

# Why America Cannot Win in Afghanistan

Exclusive Interview with Bonnie Faulkner

By [General Hamid Gul](#)

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Transcript:

I'm Bonnie Faulkner. Today on Guns and Butter, General Hamid Gul.

Today's show: "Why America Cannot Win in Afghanistan."

General Gul had a brilliant 36-year military career in the Pakistan Army. At the height of his military career it was expected that he would be promoted to the position of Chief of the Army Staff. But due to political pressures from abroad, he was not selected, and as a result he resigned from the Army and is now retired. The highest attainment of his long and distinguished career was his command of Inter-Services Intelligence, ISI, from 1987 to 1989, during the fateful period of Afghan jihad against the Soviet occupation of that country. General Gul faced down riot police when they tried to arrest him at a rally outside the Supreme Court in Islamabad protesting attempts to dismiss Chief Justice Chaudry. He has written hundreds of columns, mostly for Pakistan Urdu Press, but also for the English readership within Pakistan and abroad.

General Hamid Gul, welcome again.

Gul: Thank you, Bonnie.

Faulkner: The US appears to be sinking into a quagmire in Afghanistan. The number of US troops on the ground keeps rising, and the number of troops killed and wounded keeps rising as well. The much-trumpeted operation in the Helmand River valley around Marja didn't succeed in permanently removing resistance fighters. Since that was its sole purpose, it was a failure. The planned attack on Kandahar has been delayed, and many outlying operating bases have been abandoned by US forces as too costly to hold, such as in Nuristan and Kunar, in the northeast. Isn't the United States losing the war on the ground in Afghanistan?

Gul: Bonnie, right from the beginning, this war was a lost war. There was no way that it could be won. And I think we need to review this. I want to do this one favor to the American people because I like them, they are so innocent that they are taken up for a ride quite easily, because of the disinformation, because of the propaganda hype by those people who control the sinews of power in America. So I think this is an opportunity that

you are providing me to educate them, that this war was a lost war from the very beginning, from its very inception. And I want to pass a professional judgment on it, and I would want any American soldier worth his salt, soldier, general, corporal, or whatever it is, to tell me that I am wrong. I would wish that they tell me that I am wrong. You know, because wars are fought within a certain environment. That environment is both political, logistical, and it is the combat environment in which wars are fought and won, or lost for that matter.

Now, from the beginning, the premise on which the American case stands against Afghanistan was totally wrong, because not a single Afghan was ever involved in any act of terrorism outside the boundaries of Afghanistan. And inside, it is a freedom struggle. They are a proud, rather I would describe them as a ferociously proud race, and Americans, who love their freedom, why should they want to curb the freedom of this proud and free nation? Now that premise was basically an illusion created that we will be able to beat the daylight out of everybody, you know, that revenge motivation, that we will take our revenge. But this wasn't it. I think the latent objectives were very different. On our last program we discussed this, that the latent objectives were not to serve the American people, but to serve corporate America, to some extent, but more than that, to satisfy the whims and the ambition of the Cold War warriors like Dick Cheney and company. And incidentally I know them personally, Dick Cheney, and Richard Armitage, Rumsfeld, etc.. I have been dealing with them when I was heading the ISI, in the days of the, the heady days of the Afghan jihad in Afghanistan. So I know what is their mindset. And I think it was to satisfy the whims of this coterie of people, who wanted to conquer the world, if you like, or establish a Pax Americana, that means an American century, the 21st century will be an American century. So these were hyper goals, and they have brought tremendous damage.

So first, the premise has to be correct for going to war. That wasn't correct at all. And I think it was based on lies. 9/11 is, in my opinion, still a huge, big fraud which has been perpetrated on the world, but more than that, on the American people themselves. And because they could not win a vote to support a war of this kind, so they had to create an excuse so that there would be world sympathy, which there was after 9/11, and the American people would be so angry, annoyed and alarmed that they would not question their government about their credentials and the veracity of what happened on 9/11.

That apart, now we come to the situation and judge it militarily. So, for going to war, apart from the political support that you need to have, and that is declining as you understand, now it's more than sixty percent of Americans have turned against the war. But, after a lot of damage. As Churchill once said, Americans eventually do the right thing after they have exhausted all the wrong options. So I think unfortunately that this is a condition that is applicable here.

