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**REVIEW ARTICLE
STEVE COLL, 'DIRECTORATE S'**

OLIVIER IMMIG

2018-04

THE NETHERLANDS

REVIEW ARTICLE

Steve Coll, *'Directorate S'. The C.I.A. and America's Secret Wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan, 2001-2016.* Penguin Random House, UK, 2018, 757 p.

By OLIVIER IMMIG

Amsterdam, April 18, 2018

Arriving fourteen years after his highly successful 'Ghost Wars', published in 2004, *'Directorate S'. The C.I.A. and America's Secret Wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan, 2001-2016*, is the second volume of what Coll calls a 'journalistic history'.

As Coll puts it at the end of his Introduction (p. 7): "This (book) is the story of Directorate S". Which sounds quite promising, but which is not solely what the book is about. Rather, it is a meticulously researched work on the US military, secret services, policies and persons of the US administrations of Presidents George Bush and Barack Obama, Pakistan's military leadership, and some key Afghan leaders and processes. This makes the book primarily a richly informed story about the major forces shaping the course of the Afghan war since at least 2001, including the 'Directorate'. It is filling in a lot of details on a number of subjects, owing to hundreds of Coll's interviews, and owing to information made public through Wikileaks.

Coll candidly states that he 'understands the American system best' (p. 689). He is chronologically telling the story of the war in Afghanistan by the US and its allies here, although the efforts of 'Western allies' receive scant attention. As former UK Ambassador to Kabul (2007-2011) Sherard Cowper-Coles remarked, 'all real decisions on Afghanistan were taken in Washington, not in Kabul or London'. (Cowper-Coles, *Cables from Kabul*, 2011, p. 50).

As Coll repeatedly and correctly says, initially the US Bush-administration clearly lacked understanding about the way the Pakistani Army worked, especially its Inter Service Intelligence (I.S.I.) bureau. Or about Afghan society, for that matter; Bush's national security cabinet included ... nobody who knew Afghanistan well (Coll, p.64). Zalmay Khalilzad, senior director for Afghanistan at the White House's National Security Council and US Ambassador to Afghanistan from 2003 to 2005, should be excluded from this harsh judgement. As former Taliban Ambassador to Islamabad Abdul Salam Zaeef explained: "As an Afghan you are always more than one thing: your kin, your tribe, your ethnicity and the place you were born; all are part of you". (Abdul Salam Zaeef, *My life with the Taliban*, 2010, p.2). Complicated, indeed.

Tamim Ansary, an Afghan born US citizen, points out that the 'intervened-upon' [the Afghans] have a story of their own. In *this* story the [foreign] interventions are not the main event, but interruptions of the main event'. (Tamim Ansary, *Games Without Rules. The Often Interrupted History of Afghanistan*, 2012). It is precisely this story that hardly mattered at all to British, Soviet or American leaders seeking to somehow 'control' Afghanistan. This is the often neglected 'domestic half' of the enduring war in Afghanistan, as stated by Thomas Ruttig, for instance. ('The Road to Turkestan or: More Theses on Peacemaking in Afghanistan. Manifesto No 2'. *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, February 28, 2018.)

What is 'Directorate S'?

Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence (I.S.I.) at the end of the 1980's had grown into a mighty organization. It acquired this status by its exclusive channeling of US weaponry and US and Saudi-Arabian money to several

Afghan resistance groups or *mujahedin* during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1979-1989), the Hezb-i-Islami led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar in particular. Beside forging Afghan Islamic resistance to the Soviet occupation, the US, by putting the responsibility for distributing financial aid and military equipment in the hands of I.S.I., also considerably strengthened that Service.

Consequently, I.S.I. increasingly manipulated political processes, among Afghans but within Pakistan as well, on behalf of the Pakistani army. Ever since, I.S.I. has retained its dark, negative reputation, whether about its continued interfering in Afghan affairs, or concerning its role in arming and training terrorist outfits, destined to attack Indian Kashmir or even India proper, like in Mumbai, 2008.

