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The General of the Generals

You would have heard about many Generals who know the dirty tricks to lengthen their rule, but have you heard of silent soldier who led the Afghan Jihad against a super power and forced them to leave Afghanistan. When future students of Pakistan's history may find it incredible that how a guerrilla war could have waged on such a gigantic scale by General Akhtar. Albiet, a General of the generals could only have done it.

Born in Peshawar on 11th June, 1924, he was the son of Dr Abdul Rahman Khan, who spent 30 years as a doctor in the NWFP government service. Unfortunately, his father died when Akhtar was only four, so his mother took the family back to their native village in Jallundhar area of East Punjab. From then on, his upbringing was humble, and in many ways hard.

His formal education was at college in Amritsar, and then at the Government College in Lahore where he obtained a masters degree in Economics in 1945. Akhtar joined the Indian Army in the same year and was commissioned in early 1947. Akhtar was a junior artillery officer when Pakistan emerged.

He fought against India three times before he faced the Soviets

in Afghanistan. In 1948, he participated in the Kashmir War that gave him the opportunity to operate with tribal Lashkars. With them, he gained an understanding of the tribal psyche that eventually helped him direct the Afghan war over 30 years later.

At 50, he was given command of an infantry division, and he remained with it in Azad Kashmir for four years from 1974 to 1978. His final appointment before going to ISI was as Adjutant General of the Army. In June, 1979, Akhtar was posted as Director General ISI. He was picked up for the job by President Zia. Gen Akhtar was the architect of the Afghan Jihad. It was he who advocated Pakistani participation, it was he who devised the overall military strategy, and it was he who supervised its implementation so skillfully that it enabled the Mujahideen to defeat a superpower. One of Gen Akhtar's greatest contributions to the success of the Jihad was regarding the Mujahideen united. Akhtar maintained to win a guerrilla war on such a scale, the operations must be coordinated, they must be selective, and they must be carried out in the spirit of cooperation. His major achievement

in the field was to get the Sev-Party Alliance established by President Zia in 1984. It was through the alliance of political parties that Akhtar controlled the campaign effort.

He faced many problems with the Americans and the CIA. The CIA, and senior US government officials, pressed Akhtar to be allowed to decide who got the arms, how much they received, what targets the Mujahideen should assault and demanded that American instructors should train the Mujahideen. None of these things ever happened while Akhtar was Director-General.

There were two fundamental reasons why Akhtar never allowed Americans to become directly involved in the Jihad. Firstly, to do so would have meant giving truth to Soviet propaganda that the war was not a Jihad, but an extension of US foreign

policy, with Afghan fighting Afghans on behalf of the two superpowers. To fight in a Jihad was the most powerful force for unity among the Mujahideen, if this could be undermined, the shaky Alliance would collapse.

The second reason for keeping Americans out was that the CIA, their methods were clumsy, unrealistic, and often totally unprofessional. This was not really surprising as they were not military men, they had no relevant experience, and above all they did not understand the Afghans. In short, to let them loose among the Mujahideen would have courted strategic and tactical disasters. Thus he kept the Americans away from the battlefield.

Perhaps, he was the only man capable of doing that. Even the president was under pressure to give the US a free hand, but it was Akhtar's strength of character that prevailed. After being unsuccessful

ful to gain control over Afghanistan, the Soviets decided to destabilise Pakistan. The sabotage activities like bombing the cities and air and artillery strikes in the bordering areas in the garb of hot pursuits were unleashed to weaken Pakistan. To teach a lesson to the Russians, Akhtar planned to take the war into the Soviet territory. Series of small-scale actions were planned and boldly executed by the Afghan Mujahideen inside the Soviet territory which have got the desired effects on her Muslim population.

If such attacks were to continue unchecked it might not be long before they had a general uprising on their hand. Unfortunately, all such attacks were halted (after Akhtar's departure from ISI) when the Soviet's ambassador gave a stern warning to the foreign office.

The first move to undermine the Jihad was the removal of Gen Akhtar. This was done by Pakistan's President, but at the instigation of the US. Once Akhtar had gone the whole process of political intrigue, and the weakening of the military effort, gathered momentum. It was Akhtar who had resisted all the American pressures; he was seen as the champion of an outright military victory and the establishment of

an Islamic government in Kabul. The US exerted pressure on Zia to remove him.

Then was the air crash which killed both President Zia and Gen Akhtar deliberately and the US Ambassador and Military Attaché accidentally. Immediately the Americans blocked an attempt to uncover the culprits.

The likelihood was that the KGB or KHAD, RAW or even the CIA had been involved, with the collusion of some Pakistani military personnel.

To expose them would upset American plans and probably lead to public demands for retaliation - after all two senior US officials had been murdered. The US was not sorry to see him go; and they regarded him as a liability who could not be removed by political means.

In the short history of Pakistan, he is the only General to have master minded a victory in major war earn a name of military genius. The army and the nation need to salute him.

—Mohammad Yousaf

