

# Scenario 237

## THE \$88 BILLION GAMBLE

### **GHOST AFGHAN ARMY & POLICE:**

See an article by ***Bryan Bender & Paul Mcleary*** in 'FOREIN POLICY' dated 13<sup>th</sup> August 2021 – which gives an insight vision of the writers who had foresightedness and courage to pen down their analysis BEFORE the fall of Kabul in the feet of the Taliban. Its opening paragraph was:

*"The United States spent more than \$88 billion to train and equip Afghanistan's army and police, nearly two-thirds of all of its foreign aid to the country since 2002. So why are they crumbling in the face of the Taliban onslaught?"*

*The breathtaking failure to mold a cohesive and independent Afghan fighting force can be traced to years of overly optimistic assessments from US officials that obscured — and in some cases, purposely hid — evidence of deep-rooted corruption, low morale, and even **ghost soldiers and police** who existed merely on the payrolls of the Afghan Defense and Interior Ministries....."*

However, in the last the Afghan commanders came out with an excuse that how could they operate without high-tech air and ground support from foreign allies. In fact, the special operations were really doing quite well but that was always when they had Americans advising and assisting them. When Afghanistan's second and third-largest cities, *Ghazni* and *Herat*, had fallen to the Taliban and next day *Lashkar Gah*, the capital of *Helmand* province, was also taken over by the Taliban; there appeared growing doubts among military officials and Washington that the Taliban could soon be at the gates of the capital and Afghan units would fizzle away. And two days later it happened exactly as had been anticipated.

When 3,000 American troops were flowing into Kabul to evacuate US diplomats, who were instructed a day before to destroy sensitive govt

1 documents before fleeing for their safety, Pentagon still had hopes for  
2 Afghan regiments' performance. Pentagon's **Press Secretary John Kirby**  
3 was telling media reporters that:

4  
5 *"We want to see the will and the political leadership, the military  
6 leadership, that's required in the field. We still want to see that, and we  
7 hope to see that, but whether it happens or not, whether it pans out or  
8 not, that's really for the Afghans to decide."*

9  
10 *The Afghan forces' advantages are their numerical superiority and that  
11 the Taliban lacks an air force - you have to use it."*

12 ...but Kabul collapsed in a short while.

13 The facts remained that the Afghan security forces had expanded  
14 substantially over the past two decades — from just 6,000 under the  
15 Ministry of Defense and no national police at all in 2003, to 182,071  
16 and 118,628, respectively, as of April 2021, according to the latest  
17 Pentagon figures. As the forces had ballooned, they had always claimed  
18 about their increased skills or expertise. One US commander boasted a  
19 decade ago:

20  
21 *"Afghanistan's army fought with skill and courage - they had 'proven  
22 themselves to be increasingly capable."*

23 In July 2021, the Pentagon's chief spokesperson insisted that the Afghan  
24 forces '**know how to defend their country.**' But the counter-evidence was  
25 coming up that government forces were ill-prepared to take on any  
26 sustained conflict - was often left out of public testimony or simply  
27 classified as secret.

28 Documents revealed that in 2015, the Pentagon started shielding actual  
29 data on the Afghan forces from the public, in a move that the Special  
30 Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction [SIGAR] was assigned  
31 a special task to unearth real facts. The independent watchdog concluded:

32  
33 *"....it was unable to publicly report on most of the US-taxpayer-  
34 funded efforts to build, train, equip, and sustain the Afghan forces."*

35 The Pentagon loosened some restrictions on data but since 2017, much  
36 of the previously available information about the size, strength and  
37 casualty rates of Afghan military units remained mysterious – especially  
38 about the '**operational performance of the Afghan forces**'.

Hiding the core facts by the Pentagon itself was a warning sign – showing 1  
 the organization's incompetence but the signs had been mounting since 2  
 years that the rosier assessments didn't reflect the reality on the ground. 3 In  
 army establishments, a loss to desertion is the most deplorable factor; 4 the  
 high rate of fleeing leads to a lack of cohesion. **Mike Jason**, a retired 5 Army  
 colonel who commanded training units in Afghanistan, said: 6  
 7

*"If you don't pump new energy and professionalism into the force 8  
 constantly, it disintegrates pretty quickly and you won't recognize it 9  
 two years later, much less often."* 10

*"That caused huge losses for the Afghan army and they've had to start 11  
 from scratch with a lot of recruits. Almost every year they are having 12  
 20-30% strength either from casualties or desertion."* 13

The poor performance of the Afghan Air Force also spurred ground 14  
 troops to flee. A former senior US military commander in Afghanistan 15  
 divulged: 16

