

Scenario 223

AFGHANISTAN - BEFORE 9/11:

AFGHANISTAN – AS COUNTRY:

Afghanistan is approximately 653,000 sq km, out of which arable land is only a little less than 12%, amounting to 78,360 sq km. One sq km has 247 acres. In America one acre feeds about 1-2 people. In Afghanistan, if one acre fed 10-15 people, then less than 2 million people get food out of a population of about 38 million. The other 36 million have to be fed from Pakistan, because it is the cheapest source of surplus wheat. Pakistan's 882,000 sq km has more than 40% arable land and it normally produces surplus wheat and rice.

Afghanistan needs Pakistan for its access to the sea, food security and building up a modern defence capability. If Afghanis keep practicing pure Afghan nationalism, and Pakistan continues to keep practicing Uncle Tom's backward ideologies from the bygone days of European enlightenment, both will remain adversaries. Pakistan will remain poor and Afghanistan will starve to death. Better for Afghanistan to partner up with Pakistan's various sectors, except politics; if not, Pakistan would let its neighbour down for its own security.

An important factor to be remembered by ruling Afghan Taliban, that the Muslim women have been leading the armies of men in Islamic history. Islam produced female scholars before any other civilization could do so – so education should be opened up equally for all. Better to follow enlightened Islamic injunctions and protect your women. Disallow man-hating feminist ideologies to protect the family unit; community's wellbeing depends on the wellbeing of mothers, sisters, daughters and wives and on various roles performed by them.

Afghan government should reject all pressure from abroad on this account but it can gradually re-engineer its society in which women will be modest but fully participating in Islamic empire at local as well as national levels.

THE EARLY HISTORY:

Most Americans don't know that the phenomenon of tense US-Afghan relations has its deep roots. In American libraries still one can find a press-photo of **16th December 1955**, originated by the AP, in which Sardar M Daoud Khan, the then prime minister of Afghanistan, is seen with Soviet Minister of Defence Marshal Nikolai Bulganin in Kabul in a state celebration. In fact, these Soviet ties brought a slow escalation of conflict with the US in the Cold War.

During Daoud Khan's rule, Afghanistan increasingly saw in Pakistan both a competitor and a threat. Indeed, Daoud's quest for arms from Russia was in large part motivated by Afghanistan's own cold war with Pakistan. However, it was Daoud's support for a '**Pashtun Nationalist Movement**' in Pakistan that left the greatest lasting repercussions. Though issue of the **Pashtunistan** has roots in 1893 when Sir Henry M Durand, foreign secretary of India, demarcated what became known as the **Durand line**, setting the boundary between British India and Afghanistan; thus dividing the *Pashtun* tribes into two countries BUT Daoud Shah flared up the problem more intensively.

In 1955, Pakistan re-ordered its administrative structure to merge all provinces in West Pakistan making it a single unit. Daoud Khan interpreted the move as an attempt to marginalize the Pashtuns of the North West Frontier Province [NWFP] now the Khyber PK.

In March 1955, Afghan mobs attacked Pakistan's embassy in Kabul, and ransacked the Pakistani consulates in Jalalabad and Kandahar. In return, Pakistani mobs retaliated by sacking the Afghan consulate in Peshawar. Afghanistan mobilized its reserves for war but Kabul and Islamabad agreed to approach an arbitration commission - the process provided time for tempers to cool.

Twice, in 1960 and in 1961, Daoud Khan sent Afghan troops into Pakistan's NWFP; in September 1961, Kabul and Islamabad disengaged diplomatic relations and Pakistan sealed its border with Afghanistan. Pakistan, meanwhile, got disturbed with a Moscow-New Delhi-Kabul alliance. For the next two years, Afghanistan and Pakistan traded venomous and hurtful radio and press propaganda as Afghan insurgents fought Pakistani units inside Pak-territory.

On 9th March 1963, Daoud Khan stepped down. Two months later, with the mediation of the Shah of Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan

re-established their diplomatic relations – but remained confined to lip-services only.

In those days, Afghanistan was going through a series of modernizing projects; attempting to really build into a modern nation-state under two consecutive leaderships: King Zahir Shah, and followed by his cousin President Daoud Khan - amidst the rogue curse of the Cold War.

