



Gary Bowersox
on Afghanistan,
Pakistan
War & Politics
Excerpted from
*The Gem
Hunter, True
Adventures of
an American in
Afghanistan*

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- In the aftermath of 9-11, I was one of the Americans who knew the most about the geology and politics of Afghanistan. That's why they wanted to talk to me. I was happy to comply. It wasn't just the Department of Defense who wanted my view. So did Diane Sawyer on "Good Morning America." I was glad to talk to anyone who would listen. But my message was always the same. Our government, in our names, supported the wrong guys. In some cases, we are continuing to do it. The reasons, while unclear, have as much to do with oil and drugs and money as they do with the Taliban and al-Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden. And the sooner we, the people, understand that, the sooner we will be able to put our energies where they will do the most good.
- Massoud's capture of the important emerald mining area of Dara-e-Khanj in late 1981 gave him an extensive and unprecedented financial resource. The presence of emeralds there had just been a rumor until the 1970's, but developed quickly. According to the Associated Press, 10 September 1982, Radio Free Afghanistan, Massoud's yearly income from the Dara-e-Khanj precious stone mines reached \$100 million dollars ... That was enough money was to support a war effort.
- The roads – and often even the adjacent fields and hills, would often be mined, since Afghanistan is the most heavily land mined country in the world. Estimates of the number of mines range from six to eight million. Landmines are very egalitarian. They don't care who you are.
- There were 100,000 Soviet troops occupying Afghanistan fighting against seven US-backed rebel factions. In 1985, the US sharply increased its covert support for these mujahideen, providing both high-tech weaponry and expertise, all funneled through Pakistan's ISI. Some estimate that the US gave more than \$2 billion worth of guns and money to the now 12 Afghan rebel factions during the 1980's, the largest US covert action since World War II
- In Afghanistan, as in Pakistan, the Sunnis represent 75% of the population; the Shiites are about 24%. Most of the Shia minority are *Hazara*. ... Because they are from the same religious denomination, they have maintained direct ties to Iran since the early 1700's. Easily identified by their Mongolian features, the Hazara were persecuted by the Taliban, who are Sunni. Mass graves of Hazaras who were killed as little as a month before the fall of the Taliban are still being found today
- The Brits were too smart to pick a side in a civil war. To have done so would be a bit like the cliché that when you sleep with someone, you are sleeping with everyone she has ever slept with as well. Because when you take an ally, you risk becoming the enemy to anyone he has ever fought. Our foreign policy in Central Asia has fallen into this trap. By aligning ourselves with Pakistan, a notoriously corrupt, major drug-producing nation, we have brought about a host of unintended consequences.

- From out of the religious schools in Pakistan emerged the Taliban. They were Afghans who had been indoctrinated into a fundamentalist Islam and given military and arms. And who was behind this? Pakistan's ISI, of course, with money from Saudi Arabia and substantial support from our own CIA.
- As an American I had great difficulty understanding how the US could justify continuing to back the Pakistan government and, in turn, the Taliban with funding and supplies. Given the rhetoric about drugs and women's rights, how could we, in good conscience, have support rapidly increasing drug production and the Taliban's extremely abusive policies against women. Women were not allowed to work, attend school, or even go outdoors without escort by their husbands or fathers and totally covering themselves.
- In addition, rumor has it that the earlier bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City was planned in Peshawar. Certainly most of the characters involved had often spent time in Peshawar. Now, in hindsight, it is too easy to speculate. But our government chose its allies badly back in the eighties, when the CIA funded the recruitment and training of thousands of recruits from the world over to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan. Among them were Osama bin Laden and the core many who later joined al Qaeda. And our government continued to support the wrong regime with the wrong values even in the face of mounting evidence against them. And continues to do so now in Pakistan. What will it take for us to learn?
- The UN Security Council, recognizing the Taliban as the horror they were, began imposing sanctions on them in November 1999, and would later strengthen them. They even demanded the extradition of Osama bin Laden. I was very disappointed but not surprised that neither US newspapers nor the US government criticized Pakistan for backing the Taliban or bin Laden. Was this the politics of petroleum at work?
- I detailed the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan with the war, weapons, and Osama bin Laden's collection boxes. My main purpose for the meeting was to assist in arranging for a meeting between Ahmed Shah Massoud and Colin Powell to discuss the situation. I walked out of the State Department offices in Washington, DC after being told that there was no interest in discussing anything with Massoud. Massoud was fatally injured by homicide-bomber terrorists who gained access to him by claiming to be Arab journalists. Two days later came 9-11.
- We understand the world by labeling. It is convenient and comforting. When we use labels, we *think* we know what things are, because we know their names. That helps us make sense of things --- even senseless ones. We have the illusion of certainty. It is deliciously simple to live in certainty. But it is a luxury we can't afford to see things only through our own lense and frame of reference, and to discount all others ... But labels are, of necessity, reductionistic and oversimplifying. A problem arises when we begin to mistake our convenient reductions for the truth. We confuse our simple map with the complex territory, and the label for the thing itself. We think we can manipulate labels in order to understand the world, but in fact, we can only know it through experience.
- Pakistan believes that a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan will be an ally and give its army strategic depth against India and Iran. Despite its tolerance of Taliban policies and practices of growing poppies for production of opium and abusing human rights, including denying women education and work, the US government continues to support Pakistan.

Media Note:

For a review book or to arrange an interview with Gary Bowersox, contact Scott Lorenz of Westwind Communications at scottlorenz@westwindcos.com or by phone at: 734-667-2090 or cell: 248-705-2214. **The Gem Hunter, True Adventures of an American in Afghanistan** (ISBN 0-9747323-1-1 \$29.95 505 pages) is available from the publisher at www.thegemhunter.net or by calling 877-612-9078.