*"They realized after fighting two to three days, being hit in various 17  
 locations all around the country, that the Afghan air force would not 18  
 deliver reinforcements, re-supplies, air medics, or air support."* 19

Some also viewed the original conception of the training program as 20  
 faulty. **Mark Jacobson**, a former Pentagon official held that: 21

*".....too much focus was given to preparing the Afghan military to repel 22  
 a foreign army rather than a home-grown insurgency like the Taliban. 23  
 We failed in trying to make the Afghan army in our own image; we tried 24  
 to create regiments and brigades when we needed to create an army 25  
 and police force that was basically special forces designed specifically 26  
 to beat back an insurgency, not to defend the Afghan borders against 27  
 outside conventional attacks."* 28

*"Another factor - the most effective Afghan units, which could only be 29  
 engaged in one battle at a time, were in heavy demand."* 30

## **CORROSIVE EFFECTS OF CORRUPTION:**

**Bryan Bender & Paul Mcleary** in their essay referred above also discuss 31  
 about the Corrosive Effects of Corruption within the ranks, as well as 32  
 questionable accuracy of data on the actual strength of the force and an 33  
 inability to assess intangible factors such as ***the will to fight***. Problems 34

1 such as fake personnel records that corrupt actors used to pocket salaries  
2 for both '**ghost soldiers and police**' were common. The fact remained:  
3

4 *'The (feelings about) abandonment of Afghanistan by the US and  
5 its allies caused the dramatic change in the ability of the Taliban to  
6 accelerate its campaign to take territory and in the process, destroyed  
7 the confidence of the Afghan security forces.'*

8 **O'Hanlon**, a former Adviser to the US commanders, sadly told that:  
9

10 *"One problem is just that we never expected an abrupt departure.  
11 We always assumed there would be a 12- to 24-month notification  
12 of a drawdown or a departure and that would have allowed for some  
13 adjustments.*

14 *The speedy US and NATO withdrawal had a huge effect on rank and  
15 file of Afghan troops (he believes). Anybody who was a fence sitter on  
16 how hard they were going to fight in defense of the government has  
17 decided not to be a fence sitter anymore, but to go ahead and lay down  
18 their arms and either do a deal with the Taliban or blend in."*

19 However the end result remained that the Afghan force had been there  
20 but with low degree of control, poor leadership, and lack of adequate  
21 recruitment, desertion and weak battlefield performances. While the  
22 Afghan security force boasted of sophisticated and advanced weapons, it  
23 suffered from lack of cohesiveness, corruption and mismanagement. The  
24 Taliban, on the other hand, also lacked high technology weapons but  
25 were financially stable with a binding force of their Islamic ideology in  
26 philosophy and practice.  
27

28 Referring to **Reuters / daily DAWN** dated 15<sup>th</sup> August 2021:

29 *"Despite about \$88 billion budgeted for training the Afghan army; it  
30 took the Taliban little more than a month to brush it aside.*

31 *The rout of Afghan forces as Taliban fighters seized one provincial city  
32 after another provides a stark answer to anyone wondering about the  
33 success of two decades of America-led efforts to build a local army."*

34 Over the few days prior to reach Kabul, the Taliban had seized every  
35 major city in Afghanistan — from *Kandahar* in the south to *Mazar-i-*  
36 *Sharif* in the north, *Herat* in the west to *Jalalabad* in the east – then they  
37 knocked at the gates of Kabul without any fear of reprisal or retaliation.  
38

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani praised Afghan security and defence forces in a brief televised address a day before, saying '**they had a strong spirit to defend their people and country.**' But the world got shocked at the lack of resistance put up by any Afghan army units. Some abandoned their posts and others reached agreements with the Taliban to stop fighting and hand over their weapons and equipment.

The US officials held, that in some instances, provincial governors asked security forces to surrender or escape, perhaps in order to avoid further bloodshed because they believed defeat was unavoidable. Where deals were not cut, Afghan forces still melted away. One US official correctly explained: '**Once morale goes, it spreads very quickly, and that is at least partly to blame.**'

The US commanders were long worried that:

*"Rampant corruption, well documented in parts of Afghanistan's military and political leadership, would undermine the resolve of badly paid, ill-fed and erratically supplied front-line soldiers — some of whom had left for months or even years on end in isolated outposts, where they could be picked off by the Taliban."*

**AFP** [French International News Agency] had published series of images in the world press and social media in which Taliban fighters were seen driving Afghan National Army vehicles through the streets of *Laghman* province, Afghanistan on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

Over many years, hundreds of Afghan soldiers were killed each month – un-official figures: c60000. But the army fought on, without any of the airborne evacuations of casualties and expert surgical care standard in Western armies, as long as international backing was there. Once that went, their resolve evaporated. Another US official asked: **"Would you give your life for leaders who don't pay you on time and are more interested in their own future?"**