This rather diffuse Afghanistan-layer within I.S.I., one of a number of 'directorates', is of course shrouded in secrecy. At the same time, it should be noted that the 'Directorate' primarily functions as an 'executive' part of Pakistan's military leadership and Intelligence; that august body itself is ultimately responsible for all actions taken - or not taken - by it. Spread throughout the book, a number of descriptions of the 'Directorate' can be found; it is highly informative to quote some of the most relevant ones here.

About the organizational structure of I.S.I.: "The service was organized into a series of directorates underneath the director-general, who was always a serving three-star general. Two-star generals led the major directorates. There were full directorates or subsidiary wings dedicated to counterterrorism, counterintelligence, and Pakistani domestic policies, for example. The analysis directorate was a prestigious post that produced white papers and memos and managed international liaison. I.S.I. ran stations in Pakistan embassies devoted to spying abroad. Buried in this bureaucracy lay the units devoted to secret operations in support of the Taliban, Kashmiri guerrillas, and other violent Islamic radicals - Directorate S, as it was referred to by American intelligence officers and diplomats. It was also known as "S Wing" or just "S". Directorate S partially resembled the C.I.A.'s Special Activities Division, in charge of covert paramilitary operations. Officers inside I.S.I. sometimes used other names for the external operations unit - the Afghan cell, the Kashmir cell, Section 21, or Section 24. Veterans of Pakistan's Special Service Group, a commando organization, primarily staffed the I.S.I.'s covert war cells, just as the C.I.A. drew its paramilitary specialists from the ranks of U.S. Special Forces" (Coll, pp. 46-47).

"By the fall of 2008 Mullen (Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff 2007-2011, Kayani's counterpart in rank) was forming a hypothesis about Directorate S, one aligned with intelligence reporting. At the very top of its hierarchy, I.S.I. was a black-and-white organization, fully subject to discipline and accountability, Mullen told colleagues. In the middle the organization started to go grey, fading into heavily compartmented operations that drew upon mid-level officers, civilians, contractors, and retirees. Then there were retired I.S.I. director-generals or senior brigadiers with their own followings among militants" (Coll, p. 322).

"Kayani and Pasha had replaced General Akhtar at Directorate S just weeks before the Mumbai attack (November 2008). The scale of the covert and militant networks I.S.I. sought to manage was mind-boggling. American intelligence reporting put the total number of armed militants in Pakistan at about a 100.000 and estimated that I.S.I. ran 128 different training camps and facilities" (Coll, p. 345-346).

About the I.S.I. leadership: "By 2001, C.I.A. and D.I.A. analysts were circulating reports that some I.S.I. and army officers had become increasingly influenced by the radical ideologies of their clients. This raised the possibility that generals with a millenarian or revolutionary outlook might capture the Pakistani state and its nuclear bombs" (Coll, p. 47).

"I.S.I.'s leadership that summer of 2008 was in disarray. The I.S.I. officer in charge of Directorate S was Major General Asif Akhtar. He reported to the spy service's director-general, Nadeem Taj, who in turn reported to Kayani" (Coll, p. 310).

About continued support to the Taliban: "On Directorate S and the revival of the Taliban, during 2007 and 2008, American and N.A.T.O. Intelligence did become clearer, informed by harder evidence. (...) It showed that

Musharraf and Kayani had authorized deniable support to the movement, stopping short of weapons supply - the reporting showed that they were very cautious about directly providing money and weapons to the Taliban because they feared they could get caught and pay a price in the international system. Retired I.S.I. officers, nongovernmental organizations, and other cutouts supplied the Taliban to reduce this risk. American intelligence reporting on individual, serving I.S.I. case officers, who managed contacts with the Quetta Shura or the Haqqanis or Lashkar-e-Taiba, which fought in Kashmir, also showed that they were clearly in the Pakistan Army's chain of command. This reporting belied any "rogue I.S.I." hypothesis" (Coll, p. 289).

