

MITRA4095- Master Thesis in Modern International and Transnational History

# **Bake Sale for Weapons**

*The Role of the Norwegian Afghanistan Committee in  
mobilizing Norwegians for the Afghan Cause (1979-1989)*

**Inaytullah Hanbaly**



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**Department of Archaeology, Conservation and History**

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## Abstract

This thesis looks at the Norwegian Afghanistan Committee (NAC) and its role in mobilizing support for the Mujahedeen in their fight against the Soviets. During the Soviet occupation from 1979-1989, thousands of Norwegians participated in rallies, national donation days, bake sale, study circles and educational meetings to be educated on the conflict happening in a far away country. This thesis will examine the reasons, motivations, and goals of the solidarity movement. Why was a conflict, happening thousands of miles away in a country that was unknown for many Norwegians, able to attain a solidarity movement such as the NAC? An important argument made in this thesis is that the intricate ways in which the conflict and its participants were presented was vital in mobilizing Norwegians on behalf of the Afghan Cause. As neighbours of the Soviets, many Norwegians followed the invasion with a keen eye; some fearing that the next border the Soviets crosses might be the Norwegian-Russian border. This way of thinking was especially prevalent amongst Maoists, who used the conflict to further anti-Soviet sentiments and their own position in Norway. Through its own publication *Afghanistan-Nytt* (*Afghanistan-News*), often shortened to *A-Nytt*, and its appearance in mainstream Norwegian media, the NAC worked to strengthen the Mujahedeen narrative regarding the conflict in Afghanistan.

The foremost conclusion in this thesis is that even though the NAC stressed its humanitarian role, their most important role was that to mobilize support for the Mujahedeen narrative in Norway. With time, the NAC established a relationship with the Mujahedeen, which culminated with the latter being responsible to distribute aid to civilians in Afghanistan, with few mechanisms in place to ensure the aid was used for its intended purposes. An important argument made in this thesis is that the ways in which the Mujahedeen were portrayed by the NAC, enabled mobilization of Norwegians for the Afghan Cause. Some scholars would “accuse” the NAC of “hijacking” the Afghan Cause. I will finally argue that this kind of thinking deprives the Mujahedeen of agency, and restricts the Mujahedeen to passive actors.

## Acknowledgements

As a history student with parents from Afghanistan, the transnational connection between Afghanistan and Norway have always interested me. It has therefore been a great privilege to look at the transnational connections between these two countries. The first transnational meeting between these two countries was in the early 1980s, when a Committee for Afghanistan was created in Norway, where Norwegians worked to provide aid and support for the Afghans against the Soviet invaders. Why did Norwegians engage for the Afghan Cause? This curiosity was furthered strengthened when I found an article describing Norwegian nine graders in rural Porsgrunn having a bake sale for arms. Yes, a bake sale in rural Norway so Ahmad Shah Massoud could buy arms in his struggle against the Soviets.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank my supervisor Toufoul Abou-Hodeib, for her help in writing this thesis. Her help is *heavily* appreciated, and the helpful nature of her feedback on the different drafts of this thesis cannot be underplayed. *Shukran Jazilaan!*

After handing in this thesis, I will no longer be a student at the University of Oslo, a place that has been my second home for the past five years. I would like to thank my friends (*UB-fæm*) at the University for their support, especially this semester. My family has always been there and supported me the past five years, and I would like to thank them, especially my two wonderful nieces who have and will always provide me with love and friendship.

Inaytullah Hanbaly, Oslo, May 2019

*To my beloved family*

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## Introduction

On Christmas Eve 1979, thousands of Soviet troops marched across the Russian-Afghan border into Afghanistan, and the nine-year long occupation of the landlocked country began.<sup>1</sup> Many countries criticized the invasion, as Afghanistan was an underdeveloped and poor country. The Central Asian country attracted a lot of attention and sympathy by people in the West, who considered the invasion of the country as a demonstration of the USSR's aggressive and authoritarian tendencies. Across the world, organizations were created in solidarity with the occupied population of Afghanistan. These solidarity movements were by nature transnational, as they united different people across borders and continents, for the common goal of getting "*Soviet out of Afghanistan!*" Amongst these committees was the Norwegian Afghanistan Committee (NAC). With its predominate Maoist base, the organization worked to mobilize the Norwegian public for the Afghan Cause.

Many people assume that the Norwegian "adventure" in Afghanistan began with the NATO invasion in 2001, as a response to September 11 attacks. As a NATO-member, Norway eagerly joined the overthrow of the Taliban government in 2001, contributing with both soldiers and aid to rebuilding the country. In 2018's budget, the Norwegian government allocated more than NOK 34 billions to foreign aid, where more than NOK 600 millions went to Afghanistan alone. Norway's engagement in Afghanistan is well documented, and Norway has in total spent more than NOK 22 billions in Afghanistan, since 2001. In reality, Norwegian involvement in Afghanistan goes back to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. As a NATO-member it condemned the invasion, and Norway did not participate in the 1980 Summer Olympics, which were that year hosted by the USSR in Moscow. Together with this, the NAC's work in Afghanistan was Norway's first "humanitarian meeting" with the country, as the NAC also provided aid to the Afghans. Even though the NAC operated with much smaller funds than today's Norwegian government, the NAC was able to establish schools and clinics in the country. Alongside this humanitarian side, the NAC in the 1980s also had a political side in which they actively supported the Afghan

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<sup>1</sup> Hammond, Thomas T. *Red Flag over Afghanistan : The Communist Coup, the Soviet Invasion, and the Consequences*. (Boulder, Colo: Westview, 1984), p 69

Mujahedeen in their struggle against the USSR. The term Mujahedeen is often used to collectively describe the resistance against the Soviets, and is also used to other groups in other countries. In this thesis, it will be used to describe the resistance established in Afghanistan, as the result of the Soviet invasion in 1979. At times, the NAC also functioned as an ambassador for the Mujahedeen in Norway, as they often defended and worked to ensure the interests of the Islamist movement.

The purpose of this thesis is to study the role of the NAC in mobilizing support for the Afghan Cause in Norway. This thesis will attempt to answer three main questions; why was the Afghan Cause esteemed on the Norwegian “solidarity market”? What role did the NAC play in mobilizing the Norwegian public? And did the AKP-ml “hijack” the Afghan Cause to further their own political interests? The Committee operated during the Cold War, and it will therefore be highly relevant to look at how Cold War politics impacted NAC’s work. Some historians argue that the politicization of humanitarian organizations took place in the 1990s. I will argue that the case of NAC shows that these changes were already visible in the 1980s, as the NAC was grounded in politics. This thesis examines the Afghan Cause in Norway, and how it was able to attain respect and admiration at the “solidarity market” in Norway. The main argument proposed in this thesis, is that the portrayal of the Mujahedeen were essential in mobilizing Norwegians for the Afghan Cause. To understand how the Maoist-influenced NAC worked to promote a certain narrative regarding the Mujahedeen it will be relevant to look at its publication *A-Nytt*, and its role in the flow of information in mainstream Norwegian media.

Amongst those who argue that the politicization of humanitarian organizations started in the 1990s is Michael Barnett. He is a scholar in the field of International Relations and argues in his article “Humanitarianism Transformed”, that during the 1990s the purpose of humanitarianism was politicized, and that the organization of humanitarianism was institutionalized. Traditional humanitarian organizations usually provided impartial relief to victims, but after the changes in the 1980s many also included work to promote democracy, human rights and building responsible communities.<sup>2</sup> This characterized NAC in the 1980s, as an organization that actively

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<sup>2</sup> Barnett, Michael. "Humanitarianism Transformed." (*Perspectives on Politics* 3.4, 2005), p 723



worked to not only provide relief, but also to stabilize Afghanistan and remove the cause for the unstableness in the country by working for a Soviet withdrawal from the country. With time, the NAC also made the Mujahedeen responsible for distributing aid amongst civilians living in Afghanistan, further strengthening my argument that the case of the NAC shows that process of politicization of humanitarian NGOs started already in the 1980s.

## **Scholarly Debate**

Over the past two decades, the interests for solidarity movements as cases of transnationalism have increased. Transnational encounters have become important, especially in the era of modern globalization. This is especially true, as transnational history looks at how historical developments in one country are impacted by events outside this country. Globalization has made it difficult to use nation states as “frames” to analyse history. The case of the NAC works to remind us how events in the Global South were crucial in the establishment and shaping of political discourses in the Global North.

Even though the conflict in Afghanistan included the two superpowers of the time, there has not been done any previous research on the conflict in Afghanistan and Norway’s participation in it. By looking at transnational encounters one is able to understand the Norwegian role in the conflict, and how the Maoist-backed NAC worked to mobilize support in Norway for the Afghan Mujahedeen in their “*jihad*” against the USSR. The Norwegian engagement has without doubt been overshadowed by the engagement of nation states like the US and Saudi Arabia, as these two countries alone contributed billions to the Afghan cause. In the three years from 1987 to 1989, the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan received almost two billion dollars from the Saudis alone.<sup>3</sup> Because of this, the scholarly attention given to the topic of Norwegian activism for the Afghan cause has been limited. This is amongst the most important reasons for why I have chosen to write a thesis on this topic, as this will shed much needed light on an important part of the Norwegian history. At the same time, this thesis aims to focus on transnational relations, rather than relations between nation states. Transnational relations are usually defined as interactions across

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<sup>3</sup> Hegghammer, Thomas. *Jihad in Saudi Arabia : Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979*. (Vol. 33. New York: Cambridge UP, Cambridge Middle East Studies 2010), p 25

borders, between people and NGOs. By focusing on the transnational relationship between the NAC and the Mujahedeen, one is able to understand the development and sustainment of solidarity movements during the Cold War. This thesis will contribute to the scholarly debates on the role of the Norwegian Maoists in mobilizing support for anti-Soviet causes and the history of Norwegian solidarity with the Afghans in the 1980s.

The history of Maoism in Norway is often trivialized, as historians argue that they never obtained any significant power in Norwegian politics. The belittled position of the Maoists in Norway is visible by both the amount and the quality of the books written on the topic. The most influential book on the topic being *The Big Marxist-Leninist Book*, written by Jon Rognlien and Nik Brandal in 2009. This is not an academic book; instead this book amuses both the creation and the work performed by Maoists in Norway in the 1970s and the 1980s. The book does provide some historical facts on the movement, and is therefore relevant to some degree. The book also provides some account of the people being active in the movement, and is in this way appreciated. While there has not been written that much on the topic of Norwegian Maoists in Norway, Tarjei Vågstøl wrote in 2007 a thesis on the Norwegian Solidarity Movement for Palestine, focusing on how the solidarity movement was organized and how it mobilized the Norwegian people for the Palestinian Cause in the 1970s. He concluded the thesis with arguing that the Norwegian Maoists were essential in promoting the Palestinian Cause in Norway. Both Vågstøl's and this thesis will demonstrate that even though the Maoists in Norway never obtained any political power, they were able to sway public opinion by establishing and being active in solidarity movements.

While there is not that much written on the topic of Maoism in Norway, there have been done some studies on Maoism in France. In the book "Wind from the East", Richard Wolin argues that during the 1960s, Maoism began to attract prominent intellectuals in universities across the country.<sup>4</sup> This was especially true for the political activists who were influenced by the student demonstrations in 1968. He also attributes this fascination as something brought on by the disarray of the Socialist

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<sup>4</sup> Wolin, Richard. *The Wind from the East : French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s*. (Princeton, N.J: Princeton UP, 2010), p 4

party in France and the international political climate as the result of the Vietnam War in the late 1960s. It must be understood that these changes, as in Norway, were not revolutionary, but rather evolutionary. Most of the Maoists had previously been keen supporters of the USSR. During the 1960s, many of them changed camps and decided that the Soviets were not any better than the Americans. Some of them went on to become activists in solidarity movements against wars initiated by the two superpowers of the time.

In regards to the discourse on solidarity movements, the book “Political Altruism” by Florence Passy will be used to explain both the emergence of these movements and why they came to be. The book describes how solidarity with people in the Global South increased as the result of the American invasion of Vietnam, and how committees against apartheid in South Africa were established to pressure governments in the West. While the book looks at how solidarity movements work, it does not provide the critical opinion on solidarity movements voiced by many in the Global South. This is where Yassin al-Haj Saleh comes in. He is a Syrian writer and a political dissident who has written on the topic of German solidarity with the people in Syria, in the wake of the Arab Spring in 2011. He argues that the Germans “hijacked” the conflict in order to make it more appealing to a German audience. He goes on to say that the relationship between the solidarity provider and the solidarity receiver has tendencies of a patron-client relationship. According to Saleh, this leads to perpetuating an already established relationship of dependency between the Global South and the Global North.

Saleh also argues that “solidarity-providers” in the West act as both spokesperson and adviser for the cause, while the solidarity-receiver is relegated to a secondary position, without the power to shape or formulate the conflict as they themselves wish.<sup>5</sup> Saleh argues that the cause is shaped in a specific manner that secures the largest yield of solidarity, as different causes are competing against each other. Saleh terms this as the “solidarity market place”, where different causes compete for solidarity from people in West.<sup>6</sup> Should one engage in solidarity with the Palestinians? The Afghans? Or the Syrians?

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<sup>5</sup> Saleh, Yassin el-Haj, 2005, *A Critique of Solidarity*, translated to English from Arabic by Alex Rowell, p 1

<sup>6</sup> el-Haj, *A Critique of Solidarity*, 1

This thesis will demonstrate that Saleh's argument that the "solidarity-receivers" are relegated to a secondary position, without the power to shape or formulate the conflict themselves is not entirely correct when looking at the relationship between the NAC and the Mujahedeen.