The same was the analysis shared by some in the Taliban movement itself. One Taliban commander in Ghazni said:

*"....the government forces' collapse started as soon as the US forces started withdrawing as they didn't have any ideology except fleecing the Americans."*

*The only reason for this unexpected fall of provinces was our commitment and the withdrawal of US troops."*

1 The defeat highlighted the failure of the US to create a fighting force in  
2 the image of its own highly professional military with a motivated, well-  
3 trained leadership, high-tech weaponry and seamless logistical support.  
4

5 On paper, Afghan security forces numbered around 300,000+ soldiers.  
6 In reality, the numbers were never that high. Dependent on a small  
7 number of elite Special Forces units that were shunted from province to  
8 province as more cities fell to the Taliban, the already high rate of  
9 desertion in the regular army soared.

10 As government forces started to fall apart, hastily recruited local militias,  
11 loyal to prominent regional warlords also rushed in to fight. Western  
12 countries had long been wary of such militias. Though more in line with  
13 the realities of traditional Afghan politics where personal, local or ethnic  
14 ties outweigh loyalty to the state, they were also open to corruption and  
15 abuse and ultimately proved no more effective than conventional forces.  
16

17 Leaders like Rashid Dostum fled to Uzbekistan as the Taliban advanced  
18 and warlords surrendered to them being docile and obedient.  
19

20 Question however, arises whether it was ever a realistic goal to create a  
21 Western-style army in one of the world's poorest countries, with a  
22 literacy rate of 40% [*that too in cities only*] and a social and political  
23 culture far from the developed sense of nationhood underpinning the US  
24 military. US army trainers who worked with Afghan forces struggled to  
25 teach the basic lessons of military organisation but even those were  
26 blown in air by illiterate Afghanis.

27  
28 **Jonathan Schrodén**, an expert at the CNA Policy Institute, who served as  
29 an adviser to US Central Command [**Centcom**] and the US-led  
30 international force in Afghanistan, opined:

31  
32 *"The Afghan army functioned as much as a 'jobs programme' only.  
33 But the chronic failure of logistical, hardware and manpower support  
34 to many units, meant that even if they want to fight, they run out of the  
35 ability to fight in relatively short order."*

36  
37 Afghan forces were forced to give up repeatedly after pleas for '**supplies**  
38 **and reinforcements**' went un-answered, either because of incompetence  
39 or the simple incapacity of the system to deliver. Even the elite Special  
40 Forces units that had borne the brunt of the fighting in recent years  
41 suffered most. Within a month, at least a dozen commandos were  
42 executed by Taliban fighters in the northern province of Faryab after  
43 running out of ammunition and being forced to surrender.

**Richard Armitage**, the former US diplomat who organised a fleet of South Vietnamese Navy ships to carry some 30,000 refugees out of Saigon before it fell in April 1975, watched the situation as the threat of a similar disaster unfolded in Kabul.

As Deputy Secretary of State under former President Bush when the US invaded in 2001, was deeply involved in Afghanistan diplomacy. He said:

*"The Afghan army's collapse pointed to the wider failures of two decades of international efforts.*

*I hear people expressing frustration in the press that the Afghan army can't fight a long fight. I can assure you the Afghan army has fought, can fight if it's got something to come out of their barrels.*

***The question is; is this government worth fighting for?"***

### **AMERICA MOVED TOO SLOWLY:**

Since 2002, the US allocated about \$88 billion in security assistance to Afghanistan, a sum that dwarfed the defence budgets of other developing nations. In 2011 alone, at the peak of the war, Afghanistan received \$11 billion in security aid from Washington. Yet after almost two decades of help, the Afghan army and police were still too weak to fend off the Taliban, the Islamic State and other 'FREEDOM FIGHTERS'.

SIGAR, the US government watchdog, chronicled severe shortcomings with the Afghan security forces over the years. The interview records obtained by them contain new insights into what went wrong and exposed gaping contradictions between real facts and lies at all levels; administrative, military, diplomatic and political – showing up an utter shameless image of one and the only super power.

Almost always, the Afghan commanders inflated the numbers so they could pocket salaries – paid by the US – for ghost personnel, according to the US state-audits. On paper, the Afghan security forces looked robust, with 352,000 soldiers and police officers but on ground there were only 254,000 serving in the ranks. As a result, When Washington asked the Afghans to produce biometric data, fingerprints and face scans, to verify the real presence – it had gone too late till then.

