

Demystifying a Warlord: Conflicting Historical Representations of Ahmad Shah Massoud

Jalil J. Kochai

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When I landed in Kabul, Afghanistan in July 2015, one of the first images I noticed after leaving the Hamid Karzai International Airport (fittingly located on Great Massoud Avenue) was a billboard of former Afghan president Hamid Karzai beside the ‘national hero’ Ahmad Shah Massoud. As I traveled into the city, I repeatedly encountered Massoud’s image: he was on small posters that hung across the dilapidated walls of apartments, decals of his face were strung across the rear window of every other taxi in view, and there were huge murals painted of him on the sides of worn government buildings. The ‘Lion of Panjshir’ was everywhere. It was during this trip back to Afghanistan that I began to wonder who Ahmad Shah Massoud really was, and why Kabul loved him so much. I discovered that several history books, biographies and journal articles lionize the image of Massoud depict him as mystic poet, devout Muslim, and principled warrior, while other primary sources and the works of scholars and journalists provide a different perspective. These sources represent him as a warlord

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driven less by abstract commitments to love and courage and more by pragmatic political goals. In this work, I argue that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the devastating civil war that followed was a period of history that defies encapsulation within binaries of “good” and “evil”. This work examines conflicting historical representations of Ahmad Shah Massoud and his role in these two destructive wars. It aims to demystify the image of a warlord.

Massoud’s Roots, Rise and Fall

Ahmad Shah Massoud was born in 1952 in his ancestral homeland of Panjshir, Afghanistan. He was ethnically Tajik, a minority in Afghanistan. He grew up in a relatively wealthy family, as his father was a colonel in the Afghan army. His mother stayed at home and raised him and his seven siblings. When he reached high school, his father retired and moved his family into luxurious home in an upper-middle class neighborhood of Kabul. It was here that Massoud attended Lycée Istiqlal, a French-sponsored high school. He earned high marks at this elite private school and learned the language of French. He did so well that he eventually earned himself a scholarship to attend a school in France. Surprisingly, he turned down this opportunity and instead chose to attend Kabul Polytechnic Institute, a Soviet-sponsored university located near his family’s home.[1]

The university played a fundamental role in shaping Massoud’s ideologies and beliefs. During this period of his life, Marxism and Islamism were both finding their ways into the minds of Kabul’s youth and Massoud, a devout Muslim, affiliated himself with the latter. In 1969, he joined the Muslim Youth Organization (henceforth referred to as MYO), and it was here that Massoud met both his life mentor, Burhanuddin Rabbani, and his eventual rival for power, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Rabbani studied Islamism in Egypt where he translated Sayyid Qutb’s pivotal Islamist text *Milestones* into Dari. After he returned to Afghanistan, he gave lectures that Massoud frequently attended. While Massoud was growing more and more involved with the MYO, the political climate was drastically changing in Afghanistan, following the July 1973 overthrow of King Zahir Shah by his cousin Mohammed Daoud. Because Daoud had communist ties, he was quickly deemed an enemy of Rabbani’s Islamist organization. The MYO, however, lacked the necessary power to overthrow the new regime, and thus were soon forced to flee to Pakistan after Daoud declared all Islamists enemies of the government.[2]

Pakistan welcomed Hekmatyar, Rabbani, Massoud and over 5,000 other Islamist exiles as it did not support Daoud’s communist-tied government. Soon, Pakistan’s military even began training these exiles in order to prepare them for an uprising in 1975. Massoud was assigned the task of starting an uprising in Panjshir which failed horribly, forcing him to flee back to Pakistan for the second time. This failed revolt played a key role in facilitating a split among the Islamist leaders, as Massoud lost trust in Pakistan’s government and other Islamists including Hekmatyar. He soon joined Rabbani’s Mujahideen faction, Jamaat-e-Islami (Islamic Society), which was mostly composed of ethnic Tajiks. At the same time, Hekmatyar created his own primarily Pashtun group, Hezb-e-Islami (Islamic Party), which had strong ties to Pakistan’s ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence). In 1978, Massoud returned to Panjshir to instigate an uprising once more, but this time without the support of Pakistan. The Soviets would invade Afghanistan the following year.[3]

