

## Scenario 116

### **HOW & WHY AMERICA DEFEATED:**

The poor people of both countries, Pakistan & Afghanistan, were being crushed; human blood was – so cheap here.

Pakistan's Northern Areas, especially regions around Peshawar, have been under operations of one kind or the other since 2008. Adam Khel, Khyber, Mohmand and Orakzai Agencies are specially referred where a series of un-ending operation were being launched but without any success. One of the normal episodes of those days:

*'During the Sunday night of **14<sup>th</sup> October 2012**, Pakistan's Taliban attacked two check posts of Mattani police station on the outskirts of Peshawar and killed five security personnel, including Superintendent of Police (SP) Rural Khurshid Khan, while 10 police and Frontier Constabulary (FC) men were injured. It was a surprise attack on the Ghaziabad and Frontier Road check posts at around 10pm and the militants were equipped with RPG-7 rockets and heavy machine guns; the exchange of gun fire continued for almost 45 minutes.*

*The militants over ran the Ghaziabad check post building and torched it completely. This was the second such attack in the past 12 hours. Earlier in the morning an FC constable was killed in a sniper attack on the Frontier Road in Sheikhan in the jurisdiction of Badabher police station.'*

What did it speak and what was needed; a consensus in national patriotic approach which were missing those days. Policies in the Foreign Office and GHQ were coined with opposite directions. The PPP's political leadership had pushed the Pak-Army in sand grave of uncertainty; sometimes Swat Operation became priority and the other moment they were expected to make search of Taliban in the Tribal belt.

In the Capital, all the three major institutions, the judiciary, army & executive, were at dagger drawn with each other; all they wanted to paste 'failure labels' on each other. When the three did not find a way out they dragged 'media people' from their collars and made them stand in the middle to get stoned.

In general public, a question kept on volleying: Are the TPP & Afghan Taliban same?

There were very strong beliefs and evidences that the Taliban in both the countries, Pakistan & Afghanistan, were one and the same; or at least there command level was inter-linked. Once CIA Centre at Khost in Afghanistan was stormed by a suicide bomber in which at least seven CIA officers were killed. The suicide bomber was later identified as one Abu Dijana of Jordan who was trained, instructed and sent by Hakimullah Mahsood.

Referring to **daily 'Jang' of 20th October 2012**, Saleem Saafi, the veteran columnist had seen the related video in person. Nek Mohammad was once the Incharge Kargha Camp in Afghanistan when the country used to be under Mulla Umar's Taliban government. Baitullah Mahsood, before being the head of Pakistani Taliban, was the 2nd in Command with Mulla Dadullah, the known Afghan Taliban leader.

Abdulla Mehsud, another Pakistani Taliban leader, was actually arrested in Afghanistan while fighting Americans there and was taken to Guantanamo Bay from where he was released after years to be welcome by Pakistani Taliban as their Amir. He was purposefully sent back with 'proper' briefing and future strategy to weaken Pakistan.

Most of the Taliban in Swat, who were later handled by the Pak-Army in 2007-09, were the same persons who had accompanied Maulana Soofi Mohammad to Afghanistan after Nine-Eleven episodes. Still Mulla Fazalullah of Swat [son in law of Maulana Soofi Mohammad] is in Afghanistan with his comrades with his HQ in Nuristan.

The above spills indicated that the Taliban on both sides of Pak-Afghan border were inter-related; their targets might not be chosen by one command; their activities might not be overseen by one centralised body but they knew each other's mode of activity when the operations were launched in Afghanistan or Pakistan. In Afghanistan, the US and NATO forces were attacked because they were considered as foreign intruders and in Pakistan the security personnel were targeted because the Pakistani government was, for long, considered America's ally.

But the America was equally suffering by its follies from within. The Afghan War had gone expanded as against its initial estimates. Obama had already signed pacts with President Karzai and plans were chalked out to quit the Afghan lands till ending 2014.

In 2001, America thought that their troops would simply walk into the Afghan soils, the Pak-Army would be there to aid them and Afghanistan would be a new American colony in Asia. The facts were other way round. America got badly beaten on the Afghan soils by guerrilla Afghan Taliban AND the US got defeated on internal front in its own country; see few narrations here.

