

The beginning of the nuclear era

BILLY I AHMED

THE history of mankind was once again scarred by the horror of war. If the time-honoured code against the use of toxic chemicals was breached during the First World War, the Second World War witnessed another violation of time-honoured tradition. On 25 July 1945, the moral debate ended when Truman ordered to drop the first atomic weapon "as soon as weather will permit visual bombing after 3 August 1945." It marked the beginning of the nuclear era.

Truman's monumental decision

The US President Truman's monumental decision, to drop these bombs, came out of a complex background of decisions. Pressure to drop the bomb stemmed from three major categories: military, domestic and diplomatic. The military pressures stemmed from discussion and meetings Truman had with Secretary of War Stimson, Army Chief of Staff General Marshall, Chief of Staff Admiral William Leahy, Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal and others. On June 18, 1945, General Marshall and Secretary of War Stimson convinced Truman to set an invasion of the island of Kyushu for November 1945. Truman knew of the ferocious fighting taking place in the Pacific.

Truman naturally had a need to lessen what he felt would inevitably be a long, bloody struggle. The solution was the bomb. Even to the end, Truman implied the bomb was something for which the American people should be proud of, because it eventually saved more Ameri-

can lives. Truman knew that if he backed down from not dropping the bomb and did not remain firm on his stance with Japan, the American public might be outraged. The attack on Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941, by the Japanese, sinking 19 ships and killing about 2400 American soldiers and sailors, was also one of the justifications President Truman gave for his decision.

Above all, the use of the bomb was meant to prove the undisputed dominant position of the United States in the post-war period.

The daytime that stood still in Hiroshima

In the early morning hours of August 6, 1945, an American B-29 Superfortress, the Enola Gay, the warplane named after the mother of the pilot Paul Tibbets Jr., taxied down the runway of an American airbase on the Pacific island of Tinian. It flew for almost six hours, encountering no resistance from the ground.

At 8:15 a.m. local time, the Enola Gay dropped its payload over the clear skies of Hiroshima, a Japanese city with an estimated population of 255,000. The atomic bomb the plane was carrying, "Little Boy," detonated some 600 metres above the city centre, killing 80,000 people 30 per cent of the population immediately or within hours of the explosion. The Little Boy indiscriminately killed at least 100,000 people and maimed and shocked thousands of people of Hiroshima. Indeed the whole world reacted in disbelief.

In less than a minute after the release, flashes of light appeared in midair about

600 metres (1,800 feet) above the ground. Then, a large fireball formed which rapidly transformed into a loud deafening blast. A terrifying tower of flames struck the ground and almost instantaneously shot up to form a giant mushroom-like cloud measuring 9,000 metres (27,000 feet) high. The dark clouds of dust drifted toward the northwest followed by the "black rain". The explosion was revolutionary not only in its destructive power (including radiation), but also strategic and tactical implications.

At the hypocenter, the surroundings temperature instantly jumped to around 7,000 degrees. The heat wasn't the worst of it. The real damage was done by the unworldly winds produced by the explosion. The wind speed at the hypocenter was 980 mph. By comparison, a Class 5 hurricane, at 156 mph will destroy everything in its path.

One-third of a mile from the hypocenter, the wind speed had dropped to 620 mph. Almost leaving nothing standing within this range but for a couple of concrete buildings. A mile out, the 190-mph wind was enough to destroy brick buildings.

The July 24, 1995 issue of Newsweek reports that... "A bright light filled the plane," wrote Col. Paul Tibbets, the pilot of the Enola Gay, the B-29 that dropped the first atomic bomb. "We turned back to look at Hiroshima. The city was hidden by that awful cloud...boiling up, mushrooming." For a moment, no one spoke. Then everyone was talking. "Look at that! Look at that! Look at that!" exclaimed the copilot, Robert Lewis, pounding on Tibbets's shoulder. Lewis said he could taste atomic fission; it tasted like lead. Then he turned away to write in his journal. "My God," he asked himself, "what have we done?" (Special Report, "Hiroshima: August 6, 1945")

Little Boy

The atomic bomb named "Little Boy" dropped on the Hiroshima City, employed uranium-235 and was equivalent in power of 15 kilotons of TNT gunpowder roughly. The energy dissipated is believed to have been in the following ratio: bomb blast - 50%, thermal rays - 35% and radiation - 15%. Estimation the bomb blast travelled about 3 km, the thermal rays, about 3.5 km, and radiation, about 2 km, from the hypocenter, respectively. (Figure prepared by Radiation Effects Research Foundation.)

