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## Three of America's "Great Satans" Dead

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August 22, 2015

The deaths in South Asia of three of the West's 'Great Satans' were announced in recent weeks: Mullah Omar and Jalaluddin Haqqani in Afghanistan; and Pakistan's Lt. Gen. Hamid Gul. I never met Mullah Omar though I was present at the birth and expansion of his movement, Taliban.

Mullah Omar was a renowned combat veteran of the 1980's great jihad against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. In 1989, the Soviets wisely withdrew. Afghanistan was convulsed by civil war between the eleven mujahidin factions, many of whom were supported by CIA through Pakistani intelligence.

The ethnic Pashtun region of southern Afghanistan was scourged by rampant banditry and rape. A local Muslim preacher, Mullah Omar, rallied a group of religious seminarians ('talibs') and set out to fight the bandits and still powerful Afghan communists. Pakistan quickly aided the Taliban as a way of expanding its influence in next-door Afghanistan and fighting Communist forces.

Pakistan's intelligence agency, ISI, moved swiftly to arm and direct the rag-tag Taliban forces. Its head, Lt. Gen. Hamid Gul, a fierce Pashtun warrior and dedicated nationalist-Islamist, led the

ISI effort. Pashtun Afghanistan rallied to Taliban, which quickly ended banditry, rape and almost extinguished the heroin trade.

Mullah Omar, a shadowy Pashtun warrior who had lost an eye fighting the Soviet occupation in the 1980's, declared Afghanistan a state run under Islamic values. Like Pakistan's strongman, Gen. Zia ul-Haq, he aspired to overthrow the brutal Communist Red Sultanates of post-Soviet Central Asia.

But Washington had made a secret deal with Moscow over Afghanistan and it had other ideas. President Zia and his then ISI chief, Gen. Akhtar Abdul Rahman (both well known to this writer), were murdered in August 1988 when their aircraft was sabotaged.

Their deaths remain a mystery; but many Pakistanis blame the US. My view is that the Soviet KGB was likely responsible. Benazir Bhutto told me she believed a senior general, Mirza Aslam Beg, was responsible. I asked if she was responsible.

With Zia out of the way and the pliant Benazir installed in power, the US quickly abandoned allies Pakistan and Taliban.

Then came 9/11. President George W. Bush needed a target for America's fury and humiliation. He foolishly chose Taliban, which had nothing to do with the attacks but which was hosting Osama bin Laden, a Saudi hero of the anti-Soviet war. Taliban offered to hand bin Laden over if the US produced evidence of his guilt for the 9/11 attacks. But no such evidence was ever produced. US oil firms, who had long-eyed transit routes through Afghanistan, cheered on the US attacks.

The US invaded Afghanistan and threatened Pakistan with being bombed back to the stone age if it did not become a vassal state and cooperate with the US takeover of Afghanistan. Taliban was demonized by the US media as wife-beating "terrorists," then overthrown. The US created a new Afghan government made up of Taliban's enemies, the drug-dealing Tajik and Uzbek minorities, and the criminal Afghan Communists. The new US-backed regime immediately restored and expanded Afghanistan's heroin trade.

The fiercely bearded Pashtun tribal chief, Jalaludin Haqqani, had been a leading fighter against the Soviet occupation and a major CIA "asset." I met Haqqani while covering the war in Afghanistan. The US hailed him a "freedom fighter" when he battled the Soviets. When he sought to oust the US from Afghanistan he was branded a "terrorist." After the US replaced the Soviets as the foreign occupier of Afghanistan, Haqqani became one of the most effective and feared leaders of the anti-US resistance. Countless US efforts to kill or suborn him failed.

After leaving the military, Gen. Hamid Gul remained a leading supporter of Taliban, so earning Washington's wrath. Gul's relentless anti-Indian feelings led him to back Kashmiri independence groups and a number of shady Pakistan extreme Islamist groups. However, Germany rightly asserted Gul had struck the first blow that brought down the Soviet Union.

Gul was very outspoken. He claimed ISI had proof that 9/11 was an "inside job" mounted by pro-Israel groups, US right-wingers and Israel's Mossad. This claim was widely believed across the Muslim world, though Gul never produced any evidence backing this claim. The US claimed he was crazy. But the US also claims the religious, anti drug, anti-Communist movement Taliban are terrorists.

Gul claimed Benazir Bhutto was a US stooge. She had even less generous words for Gul. “Eric, you just love your Pakistani generals,” she always chided me, ‘specially that SOB Gul.” Mullah Omar, with millions of dollars of US bounties on his head, wisely stayed out of sight. It now transpires that the Taliban leader may have died of natural causes in Karachi two years ago. Unable to settle on a new leader, Taliban, which is a loose confederation of tribes, kept silent on his death until recently when a new, little-known emir, Mullah Mansour, was chosen. The same subterfuge was used with the deceased medieval Spanish leader, El Cid. Washington was delighted, hoping Taliban would splinter and cease challenging its latest efforts to keep control of strategic Afghanistan. But I suspect most of the Pashtun will keep on fighting until Taliban’s goal of driving out all foreign occupation troops is achieved.