"In considering I.S.I.'s relationship with the Haqqanis or the Afghan Taliban (the distinction is hard to make - O.I.), the C.I.A. group (i.e. The Near East and South Asia office of the Directorate of Intelligence) would ask whether Directorate S or its contractors had "cognizance, influence or control" of a particular guerrilla or terrorist unit - a sliding scale of culpability. Clearly I.S.I. influenced the Haqqanis and the Quetta Shura, but to say the service controlled these organizations was doubtful, according to this analysis" (Coll, p. 290).

"...Peter Lavoy (US intelligence officer for South Asia, 2007-2016) said that I.S.I.'s (continuing intelligence and financial) aid to the (Afghan) Taliban was explained by three factors. First, "Pakistan believes the Taliban will prevail in the long term, at least in the Pashtun belt most proximate to the Pakistani border". Second, Pakistan "continues to define India as the number one threat" and "insists that India seeks to undermine Pakistani security through covert operations inside Afghanistan". Third, Pakistan's high command believes "that if militant groups were not attacking in Afghanistan, they would seek out Pakistani targets" (Coll, p. 337).

"On the other side of the war, I.S.I.'s support for the Taliban remained steadfast. Ashfaq Kayani finally retired as chief of army staff at the end of November 2013. General Raheel Sharif, his successor, extended the army's influence over Pakistani media and foreign policy. During Sharif's tenure, American commanders in Afghanistan detected no change in Kayani's policies of support and sanctuary for the Taliban. By 2016, Major General Muhammad Waseem Ashraf reportedly ran I.S.I.'s Directorate S. On the Afghan front of external operations, his bureaus seemed to follow a policy of providing as much support for the Taliban as I.S.I. could get away with - just enough to keep the war broiling, while avoiding aid so explicit that it might provoke the international community to impose sanctions on Pakistan or withdraw military sales" (Coll, p. 679).

The Kayani era (2004-2013)

Describing America's secret wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan from 2001 to the end of 2016, Coll has of necessity a lot to say about General Kayani. From 2004, both the Afghan Taliban movement and Al Qaeda made a revival. And once more, I.S.I. was directly and actively involved in the process. Its leader at the time was General Kayani.

Since General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani in 2004 was appointed by then-military ruler Musharraf to lead I.S.I., and subsequently became Chief of Staff Pakistani Army in 2007, he possesses intimate knowledge about, and has been responsible for, the inner workings of both intelligence organizations and the army. In both capacities, Kayani has been overseeing Pakistan's military policy towards Afghanistan. It was a highly unusual step for the then-PPP civilian government, in 2010, to extend Kayani's command with another three years. Although the general declined to be interviewed for 'Directorate', his long public record and many personal contacts provide a wealth of information about the man and his career.

One of several remarkable things about Kayani is, that he studied 'Strategy' at Fort Leavenworth in the US. There, he wrote an important thesis, which would turn out to determine his approach of the United States and the Afghan war. At Leavenworth, Kayani analysed how the Afghan resistance had defeated the Soviet occupation (1979-1989), and 'how Pakistan had played his hand in that war, managing the rebellion so that it was successful but did not provoke a total war with Moscow'. (Coll, pp.147-148.) That policy must sound only too familiar to a number of US military and civil leaders, especially as US President Trump has decided, in August, 2017, to once again increase the number of US soldiers fighting off the Taliban in Afghanistan.