Both the Soviet Union and the United States were involved in Afghanistan through infrastructure building. The Soviet Union built the much needed *Salang* Tunnel, which connected northern Afghanistan to Kabul. The US got involved in the *Helmand* Valley project - an irrigation and agricultural project about building dams in southern Afghanistan. Both super powers were funnelling significant amounts of money from the '50s till much late.

In brief, during that Cold War era, both the US and the Soviet Union sought to gain footholds in Afghanistan; first through infrastructure investments and then military intervention. One power had to escape from that soil in February 1989 leaving the country with inheritance of a civil war — a backdrop to the rise of Taliban.

While the US took a back seat in Afghanistan during much of the '90s, it invaded it after the 9/11 event in 2001 and assumed a two-decade project to end on 31st August 2021 with humiliations and losses of all sorts. Then a wide spread notion appeared on world media horizon – who were the Taliban and how the group managed the only super power's defeat.

For the answer, one can follow the new conceptions developed in most American minds soon after 9/11 attacks. A testimony titled as **“WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE TALIBAN”** by Michael Rubin appeared at Washingtoninstitute.org website on **1st March 2002**, just about 5 months after America's attack on Afghanistan. The essay starts with:

“As the United States prepared for war against Afghanistan, some academics or journalists argued that Osama bin Ladin's al-Qa'ida group and Afghanistan's Taliban government were really creations of American policy run amok. A pervasive myth exists that the United States was complicit for allegedly training Osama bin Ladin and the Taliban.

For example;

Jeffrey Sommers, a professor in Georgia, has repeatedly claimed that the Taliban had turned on 'their previous benefactor.'

David Gibbs, a political science professor at the University of Arizona, made similar claims.

Robert Fisk, widely-read Middle East correspondent for The Independent, wrote of 'CIA camps in which the Americans once trained bin Ladin's fellow guerrillas.'

Mort Rosenblum, Associated Press writer, declared that 'Osama bin Ladin was the type of Soviet-hating freedom fighter that US officials applauded when the world looked a little different'."

The same type of opinions again started appearing in media pages, might be sponsored by the US government, after a decade to win the public opinion: see **TO WIN IN AFGHANISTAN-DESTROY PAKISTAN's ISI** written in American Intelligence Journal - Vol. 30, No. 2 (2012), pp. 120-124 (5 pages) by Howard Kleinberg - Published By: **National Military Intelligence Foundation**: Ref: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26202023>

In above write up, it was argued that neither Osama Bin Ladin [OBL] nor Taliban spiritual leader Mullah Omar were direct products of the CIA.

Linguistic and Tribal divisions have been the peculiar characteristics of Afghan whirlpool. The Pashtuns are divided among the Durrani, Ghilzai, Waziri, Khattak, Afridi, Mohmand, Yusufzai, Shinwari, and numerous smaller tribes. Further, each tribe is divided into subtribes. For instance, the Durrani are divided into seven sub-groups: the Popalzai, Barakzai, Alizai, Nurzai, Ishakzai, Achakzai, and Alikozai. These, in turn, are further divided into numerous clans. Zahir Shah, ruler of Afghanistan between 1933 and 1973, belonged to the Muhammadzai clan of the Barakzai subtribe of the Durrani tribe. Such clan, sub-tribal, and tribal divisions mostly contribute towards intense rivalries.

Religious diversity further complicated internal Afghan politics and relations with neighbours. Once home to thriving Hindu, Sikh, and Jewish communities till the mid-twentieth century, Afghanistan today is overwhelmingly Muslim. The vast majority – 84% are Sunni Muslims; amongst the rest the Hazaras are Shi'a Muslims, and so have sixty million Shi'ites in Iran. In the north-eastern Badakhshan region, there are many *Isma'ili Shi'ia*. Further; the *Pashtun* Muslims of Kandahar traditionally look toward their compatriots in Pakistan while people in northern Herat keep links with Iran.