Fat Man

The atomic bomb, nicknamed "Fat Man", which was dropped on the Nagasaki City, exploded at an estimated altitude of 500 metres at 11:02 am. The atomic bomb employed plutonium-239 and was equivalent in power nearly 21 kilotons of TNT gunpowder. The dissipation of energy is believed to have been in the following ratio: bomb blast - 50% thermal rays-35%-35% and radiation-15%. It was estimated that the bomb blast traveled about 5 km, the thermal rays, about 4 km, and radiation, about 2.5 km, from the hypocenter, respectively. (Figure prepared by Radiation Effects Research Foundation.)

Health Hazard

Today, especially after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it is recognised that radioactive compounds can threaten the whole

human race, if not every form of life on this planet. As such it is important for all of us to know about such substances and what it stands for. Someone exposed to small doses of radiation can lose all the hairs in the body as obvious in patients who undergo cancer radiotherapy. With the atomic bomb exposure, those involved continued to be vulnerable to certain risks for several years. This is found in a study conducted almost 20 years after the bombing incident. In 1967, the US Academy of Sciences showed, between 1950 and 1960, those subjects who had been within less than 1.8 kilometres of the epicentre of the explosion, and had survived the early irradiation, had an incidence of leukemia 13 times greater than a control group not exposed to radiation.

Upshot

Dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki pushed our world into the nuclear age. Today, many people question the wisdom of having used the atomic weapons against Japan. But by developing nuclear weapons, we are coming to realise the pain and devastation that these can cause. The world must understand the consequences of using nuclear arms, of total destructive power that destroy nature. It should have never been used but most importantly, the world should not rely on them to preserve peace. We need to face the diversity of the races in a country and have a balance between economic and social development. Difference in economic developments among different countries triggers war between them. We must learn from our past to be able to control the nuclear threat and strive towards maintaining peace in the world or we might destroy ourselves with the new technology.

To commemorate the 60th anniversary of Nagasaki devastation a Catholic Mass, a moment of silence and an angry plea for a global ban on nuclear arms was held. Nagasaki Mayor Ichio Itoh then had some angry words for the leaders of the nuclear powers, especially the United States. "We understand your anger and anxiety over the memories of the horror of the 9-11 terrorist attacks," he said. "Yet, is your security enhanced by your government's policies of maintaining 10,000 nuclear weapons, of carrying out repeated sub-critical nuclear tests, and of pursuing the development of new 'mini' nuclear weapons?" Itoh also urged Japan to get out from under the U.S. "nuclear umbrella."

As one Nicholas Doughy wrote, "Born in a flash of white light and enough heat to turn desert sand into glass, the nuclear age that started 50 years ago offered humankind a bargain worthy of the Devil himself". Exposure to radiation in 1945 continues to this day to threaten the health and well being of the survivors.

The deadly nuclear clouds hang evermore dangerously over our heads. On the subject of "should we or shouldn't we have dropped the bomb," it seems like the question that shouldn't be asked, let alone answered.

The author is a columnist and researcher.

BOOK REVIEW

Ghost Wars

The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan and Bin Laden from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001 by Steve Coll, Penguin Books 2005 (paperback). 712 pages

REVIEWED BY MUMTAZ IQBAL

Washington Post's former South Asia bureau chief and current Managing Editor Steve Coll's Ghost Wars is a meticulously researched, lucidly written and absorbing book that should hold the readers attention throughout its 588 pages of text, though the plethora of detail sometimes overwhelm.