## Sources and Methodology

The bulk of the source material in this thesis is founded on the rich collection of documents in both the NAC's archive in *Arbeiderbevegelsens arkiv og bibliotek* (*The Norwegian Labour Movement Archives and Library*) and mainstream newspapers from *Nasjonalbiblioteket* (*National Library of Norway*). Primary sources will help me greatly in understanding how the NAC worked and how Norwegians viewed the conflict in Afghanistan. Amongst these primary sources is the newspaper of the NAC, named *A-Nytt*, which was published quarterly.<sup>7</sup> *A-Nytt* will be used to verify my hypothesis that NAC perpetuated Cold War-narratives through its newspaper *A-Nytt* and that NAC's solidarity with the Afghan people was the result of the Norwegian position during the Cold War. The newspaper will also be used to understand how information from the war was portrayed, and not for its objective substance. As people who had actively taken a side in the Afghan Conflict wrote *A-Nytt*, the newspaper is *heavily* favouring the side of the Mujahedeen. It will also be relevant to look at the newspapers attempt to establish a certain narrative regarding the Afghan Civil War, within the context of the Cold War. The newspaper was distributed to Norwegians who were interested in being up-to-date on the conflict in Afghanistan. Published editions of *A-Nytt* from the 1980s and 1990s is available on the NACs website. I will only look at newspapers from the 1980s, as this thesis focuses on the period of the Soviet invasion, which ended in 1989. *A-Nytt* will be used in two ways: to explain how the Mujahedeen were portrayed and how the NAC organized activities for mobilizing Norwegians for the Afghan Cause.

This will be supplemented by mainstream newspapers and archival research at *Arbeiderbevegelsens arkiv og bibliotek*. Archival research at *Arbeiderbevegelsens arkiv og bibliotek*, will provide me with internal memos and correspondences written by NAC-members in central positions. This will help us in understanding what was

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<sup>7</sup> *A-Nytt*, 1/1988 p 26

happening behind the scene concerning important events. Amongst these important events was the 1986 OD for Afghanistan, which was attacked by the pro-Soviet NKP, to finance arms for the Mujahedeen. Internal memos disclose how the NAC reached out to local NAC-committees, urging them to visit local schools and correct perceptions regarding the conflict in Afghanistan. Internal documents also reveal the financial aid the NAC provided civilians living under different Mujahedeen commanders. All of the mentioned documents will help us further understand the role the NAC had in mobilizing support for the Afghan Cause in Norway.

While *A-Nytt* and internal documents provide an insight in the world of NAC, mainstream newspapers will be used to describe how the NAC positioned themselves in mainstream medias. Studying mainstream newspapers will help us realize how the visits from the Mujahedeen were portrayed in Norwegian media, and how the NAC was able to shape public opinions regarding the conflict in Afghanistan. This is especially evident in the case of the public broadcaster NRK being shamed by the NAC of showing reports favouring the Soviet narrative on the conflict. This works to further strengthen my argument that the NAC had the power to influence the agenda. As there are no books or academic articles written on these visits, the newspapers will also be used as factual description of what actually happened. The visits were often recounted in both mainstream and local Norwegian papers, and will be used to show how these visits were essential in correcting public perceptions regarding the Mujahedeen in Norway. Some of the mainstream newspapers also include letters to the editorial, which will give us an idea of public perceptions regarding the conflict. The letters were often sent in by ordinary Norwegians who were concerned about the situation in Afghanistan. Amongst the most referenced mainstream newspaper in this thesis is the Norwegian daily newspaper *Klassekampen* (The Class Struggle). As the name suggests, the newspaper is a left-wing publication and was established by the Norwegian Maoist party AKP-ml in 1969.<sup>8</sup> The conflict in Afghanistan is often mentioned in the newspaper, something that might be the result of the newspaper's Maoist background. This further strengthens my argument that the Afghan Conflict was often used by the AKP-ml to consolidate their position in Norway.

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<sup>8</sup> Pettersen, B. Øyvind, *Klassekampen*, *Store Norske Leksikon* ([www.snl.no/klassekampen](http://www.snl.no/klassekampen))

Together, these diverse primary sources paint a picture of the NAC and their role in furthering a specific narrative regarding the conflict in Afghanistan. The sources will show how portrayals of the Mujahedeen were essential in mobilizing Norwegians for the Afghan Cause, as the Mujahedeen were often compared to the Norwegian resistance to the German occupiers during the Second World War.

### **Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis will work to build further on both Passy's and Saleh's work regarding the discourse on solidarity movements. It will work to explain how the paradigm of the Cold War was essential in mobilizing Norwegians for the Afghan Cause. The conflict received more attention in Norway than other conflicts, because of its Cold War dimensions. The Afghan Cause and the NACs work had a strong position in the "solidarity market", because of Norway's geographical position as a neighbour of the Soviet Union. I will make an argument for that even though the Norwegian Maoists were politically fringe and peripheral, by being active in solidarity movements, they were able to attain a voice and opportunities to shape public perceptions regarding international conflicts.

Together with this, I will also argue that the case of the NAC shows that Saleh's argument that the solidarity-provider "hijacks" a cause, oversimplifies the relationship between the solidarity provider and the solidarity-receiver. The case of the NAC shows that solidarity-provider worked as a link between Norway (both on micro and macro-levels) and the Mujahedeen. This was done by working to make the conflict in Afghanistan more recognisable to a Norwegian audience. With time, this relationship developed into that of two allies, in which the NAC handed over funds to Mujahedeen commanders without any significant mechanisms in place to secure that the aid was used for the intended purposes. This thesis will examine how the Norwegian Afghanistan Committee, both through its newspaper *A-Nytt* and its expert opinion in Norwegian media outlets in general, promoted a certain perspective on the conflict in Afghanistan. Analysing how the Mujahedeen are portrayed in their newspaper will help us greatly in understanding how the committee worked to proliferate support for the Mujahedeen, despite the Mujahedeen's human rights record.

The overall theme of this thesis is how Norwegian Maoists were able to use the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 to engage on a more global scene, with providing relief to the anti-Soviet Mujahedeen. The first chapter looks at the Norwegian Maoist party (AKP-ml), the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the establishment of the Norwegian Afghanistan Committee (NAC). The chapter also describes the Norwegian response to the invasion itself, and how Norwegians rushed to create solidarity movements with the Afghans. I also give an introduction to the new Cold War of the 1980s, which was instigated by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. I will continue and show how the emergence of the NAC was a part of a phenomenon that took place in the 1970s and the 1980s, in which solidarity movements were created by middle-class people and left-leaning students who were angry at the governments in their own countries for the indifference regarding conflicts in the Third World. The student movement of the late 1960s is explained, and how student activists, who were against the War in Vietnam and the apartheid-government in South Africa, created solidarity movements. An important argument made in this chapter is that the “Maoist Moment” enabled Maoists in Norway to further their own political position, under the cover of a solidarity movement for the Afghans. The “Maoist Moment” characterizes a time in which the US and the Maoists were on the same side in a conflict, making it possible for the Maoists to make use of the American support to further their own political goals. In Norway, this “Maoist Moment” led to the creation of the NAC.

An important argument in this thesis is that the narrative regarding the Conflict in Afghanistan and the portrayal of Mujahedeen as promoted by the NAC, was essential in the mobilization of Norwegians for the Afghan Cause. I will therefore in Chapter 2 look at how the NAC’s newspaper *A-Nytt* upholds to preconceptions created by and maintaining the Cold War paradigm. This chapter will also look at how the NAC worked to familiarize the conflict in Afghanistan to a Norwegian audience, especially how at times the conflict was juxtaposed to Norway. Together with this, *A-Nytt* also used terms familiar to Norwegians from the Second World War to describe the conflict in Afghanistan. Finally, I will look at how oriental perceptions of the Afghans amongst Norwegians, might have helped the NAC in justifying its unequivocal support for the Mujahedeen. By looking at the newspaper, we are made aware of their romanticized perceptions of the Mujahedeen and Afghanistan, as related to the term “Noble Savage”.

Chapter 3 argues that the NAC's most important role was that of an intermediary between the Mujahedeen and the Norwegian people. This is based on two account, a) on the international scene, the US was a champion in providing aid for Afghans, b) the aid provided by the NAC was limited compared to other Norwegian NGOs. Because of this, I will argue that the Committee's most important role was that as an influencer for the Afghan Cause in Norway. This was made evident when the NAC, in both 1981 and 1986, lobbied for Norwegian schools to select Afghanistan as a project for Operation Day's Work. Alongside this, they also annually organized solidarity weeks for Afghanistan, the most important being the one in 1986. Finally, they also had the role of an agency for information regarding the conflict in Afghanistan, as the Committee had representatives in neighbouring Pakistan and sometimes in Afghanistan. This argument is further strengthened by the tendency of NAC-members often being interviewed on the conflict in Afghanistan, by mainstream media in Norway. In these various ways, the NAC's most important role was that to raise awareness around the conflict in Afghanistan.

## **Chapter 1: The Maoist Moment**

In this chapter I will look at how the NAC was created under circumstances favouring the establishment of a solidarity movement in Norway for the Afghans. Even though AKP-ml was a peripheral party in the landscape of Norwegian politics, in regards to the Afghan Conflict their interest were corresponding with the interests of the Americans. Furthering a cause, which was supported by the Americans, enabled AKP-ml to attract Norwegians in a considerable scale. The Americans supported the Mujahedeen with billions, and even invited prominent representatives from the Mujahedeen to the White House. Sharing political interests with one of the great powers of the time, led to what I call the "Maoist Moment". The Maoist Moment enabled Maoists in Norway to further their own political position, under the cover of a solidarity movement for the Afghans. Furthermore, this chapter looks at how the conflict played out in Afghanistan, and the Norwegian response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. First, I will explain the emergence of solidarity movements in the



West, followed by the emergence of the Maoists in Norway, and how they and Norwegians at large responded to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

Solidarity movements are defined as movements that are created for a specific goal, that the activists do not themselves benefit from personally. Norwegians active in the NAC did not benefit personally from their commitment for the Afghan Cause. Their activism for the Afghan Cause didn't further their own welfare, nor did it further their own political interests, something participation in trade unions would have aimed to do. The term *political altruism* is therefore synonymous with solidarity movements. It is used to define "actions performed by a group/individuals on behalf of another group, which is not aimed to meet individual interests and is directed at a specific political goal of social/political change or the redefinition of power relations that does not benefit the person/group itself".<sup>9</sup> The idea behind these movements was that by mobilizing people in the West, they could pressure governments to favour a specific policy regarding a certain country or conflict in the Global South. This was the case in 1980s, when Norwegians mobilized for the Afghan Cause. The conflict was happening thousands of miles away; in a country few Norwegians had visited or even heard of. Still, thousands of Norwegians were at some point activists for the Afghan Cause. The volunteers collected money through bake sales, used their spare time to meet other activists and engage in study circles, and most of all enlighten other Norwegians on the situation in Afghanistan.

The importance of solidarity movements increased steadily throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and gained momentum in the 1960s and the 1970s, with solidarity movements being established in many Western countries against the US invasion of Vietnam. Even before that, in late nineteenth-century Europe, there were strikes in support of African slaves working in the cotton fields in the American South.<sup>10</sup> People who were involved in solidarity movements did so to champion for the rights, interests, and safety of others.<sup>11</sup> According to Florence Passy, while modern solidarity movements are grounded in political ideology and Third-Worldism, early 20<sup>th</sup> century solidarity movements in Europe were grounded in the Christian cosmology, the

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<sup>9</sup> Passy, Florence, and Marco Giugni. *Political Altruism? Solidarity Movements in International Perspective*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001, p 6

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*, 7

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*, 5

humanist component of the Enlightenment and the socialist tradition.<sup>12</sup> The Christian idea of “helping your neighbour”, the Enlightenment focus on the respect for human rights and the socialist emphasis of an egalitarian society have been important ideas for many European solidarity movements. The political character of solidarity movements were amplified after the Second World War, as the era of decolonization began in large parts of the world.<sup>13</sup> People in Western countries established campaigns in their respective countries against apartheid in South Africa. Solidarity movements might have had limited power, but by providing information on a specific issue, they were able to gain legitimacy.

### **The Emergence of Maoism in Europe**

In the late stages of the Second World War, the Allies understood the threat the Soviets would make to Western hegemony. By the end of the Second World War, the Soviets had most of Eastern Europe under their control.<sup>14</sup> Stalin had set up satellite states stretching from Bulgaria in the south to the Baltic Sea in the North. Western fears over Communism intensified in 1949, when the Communists seized the power in China. The threat posed by Communism led to an American policy of containment, in which the US isolated the Soviets by surrounding their great country with nations hostile to Communism and friendly to the US and West-Europe. To realize this, the US created a number of alliances spanning the world. NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) was supplemented by Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) and Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). In this heated atmosphere, Afghanistan decided on a non-aligned position joining the likes of India and Indonesia.<sup>15</sup> Afghanistan was at the time surrounded by countries engaged in the Cold War. In the East, Pakistan was a member of both SEATO and CENTO. In the West, Iran was a close ally of the West and a member of CENTO. And in the North, Afghanistan neighboured both the USSR and China. Afghanistan’s position as a neighbour of both the USSR and China gained importance in the 1960s.

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<sup>12</sup> Passy, *Political Altruism and the Solidarity Movement*, 8

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, 11

<sup>14</sup> Ansary, Tamim. *Games without Rules: The Often Interrupted History of Afghanistan*. PublicAffairs, 2012, p 147

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*, 147

Political tensions between China and the Soviet Union escalated during the 1960s, resulting in a “tri-polar” Cold War in which the Chinese became increasingly friendly to the Western countries. The Chinese agitation against the “Soviet-way” led students in Europe to read more about the “Sleeping Giant”. In Norway, Workers Communist Party of Norway (*Arbeidernes Kommunistparti Marxist-Leninistene*), often shortened in Norwegian to AKP-ml, was created. The party never gained any parliament members in the Norwegian Parliament, but did have a large presence in Norwegian universities. AKP-ml was officially created in 1973, and many of the party leaders had been active in the movement against the American occupation of Vietnam.<sup>16</sup> Pål Steigan, who was the leader of AKP-ml from 1975 to 1984, explains in *At Tiananmen Square* that the student protests of the late 1960s were critical in the founding of the AKP-ml.<sup>17</sup> The West was swept by protests against the US’ invasion of Vietnam and its support for North Vietnam during the Vietnamese Civil War. In Norway, students criticized Norway’s membership in NATO, and its close alignment with the US. At the same time, the USSR didn’t provide the answer for many as well, as it had shown in the fall of 1956, when it invaded Hungary.