As he was succeeded as Chief of Army Staff by General Raheel Sharif in November, 2013, opinions about Kayani's legacy were divided. On the one hand, he oversaw the first transition of civilian power ever in Pakistan, from a PPP-led government to a PML-N led government. Kayani also managed to remain on speaking terms with the US after the killing on May 2, 2011, of Osama bin Laden by US commandos in Abbottabad, and after the bloody border incident between US/Afghan troops and Pakistani military at Salala, late in 2011. Next to violations of Pakistan's territorial integrity, 26 Pakistani soldiers got killed, infuriating the military leadership in Rawalpindi. It did lead to a temporarily closure of US and NATO ground supply routes through Pakistan for US troops in Afghanistan, thus forcing the United States to develop an even more costly Northern Distribution Network (NDN) through Russia and Central Asia

On the other hand, despite numerous US 'requests', Kayani never started a full-scale military operation in North Waziristan, part of Pakistan's unruly FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas), against Haqqanis and other banned terrorist networks operating there. Quite remarkable is the reason quoted by Coll for that; Kayani had lost faith in the effectiveness of military clearing operations (Coll, p. 629), that is, in *his own* military! As Kayani had written at Fort Leavenworth some decades ago, it was 'managing the rebellion so that it was successful but did not provoke a total war' all over again, this time not with the former Soviet Union, but to avoid a total rupture of highly profitable relations with the US and Western countries. Kayani's successor as Chief of Army Staff, Raheel Sharif (2013-2016), did invade North Waziristan - and by pushing Pakistan's Taliban back (across the border into Afghanistan, where they still hide), he succeeded in strongly reducing terrorist domestic violence in Pakistan. Otherwise, I.S.I. support to the Afghan Taliban continued.

To better understand why Kayani choose not to start a full-blown military operation in North Waziristan during the 9-year rule of General Pervez Musharraf (1999-2008), one should consult the review article about the 2018 edition of Shuja Nawaz's book '[Crossed Swords: Pakistan, its Army and the Wars Within](#)' by Ejaz Haider, 'Understanding Pakistan Army', in: [Newsweek Pakistan](#), February 28, 2018. Between 2002 and 2009 hundreds of small and large-scale operations were successfully conducted against the Pakistani and Afghan Taliban, and Al Qaeda, yet the broader strategic picture had clearly gone in favour of the Pakistani militants.

Shuja Nawaz states, as quoted by Haider: "The deep irony is that Musharraf, who Nawaz refers to as 'the liberal autocrat', despite his 'enlightened moderation' and the new war, served to strengthen the religio-political parties by hobbling the two mainstream parties, the PML-N and the Pakistan Peoples Party".

Only since 2008, when new Chief of Army Ashfaq Kayani pulled the military back from Musharraf's political entanglements, the idea of public buy-in gained weight in General Headquarters, or, does the military have support of the people of Pakistan in its operations against the militants?

Once again, not a single Pakistani civilian political voice can be heard. Then, as now, it is the military that run security affairs of the country to their own liking, and advantage, one might add. (Coll could well have provided us with some more information concerning the place and meaning of the Pakistani army and its personnel in Pakistani society in general. One should consult [Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy](#), 2007, and [Soldiers of Fortune](#), 2009, both by Ayesha Siddiqa. Another informative, and entertaining, work is [The Duel. Pakistan on the flight path of American power](#), 2008, by Tariq Ali.)

Failed assumptions

General Ashfaq Kayani did not think much of Afghan President Hamid Karzai (2001-2014). Hence, Kayani expected the Americans to be able to make Karzai do 'whatever was necessary' in obtaining some sort of settlement of the Afghan War. The US clearly were, and are, not capable of doing just that, either because it did not wish to do so, or could not do so without jeopardizing relations and interests. This loathsome perception by Kayani of the Afghan president, reciprocated by a widely felt Afghan aversion to Pakistan in general, undoubtedly well-known in Kabul, did nothing to make Karzai accept Kayani's urging to 'talk to us [Pakistan], not the US'. Washington has formally maintained, at least since 2010, that any peace talks with the Taliban must be 'Afghan-led', despite its own multiple one-sided efforts to develop contacts within the Taliban movement.

President Karzai, for his part, increasingly failed to understand why the United States did not come down harder on the duplicitous Pakistani military leadership, I.S.I. in particular. After all, it was a public secret that Pakistan's military and intelligence services were playing a 'double game'. Karzai always believed that there was a guiding Pakistani (I.S.I.) hand behind the foggy screens of the Afghan war, controlling the Taliban.