The contemporary political history of Afghanistan starts with a bloodless 1
 coup of 1973 when government of King Zahir Shah was toppled by his 2 cousin
 Daoud Khan. Daoud Khan had served as prime minister of 3 Afghanistan since
 1953 and promoted economic modernization, 4 liberation of women, and
Pashtun nationalism – the last phenomenon 5 was though developed amidst
 Pak-Afghan armed clashes as mentioned 6 in above paragraphs.

Till early 1970s, the US was quite hesitant to support any type of
 military project on Afghan soils. However, Daoud Khan started inclining
 more towards the Soviet Union. He could not stick to his own famous
 phrase:

“I feel happiest when I light my American cigarette with Soviet matches”.

Pakistan continuously felt threatened for two decades while facing
 with its own restive Pashto-speaking population. Pakistan viewed
Daoud's Pashtunistan rhetoric - and his simultaneous support for
Baluchi separatists - as well as his generally pro-India foreign policy, as
 a serious threat to country's security.

In mid-1970s Pakistani PM Zulfikar Ali Bhutto [ZAB] responded
 Afghanistan by supporting an Islamist movement there – in fact that
 strategy later developed into Taliban myth. PM Bhutto started encouraging
 Afghan Islamic leaders; it was from this Islamist movement that
 Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence [ISI] introduced the US to important
Mujahedeen leaders as Burhanuddin Rabbani, Ahmad Masud, and
 Gulbuddin Hikmatyar.

Under Daoud's rule, Afghanistan became increasingly polarized. Just as
 Pakistan backed the Islamist opposition, the Soviet Union threw its
 encouragement behind the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan
 [PDPA] but soon withdrawn its support without showing any anger.

DECADE OF MUJAHEDDEEN VS RUSSIAN ARMY:

On 27th April 1978; there was another bloody coup in Afghanistan;
 Daoud Khan was formally overthrown and a communist government
 was established in Kabul; two days later, a Revolutionary Council
 declared Afghanistan to be a ***Democratic Republic***. The US started
 funding some resistance groups but without any unified policy.

In the US government, the then Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski and his group-mates were seen more interested in getting involved. They thought if the US got involved, the Soviet Union would come open – so the cold-war era should be ended. In 1979, they started funnelling cash & arsenal to Pakistan's intelligence services; especially the ISI, that US policy eventually induced formal Soviet invasion on Afghanistan through its northern borders; the US got more involved, too.

US involvement with Islamic groups remained uneven. Brzezinski used to say proudly: '***We created the Mujahedeen.***'

In reality, the *Mujahedeen* were already there in various pockets but the US exploited them strategically; used them to their advantage. Money was passed on through Pakistan's ISI - mostly going into the hands of the group-leaders of the *Mujahedeen*. Ordinary people didn't receive training from the CIA or Pakistan's ISI; they had guns in their houses; picking up their guns and fighting - nothing beyond. But these were the reactionary elements that the US got allied with.

[AMERICA's 1st MISTAKE ON AFGHAN SOILS: The critics held that the US made some horrific blunders, too. It pressurised Egypt to release a group of Islamists that they had arrested including one ***Ayman al-Zawahiri***, who happened to be the second-in-command of al-Qaeda then. The US inadvertently imported him — or it might be intentional to bolster the *Mujahedeen* by calling in foreign fighters. They were accompanied by Arabs, later called ***Arab Mujahedeen***; in fact they were the people from **Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood**, from Yemen and Saudi Arabia - who later became fighter members of al-Qaeda.

Additionally, the US, either inadvertently or intentionally, ended up funding for groups of foreign fighters who were allied with organized factions of the *Mujahedeen*. It was a sudden decision. For more than a decade the funding was being done via Pakistan's ISI and sometimes through direct cash payments; once the process stopped, Afghanistan fell into civil wars. The unintended consequence of such meddling brought chaos – thus another class of fighters emerged, of course, with American training manuals, funds and guns.]

In 1978, Daoud Khan was killed in a coup by Afghan's Communist Party, his former partner in government then known as the **People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan [PDPA]**. The PDPA pushed for a socialist transformation by abolishing arranged marriages, promoting mass literacy, and reforming land ownership. This undermined the

traditional tribal order and provoked opposition from Afghani Islamic leaders across rural areas, but it was particularly the PDPA's crackdown that contributed to open rebellion.