Referring to a British Report: 'Afghanistan an Un-winnable War' appeared in the electronic media, ***Antiwar.com*** dated **14<sup>th</sup> March 2013** is referred:

*'An internal report from the British Defence Ministry has concluded that the ongoing occupation of Afghanistan is un-winnable in military terms, ruling that the NATO goals have largely failed and the survival of the Karzai government cannot be guaranteed. .... Whenever international troops leave, they will be leaving Afghanistan with a very weak economic base and NATO will be on the hook for "large-scale support" of the government for many years.'*

Comparing with the NATO occupation for Afghanistan to the previous attempt by the Soviet Union, there were '*an extraordinary number of similar factors*' surrounding the two wars, and that commanders could have learnt the lessons of the Soviet war.

Elaborating; both wars aimed at imposing "***an ideology alien to the Afghan people***" and that both eventually abandoned it in favour trying to secure relative support for their respective propped-up governments as the only alternative to the *mujahedin*, adding that the historical estimate of the NATO war would be, as with the Soviets, linked entirely to how long the government survived after they leave.

The UK's Defence Ministry downplayed the importance of that research report, insisting that the determination that '***the war is un-winnable***', would not change the official government position - that continuing the war was vital to British national security.

### **DEADLY INSIDER ATTACKS:**

Referring to the **BBC of 11<sup>th</sup> March 2013**, one of the reasons of US quit from the Afghan region could be described as **Deadly insider attacks** which had become one of the defining features of the later phase of conflict. The killings had undermined NATO's ambition to fight "shoulder to shoulder", against the Taliban. But what were the factors behind those incidents? BBC News examined the complex web of reasons that lead Afghan soldiers to turn their guns on their allies.

In Afghanistan's scenario of those days, it was difficult to develop a clear picture of why this happened as few "rogue" soldiers were taken alive - most were shot dead and several escaped. Meanwhile, the Taliban claimed responsibility for almost every instance of an Afghan soldier in uniform gunning down his NATO ally. Few believed such claims as credible.

In August 2012, NATO officials **estimated that about 25% of those attacks** were the result of Taliban infiltration into the security forces - previously the official record had figures of 10% of the attacks linked with insurgents. They were quick to point out that Afghan forces also turn their weapons on other Afghan soldiers. '**General Notes on Afghan War**' written by Commander **Gen John R. Allen** of the Marine Corps, appeared in '**New York Times dated 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2012**' is referred here.

Gen John had held a video news conference a day after Afghan officials blamed foreign intelligence services for being behind most of the insider killings. Gen John had not seen the information that prompted the said claim, but sought to clarify that why Afghan forces had resorted to kill their American colleagues in increasing numbers. The General tried to sort out roughly 15% additional attacks – which could be caused by Taliban coercion of soldiers or police officers, either directly or through family members. He also noted that more Afghans than Western troops had been killed by such insider attacks.

Such attacks had raised concerns about the mission to train Afghan forces in order to hand over security control to them by 2014 - Western troop withdrawal deadline then announced. Even then, Gen John insisted that the NATO countries should remain committed to the strategy of working with the Afghans as trainers and advisers despite the intensified insider attacks. "**The closer the relationship with them — indeed the more we can foster a relationship of brotherhood — the more secure we are,**" he asserted.

Even so, American and allied troops had to be "more watchful" because **40 NATO service members were killed by insider attacks within seven months** of that year, already more than last year's total, and with at least 9 of the deaths coming over the past two weeks. Gen John Allen thought it as the pressure of fighting through the Ramadan fasting which could be responsible for that surge.

The general opinion of the intelligentsia was that the things could have been better in Afghanistan had the US not launched new adventure in Iraq. One remarked that:

**'When you can't trust the people you're training and working with side-by-side each day or tell which side is friend or foe, it's time to quit now.'**

A day earlier, President Karzai had asserted **for the first time** 'Afghan officials believed that foreign spy agencies were behind most of the attacks, putting it directly at odds with NATO's assessment of the crisis'. The Afghan authorities were studying every known insider attack, also known as **green on blue attacks**. Based on interrogations of attackers who had been detained and other evidence like letters and records of phone calls, the government had concluded that **it could be the job of the foreigners**. Karzai did not name them, but the government frequently accused **Pakistan** and **Iran** of meddling.

Till that moment, however, Gen Allen did not believe Karzai's stance. The American General had determined that most of the "green on blue attacks" stemmed from "disagreements and animosities" as well as "personal grievance & social difficulties."

On the other hand, Afghan officials believed that the **figure of 25% had underestimated** the true level of Taliban infiltration or influence.