So Americans, when they go to war, the first thing that they have to ensure is a line of communication. The communication has to be good. Now there is a line of communication which passes through Pakistan on two routes. One is from Karachi to Chaman; that is to the south of Afghanistan. And the other is from Karachi to Tor Kham [Khyber Pass], which is to the center of Afghanistan. These, each one of them is ... the line that runs from Karachi to Tor Kham is about 1,100 miles long. And the other one is about 1,300 miles long. So these are long and tenuous lines of communication. But to — first of all, sustaining them in a country which is not on board with you, because they like this war or because it is their war, but because they have been arm-twisted, they have been coerced into supporting you — so these lines of communication remain insecure, to say the least. Only yesterday there was a huge damage caused to the column that was going into Afghanistan carrying supplies for

NATO.

But that was not the only thing. The other wrong thing that happened was that the Indians, who are the arch-rivals of Pakistan, were allowed a free hand to destabilize Pakistan inside. And they were able to motivate some of the annoyed young men and to cause damages in the cities, bomb blasts, this, that and the other. So Pakistan is paying a huge price for participation in this war against terrorism. And there is an anti-American sentiment also, very rampant I think. Sixty-eight percent of Pakistanis have outrightly said that they hate America. Now in this situation these lines of communication are not sustainable. So, there is no way that you can fight a war and win without a secure and very easy line of communication and a short line of communication. In this case the lines of communication are both insecure and also very long.

The second important thing outside the battle zone is the intelligence input. Now, intelligence input, in the case of Iraq there was a failure, in the case of 9/11 there was a failure, in the cases of many other areas there have been failures. And now the WikiLeaks is also pointing to the fact that this was a huge intelligence failure. So if the intelligence input is going to be faulty, then how do you hope to win the war? Right from the beginning. And why the intelligence failure has been there is because the human intelligence aspect, which is a so very important component of the total intelligence spectrum, that human intelligence is not provided if it is not accurate. Then you are not able to collect the information through only electronic means. Your satellites flying overhead that will pick up the signals, this, that, and the other; it has failed. If that was the analogy, if that was the thesis, that our technical intelligence, or electronic and signals intelligence, would fully supplant the human intelligence, then this has not worked. And this should have been realized a long time back.

I know there was a less amount of investment in human intelligence after I think, Edgar Hoover and many other people, of the big names, Bill Casey; after Bill Casey, particularly, because I had known Bill Casey directly. So after then the CIA was relying more on NSA, the National Security Agency, and much of the funding was going to the NSA and relatively less to the human-intelligence aspect of the CIA. So human intelligence was a failure. And you don't win wars, in Third World countries particularly, where technical intelligence does not work. You have to have reliable sources.

Then, on top of it, to gather intelligence – and this is amazing, it gets so outlandish that one has nothing but to lament about it, being an old intelligence and military professional – that you rely on security contractors to provide you the intelligence. For God's sake, what is this? I mean, I was aghast when someone came and mentioned to me that they wanted to mix the CIA with some of the security contractors, with Navy Seals and with the Marines and the Army and so on and so forth – one was known as Delta Force, another was known as Orange Force, and the third one was known as some other force – then this conglomeration or this admixture of these forces, that they would carry out the intelligence work. It's never done. Regular military troopers are never mixed with the intelligence hard-cores. Because this will destroy both the organizations. Because they don't meet and their sequences don't meet. And therefore intelligence was a failure, and line of supply was a failure. Now that, when you have these two negative factors there is no way that you can win a war, particularly in a country like Afghanistan.

Now let's come to the battle zone. I think in the battle zone the opposition was underestimated. They thought that we will come and throw out the Afghan government, the Taliban government, and the Afghan people will receive them with garlands, and they would think, okay, good business with bad rubbish, and thereafter everything is going to be hunky-

dory. But this was not to be so, because I don't think the policy planners in America read the history of the Afghans. And it is amazing. Why? Because they were in a war with the Afghans during an earlier decade of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. So why would the American policy makers not have been able to read into the Afghan character, that they don't give up? That the war in Afghanistan begins only after the occupation has taken place? I'm not saying this; Churchill has said this and many other British historians have said this, that it is amazing that the war in Afghanistan begins only after the occupation forces have declared themselves victorious. And then the war begins. Because this is a war of attrition. This is a war of nibbling away, slowly, gradually, building up your strength. Because this is not like firepower against firepower, a number of men against a number of men. This was not the case in Afghanistan. And if anybody was assuming this then he was dead wrong.