The fact remained that the US moved too slowly to build up the Afghan forces during the first few years of the war when the Taliban presented a

1 minimal threat. Then, after the Taliban rebounded, they rushed and tried  
2 to train too many Afghans too quickly. **Marin Strmecki**, a former adviser  
3 to Rumsfeld, told SIGAR in 2015 that:

5 *"The poor timing and inept planning are mortal setbacks. These are  
6 strategic consequences to this. This is not just doing well or it would  
7 be nice to be able to operate better. You succeed or fail on whether you  
8 can do these things in a timely manner."....*

9 Ref: **The Washington Post** dated 9<sup>th</sup> December 2019

10  
11 Drawing partly on the interviews but largely on other government  
12 documents, SIGAR published two 'Lessons Learned' reports in **2017 and**  
13 **2019** that highlighted an array of problems with the Afghan security  
14 forces. The reports followed several SIGAR audits and investigations  
15 that had pinpointed similar troubles with the Afghan forces.

16  
17 From a base in **Khost Province**, the CIA used to support a militia  
18 contingent since early 2001 continuously and constantly. It was called  
19 the **Khost Protection Force** [KPF]; the organization was reported to have  
20 4,000 members in 2015 and 8,000–10,000 in 2018. In August 2021,  
21 6,000 KPF soldiers / fighters surrendered to the Taliban – a sharp blow  
22 to the US.

23  
24 **Lt Gen Douglas Lute**, White House's Afghan war Czar with Presidents  
25 Bush and Obama, told government interviewers that:

26  
27 *"We got [the Afghan forces - what] we deserved. If the US government  
28 had ramped up training between 2002 and 2006, when the Taliban  
29 was weak and disorganized, things could have been different. Instead,  
30 we went to Iraq. If we committed money deliberately and sooner, we  
31 could have a different outcome definitely."*

32  
33 In **October 2004**, the Pentagon had talked high about the Afghan army  
34 and police; it praised the 15,000 soldiers in the promising Afghan army  
35 as '*a highly professional, multi-ethnic force, which is rapidly becoming a*  
36 *pillar of the country's security.*' It also touted how the Afghan national  
37 police – partly under the tutelage of Germany – had 25,000 newly  
38 trained officers - but internally, Bush admin officials shared anxieties and  
39 sounded alarms.

40  
41 In **February 2005**, the then Defence Secretary Rumsfeld forwarded a  
42 confidential report to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice about the  
43 Afghan National Police [ANP]. The report was titled, '**ANP Horror**

**Stories'** and described how most of the police were illiterate, under-equipped and barely trained. Rumsfeld wrote in a memo, accompanying the report, saying:

*"Please take a look. This is the Afghan National Police situation. It is a serious problem. My impression is that these two pages were written in as graceful and non-inflammatory a way as is possible (and appropriate)."*

One month later, Rumsfeld sent another confidential memo to National Security Adviser **Stephen Hadley**, complaining about a tangled arrangement between the Pentagon and the State Department to train Afghan police that was going nowhere; saying that:

*"He was ready to toss in the towel. I don't think it is responsible to the American taxpayers to leave it like it is. We need a way forward. I've worked on it and worked on it. I am about to conclude that it is not possible for the US Government bureaucracy to do the only sensible thing."....*

Ref: Rumsfeld's published memoirs [2011].

The above details show that Rumsfeld pushed to train the Afghan forces quickly yet wanted to keep them small to avoid massive expenses but Bush admin said Rumsfeld was stingy and short-sighted. Bush White House insisted that Washington would have saved money in the long run – ***if it had built a bigger Afghan army and police force sooner.***

### **DISORGANISED & RIDICULOUS APPROACH:**

The initial war-years were marked by a 'disorganized, unprepared, ridiculous US approach' to train the Afghan security forces. At first, the Bush admin insisted on a cap of 50,000 Afghan soldiers and police – but the fact that they were 'totally irrelevant for security needs'; and it was known to all in White House and the Pentagon.

**Zalmay Khalilzad**, the US ambassador in Kabul during 2003-04, later confirmed in an interview that:

*"The Afghan government wanted Washington to pay for security forces of 100-120K Rumsfeld drew a hard line and held the training program 'hostage' until the Afghans agreed to the 50,000 cap, which led to long delays.*

1        *So we were fighting in 2002-03 about those sorts of numbers - it was  
2        apparent [that] more Afghan forces were required. Now we're talking  
3        about God knows what, 300,000...."*

4

5        Thus that internal dispute dragged on till 2004-05 and the situation  
6        became extremely tense in war-areas and the need was felt that the  
7        Afghan forces should be expanded quickly to fight the re-emerging  
8        Taliban. See a comment then appeared in media:

9

10        *"The way it gets resolved is the way everything gets resolved in  
11        Washington - by not getting resolved".*

12

13        However, another problem was that the US government lacked the  
14        capacity to train and equip large foreign armies from scratch. They were  
15        not to invent how to launch infantry operations or how to do artillery at  
16        the start of a war. All was being done on ad hoc. There was no doctrine  
17        and no science to it. It got done very unevenly - creating security forces  
18        for another society remained the most important political act for the  
19        states - which requires more enhanced wisdom and funds.