The BBC's correspondent in Kabul, Bilal Sarwary, had examined a number of insider attack cases, and discovered that a disproportionate number of the soldiers came from two remote districts in Afghanistan's eastern Nangarhar province - the areas where Taliban militants wielded influence over local populations and the writ of central government was weak. Further; many of the cases involved fake recruitment files and Afghan intelligence officials had no cogent explanations for rogue soldiers whose recruitment files had serious flaws.

The yearly figures for attacks and killings therein, given by the BBC, were that in 2007 - 2 attacks, 2 Isaf soldiers dead; 2008 - 2 attacks, 2 dead; 2009 - 6 attacks, 10 dead; 2010 - 6 attacks, 20 dead; 2011 - 21 attacks, 35 dead; 2012 - 46 attacks, 60 dead;

*Source: International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Some attacks in 2012 and 2013 were still under investigation and not included above.*

In those remote districts, mobile phone ring tones contained Taliban chants. Even if the Taliban had not actively recruited the rogue soldiers, the influence they exercised on vulnerable soldiers was not to be taken lightly, intelligence officials argued.

One commander for the Afghan local police in Kunar - who used to be a Taliban fighter - told BBC that: **"Two years ago [in 2010] there was a decision taken by Taliban leadership to focus more on infiltration and rogue soldiers instead of suicide attacks, and other attacks."** Many analysts believed they were rooted in underlying, even subconscious resentments that were prone to flare up and with deadly consequences.

**[History]:** *During the last century, the British on India's north-west frontier worked with Pashtun militias and it was not uncommon for units with a good combat record to turn and shoot their own British advisers - simply think about cultural misunderstandings.*

*Pashtun culture is governed by strict codes. The main pillar of the Pashtun code is called 'Pashtunwali' and Afghans will do anything to protect this. It means they are very sensitive to anything perceived to insult their traditions, religion and values.*

*It has been called "motivation by rage rather than ideology" and perceived personal, cultural and religious transgressions can prompt such rage - sometimes seemingly innocent, but many security personnel come from conservative and rural areas where such codes are important. When American soldiers raise their hand, it is generally a signal to stop. In Afghanistan, it is simply a greeting.*

*US soldiers are often accused of appearing arrogant and superior - such perceived attitudes can be deeply hurtful. Quite often foreign forces have no idea they have just insulted their colleagues.]*

More serious:

In Afghanistan the desecration - albeit accidental - of the Islamic holy book Qura'an [or Koran], or American soldiers urinating on the bodies of dead Taliban fighters or posing for photographs with body parts have all caused anger. One such soldier had **killed three British**

**soldiers in 2010** when they killed a young girl: **"Was she a Taliban? You didn't even know her name,"** the British soldiers had no answer so were fired and killed. The British Authorities had later rejected their claims too.

Night raids and raids on homes of suspected fighters were necessary military operations for NATO soldiers, but Afghans believe the home is a sanctuary.

The list keeps growing and each incident reminds the soldier of all the previous indignities.

Under the *Pashtun* code called **Melmastya**, which means hospitality, Afghans will protect a guest at any cost. But their guests' conduct must also remain within certain parameters. If they fail to respect the values of their host, they cross the line. Many of the soldiers killed by their Afghan colleagues - sometimes without even knowing - would have crossed the line.

Many more little things; some soldiers joined hads with the US because they got rice and meat twice a day. Those were the kind of luxuries they could not afford in their communities. Some had been brought up by stepmothers and joined the police because they were not well looked after. Another soldier's only love in life was having a gun and firing it - that was why he joined the army.

Some Afghan soldiers had stresses and strains of violent postings; for some food was terrible, some were exhausted and could not get enough leave, their pay used to arrive late and some when fell ill, were given poor medical care. More Afghan recruit soldiers had complaints of violence and sometimes even abuse.

When a young Afghan man in uniform, posted to an area with a particularly brutal insurgency, would face with such pressures, the results could be anything but unpredictable.

### **BURNING OF QURA'AN:**

The American and the NATO commanders were not educated that the family, village culture and tribal ties are the glue of Afghan society. One of the angry protests against the inadvertent burning of copies of the Qura'an by NATO soldiers took place at *Khogyani Base*, in the eastern province of Nangarhar early that year. Local villagers came to the base and the protest turned ugly. One of the Afghan soldiers at that base was from the same village and when he saw locals from his home village up against troops at the base he picked up his gun and killed two US soldiers.