Increasingly disturbing for Karzai's night rest was the worrying thought that one day some sort of deal might be struck between the US and the Taliban, with Pakistan's support, leaving him out in the cold. Mullah Abdul Zaeef, former Taliban ambassador to Pakistan, used to be equally dismissive of Pakistani influences and interferences in his country. As Karzai's presidency lasted, he started to label the Taliban as 'strayed brothers', rather than insurgents, while at the same time increasingly criticizing the way US troops in Afghanistan behaved. Thus, Karzai and Zaeef at one point seemed to become remarkably like-minded.

Tellingly, the Taliban leadership wants to negotiate, not conduct peace talks, with the US only, and *after* all US troops have left the country. Likewise, the US government prefers to negotiate with and talk to the Pakistani Army leadership, rather than its civil government(s). South Asian civilian governments don't count for much in the region, or in Washington.

Useful connections

The Pakistani Army, representing if not embodying the Islamic State of Pakistan (formally since March, 1953, when Pakistan was proclaimed an *Islamic* republic), and the Haqqani organization, an integral part of the Afghan Taliban movement that seeks to establish a purely Islamic state, maintain useful bonds. Just in case the Afghan Taliban will somehow get governing powers in Kabul. In that - probably inevitable but remote future - case, this 'useful connection' might serve as a restraint on possibly growing ties between a renewed Afghan Taliban presence in Kabul and their persecuted Pakistani counterparts, now hiding for several years already in Afghan borderlands.

Although there exists a certain amount of ideological understanding between both the Taliban movements, the differences between them are quite large. The Afghan Taliban movement, established in 1994, always was, and is overwhelmingly Pashtun; besides, they all belong to one and the same movement. After having been in power from 1996 to 2001, they primarily seek to re-establish their 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan'. The Tehrik Taliban Pakistan (TTP, created in 2007), is made up of dozens of more localized, often petty organizations. Of course, both movements face entirely different national armies, as well. The current ANA (Afghan National Army), is a far smaller, weaker organization than the well-established and well-equipped Pakistani Army. The latter also is the *de facto* determining force in Islamabad's national security policy issues. When the Pakistani Taliban, progressing from the Northeast of the country in 2009, got dangerously close to Islamabad, they were easily hit back by Kayani's army.

The Pakistani military leadership always considers regional security issues through the coloured lens of 'India' - even when Indian leaders like former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh solemnly and repeatedly declared in public that India will be no threat to Pakistan, and that Delhi wishes to assure Pakistan of its peaceful intentions. Regrettably, current Prime Minister Modi has somewhat changed that attitude. As Pakistan, in 1998, established its credentials as a nuclear power, this newly acquired 'nuclear umbrella' against India led to sighs of relieve in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. After all, three conventionally fought wars between Pakistan and India had ended in as many Pakistani defeats.

Former U.S. Ambassador to Islamabad Anne Patterson (2007-2010) made a very valid, still fully applicable, point; as long as the Pakistani army leadership remains primarily focused on its perceived 'Indian threat', it will not give up its silent, or even public, support for the likes of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jamaat-ud Dawa (JuD), but also the Haqqani component of the Afghan Taliban. They will all remain instrumental in a future, of nuclear necessity final, armed struggle between Pakistan and India, just as neighbouring Afghanistan will remain an area to seek refuge in, just in case the valiant Pak army gets another beating, or worse. Another blunt remark by Mrs. Patterson was: "Let's not fool ourselves that we have a democracy" to work with in Islamabad. (Coll, p. 403)

It reminds one of the 1980's, when intimate cooperation took place between the Afghan Hezb-e-Islami led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and the Pakistani military regime of Zia-ul Haq (1977-1988). Amazingly, Hezb, still led today by Hekmatyar, since its peace accord with the Ghani government in 2016, is back in power in Kabul (Sharing some government posts within the so-called National Unity Government or NUG).