Coll's 1,076 footnotes covering 78 pages (12% of text) contain sparkling vignettes that add colour to the context and bring its colourful characters to life. The book is a drama in three acts. Their endings vary from the eminently desirable to the imponderably somber to the forebodingly tragic. A four-page list of the dramatis personae and three maps facilitate comprehension.

ACT I: HUMBLING THE BEAR

The first act (Blood Brothers) covers November 1979 to February 1989 when Afghan resistance helped by CIA, Pakistan and Saudi intelligence forced Moscow to quit Afghanistan.

Russia's current diminished condition shouldn't mask the fact that the USSR bestrode the world like a Colossus in the 1970s, despite a moribund economy; a gerontocratic leadership; a jaded ideology; and restless peoples on her western and southern marches.

So when Afghan dissidents in 1979 threatened the stability of the Soviet puppet leaders in Kabul, the Kremlin invoking the Brezhnev Doctrine intervened to save face.

Moscow's lightning occupation of Kabul on 24 December 1979 set the stage for a Faustian bargain between US/Pakistan/KSA motivated by differing considerations: Cold War (US); Afghan irredentism (Pakistan); and expand influence (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia or KSA).

American assistance, with matching Saudi GID (General Intelligence Dept.) money, expanded exponentially under Reagan. As quartermaster, the CIA supplied simple and sophisticated weaponry AK47s to Stingers including invaluable Chinese and Texas pack mulesthat overcame the Soviet advantage in tanks, Mi24 Hind helicopter gunships and Spetsnaz forces.

The CIA funneled aid to seven Mujahideen (freedom fighter) groups through Pakistan's ISI (Inter Services Intelligence). By early 1983, CIA received complaints from many Afghans about ISI's favouritism to Sunni religious organisations.

But the complaints were redundant. By then, Moscow was inextricably bogged down. It had had enough by 1987, started pulling out 15 May 1988, with the last soldier 40th. Soviet Army commanding General Boris Gromov--leaving 15 February 1989.

That day CIA Islamabad sent a two-word cable constructed as crosses to its HQ: WE WON. US for a change had sided with and not against a war of national liberation, hitherto a Soviet preserve. The Vietnam stain expiated, Langley uncorked chilled champagne. Revenge, so goes the French adage, is a dish best eaten cold.

During the war, Saudi and Gulf money financed the establishment of numerous NGOs located around Peshawar that serviced 4,000 Arab volunteers including Osama bin Laden (UBL-the acronym CIA used).

ACT II: THE TALIBANS ASCENT

The second act (The One-Eyed Man was King) extends from March 1989 to December 1997 when Washington dumped Kabul; UBL loomed larger on the CIA's radar; and two Mujahideen groups struggled for power.

