

AFGHANISTAN

Annals of history remind us of the rugged terrain of Afghanistan thwarting the likes of Moguls of Genghis Kahn, Russian and British incursions. Fear of Russian appetite for India, caused British retaliation after a small Russian force entered Afghanistan. To counter, British placed a candidate on the throne in Kabul. As Winston Churchill reminded, "the country rose up in arms, subsequently granting 'safe conduct' for the garrison(4000 soldiers, families and Afghan camp followers)to return to India via the Khyber Pass. One survivor told of the massacre enroute." It was 1841.

After a Russian-aided coup, they invaded Afghanistan in 1979. Good friend, Bob Clarke, was there teaching in a Kabul high school and recalled the moments, turmoil and lucky passage home. US fears of Russian historic desire for a warm-water port, and influence in the Mideast-already astir with the recent downfall of the Shah of Iran, and the takeover of the American embassy in Tehran-by Shi-ahs under Ayatollah Khomeini and militant Islam. 1980 opened with Iraq's invasion of Iran(over disputed borders, as well as Sunni-Shi-ah discord and a fear of Khomeini influence over Iraqi Shi-ahs in Basrah). Oil, the strategic crucible, was part of the equation. And players lined up, in consort or alone to thwart Soviet Union's gamble in Afghanistan.

Saudi-Arabia led the Islamic world's hostile reaction to the Soviet's invasion: an infidel attack on Islam, as Koran sanctions a defensive Jihad. Mujahedin cause was universally popular on 'Arab street'. President Carter's 'finding'(a new requirement to control CIA in covert operations): provided "authorization to spend \$500,000 on propaganda, psychological operations, radio equipment, medical supplies and cash to Afghan rebels."(Ghost Wars/Coll). To

hide involvement was through Pakistan's ISI(inter-services intelligence)who arranged the support to the resistance

Thus most of the aid came from the US(CIA), Pakistan(ISI), Saudis(Turki al-Faisal)and Osama bin Laden whose money and connection with the Mujahedin fighters was most significant. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a Pushtun, and Ahmed Shah Massoud, a Tajik led the most promising insurgents in the south and north. Money, that root of all evil, kept them in the battle, or did it, as rivalries between them denied a cooperation against the Soviets. With their sophisticated hardware, armour and especially large Hind helicopters plus Spetsnaz(special forces)collectively dominated conventionally, yet the mujahedin seemed omnipresent like ghosts. The plan was to apply the techniques of famed guerrilla-fighter, Mao ste-tung. ...everywhere, somewhere, nowhere and wear-out the cumbersome roadbound Soviets. US Stinger missiles became the weapon of choice, as these hand held weapons turned the tide by knocking out the armed helicopters. The ten-year war wound down.

In the meantime, Osama was symbolic with his wealth, other support and presence and freedom fighters came from all over seeing the rebirth of once proud Islam fighting infidel power, like the Crusades The US had launched, intended or not, the first pan-Islamic jihad(holy war)in 8 centuries. In their brutal oppression the Soviets inspired the response.

Al-Qaeda(the base)became the focal point of Islamic Jihad there and spoked eventually almost worldwide. Taliban-spawned in Pakistan madrassas-with efficient fanaticism recruited or destroyed the Afghan mujahedin. It was the stuff of those dreams and perhaps a nightmare for the rest of us.