So, really, the proper study was not carried out; the proper assessment was not carried out. The resilience of the Afghan nation; the strength of the Taliban, and the fact that they had brought peace and tranquility to Afghanistan, even though their measures were harsh, but they had de-weaponized the society; they had eliminated the poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, by one edict, by one order, they had done this (which you are not able to do). So now, the Taliban, in the countryside, they were liked, because they are used to such harsh ways. And then as far as human education was concerned, unnecessary hype was created. This is the Afghan society; they have their own style. There were certain liberated women in some of the big cities, like Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif, and Herat, to name just three, because there was no other city where women had that kind of liberty. And these 30,000, 35,000-odd women, they were deemed to be the population which was highly oppressed by the Taliban, and there was so much propaganda against them. So, on the whole, it was not realized that the Taliban may have become unpopular – but they were unpopular in the rest of the world, and in the cities, some cities, in Afghanistan – but they were not unpopular in the countryside of Afghanistan. There, people liked their ways and they followed them, and they respected them, because they were not corrupt. Whatever else they may have been – they may have been harsh – but they were just, they were fair, they had set up the sharia system, and the Afghan nation on the whole, by and large, likes the sharia laws because the sharia laws mean quick justice, quick dispensation of justice, and disposal of cases in the court. So that was another thing on the battlefield which was not looked into.

Then they started supporting those people who were corrupt. They thought that with the help of those corrupt people they would be able to win the war. And what is disastrous, is that in the beginning the declared objective, which was Osama bin Laden, the capture of Osama bin Laden or killing him, for him they had outsourced rather than use their own military for such an important target. They picked up a commander called Hazrat Ali from Jalalabad, and gave him tons of money, dollars, and said, "You surround Tora Bora" where thermobaric bombs were used against the civilian population, very unfortunate. So the civilian population turned against them. Then Hazrat Ali and company, were receiving money from one side, they were receiving money from the both sides. They should have known that Afghan characters like that, they would take money from both sides. So they outsourced, in the most critical area in which they should have gone themselves physically, they were reluctant to go in, I don't know on whose advice. So, this happened and Osama bin Laden slipped out. That was the prime objective, and that was lost. And you don't know where he is now, and you are still carrying out what is called the clearing of shadows. And Osama bin Laden is now the proverbial bird, I forget what the name of the bird, that is supposed to be existing but it isn't there. I don't know what is the condition of Osama bin Laden, whether he is living or he's not, and I think that is what Leon Panetta and other

intelligence chiefs have said. So that is where you went wrong.

OK, now we come to the battlefield. Selection of objective. At one time, and rightly, it was said that Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda — Al-Qaeda to be dispersed out of Afghanistan, and Osama bin Laden to be captured — to be the objective of our operations in order to capture him. The Afghans and the Taliban were not the objective. It was a declared, stated objective. But what is the objective now? Because Al-Qaeda has dispersed, Al-Qaeda is now concentrating in the Red Sea area, around Somalia, around Yemen, and they are getting closer and closer to the state of Israel. That seems to be their center of gravity. Osama bin Laden is still elusive; we don't know where he is. Sometimes they say, well there may be 60 to 70, or 60 to 100 operators in any of the area spread between Pakistan and Afghanistan. And do you know how big this area is? In length alone it is 2,500 kilometers. So what is this nonsense? I think this is to be fooling the people, be fooling the supporters of the war. I think this is neither here nor there. As far as the numbers are concerned, 60 to 70 Al-Qaeda operators may be present in any of the European countries if you like – in France, in Germany, in UK – so many of these may be present even in those countries, so why not attack them? So it really doesn't click, the logic.