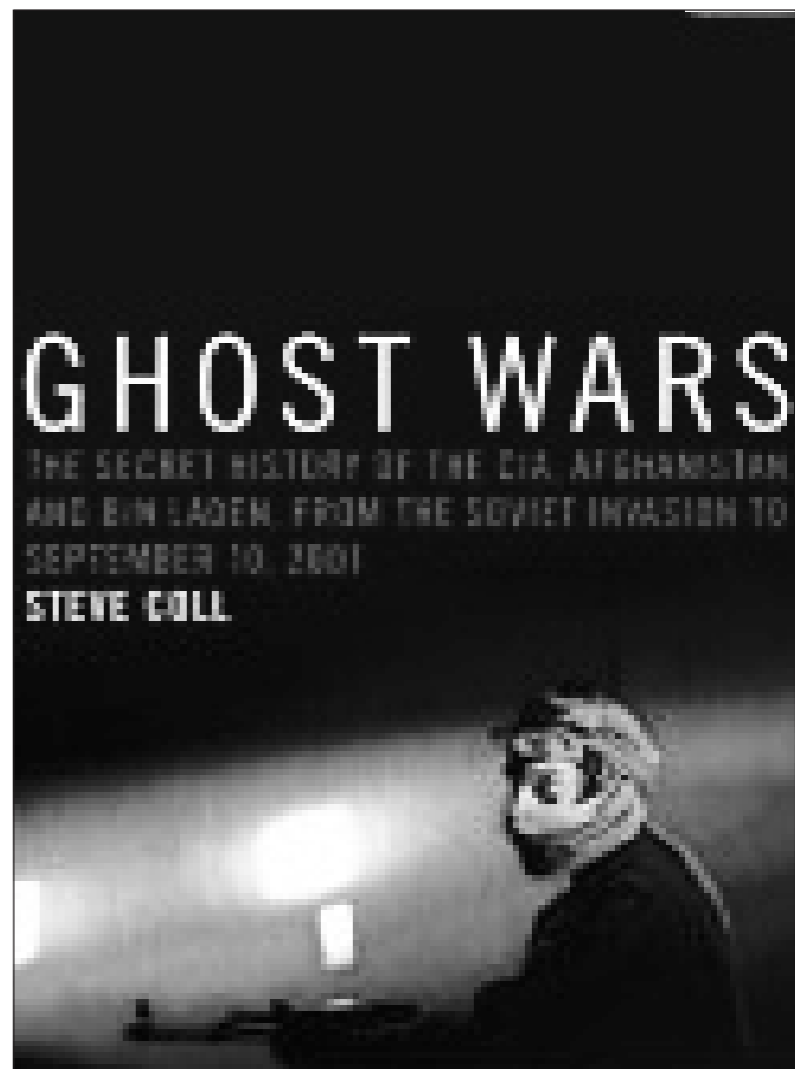
The Uzbek/Tajik Northern Alliance, led by the Shia Persian speaking CIA favourite Tajik, Ahmed Shah Massoud, outnumbered Sunni Pashtun Pushto speaking ISI/GID supported, anti-US fundamentalist, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, to capture Kabul from Moscow's proxy Najibullah, in April 1992. The peeved Hekmatyar responded with deadly rocket attacks on the capital, prolonging the bloody civil war.

Paradoxically neither group won but a Johnny-come-lately surfacing in 1994 did. A small militia of Talibs-religious students widely respected in conservative Kandahar and surrounding areas--supported by Durrani Pashtun traders and chieftains captured Kandahar in mid-1994.

Thereafter, GID money and ISI muscle helped the Taliban capture Herat, Kabul (when quixotic edicts regulating social behaviour followed) and Mazar (temporarily) by May 1997. Late Pakistani President Zia's dream of a "loyal, Pashtun-led Islamist government in Kabul" seemed to be realized when Pakistan, KSA and UAE recognized the Taliban.

This ran counter to US policy that advocated power sharing amongst Afghan factions. But Washington couldn't or wouldn't do much about this, focused as it was on weightier post Cold War and S. Asia regional issues.

One subject US diplomats pursued energetically was UNOCAL's pipeline project to pump Turkmenistan's "stranded gas" through Taliban-controlled southern Afghanistan. The CIA maintained its links with ISI, though the 1980s honeymoon became strained due to a divergence



of interests. ACT III: THE HUNT FOR UBL

The third act (The Distant Enemy) covers January 1998 to September 10, 2001 when Washington mounted abortive efforts to capture or kill UBL after gradually concluding he was an existential threat.

A minor player in Pakistan in 1980s and, upon his return to KSA in early 1990, a stern critic of the House of Saud, especially its decision to invite GIs into KSA, UBL attracted CIA's serious attention only after being exiled to Khartoum in 1991.

There, he crossed swords with the CIA which became worried enough to form a separate bin Laden unit within the Counter-terrorism Centre (CTC) on 1 January 1996 to keep closer tabs on this enigmatic, angry and outcast scion of a well-connected wealthy Saudi business house.

By this time, UBL was viscerally anti-American, a feeling exacerbated by being forced to relocate from Sudan to Jalalabad, eastern Afghanistan, in spring 1996 under US pressure on Khartoum. He moved to the Taliban power centre of Kandahar end-1996 and developed a close enough rapport with the one-eyed Taliban chief Omar to have his cabinet unanimously endorse a fateful alliance with al-Qaeda end-1999.