The interest for Maoism increased steadily throughout the 1970s in Europe, especially in France, where they made significant gains.<sup>18</sup> Students across universities in Europe began to identify with Mao’s China.<sup>19</sup> Radical students believed people in the West had lost sight of what really mattered in life, and that they were occupied with amusements created to distract people from the real problems they were facing.<sup>20</sup> Maoists argued that the Soviets did not represent true Socialism, and were accused of being more interested in furthering their own national interests, rather than exporting the revolution. AKP-ml had previously established solidarity organization with the people of Poland and Czechoslovakia, in accordance with their Maoist tradition. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 gave Norwegian Maoists an opportunity to become an actor on the global scene.

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16 Steigan, Pål. *På Den Himmelske Freds Plass : Om ML-bevegelsen I Norge (At Tiananmen Square: the Marxist-Leninist Movement in Norway)*, Oslo: Aschehoug, 1985, 38

17 *ibid*, 38

18 Wolin, *The Wind From the East*, 5

19 *ibid*, 2

20 *ibid*, 11

## **The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan and the Resistance**

Alongside the violent struggles between Communist and anti-Communist forces, there was also a “peaceful” struggle for influence in various “nonaligned” countries. According to Tamim Ansary, nowhere in the world did this competition rage more intensely than in Afghanistan during the 1960s and the 1970s.<sup>21</sup> Americans feared that if the Soviets took Afghanistan, they might use the country as a door into Pakistan. In 1973, Mohammad Daud Khan initiated a military coup in which he deposed his cousin, the last King of Afghanistan, Zahir Shah. Daud Khan understood that the Cold War competition provided Afghanistan with an opportunity to play the superpowers against each other in a competition to give the country the most aid. The Americans initiated grand projects in the country, including an American built dam in the province of Helmand. The Soviets on the other hand provided the Afghans with military aid, and built the country’s biggest military airbase in Bagram.<sup>22</sup> Thousands of students were sent abroad to the USSR for higher education, returning home with a Marxist-Leninist framework through which they understood Afghanistan. Marxism spread throughout the country, culminating in the creation of the People’s Democratic Part of Afghanistan (PDPA) in 1965.<sup>23</sup>

Years later in April 1978, the PDPA seized power in the country with a military coup.<sup>24</sup> The first president of the socialist government, Nur Muhammad Taraki was not able to handle the pressure from the opposition, which was formed almost immediately after the PDPA came to power. The opposition to the PDPA-government consisted of different fractions, a majority of them coming from the conservative clergy.<sup>25</sup> Amongst them were also capitalists and traders who considered the government in power a threat to their assets. The resistance to the Afghan government continued to grow, when the government initiated reforms to redistribute land, elevate the status of women and eliminate racial discrimination. Land reforms violated many Afghan cultural norms and were met with much hatred by religious authorities that condemned taking land from landowners without handing them compensation.

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<sup>21</sup> Ansary, *Games without Rules*, 148

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, 153

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, 172

<sup>24</sup> Black, Jeremy. *A Century of Conflict : War 1914-2014*. New York: Oxford UP, 2015, 148

<sup>25</sup> Hammond, *Red Flag over Afghanistan*, 69

In addition to antagonizing the landowning and religious elite, the government introduced other reforms cancelling out all rural debts and forbidding lenders to collect rents in the future. Peasants had ended up in substantial debt, as the feudal system in rural areas was designed to keep the peasants in poverty. The government also forbade the practice of “bride price”, in which women were married in exchange for money.<sup>26</sup> All of the reforms mentioned above led different sections of the Afghan society to rebel against the government. The Soviets were concerned, as the reforms were unpopular amongst rural communities, which formed more than 80 percent of the country’s population. The Soviets feared that the resistance would be able to topple the government and establish a US-friendly government. This led to a Soviet invasion of the country in December 1979. A month later in January 1980, there were more than 40,000 Soviet combat troops in Afghanistan. By the end of the year, that number had doubled and the conflict escalated Cold War tensions.<sup>27</sup> The Soviet invasion transformed opposition to the government into a national liberation struggle, pitting Afghans of all classes against the Soviet invaders.

### **The New Cold War of the 1980s**

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan led to a new chapter in the Cold War. The US considered the invasion an act of aggression that needed to be countered, fearing that the next invasion might be in Europe.<sup>28</sup> In his State of the Union speech in 1980, President Carter described the invasion of Afghanistan as the most serious threat to world peace since the Second World War.<sup>29</sup> The American support for the Mujahedeen was strengthened with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1981. An important part of President Reagan’s foreign policy, was to weaken the USSR. While the 1970s was characterized by a so-called *détente*, the 1980s were characterized by increased tensions between the two superpowers.<sup>30</sup> For the Americans, the conflict in Afghanistan had the potential to be the Soviets “Vietnam War”. The US funded the resistance, as they wanted to drag the USSR into a recession. The Americans wanted to present the war as a small country fighting a superpower, David vs. Goliath, and kept a distance from the Afghan conflict.<sup>31</sup> The US embassy in Islamabad warned the

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<sup>26</sup> Hammond, *Red Flag over Afghanistan*, 69

<sup>27</sup> West, Katarina. *Agents of Altruism : The Expansion of Humanitarian NGOs in Rwanda and Afghanistan*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001, 40

<sup>28</sup> Black, *A Century of Conflict*, 151

<sup>29</sup> West, *Agents of Altruism*, 59

<sup>30</sup> Black, *A Century of Conflict*, 151

<sup>31</sup> West, *Agents of Altruism*, 64

US State Department that strong American public presence in the war would damage the credibility of the Afghan resistance.

The US also greatly influenced the humanitarian NGOs in Pakistan, who were providing relief to Afghan refugees. In *Agents of Altruism*, political scientist Katarina West argues that it was important for the US to be active in the humanitarian sphere in order to ease tensions between the Afghan refugees and the local Pakistanis, as tensions between these two groups could potentially weaken the Pakistani regime's enthusiasm for providing the Mujahedeen with a base for their war against the Soviets.<sup>32</sup> Even though Iran hosted more than two million Afghan refugees, the country wasn't able to attract aid agencies in the way Pakistan did. The reason for this was highly political, as Pakistan's willingness to engage in the conflict in Afghanistan was crucial since the country functioned as a base for the Mujahedeen. As a member of both CENTO and SEATO, the Pakistanis had since the 1950s been an ally of the West in their fight against Communism. The Pakistanis were eager to help the Americans when they were offered a central position in the American plot to weaken the Soviets. Saudi and American aid to the Mujahedeen went through Pakistan, where the country's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) was responsible for handing out aid to the different Mujahedeen groups. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Afghanistan and Pakistan had been hostile neighbours; skirmishes often occurred by the border between the two.<sup>33</sup> Alongside this, the Pakistani's also feared that a hostile government in Afghanistan might become an ally of India, thus surrounding Pakistan with enemies. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan provided Pakistan with an opportunity to put in place a friendly government in the country, removing the possibility of an Afghan-Indian alliance in the future.

The government of Pakistan was therefore more than willing to help the Americans. This is especially true when related to humanitarian organizations operating in the country. American NGOs working in refugee camps often experienced problems as they were accused by the Soviets of being bases for CIA operations. According to West, the US did not want to be perceived as a direct party to the conflict. The answer was to internationalize the Afghan crisis, by either channelling humanitarian aid via

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<sup>32</sup> West, *Agents of Altruism*, 65

<sup>33</sup> Ansary, *Games without Rules*, 153

the UN or encouraging its European allies to take a greater part in the humanitarian sphere.<sup>34</sup> This enabled European NGOs to strengthen their presence in the area.

The NGOs themselves had different motives for their humanitarian work in Pakistan. The war in Afghanistan killed more than 1.5 million, and over three million escaped to neighbouring Pakistan and Iran.<sup>35</sup> A landlocked poor country in the Third World being invaded by one of the world's superpowers gained a lot of solidarity in European countries. Ideological or political interests often motivated charitable actions. The initial response to the refugee crisis in Afghanistan was limited, but the help grew steadily throughout the 1980s.<sup>36</sup> At its peak, almost 400 million dollars of aid were being channelled annually to Afghanistan.<sup>37</sup> Most of the aid was funnelled through neighbouring Pakistan, as most of the NGOs could not carry out humanitarian operations in Soviet-held Afghanistan.<sup>38</sup> One of these NGOs was the NAC.

### **The AKP-ml's response to the Soviet invasion: The Creation of NAC**

The Norwegian Afghanistan Committee (NAC) was formally established in early 1980, as a response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan the year before. At its peak in late 1986, the NAC had more than thirty local committees throughout Norway.<sup>39</sup> The initiative to establish a solidarity movement with the Afghans came from AKP-ml, but the organization and its petitions had broad political support.<sup>40</sup> Several prominent political leaders in Norway signed a petition to call an end to the Soviet invasion of the country in 1984, amongst them the parliament leader of the Conservative Party (*Høyre*) Jo Beknow and the leader of the Progress Party (*Fremskrittspartiet*) Carl I. Hagen.

The NAC had humble beginnings with organizing petitions against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.<sup>41</sup> The petitions called for an end to the Soviet occupation and stressed the need for a stronger Norwegian opposition to the occupation. The broad support, which the organization enjoyed, is visible in the wide-ranging spectre

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<sup>34</sup> West, *Agents of Altruism*, 65

<sup>35</sup> *ibid*, 59

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*, 60

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*, 60

<sup>38</sup> *ibid*, 61

<sup>39</sup> *A-Nytt*, 1/1988, 26

<sup>40</sup> *A-Nytt*, 2/1984, a registry of the political background of the board, elected as representatives to the Norwegian parliament *Storting*, from the Christian Democratic Party (*Kristelig Folkeparti*) the Liberal Party (*Venstre*) and the Conservative Party (*Høyre*).

<sup>41</sup> *A-Nytt*, 5/1983, 8

of politicians who supported NACs work. Representatives from all registered political parties, excluding the pro-Soviet NKP, were supportive of the solidarity movement. The NAC encouraged the Norwegian government to support international organization's efforts to bring in aid to the occupied population in Afghanistan, and not only limit the financial aid to refugee camps in Pakistan. The NAC also pushed the Norwegian government to lobby for the Mujahedeen to represent Afghanistan in the UN General Assembly.<sup>42</sup> Throughout the course of the 1980s, the organizations activities expanded unto the point that the NAC brought aid into Afghanistan themselves. At the time, the NAC was amongst few international organizations that brought aid into Afghanistan, as most of the international organizations had limited their attention to the refugee camps in Pakistan. An important goal for the NAC was to make it possible for Afghans to stay in Afghanistan, and not take refuge in neighbouring Pakistan. Alongside the goals to end the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and make it possible for Afghans to stay in Afghanistan, the organization also worked to inform the Norwegian public of the situation in Afghanistan and mobilize support for the Mujahedeen and their cause. This begs the question of whether the NAC was a case of political altruism or just politics.

Even though the solidarity movement gained broad political support, its most active members were from AKP-ml. This gave the Maoists vast influence over how the Committee was both shaped and run. This is especially true for the rhetoric and worldview presented in the Committee's newspaper *A-Nytt*. The NAC itself often stressed its own apolitical nature, but central positions in the Committee were often held by significant figures from the AKP-ml. Marga van der Wal was the leader of the NAC in the early 1980s, while Petter Bauck was the leader of NAC Oslo and the editor of *A-Nytt*. The NACs Maoist feature became a problem for some of its more conservative members. This led in 1984 to the establishment of *Afghanistanhjelpen* (*The Afghanistan Help*), an organization that also worked to provide relief for the Afghans.<sup>43</sup> I will therefore focus on the NAC and their work, as many considered it as the main organization for solidarity with the Afghans.

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<sup>42</sup> *A-Nytt*, 1/1988, 26

<sup>43</sup> *Morgenbladet*, 18.12.84, p 6



## Chapter 2: Constructing the Afghan Conflict

The conflict in Afghanistan was started as a Cold War-proxy between the two great superpowers. This chapter will look at the role of NAC in mobilizing support against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Additionally, it will look at how the NAC shed light on issues in Afghanistan that were neglected by mainstream media. Finally, the chapter will describe how NAC gained legitimacy as an information agency by bringing relief *into* Afghanistan, something they were alone in doing, in relations to other Norwegian NGOs. I argue that the NAC created a specific narrative regarding the conflict that was both the result of its Maoist worldview, and that it reinforced the said worldview. The ways, as we shall see, in which the Mujahedeen and the Afghan Civil War was presented by the NAC through their newspaper *A-Nytt*, enabled mobilization and support for the Afghan Cause. By portraying the Mujahedeen as the Afghan equivalent of the Norwegian resistance against the Germans during the Second World War, the Mujahedeen were able to gain a lot of sympathy amongst the Norwegian people. Alongside this, they also controlled the “flow of information”, meaning they concealed parts of the Mujahedeen that were damaging to their representation.