And now, the objectives have been totally changed. From catching Osama bin Laden, killing him, and dispersing the Al-Qaeda, now you have shifted so the American objectives are declared by the president of America, is to reverse the momentum of the Taliban. The Taliban movement is not restricted now only to the Taliban cadres, it has become a veritable national resistance movement. That means the objective now, implicitly, is to defeat the Afghan nation. And that is not possible. Nations cannot be defeated by invading armies, when they can come to resist. And it is true of Afghanistan, if not of any other country. Because the Afghan nation, when it comes to resist, it cannot be defeated. So you have set yourself a new goal, and this is disastrous. Anybody, any soldier who has any inkling of elementary military knowledge, of military history, of military principle, would tell you that selection of a correct aim, and maintenance of that single aim, is very important. So that means your original aim was wrong? And therefore you have now deviated and changed your aim? This is what, from Sun Tzu, who was a Chinese military philosopher, through Napoleon to MacArthur, everybody has said maintenance, selection and maintenance of a single aim. And here there is a duplication of aims, number one, and then there is not duplication only, there is multiplication, multiple aims. And then there is this changing of the goalposts, you set your armed forces one goalpost and then you set them another goalpost. This has been shifted. So this is a fundamental mistake. No army in the world, when it starts changing, shifting from one goal to another one, can ever hope to win.

But now come to the more mundane, but more effective, or rather, the chief determinants of the situation on the battlefield. These are three factors, Bonnie, very important factors, and I want your listeners to really pay attention to it. One is time, the other is space, and the third is relative strength. Interplay of these three factors decides the outcome of the war, victory or defeat. As far as relative strength is concerned, undoubtedly America has – there are two aspects to relative strength: number of people that you have, number of boots, number of men that are fighting, that is one important aspect (and number of men means their morale also, and their commitment to the cause); and the other is the firepower, so manpower and the firepower together constitute the factor of relative strength. Now undoubtedly in the area of firepower, there is no match to America. But that firepower cannot be actualized in the hills and dales of Afghanistan for the obvious reason that the target is not there. Firepower can be used only when you know the target, the exact



location of the target. So it turns out that whenever you use firepower, you kill civilians. And thousands and thousands of civilians – marriage parties, the funeral processions, and this, that, and the other all have suffered because of that – and this has annoyed the Afghan nation to no end, and therefore greater sympathy for the freedom fighters in Afghanistan. So firepower is not really as effective as it could be, let's say if you were fighting the Russians or you were fighting somebody else who had a matching firepower, and you have a superior firepower, that becomes relevant. You may have all the Nebraska, submarines and Polaris missiles and this, that and the other – but this is not of any consequence in this kind of war of attrition. So the firepower also is limited.

And now we come to the manpower. Every time the American commanders in Afghanistan have been demanding more troops, surge, they have been asking for a surge. Initially a surge of 21,000, so as President Obama stepped into the Oval Office he provided 21,000 more troops. That would not make any difference. And then another 40,000 troops were asked for by McChrystal. So McChrystal continued to ask. It is reminiscent of Vietnam, where General Westmoreland, who was a great general in his own right, but he kept on asking for more and more troops at that time, against the Viet Cong, and finally the figure was 556,000. More than half a million American troops were committed in Vietnam. Here again it seems to be a similar situation. Whereas Operation Marja, which was known as Operation Moshtarak, that means the Afghan forces and the other forces were “joined together.” So if the asking for manpower has not – and everyone knows what happened to Marja, and you mentioned about Kandahar not taking off from the ground, really I don't think the operation is possible, not in this year at least, and therefore the year will run out, elections will be over, the Congress election, the Senate election, etc., and then there will be a, perhaps a new policy which will be announced by the president. So if additional manpower has not worked, we would term it as “reinforcing the failure,” that you have been reinforcing your troops, but you have been reinforcing basically what has already been, practically become, a failure. Or call it “investment in error,” both terms are used in the military; they are reinforcing the failure or investing in the error. If you, at this stage, as a professional judgment I can say, if instead of 40,000, if you would put in 400,000 more troops, still you cannot win in Afghanistan where the situation stands. Because the initiative is now with the opposition, the Afghan Mujahedin, and more and more recruits are joining up their ranks, and they're coming from all the other countries also, wherever they are. Because there is nothing like the feeling, the sense of victory, the smell of victory, they are smelling victory, and therefore, their ranks are swelling. Whereas the Americans have already said that from next year onward we'll start drawing down on the presence of troops. And we are not here to stay forever; that is the policy. So obviously the other side would attract more recruitment, and that is what is happening. So on the scales of relative strength you can say, half the factor is in favor of America, the other half is not.