US attitude towards UBL was ambivalent at first. The CIA mid-1997 evaluated UBL as "an active, dangerous financier of Islamist terrorism in Egypt, Sudan, Algeria and Kashmir." However, neither UBL nor al-Qaeda was on State's first list of officially designated Foreign Terrorist Organisations issued in autumn 1997. This ambivalence originated from the extensive but somewhat inconclusive internal US debate on terrorism - a police or national security problem? - and Washington's preoccupation with heftier issues such as USSR's dissolution and S. Asia nuclear proliferation.

Coll shows that the Hydra-headed nature of these issues caused honest differences of opinion and shades of emphasis within the US national security establishment about UBL and Taliban, both given somewhat grudging priority by Clinton and Bush officials. Clinton's impeachment and the 2000 presidential elections distracted policy makers.

After Tenet became director in July 1997, CIA policy towards UBL became more aggressive, once the White House decided in spring 1998 to capture, and then in August 1998, to kill him, decisions catalysed by Nairobi and Zanzibar bombings August 1998, and USS Cole attack October 2000.

The intense legal deliberations underlying these decisions recounted by Coll recall the mediaeval theologians' arcane disputation about the number of angels that can fit a pinhead!

Coll graphically describes the CIA's measures to refine (unilaterals; satellite; Predator) its intelligence on UBL and proposals (raids; missile attacks) to nail him. Policy makers rejected most proposals for various reasons. Inadequate real time intelligence and logistical constraints explains the Pentagon's diffidence towards using Special Forces. US exhorting Pakistani and KSA authorities, to intercede with the Taliban to surrender UBL, got nowhere.

Meanwhile, UBL had set in motion his plan to attack the US homeland. The tragic denouement of 9/11 happened as the Bush administration contemplated more muscular measures against him.

RICH TAPESTRY OF PERSONALITIES

Somewhat larger than life cloak and dagger characters dot Ghost Wars. Catholic Knight of Malta and OSS veteran CIA Director Bill Casey viewed Afghanistan as a messianic struggle between Jesus and Marx. Smooth and soothing operator Tenet grasped the



On the causes of terror bombing

ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER

AFTER London bombing on 07th July 2005 a debate is raging on the causes of suicide or terror bombings. There are different views, of course. Some commentators emphasise that Islam breeds contempt and violence against the "others" and especially against the West and that motivates the young angry Muslims to attempt suicide bombing. Some others maintain that it is inspired by Afghan and Iraq war. And some others maintain it is on account of madrasa education where narrow, sectarian attitude is imparted. Some also feel that it is alienation of the youth in western countries due to their marginalisation in that society.

All this may contain elements of truth but certainly not the whole truth. While truth is far more complex than simplified and even oversimplified explanations offered by any authors and commentators. We must look deeper and without prejudice if we want to understand the phenomenon, which has caused so much trouble today in the world. And it is far more necessary to understand it impartially if we seek to find solution to the problem.

Many commentators have also pointed out that any terrorism is a response to others' terrorism, especially state terrorism. They accuse USA and UK of much bigger terrorism in which not hundreds or thousands but hundreds of thousands are killed. Iraq war was certainly not fought on any valid reason. Moreover, it was fought against all international laws and in violation of UN resolution. The London bombing certainly cannot be explained away as act of barbarism against a civilised world. It is much more complex than that.

Firstly, those who indulge in such violence are, more often than not, not the product of madrasa education. Most of those involved come from well-educated middle class families. Some of them are even educated in western institutions and in liberal environment. This is often overlooked and the very Muslim name is taken as indicative of "Islamic fanaticism without considering his background.

We generally believe that western commentators and social scientists are 'quite objective'. This may be so where they are not emotionally involved. But when they are emotionally involved, like us lesser mortals, their objectivity also goes down the hill. Most of them would rather blame it on Islam and Islam alone ignoring all other factors. It is a different story about the rulers like Bush and Blair. For them it is "freedom and democracy" versus "terrorism and violence". While they are champions of freedom, the terrorists are inspired by hatred for their values and noting else.

