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AFP

West quickly agreed to back Afghan resistance in 1980: files

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Western powers met in secret soon after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and formed plans to back Islamic resistance, according to British files from 1980 released Thursday.

Senior officials from Britain, France, then West Germany and the United States met in Paris on January 15 that year to discuss the West's response to the December 24, 1979 invasion.

The National Archives' release of the secret papers after 30 years in the vaults comes as Western allies prepare to enter another year of conflict in Afghanistan, battling Islamist insurgents.

US national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski was among those at the Paris meeting, as was Britain's cabinet secretary Robert Armstrong, the top civil servant.

He said support for the mujahideen should be coordinated by "our friends" -- a euphemism for MI6, Britain's foreign intelligence agency, and its peers from the allies.

Armstrong reported from the Paris meeting that while they wanted to avoid sparking a border war with Pakistan in the volatile tribal region, there was still much they could do.

He said that the powers at the meeting concluded "it would be in the interests of the West to encourage and support resistance".

As long as there were Afghans willing to continue resisting the Soviet invasion and as long as the Pakistanis were willing to see their territory used, resistance should be supported, said Armstrong.

"That would make more difficult the process of Soviet pacification of Afghanistan, and would make that process take much longer than it otherwise would," he said.

Armstrong added that "the existence of a guerilla movement in Afghanistan would be the focus of Islamic resistance, which we should be wanting to continue".

He suggested that organising support for the resistance could best be done by "a representative of our friends" meeting officials from their US and French counterparts.

The mujahideen resistance ultimately led to the growth of radical Islam in Afghanistan, which nurtured the growth of the Al-Qaeda network.

Following the September 2001 attacks in the United States, NATO forces overthrew the Taliban regime in Afghanistan but are still fighting an Islamist insurgency which has rear bases in Pakistan.

2010 has proved to be the deadliest year on record in the campaign with the deaths of more than 700 foreign soldiers, or an average of two a day.