The Afghan army had not allowed soldiers to serve in their home villages but, in that case, the village came to the base and that soldier could not contain his anger.

Moreover; a number of policemen and soldiers were having family members affiliated to the Taliban - such was the intricate web of Afghan family and clan networks. Authorities knew that the vast majority of Afghan soldiers were professional and knew their duties - but circumstances could conspire to test their loyalties.

At a ceremony then at *Bagram* base, one Afghan commander told TV crew where to start filming - he pointed out politically sensitive locations. A US soldier harshly shouted at his commander and asked him to avoid such mistake.

The commander turned towards the US soldier via his translator and said: **"If I had a gun, I would empty an entire magazine in your stomach."**

Afghan War could be compared with a marriage. Marriages start great, the initial years are a honeymoon, the middle years get a little grinding. Sometime in the later years things fall apart – and that situation was cropping up in Afghanistan.

Gen John can be cited here again: his guess was perfect as a lot of people in Afghanistan, 10 years ago, loved the fact that the West was there. A decade later they were just tired of it. They were tired of their '**fumbles and bumbles and mistakes**'. They were tired of the enemy [Taliban] that had no shortage of blood and bold attacks.

**A US SOLDIER - MAJOR BENJAMIN TUPPER** accounted for:

*'..... I also know the Americans and British and Romanians and Polish I served with in Afghanistan, we had good intentions. We went in there with the highest degree of respect and camaraderie that we could display towards our Afghan soldier and police peers as well as civilians.*

*Even with those good intentions, we have to be honest that **we have left a track record of mistakes**. Some of them have been literal mistakes such as bombing the wrong compound.*

*I always point to the example of the sergeant who went out in the middle of the night and killed Afghan women and children. While we discount them and say that sergeant had mental problems, Afghans see a guy in US army uniform!*

*Even though 99.9% of us go in with good intentions and professional standards... some Afghans have gone from loving the West to wondering what our true intentions are.....[in fact we were moving towards the ending game].'*

Major Benjamin Tupper, interviewed for **BBC Radio 4's PM programme dated 11<sup>th</sup> March 2013** is referred. He is the author of ***Greetings From Afghanistan, Send More Ammo: Dispatches from Taliban Country***.

### **COST OF IRAQ & AFGHAN WARS:**

During the **2<sup>nd</sup> week of September 2013**, the Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government [United States] published a report that the decade-long American wars in Iraq and Afghanistan [till then] ended up costing as much as \$6 trillion, the equivalent of \$75,000 for every American household. The Afghan War was not over yet because, as per Obama's program, the American forces were to stay till ending 2014 and some contingents even beyond that.

A point to ponder that when President George Bush's National Economic Council Director, Lawrence Lindsey, had told the '**The Wall Street Journal**' [WSJ] that the war would cost between \$100 billion and \$200 billion, he had found himself under intense fire from his colleagues who claimed that this was a gross overestimation. Thus Lawrence Lindsey was forced to resign and quit.

One may recall that the Bush administration had claimed at the very outset that '**the Iraq war would finance itself out of Iraqi oil revenues**', but Washington DC had instead ended up borrowing about \$2 trillion to finance the two wars, the bulk of it was borrowed from foreign lenders like China; thus adding nearly 20% to the US national debt between 2001 and 2012.

Till mid 2013, the US had already paid \$260 billion in interest on the war debt; a profound impact on the federal government's fiscal and budgetary crises over a protracted period was an additional phenomenon. Care and compensation for thousands of troops left physically and psychologically damaged by the two wars being estimated in detail by other sister organisations to add misery for the Americans.

The report stated that:

*"The Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, taken together, will be the most expensive wars in US history—totalling somewhere between \$4 trillion and \$6 trillion. This includes long-term medical care and disability compensation for service members, veterans and families, military replenishment and social and economic costs. The largest portion of that bill is yet to be paid.*

*Another major share of the long-term costs of the wars comes from paying off billions of dollars in debt incurred as the US government failed to include their cost in annual budgets and simultaneously implemented sweeping tax cuts for the rich.*

*In addition, huge expenditures are being made to replace military equipment used in the two wars. The improvements in military pay and benefits made in 2004 to counter declining recruitment rates as casualties rose in the Iraq war."*

The fact remains that till mid 2013:

- 1.56 million US troops—56% of all Afghanistan and Iraq veterans—were receiving medical treatment and were entitled for **'special benefits for the rest of their lives'**.
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- Exactly half of the veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan had applied for permanent disability benefits till then; about 50,000 American troops were declared **"wounded in action"**.
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- One-third of returning veterans were diagnosed with mental health issues—suffering from **anxiety, depression, and / or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**.
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- Over a quarter of a million troops had suffered **Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI)** mostly combined with PTSD, posing greater problems in treatment and recovery.
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- The suicide rate for US Army personnel, with many who attempted suicide suffering serious injuries, was almost doubled.
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- The **Veterans Administration's budget** had to be doubled over the past decade, from **\$61.4 billion in 2001 to \$140.3 billion in 2013**.
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- Among the most severely wounded were 6,476 soldiers and Marines who had suffered **"severe penetrating brain injury"**, and another 1,715 who had **one or more limbs amputated**.
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- Over 30,000 veterans were listed as suffering 100% service-related disabilities, while another 145,000 were listed as **70 to 90 percent disabled**.
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- The Walter Reed Medical Centre, US Army's flagship hospital at Washington DC, treated hundreds of amputees and severe casualties; this facility had received 100 amputees for treatment **during 2010; 170 amputees in 2011; and 107 amputees in 2012**. Mostly such living was considered worse than death.

Soaring medical costs for veterans was attributed to several factors. Among them was that soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan had survived wounds that would have cost their lives in earlier war periods. While the US government had till then spent \$134 billion on medical care and **disability benefits for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, this figure was estimated at \$836 billion** over the coming decade. The worst of those casualties took place under the Obama administration as a result of the so-called surge that the Democratic president ordered in Afghanistan.

Even then, massive direct spending on the two imperialist interventions continued. With over 60,000 US troops remaining in Afghanistan till ending 2013, it was estimated that the cost of deploying one American soldier for one year in the Afghan war amounted to \$1 million. Those troops continued suffering casualties with every passing day.

The US has been maintaining a vast diplomatic presence in Iraq, including at least 10,000 private contractors providing support in security, IT, engineering and other occupations; as well as logistics support and payments for leased facilities in Kuwait. The US think tanks had been able to dispel illusions that ending wars in Iraq and Afghanistan would produce any "peace dividend" that could help restructure or improve conditions of poverty, unemployment and living standards for common US populace, but unfortunately, the decisions were mostly made by the **'Defence Experts' in Pentagon and 'Strategic Planners' at CIA HQ** who used to dictate the political elite in one way or the other – so the all fuss.

Another treat on the **'Cost of War'** is available at [TomDispatch.com](http://TomDispatch.com)

*The last time I saw American soldiers in Afghanistan, they were silent. Knocked out by gunfire and explosions that left them grievously injured, as well as drugs administered by medics in the field, they were carried from medevac helicopters into a base hospital to be plugged into machines that would measure how much life they had left to save. They were bloody. They were missing pieces of themselves. They were quiet.*

*The time I spent in trauma hospitals among the wounded and the dying and the dead - it was almost as if they had fled their own bodies, abandoning that bloodied flesh upon the gurneys to surgeons ready to have a go at salvation. Later, sometimes much later, they might return to inhabit whatever the doctors had managed to salvage. They might take up those bodies or what was left of them and make them walk again, or run, or even ski. They might dress themselves, get a job, or conceive a child. But what I remember is the first days when they were swept up and dropped into the hospital so deathly still.*

*..... I was in the north, at the historic Dasht e Shadian stadium near the city of Mazar e Sharif, the stadium was famous for a day during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan when local people invited 50 Soviet soldiers to enjoy their traditional sport event and slaughtered them on the spot.*

*What had happened to those boys who had been there at breakfast in the DFAC? Dead or torn up by a sniper or a roadside bomb, they had been whisked off by helicopters and then... what?*

*..... I asked to follow casualties from that high desert "battle space" to the trauma hospital at Bagram Air Base, onto a C-17 with the medical teams that accompanied the wounded soldiers to Landstuhl Regional Medical Centre in Germany -- the biggest American hospital outside the United States -- then back onto a C-17 to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, and in some cases, all the way home.*

*Over the years, more and more of America's kids made that Medevac journey back to the States; 106,000 Americans wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan or evacuated from those war zones because of accident or disease. Witness the fact that, as of June 2012, 247,000 veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq had been diagnosed by the VA with post-traumatic stress disorder, and as of May 31, 2012, more than 745,000 veterans of those wars had filed disability claims with the Veterans Administration (VA). Taxpayers have already spent \$135 billion on medical and disability payments for the veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the long-term medical and disability costs are expected to peak at about mid-century, at an estimated \$754 billion.*

