**CIA`s turn to admit to its fiasco**

BY J A W E D N AQ V I 2021-08-17

AS far as the Afghan Taliban`s fanaticism is concerned, together with their overwhelming military superiority with their winning guerrilla tactics, there ought to be no surprises at the brigands` return to Kabul with amazing ease. It is also not a huge surprise that the US spilled unimaginable quantities of blood and money in the 20 years of its occupation of the landlocked impoverished nation with precious little to show for it.

The savagery showcased the nature of the beast for both sides, one under the banner of democracy, the other openly tethered to religious and cultural atavism and, therefore, in this situation, less of a hypocrite. The gloss of human rights and women`s liberation offered by the Western coalition as a ruse to wreck Afghanistan was wearing thin at least a decade ago.

At the risk of annoying my liberal Pakistani friends, and Indians who have lost crucial listening posts in the erstwhile friendlier Afghanistan, the question needs to be asked: why this fret over barbarism when we can put up with the routine chopping of heads and hands in other countries, legally? How was the demolishing of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban any worse than Turkey`s forcible conversion of a fabled church into a mosque? How was that different from the razing of a mediaeval mosque in India by a frenzied mob? When the acrimony and false pride surrounding the great tragedy fade away, history would search for the genesis and execution of the mindlessness.

The main personalities involved in the latest version of the Great Game which better qualifies to be called the dirty game were the KGB and the CIA. We know from the contrite revelations of Vasili Mitrokhin, the senior KGB defector to the West, the Soviet side of the truer story. We could do with a CIA defector, why not, to Afghanistan itself to explain the inexplicable insanity that was not the agency`s first such enterprise.

When I visited Kabul in 1981 for a Dubai daily, I saw girls going to schools and women heading of f to colleges and universities. One was aware that the rural regions in the story were built on a different foundation. Iran`s Islamic revolution also had its seeds in the greater control that the religious clergy had on the rural masses. It was mainly the underground communist groups led by the pro-Soviet Tudeh Party that provided the urban sinews for the revolution in Iran. In Afghanistan there was no similar bridge between the rural conservative massesandtheleft-leaning andliberalintellectual elite located in urban pockets.

Yet, the erstwhile conservative Afghans were an agreeable lot, relatively speaking. Sample the way the Soviet-backed government would pick them out f rom their lairs. One of the most popular method of arresting suspected Afghan mujahideen in droves was to raid cinema halls where everyone would be watching recently released Indian movies. The Soviet ambassador, probably a Tajik, was a burly man named Fikriat al Tabeev. Indian ambassadorJ.N. Dixit introduced us at a party thrown by some Eastern European embassy. I remember a flare would be shot into the sky for the Soviet ambassador to travel.

I met Sultan Kishtmand, the prime minister, and found him to be an enlightened communist who supported the rights of peasants, workers and women. Life was, however, difficult already with the support that the culturally regressive Muslim groups were getting from Pakistan, a conduit to a Western campaign to evict the Soviet presence f rom Afghanistan.

The Mitrokhin Archive has been an excellent source to correct the communist narrative one had impressionably accepted. But there is no matching account of the American story other than the dribble in the Western media and their global consumers that have justified the CIA`s blunders in Afghanistan.

A KGB report submitted to the Soviet politburo,On the Events in Afghanistan on 27 and 28 December 1979, was ef fectively designed to mislead the rest of the Soviet leadership about the harsh reality of the Afghan situation, admits Mitrokhin with the help of his co-author Christopher Andrew. Probably composed for `Brezhnev`s benefit, the report maintained the fiction that the assassination of Amin had been chiefly the work of the Afghans themselves rather than KGB special forces` says Mitrokhin.

`On the wave of patriotic feelings which had overcome fairly broad sections of the Afghan population following the introduction of Soviet troops which was carried out in strict accordance with the Soviet-Afghan treaty of 1978, the forces opposed to H. Amin carried out an armed attack during the night of 27 to 28 December which ended in the overthrow of the regime of H. Amin. This attack was widely supported by the working masses, the intelligentsia, a considerable part of the Afghan army and the state apparatus, which welcomed the establishment of the new leadership of the DRA [Democratic Republic of Afghanistan] and the PDPA[People`sDemocraticPartyof Afghanistan].

It reads like any communist pamphlet, not dissimilar to the story Tabeevand Kishtmand-fed journalists like me.

The reality was starkly different as Mitrokhin reveals. `Far from receiving widespread support from both working masses and intelligentsia, the Soviet invasion provoked immediate opposition.

Demonstrations against the presence of Soviet troops began in Kandahar on 31 December.

The KGB also gave the politburo an extraordinarily optimistic assessment of the prospects for the new Babrak Karmal government. He was `one of the best-trained leaders of the PDPA theoretically. He is able to take a sober and objective view of the situation in Afghanistan. He has always been noted for his sincere goodwill towards the Soviet Union and is held in great respect in the Party and throughout the country`. We know what happened to someone`s dream of sowing socialism in Afghanistan. And now we are compelled to remember the f all of Saigon as the Taliban entered Kabul on Aug 15.  The writer is Dawn`s correspondent in New Delhi.

jawednaqvi@gmail.com