Afghan peace offerings

Highly intriguing are several peace-offers made by Taliban leader Mullah Omar, and their outright rejection. For instance, right after the Bonn-conference, late 2001, a trusted lieutenant of Omar, Tayeb Agha, carried a letter allegedly written by Omar, in which he wrote that 'We want to be part of Afghanistan's Future and I'll let my Shura decide how to do this' (Coll, p. 141). Interim-President Hamid Karzai was willing to enter into talks, but the Bush administration, then-Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld in particular, blocked the opening.

But why? Presumably because there was a big fear in CIA-circles that another Al Qaeda attack, possibly emanating from Afghanistan, might be imminent. Another recent development at the time made the Bush administration equally determined to keep US troops stationed in Afghanistan; it wanted to be able to closely control Pakistan's newly acquired nuclear weapon capabilities. Also, after Pakistan's failed military adventure in Kargil, 1999, any future armed conflict between Pakistan and India might escalate into a nuclear war, forcing the US and other major powers to be able to rapidly interfere.

Remarkably, a few years later, as the US got increasingly mired in Iraq, the Pakistani military leadership concluded that US troops would soon be withdrawn from the region. Undoubtedly, if that were to happen Afghanistan would fall apart once again; a solid reason for the Pakistani to continue their support to their preferred Afghan allies, the Taliban (Coll, p. 201).

Not mentioned at all by Coll are talks between the Taliban and Norwegian diplomats which were started in 2007, and lasted for several years. Since the Taliban leadership by now had little trust in them, no Americans, Pakistani or Saudi Arabians were involved. The process began in earnest when Taliban leader Mullah Omar had a list of names handed over to Norwegian diplomat Alf Arne Ramslien in Islamabad. The list contained five names of Taliban negotiators, tasked with exploring ways to arrive at peace talks.

When, in May, 2008, delegations from the Taliban and the Afghan government were preparing for their first face-to-face meeting in Oslo, news of the blowing up of a house of a Taliban delegation member near Quetta arrived. Everyone present took it as a warning against trying to pursue talks; Mr. Ramslien pointed a finger at Pakistan, secret service ISI in particular. (Mujib Mashal, 'How Peace Between Afghanistan and the Taliban Foundered', in: The New York Times, December 26, 2016; one of several highly relevant sources not mentioned by Coll.)

At a certain point, the Norwegians even met with the usually highly secretive Mullah Omar in person, indicating how eager the Taliban leader was in establishing some sort of peace. That meeting took place near Karachi, in March, 2009. Eventually, the talks failed, mainly because of solid Pakistani resistance to any negotiated peace with the Taliban, according to Mr. Ramslien. As a Pakistani military leader once famously remarked, 'we should not kill the goose that lays the golden eggs'. He was referring to the influx of massive US and international aid into Pakistan, to support it in its struggle against both Al Qaeda and the (Pakistani) Taliban. Another serious obstacle to Taliban-Afghan government peace talks was the presence of Al Qaeda; once more both the differences in ideological and strategic outlook between both organizations played havoc with the Afghan peace process.

Only in September, 2010, the Obama-administration was prepared to start direct talks with the Taliban. That decision implied a key acknowledgement; a US/Afghan military victory over Taliban was not attainable, only a political settlement of some sort could bring an end to the war in Afghanistan. (Recently, on March 12, 2018, US Secretary of Defense Jamis Mattis on his arrival in Kabul repeated this point of view. Mattis, being an old Afghanistan hand, should know indeed.)

Characteristically though, under Obama three US approaches to possible talks with the Taliban were adverted, by as many US institutions (the State Department, the Pentagon, and the CIA). The US approach of Afghanistan was always multi-layered, a sort of 'learning on the job', but never arriving on solid ground. Why not? First among several answers is 'because of the twisted functionality of staying the course'; the continued presence of US troops in Afghanistan served unattainable purposes, like keeping in check neighbouring Pakistan. Another US issue: should its policy be exclusively battling and eradicating Al Qaeda, or actively pursuing 'Afghan nation-building' as well, forcing it to remain deeply politically and militarily involved in the country? Differing opinions and analyses may result in a more complete, better informed policy, but in daily practice often led to personal and institutional battles, hampering the US efforts in South Asia.

