

# **BOOK REVIEW: 88 DAYS TO KANDAHAR; A CIA DIARY**

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This book is holding a tremendous amount of inside knowledge of how CIA operatives work, plan and negotiate in clandestine operations. From secret meetings to intelligence based operational preparedness, coding and de coding of intelligence intercepts and maneuvering through double cross in a real war time scenario; this book provides a detailed account on various aspects of CIA's way of war. Robert Grenier, a former CIA Station Chief, has authored a great piece of information in this book. He is one of the key architect of US clandestine intelligence activities in Pakistan and Afghanistan after 9/11 incident. The book gives a mature perspective on initiation of Afghan war and post 9/11 secret meetings of Taliban representatives and CIA officials.

This book has divided into five parts. Other than part one named "the subversive" that tells everything about author's inclusion into CIA and his journey to the hierarchy. Other four parts contains the detail account how CIA converted some Taliban commanders to their side and its intelligence-based cooperation with Pakistan intelligence services. Then authors provide his analysis and observation of U.S policy in Afghanistan.

The plot of the book starts with a phone call with George Tenet, the then Director of CIA informing Robert Grenier about the imminent war in Afghanistan in the wake of 9/11. Grenier was asked operational question about American war in Afghanistan and how it should have begun. Despite the confirmation from the Department of Defence that Al Qaida had evacuated their camps, yet the US invaded Afghanistan bombing empty grounds. Grenier thought that instead of military action alone, the US had better focus on a long-term political objective, a post-Taliban political government denying any space to Al Qaida. But the opposite happened. Regional geostrategic goals were given preference and Afghanistan proved another Vietnam for the US.

Initially the war focused on destroying Al Qaida. Obama administration revisited Afghan strategy and shifted the focus to an overambitious plan of Afghan nation building to end the crisis. A complete US withdrawal was announced in 2014 without achieving any substantial success as Obama shifted the focus towards Asia Pacific region.

Trump administration re-shifted the focus back to Afghanistan. The third phase of Afghanistan war was a 'conditions-based policy' which means the US would be present in Afghanistan as long as circumstances demanded. Grenier, the then CIA Station Chief in Islamabad, advised to avoid interfering with ongoing civil war between the Taliban and Northern Alliance given the ethnic sensitivities in Afghanistan. But the US allied with Northern Alliance, which embittered the public sentiments in Afghanistan. However, the US failed to recognize these cultural realities and destroyed the social, cultural, and religious landscape of the country.

It is allegedly said that Pakistan created Taliban which, according to Grenier, is untrue. Pakistan's political support to Taliban was based on a premise that they could unify various Afghan factions relieving Pakistan of its western border concerns. Given the fact that Pashtun diaspora is spread both inside and beyond Pakistan's western border, Pakistan's political support to Taliban was justified.

When the US forces were bombing empty Taliban camps, the CIA was busy arming Afghan tribal rebellion led by Hamid Karzai and others against the Taliban. Hamid Karzai and Shizai entered Afghanistan from Pakistani territory and ISI supported these tribal leaders. At the same time CIA began to recruit the non-Pashtun dominated Northern Alliance in the north. It was the beginning of sectarianizing of this war.

The book also affirms the perception held in Pakistan that Islamabad's cooperation resulted in radicalization in the country. The resultant anti-American sentiments helped the radicals to recruit and raise funds. It is believed that Tehreek Taliban Pakistan was a tribal response to military operation in the Tribal Areas. Since the start of this war, CIA and CTC distrusted Pakistan and never fully shared critical intelligence with Pak Army. This helped Al Qaida fighters to flee into the badlands of Af-Pak border. However, even with limited intelligence, Pak Army captured and handed over hundreds of Tora Bora escapees to the US authorities. These included Afghans, Arabs, Chechens, and Turk militants.

Moreover, failing to understand the nature of this war, the US was quick to celebrate victory. It thought that it was about toppling a government with military force, but it failed to understand the strategic deceptive collapse of the Taliban. It is said that it was Bin Laden's strategy to lure the US to the graveyard of empires and Taliban's tactical superiority to trap it in guerilla warfare. Due to power being decentralized in the border areas of Pakistan and

Afghanistan, the US failed to understand it. Replacing a government with tribal rebellion and setting up a centralized constitution embittered public sentiments for the US. Robert Grenier writes, “Seeds of future instability were being sown” in the US installed system in Afghanistan.

US invasion resulted in disruption of social, political, and sectarian landscape. It was further disrupted by the ill-planned and bloody withdrawal of the US following Doha Peace Agreement between the Taliban and the US. America needs to understand that invasions in Afghanistan (Alexander, British and the Soviets) ended in unconditional withdrawal. Only Afghans can rule Afghanistan peacefully.

The enclosed information and insider’s account of U.S war on terror, this book is an ideal choice to read out and understand how fog of war can lead to disasters and turn victory into defeat.

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