*Then there were the "fallen", the dead, shipped to Dover Air Base in metal "transfer cases" aboard standard cargo planes. They were transferred to the official military mortuary in ceremonies from which the media, and thus the public, were until 2009 excluded -- at least 6,656 of them from Iraq and Afghanistan by February of this year. At least 3,000 private contractors have also been killed in both wars. Add to this list the toll of post-deployment suicides, and soldiers or veterans hooked on addictive opioids pushed by Big Pharma and prescribed by military doctors or VA psychiatrists either to keep them on the job or, after they break down, to "cure" them of their war experiences.*

*The first veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq returned to the United States 10 years ago in 2003, yet I've never spoken to a damaged soldier or a soldier's family members who thought the care he or she received from the Veterans Administration was anything like appropriate or enough. By the VA's own admission, the time it takes to reach a decision on a veteran's benefits, or simply to offer an appointment, is so long that some vets die while waiting.*

*So it is that, since their return, untold numbers of soldiers have been looked after by their parents. I visited a home on the Great Plains where a veteran has lain in his childhood bed, in his mother's care, for most of the last decade, and another home in New England where a veteran spent the last evening before he took his own life sitting on his father's lap.*

*As I followed the sad trail of damaged veterans to write my new book, , I came to see how much they and their families have suffered, like Afghans, from the delusions of this nation's leaders -- many running counter to international law -- and of other influential Americans, in and out of the military, more powerful and less accountable than themselves.*

*Like the soldiers, the country has changed. Now, in Afghanistan as in Iraq, Washington scrambles to make the exit look less like a defeat -- or worse, pointless waste. Most Americans no longer ask what the wars were for.*

**Another scenario** on the upper side: One angry career officer told:

**"They only follow orders. It's the other 1% at the top who are served by war, the great American engine that powers the transfer of wealth from the public treasury upward and into their pockets. Following that money trail reveals the real point of the chosen conflicts. The wars have made those profiteers 'monu-fuckin - mentally rich.' It's the soldiers and their families who lost out."**

*For more details; 'They Were Soldiers: How the Wounded Return From America's Wars -- the Untold Story' at [tomdispatch.com](http://tomdispatch.com) is referred.*

An essay by Ernesto Londoño appeared in the '**Washington Post**' dated **28<sup>th</sup> March 2013** is also referred.

### **AMERICA'S ZERO OPTION:**

**On 16<sup>th</sup> January 2014**, the White House convened a meeting of top national - security officials to discuss the Afghan war and future of the US troop presence. Mr Biden lost previous debates on Afghanistan, but his arguments for a smaller force [*likely of 2,000 to 3,000 troops*] gained more footing within administration.

On the other hand, Mr Karzai refused to sign a security agreement allowing American forces to remain in small numbers after the NATO's departure that year. Some US officials advocated for 9,000 - 12,000 troops in post-2014 scenario suggesting that a full pullout would make more military sense instead of going by Joe Biden's minimal presence.

A US military official told the '**Wall Street Journal**' [WSJ] that '*we are coming to grips with the potential for zero*'. The WSJ further held [*its essay on Afghanistan dated 16<sup>th</sup> January 2014 is referred*] that the resumption of debate and the push by Mr Biden and his allies in the administration block for a limited force in fact prompted Mr Karzai to refuse to sign the security agreement and thus President Obama to withdraw all US forces. The **US Institute of Peace's Andrew Wilder** commented that:

*'Pulling the rug out from under Afghanistan really risks collapse... We're in the end-game with Karzai, hopefully, by announcing a **Zero Option** based on our frustrations amid negotiating with a president who should soon be gone.'*

The US government had sent a message to Karzai through the new fiscal bill of 2014 [passed by the Senate just a night earlier] making 50% cut in the civilian assistance for Afghanistan, from \$2.1 billion to \$1.12 billion. Many feared that the US was going to break its promises to Afghanistan; in fact denying honouring its financial commitments made in Tokyo. That was why Mr Karzai had refused to sign on the Bilateral Security Agreement [BSA].