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By using a variety of military tactics, Massoud successfully repelled six Soviet offensives by the time he was thirty years-old. Panjshir became a significant theater of the Soviet War because of its location near the Salang Highway, a route by which Soviets transported food, weapons, and other essentials between the USSR and Kabul. Massoud and his troops also relied heavily upon the Salang Highway, as it was along this route that they frequently raided passing Soviet convoys for military and other supplies. It was at sites like these that Massoud and his men employed guerilla warfare techniques learned from the works of Che Guevara, Ho Chi Minh and Marshall Tito. These strategies worked particularly well against the Soviets due to Panjshir's unique geography and it being surrounded by harsh terrains and mountains. By 1982, Massoud had earned himself the famous nickname the "Lion of Panjshir" due to his military genius.[4]

The Soviets combatted the successful resistance led by Massoud with a scorched earth policy. They relentlessly bombed the Panjshir Valley, killing thousands of civilians and laying to waste over 80% of Panjshir's buildings.[5] It was in this context that Massoud made his most controversial decision: signing a peace treaty with the Soviets in 1983, and allowing them to set up camp near Panjshir. This treaty ruined Massoud's name to many other mujahedeen and anti-communist factions, as they believed he was negotiating with the enemy for his own political gain. By the time the USSR withdrew its last troop from Afghanistan in 1989, these intra-mujahedeen rivalries had grown intense.[6]

Two years later, the USSR collapsed altogether, leaving Afghanistan's communist government vulnerable to attacks by Mujahideen factions. President Mohammad Najibullah's communist government eventually came to an end when his leading general, Abdul Rashid Dostum, defected and joined sides with Massoud. An ethnic Uzbek, Dostum ultimately joined Massoud because he disagreed with Najibullah on who should control the northern territories of Afghanistan as Dostum believed that Pashtuns shouldn't control areas predominantly populated by Uzbeks. Together, Massoud and Dostum quickly sent troops to seize Kabul before his Pashtun rival Hekmatyar could take control of the capital city.[7]



It was at this point, on April 30th 1992, that the infamous civil war began. Although thousands of Mujahideen chose to put down their weapons after the Soviets retreated, Massoud decided to continue his quest for power and to participate in the *watan froshi*. [8] All sides, Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami, Abdul Ali Mazari's Wahdat forces, Rashid Dostum's Junbish Milli Islami, and lastly Ahmad Shah Massoud's Jamiat Islami committed atrocities, as this point in Afghan history was marked by ethnic tensions between the majority Pashtuns and minority Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Hazaras. As Rabbani was being named president of Afghanistan in 1992 and Massoud his Minister of Defense, thousands of Afghan civilians were being raped and killed because of the power struggle between Hekmatyar, Massoud and other warlords.[9] While the Soviets effectively destroyed the countryside of Afghanistan, Afghans themselves brought destruction to their country's infrastructure and capital city. The struggling nation was effectively divided up in territories ruled by various warlords.[10] Hekmatyar, who was funded by Pakistan, repeatedly attempted to topple Rabbani and Massoud's government during this civil war but ultimately proved unsuccessful. His attempts led to him earning the nickname the "Butcher of Kabul" due to the amount of innocent civilians he killed in order to try and oust Rabbani and Massoud's government. Pakistan decided to end its support of Hekmatyar in 1994 and instead began funding the growing Taliban movement, which was led by a Pashtun named Mohammad Omar, more famously known as Mullah Omar.[11]