20

21        **In January 2009**, the war was going bad and at top speed. President  
22        Obama took over and immediately unveiled a new counter-insurgency  
23        strategy and nearly tripled the number of US troops in Afghanistan.  
24        Obama told the American people that surge in the US troops was  
25        temporary. He later promised to bring home all the native soldiers back  
26        till ending 2016. His war strategy also caused huge expansion of the  
27        Afghan security forces; more than 350,000. The idea was not bad - that  
28        the Afghans could take over the fight onwards.

29

30        The number of US troops in Afghanistan decreased from 100,000 in  
31        2010-11 to 13,000 in 2019; the Trump administration had escalated air-  
32        strikes to win the war from the Taliban with three times as many bombs  
33        and missiles on average each month; US Air Force statistics are on  
34        record. In view of withdrawing more US troops from Afghan soils, he  
35        and his diplomats got engaged in peace talks with the Taliban.

36

37        The American military commanders assured the public time and again  
38        that the Afghan security forces were constantly improving and that the  
39        US troops would eventually be relieved but it could never. A Marine **Gen  
40        Mattis**, who later served as Trump's Defence Secretary, told a Senate  
41        panel in July 2010:

42

43        *"This is the worst nightmare for the Taliban, that the Afghan army is  
increasingly effective, partnered with our forces and moving against*

*an enemy that they know better than anyone - I think this is very heartening."*

In ending 2010, at a White House news conference, the then **Defence Secretary Robert Gates** said:

*"The Afghan security forces are progressing ahead of schedule. They are performing well in partnership with coalition troops and will continue to improve with the right training, equipment and support."*

Members of Congress from both parties also lavished praise on the Afghans; though it was all blatant lie.

In March 2011; **Sen Carl Levin**, the Chairman of the Armed Services Committee, said in a hearing.

*"The growth in the size and capability of the Afghan security forces and control of territory by those forces is robbing the Taliban of their propaganda target and bringing us closer to the success of the mission."*

**Sen John McCain** had added then:

*"We are turning around the war. Afghan security forces are growing in quantity and improving in quality even faster than it was planned."*

**On 22nd June 2011**; President Obama, in a televised statement to the nation declared success against al-Qaeda and the Taliban and the withdrawal of 33,000 troops, about a third of US forces, by next year. He said the troops would be back by the summer of 2012 or by September at the latest. The first 5,000 would return next month and another 5,000 by the end of the year. Also adding that '**Tonight, I can tell you that we are fulfilling that commitment - we are meeting our goals.'**

**Lt Gen Mark Milley** during a **2013 press briefing** from Kabul said:

*"Everything is going according to plan. This [Afghan] army and this police force have been very, very effective in combat against the insurgents every single day. Have there been one or two outposts that have been overrun? Yes. But you're talking about 3-4,000 outposts that are in the country."*

Just after about two years, Pentagon officials started to revise their assessments. They still held that the security forces were making progress

1 but acknowledged that maybe they had overstated the Afghans' abilities  
2 in the past. The then Defence Secretary **Ashton Carter**, during a visit to  
3 *Kandahar in February 2015* said:

4  
5 *"It's not that the Afghans aren't good at fighting. They are; but just a  
6 few years ago there really was no Afghan national security force at all."*

7 10 months later, during another visit to the war zone Carter said:

8  
9  
10 *"The Afghan security forces are getting there.....If you'd have asked  
11 me to bet on it five years ago, I don't know. I'd may be give you even  
12 odds on it or something. But it's coming together."*

13  
14 **ODD CONDUCT OF THE FORCE:**

15  
16 Referring to **THE SEATTLE TIMES** dated 9<sup>th</sup> December 2019, the US  
17 military trainers described Afghan security forces as **incompetent**,  
18 **unmotivated and rife with deserters**.