### **Afghanistan-Nytt (A-nytt)**

*Afghanistan-Nytt* (Afghanistan-News), usually shortened to *A-Nytt*, was the official newspaper of the NAC, and was in circulation from the first edition in January 1981 to late 2000s. The goal of the *A-Nytt* according to the newspaper itself was to inform the Norwegian public about the daily life in Afghanistan, the progression of the war and the situation regarding civilians in the country. The newspaper also aimed to support the views of the Mujahedeen before a Norwegian public. *A-Nytt* functioned as the backbone of the solidarity movement and was for those who were interested to know more about the situation in Afghanistan.<sup>44</sup> It never enjoyed a large publication, and peaked at 3000 subscribers in 1984.<sup>45</sup> *A-Nytt* was always sent to public libraries across the country, and people were therefore able to attain unrestricted access to the newest editions of the newspaper. The newspaper was written in Norwegian and consists of articles written by NAC-members and translations from international mainstream newspapers. Some of these articles were published by newspapers like

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<sup>44</sup> *A-Nytt*, 2/1986, last page

*International Herald Tribune* (which would later become *The New York Times*), the Norwegian newspapers *Verdens Gang* and *Klassekampen*, and the Chinese journal *Beijing Review*.<sup>46</sup> *A-Nytt* would also publish bulletins provided by the Afghan Information Center (AIC), located in Peshawar. The AIC was established in 1982 by Afghan academics that had taken refugee in Pakistan..<sup>47</sup>

The main audience for the magazine was Norwegians who wanted to be up to date on the conflict in Afghanistan, and who supported the Mujahedeen against the Soviets. According to the editors of the newspaper, the war in Afghanistan gained limited attention in mainstream Norwegian media outlets, and it was therefore the job of the NAC to provide sufficient information on the conflict. Their articles covered a range of topics, with updates from the situation in Afghanistan. There were articles informing the public about the local committees having stands for Afghanistan. Included were also poems, short stories and letters to the editor written by the readers. The newspaper started with an editorial describing the situation in Afghanistan, and what the NAC had worked with since the last publication of the newspaper. This included events and demonstrations that had taken place in the country, or in Europe at large. In the editorial they also shared their plans for the next quarter of the year, both in regards to humanitarian work in Afghanistan and events in Norway.

### **Influencing the Agenda**

NGOs and solidarity organizations have gained significant positions during the last three decades, as they have been able to shape the public discourse in many countries. The British social theorist Steven Lukes describes the “Three Dimensions of Power” in his book *A Radical View* from 1974. He argues that power can be exercised in three different ways: decision-making power, non-decision-making power and ideological power. Decision-making power is what most people think of when talking about power. Nation states have Decision-making power, so do international organizations like United Nations, which are able to gain legitimacy as they are based on nation-states. Non-decision-making power is that which sets the agenda for debates. It decides what is acceptable and unacceptable for discussions in public forums, and how one relates to a certain issue. NAC had limited decision-making powers, as it

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<sup>46</sup> *A-Nytt*, 2/1981, 2-9

<sup>47</sup> *A-Nytt*, 1/1984, 10

was a solidarity organization with humanitarian aspects, but it played an important role in shaping the discussion about the conflict in Afghanistan. The NAC gained legitimacy by being perceived as the main agency in Norway for furthering the interests of the Afghan people. The NAC worked to influence the Norwegian discussion and debate regarding the conflict in Afghanistan. Activists from NAC were often in national newspapers to further the views of the organization, often pressuring the Norwegian government to take a more active role in the Afghan conflict. For instance, in an article in one of Norway's largest newspaper *Dagbladet* (*The Daily Magazine*), the leader of NAC Ivar Eskeland, criticized a decision made by Norwegian authorities to expel three Afghan refugees who had entered the country illegally.<sup>48</sup> Eskeland went on to condemn the Norwegian government, reminding the public of how neighbouring Pakistan, even though it was a developing country, had taken in more than three million refugees.

The Committee provided information on the situation in Afghanistan, as the Committee often had people working in the country. In an article written in *Dagbladet* about skirmishes between the Afghan government and Mujahedeen in the Kabul-area, Boye Ullmann, who was the leader of NAC Oslo at that time, was interviewed and highlighted how his reporting from sources *inside* the country describes a situation that was getting worse.<sup>49</sup> While other Norwegian NGOs, like *Kirkens Nødhjelp* (Norwegian Church Aid), *Redd Barna* (Save the Children) and *Flyktningshjelpen* (Norwegian Refugee Council), had focused on providing relief to Afghan refugees living in Pakistan, the NAC was the only Norwegian NGO that provided relief to Afghans living in Afghanistan. By doing so, the NGO was able to obtain status as the official information channel on the situation in Afghanistan. This was also evident in how the NAC was invited to Norwegian schools to explain the situation in Afghanistan, relating to Operation Day's Work, something I will explain in depth in the following chapter. NACs status as an informant in the Norwegian discourse on the conflict in Afghanistan, provided them a significant role, even though their engagement in Afghanistan was limited. All of the mentioned Norwegian NGOs operated with a larger budget than the NAC. This works in favour of the argument that NACs most important role during the 1980s was to mobilize support

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<sup>48</sup> *Dagbladet*, 06.02.1989, 41

<sup>49</sup> *Dagbladet*, 06.02.1989, 18

for the Mujahedeen, rather than providing relief as the NGO operated with limited funds.

### **The Good, the Bad and A-Nytt**

Media is often an important part of how a discourse is established; *A-Nytt* therefore worked to legitimize the mentioned discourse. West argues that the Western media-created conflict in Afghanistan had only two sides, in which the “good guys” were made up by the Mujahedeen, and the “bad guys” by the Afghan regime.<sup>50</sup> This is in line with what my research on *A-Nytt* has produced. *A-Nytt* was able to influence how the Norwegian audience related to the conflict in Afghanistan, and was able to shape a narrative on who the “good guys” and the “bad guys” were. The newspaper shows strong affiliation with the Mujahedeen, and often addresses the mentioned group as “freedom fighters” and “heroes”.<sup>51</sup>

Not only were the NAC able to shed light on issues they meant were important, but also which issues were actively and passively prevented from reaching the public. The Mujahedeen have been widely criticized for human rights violations and war crimes. Severe human rights violations occurred throughout the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The Socialist regime established a system of repression in which political opponents were arrested, tortured and executed.<sup>52</sup> In an attempt to “sovietise” Afghanistan, thousands of children were sent to the USSR, the majority of them involuntarily. On the other side, the Mujahedeen tortured and executed captured government officials. Katarina West argues that the Western media did not publicize the misconduct of the Mujahedeen, as the rebels fought against the USSR.<sup>53</sup> This also includes NACs newspaper *A-Nytt*, who fails to mention the human rights violations carried out by the Mujahedeen. Instead, the newspaper attribute these as the actions of the “Khomeini-fascists”, a term they had coined for the religious extremist fraction of the Mujahedeen. This worked to distance the Mujahedeen from the human rights violations committed by the guerrilla fighters.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> West, *Agents of Altruism*, 69

<sup>51</sup> *A-Nytt*, 2/1986, p 1

<sup>52</sup> West, *Agents of Altruism*, 69

<sup>53</sup> *ibid*, 69

<sup>54</sup> *A-Nytt*, Nr.5, Mars, 1983, 12

This was also true for mainstream media outlets, as the NAC not only criticized public broadcasting company NRK, but also informed them on the “right” terms for the different parties in the Afghan Civil War. In March 1982, NRK showed a series of reports from Kabul depicting the city and the people living there. In the reports, the interviewed voiced their appreciation for the PDPA-government, and their work to modernize Afghanistan.<sup>55</sup> NRK’s decision to air the reports was heavily criticized by the NAC. In an article published in *Klassekampen*, Hans Thorstensen from the NAC criticized NRK for broadcasting what he considered Soviet propaganda. He went on to say that the segment shown on NRK was insensitive to the Afghan people as it featured a representative from the Afghan government who called the Mujahedeen “terrorists”. Thorstensen asked how Norwegians living under the Nazi occupation would react if the Quisling-government were allowed to be interviewed as representatives of the Norwegian people. The team from NRK who visited Kabul weren’t allowed outside of the city by the Afghan government.<sup>56</sup> This was pointed out by Thorstensen who reminded the public that the calm and secure Kabul is not representative of Afghanistan as a whole. Thorstensen informed the public that the NAC has had reporters visit the liberated areas, which documented a people being oppressed by the Soviets. The article concluded with “NRK, show some respect for a country being occupied by a foreign power! Remember that we have been in the same situation, and might be in it once again”.<sup>57</sup>

The debacle ended with NRK inviting Pål Hougen and Petter Bauck from the NAC to meet with the editorial staff at NRK.<sup>58</sup> The purpose of the meeting was to educate staff about the conflict with information provided by the Mujahedeen. The NAC also offered to make segments on the conflict with reporting provided by their allies in the Mujahedeen.<sup>59</sup> The meeting with NRK gave the NAC an opportunity to discuss the matter with the public broadcaster. The NAC informed the broadcaster on the right terms to use regarding the conflict. In an article published in *Klassekampen*, describing this meeting, the representatives from NAC criticize NRK and their use of

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<sup>55</sup> *Klassekampen*, 05.03.1982, 14

<sup>56</sup> *ibid*, 14

<sup>57</sup> *ibid*, 14

<sup>58</sup> *Klassekampen*, 17.03.1982, 10

<sup>59</sup> *ibid*, 10

pro-Soviet terms to describe the parts in the Afghan Conflict.<sup>60</sup> In the reports from Kabul, the NRK used terms like “terrorist” and “rebels” to describe the Mujahedeen.

The report also described President Karmal as the “head of the Afghan government”. This was also criticized by the NAC, as they wanted the president to be described as a “Soviet puppet” and the government at large as “the Quisling-government”.<sup>61</sup> The meeting concluded with NRK agreeing to show an hour-long documentary film provided by the NAC, made by a French journalist who had visited Mujahedeen-controlled areas in Afghanistan. According to the NAC, the documentary film offered the public a balanced view of the conflict, as it presented interviews with Afghan civilians living in areas controlled by the Mujahedeen. This example shows some of the power the NAC enjoyed, as it was able to sway the public broadcaster and shame them for their reporting. The reporting broadcast by the NRK, wasn’t in line with the narrative established by the Mujahedeen, and was therefore not supported by the NAC.

### **Informing the Norwegian Public on the Situation in Afghanistan**

The committee worked extensively to enlighten the Norwegian audience of the situation in Afghanistan. The Committee did this not only with its publications, but local committees throughout Norway had stands to collect donations for the cause in Afghanistan. *A-Nytt* describes how the local branch of NAC in Lillehammer, had a stand during Christmas, where they sold mulled wine to raise awareness and collect money for the Afghan cause.<sup>62</sup> The financial gains of such events would have been limited, but they increased awareness around the conflict. The Committee also held demonstrations, amongst them one outside the Soviet Embassy in Oslo on 27<sup>th</sup> of December in 1981.<sup>63</sup> Articles also describe Norwegian doctors and activists, who have visited Afghanistan. In an article written in *A-Nytt*, Dr. Marianne Mjaaland and Dr. Steinar Nilsen describe their trip to the Afghan province of Paktia in the autumn of 1983. The article describes the hardships Afghan women and children faced, and the great shortage of medicines in the country. Eyewitness accounts from Norwegian doctors who worked in Afghanistan, was an important way of gathering support for

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<sup>60</sup> *ibid*, 10

<sup>61</sup> *Klassekampen*, 17.03.1982, 10

<sup>62</sup> *A-Nytt*, 1/1984, 7

<sup>63</sup> *ibid*, 7

the Afghan cause. Mainstream media outlets would pick up stories from *A-Nytt*, which described Norwegian doctors visiting a poor country in the Global South.<sup>64</sup> Another article describes how nine-graders in the city of Porsgrunn established a youth branch of the local NAC, and started raising money for the Afghan cause. One of the teenagers, Vibeke Andersen, was frustrated over the unwillingness amongst Norwegians to donate money to weapons:

People in Norway are fully supportive as long as we talk about humanitarian aid. It is harder to ask people to give money to weapons, and that was what Bashir [A Mujahedeen representative who visited Norway in 1984] repeatedly said they needed the most. Understandably, many are reluctant to give money that might be used to shoot people, but really it is not that difficult to understand that they need anti-aircraft missiles to defend the villages from helicopters that bomb everything to ruins. We just have to dare to say it to the people we talk to. I think it is arrogant of Norwegians to demand to have a say in what the money should be used for. The Afghans themselves know best what they need.<sup>65</sup>

Thommas Hegghammer claims that in 1984, *Rød Ungdom* collected more than NOK 120.000 to buy weapons for the Mujahedeen Commander Ahmed Shah Massoud.<sup>66</sup> It speaks volumes that Norwegian nine-graders knew what anti-aircraft missiles were and why the Mujahedeen needed them.

### **Afghanistan in Norway**

Why did Norwegian ninth graders in a small Norwegian rural town collect donations for a guerrilla group in a far away place? A place none of them had any relations to nor visited? The main reason for this remarkable mobilization was the ways in which the conflict and the Mujahedeen were portrayed, not only in *A-Nytt*, but also in the Norwegian media at large. The conflict was portrayed in such a way, that Norwegians could often relate to the war. An important way in which the NAC proliferated support for the Afghan cause was to draw parallels to the Nazi occupation of Norway during the Second World War. Since the conflict in Afghanistan was a Cold War by proxy, the crisis received more funds than other conflicts in the same time.<sup>67</sup> While in the US the political aspect was put under spotlight, in large parts of Europe, the humanitarian aspect of the conflict received more attention. Many

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<sup>65</sup> Vibeke Andersen, translated from Norwegian to English. The article shows the personal opinions of the members of the local NAC-committee in Porsgrunn, *A-Nytt* Nr 5 Mars 1983

<sup>66</sup> Hegghammer, Thomas. "Skandinavia's Første Jihadister." (Scandinavia's First Jihadists) *Babylon : Nordisk Tidsskrift for Midtøstenstudier [elektronisk Ressurs]* 16.2 (2018): 174-93, 177

<sup>67</sup> West, *Agents of Altruism*, 39

Europeans could relate to the Afghan cause, as many Europeans had experienced occupation under the Germans.<sup>68</sup> This is also evident in *A-Nytt*, where the publishers often refer to the Norwegian experience under German occupation from 1940 to 1945.<sup>69</sup> The publishers often used terms Norwegians could relate to, like “the Quisling-regime” to describe the Afghan political leadership in Russian-occupied Afghanistan.<sup>70</sup> Vidkun Quisling was the Norwegian leader of the puppet-regime put in place by the Germans during the Nazi occupation of Norway. In an article about the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the publishers describe, “Parents close to the Quisling-government send their children abroad as Mujahedeen gain more and more territory”.<sup>71</sup> In another article describing Commander Qari Baba-Taj Mohammad’s visit to Norway in January 1986, the Commander himself says: “You have Quisling, we have Karmal”.<sup>72</sup>

To familiarize the conflict in Afghanistan to a Norwegian audience was a recurring theme in the newspaper. In one striking example, the war situation in Afghanistan was juxtaposed onto Norway:

The enemy poisoned Gudbrandsdalen yesterday - and thus Mjøsa [Norway’s largest lake]. They target the farmers and agricultural workers who have not been bombed out of their homes, in the once-rich grain villages of Norway's largest lake. At Jæren, helicopters have dropped large quantities of explosives that kill in large numbers. Hundreds of children have lost arms and feet. In Northern Norway, people and cattle have been slaughtered. In Oslo there is a disgraceful government, which balances on the enemy’s bayonets. This Quisling government represents Norway in the UN and other international forums, despite the fact that the government only represents a fraction of the population. This statement is not true - yet.<sup>73</sup>

In this article with the title “Solidarity with the Afghans”, the publishers draw parallels between Norway and Afghanistan, by describing events in Afghanistan as if they were happening in Norway. This was both to familiarize the conflict to readers and thus invoke feelings amongst them, and to remind them that this *can* happen in Norway. The publishers often reminded the audience of how Norway also shared a border with the USSR, just like Afghanistan did. During the Cold War, Norwegians often feared that the Russians would invade the country. Norwegian leftists often argued that Norwegian membership of NATO could provoke the USSR. On the other

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<sup>68</sup> West, *Agents of Altruism*, 59

<sup>69</sup> *A-Nytt*, 5/1983, 2

<sup>70</sup> *A-Nytt*, 1/1988, 16

<sup>71</sup> *A-Nytt*, 1/1988, 16

<sup>72</sup> *A-Nytt*, 1/1986, 10

<sup>73</sup> Translated from Norwegian to English, *A-nytt*, 2/1986 p 1



side, people on the right often highlighted how the mentioned membership had actually saved Norway of Soviet influence.

In a longer text published in January 1986, an article in *A-Nytt* about the situation in Afghanistan concludes with a quote from a Mujahedeen leader saying “ People in Europe must remember that a Soviet lieutenant (... who is fighting against the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan now) will be a general in an attack against Europe”.<sup>74</sup> This quote used the established anxiety that existed in Norway at the time. Afghans weren’t only fighting for themselves; they were fighting for the Norwegians, and Europeans at large. Afghans were keeping the Soviets at bay, and their struggle in Afghanistan was keeping democracy alive in Europe. This was also evident in another article which concludes with “*Their* fight is *our* fight, Norway is safer as long as the Mujahedeen stand”.<sup>75</sup>

### **Depictions of the Mujahedeen as “Noble Savages”**

The conflict in Afghanistan was able to garner a lot of attention in the West. The American president, Ronald Reagan went so far as to praise the Mujahedeen and invited representatives from the movement to the US.<sup>76</sup> On one occasion, six Mujahedeen representatives were invited to the White House to explain the situation in Afghanistan. In February 1983, the American President invited the “freedom fighters” to the Oval Office and explained in front of media how these men were fighting the good fight against the “Empire of Evil”.

In 1987, the American President invited parts of the leadership of Mujahedeen, amongst them the Islamist Younes Khaless and the national traditionalist Sibghatullah Mujadidi, to a press briefing headed by the White House.<sup>77</sup> The American president held a speech, honouring the Mujahedeen as a people representing the true will of the Afghan people, and concluded with saluting the Afghan resistance and calling them a “nation of heroes”.

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<sup>74</sup> *A-Nytt*, 1/1986 p 27

<sup>75</sup> *A-Nytt*, Mars 5/1985 p 2

<sup>76</sup> Ansary, *Games without Rules*, 213

<sup>77</sup> November 12, 1987, Press Briefing at the White House

Romantic depictions of the Mujahedeen were not only expressed by the Americans, as the NAC also promoted a romanticized view of the Mujahedeen, often including propaganda produced by the Mujahedeen in their newspaper *A-Nytt*. The movement gained a lot of supporters amongst Norwegians, as NAC had drawn parallels between the Mujahedeen and the Norwegian resistance movement against the Nazi-Germans.



Figure 1, *A-Nytt*, 2/1986, 27

Figure 1 shows the sentiments the NAC wished to convey to the Norwegian audience regarding the Mujahedeen. The text is written in *dari*, a language not familiar to most Norwegians, and translates roughly to “Continue your father’s legacy, and defend your homeland”. Even though the text is written in *dari*, the message was clear. The picture depicts a young man receiving a firearm from what can be understood as his mother. The mother is pointing at a picture of his father, which hangs in the background, related to the text on the top of the picture.

Alongside pictures, the newspaper also included stories depicting Afghan “bravery” and “pride”.

For instance, the publishers tell a story of a mother affiliated with the Mujahedeen, who found out that her son had worked for the Soviets:

A mother found out one day that her son had contact with the Russian forces, and he had told the Russians where the Mujahedeen were planning on carrying out attacks. She was completely disheartened and disappointed - she told the Mujahedeen about her son's contact with the Russians. The Mujahedeen came to the village and found the son's Russian radio. "How should we punish your son?" said the Mujahedeen. "Give me your Kalashnikov machine gun," said the mother and shot her own son.<sup>78</sup>

The story was introduced by the publishers as an illustration of how much the Afghans hated the Russians.<sup>79</sup> Mothers were willing to kill their sons, if it led to the weakening of the Russians. A story like this would never be celebrated if it happened

<sup>78</sup> *A-Nytt*, 2/1984, 6

<sup>79</sup> *ibid*, 6

in Norway, but because it was happening in Afghanistan, it was celebrated as a heroic tale of a proud mother.

Depictions like this were often found in *A-Nytt*, reproducing the image of the “noble savage”. The term has a long history, which it shares with another European creation of the East, it being the “Orient”. These terms were first created by European writers during the age of exploration and colonialism in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and have throughout time been used to describe different social phenomenon related to the Global South.<sup>80</sup> The terms are a part of an ethnographic paradigm that was the ruling social system, in which the Orient, meaning the East, was often characterized as “wild” and “savage.”<sup>81</sup> This worked both to distance the people of the areas from White Europeans, and to justify discriminating policies towards the local populations. By arguing that they were “different”, they enacted policies that would never be tolerated back home in Europe. This kind of thinking was also visible in another article published in *A-Nytt*, describing where money, which was donated by the public goes to, the publishers list the different projects they have initiated in Afghanistan. The article explains its aim to finance sixty sewing machines, equipment for a female doctor and books for school.<sup>82</sup> The article concludes:

It is important to be aware that money, that is not earmarked, can be used by the guerrilla for weapons. And weapons are needed for the war in Afghanistan. In the actual war, and also to defend schools, hospitals and the fields. The women's league needs guns to defend themselves when they are out in the streets transporting leaflets. Norwegian women and men are not used to weapons. Norway has a strong pacifist tradition. The image of the proud Afghan warrior with his rifle seems alien and perhaps repulsive to Norwegians. In Afghanistan, there is war. The people fight against the Soviet on life and death. They have so few weapons that not everyone who wants can be in the fight. The weapons they have are often very old-fashioned and inadequate. They need more and better equipment in the fight against the Soviets. Also in peacetimes the Afghans carry weapons. A 17-year-old saves for a car in Norway. In Afghanistan, the goal of a teenager is to have his own rifle. Just to have it. To protect himself from wild animals and other dangers. A man always has his rifle with, just like Norwegian women hold handbags. The gun is a part of their day.<sup>83</sup>

The above paragraph from *A-Nytt* describes the Afghans, as they were born with a weapon in their hand. They were made to fight, their history prove this. This is in line with the term *noble savage*, in whom non-European people, are often portrayed as aggressive and irrational. Weapons are portrayed as a normal part of their attire. Even

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<sup>80</sup> Ellingson, Ter. *The Myth of the Noble Savage*. Berkeley, Calif: U of California, 2001, XIII

<sup>81</sup> *ibid*, XIII

<sup>82</sup> *A-Nytt*, Nr.5, Mars, 1983, 12

<sup>83</sup> *ibid*, 12

though the text is meant to justify the use of weapons to a pacifist people, like the Norwegians, the text unintentionally perpetuates an essentializing portrayal of Afghans.

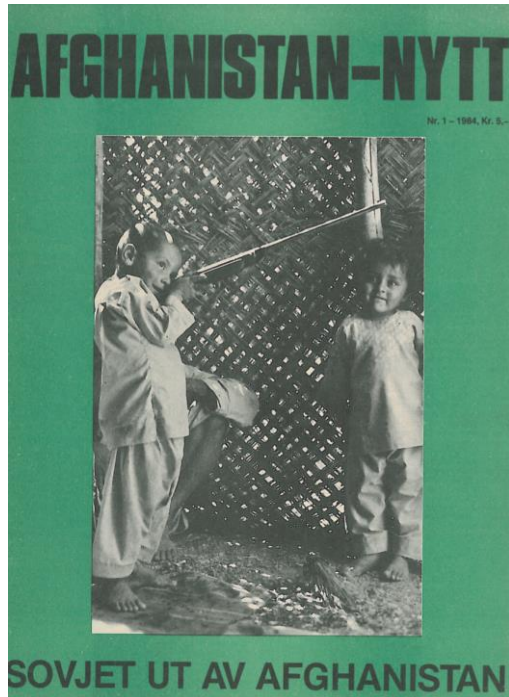


Figure 2, A-Nytt, 1/1984, Front-page

Contemporary use of the term “*Noble Savage*” often highlights how people in the West tolerate and support things in other parts of the world, that would never be tolerated back home in the West. Figure 2 is an excellent example of this, as it portrays children holding guns. This picture was published on the front-page of *A-Nytt*.<sup>84</sup> With Norway’s strong pacifist tradition, these kinds of pictures would never be glorified or celebrated, if Norwegian children were carrying the guns. Because it was something that happened “far-away”, in the context of the Cold War, and promoted the interests of the Norwegian people, the

pictures were justified as something that was “normal” in Afghanistan. Weapons are portrayed as just a normal part of their culture.

The American anthropologist Ter Ellingson describes in “*The Myth of the Noble Savage*” how the term “Noble Savage” was created to establish European hegemony and to project cultural inferiority to justify political subordination. According to Ellingson, even though the term has historically been used to refer to the inhabitants of colonial dominions, the myth of the “Noble Savage” continues to be relevant in our contemporary world.<sup>85</sup> The term provides a romantic glorification of “savage life”, cultures that has not been “touched by” industrialization and that are still “one with nature”, who are “naïve”, “wise”, “uncivilized”, and “uncorrupted” by the vices of civilization.<sup>86</sup> One could argue that the ways in which the Mujahedeen were portrayed by the NAC in *A-Nytt*, is accordance with the myth of the “Noble Savage”, but this time with a gun. The newspapers often portrayed the Afghan people as a “... people

<sup>84</sup> *A-Nytt*, 1/1984, Front-page

<sup>85</sup> Ellingson, *The Myth of the Noble Savage*, 331

<sup>86</sup> *ibid*, p 1

of honour, who are proud of their weapon and are willing to sacrifice their lives for their honour”.<sup>87</sup> In contrast, the government-led forces and the political elite in Kabul were often portrayed as evil, creating this dichotomy between the Soviet-supported Afghans who have been “corrupted by civilization”, and those who are “pure” and “uncorrupted” i.e. the Mujahedeen.

The attraction that the NAC has regarding the traditional and “primitive” Afghanistan, which is visible in the newspaper, might be the result of the publishers Maoist affiliation. As explained in Chapter 1, Maoists often romanticized peasant agriculture and the traditional peasant living. For instant, an article in *A-Nytt* describes the “*real*” Afghanistan as that which exists in the villages, and the “*real*” Afghans as the farmers and shepherds, which the Mujahedeen were recruited from.<sup>88</sup> Pictures of men in the mountains with guns often accompanied articles about the guerrilla fighters, strengthening the idea of Afghans as a people “one with nature”.

By portraying the Mujahedeen as the equivalent of the anti-German Norwegian resistance, the NAC was able to correct public sentiments towards the group. This was also done with its presence in Norwegian media outlet, like the NRK. Their Non-Decision making power was evident when it successfully challenged the showing of information favouring the Soviet-narrative regarding the conflict. Alongside this, the newspaper also essentialized Afghans as a “gun-loving” people, seeing the gun as a normal part of the Afghan daily attire. Favourable depictions of the Mujahedeen enabled mobilization in Norway.

### **Chapter 3: Mobilizing Support for the Afghan Cause**

Alongside informing the Norwegian public on the situation in Afghanistan, the NAC also worked to mobilize support for the Afghan Cause. In order to make this happen, the NAC made use of a variety of activities and events. Rallies, dances, national donation days, discotheques, bake sales, study circles and educational meetings were amongst the most employed methods used by the NAC mobilize Norwegians for the Afghan Cause. Together with this, endorsement and support from public officials also

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<sup>87</sup> *A-Nytt*, 5/1983, 2

<sup>88</sup> *A-Nytt*, 1/1989, 2

worked to mobilize across the political spectrum. The support and the sympathy for Afghans in Norway was made evident in both 1981 and 1986, as Operation Day's Work was on both those years dedicated to provide help to the Afghan people. The NAC also invited representatives from the Mujahedeen to give lectures and speeches in Norway. While on their visit to Norway, some of these representatives met with representatives from Norad and the Norwegian government. During these visits the Mujahedeen worked extensively to correct public perceptions of the Movement, as they were often accused of being too extreme. Together with correcting these perceptions, the visits enabled the Mujahedeen to remind the Norwegian public that this war was essential in weakening the Soviets. Some of them went as far as stating that the Mujahedeen were preventing a Third World War, prompting Norwegians to support them in their fight against the Soviets.

### **NACs Role as Mediator between Norway and the Mujahedeen**

Together with familiarizing the conflict in Afghanistan to a Norwegian audience, the second important role of the NAC was its role as an intermediary between the Mujahedeen and the Norwegian public. This is evident not only in the Committee's work to ensure their interests through selective coverage, but also by organizing visits for representatives from the Mujahedeen to Norway. The visits from the Mujahedeen to Norway had two goals: the first was to mobilize Norwegians for the Afghan cause, while the second one being to establish a narrative regarding the war and the Mujahedeen. There were numerous visits, many of them hosted in relation to events in Norway, like Operation Day's Work and the Solidarity Week for Afghanistan.

Amongst those invited by the NAC was Habib Zikria in 1981. Zikria had studied Political Science in France and spoke both English and French. Often labelled an intellectual, he was popular amongst radical leftists in Scandinavia and had previously paid a visit to both Sweden and Denmark. He had since the invasion in 1979 worked in Paris, where he coordinated French aid to Afghans.<sup>89</sup> The political scientist had close contacts with *Jamiat-e-Islami*, one of the biggest mujahedeen-groups. *Jamiat-e-Islami* was the first Islamic party in Afghanistan, and was led by Burhanuddin Rabbani, who would later serve as president in 1992. The vast majority of the party's supporters and members were ethnic Tajiks, the second largest ethnic group in the

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<sup>89</sup> *Nordlandsposten*, 09.02.1981, 5

country. Zikria was at the time working with Western NGOs providing relief for Afghan refugees living in Pakistan, and was invited by the NAC to Norway, to hold lectures on the situation in Afghanistan.<sup>90</sup> During a demonstration in Oslo in January 1981, he gave a speech informing the people on how information from the Mujahedeen suggested that three-quarters of the Soviets tanks were pointed at the strategic Strait of Hormuz, where more than 60 percent of Europe's oil was shipped through.<sup>91</sup> He explained how the war against the Russians in Afghanistan was preventing a third World War, as Soviet control over the Strait of Hormuz would escalate tensions between the two superpowers.<sup>92</sup> It was only because of the armed struggle of the Mujahedeen that this was being prevented from happening. The activist ended his speech with an appeal to Westerners to support the Afghans with not only financial means, but also with arms.<sup>93</sup> By pointing out the international ramifications of such a hypothetical scenario, Zikria was able to justify the Mujahedeen's appeal for arms from its allies in the West. How could one not support their appeal for arms, if it was preventing the Third World War from happening?

Visits from Afghan intellectuals provided the Mujahedeen with opportunities to brand themselves as a democracy-loving movement. People in the West feared that their support for the Mujahedeen would not only escalate the conflict in Afghanistan, but that the movement would in the future develop into a government regime having less respect for human rights than the PDPA-government. In an interview with Zikria published by the left-wing newspaper *Klassekampen*, he was confronted with the radical elements within the Mujahedeen.<sup>94</sup> The interviewer asked Zikria: "Europeans are alarmed by the radical groups that are a part of the Mujahedeen. Many are hesitant to support these groups, as they have declared their wish to establish a feudal Islamic society in Afghanistan". The Afghan activist brushed this off as Soviet propaganda, reminding the interviewer how the Soviets have developed an immense apparatus of propaganda, and how disinformation worked to discredit the Mujahedeen. He went on to say how this apparatus was established to disgrace the movement among progressive Europeans, as these rumours would lead Europeans to cut ties with the

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<sup>90</sup> *Bergens Tidene*, 26.01.1981, 12

<sup>91</sup> *A-Nytt*, 2/1981, 7

<sup>92</sup> *Bergens Tidene*, 26.01.1981, 12

<sup>93</sup> *Nordlandsposten*, 09.02.1981, 5

<sup>94</sup> *Klassekampen*, 28.01.1981, 9

Mujahedeen.<sup>95</sup> Zikria also pointed to how the movement was established by a bottom-up approach, with people spontaneously rebelling in villages and then establishing regional guerrilla groups. In fact, Zikria argued the opposite, saying that the war against the Soviets has led to Afghans embracing democracy, increasing the support for institutionalization of human rights in this country. He went on to argue that now that the average Afghan has a weapon, "...no feudal lord nor authoritarian government in the future can force on us something against our own will".<sup>96</sup> By saying this, Zikria argued that arms to the Afghans wasn't only helping the Afghans in their fight against the Soviets, but that it would prevent future regime change initiated by authoritarian movements.

A second visit that also gained a lot of attention in Norwegian media was that of Wakil Akberzai in 1984, from the political party *Islamic Unity*. In his two-week long visit to Norway, he met with representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norad, Save the Children, and Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO).<sup>97</sup> His visit to the country gained a lot of attention in the Norwegian media, and Akberzai was interviewed by *Aftenposten* (The Evening Post), *Dagsnytt* (Daily News) and *Dagsrevyen* (The Daily Review). In an interview with *Aftenposten*, Akberzai describes a process of sovietisation happening in Afghanistan, in which the military leadership of the campaign against the Mujahedeen were slowly changed as the Soviets were losing patience with the Mujahedeen.<sup>98</sup> The national newspaper gave the Mujahedeen representative a platform to share an analysis of the situation in country. He went on to explain how government soldiers were deserting in their thousands, and that many had joined the Mujahedeen. According to Akberzai, this was the result of Afghan soldiers becoming aware of how the Soviet invasion was meant to enrich the Soviets.<sup>99</sup> The Soviets were accused by the Mujahedeen of invading the country for its mineral deposits and the access it provided to the Indian Ocean.<sup>100</sup>

Akberzai's visit wasn't only mentioned in national papers, but also local papers. As he travelled through the country, local papers like *Romsdal Budstikke*, *Trønder-Avisa*,

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<sup>95</sup> *Klassekampen*, 28.01.1981, 9

<sup>96</sup> *ibid*, 9

<sup>97</sup> *A-Nytt*, 3/1984, 4

<sup>98</sup> *Aftenposten*, 23.10.1984, 4

<sup>99</sup> *Klassekampen*, 22.12.1984, 15

<sup>100</sup> *ibid*, 22.12.1984, 15



*Sandefjords Blad*, *Dagningen* and *Moss Dagblad* interviewed him. While visiting the small city of Stjørdal, Akberzai reminded the small community in Nord-Trøndelag how the Afghan struggle against the Soviets was part of the international effort against the totalitarian ideology of communism.<sup>101</sup> He went on to say: “If you let the Soviets eat us today, they will eat you tomorrow”.<sup>102</sup> Looking through the edition of the local newspaper, this article shines out as the only one covering international politics, showing how important these visits from the Mujahedeen were. By visiting rural areas in Norway, they brought the conflict *closer* to the Norwegian people. This worked in parallel to NAC’s effort, with juxtaposing the conflict in Afghanistan onto Norway and using terms comprehensible to Norwegians, as explored in the previous chapter. Akberzai also visited the Norwegian parliament, encouraging the Standing Committees of the Norwegian Labour Party and the Conservatives to pay a visit to the refugee camps in Pakistan.<sup>103</sup>

In addition to lobbying for increased arms for the Mujahedeen and giving interviews to major mainstream newspapers on the situation in Afghanistan, visiting European countries gave the Mujahedeen representatives an opportunity to tell their side of the story. The PDPA-government in Afghanistan had initiated grand reforms to reduce inequality in the country. Amongst these reforms were plans to redistribute land and women’s emancipation. The PDPA-government had often used the Mujahedeen’s opposition to these reforms to argue that the movement consisted of radicals and religious fanatics who wished to maintain Afghanistan as a feudal society. When confronted with this, Zikria explained why the Mujahedeen opposed these reforms, arguing that the reforms never intended to profit the Afghan people, but the Soviets.<sup>104</sup> For example, Zikria argued that the government-led cotton-production in the Northern Afghanistan intended to support the Soviet textile industry. By visiting Norway, Zikria and the Mujahedeen at large, were able to answer questions like this face-to-face, weakening the Soviet narrative regarding the Mujahedeen and the conflict in Afghanistan.

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<sup>101</sup> *Trønder-Avisa*, 01.11.1984, 21

<sup>102</sup> *ibid*, 01.11.1984, 21

<sup>103</sup> Hegghammer, *Skandinavia's første jihadister*, 177

<sup>104</sup> *Klassekampen*, 28.01.1981, 9

A third visit showed how the NAC worked as an intermediary between the Mujahedeen and elected officials in Norway. In Mars 1986, Commander Alludin Khan from the political party *Jamiat-e-Islami*, which operated in Herat, visited the city of Bergen. During his visit, the Commander met with the Governor of Bergen, Henrik J. Lisæth.<sup>105</sup> The leader of NAC Bergen, Per Hornfelt, joined Commander Khan on his courtesy call to the Governor's office.<sup>106</sup> During the visit, Commander Khan informed Lisæth of the situation in Afghanistan, and how the people of Bergen could help the civilians living in Herat. The governor told the Commander that he would make sure that public opinion in Norway would remain sympathetic to the Mujahedeen in their struggle against the Soviets.<sup>107</sup> The governor took the opportunity to share his own experiences from the Second World War, when he was part of the resistance against the Germans.<sup>108</sup>

### **The 1986 Solidarity Week for Afghanistan**

The same month Alludin Khan met with Governor Lisæth in Bergen, the NAC organized a Solidarity Week for Afghanistan. The NAC had previously hosted a similar event in 1983, which led to a UN Human Rights Commission to research human rights violations in the country.<sup>109</sup> The purpose of the Solidarity Week for Afghanistan was to mobilize people and raise awareness of the war in Afghanistan. The Solidarity Week for Afghanistan ended with a Hearing on the Conflict in Afghanistan, where people afflicted by the conflict were able to present their stories to a Western audience. The purpose of the hearing was to bring eyewitness accounts from the conflict, in order to strengthen the Mujahedeen's narrative. Little information was coming out of Afghanistan as the Soviets had put a lid on what was happening in the country. The idea was that this hearing would discredit the Soviet narrative on the war in Afghanistan.<sup>110</sup> In 1986, the NAC had invited prominent members of the Mujahedeen and civilians who had been injured in Afghanistan. Amongst these civilians, was Ashiqualla, who had lost a leg in a Soviet air raid.<sup>111</sup> The ten-year old rolled his wheelchair up to the podium, and told the story of how he also lost his father and his sister in the same attack, leaving him alone with his mother.

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<sup>105</sup> *A-Nytt*, 1/1986, 16

<sup>106</sup> *Bergens Tidende*, 11.03.1986, 14

<sup>107</sup> *ibid*, 14

<sup>108</sup> *ibid*, 14

<sup>109</sup> *A-Nytt*, 1/1986, 7

<sup>110</sup> *Morgenbladet*, 17.03.1986, 1

<sup>111</sup> *A-Nytt*, 1/1986, 5

The boy gave a powerful speech, and according to *Klassekampen*, it brought the people in the audience to tears.<sup>112</sup>

Present at the hearing was also Nikolai Movtsjan, previously a Russian soldier who had in 1983 deserted his position as a sergeant in the Red Army and joined the Mujahedeens. In the hearing, the sergeant explained the gruesome ways in which the Soviets operated in Afghanistan.<sup>113</sup> As someone who had been on the other side, Movtsjan was able to bring an important perspective to the hearing, with his description of how the Soviets randomly bombed rural villages, hoping some of them would target the Mujahedeens. A third witness by the name of Nawab not only testified, but also showed the scars he obtained after the Soviets dropped a napalm bomb in the province of Nangarhar in East-Afghanistan. Nawab was later sent for

treatment in Peshawar, where he met representatives from the NAC, who sent him to Norway for further treatment of his wounds.<sup>114</sup>

The 1986 Solidarity Week for Afghanistan gained a lot of attention in the media, with fifteen different outlets writing more than a hundred articles on the event. As Figure 3 shows, the story of ten-



Figure 3, *Morgenbladet*, 17.03.1986, Front Page

year old Ashiqualla even made it to the front page of *Morgenbladet*.<sup>115</sup>

The eyewitness accounts provided by civilians weakened the Soviet narrative regarding the conflict in Afghanistan, as they were sharing their own experiences. These accounts proved to be difficult to brush off as Mujahedeens propaganda. In an article written some days after the Hearing, the editorial staff of *Dagbladet* reminds people of the solidarity week for Afghanistan has ended, but the war hasn't.<sup>116</sup> The editorial staff went on to say that this hearing should be enough to pressure the Norwegian

<sup>112</sup> *Klassekampen*, 17.03.1986, 6

<sup>113</sup> *Dagbladet*, 17.03.1986, 19

<sup>114</sup> *ibid*, 19

<sup>115</sup> *Morgenbladet*, 17.03.1986, 1

<sup>116</sup> *Dagbladet*, 18.03.1986, 2

government to take a more active role in Afghanistan through the UN.<sup>117</sup> At the same time, the editorial went on to say that the Norwegian government should pressure the Soviets to let in relief from humanitarian organizations, as the Soviets had limited these organizations to Kabul-area. In a letter to the editorial published in *Dagbladet*, Knut, a newly engaged Afghanistan-activist, states to other Norwegians that the hearing that took place a week earlier should be enough to motivate them to get involved in solidarity work on behalf of the Afghans. He went on to shame the public broadcasting company in Norway, NRK, into "...featuring at least one segment per day about the conflict in Afghanistan in *Dagsrevyen*, the evening news broadcast."<sup>118</sup>

Pål Hougan, a representative from NAC, also pointed out the increased interest for the Afghan Cause in the wake of the Solidarity Week for Afghanistan. He concluded the Solidarity week by referring to it as only the start for the Committee, saying that the week did wonders for the Committee's work to mobilize support for the Mujahedeen in Norway.<sup>119</sup> During the Afghanistan-Week, four representatives from the Mujahedeen visited more than twenty-eight places throughout Norway.<sup>120</sup> The week was presented as a success, and Hougen was amazed by the amount of mail they had received as a result of the week. Even though these claims might have been exaggerated, many of the events were even attended by correspondents from the foreign media outlets, amongst them the Chinese news agency Xinhua, BBC, Voice of America and multiple German TV stations.<sup>121</sup>

With the Solidarity Week for Afghanistan, the NAC was able to mobilize people as few other means could. Mainstream media outlets reported from the events that were held by the NAC, like the Hearing on Afghanistan. Even though some people argued that the Hearing brought little new information to the public, others argued that it confirmed the human rights violations made by the Soviets in Afghanistan.<sup>122</sup> In 1986, the Soviet occupation of the country was in its sixth year, and the attention given to the Afghan Cause had declined. It worked to remind the Norwegian people about the situation in the country. The limited attention given to the issue didn't mean

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<sup>117</sup> *Dagbladet*, 18.03.1986, 2

<sup>118</sup> *ibid*, 2

<sup>119</sup> *Klassekampen*, 28.01.1981, 9

<sup>120</sup> *ibid*, 9

<sup>121</sup> *Morgenbladet*, 17.03.1986, 1

<sup>122</sup> *Valdres Newspaper*, 03.04.1986, 3

that the war in Afghanistan had come to an end; it only meant that the media was prioritizing other conflicts, like the Iran-Iraq War and the Civil War in Guatemala. The little attention and mobilization for the conflict in Afghanistan is also evident in another article written in the local paper *Valdres*, where Farmand asks why the conflict hasn't been able to attain the same level of engagement as the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>123</sup> The Solidarity Week for Afghanistan worked to remind people exactly of this, that the conflict in Afghanistan deserved the same level of mobilization like the war in Vietnam. Civilians were able to present their stories, often favouring the narrative set by the Mujahedeen.

