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www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

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The al-Qaeda demon

Ghulam Asghar Khan
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Al-Qaeda, which in Arabic means the Base, was originally the name given by the CIA operatives in Saudi Arabia to the database that they shaped to keep track of the individuals and groups to which the US administration was providing funds for the Afghan Mujahideen against the Russian occupation of Afghanistan. The CIA also provided military training and logistic support to the Mujahideen. US arms dealers, CIA agents and the covert US military 'Special Operation Troops' were deeply involved in assisting the Afghan resistance to the Russian occupation. Part of the hardware provided were shoulder-launched anti-aircraft stringer missiles that enabled the Mujahideen to turn the tide of the battle that eventually defeated and expelled the Russian army from Afghanistan. All the war material from Washington for the Afghan Mujahideen was channelled through Pakistan with the tacit consent of the then military dictator Zia ul Haq. The arms training and the logistical support to the Mujahideen couldn't have been possible without the active support of the ferocious tribesmen on the Pakistani side of the Durand Line. During the Russian occupation of Afghanistan, Osama bin-Laden was the Major Domo, who helped to funnel US arms and supplies to the Mujahideen force that had become an amalgamation of many foreign fighters from Saudi Arabia to Chechnya to push the Russian bear out of Afghanistan. In this pivotal role, bin-Laden was constantly in close contact with the CIA and was supposedly America's only bet to defeat Russia on the Afghan front. He accomplished the mission of dissipating the USSR in a big way that Washington couldn't have done in hundred years of its lingering "Cold War." Al-Qaeda was nothing more than a bogey man, an invented invisible and non-existent phantom to frighten children and the ignorant populace and to provide an excuse for its unending war on terror. It is part of the US global policy to commit 'false flag' attacks like the 9/11, the Bali, Madrid, London and more recently the Mumbai carnage, providing Washington an excuse to step in to "rescue and protect" global community from the rampant terrorism that was actually perpetrated by the US itself. The Taliban did not grow out of the dark overnight; it in fact was a corollary to the US proxy war against the Soviets in Afghanistan. It is the largest ethnic Pakhtun group that occupies a great swath of land and forms 80% of the total population of Afghanistan. Fiercely independent, the Pakhtuns have

always defended their homeland from the foreign interlopers since 326 B.C. The region has a long history of invaders, who failed to overpower them. Among them were the Persians, Scythians (present day Ukraine), Kushans, Sakas, Huns, Arabs, Turks, Mongols, British, Russians, and most recently, Americans and their NATO allies. No alien power has ever been able to tame them in toto. They routed most of their invaders completely, or absorbed them into their tribes in such a way that they lost much of their identity with the passage of time. The adaptability of the Pakhtuns to the military strategies of their invaders had been par-excellent, which they used to fight among themselves until they confronted another alien threat to their sovereignty. It is this martial reorientation that has shaped the Pakhtun and Taliban outlook. The Afghans had their first encounters with a modern military power during the three Anglo-Afghan wars of 1839, 1878 and 1919. After failing to make any headway inside Afghanistan, the British Indian government established a porous boundary between Afghanistan and British India, the Durand Line that did not affect Afghans with strong ethnic and cultural bonds with the Pakhtuns living across the border. The British gave semi-autonomous status to the tribes on the eastern side of Durand Line by creating "tribal agencies" that morphed into FATA after independence in 1947. The FATA area generally remained calm until the last quarter of the 20th century. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1979 brought an end to this lull, when Afghanistan's conservative religious majority rebelled against the occupation and a powerful group of Mujahideen emerged to lead the insurgency against the Soviets. In response, the Soviet army waged a brutal counterinsurgency crackdown that prompted the Mujahideen to call for jihad. During 10 years of occupation, Russian forces and their Afghan leftist allies reportedly killed 1.3 million Afghans, destroyed the infrastructure in the urban and rural areas and caused 5.5 million Afghans to flee to refugee camps in Iran and Pakistan where most of them found their way to the FATA. After a humiliating defeat and heavy loss of men and material, the Russians were forced to withdraw from Afghanistan in February 1989. Soviets left huge caches of arms and ammunition for their leftist allies in Kabul and sustained their material support for two years after the humiliating withdrawal. The leftist government the Russians left behind could not hold the fort against the might of the Mujahideen and fell in April 1992. The disorganised Mujahideen groups could not stick together and fell out. Each faction had a leader, or warlord with aspirations for power. Strife between the warlords and a war-wearing population led to an environment that allowed the Taliban's radical ideas to have the sway. There is a quote that a Pakhtun is never at peace except when he is on war. The core of the Taliban grew from the Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan and presented themselves as the righteous religious students in the march for peace. Their popularity rapidly spread in the Pakhtun populace and became their de facto leaders under the command of Mullah Omar, who claimed the right to lead not just all Afghans, but all Muslims. In November 1994, Taliban seized control of the southern province of Kandhar under Mullah Omar's command and claimed to be the legitimate rulers of Afghanistan. They made lightning progress and by 1997 they established their hold over 95% of the country. Mullah Omar had a close liaison with bin-Laden, and the Taliban also hosted al-Qaeda training camps and leaders in areas under their control. At this time, they allegedly supported the militant fundamentalist sectarian groups in Pakistan. Amidst a myriad of transcontinental terrorists al-Qaeda predominantly gives the Taliban a religious cause and some legitimacy. It lends a helping hand to the Taliban information and warfare efforts and might as well provide money, personnel, advanced technology and tactical training. Also supporting or at least coordinating with the Taliban, are some Central Asian Islamist movements and other smaller militant groups. As an accident of history, the leadership of this movement has fallen to

the Taliban as they had effectively dissipated the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Since the religious seminaries had played a predominant role in the anti-Soviet jihad, they acquired repute both as centres of learning as well as Mujahideen recruitment hubs. This aspect is crucial to the success or failure of Taliban insurgency. An uprising cannot maintain itself without the support of the people. The Pakhtun majority, rendered vulnerable by what they perceive to be a lack of influence in Kabul. Their suspicions and mistrust of the government were further heightened by the inability Afghan Transitional Authority (ATA) from the hostile Northern Warlords, the genocide and the persistent Human Rights violations by the US-led forces in Afghanistan and the Pakistani tribal belt. The contiguity of the Pakhtun tribes on both sides of the Durand Line, approximately 28 million Pakhtuns contribute recruits, support personnel, money, weapons and up-to-date intelligence to the Taliban insurgents. With more than two generations of war-hardened inhabitants, it is easy for the Taliban to recruit experienced fighters, who know the terrain and can survive in the harsh environment. An added bonus is the weaponry that fell to the Mujahideen during the war with Soviets in 1980s. And same tactics are in vogue in their war against US-led occupation since after 9/11. The Taliban strategy is one of patience, while the US-led coalition is in a hurry to wipe them out. And as a consequence to this hurried-approach, they have killed hundreds of thousands civilian on both the sides of Durand Line. History proves that such porous defences like the Maginot and Siegfried Lines, and even Roman Emperor Hadrian's Wall failed against the hard-core determined freedom fighters. The Taliban strategy is one of patience. They are conducting a classic 'war of the flea' aimed at causing their enemy to suffer the 'dog's disadvantages; too much to defend against too small ubiquitous and agile enemy. If, the war continues long enough, the dog would certainly succumb to exhaustion. The oft quoted Taliban axiom is; "The Americans may have the watches, but we have the time."