Many civilians in Afghanistan supported the Taliban as a force of stability. The Taliban brought order to the war-torn country and was eventually able to gain enough strength to take control of Kabul in 1996. Rabbani and Massoud lost popular support in Kabul and were forced to flee north to Tاليقان, Takhar. It was there that they set up their own government known as

the “Northern Alliance” to oppose Taliban rule.[12] Massoud was the only mujahedeen leader who stayed in Afghanistan after the Taliban’s 1998 victory over the warlord Dostum in the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif, as Dostum was forced to flee or face imminent death. Without much support, Massoud attempted to garner global attention to his cause, claiming that the Taliban were allowing al-Qaida to harbor and train militants; this, however, ultimately led to his demise.[13] On September 9th, 2001, he was assassinated by two al-Qaida members who posed as foreign news journalist. The camera with which they claimed they would film him was actually rigged with a bomb, and he died on his way to a hospital at the age of 49. Two days later, the world trade center was bombed on September 11th, 2001. Shortly after, US and NATO forces overthrew the Taliban government, allegedly because of its association with al-Qaida, and subsequently installed an Afghan Interim Government. Massoud was proclaimed a “national hero” by this government later that year.[14]

The Lionization of Massoud

A myriad of historical and journalistic works have propagated Massoud’s image as an Afghan hero. An inaugurating work of this type was Robert D. Kaplan’s famous news article in the *Wall Street Journal*, “The Afghan Who Won the Cold War”. Kaplan is a distinguished journalist who visited the Pakistan/Afghanistan border during the Soviet invasion. The article was published on the front page of the journal on May 5th 1992 - only a few days after the onset of the Afghan Civil War. While Americans were consuming a romanticized image of Massoud, he and his faction were preparing for violent civil war against Hekmatyar and other Mujahideen. Kaplan’s article describes Massoud as a genius revolutionary and compares him to some of the greatest guerilla leaders of the 20th century including Che Guevara, Ho Chi Minh, and Marshall Tito. He goes so far as to claim that unlike these revolutionaries, Massoud was able to accept the support of foreign countries without being influenced by them. Notably, Kaplan provides no historical evidence to support his assertions. Further, he omits crucial aspects of Massoud’s history to maintain his image as an inspirational leader.[15] For example, he criticizes Hekmatyar and other Mujahedeen factions for taking US and Pakistani support, but fails to mention Massoud’s controversial pact with the USSR in 1983.[16] Furthermore, the article’s title - “The Afghan Who Won the Cold War” - suggests a causal relationship between Massoud’s leadership and the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan, understating other crucial factors that facilitated Soviet withdrawal, e.g. the introduction of the Stinger missile by Pakistan and the United States, and the joint effort of Afghan mujahedeen across the nation’s countryside.[17] While Kaplan’s article was relatively short (just under 1,000 words), it played a key role in shaping Americans’ understanding of Massoud in the 1990’s.

Journalist and political analyst Hashmat Moslih also perpetuates a distorted representation of Ahmad Shah Massoud in his *Al Jazeera* article, “Afghanistan in the Shadow of Ahmad Shah Massoud”. He begins his polemic by describing Massoud as “legendary” and referencing Kaplan’s article - a demonstration of how influential Kaplan’s work was in constructing Massoud as the “Lion” of Afghanistan. Moslih attributes no blame to Massoud for atrocities committed during the civil war and instead, blames civilian deaths on Pakistan and Iran’s support for various armed groups.[18] He fails to mention that Massoud also received support from Iran and Russia during the civil war.[19] So while Kaplan makes the claim that Massoud

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pragmatically accepted support from foreign countries during the Soviet War without being influenced by them, Moslih omits the fact that Massoud took such support altogether. In actuality, the few years that Burhanuddin Rabbani and Massoud ruled over the nation's capital were some of the darkest and chaotic in Afghan history. During this time, the city of Kabul was politically unstable and armed fighting between various Mujahideen factions was frequent.[20] The looting of property, rape of women and kidnapping of civilians for ransom was a normal occurrence, yet Moslih guards Massoud, the Defense Minister during this period, from criticism.[21] He also ignores that Massoud was an advisor to the former president Rabbani.[22] Moslih's article illustrates how the image of Massoud as a "national hero" grew more pronounced after Kaplan's article. Like Kaplan, Moslih relies upon polemics rather than historical details to paint a picture of Ahmad Shah Massoud.

