

War Against The Taliban: Why It All Went Wrong In Afghanistan  
by Sandy Gall.  
Bloomsbury 2012.

Since the terrorist attacks on America in 2001 books on Afghanistan and the Taliban have mushroomed, with new volumes being published every year. The difference between those volumes and this one, together with the several others written by Sandy Gall, is that they come from the pen of a man who has been involved with Afghanistan since the days of the Soviet invasion in the 1980s.

Due to his long-standing engagement with the region as a leading journalist, Gall has known many of the key protagonists and, for a Westerner, must have one of the best feels for it around today. This gives War Against the Taliban a depth and strength that enhances the contents immeasurably.

The book is divided into four parts, each with a number of subsections: Early Battles; Corruption and Bad Governance; Why We Failed in Helmand: Politicians or Generals?; End Game and the Pakistan Connection.

Gall ties together all the threads, contemporary and historical, doing nothing to allay fears about the region in general, about Afghanistan and Pakistan in particular, or about the futility of the ISAF efforts to control a situation that is now beyond control. Like others before him he lays much of the blame for the early mistakes made in Afghanistan after 9/11, and the distraction that was the ill-fated Iraq fiasco, squarely on the shoulders of the Bush administration and its incompetent and malevolent key figures.

War Against the Taliban is a further authoritative book about the disaster unfolding in the AfPak region, written by a journalist who has a record not only of astute observation but of internationally recognised humanitarian engagement. It is a sobering read, as are so many others, and a disturbing one, but it is also one of the best books of its kind available today.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh