

BOOK REVIEW

***The Wrong Enemy: America in Afghanistan, 2001-2014.* Carlotta Gall. Gurgaon: Penguin Books, 2014. Pp. 329.**

Even as America wraps up its ‘long war’ in Afghanistan, it has failed to completely wipe out the Al-Qaeda and other terrorist outfits operating in that country. Many in the US, including the late Richard C. Holbrooke, US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan were of the opinion that “we may be fighting the wrong enemy in the wrong country.” Carlotta Gall, a British journalist, who covered Afghanistan and Pakistan for The New York Times during 2001-2014 has picked up on Holbrooke’s remarks for the title of her latest book ‘The Wrong Enemy: America in Afghanistan: 2001-2014’ published by Penguin Books in 2014.

Gall’s book is based on her experience covering the war in Afghanistan from her base in Pakistan. Her work is divided into fourteen chapters ranging from the surrender of the Taliban in 2001 up to the events in Zangabad in 2013. Gall narrates the defeat of the Taliban in elaborate detail, and how the Americans collaborated with the United Front, better known as the Northern Alliance formed by the late Ahmed Shah Massoud comprising the Uzbeks, Hazaras, and Tajiks, to bring down the Taliban government in Afghanistan. Gall also delves into Pakistan’s “proxy war” inside Afghanistan, particularly in Kunduz, and how two thousand Taliban were rescued through military flights, while almost one thousand were left behind in lurch. (p.8)

Gall argues that President Hamid Karazi needed the support of the Americans, and was a “willing tool” in distributing large sums of cash and ammunition from the Americans among the anti-Taliban forces in their efforts to clear the Taliban strongholds. She questions the rise of Mullah Omar from 1994 to 2001 as a Taliban resistance force – a man who never seemed marked for leadership (p.39). In fact, he is singled out as a man who wanted to overthrow the Kabul government and establish an Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (p.47). Gall wonders how Pakistani establishment could have considered Omar as an able leader.

Quoting her interview with Amrullah Saleh, the head of the National Directorate of Security in Kabul on 30 September 2012, Gall mentions that Pakistani diplomatic cables found in Kabul in 2001 warned that the Arab militants in Afghanistan were growing “too big to handle.” (p.51) This is a very revealing point, which shows that the ISI was not behind Osama bin Laden as was portrayed in the media, books, analyses, and comments. According to Gall, Lt. General Ziauddin Butt, the then Director General of the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) travelled to Kandahar and told Mullah Omar to get rid of Osama, but Omar could not move against him. (p.51). Osama was Omar’s guest and he found it difficult to send him back under Afghan traditions of hospitality. This point was highlighted in the media when Americans were ready to bomb Afghanistan.

Gall remains doubtful of General Pervez Musharraf’s support to the United States extended after 9/11. She says that Musharraf was not ready to dismantle thousands of home-grown fighters especially those fighting in Indian Occupied Kashmir (pp. 60-61). He did, however, hand over Mullah Abdul Salam Zaef, the Taliban Ambassador to Pakistan, to CIA, which sent him to Guantanamo Bay.

Gall also suspects that “Al-Qaeda had spread its tentacles into Pakistani armed forces” (p.84), she, however, could not substantiate her claim with evidence and supporting arguments. Such accusations against the Pakistan Army had been made by many western journalists throughout the war and operations in Afghanistan, even as Pakistan continued its support to the American war on terror and carry out operations against terrorist outfits inside its own territory.

Gall, like most western journalists, fails to appreciate Pakistan’s role against terrorism, and the book is full of accusations against Pakistan. In fact, Gall makes frequent indications that the ‘right enemy’ in the American war on terror was Pakistan, with the training camps for ‘jihadis’ inside its territory, the ‘madaris’ spread throughout its cities, and its intelligence agencies. In her foreword, she describes her arduous experience as a journalist working in Pakistan with constant disruptions in her reporting by its security agencies. It may be pointed out here that some

of her observations border on exaggeration, conveniently forgetting to mention the freedom that Pakistan provided to the press under President Musharraf. A clear example of which has been the mushrooming of independent media channels that sprung up in the country under his tenure.

Gall also accuses the ‘madaris’ in Pakistan of producing the suicide bombers that were unknown before 2001 in Afghanistan. She maintains that a number of militant organisations such as Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, Jaish-e-Mohammad, and Hizb-e-Islami were responsible for training suicide bombers with the assistance of middlemen such as Al-Qaeda and the ISI. (pp. 154-5). Many Taliban leaders were also detained by ISI in order to control them and keep them away from contacting the Karzai Government. (p. 161)

Quoting one of Osama’s wives, the author says that Osama lived in many Pakistani cities after 2004 including Haripur, Swat, and finally settled in Abbottabad in 2006 (p. 91-2). Quoting her interactions with a number of people, she remains convinced that Musharraf knew about Osama’s presence in Pakistan. This accusation, like many others, remains a conjecture on her part and lacks any solid evidence in support of her argument. The American raid on Osama’s residence in Abbottabad in May 2011 is dealt with in a perfunctory manner.

Gall also describes militancy in Pakistan following the war in Afghanistan in her own journalistic style focusing in detail on the Red Mosque incident in Islamabad and its backlash. Former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, Gall writes “spoke out more than any other Pakistani politician about the dangers of militant extremism.” (p. 174). Extracting information from multiple sources, Gall notes that Benazir was killed by Al-Qaeda and Baitullah Mehsud, a militant commander from South Waziristan (p.181).

The *Wrong Enemy* presents a one-sided point of view of a journalist actively watching and covering the America-NATO-ISAF war in Afghanistan, as well as political and social developments inside Afghanistan and Pakistan over a number of years. The book seems to have

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been brought together by the innumerable stories that had been filed by Gall, rather than any well-researched study. This is evident from the author's narratives that are largely based upon her conversations with people in Afghanistan and Pakistan. They, however, are penetrating, drawing the attention of readers to make their own analysis.

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