

***Why Counterinsurgency Fails: The US in Iraq and Afghanistan*, Tray, Dennis de. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, 133.**

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Why Counterinsurgency Fails: The US in Iraq and Afghanistan is a memoir written by Dennis de Tray, a long time World Bank expert. The book describes his work in 2010 and 2011 as a member of an assessment team in Iraq and as an advisor to the 173rd Airborne Brigade combat team in Afghanistan. The book highlights the reasons of the failure of counterinsurgency campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan and proposes a solution for future US counterinsurgency campaigns by drawing lessons from Afghanistan. The author argues the benefit of routing economic assistance through the local government to build its capacity and increase its popular support. He states that the lessons learned in Iraq were then put in practice in Afghanistan by him and his colleagues.

The book is divided into five chapters. In the first chapter, the author states that Counterinsurgency, also termed as COIN, was a strategy used by General Petraeus in the Iraq war. By applying the tenets of Counterinsurgency, Mc Chrystal was going to win Afghan's hearts and minds to pacify the country. By the end of August 2009, he completed his strategy and devised a plan. The extracts of what the plan had to say are protect the people, win their confidence and build a government. This was the recipe to succeed. President Obama supported and backed General Mc Chrystal. In December 2009, Obama announced to send another 30,000 troops to Afghanistan to target the insurgency and to secure key population centres. Now the Afghan war was Obama's war, whatever its eventual outcome.

The author particularly tells us that during the George W Bush administration from 2003 to 2008, Afghanistan was pretty much ignored. The Bush administration took little notice of Afghanistan during these years for one particular reason. The Iraq war, in which the US was

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engaged, absorbed the lion's share of the US attention. The war in Iraq consumed all the Pentagon's material resources such as troops, equipment and specialised capabilities. Hence, as the Iraq war consumed just about everything — the US Army and the US Marine Corps — there just was not much left for Afghanistan. He states that, from a strategic point of view, the interests of the US in Afghanistan had been minimal at that time.

The Iraq war had been a mammoth mistake in Obama's point of view but Afghanistan, however, was a completely different story. Obama described Afghanistan as "The Necessary War." If elected he vowed to end the Iraq war responsibly but the war in Afghanistan, he argued, that they had to win. His strategy was to withdraw forces from Iraq, yet he would increase the US forces in Afghanistan in order to, as he put it, "finish the fight against al-Qaeda and Taliban." Thus, after winning the elections, the number of the US troops was doubled in Afghanistan. However, when Obama took charge of the executive office with a new vision and the rhetoric was adherence to the rule of law, democracy, promotion of human rights and economic development. Afghanistan offered an immediate test of his ability to implement this vision. Obama began by attempting to reframe the problem. The administration insisted that the problems besetting Afghanistan cannot be treated in isolation and that the US will be counting on its allies in the region because those problems occurred in a regional context.

While talking about Pakistan, in chapter four of this book, the author is of the opinion that Pakistan, in this particular context, was very important among Washington's allies; Pakistan had a class of its own. The frontier regions of Pakistan provided a base of operations for the jihadists moving in and out of the Afghan territory. The US wanted strict action towards these jihadist camps but there were some signs of sympathy towards the anti-American jihadists from the Pakistani side. Carlotta Gall, a seasoned western correspondent published a book called *The Wrong Enemy — America in Afghanistan*. She argued that America's real enemy from the very outset was Pakistan. Osama bin Laden was staying in Pakistan for a very long time and this speaks volumes of the US-Pakistan relations but the Obama administration did not overtly classify Pakistan as an enemy. Instead, it claimed that Pakistan was an ally. Although this could have been a pretence but the US had no other choice. Obama had already pledged that

this war cannot be won in isolation. So, the term Af-Pak was used to describe the problems in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

On the development front, he states that multilateral development programmes funded by the World Bank, United Nations and Asian Development Bank form only 10 per cent of the development assistance that was pleaded to Afghanistan since 2002. While the USAID, he states is the big money player in Afghanistan.

In the last chapter, the author reflects on why counterinsurgency is flawed in the post-2018 scenario. He informs the readers that the solution proposed was initially developed by David Petraeus but never effectively implemented. This book provides a detailed analysis and an insider's perspective coming from someone who has been directly involved in the US counterinsurgency campaigns in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

