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Dear Sumit Narula:

The “Free Afghanistan” Portal thanks you from the bottom of its heart for sending a very informative and provocative article. Indeed, this is an interesting piece of literature that sheds lots of light on the CIA activities in Afghanistan. We sincerely hope that you will continue your volunteer cooperation with “Free Afghanistan” Portal. Your inputs and ideas will enlighten our readers in every quarter of the world.

Best Regards

“Free Afghanistan” Portal

Risk-takers at risk

BY: SUMIT NARULA

Since 1965, the CIA has suffered the largest number of fatalities in Afghanistan — a total of 11, nine of them regular members of its staff and the remaining two employees of a CIA contractor. Is this coincidental or is there more than meets the eye?

When Mr Robert Gates, the US Defence Secretary, was the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, then US President George HW Bush, had visited the CIA headquarters and addressed its officers. In his speech welcoming the President, Mr Gates described the CIA officers as risk-takers and not risk-seekers. This quote from his welcome address is inscribed at the entrance to the CIA building to inspire and motivate future entrants to the CIA.

The Soviet, Russian and West European intelligence agencies too have the reputation of being risk-takers. A risk-taking external intelligence agency posts its officers for intelligence collection in remote areas and danger spots and the officers willingly go to such places. Risk-avoiding agencies keep their officers confined to the safe precincts of diplomatic and consular missions, where the risks faced are minimal.

The best professionals of the CIA are posted in areas of conflict and not in areas of comfort. There is never a shortage of volunteers to serve in areas of conflict. They are generally attached to US military units deployed in such areas and use the protection provided by such units to do their intelligence collection and special operations work. The CIA keeps rotating them frequently so that its officers are not required to serve in dangerous areas for a long time. The officers, who volunteer for such posts, also have the confidence that their agency will look after their families during their absence from the US and will not keep them in dangerous areas for too long.

The absence of CIA fatalities in Iraq and the large number of fatalities incurred by the CIA in Afghanistan could be attributed to the following reasons:

(a) The CIA personnel posted in Iraq totally depend on the US forces for their physical security while performing their duties. They do not depend on Iraqi personnel. In Afghanistan, they depend largely on American personnel, but there is also a limited involvement of Afghan personnel in protecting them.

(b) In Iraq, the intelligence agencies of the US Defence Department play a more active role in intelligence collection and special operations. The casualties incurred in Iraq are essentially those of the agencies of the Pentagon. In Afghanistan, CIA officers play a very active role in intelligence collection and in facilitating the unmanned Drone strikes in the Federally-Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan.

(c) Individual anti-US officers of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence, which has had a long history of co-operation with the CIA, know how to identify CIA officers working clandestinely under cover. They expose their identity to Al Qaeda and the Taliban.

The latest incident in the Khost area of Afghanistan involving the death of seven CIA officers at the hands of an Afghan suicide bomber would be a major loss to the CIA at a critical time in the 'war' against Al Qaeda and the Taliban. The CIA officers succeeding them would have to start literally from the scratch in building up a new network of contacts. The contacts of the officers, who have been killed, would now be under a question mark due to suspicion regarding the role of any of them in facilitating the suicide bombing.