19  
20 **Marine Gen Jim Mattis** had once briefed the Congress in 2010 that:  
21 *'We're on the right track now.'*

22  
23 **Marine Gen John Allen** told Congress in 2012 that: *'....the Afghan  
24 forces are better than we thought they were.'*

25  
26 **Army Lt Gen Joseph Anderson** told reporters in 2014 that: *'The Afghan  
27 national security forces are winning'.*

28  
29 **Thomas Johnson**, a Navy officer and an Adviser in *Kandahar* said:  
30 *'Afghans viewed the police as predatory bandits, calling them the most  
31 hated institution in Afghanistan'.*

32  
33 The estimates told that more than 60,000 members of Afghan security  
34 forces were killed in this 20-year war about 17 times the number of US  
35 and NATO troops who have lost their lives. The Afghan security forces  
36 comprised of troops from regular army and about half of that number  
37 from police [*Afghan police is more of a paramilitary force than a crime-  
38 fighting agency*].

39  
40 However, in secret '**The Afghanistan Papers**' - *a secret history of  
41 America's longest war* - all the above statements were proved lies; the  
42 Afghan proxy force was a long-running calamity. With most speaking on  
43 the assumption that their remarks would remain private, they told about

the Afghan security forces as incompetent, unmotivated, poorly trained, corrupt and riddled with deserters, secret agents & infiltrators.

On another count, in one interview, **Ryan Crocker**, a former US ambassador to Kabul, told government interviewers that:

*“....the Afghan police were ineffective not because they’re outgunned or outmanned. It’s because they are useless as a security force and they’re useless as a security force because they are corrupt down to the patrol level.”*

**Victor Glaviano**, who worked with the Afghan army as a US combat adviser in 2007-08, complained to government interviewers [2016]:

*“Afghan troops had beautiful rifles, but didn’t know how to use them, and were undisciplined fighters, wasting ammunition because they wanted to fire constantly. ....the soldiers [are] stealing fools who habitually looted equipment supplied by the Pentagon.”*

By the end of year 2016, instead of ending the war as Obama had promised, there were 8,400 US troops left in Afghanistan. Less than a year later, his successor in the White House Mr Trump decided that was not enough and sent back several thousand more American troops to help the Afghans; making it nearly 13,000. The fairy progress reports, as usual before, continued to be delivered to the public, mostly based on illusion - only 2 in 10 Afghan recruits could read or write. SIGAR report interestingly noted that:

*“Questionable motivations and loyalties snaked through the ranks of the army and police. Ethnic and tribal tensions posed a perpetual problem, with the **corps dominated by warlords** who doled out promotions based on patronage, according to the interviews.”*

It took nearly a decade to get the Afghan Air Force off the ground, because the pilots were not qualified; when some became available they were not able to read operational manuals. Most motor mechanics claimed themselves as pilots *‘but having no flight experience’*. The air bases were plagued by *‘mischief’* as many Afghans used to steal jet fuel when they left each day - they used to sell it in small containers to the needy. Such petty corruptions were uncontrolled and widespread.

Afghan police recruits, usually on absconding, used to get their uniforms, then go back to home and sell them around; many re-enlisted them in

1 other centres and did the same time and again. The US trainers constantly  
2 tried to plug holes in the system to prevent looting and stealing but their  
3 Afghan officers often protected them. More they miss-behaved, the more  
4 money was showered by the US on them – really awful situations.  
5

6 **Michael Callen**, an economist specialized in the Afghan public sector,  
7 recalled [2015] that once he was working with a newly arrived military  
8 officer. They wanted to set up a secure system of paying salaries into  
9 bank accounts direct or through phone apps. They had to abandon the  
10 idea when after long briefing, the concerned Interior Ministry official  
11 didn't even hear our briefing – '....he enjoyed his sleep during our stay  
12 there and finally said that Sure, if you want to go do it, go do it in places  
13 where there aren't mobile money agents..... Go do it in places where  
14 cell phones don't work.'

15 One could understand that Afghan official's interests and motive.  
16

17 This 'all inclusive' corruption ultimately brought most disgusted  
18 Afghan security officials to question openly: '**....who represented the**  
19 **bigger evil – the Taliban or the Afghan government.**'  
20

21 In real terms, if the US & NATO were not able to reform those Afghan  
22 lots in 2015 – they should have quit Afghanistan then – what fun in  
23 staying there for six / seven years more.  
24

25 In 2017; **Shah Mahmood Miakhel**, a former Adviser to the Afghan  
26 Interior Ministry and later the Governor of *Nangahar* province, was  
27 asked:  
28

29     *"....that why is it possible that a large number of 500 security forces*  
30     *cannot defeat about 20 or 30 Taliban."*  
31

32 **Miakhel**, while passing on a discussion amongst village elders, replied:  
33

34     *"The security people are not there to defend the people and fight*  
35     *Taliban, they are there to make money by selling their uniforms,*  
36     *weapons or fuel.*

37     *To a further question that OK the government is not protecting you,*  
38     *but you are about 30,000 people in the district. If you don't like Taliban*  
39     *then you must fight against them – the response came; that we don't*  
40     *want this [Ghani's] corrupt government to come and we don't want*  
41     *Taliban either, so we are waiting to see who is going to win."*

The American commanders stacked their disrespect and contempt on 1 units known as the Afghan Local Police [ALP] - about 30,000 militias 2 organized at the village level. The US had raised them in 2010 - and 3 trained them exclusively - but they quickly generated a reputation for 4 brutality and drew enormous complaints. In 2016, about one third of the 5 local police '**seemed to be drug addicts or Taliban'** - their main concern 6 was getting fuel from their American units.