Now we come to the two other factors. Remember I told you, relative strength, and space and time. So let's come to the space. The spaces are with the freedom fighters. They are with the Taliban. They control the countryside, and everyone knows that the countryside is totally in their control. Where the road ends, there the Taliban territory begins. And it is there, and their prowess in that area is so much, that the people simply support them. After all, they are involved in guerilla warfare, and guerilla cannot exist, it's like fish and water, and water in this case is the population. And so that means the local population is supporting them; that is why operations against them are not successful. So spaces are totally in their control. The Allied and the American forces, the NATO and the ISAF forces, they are all confined to the garrison towns. They are being squeezed into the garrison

towns, and they dare not venture out. Currently, the casualty rate, the daily casualty rate, is between five to seven forces, NATO and American soldiers, these are the fatality figures. Every day I keep on reading the newspaper, and it is between five to seven. And the Afghan casualties are even more than that, the Afghan policemen, the Afghan soldiers, etc.. Now what is the condition of the Afghan soldiers in this case? They are not fighting. Wherever they find an opportunity they start killing the NATO forces. Some angry Afghan soldier would turn his gun upon his own colleagues in NATO or ISAF/American, so their morale is low, they are not prepared to fight. The Afghan police are still not up to the level. So there are a lot of problems on that score as well. Out of three, we have discussed two. The spaces are with the Taliban, and they are squeezing the occupation forces more and more as the days go by.

The third factor is the time factor. Now you have already said, that you put a time limit, we will start drawing down from July, 2011. Fine. Good. And everyone knew that this time cannot be unlimited. You may change here and there by a few months, but you have to go, the Americans have to go, to pull out of Afghanistan. If that be the case, and some commander, Afghan commander, very rightly said that "Americans have the watch, but we have the time." So time is a factor on their side. So really, out of the three factors of time, space and relative strength, two-and-a-half factors are in the control of the Taliban or the opposition fighters, and only one-half factor is in favor of America. With this kind of a combination, with this kind of interplay of these factors, tell me, bring any soldier, like I was telling you before, I do so now again, ask any soldier in America to come and discuss with me, how are you going to win this war?

Faulkner: What an incredible summation of the situation. Thank you for that, General Gul. You covered a lot of territory there. Last week, you talked about the intense pressure the US is putting on the Pakistani government and military to fight a proxy war in the tribal area that borders on Afghanistan. The US pressure is said to be due to the support provided by the Pashtuns in the tribal areas for their brethren the Pashtuns of Afghanistan in their resistance to the US occupation of their country. The US uses the term "Taliban" to describe the fighters on both sides of the border. But isn't the resistance to US occupation in Afghanistan much more complex in reality? Could you describe the true complexity of the situation on the ground? To whom does the term "Taliban" properly refer? And what other resistance forces are operating in specific areas?

Gul: Taliban are the organic part of the Afghan society, and I think we have a long history, whenever Afghanistan has been struck by a foreign invader. The Taliban, that means the "students", "Taliban" exactly means "students" in literal terms. So students have risen for jihad, and their teachers have joined them. Now here was a case like the student movement against Astrada of Philippines or Suharto of Indonesia. These are the important names, Professor Sayyaf, Professor Mojedadi, Professor Karim Khalili, Professor Burhan ud Din Rabbani, and whatever, a long list of teachers who, and along with their students, who came out to fight jihad against the Soviet Union. But when the Soviets withdrew the leaders started fighting for power. The Taliban, so-called students, they left them, they abandoned them, apart from a very few. And they went back to their education, they opened their madrassas, like Mullah Omar, Mullah Omar in Orzeghan his home country, and there he started teaching some 40 students, and he himself was learning, because Taliban means "the students," not the teachers. So, they abandoned their teachers, and that is how ... but after a while they realized that Afghan society was being ripped apart. So they stood up and they said, "We have got to cleanse this mess," and they started off. This is the story of the

Taliban.

And interestingly, and ironically, the Taliban movement, which is supposed to be anti-women, basically it started when a newly-wed girl was raped, they started this movement. At that time Mullah Omar was the first one to rise, and he said, "Now it has become incumbent upon us that we give up our education and that we take to the jihad, take to the field and fight these infidels out," because they had started behaving like infidels, their own old commanders. So they fought against them, and the population supported them because the population of common people were fed up with the kind of atrocities that they were facing every day. That's the story of the Taliban. Now, the Taliban are basically sons, wards, relatives of the same people. They come from them, not an entity which is descended from heaven; they are very much a part of that society. If they start wearing a white turban, then they are peaceful citizens, if they put on a black turban, then they become Taliban. So, really therefore when you ask who is a Taliban, you are asking for the moon, for there is no way you can distinguish a Talib from somebody else. If he is wearing a black turban then you can suspect him, that he's a Talib, but if he's wearing a turban of any other color then what will you say?