### **Operation Day's Work 1986**

The same year as the mentioned Solidarity Week for Afghanistan was held, the OD was held for the Afghan Cause. Operation Day's Work (*Operasjon Dagsverk*) is a program introduced to Norwegian high schools in 1964, as a way of increasing solidarity with other teenagers in developing countries. The idea behind OD was to raise awareness amongst Norwegian high school students concerning the difficulties faced by teenagers in other countries. Norwegian high school students volunteer at stores, cafés, or their parent's work place in exchange for a small payment, which is donated to a specific cause each year. It is also common to see high school students at stands, where they sell different kinds of cakes and buns in central areas. OD has supported projects in more than sixty countries across Asia, Africa and Latin-America, since it first began fifty-five years ago. OD often partners up with local organizations in the Global South that provide educational services for teenagers. The OD-Committee is elected from the *Norwegian School Student Union (Elevtinget)*, and is responsible for selecting the project for each year.

*Elevtinget* decided in the autumn of 1985 that in 1986, OD was to be held to establish and maintain schools in Mujahedeen-controlled areas in the Afghan cities of Herat and Ghazni.<sup>124</sup> The role of the NAC in the OD-Committee selecting Afghanistan as destination for 1986 was decisive. The NAC had both filed the application and

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<sup>123</sup> *ibid*, 03.04.1986, 3

<sup>124</sup> *A-Nytt*, 1/1986, 18

lobbied for Afghans to receive the funds for the 1986 OD.<sup>125</sup> OD had also been held previously in 1981 for Afghanistan, that year funds went exclusively to educating Afghans refugees in Pakistan. In 1986, on the other hand, some of the funds were also meant for educating nurses and buying medical equipment. On the 23<sup>th</sup> of October, more than 200 000 Norwegian students volunteered across Norway to collect donations for these causes.<sup>126</sup> The campaign was massive, and the OD-Committee closely worked with the NAC to both make this happen, and for it to be successful. The NAC provided schools across Norway with slides, educational videos and leaflets about Afghanistan.<sup>127</sup> The NAC had divided Norway in five areas, each to be toured by a representative from the Mujahedeen. These representatives toured Norwegian schools and informed the students of the situation in Afghanistan. Representatives from the local NAC committees also assisted by visiting different schools and accompanying the representatives.<sup>128</sup>

In internal memos, the NAC focused on how the OD in 1986 would bring a wave of new members, just as the Solidarity Week for Afghanistan in March the same year did.<sup>129</sup> Documents describe how it was important that local NAC committees prioritize school visits. This was especially important as the pro-Soviet Communist party NKP was publicly criticizing ODs choice of Afghanistan as the recipient. Arguing that the Afghan government had invited Soviet troops into the country, the NKP alleged that the Mujahedeen were terrorists who were preventing the Afghan government from modernizing the country. They believed the country was plagued by feudal lords who oppressed the farmers by forcing them into a patron-client relationship.<sup>130</sup>

The NKP and their youth faction NKU criticized OD's choice for the year 1986, as they believed the money would go to benefit the Mujahedeen themselves, instead of educating children in Afghanistan.<sup>131</sup> The pro-Soviet groups went as far as sending letters to schools that were participating, telling them that the hard-earned money of

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<sup>125</sup> *Klassekampen*, 20.11.94, 11

<sup>126</sup> *A-Nytt* 2/1986, 6

<sup>127</sup> Arbeiderbevegelsens arkiv og bibliotek/ARK-2969/D/Da/L0043 – A document showing the responsibilities of the different local branches of the NAC.

<sup>128</sup> Arbeiderbevegelsens arkiv og bibliotek/ARK-2969/D/Da/L0043 – A document describing which local branches were to accompany the Afghan guests

<sup>129</sup> Arbeiderbevegelsens arkiv og bibliotek/ARK-2969/D/Da/L0043

<sup>130</sup> *Friheten*, Number 1, Thursday 3th January 1980, 4

<sup>131</sup> *Klassekampen*, 01.10.1986, 2

their students would go to “...fund terrorists and feudal lords”, urging them to boycott the event.<sup>132</sup> NKP was a fringe political party with limited influence on the discourse related to the conflict in Afghanistan, but unlike the AKP-ml, the NKP did enjoy a following amongst radical workers in Norway during the 1970s and the 1980s. The campaign led by the NKP was successful enough that OD had to publicly comment on the situation. Tore Evang, who was in charge of OD that year, explained in an interview with *Klassekampen* that some schools who were contacted by the NKP were now hesitant to join, as they had been told that funds collected through OD would go to finance arms for the Mujahedeen.<sup>133</sup> Amongst these schools was Malakoff Secondary Elementary School in the town of Moss.<sup>134</sup> But after being visited by the NAC the school decided to re-join the campaign.

The great enthusiasm amongst Norwegians for contributing to the Afghan Cause was visible by the amount of money collected. The OD in 1986 for Afghanistan brought in more than NOK twenty millions, an increase of NOK eight millions from the previous year, which was for Namibian refugees living in Zambia.<sup>135</sup> While both were noble causes, the conflict in Afghanistan had a stronger appeal amongst Norwegians. This might have been the result of the conflict enjoying great media attention in the year of 1986, its Cold War association, and that the USSR bordered Norway. At the same time, the NAC provided schools with slides, videos and educational staff to promote the OD. The NACs work to promote Afghanistan as the receiver for 1986 OD and their technical support to the schools, made the 1986 OD successful, bringing in a sizable donation for medical equipment and educating Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

### **Strengthening the ties with Mujahedeen**

At first glance, the NACs relationship with the Mujahedeen seems simple and easily understandable. The relationship between the NAC and the Mujahedeen was more complex. The relationship was based on its mutual opposition to Soviet imperialism. Even though the NAC had broad political support, the most active in the organization were Norwegian Maoists from the political party AKP-ml. The bond between the Maoist-influenced NAC and the Mujahedeen started first with representatives from

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<sup>132</sup> *Klassekampen*, 01.10.1986, 2

<sup>133</sup> *ibid*, 2

<sup>134</sup> *ibid*, 2

<sup>135</sup> *Klassekampen*, 24.10.1985, 12

the Mujahedeen providing safety for Norwegian journalists and doctors visiting Afghanistan in the first years after the invasion. This relationship developed in late 1981, with members from the Mujahedeen being invited to Norway. Amongst these was Habib Zikria, who travelled through Norway to mobilize support. During these visits some Mujahedeen members met with the Norwegian political establishment. The relationship was further strengthened with the NAC hosting Solidarity Week for Afghanistan in 1986, in which the Soviet narrative was significantly weakened. The same year, the NAC lobbied for OD to benefit the Afghan Cause. With time, the Mujahedeen proved to be a reliable ally for the NAC, as they later provided the Committee with protection to perform cross-border operations into Afghanistan, starting in 1987.

Many NGOs were barred by the Afghan government from providing relief to people living in Afghanistan, and some NGOs therefore relied heavily on the protection of the Mujahedeen in order to gain access to civilians in Afghanistan. The Afghan regime was mistrustful of international NGOs, but allowed some UN agencies and small NGOs to operate in the capital of Kabul.<sup>136</sup> European peace workers who visited the country were at risk, and there were cases where either the Pakistani or the Afghan government had arrested them. The Norwegian doctor Marianne Mjaaland experienced this in 1985 when the Pakistani government on charges of being a Soviet spy arrested her.<sup>137</sup> The situation ended when a Mujahedeen affiliate assured the Pakistani government that Mjaaland was no Soviet spy. The situation worked to remind the NAC of how important it was to have contacts in the Mujahedeen.

Even though the war in Afghanistan was one of the biggest crises of the 1980s, limited number of humanitarian organizations operated in the country, and the majority did so in rebel-held areas. By aligning themselves with rebel-groups, NGOs were not only able to gain protection but also access to rural areas in Afghanistan. For instance, the French humanitarian organization Médecins du Monde (MdM) operated in the province of Wardak, which was controlled by the mujahedeen leader Amin Wardak.<sup>138</sup> The British NGO Afghanaid worked closely with Commander Ahmad

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<sup>136</sup> West, *Agents of Altruism*, 39

<sup>137</sup> *Klassekampen*, 23.10.1985, 9

<sup>138</sup> West, *Agents of Altruism*, 39



Shah Massoud, and provided relief to areas held by the rebel-group *Jamiat Islami*.<sup>139</sup> The NAC on the other hand, did not limit its humanitarian effort to one single area, and was therefore in contact with many different commanders from a myriad of political parties. This is evidenced by the work done by Elisabeth Eide and Terje Skaufjord, who were stationed in the Committee's office in Peshawar from 1987 to 1988.<sup>140</sup>

While working at the office in Peshawar, the two Norwegians experienced the difficulties of providing cross-border relief. NGOs operating in Afghanistan and Pakistan had to navigate around two host governments and rebel commanders, who at times were crucial in gaining access to civil population inside Afghanistan. Western NGOs who wished to gain access to government-held areas, had to negotiate this with the Afghan government. On the other hand, NGOs who wished to work with refugees in Pakistan, had to have permits according to Pakistani law. The third one, which is highly relevant as this was the area in which NAC worked, was cross-border NGOs, who had to negotiate with the Mujahedeen commanders. Since the Afghan government was suspicious of foreign NGOs and the UN, they were rarely permitted to enter the country. This would change in 1988 after the Geneva Accords were signed by the Afghan government, which required that relief be sent to Afghanistan through the different UN agencies.<sup>141</sup> Prior to this, the UN and other NGOs chose to focus on the refugees in Pakistan. This is especially true as the war dragged on and the humanitarian tasks in the refugee camps multiplied.<sup>142</sup> The UN was also not able to "break" international law and conduct cross-border operations, as this would offend Afghanistan's sovereignty.<sup>143</sup> This was where NAC came in, as an independent NGO, which wasn't prevented from intervening in the internal matters of the host country. The NAC's role became too radical for the UN, to provide relief to the areas controlled by the Mujahedeen by organizing cross-border operations. The NAC's relationship with the Mujahedeen has to be seen in this context. In regards to establishing contact with the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan and Pakistan, their relationship was one born out of necessity: as only by aligning themselves with a rebel group, could they be given access to the population living in Afghanistan.

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<sup>139</sup> West, *Agents of Altruism*, p 39

<sup>140</sup> Eide, Elisabeth, and Terje Skaufjord. *Afghanistan : Ingen Fred å Få*. Oslo: Pax, 2014, p 57

<sup>141</sup> West, *Agents of Altruism*, 74

<sup>142</sup> *ibid*, 71

<sup>143</sup> *ibid*, 73

The government of Pakistan had a tight hold over the rebel groups that operated in Pakistan. The Pakistani government allocated funds provided by Saudi-Arabia and the US to the different rebel groups, and was therefore able to decide how the Mujahedeen were shaped, as without external financing waging a war proved to be too difficult. This is evident in how secular organizations were ostracized, as their political position was not one that favoured the Pakistani government. The NAC was therefore “forced” to align itself with one of the Pakistani-supported “Seven Party Mujahedeen Alliance”. Amongst these parties was that of Commander Jalaludeen Haqani from *Hezb-e-Islami-kf* (Khales Faction). *Hezb-e-Islami-kf* is an Islamist party, and was part of the “Peshawar Seven”. The political party would later oppose the 2001 American invasion of Afghanistan, and Haqqani is supposed to have introduced suicide bombing to the country, during the war against the Americans.

Before Commander Haqani was radicalized, the Commander seems to have been favoured by the NAC, as he often received aid from the Committee. In correspondence letters between the main office in Oslo and the regional office in Peshawar, documents reveal the financial support for civilians living in areas controlled by the fraction.<sup>144</sup> The agreements between the NAC and the Mujahedeen stipulate that the aid was to be spent on food, medicine and clothes for the local population living in the areas controlled by the Commander. The money was often provided in cash to representatives from commanders, as the commanders themselves were often in Afghanistan fighting. In an agreement between *Hezb-e-Islami-kf* and the NAC, the Committee requested a list of the goods purchased and the locations where the goods were distributed. Alongside this, the Committee also requested a list of signatures or thumbprints from people who had received help. This worked as an assurance that the money donated were used for humanitarian purposes.