After some 40 years of unending war in the country, Afghanistan today continues to suffer from horrifying acts of violence. Huge parts of the country are 'no go' areas for government officials. Due to safety concerns, Afghan parliamentary elections, to be held in July, have already been moved to October, 2018.

Recently, on February 28 current Afghan President Ashraf Ghani launched another frenetic new 'peace initiative' during the second gathering in Kabul of the 'Kabul Conference'. Ghani's 'unconditional' offer for peace talks to the Taliban movement was well received, and endorsed, by all countries and parties somehow involved in the Afghan war, primarily Pakistan (by both its military and civilian leaders), China, Russia, the United States, but also by Iran and the European Union, one should add. (1)

It is highly doubtful whether the most recent attempts to finally get the Taliban leadership to the negotiating table will be more successful than previous efforts. Under the leadership of mullah Haibatullah Akhundzadha since May, 2016, the Afghan Taliban is controlling more territory than they have done since their ouster in December, 2001. Clearly, the movement lacks no military and financial means, and a solid amount of Afghan Pashtun support; why negotiate?

The leadership's initial reaction to Ghani's latest peace-talks offer was an all too familiar one. It maintained that 'talks can only be held with the United States, since that nation is representing true power in Afghanistan, not with the puppet-government led by Ghani and Abdullah'. Ever since, suicide attacks by the Taliban against government employees and civilians and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) have continued unabated.

Border fencing; promoting peace?

Pakistan is steadily carrying out its fencing project of the entire 2600 kilometers long Pakistan-Afghan border, despite strong protests from Kabul. Consequently, one expects all sorts of traffic between both countries will be better controlled. Already early in 2012, the then-Pakistani Inter Service Intelligence (ISI) director of analysis, Major General Sahibzada Pataudi, expressed Pakistan's desire to do so to his American visitor, Barnett Rubin (Coll, p. 631).

By seeking to effectively seal the border, safe havens for radical terrorist groups in both Afghanistan and Pakistan should be eliminated. The border fences and controls already in place between Iran and Pakistan (in the province of Balochistan) indicate as much. (As described in a recent, well-researched work on Iranian-Pakistani relations and its history: Alex Vatanka, Iran and Pakistan. Security, Diplomacy and American Influence, 2015/2017, p. 259). Another consequence of this rather ambitious fencing project will be the factual establishment of an identifiable-for-all border between both countries, making Kabul protestations about it largely futile. No Afghan government since 1947 has ever acknowledged the 'colonial' Durand-line, established in 1893, as an international border between both countries.

In this way, Pakistan seeks to limit the impact of the endless Afghan war and its highly damaging by-products on its soil; drugs, guns, warlords, terrorists. At least, once effective border controls are in place, breaks may be put on an otherwise uninterrupted amount of terrorists' border crossings, enhancing Pakistan's 'leverage' over all Taliban groupings. But will it help to bring peace?

In sum

The thorough combining of many written public resources, Wikileaks information and (over 550!) interviews, including with I.S.I. cooperatives, regularly sheds new light on a number of processes and events, even for long-time 'Afghan war watchers'. It made me wonder what other dark secrets remain to be unearthed? Coll's main contribution is in carefully (re-)constructing the backgrounds of a number of crucial developments and events in the years 2001- 2016, mirroring the subtitle of the book.

In 2017 and 2018, new leaders are in place, and several 'new' developments have accelerated: the rise of Islamic State in the region: continued operations against militants by Pakistan's new army leader Bajwa: a more aggressive policy by India's Modi towards Pakistan and its own minorities: Pakistan's interim-Prime Minister Abbasi replacing Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif after the latter was sacked by Pakistan's Supreme Court: China's increasing economic and diplomatic presence in the region: the rapid implementation of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC): frantic Afghan peace efforts: considerable territorial gains by the Taliban: President Trump's 'new' Afghan strategy and its effects.