However, **Gen John Allen**, commander of all US and NATO forces during 2011-13, had described the ALP as a major success. The General held that:

*'....the ALP stood their ground 80% of the time they were attacked. Indeed, the Taliban were more concerned about ALP than almost any other single measure taken to protect the Afghan people.'*

No one else corroborated Gen John's assessment, however.

**Robert Perito**, a former analyst at the US Institute of Peace, also called the local police '**dysfunctional and a corrupt force, run by warlords.**'

**Lt Col Scott Mann**, told government interviewers that: '*...the local police training expanded too rapidly between 2011 and 2013, causing the program to deteriorate.*'

However, the US and NATO deserved a large share of the blame; the training programs for the Afghan security forces - not just the police - were **ill-designed, poorly coordinated and thinly staffed**. The programs were plagued by inconsistency and constrained by the fact that US and NATO trainers served for only 6-12 months at a time. For years, the both could not find enough certified law enforcement professionals to train the Afghan police. To fill the gap, the Pentagon assigned regular troops to the job - but of no avail.

**Victor Glaviano**, (cited earlier), told interviewers [in 2016] that:

*"....it made no sense for US infantry troops to train the police. Thinking we could build the [security forces] that fast and that well was insane. We can't even stand up a sustainable local police unit in the US in 18 months. How could we expect to set up hundreds of them across Afghanistan in that time frame?"*

1 See the war's ending moments now.

2

3 Quoting **Susannah George** for her analysis titled as 'How Afghan  
4 security forces lost the war' appeared in the **WASHINGTON POST**  
5 dated 25<sup>th</sup> September 2021:

6

7 *"Building Afghanistan's national security forces were one of the most*  
8 *ambitious and expensive aspects of two decades of US-led war - it*  
9 *resulted in failure.*

10

11 *The US spent billions of dollars [\$88b - detailed in a separate*  
12 *chapter]; training and equipping police, soldiers and Special Forces.*  
13 *Despite years of warnings from US and Afghan officials, successive*  
14 *US administrations pledged that the Afghan military was capable*  
15 *of defending the country. President Biden said the Afghan military*  
16 *was 'as well-equipped as any army in the world' just a month before*  
17 *its collapse."*

18

### **THE WORST STYLE OF SURRENDER:**

21 During the taking over of various Afghan cities including Kabul in or  
22 before August 2021, not a single unit of Afghan security forces remained  
23 intact.

25 A sophisticated Taliban campaign aimed at securing surrender deals  
26 was laid at the heart of the Afghan military's collapse, **but layers of**  
27 **corruption, waste and logistical failures left the country's security forces**  
28 **so under-equipped, coward and with such battered morale that it**  
29 **enabled the Taliban's success ultimately.**

31 Interviews with more than a dozen members of the Afghan Special  
32 Forces, army and police in three [sample] provinces illustrated that the  
33 collapse of security forces was not abrupt. Instead, it was a slow, painful  
34 breakdown that had taken start months before the fall of Kabul. BUT  
35 where was the CIA's network through those months.

37 It remained a fact that the US withdrawal gained momentum and the  
38 Taliban enhanced their relentless sweep through rural Afghanistan;  
39 casualties among Afghan govt fighters also surged. In Kandahar  
40 province, as the war intensified, many of Afghanistan's police on the  
41 front line were **entering their sixth month without pay**, a widespread  
42 problem that took a toll on government forces' morale and made them  
43 vulnerable to Taliban's cash offers and safety for their own lives.