On **11th September 1979**; while the PDPA was besieged by internal leadership differences it went totally destabilized by an internal coup in which Hafizullah Amin ousted Nur Muhammad Taraki, the then ruler.

In December 1979; the Soviet Union, sensing PDPA's weakness, got involved militarily in Afghanistan's internal affairs, to depose Amin and install another PDPA faction. In fact the Soviets had welcomed the new regime of Democracy-lovers in Afghanistan with a massive influx of aid. However, the old rivalries between Hafizullah Amin's faction [*Khalqis*], who dominated the new government and its rival group [*Parchamis*], crippled the regime. Rule through brutal force and terror was rejected; so Russia sought to salvage its influence there through altered leadership, but Hafizullah Amin straightaway refused to relinquish power.

America immediately planned to get engaged in Afghanistan because he had lost Iran as its most trusted ally in the region due to Khomeini's successful Islamic Revolution of 1978-79. In December 1979, Premier Brezhnev sent the Soviet Red Army to Kabul; punished Hafizullah Amin by storming his palace and then executed him – installed Soviet client regime and controlled the city. Like in American stay during 2001-21, the Soviets were never fully able to gain control over the countryside; pockets of resistance continued to remain and exist with full hidden force.

When the Red Army contingents flew on Aeroflot planes into Kabul, and as Soviet tanks rolled across the Friendship Bridge [in Uzbekistan now], the Afghan *mujahedeen* were already there. Many of them had been and were in Pakistani exile since their failed uprising four years before. The US decided at once to arm the Afghan *mujahedeen* and they launched resistance afresh which quickly gained momentum. In 1980, President Carter sent only \$30 million to help that resistance movement but President Reagan enhanced the amounts steadily reaching \$250 million in 1985 while Saudi Arabia had contributed an equal amount. Contrarily, Moscow invested about \$5 billion per year in Afghanistan.

Entry of the Soviet Union into Afghan political arena had also prompted [besides the US] its other Cold War rivals like Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and China, to support rebels fighting against the Soviet-backed PDPA factions in Afghanistan.

1 In comparison to the secular and socialist government backed by Soviets,
2 which controlled the cities well, religiously motivated *mujahedeen* held
3 influence in much of the countryside. Beside *Rabbani* and *Hekmatyar*,
4 other *mujahedeen* commanders including *Jalaluddin Haqqani* also
5 jumped in.

6
7 Historians noted that PDPA was a progressive regime in Afghanistan; a
8 government that expanded women's rights, it extended literacy; it
9 brought agricultural reforms in the economy and adequate health care.
10 But, like in other communist states, no one was allowed to speak against
11 the government; such critics were arrested, thrown in jail or declared
12 '*disappeared*'.

13
14 *Mujahedeen* was in fact a Resistance Movement; it was not a single
15 group – but actually four different groups who were roughly aligned for
16 resisting ruling PDPA's harsh government. Amongst them was a more
17 organized '**the Islamist Faction**', led by *Gulbuddin Hekmatyar*. Even
18 before the Soviet invasion, he carried out a series of horrific acid attacks
19 against un-covered women.

20
21 Another adequately organized group was allied with the moderate
22 **Ahmad Shah Masoud**; not involved in acid attacks; not regressive –
23 only wanted egalitarian Islamic Republic. One group was of **Maoists**
24 **and leftists** who were angry with ruling PDPA government simply
25 because they weren't being heard. Then the fourth group comprised
26 of **just ordinary people** — that they just '*pick up arms and fight*'.
27 They didn't have an ideology; no particular vision of the government
28 or its functions. They were slower but when the Soviets invaded, this
29 group of ordinary people grew up dramatically and became leading
30 fighters.