As far as Pakistan is concerned, Pakistan is really very, very angry about the Indian presence in Afghanistan. Because Indians are leaving no opportunity to hurt Pakistan. They are arming the terrorist groups which are in our tribal area, or they are on the other side, in Afghanistan. They are sending them to carry out suicide blasts. And they are doing everything possible. They are inciting insurgency in our Baluchistan province, which is very, very sensitive to both Iran and Pakistan, and they are creating lots of problems. On top of it, the security contractors – and the last documents released by WikiLeaks fully reveals this – that the security contractors, the Xe Worldwide Services, who have twenty other different names, they are operating secretly, clandestinely inside Pakistan, and they have recruited a large number of people, from our own people, from our own public, who are doing anti-state activities. So Pakistan is very unhappy about it. Now the Americans have been pressurizing Pakistan, sometimes unreasonably, that we move into North Waziristan, because other areas have all been attacked by the Pakistan Army, and the Pakistan Army is present there, no less than 150,000. Now this matches the figure of total ISAF/NATO/American forces in Afghanistan. There are around 150,000. And Pakistan has deployed 150,000 troops along our western border which adjoins the Afghan territories. Now, Pakistan says we cannot pull out any more troops from our eastern border to be engaged on the western border. And this is realistic, because the Indians are not changing their stance. The movement that is going on in Kashmir, it is now no more a militant movement, the militancy has taken a very, very far backseat. It is now a political movement being waged by the young men and women of Kashmir. And all they're asking is for their right of vote, which has been guaranteed to them in the United Nations resolutions. And India is a signatory to those resolutions, but India is flouting that. So India is being given undue advantage by the Americans. Everything is being asked of Pakistan, in spite of India's belligerent, hostile attitude towards Pakistan. That Pakistan should pull troops out from the eastern border, and deploy them on the western border. I think this is not going to be, specially now that the floods have hit Pakistan so badly, and levelled nearly 20 percent of Pakistan directly, and displaced some 20 million people, who require an Army, the only institution which can provide this kind of relief to them, and resettlement and rehabilitation. So they should forget about it. Pakistan cannot do this. It is not possible; it is not physically possible. And so as far as this demand is concerned, it is not good, it is not a reasonable demand.



Faulkner: How many troops did you say that Pakistan has on its western border with Afghanistan?

Gul: 150,000.

Faulkner: That's what I thought you said. And that's the total amount of troops that NATO and the US have in Afghanistan.

Gul: Yes, that means that the troops they have, in fact NATO and US/ISAF are 147,000. Pakistan troops are 3,000 more, 150,000.

Faulkner: You are familiar with the long history of the war against the occupiers of Afghanistan, going back through the period of the Soviet occupation. The Afghan resistance defeated the Soviets, with Pakistani and US help. Can you compare the present situation of the NATO forces to any particular period in the Soviet attempt to conquer Afghanistan? What parallels between the two occupations are evident to you?

Gul: A remarkable question; I think it will throw some very interesting light on the whole scenario here. The Soviet Union when they came in, they had a tremendous amount of political support among the Communist cadres, the political cadres. The Communist Party, which was split into two factions, known as Parcham and Khalq, these were two parties but they had the same objective: to sort of have a Communist order established in Afghanistan. And the Mujahedin, ragtag Mujahedin at that time, they were resisting them on their own. But they were able to trounce this government, or almost trounce this government. The Soviet Union got alarmed back in December of 1979, and they struck Afghanistan with a direct invasion, with 140,000 troops. So the figure is the same. But interestingly, at that time nearly a quarter million Afghan forces existed at that time. They were well-equipped; not as well-equipped as the Western armies, but they were quite reasonably equipped, with APCs and the tanks, with everything that you can name, they had tons of equipment at their disposal, and their number was a quarter million. So 150,000 Soviet Union troops and a quarter million of the Afghan, and trained, highly trained. Not as well as the Western troops, not as well as Pakistani troops, but quite well trained. So this kind of force was available. The police force was, in addition to it, about 100,000. So altogether there was an infrastructure which was available to the Soviet Union, and they were politically motivated. The Parcham and Khalqis, they were Communists and they were politically motivated to side with the Soviet Union. So relative-strengthwise you can see what was the nature of it.