The forces were in so miserable situation that when Eid holidays were 1 approaching, even if they were granted leave, they were NOT in a 2 position to go home. They would have been felt too ashamed to look at 3 their children with empty hands. When they joined Afghan-police force, 4 all they were given was a gun — **no training or documentation or duty 5 roasters or pay & allowances.** 6

[As they were not paid so next month they just sold their rifles and 7 offered loyalties to the Taliban; then the **Taliban were paying around 8 \$2,000** for Afghan govt weapons, a price much higher than the market 9 rate. It was **the worst style of surrender;** the historians would re-write 10 facts about the fall of *Kandahar*.] 11

Afghanistan's most highly trained fighters were assigned to defensive 12 operations as the Taliban pushed closer to provincial capitals and as the 13 US air support had disappeared. Elite fighters were tasked with running 14 dangerous supply missions that made them more vulnerable. Special 15 Forces elite teams were tasked with defensive operations that put them 16 at heightened risk of the Taliban ambush – it was not what they were 17 trained to do. Those commandos were given this task because they were 18 one of the few units with heavy armoured vehicles. 19

In the last month of surrender, the Taliban snipers had started killing 20 the city police-men on patrol or on supply of bread & milk to the other 21 fellow units. The Taliban came open to target the police and other 22 security units in busy bazaars after recognizing them as Afghan govt 23 employees. 24

In **Kunduz** province, the Afghan government had lost control of most 25 village posts which were largely relying on elite units — the best trained, 26 equipped and generally most motivated — to lead the fight. But without 27 US supervision, the troops were being mismanaged and overworked. The 28 elite units knew how to defeat the Taliban, but the leadership at the top 29 was not interested to listen their *jawaans* [troops]. 30

Special Forces fighters in Kunduz kept their equipment ready so they 31 could jump into action at short notice. But as the US withdrew its forces, 32 Afghan special operators were largely moved under the command of the 33 Defence Ministry; they were no more independent then. The Defence 34 officials set their deals with the Taliban and somewhere had sold the 35 Units' weapons, too. The empty handed troops were sent to conduct 36 clearing operations. How could they win the war. 37

1 In Kunduz [July 2021], an incident of friendly fire jeopardized a critical  
2 clearance operation. The captain admitted that the men in his unit were  
3 struggling to operate without US coordination and air support whereas  
4 the units never moved without American backing. The men suddenly  
5 found themselves without tools they had relied on for years. As one unit  
6 prepared to go on leave, its commander confided that he feared they  
7 would not return to the unit any more. In fact most of them had  
8 managed to fly to America with corruption-tainted arrangements with  
9 the Defence Ministry at Kabul – actually they had fled Afghanistan.

10  
11 Soon after, members of the KKA fighters had to arrange a helicopter to  
12 flee from Kunduz because most territory surrounding the city was  
13 occupied by the Taliban; ***airlifting troops was the only way to evacuate  
them.***

14  
15 By late July [2021], the Taliban were closing in on nearly all the country's  
16 provincial capitals. Afghan security forces, that hadn't been killed by the  
17 Taliban till then had deserted or fled, steadily retreating from remote  
18 outposts into city centres. Those who remained on the country's front  
19 lines were some of the least capable. A wounded policeman told the  
20 **Washington Post**'s reporter that:

21  
22  
23 *"The Taliban are everywhere now, even inside the city. He was driving  
24 an un-armoured police truck through eastern Kandahar to re-supply a  
25 checkpoint when he was caught by a Taliban ambush.*

26  
27 *It's because of our leadership that we are in this position; the  
28 government had suffered a great loss in a matter of weeks. Our leaders  
29 sell our checkpoints. They've already sold our blood."*

30  
31 One police commander said the only men from his unit willing to hold  
32 positions against the Taliban were drug addicts; it keeps them awake.  
33 ***'The addicts are the only men who can stand being on the front line,'***  
34 Commander Wali said. *If they weren't using drugs, they would go  
35 crazy;* **WP dated 25<sup>th</sup> September 2021** is referred again.

36  
37 Afghan army collapse '**took us all by surprise**' - in ***Reuters' analysis***  
38 published on world media pages dated **28<sup>th</sup> September 2021**.

39  
40 **On 28<sup>th</sup> September 2021;** US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin told  
41 Congress that the **Afghan army's sudden collapse caught the Pentagon  
42 off-guard** as he acknowledged miscalculations in America's longest  
43 war including corruption and damaged morale in Afghan ranks. While

speaking before the Senate Armed Services Committee, the Secretary told that:

*“The fact that the Afghan army simply melted away in many cases without firing a shot took us all by surprise. It would be dishonest to claim otherwise.”*

The Senate and House committees overseeing the US military were holding hearings; questioning was there that saw the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken staunchly defending the administration, even as he faced calls for his resignation. **Senator James Inhofe** squarely blamed the Biden admin for a shameful end to a 20-year endeavour; further that:

*“Biden ignored the recommendations of his military leaders and left many Americans behind after the US withdrawal. We all witnessed the horror of the president’s own making.”*

Many of the hardest questions were raised against the two senior US military commanders testifying: **Army Gen Mark Milley**, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and **Marine Gen Frank McKenzie**, Head of US Central Command.

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