Afghan historian Tamim Ansary also portrays Massoud as a compassionate leader in *Games without Rules: The Often Interrupted History of Afghanistan*. *Games without Rules* offers a concise history of Afghanistan, beginning with the founding of the nation and ending with the United States' ongoing occupation. Throughout the book he argues that Massoud wanted to protect the citizens of Kabul and cites an alleged conversation (he provides a YouTube link that is no longer available) shared between Massoud and Hekmatyar a day before chaos and violence ensued in the capital. According to Ansary, the conversation demonstrates Massoud's concern over the well being of those in Kabul.[23] However, later in the same chapter, he asserts that Pashtun warlord Abdul Rasool Sayyaf and Massoud were the architects of the Afshar Massacre, even claiming that "Sayyaf, Massoud - all ended up having blood on their hands." [24] These contradictions appear later in *Games without Rules* as well. Despite acknowledging Massoud's role in the massacre, Ansary portrays him as a leader preoccupied by the plight of his people. He writes,

Massoud spent the hot nights remaining of that summer on the roof of his house, reading classical Persian poetry, of which he had hundreds of volumes... Someday, he believed, Afghanistan would be prosperous, modern, educated country whose practice of Islam would provide an example to the world of how just, gentle, and democratic Islam could be. [25]

Ansary's speculations in this passage highlight his romantic reading of Massoud - a narrative shared by Kaplan and Moslih. These three works, all of which are dedicated to 'lionizing' the image of the warlord, represent the most prominent writings on Massoud available in the West.

Demystifying a Warlord

Although a significant amount of scholarship on Massoud glorify his life and actions, some offer an alternate perspective of the commander. These works depict him less as a "national hero" than a power-seeking commander. Steve Coll's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Ghost Wars* is one such account; the book is over 500 pages long and traces the CIA's role in facilitating the rise of "Islamic radicalism" in Afghanistan. He examines declassified government documents (both those of the US and USSR) and historical texts on Afghanistan. Coll's nuanced biography of Massoud departs from the laudatory tone of previous sources. While the chapter

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“Who is this Massoud?” depicts him as skilled military commander and examines both his tactical victories over the Soviets and later opposition to the Taliban, it also explores Massoud’s pact with the Soviets in 1983 and other underemphasized historical details. He asserts,

Massoud decided to cut a deal. In the spring of 1983 he announced an unprecedented truce. Under its terms the Soviets would stop attacking in the Panjshir if Massoud allowed the Afghan army to operate a base at the southern end of the valley. The truce followed three years of secret negotiations. For as long as Massoud had been fighting the Soviets, most Afghans outside the Panjshir Valley were shocked to learn, he had also been talking with them...Massoud and his counterparts conversed like colleagues...Massoud’s deal was a blow to the mujahedin just “as Benedict Arnold was a blow to the Americans,” one American pundit declared. Leaders of Jammāt, Massoud’s own party, felt particularly betrayed since Massoud had not bothered to consult them beforehand. [26]

Coll concludes that one of the primary reasons Massoud agreed to this truce was to advance his own strategic political goals - mainly, building enough strength to compete for power in Kabul after the Soviets left. While Massoud himself did not face the Soviets, other Afghans, who were predominantly Pashtun, were systematically slaughtered as a direct result of his cooperation.[27] He used the time of ‘peace’ following his treaty with the USSR to stockpile weapons and other necessities for his future military objectives. Notably, Massoud did not restrain himself from fighting other Afghans during this period. Coll notes,

Massoud also capitalized on the calm to attack Hekmatyar’s forces. Before the truce, a group aligned with Hekmatyar’s party had been using an adjacent valley to stage assaults on Massoud’s flank and cut off his supply lines. With one swift commando raid, Massoud drove these fighters out of the valley and, for the time being, off his back. It was an opening action in an emerging war within the Afghan War.[28]

Ghost Wars illustrates that Massoud’s Soviet years were more ambiguous than Kaplan suggests. In contrast to Coll’s measured account, Kaplan asserts, “Mr. Masood never bothered to visit this rear base, where the American moneymen, the TV cameras, and the journalists such as myself were available. He had something more important to do: fight.” Indeed, it seems there were prolonged periods of time during which Massoud did not fight.