When they came in, they had no support, the Taliban of that time, call them the Mujahedin, they were known as the Mujahedin, now they are called Taliban. The Mujahedin of that time, Hekmatyar and others, they were youngsters. Mohammad Rabbani was one of the oldest, and youngsters Burhan ud Din Rabbani and others like Maulvi Younas Khalis who was a religious teacher, etc.. But all the other people, Ahmad Shah Masood, they were all very young fellows, they were students at that time. They left their schools and their colleges, and they came and joined the resistance. And for nearly a year and half, they resisted on their own, with some little help. And because I was, even at that time I was director of military intelligence, and I was approached, that the Afghans required some old, derelict weapons, so could I scrounge through the old depots, the military depots, and find out if I could spare some weapons for them. So we cannibalized these weapons, these were called Lee-Enfield rifles, old rifles, very old. And some muzzle-loaders! Believe you me. This was all; we cannibalized them, and gave them whatever that we had. So they were not fighting with the American help. They were, for a year and half they fought on their own, with some

help from Pakistan, very little help. And this is how they began.

But when Zbigniew Brzezinski came here, I think in 1980, he realized that — because the CIA had given it up as a closed chapter, Afghanistan was a closed chapter as far as they were concerned; the Soviet Union was too powerful, and they thought that they should better worry about the Gulf area, and they were deploying forces in that area, they were trying to arrange something there — but Brzezinski realized that the Afghan resistance was very, very strong. The Afghan resistance was determined, and General [inaudible] was a very determined, committed man, and therefore the Americans' first allocation in budget — initially, Jimmy Carter, who was the president at that time, he announced an aid of \$400 million for Pakistan. And interestingly, Pakistan was under sanctions at that time. So, because Zia-ul-Haq had taken over the reins of power, it was a military rule, and naturally the Democrats in America were very, very angry about it. So this \$400 million that were offered to Pakistan in aid, it was turned down by Zia-ul-Haq, and he termed it as “peanuts,” and it became kind of a joke because President Carter came from [Georgia], which is the heart of the peanut territory. So this became kind of a joke, because it was deemed to be a pun held out by Zia-ul-Haq. But then slowly, gradually the American aid started coming in. We were training our people, the Afghan people were training only Afghans, and then toward the end we were training something like 27,000 a year, when I was the head of the ISI. But the bulk of the training and all the sacrifices were made by the Afghan people themselves. And 1.3 million Afghans were killed. And imagine, the Afghan population is not more than 25 million, and out of that 1.3 million Afghans were killed. 3.5 million Afghans became refugees in Pakistan, and 1.5 million became refugees in Iran. And nearly two or three million were internal refugees. So can you imagine the devastation that was caused? And this nation, having made such tremendous sacrifices for the free world — they were fighting for their own cause also, for their own freedom — and that they are capable of making such sacrifices. Is there any nation in the world that can make such sacrifices? No, it is not imaginable, believe you me, because this world, which has become so much materialistic, it looks to material gains, and life is very dear and important to them. But to an Afghan his freedom and his faith is very important. So Afghans were able to resist very effectively.

Now, come to compare this with now. Same volume of troops, same quantity of troops as the Soviet Union — I mean, they were 140,000 at the peak. But now, the Afghan forces, so far, over the last nine years that you have been able to build in Afghanistan, they number no more than 70 to 80 thousand. That's all. Compare this to a well-trained quarter million Afghan forces at that time. And there is no political motivation here; these forces are only out to take money, to grab dollars.

The Afghan government is a corrupt government; the Communist government was not corrupt. But this government is a highly corrupt government. Karzai's government is gangsters government, it is Mafia government. Karzai's own half-brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, who is located in Kandahar, he is on the Governor's council, or probably Governor himself, he is known to be the biggest drug baron. And the drug trade is going on like never before, and I'll give you some figures of what is the situation on the drug front. Before the Taliban ruled, the men, the Mujahedin, were fighting among themselves, after the Soviet evacuation of Afghanistan. The volume of opium, raw opium, that was produced by Afghanistan was 4,500 tons. In the last year of Taliban rule it dropped down to 50 tons a year, 50 tons only, and that, too, in territories which were not under the control of the Taliban. So much so that the Drug Enforcement Agency of America, through Christina

Rocco, who was then the Assistant Secretary of State, gave a prize of \$41 million, it is on record, to the Taliban government, even though the Taliban government was under sanction. But the Drug Enforcement Agency thought it fit, that they had done such wonderful work, that they would give them a prize, \$41 million. With sanctions on them I don't know if they were ever paid or not; I think they were probably paid, and accepted by the Taliban at that time.