The NAC’s explanation as “being forced” to align themselves with the Mujahedeen might be slightly exaggerated. The relationship seems to be one that strengthened over time to the point where aid was given directly to commanders with few means in place to ensure that the aid was used for humanitarian purposes. Both thumbprints and

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<sup>144</sup> Arbeiderbevegelsens arkiv og bibliotek/ARK-2969/D/Da/L0009 – Agreement between Mujahedeen Commander Jalaluddin Haqani and the NAC on distribution of aid, food, medicine and clothes to the locals in Paktia Province.

signatures could be easily forged, and having this as the only mechanism to prove that the aid was used for the intended purpose, shows that this relationship was at least to some extent based on trust. Had the relationship been out of necessity it would have been limited to providing protection for NAC-representatives when they were travelling between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The NAC's effort to promote in Norway the narrative favouring the Mujahedeen, inviting commanders to the country, and collecting donations for their cause suggests that the relationship was not born out of necessity, but rather as an agreement between allies. Some of the Mujahedeen commanders were Islamic hardliners who wished to create a society in accordance with fundamentalist interpretations of Islamic *Sharia*.

In an article by the Norwegian historian Terje Tvedt, who himself was a member of the AKP-ml at the time, he backs the NAC's support for the Mujahedeen's wish to establish laws accordance to fundamentalist interpretations of Islamic *Sharia*.<sup>145</sup> He argued that Islamic rule was the truest form of non-alignment and Third-Worldism, as it disregarded both capitalism and communism. Islamism's position as a third way, separate from the two prevalent camps at the time, is an interesting rationalization for NAC's support for the political ideology. It becomes problematic only later, in 1996 with the creation of the Taliban-government. It might be easy to point this out in hindsight, but the Mujahedeen's wishes to establish a government similar to the one organized by the Taliban, was already there.

Rather than associating those fundamentalist elements with the Mujahedeen, the NAC decided to separate them from the movement by labelling them "Khomeini-Fascists".<sup>146</sup> According to Hegghammer, Afghanistan in the 1980s was the "cradle" of the jihadist movement.<sup>147</sup> The conflict in Afghanistan attracted foreign fighters from large parts of the Muslim world, especially Saudi Arabia. During this conflict, personal connections and organisational structures of the modern jihadist movement were established. At the end of the conflict, there were thousands of Saudis who had participated in the war against the Soviets. Amongst these were Osama bin Laden, who worked to mobilize Arabs on behalf of the Afghan Cause.

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<sup>145</sup> A-Nytt, 1/1988, 38

<sup>146</sup> A-Nytt, Nr.5, Mars, 1983, 12

<sup>147</sup> Hegghammer, Jihad in Saudi Arabia, 38

Studying the NAC-Mujahedeen relationship, one is made aware of the historical developments of this relationship. It started with Mujahedeen providing Norwegian doctors and journalists with protection when travelling to Afghanistan. In the first half of the 1980s, this relationship advanced when the Mujahedeen were invited to Norway to further their cause and correct public perceptions on the movement. In the later half of the 1980s, the NAC lobbied for Afghanistan to be the receiver of the 1986 OD. The funds allocated were handed to the Mujahedeen, with few mechanisms in place to ensure that the funds were used for the intended purposes.

## Conclusion

In examining how the NAC worked to promote the Afghan Cause in Norway this thesis has attempted to answer three main questions; why was the Afghan Cause esteemed on the Norwegian “solidarity market”? What role did the NAC play in mobilizing the Norwegian public? And did the AKP-ml “hijack” the Afghan Cause to further their own political interests?

The main reason the Afghan Cause was esteemed on the “solidarity market” was because of its Cold War affiliation. The empirical findings in this thesis demonstrate that the politics of the Cold War were important in shaping the response to the crisis itself. Katarina West, who believes that Afghanistan was an important Cold War arena because of its Cold War aspect, also presents this argument. According to her, the Afghan Conflict received a great amount of attention as the war was instigated by the Soviets.<sup>148</sup> This is also true in the case of the NAC, and their reasons for solidarity with the Afghan people. Analysing reasons for solidarity is problematic, but in the case of the NAC, their reasons are easily exposed. Their political alignment as Maoist activists was an important reason for their wish to show solidarity with a people who were invaded and oppressed by the Soviets.

The invasion had proved what Maoists had always believed; the Soviets were an imperial superpower that did not represent *true* socialism. Many perceived the occupation of Afghanistan as a “David vs. Goliath” situation in which one of the most

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<sup>148</sup> West, *Agents of Altruism*, 65

powerful countries in the world had invaded a small, poor, and landlocked country. Norway was *also* a small country neighbouring the USSR, and some people actually feared that Norway could be next. This fear was reinforced by the NAC with articles reminding the Norwegian public of how Afghanistan was also once a peaceful country. The NAC also pointed out the international ramifications of the Soviets gaining access to the Indian Ocean. According to Habib Zikria, the Mujahedeen were averting this from happening and were therefore preventing the Third World War, as this would escalate tensions between the two superpowers. Alongside this, they also depicted the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as the moral equivalent of the German invasion of Norway in 1940. Just like Norway during the Second World War, Afghanistan had been occupied and a “Quisling”-regime had been put in place. The Mujahedeen were juxtaposed as the Norwegian resistance to the Nazis.

The fear many Norwegians had regarding their hostile neighbour in the North was utilized by the NAC to further anti-Soviet sentiments in Norway, a political move influenced by the members’ Maoist background. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was used by the AKP-ml to expand operations internationally. The invasion provided the Maoists with an opportunity to engage on an international level. Norwegian Maoists understood that to be able to do any significant work in the field of solidarity, they had to promote the Committee as “apolitical”. Emphasizing the broad political support the NAC received, the Committee often included statements of support in their newspaper, *A-Nytt*. After the Soviet retreat from Afghanistan in February 1989, the former Prime Minister Kåre Willoch from the Conservative Party (*Høyre*) praised NAC’s work, and described it as being decisive in shaping public opinion in Norway. Willoch believed the NAC had worked to “wake up” the Norwegian conscience, and mobilized people to work for a Soviet withdrawal and an independent Afghanistan.<sup>149</sup>

NACs role in mobilizing Norwegians for the Afghan Cause cannot be underplayed. NACs work to provide relief for civilians living in Afghanistan, as noble as the cause was, stand minor when compared with its role to mobilize support for the Mujahedeen. To mobilize support for the Mujahedeen, the NAC organized a myriad of events. The most influential being rallies, national donation days, bake sale, study

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<sup>149</sup> *A-Nytt*, 4/1989, 4

circles and educational meetings. Even though the donations brought in were limited compared to the overall aid given to the refugees, they worked to bring the conflict in Afghanistan closer and make it more visible to a Norwegian audience. The idea behind these minor events was to raise awareness around the conflict in Afghanistan. The Solidarity Week for Afghanistan in March 1986 and OD the same year in October worked to do the same, but on a national level. Those affected by the war were brought to Norway, to give testimony on how the war had shaped their lives. Through OD, more than NOK 20 million was raised to benefit the Afghan Cause. The OD also proved the NACs capabilities to both shape public opinion and to successfully argue against the pro-Soviet NKP narrative regarding the conflict. The Mujahedeen visits served the same purpose, weakening the Soviet narrative on the conflict. The visits provided the Mujahedeen with a unique chance to correct public perceptions, often describing themselves as more liberal than they actually were.

Alongside this, the NAC also had the role of an information agency at times as it provided its “expert opinion” on the conflict in Afghanistan. The NAC shamed media outlets that dared to show another side of the conflict, a side that did not favour the Mujahedeen. Their role in the flow of information regarding the conflict was made evident when NAC shamed the public broadcaster NRK to use the correct terms for the parts fighting in the conflict. The NACs unintended role as a representative for the Mujahedeen in Norway outweighed their intended role as a provider of humanitarian aid for the Afghans.

The NACs role as a spokesperson for the Mujahedeen in Norway is problematic. Not only for the reason that Mujahedeen carried out human rights violations, but also because this affiliation had parallels to a patron-client relation. According to the Syrian author Yassin al-Haj Saleh, solidarity as shown by people in West with people in the Global South is problematic for the reason that it creates and perpetuates a relationship of dependency.<sup>150</sup> He argues that organized and politicized solidarity creates a relationship between that of a guardian and a ward. Saleh uses the case of solidarity with the Syrian people in the wake of the Arab Spring in 2011. He describes how solidarity movements in Germany promoting the Syrian Cause, faced problems

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<sup>150</sup> Saleh, *A Critique of Solidarity*, 6

with representatives from the Free Syrian Army (FSA) visiting the country. According to Saleh, representatives from FSA didn't know how to "act, speak or promote" their cause to a European audience. Because of this, it became important for the Germans themselves to manufacture and frame a cause acceptable to a German audience. This process is by Saleh described as one in which the cause is "moved from the raw state to the finished state".<sup>151</sup> The process entails creating a narrative acceptable for a European audience, in which respect for human rights are essential. Alongside this, it was important to empower liberal representatives of the cause, like the FSA or the Kurdish PYD (the Syrian counterpart to the Turkish communalist party PKK).<sup>152</sup> An important step in this was to determine what was said about the cause and what was not, and what was to be exposed and what was to be concealed from the European audience. According to Saleh, the process in which a cause is moved from a "raw state" to a "finished state" falls on the Western solidarity-actor. Western solidarity-actors are able to identify the most fitting methods to convey the conflict, as it is done for an audience they themselves are a member of.

This is also true for the NAC and the Afghan Cause. NAC worked to make the Afghan Cause valuable on the "solidarity market". This was done in four different ways. First, by making the conflict familiar to the Norwegians by drawing parallels to the German occupation of Norway. Secondly, represent and raise awareness for the Afghan Cause in the absence of Mujahedeen-representatives in Norway. Third, to undermine the Soviet narrative regarding the war, by controlling the flow of information to benefit the Mujahedeen. And finally, empowering the liberal representatives from the Mujahedeen by giving them a platform in Norway to correct public perceptions regarding the movement.

We have seen how the NAC was able to utilize the conflict in Afghanistan to expand its influence, both in Norway and to the international scene. One could argue that the AKP-ml "hijacked" the Afghan Conflict, "shaping" it in a certain manner that secured the largest yield of solidarity and support as possible. This would be in line with Saleh's research on solidarity movements. To do this, the NAC had to shape and convey the conflict according to Norwegian values and preferences, so as to secure

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<sup>151</sup> Saleh, *A Critique of Solidarity*, 1

<sup>152</sup> *ibid.*, 2

the largest yield of solidarity in Norway. I believe the notion that the solidarity provider “hijacks” a cause, gives the impression that the representatives of the cause are without “agency”. In the case of the NAC and the Mujahedeen, the latter was not without agency. The Mujahedeen were not passive; in fact they were actively trying to shape the conflict. The Mujahedeen sent representatives that would be preferred in Europe, like Habib Zikria. Zikria was fluent in English and French, and had studied Political Science in Paris. The Mujahedeen knew that they had been accused of extremism in Europe, and the visits served as an opportunity to correct these perceptions. Qari Baba’s visit in January 1986, is another example that the Mujahedeen actively sought to increase support for the Afghan Cause in Norway. Qari Baba’s statement “You had Quisling, we have Karmal”, shows that the representatives had knowledge about the countries they were visiting. They were educated on Norwegian history, and knew that the resistance to the German occupation was popular in this country. While I don’t have access to an Afghan

The cause was also used to further anti-Soviet sentiments in Norway, and this raises an important question: how would Norwegian solidarity with the Afghans look like if it were the Chinese who had invaded the country in 1979, rather than the Soviets? This hypothetical scenario questions the underlying motives behind solidarity movements. This is characterized by Saleh as “Selective Solidarity”.<sup>153</sup> Selective solidarity takes place when a political party supports a specific cause, because it benefits their political perspective or worldview. In the case of the AKP-ml and the NAC, would the AKP-ml be as active as they were with the establishing of the NAC, had it been the Chinese who had invaded the country? Would the same people who criticized the Soviet invasion, support and defend the “Chinese invasion”? Although such questions remain hypothetical, they remind us how Cold War politics and the Soviet-Sino schism were essential in mobilizing Norwegians for the Afghan Cause, as it provided the organizers with motive and incentive to mobilize people for the cause. According to Michael Barnett the purpose of humanitarian work became politicized during the 1990s. The case of NAC shows how these changes were evident in Norway already in the 1980s, as motives and purposes for solidarity with the Afghans was for many Norwegians grounded in politics and fear of Cold War escalations.

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<sup>153</sup> Saleh, el-Haj, Yassin, *A Critique of Solidarity*, p 3



Further research is needed to understand the underlying motives for solidarity in the modern era. This thesis has demonstrated that the initiative to show solidarity with the Afghans was the result of the anti-Soviet sentiments amongst Norwegian Maoists. With time, the conflict was shaped in a certain manner that gained attention and mobilization from ordinary Norwegians. Both Denmark and Sweden had leftist solidarity organizations that mobilized on behalf of the Afghans that remain understudied. Did the Cold War aspects of the conflict play into how the conflict was portrayed in those countries? Additional research needs to be done on the AKP-ml as well, and their role in solidarity movements in Norway during the 1970s and the 1980s. As previously mentioned, the history of the Maoism in Norway is often trivialized. As the case of the NAC illustrates, even though AKP-ml never obtained any parliamentary power, the party was able to influence public opinion through its engagement in solidarity movements. Further research will bring a nuanced view on the political movement that existed in the 1970s and the 1980s. Even though the AKP-ml never obtained any decision-making power, they were able to attain some sort of non-decision-making power through the NAC. With this kind of power, they were able to set the agenda for debates, deciding what was acceptable and unacceptable for discussions in public forums, and how one related to the conflict in Afghanistan.

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