31
32 Referring to Milton Bearden [the *CIA station chief in Pakistan* during
33 1986-89]'s thesis "**Afghanistan - Graveyard of Empires,**" published in
34 '*Foreign Affairs*' of December 2001:

35
36 *"By 1985, the occupying 40th Soviet army had swollen to almost*
37 *120,000 troops and with some other elements crossing into the Afghan*
38 *theatre on a temporary duty basis.*

39
40 *Initially, the CIA refused to provide American arms to the resistance,*
41 *seeking to maintain plausible deniability. The State Department had also*
42 *opposed providing American-made weapons for fear of antagonizing*
43 *the Soviet Union."*

The American CIA, a cold-war rival of the Soviets, worked closely with 1
Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence [ISI] to funnel foreign support for 2 the
mujahedeen. The war also attracted Arab volunteers [later called 3 Afghan
Arabs] headed by Osama bin Laden [OBL] and his reactionary 4 companions.

The US provided Stingers to the *mujahedeen* through Pakistan till 1983 7
at least. Covertly; millions of dollars were spent to purchase Chinese, 8
Warsaw Pact, and Israeli weaponry for *mujahedeen*. In March 1985, 9
President Reagan formally decided to switch their strategy from 'mere 10
harassment of Soviet forces' to driving the Red Army completely out of 11
the country – also opted [in September 1986] to provide the *mujahedeen* 12
with the Stinger anti-aircraft missile - thereby breaking the embargo on 13
'**Made in America arms**'. Under the guidance and supervision of the 14
CIA, Pakistan's ISI distributed those weapons to the Afghan warriors 15
through Karachi, Quetta and **Ojhari Camp in Rawalpindi**. 16

*[Washington had considered India a lost entity then and Pakistan's 18
role was hailed at all levels. However, the differences plagued in 19
mujahedeen did not surface until after the withdrawal of the Soviet 20
army from Afghanistan; the country had become a bleeding wound 21
for the Soviet Union. Each year, the Red Army suffered thousands of 22
casualties; plentiful Soviets died of disease and drug addiction and huge 23
economic drain out compelled Russian troops to wind up & go back in 24
1988; Soviet Premier Gorbachev had to announce it.]* 25

It was alleged by the US, throughout the 1980s & 90s that the ISI used 27
its position to promote its own national interests; the ISI refused to 28
recognize any Afghan resistance group that was not religiously based. 29
The ISI only dealt with seven groups which were more concerned and 30
adequately charged to fight in the field bravely. Indeed, the ISI tended to 31
favour *Gulbuddin Hekmatyar*, perhaps the most militant Islamist of the 32
mujahedeen commanders and having history of fighting fearlessly. 33

Ahmed Masoud, the most effective *Mujahid* commander, later developed 35
his own group named **THE NORTHERN ALLIANCE**, being a Tajik 36
received only eight Stingers from the ISI during the war; *Pamela* 37
Constable's essay 'Pakistani Agency Seeks to Allay US on Terrorism' in 38
The Washington Post dated 15th February 2000 is referred. 39

The war between the rural based Afghan tribal clergy and cities 41
controlled PDPA government backed by the Soviet Army continued for 42
a full decade but the Soviets on Afghan soils remained throughout in 43

turmoil; they were unable to get complete writ over the whole country. Under the new leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet Union [USSR] attempted to consolidate the PDPA's hold over power in the country but could not succeed due to varying strategies.

The Russians immediately started planning to move out of Afghanistan in an honourable way. The main strategy revolved around measures to save face while withdrawing troops. During this period, the military and intelligence organizations of the USSR worked with the Afghan government of Mohammad Najibullah to improve relations between the government in Kabul and the leaders of rebel tribal factions.

On 14 April 1988; Geneva Accords in this respect were signed by the USSR, the US, Pakistan and Afghanistan which provided a framework for the departure of Soviet forces, and established a multilateral understanding between the signatories regarding the future of international involvement in Afghanistan.

[Geneva Accords consisted of several instruments; a bilateral agreement between Pakistan and [the Republic of] Afghanistan on the principles of mutual relations, particularly based on non-interference and non-intervention; a declaration on international guarantees signed by the Soviet Union and the US; a bilateral agreement between Pakistan and Afghanistan on the voluntary return of Afghan refugees; and an agreement on the inter-relationships for the settlement of Afghanistan, signed by Pakistan and Afghanistan and witnessed by the Soviet Union and the US.]