Now, at this time last year, the opium production in Afghanistan is a record 6,200 tons. Which caters to more than 90 percent of the world's entire need. Previously, we know that these big drug caches and consignments that were caught in Pakistan, but of late there have been no such catches in Pakistan. So if there is a record level of production of opium in Afghanistan, it is going out to somewhere. After all, it is not being used in Afghanistan. How is it going? It's not going through Iran, it is not going through Pakistan. Some of it is going to the Central Asian republics. But most of it is being directly flown – now this is very alarming – directly flown from Afghanistan to Europe as well as to America. And, I don't know, I am not yet sure, that military aircraft are used for it or not, but I am sure the people, bigwigs up there, who are not interested in stopping the drug trade, they are involved in it. Who are those people? That is something that is for the American journalists, because unfortunately this term, “embedded journalism,” it is such a despicable term, to begin with, and it's such a horrible concept, that truth can never come out. So, let's first of all, America, allow free journalism to cover Afghanistan, and then they will know what all is happening.

On the side of construction work, because a lot of American money and American dollars are going into reconstruction, rehabilitation, I think four times more money is being spent as what is available on the ground. And I know certain sources, because these news filter out of Afghanistan, and some Afghan civilians who come and talk about this, they are saying that the Corps of Engineers of America, who are responsible for wherever the Americans are involved with in construction, they ask them to sign on an amount three times bigger than the one that they receive. So graft is rampant, corruption is rampant. And, a Mafia or a gangster government is running the country. How the hell in this situation can you control Afghanistan? Now Karzai has announced that he will set up a council, a high council, to talk to Taliban. Believe you me they will not talk. Because they despise Karzai. In their eyes he is a traitor. They would rather readily talk to the Americans, because Americans are a party. Whereas Karzai is a puppet, they will not talk to a puppet. But they would probably be prepared to talk to a party.

And I think that is the approach that we should take. Why are we trying to delay this? If you know that this is a foregone conclusion, you cannot win in Afghanistan, then it is time to cut your losses. Rather than wait until the enemy's pressure or this offensive becomes so big, like the Tet offensive in Vietnam, in the old days, when Americans had to cut and run out of there, and they were flying by hanging onto the landing [gear] of the helicopters. Those scenes should not be repeated here in Afghanistan. Because that would be very humiliating, and since Pakistan is a frontline state for America at this time, I would feel very ashamed if the Americans were to leave in this fashion.

I think it's time for showing some sagacity, some wisdom, and changing the paradigm, which is very important. And now of course, after Obama announced that there will be a drawdown, and because of the Taliban pressure, the property prices in Kabul are coming down very sharply, in fact they're down to about 50 percent or less already, and there is a rush on the banks as well. People are trying to draw money out of Afghanistan. So I don't know why Americans are delaying the major decision that they have to take. There has to

be a paradigm shift before long, and the sooner it comes, the better.

Faulkner: General Hamid Gul, thank you very much.

Gul: You're welcome, Bonnie. You're very kind, you're welcome. If I can educate the American people, to take the right decision, I think I'll be a very lucky man.

Faulkner: I've been speaking with General Hamid Gul. Today's show has been "Why America Cannot Win in Afghanistan." General Gul had a brilliant 36-year military career in the Pakistan Army, and is now retired. The highest attainment of his long and distinguished career was his command of Inter-Services Intelligence, ISI, from 1987 to 1989, during the fateful period of Afghan jihad against the Soviet occupation of that country. He attended Staff College Camberley in the United Kingdom, and as a young officer he attended the US Pacific Intelligence School in Okinawa, Japan. Visit his website at [www.generalhamidgul.com](http://www.generalhamidgul.com). There is some information there in English. Today's show was produced by Tod Fletcher and Bonnie Faulkner.

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