Coll's book to date provides the most complete, detailed story of the US Afghan war between 2001 and 2016, quite an achievement. It needs and deserves to be read by a wide audience; by all government members of all countries somehow involved in the Afghan war, by those generally interested in, and concerned about, 'America's longest war', and professional 'South Asia watchers'.

If only to get to grips with the many complicated realities of South Asia, it must be hoped that Coll will not keep us waiting for another fourteen years before he publishes part three of his 'journalistic history' of the 'Afghan war'. My guess is, he won't.

Note

(1). As President Ashraf Ghani made his latest peace-offer to the Taliban, veteran Afghan researchers and analysts Barnett Rubin and Thomas Ruttig both published their own 'manifestos' for Afghan peace-making.

Rubin, in his 'Theses on Peacemaking in Afghanistan: a Manifesto' (in: [War on the Rocks](#), February 23, 2018), identifies two major reasons for all major powers in this world to allocate resources to stabilize Afghanistan: preventing terrorist groups from establishing secure bases there, and; promoting the economic rise of continental and South Asia by securing investments and integrating Afghanistan into those connective networks. Afghan governments themselves have never been able to build and sustain a state, so, who will build it, pay for it, and fight for it? Clearly, foreign powers must continue as aid donors and/or security providers. Also, economic cooperation with neighbouring countries is required.

Rubin rightly mentions the dangers of estranging other powers in the region. However, he should also have emphasized that any action taken by whatever country is, of necessity, *never* rooted in altruism, but stems from bare self-interest, whether coming from Islamabad, Teheran, Delhi, Washington, or Beijing. Paradoxically, only security forces (army, police, intelligence) independent of factional allegiances can protect a non-military, [Afghan] political arena. Rubin acknowledges that such an Afghan force does not currently exist, and apparently does not expect it to exist in any foreseeable future. Instead, he pins his high hopes on the increasing 'connectivity' of the region, primarily worked by growing Chinese and Indian economics.

That sounds fine; if only China and India could somehow cooperate instead of mobilizing their military forces against each other! Besides, will the US ever settle for functioning as some sort of Beijing-funded military peace-keeping role in Afghanistan? Although nowadays widely considered to be a declining major power, becoming a subcontractor for rising major powers like China is not appealing to Washington. Precisely to maintain its

strategic position in the region, the Obama and Trump administrations have been courting relationships with India.

Thomas Ruttig has provided us with his own - 25 - peace-making theses on Afghanistan entitled 'The Road to Turkestan or: More Theses on Peacemaking in Afghanistan. manifesto No 2'. It was published by the Afghanistan Analysts Network organization, February 28, 2018. Concentrating on 'peace', as Rubin does, without looking at Afghanistan's internal defects only addresses half of the problem. According to Ruttig, the main culprit in this respect is the over-centralised Afghan political system that was created in Bonn, 2001. Ruttig's point makes hard sense; his sobering analysis does not provide the same 'escape route' of enlarged regional connectivity as Rubin's theses foresees. Rather, Ruttig thinks a degree of de-centralisation, and some elements of devolution, may stimulate stronger national cohesion.

One should note here, though, that Afghanistan has always been most tranquil when ruled by a strong centralized monarchy, keeping its ethnic rivalries in check, and neighbouring countries at a distance. After all, in this way the kingdom of Afghanistan (or Pushtunistan) has been founded in the eighteenth century.

Ever since, as major powers grew in size and force, traditional Afghan state-structures, once sufficiently but rudimentary developed at best, in the second half of the 20th century could no longer successfully resist foreign interferences and, in its wake, increasing domestic political diversification. In a globalized 21st century, enforcing political 'modernity' on a still largely traditional Afghan society as the Bonn agreement of 2001 did, has severely back-fired, indeed.

POSTED on April 18, 2018

