**Belittling a national hero!**

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I had known most of Pakistan’s super spies by virtue of being a journalist but never knew them that close. Lt. General ® AsadDurrani was the most outstanding among them. It was a coincidence that he and myself were appointed ambassadors by martyred Prime Minister Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto probably one and at the same time in 1994. Durrani was posted as ambassador to Bonn while I was assigned to be Pakistan’s representative at the Court of St. James. The other coincidence between us was Prime Minister’s briefing lunch for us not in Pakistan but in Bonn. It was as a rar re by people at large. The conversation led me to the conclusion that officers such as Gen Duranni served the country best in their uniform rather than without.

My interest in the General grew when he wrote his first book, followed by another and whatever. I found him to be very objective and not biased at all in case dealing with India or for that matter Kashmir issue. Had a person like him been left alone at the helm of foreign policy Kashmir issue should have be—if not solved– but almost. He rightly believed in the words of the Quaid that the pen is mightier than the sword and literally practiced it. Following his retirement as DG ISI he surprised his colleagues by showing his writing and analytical skills.

By his extra-ordinary proficiency with the pen he definitely proved to his contemporaries that he could wield his pen much better. Perhaps this was a matter of envy among the less endowed medalled men in uniform. And may be that could be the reason that he is facing the hostile music today instead of taking help from him as an expert in dealing with India and tackling Kashmir issue.

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I remember him writing somewhere that he could not recall any spy master having taken such a controversial venture as he did—obviously in writing what he penned in his three books—first being PAKISTAN ADRIFT and latest being ‘HONOUR AMONG SPIES’. Indeed, there was a time when such stories as his used to attract media headlines but ever since the scandal of British spy Harold “Kim” Philby — a senior officer in Britain’s Secret Intelligence Service, known as MI6, who worked for the erstwhile Soviet Union as a spy in 1934—for almost 54 years for KGB—got busted after passing more than 900 British documents over to the KGB—such spy thrillers have become rare after the end of Cold War.

General Durrani, perhaps, had no idea that his contemporaries had rawer nerves. He believed — ‘If any former heads of intelligence from chronically hostile countries ever undertook such a venture, I do not know; but indeed it had never been done on the subcontinent,’ so wrote Durrani who is now facing charges of being a collaborator with Indian Raw.

Educated and enlightened people have been shocked by government’s condemnable action against a former three-star general who had remained head of Pakistan’s super intelligence network for many years, Pakistan’s ambassador to Bonn and Saudi Arabia. Not only that, internationally too, Durrani is acknowledged as an outstanding objective analyst on world affairs. His co-authoring of the book “THE SPY CHRONICLES” with former Indian Raw chief Amarjeet Singh Dulat put a seal on the thinking of his junior colleagues and equals that something fishy has crept in the relationship between the two.

Unfortunately, this jaundiced view is a common malaise among the so-called intelligence community. I remember case of a foreign office colleague posted with me in London who was being denied legitimate promotion. When I made inquiries I was told that our ‘khufiaas’ had found him hob-knobbing with the Indians—though that was part of his duty as in-charge of India Desk. Poor chap was made a victim of inefficiency and misreporting by the intelligence. In one of my visits to Islamabad I took up case of his promotion and got it corrected.

After handing over the gloves General Durrani has been punching holes in the spy community by his vast and profound experience in understanding the relations between the two nations. As he himself says his vast and varied experience in Kashmir that made “their exchanges more useful and subsequently both jointly wrote papers on intelligence and Kashmir and had them published on public forums to be followed by more exchanges followed by Daulat’s proposal to write a book together.

The book, The Spy Chronicles: RAW, ISI and the Illusion of Peace, published by HarperCollins and launched in 2018 was highly commendable joint effort because it projected Pakistan’s regional policies in correct perspective. Its launch in Delhi was graced by former Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh, former vice-president Hamid Ansari; former Chief Minister Indian-held Kashmir Dr Farooq Abdullah; many ex- Union ministers; a national security advisor; two other former intelligence heads and a galaxy of the Indian intellectual elite. Pakistan should have given a Tamgha to General Durrani for getting approval of the main recommendation of the book: India to address the Kashmir issue in cooperation with Pakistan. While it did provoke quite a reaction in certain quarters in India, it ignited a crescendo of deafening hostility among the Jamaatis and the like minded much the way government has behaved by declaring General Durrani almost a collaborator and restricting his movement by putting him on the notorious Exit Control List (ECL).

Notwithstanding the contents of his books ‘Their objectivity’, as a lover of democracy my respect for General Durrani has gone up manifold ever since he dared to expose the dirty game of deceit indulged in by his army chief General Aslam Beg, late President Ghulam Ishaq Khan and their collaborator who plotted to over throw Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto’s government to the extent of providing millions in rupees to leaders opposing Bhutto government to fund the conspiracy. Gen Durrani’s affidavit in the Supreme Court and the subsequent judgement is a living testimony to the indictment of the then army chief, then president and whole lot of conspirators to up root democracy in Pakistan.

*\*Author if former High Commissioner of Pakistan to UK and a veteran journalist.*