The agreements also contained provisions for the timetable of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan; to start on 15th May 1988 and to end by 15th February 1989, thus putting an end to a nine-year-long Soviet occupation and Soviet-Afghan War.

The Afghan resistance groups - *Mujahedeen*, were neither party to the negotiations nor to the Geneva accords and so refused to accept the terms of the agreement. As a result, the civil war continued even after the completion of the Soviet withdrawal. The Soviet-backed regime of Najibullah [confined to Kabul city mainly] failed to win popular support, rural territory, or international recognition but was able to remain in power until 1992, when it collapsed and was overrun by the *Mujahedeen*.

The Russians finally worked out their exit; a complete withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghan soils was there before the given date - **15th February 1989.**

HOME WARS - MUJAHEDDEEN DIVIDED:

Mujahedeen, the coalition of groups with different aims & goals - they only aligned when the Soviets were there. Once the Soviets left in February 1989, the four groups turned towards their individual agendas to lead Afghan Civil Wars of the 1990s in all corners of their country, Afghanistan.

After May 1989, though the PDPA regime under Najibullah held on **until 1992** – but the history was to see collapse of the Soviet Union in its own and was torn into new independent countries – after which Afghan regime could not get aid of any kind from Russia; the defection of Uzbek Gen Abdul Rashid Dostum played its role to approach Kabul. With the political stage cleared of Afghan socialists, the remaining Islamic warlords started competing for power.

It remains a fact that the Afghans fought their own war and outsiders of any band of colour or race were kept on the sidelines. Then the Osama bin Ladin [OBL]'s role was confined to build and guard roads, dig ditches, and prepare fixed positions only. The battles were fought by the real Afghans while the Afghan Arabs were generally viewed as nuisances by *mujahedeen* commanders.

Most of the Afghan Arabs were from the '*Muslim Brotherhood*' of Egypt and the Saudia-based Islamic Coordination Council [ICC]. In Pakistan, Arab volunteers staffed numerous Saudi Red Crescent offices near the Afghan borders. The Arab volunteers were also allied with the *Ittihad-e-Islami*, led by Al-Rasul Sayyaf, a Pashtun scholar and long lived in Saudi Arabia. It was estimated that during 1982-92, some 35,000 members of *Ittehad-e-Islami* served in Afghanistan as volunteers.

After Russia's withdrawal, the US had only planned to support the mujahedeen for one year but Saudi and Kuwaiti donors provided \$400 million to them as emergency aid. While the US budgeted \$250 million for the collective *mujahedeen* in 1991, the following year President Bush allocated no money for them.

Like the sudden exit of the US from Afghanistan in August 2021, the Americans had walked away from Afghanistan within two years after the Russians' quit in 1988. A journalist named Ed Girardet then noted with anger then: ***"The United States really blew it. They dropped Afghanistan like a hot potato."*** Indeed, that was the time when the Pakistan's ISI filled the vacuum firstly created by the Russia and then by Washington.

1 **On 2nd August 1990;** Iraqi troops invaded Kuwait. Washington's
2 attention and resources both shifted to that nearby battle ground.
3 Islamist commanders like *Hikmatyar*, who were already upset with the
4 US, broke with their Saudi and Kuwait patrons and found new patrons
5 in Iran, Libya, and Iraq. The tables got turned around.

6
7 The CIA supported Arab volunteers who had come to Afghanistan to
8 wage *jihād* against the Soviets, eventually used those American arms in
9 terrorist activities around. Pakistan provided strong support to the
10 Taliban to achieve their early victories in 1994; p 352 of Amin Saikal's
11 book ***Modern Afghanistan: A History of Struggle and Survival (2005***
12 ***1st ed.)*** is referred. Other suggested readings are here:

- 13
14 • Ahmed Rashid's essay in the ***daily Telegraph*** London dated
15 11th September 2001-
- 16
17 • "Pakistan's support of the Taliban" in ***Human Rights Watch***
18 ***[2000]*** &
- 19
20 • An article titled "The elite force who are ready to die" in ***the***
21 ***guardian*** of 26th October 2001.
22