In *Ghost Wars*, Coll also explores the ways Massoud funded his army during the Afghan Civil War. While Moslih focuses on Massoud’s criticisms of other Afghan warlords for taking funds from Pakistan and the US, *Ghost Wars* demonstrates how Massoud himself accepted money from the CIA.[29] Coll also claims that Massoud received aid from Iran, India, and his former ‘enemy’ Russia:

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Massoud dispatched some of his longest-serving intelligence and foreign policy aides abroad to open talks with potential backers. Massoud offered himself as a bulwark against Islamist radicalism. He opened negotiations with Russia about arms supplies and airfield access as Moscow dispatched twenty-eight thousand soldiers to Central Asia, partly to defend against Taliban-sponsored incursions. Iran weighed in with offers of money, weapons, and humanitarian aid. India, ever ready to support an enemy of Pakistan or its proxies would become another source of funding.[30]

Massoud was not a dedicated nationalist; as Coll illustrates, he was ready to allow Russian influence back into Afghanistan to consolidate his own influence over the nation. Massoud even resorted to trafficking heroin for funding, smuggling the drug through Central Asia to Russia.[31] Coll notes, “The CIA Counter-Narcotics Center reported that Massoud’s men continued to smuggle large amounts of opium and heroin into Europe... They could readily imagine the headlines if their operation was exposed: CIA SUPPORTS AFGHAN DRUGLORD.”[32] While Moslih asserts that “Massoud did not support a liberal democracy where Islamic Law would be watered down or abandoned in the name of moderation”[33], Massoud played a major role in the trafficking of heroin across Asia, an action that transgressed Islamic imperatives. *Ghost Wars* provides a vivid picture of these contradictions, in contrast to accounts that glorify the warlord.

American journalist Bruce G. Richardson’s work *Afghanistan: Ending the Reign of Soviet Terror* also explores Massoud’s controversial pact with the Soviet Union in 1983. Richardson was a prominent photojournalist who traveled around Afghanistan during the Soviet Invasion. In this work, he examines the “three years of secret negotiations” Massoud maintained with the USSR. He cites declassified KGB documents, memoirs, and firsthand interviews to demonstrate that Massoud was hardly a “national hero”. For example, he quotes Soviet officer Franz Klintsevich,

Then he came to me by night, and we signed an agreement, [Massoud] would not attack Soviet or Afghan government troops on the territory he controlled, and would help any Soviet pilots who were shot down, so long as we left him alone and helped him with medical supplies, food and ammunition.[34]

Echoing Coll, Richardson depicts Massoud as a power-driven leader willing to help the same Soviet pilots who systematically killed Afghans outside of Massoud’s beloved Panjshir valley.[35] In a chapter entitled “Summary Execution and War Crime in Kabul” Richardson illustrates the grotesque crimes committed by Massoud’s secret police, Rijsat-e-Tahqiq, in order to maintain “order” in Kabul during the civil war,

When night fell, in one of the buildings where eighty women were, many guards entered, and a mass rape started. By flashing torches the victims were selected and raped on the spot. There were terrible cries, women and girls were also taking away never seen again. These mean acts repeated night after night. There was no sanitation and soon disease started. There was no food for the

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first three days, and very little afterwards. Within the two days, forty babies had died in their mother's arms in the confinements. The women were kept there for many weeks and the number of deaths increased. Babies died every day, up to fifteen a day.[36]

Unlike representations of Massoud that emphasize only his political triumphs and military achievements, Richardson's work dwells on the more controversial decisions made by Massoud and his followers to build and maintain power during the Soviet Invasion and Afghan Civil War.