As per **the International Crisis Group's Graeme Smith** [*writing for the NYT also*]:

*'The Taliban are still here [in South East Afghanistan] and those people are anxious about 2014 because the US & NATO troops are leaving. Sales of medication for anxiety, depression, and insomnia increased 30-fold. Fear of Taliban resurgence is so widespread that it is hurting property prices and the value of Afghanistan's currency, scaring investors away, and impelling Afghans to seek foreign asylum.'*

*'Worries about the year ahead are a kind of pathology here. Afghans are too scared about the withdrawal of American troops but the US government seems satisfied. In its latest report to Congress, the Pentagon said that fighting had eased in 2013, reporting a 12% drop in security incidents over the previous summer.'*

The above debate becomes more alarming when the US Army, already reeling upon cuts from its peak of 570,000 to about 490,000, was just told that those cuts figure be taken through serious planning to limit the force unto 420,000 only – austerity drive? The writing was on the wall.

With Iraq now a distant memory and Afghanistan winding down by the end of 2014, the US Army had to cut its size. Eyebrows were up - speaking before a December budget deal, Army Chief of Staff Gen Ray Odierno had also attempted to make his case while saying that:

*"If Congress does not act to mitigate the magnitude, method and speed of the reductions under the Budget Control Act with sequestration, the Army will be forced to make significant reductions in force structure and end strength - such reductions will not allow us to execute the 2012 Defence Strategic Guidance."*

**Maren Leed**, a former *senior adviser*, however, held that: **"I go back to Trotsky: We may be done with war, but war may not be done with us."**

**National Guard Bureau's Gen Frank Grass** told that: *'as the Army completes its force structure review, it is extremely important to note that final troop levels will be decided by Congress.'* It may be kept in mind that US Army's annual cost to maintain readiness for a regular infantry brigade combat team is \$277 million; the cost to prepare the unit for deployment is \$8 million - for a total cost of \$285 million.

Now turn the page please; referring to former **Defence Secretary Robert Gates'** new memoir titled as **Duty**:

*'Each time he visited US troops in Afghanistan, he [Robert Gates] found himself **enveloped by a sense of misery and danger and loss**. American policy has become perilously over-militarized; **the use of force [is] too easy for presidents**.*

*But viewed up close -- far from the 'antiseptic offices' of the White House or the CIA - war is never anything but **"bloody and horrible,"** and its costs are measured in **lives ruined and lives lost.**'*

Robert Gates was repelled by what he saw as the White House's **aggressive, suspicious, and sometimes condescending and insulting** attitude toward the uniformed military. Leaving aside his focus on tortured state of civil - military relations, his critique of the president's inner circle in fact went far deeper.

However, President Obama did not hire Robert Gates any more – no way. Whether the Zero Option gained momentum or not, let us wait for the historians' analysis in detail.

A well-known British DM Report: '**Afghanistan an Un-winnable War**' had said:

*'Afghanistan is not called "Graveyard of Empires" for no good reason. Alexander, Genghis, Mughals, Persians, Brits, Russians all occupiers failed there. Now US / NATO warriors are facing historic defeat. If they had brains, they would learn from history.*

*Afghanistan has not been and never will be conquered, and will never surrender to anyone. Afghans are a very freedom-loving and proud people.'*

Total withdrawal of US troops was wishful thinking. History tells us no army had withdrawn from Afghanistan except through disgrace and utter defeat. The US war in Afghanistan was a complete failure by all military benchmarks. **The US top decision makers wanted to define "success" as the rapid growth of opium poppies and its value, which proved explosive under US and NATO occupation; more money was there for CIA's black operatives – but what the US earned as government.**

For Yankees, famous quote by Alexander could have been the guidance note:

**"Afghanistan is easy to march into but hard to march out of".**

Pakistan's general populace remained concerned that, why their government and the army had been wasting their resources and time to remain studious ally of US '**war on terror**'? They had been playing the role of rented mercenaries, conducting military operations at the behest of outsiders knowing about the Alexander's historical remarks and the British reports in abundance.

Where did Pakistan stand after twelve years of war? Forty seven thousand dead, foreign debts tripled, killing and more of the same. But the then civilian and that military leadership were pleasantly repeating the same follies and yet expecting different results.

Pakistan needed to draw a comparison from history especially the US Civil War, what it led to for over a hundred years [*and what chaos goes on in this country*]. Everything that Pakistan's previous leaderships have been ham-fistedly doing on American dictates, was just sowing the seeds of much worse blow back that would haunt them for hundred of years.

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