Such an approach is, at best, oversim-

plification and at worst deceiving the world. If it were mere hatred for democracy and freedom the question arises why these terrorist attacks started from 2002 onwards. Why they did not take place earlier than that? Especially, earlier than the defeat of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and subsequent collapse of communism.

In order to understand these terrorist bombings one must study each event in depth and analyse motives of its actors both severally and jointly. Sweeping generalisations must be avoided as far as possible. Secondly, we must understand that religion alone can never explain everything. It can, at best, explain one of the factors, among many. Human behaviour is determined by host of complex factors in which religious beliefs, cultural and social factors, political causes and personal interests, all play role, some factors more, some less.

We should not rush to put labels before events are properly analysed and light thrown over hazy areas. It should also be found out who the actors are, what is their background. Whether they were madrasa educated or educated in modern secular institutions and what was their socio-cultural background. Did they belong to any extremist ideology or are they mere instruments in the hands of some bigger players. It is important to answer all these questions before we draw some tentative conclusions, as the final conclusion may have to wait after much greater degree of analysis and after all hazy areas are cleared. Sometimes no answers might be forthcoming enabling us to draw final conclusions.

The journalists may have to rush their articles with deadlines but their pieces can also indicate tentative nature of their conclusions with an air of humility instead of authoritative nature of their comments. This would save much greater trouble in times to come and will also help enlighten the policy makers. The policy makers are often victims of their own prejudices, apart from their economic and political interests.

It must be understood clearly that terror bombing is basically a political and not a religious response. The earlier we understand this the better it is for all of us. It is not to deny that some Muslims are advocates of political Islam and often miss spiritual Islam for political. It is also not to be denied that a section of Muslims lack tolerance towards others and display closed doctrinaire attitude. The madrasa system in particular lacks tolerance and tends to be very narrow, rigid and doctrinaire. The madrasas are intolerant not only towards non-Muslims but even more intolerant towards Muslims belonging to other schools of thought. Thus Wahabi Muslims

are more intolerant towards non-Wahabi Muslims than to Hindus or Christians and Sunnis towards Shi'ahs and so on. They label each other as kafirs.

It is indeed highly necessary for Muslim thinkers and intellectuals to promote tolerance and liberalism among Muslims and distance themselves from political Islam and be committed to its rich spiritual teachings. Political Islam has not helped them nor is it going to help them in future in the modern globalised world. A great majority of Muslims, needless to say, are not attracted towards political but to spiritual Islam and hold it dear to themselves.

In fact, it is the secular, modern educated Muslim youth, who is greatly attracted towards political Islam as the modern educated youth is far more aware of injustices being done to Muslims in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Chechnya and other places and the role played by western nations, particularly the USA in all this. They also become aware of the past colonial history and its continuation in modern times to varied degrees. Thus it is just not hatred of western freedom and democracy but exploitation of Muslims and injustices committed in its name that motivates them to violence.

Those who bombed London underground or those involved in 9/11 attacks in New York were all educated in the US or UK in modern institutions of learning. And that is why they were far more aware of injustices and hence got motivated to involve themselves in the revengeful acts killing innocent people. It was not hatred of the west but hatred towards its policies. One must distinguish between the two. Also, just because they hail from Saudi Arabia or Pakistan should not mislead us.

As pointed out above very complex factors determine human behaviour. The terrorist suicide bombers are no exception. There is no conclusive evidence available to show that in their case only religion or religious hatred towards the west motivated them to kill others as well as themselves. In case of London bombing on 7/7, it is being pointed out by some scholars and journalists like Amy Waldman of New York Times that "A life of total alienation led to a burst of rage in Leeds."

These young men are motivated by both injustices at home and abroad. Their alienation and frustration play no lesser role than the sense of injustices by the western rulers against Muslims abroad. One should not discount these factors, which many often do. The young Shi'ah Muslims of Iran in seventies of last century before Islamic revolution gravitated towards revolutionary ideology not because of their fanaticism but because of Shah's policies, which were seen as pro-US. In fact he was seen as nothing more than the US stooge.

The author is with the Centre for Study of Society and Secularism, Mumbai.

The author is a free lancer.