

**Book Review**  
**By**  
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**Carlotta Gall, *The Wrong Enemy: America in Afghanistan 2001-2014* (Penguin Books Ltd, 2014), 329**

In *The Wrong Enemy: America in Afghanistan 2001-2014* Carlotta Gall argues that Pakistan is responsible for the resurgence of Taliban resistance post 2001 and negatively impacted US war strategy in Afghanistan. In her opinion, the patronage and protection that Taliban movement enjoyed within Pakistan after their retreat from Afghanistan was not coincidental but a matter of policy by the Pakistan army.

The book is a narrative about the conditions, resources and methods used by the Taliban to stage a comeback within few years after their defeat in 2001. It also narrates how the local, regional and global developments helped the insurgency in maintaining its momentum against the Western forces. The title of the book “The Wrong Enemy” is a quotation from Richard C. Holbrooke, the United States special representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan, who said: “We may be fighting the wrong enemy in the wrong country.”

As a part of her job as a reporter with daily New York Times, Carlotta Gall was able to observe the conflict and insurgency in Afghanistan at the local and regional levels by going into the field. She was able to travel in the pro-Taliban villages extensively, mainly in Southern Afghanistan, to study the insurgency’s main support base. Looking at the situation at the local level, Gall addresses and explains how poor governance in Afghanistan, local grievances of Pushtun tribes, Islamic influence, civilian casualties caused by US raids and their support for Afghan militias, resulted in creating the support base for the Taliban.

At the regional level, Gall explains Pakistan’s linkages with Taliban, which in her view was an important reason for the worsening situation in Afghanistan. The author also highlights misplaced US priorities and insufficient resource allocation to Afghanistan as contributing factors for the Taliban gains during 2003-2009 period.

The book attempts to give a voice to common man on the ground in Afghanistan and present the viewpoints of tribal leaders, former Mujahedeen and common

villagers regarding the insurgency and state of governance in Afghanistan. Gall has reproduced, in the book, the wide spread grievances and resentments of the larger segments of Afghan population against the US led international forces and Kabul administration in an unadulterated manner.

The broader chronicling by Gall on Afghan war, Pakistan's relationships with militant groups and the thesis that the real enemy for the US in the region is Pakistan army and ISI is hardly new. The segment of the book which has attracted wider attention to the book are where the author talks about the security structure that she believed existed in Pakistan which knew Osama Bin Laden's (OBL) exact whereabouts.

Except for one unnamed inside source claimed by Gall, possibly from the US, the book provides no new information or definitive proof of Pakistani complicity in hiding OBL and the discussion remains limited to circumstantial evidence. Gall admits that the information of a special 'one-man' desk ran by the ISI to handle OBL was never confirmed by a second source but claimed in the book that two former senior government officials affirmed that the information was consistent with their own findings. This thin evidence, however, does not prevent her from claiming Pakistan's complicity.

Despite the unfounded sensationalism the strong point of the book is that Gall has reached out to people on the ground in Afghanistan in order to understand the societal support for Pushtun insurgency there. The author also managed to interview some of important operational commanders of the Taliban providing the readers a mix insurgent viewpoint of both resilience and some fatigue. The local account presented by the author reaffirms the viewpoint held by many experts of the subject that the fundamental driver of Taliban insurgency rests within Afghanistan. External circumstances are only a partial explanation of the enduring insurgency.

American policy in Afghanistan has not escaped scrutiny and criticism in the book. The author criticizes US policy and considers it a major reason for instability in Afghanistan. Some components of US strategy that Gall scrutinizes are diversion from Afghanistan to Iraq, less resource allocation, military raids on civilian population and supporting criminal elements within Afghan society for limited tactical gains.

She also explains how the US lost the battle of hearts and minds in Afghanistan by alienating local populations, thus creating space for the insurgents to expand their support base among the Pushtun tribes and villagers. A good example is the heartbreaking story of Dilawar, a naive taxi driver who was wrongly arrested in Khost in eastern Afghanistan, incarcerated in an isolation ward at the US airbase at Bagram and then beaten to death by his American jailors. She spent many weeks tracking down Dilawar's family and obtained the death certificate issued by the US Army. On other occasions, Gall describes the anger and rage within the locals in the aftermaths of night raids and bombings on people gathered for the wedding processions.

Gall has provided no insights on the larger regional geopolitical struggle in Afghanistan due to which regional powers, including Pakistan, have to maintain contacts, and support groups within Afghanistan. Unlike what Gall would like her readers to believe, supporting sub-conventional/proxy forces as tools of statecraft is a phenomenon not limited to Pakistan. In several other instances states in the region and other parts of the world have relied on proxies to enhance their security and mitigate geo-political threats.

Moreover, Gall does not investigate Pakistan's role in helping the US in integrating militant groups into US supported political system in Afghanistan or how information provided by Pakistan regarding their operations supported US war effort. Carey Schofield in her book *Inside the Pakistan army: A women's experience on the frontlines of the war on terror* has described in detail how both major and minor Pakistan military operations in FATA, since 2002, were driven with US assistance and support. Details of secret meetings between US and Pakistan army's senior leadership available through WikiLeaks reveal a different picture of US-Pakistan relations when it comes to Taliban and Afghanistan as opposed to the simplistic "double game" argument furthered by Gall.

The book is a narration of the war in Afghanistan post 2001 written from a journalistic viewpoint. The book lacks in-depth analysis of various internal and external factors that were responsible for setback to the US forces in Afghanistan. It includes some new information related to Afghan war but hardly adds to the existing body of the knowledge on the subject. Moreover, majority of sources in the

book regarding Taliban's relationship with Pakistan are cited from Afghan intelligence sources which are reflexively anti Pakistan and are biased.

The use of information in the book based on accounts by intelligence sources is an acceptable practice. As a journalist however, it is important to double check the information received from one source from another sources. Difficult as that may be, a more rigorous use of tools of research methodology could have been practiced by the author to better explain and contextualize the intelligence information. This approach is something which is missing in the book.

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