Hafizullah Emadi echoes this account in *Dynamics of Political Development in Afghanistan: The British, Russian, and American Invasion*, a concise history of modern Afghanistan and the complex geopolitical interests at stake in the country. Emadi notes that Massoud had a close relationship with the USSR and even cites a Soviet soldier's account of this: "It was said that when Yerenikov celebrated his birthday, Ahmad Shah went to visit him and took presents." [37] Like Coll and Richardson, Emadi discusses Massoud's 1983 pact with the Soviets and his role as a commander of the operation that led to the Afshar massacre, an event marked by the death and rape of hundreds of ethnic Hazaras. Most significantly, Emadi asserts, "Not a single ethnic group could claim it did not have a role in the destruction and murder of innocent people including the murder and torture of members of its own ethnic community." [38] The civil war that plagued Afghanistan in the 1990's exceeded moralistic binaries of good and evil propagated by some historical works, because, as Emadi emphasizes, all sides involved had innocent blood on their hands.

Perhaps the most damning evidence against Ahmad Shah Massoud's image as a national hero is a Human Rights Watch report entitled "Blood-Stained Hands: Past Atrocities in Kabul and Afghanistan's Legacy of Impunity". This 120-page report published in 2005 brings to light atrocities that were committed in Afghanistan in April 1992 until March 1993. It notes the lacuna of information on the Afghan Civil War available to the public, aims to fill some of these gaps, and holds specific Mujahedeen factions responsible for the war crimes they committed. Drawing from 150 in-depth interviews - with witnesses and victims of the civil war, faction members who participated in the violence, Afghan and international journalists who were present in Kabul during the hostilities, health workers at the city's hospitals and government and factional officials - the report attributes war crimes to several Mujahedeen factions including Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami, Abdul Ali Mazari's Wahdat forces, Rashid Dostum's Junbish Milli Islami, and lastly, Ahmad Shah Massoud's Jamiat Islami.[39] Throughout the report, witnesses provide firsthand accounts of the atrocities his Jamiat forces committed,

We couldn't bury him, it was so unsafe to be outside for too long. . . . That night, we took him out to bury him near to our house. We brought a hurricane lamp with us, but didn't light it. It was quiet, as we dug a hole and the cleric with us spoke and we prayed. Then we lit the hurricane lamp, in order to lower him into the ground. As soon as we lit that hurricane lamp, we heard them firing from Mamorine [the mountain southeast of Afshar, held by Jamiat], and

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explosions hit nearby, so we extinguished the light and buried him in the dark. It was Shura-e Nazar [Jamiat forces]. They would shoot at us from Mamorine all the time—at ordinary civilians. They would shoot at anyone, but especially crowds of four or more.[40]

Blood-Stained Hands also interrogates incidents often ignored by other works dealing with Massoud's role in the Afghan Civil War. It notes that Hekmatyar *did* rocket and shell Kabul from the southern city of Charasiab, but adds that Massoud's forces returned fire at both Charasiab and the southern province of Logar.[41] Countless Afghan civilians died as these rockets were infamous for their inaccurate aim.[42] As Afghan historian Hassan Kakar writes in his pivotal work *Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion and Afghan Response, 1979-1982*, "The positions of the Islamic Party in Char Asia, Logar, Bagrami, and Shawake were likewise bombed. Whatever the exact tale of who did what and to whom, the results was the further destruction of Kabul, the death and wounding of its residents by the thousands, and their displacement by the hundreds of thousands." [43] "Blood-Stained Hands" highlights that although Hekmatyar's bombings were reprehensible, on one occasion in August of 1992 he killed over 1000 people, it does not excuse Massoud's violent retaliation against Hekmatyar.[44] His attempts to counter Hekmatyar's use of violent force against Kabuli civilians facilitated the death and destruction of many civilians who lived in eastern Afghanistan.

Like Emadi's work, "Blood-Stained Hands" extensively examines Ahmad Shah Massoud and his Jamiat forces' role in the Afshar Massacre of February 1993. The massacre transpired in response to Jamiat and Ittihad forces attempting to take control of the important area surrounded by the Afshar Mountains, then controlled by Wahdat and Hezb-e Islami forces. The Kabuli district was predominantly populated with the ethnic minority Hazaras, and no warning was given to these civilians as Massoud's forces moved in. [45] One civilian describes the actions Massoud's forces took against fleeing civilians,

Jamiat took the top of the mountain. Around five in the afternoon, they started firing rockets from the top of the mountain, down into this area. They killed people right here on this street. People were rushing out of Afshar. They were rushing down this street here [the main street running north south through the eastern part of Afshar]. The street was filled with people, running away from Afshar...My house is right there, at the top of the street...Massoud's forces were shooting at them...They were firing into this street...Seventeen people were killed—there were seventeen bodies lying in the street—we counted. The corpses were lying here in the streets...Clearly they were civilians. Yes, it was clear: they had burqas, there were children...[46]

Another civilian describes almost being kidnapped and witnessing the abduction of others,

Qari Moheb, the Jamiat commander, stopped me... They took my watch, my clothes... There were two wounded people in the car with me, Hazaras. They [the Jamiat troops] just said "You're Hazara, you must come with us." Q.L.N.

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said he was able to be released because another Jamiat commander there knew him. “The others were taken,” he said.[47]

At the end of the operation the streets were littered with the dead. While the report notes it is impossible to deduce how many died in the operation, it estimates that 700-750 people were abducted and never returned. To this day, no individuals in the Mujahedeen factions who participated in this massacre have been tried or punished.

“Blood-Stained Hands” was only a preliminary attempt at uncovering the atrocities committed by Massoud and other warlords during the Soviet war and the Afghan civil war. In 2012, *New York Times* published an article entitled “Top Afghans Tied to ‘90s Carnage, Researchers Say”. In the article, journalist Rob Nordland discusses the 800-page human rights report “Conflict Mapping in Afghanistan Since 1978”. The report was commissioned by Afghanistan’s former president Hamid Karzai in 2005 and based on over six years of research by the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. “Conflict Mapping in Afghanistan Since 1978” reveals the locations of over 180 mass graves and the factions responsible for these mass murders.[48] It names over fifty individuals involved with the mass killings, including warlords who are currently within Afghanistan’s government, such as Abdul Rasul Sayyaf and Afghanistan’s “national hero” Ahmad Shah Massoud.[49] Unfortunately, the Afghan government is not allowing for the entirety of the report to be released due to the number of high profile politicians listed in it.[50] Thus, the victims of these atrocities remain unvindicated.

**The Lion’s Legacy**

The Afghan Interim Government’s decision to honor Massoud with the title of ‘national hero’ in 2001 crystallized the romantic historical narrative constructed by Kaplan in 1992. Such

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misrepresentations by historians and journalists continue to obfuscate our understanding of the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan and the Afghan Civil War. These efforts to preserve the 'legacies' of those like Massoud have functioned to protect warlords that currently hold political power and to justify present day violence against political rivals. Just this past weekend, on September 9th, 2017, supporters of Massoud wounded thirteen Kabuli residents while attempting to enter neighborhoods populated with supporters of rival factions. Thus, although Ahmad Shah Massoud was assassinated over sixteen years ago, his heralded legacy is still leading to further violence and unrest as his armed supporters continue to harm Afghans in his name. [51] In order to even begin mitigating the ethnic tensions in Afghanistan between Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras and Uzbeks, these historical inaccuracies regarding Massoud's record of warfare must be addressed and challenged by historians, journalists, and social commentators alike.

Jalil Kochai was born in Oakland, CA but his family is originally from Lowgar, Afghanistan. He studies film and history with an emphasis on modern Afghanistan.

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End Notes

- [1] Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2004), 108-109.
[2] Ibid., 109-114.
[3] Ibid., 114.
[4] Ibid., 114-117.
[5] Ibid., 118.
[6] Ibid., 118-119.
[7] Hafizullah Emadi, *Dynamics of Political Development in Afghanistan: The British, Russian, and American Invasions* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 167-168.
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