

Midcoast Senior College
Southern New Hampshire University, Brunswick, Room 220

Afghanistan: Right War, Failing State

Thursdays 9:30–11:30
March 16 – May 4, 2017
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Course Description

Afghanistan has been at war for most of the last four decades at unimaginable cost to its people. 2.6 million Afghans are living outside its borders and the number of those who are internally displaced has shot up to 1.2 million since European countries began repatriating Afghans who had joined the wave of migration to Europe in the middle of the decade. In short, there appears to be no end of Afghanistan's long nightmare in sight. This is terrible news for Afghans both inside the country and in its diaspora. It is also a concern and for the governments of nearby and more distant states which now have a stake in the country's future.

The course has three objectives: the first is to understand the causes and results of the gradual transformation of Afghanistan from a highway of conquest to be traversed but left to its own devices into a destination of interest to various outside powers; the second is to assess the consequences for all concerned of Afghanistan's recent interactions with the Soviet Union, the United States and Pakistan; and the third is to consider how hard it is been, and will continue to be, for the United States to avoid the dreaded pitfall of nation building in Afghanistan and to consider the lessons to be drawn from its post-911 experience in Brer Rabbit's briar patch.

Syllabus and PowerPoint Slides

This syllabus was distributed electronically to the class on **March 16** and will be posted on the instructor's Midcoast Senior College home page shortly thereafter. The syllabus will be **updated from time to time, mostly by the addition of readings. It will then be distributed electronically to the class and posted on the course home page. The PowerPoint slides supporting each of the instructor's talk will normally be distributed to the class the day before the class they cover and posted on the home page at that time.**

Readings of Possible Interest

The list of readings below, either after the description of each class, or in the general bibliography at the end, will be updated throughout the semester. None of these readings is "required;" there are enough for anyone other than a JFK-esque speed-reader to get through in any reasonable timeframe. Most of them are available on line for students to use, discard or perhaps save for future reference.

Class Schedule

CLASS I – MARCH 16, 2017 – FROM THE BEGINNING TO 1747; PHOTOGRAPHS OF AFGHANISTAN

First Hour: The country and its people. Afghanistan's strategic location made it a place on the "highway of conquest" from 1000 to the mid-18th Century. At the same time, its mountainous terrain, tough, anarchic tribes and lack of resources meant that it was on the periphery of the great civilizations that flourished in Persia (Iran) and in Central and South Asia. Turkic empires those of the Timurids who ruled from Herat in what is now western Afghanistan, Ghaznavids who gave their name to the town of Ghazni eastern Afghanistan, and the Ghurids in the center of the modern country. The last of the "foreign" dynasties that of the Afshars ruled what is now Afghanistan from Iran, and the assassination of Nader Shah Afshar enabled one of his ablest generals, Ahmad Shah Durrani, an Afghan, to proclaim the Durrani empire in in 1747 at the start of his 25-year rule.

Second Hour: Photographs of Afghanistan in the mid-20th Century – Taken and narrated by Hubbard Goodrich who worked in Afghanistan for the U.S. Agency for International Development and now lives in Harpswell

Suggested Readings

- Thomas Barfield Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History, Introduction, Chapter One & Two
- Wikipedia article on Afghanistan, 1-2.2 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghanistan>
- Wikipedia article on Ahmad Shah Durrani, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmad_Shah_Durrani

Note: It may be necessary to cut and paste some of the links into your browser to make them open. The one to *The New Yorker* found in the Class IV readings is a case in point.

Two Maps and a Link to a Chronology of Afghanistan

Maps – 1) Afghanistan in Its Region, and 2) Afghanistan's Provinces



Link to the BBC's Afghanistan profile – Timeline, 1838-March 8, 2017
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-12024253>

Class Schedule

CLASS I – MARCH 16, 2017 – FROM THE BEGINNING TO 1747; PHOTOGRAPHS OF AFGHANISTAN

First Hour: Introductory points about the course and the predicament in which Afghanistan and its principal outside supporter, the US, find themselves. Afghanistan's strategic location made it a place on the "highway of conquest" from 1000 to the mid-18th Century. At the same time, its mountainous terrain, tough, anarchic tribes and lack of resources meant that it was on the periphery of the great civilizations that flourished in Persia (Iran) and in Central and South Asia. Turkic empires those of the Timurids who ruled from Herat in what is now western Afghanistan,

Ghaznavids who gave their name to the town of Ghazni eastern Afghanistan, and the Ghurids in the center of the modern country. The last of the “foreign” dynasties that of the Afshars who ruled from Iran, and the assassination of Nader Shah Afshar enabled one of his ablest generals, Ahmad Shah Durrani, an Afghan, to proclaim the Durrani empire in 1747 at the start of his 25-year rule.

Second Hour: Photographs of Afghanistan in the mid-20th Century – Taken and narrated by Hubbard Goodrich who worked in Afghanistan for the U.S. Agency for International Development and now lives in Harpswell

Suggested Readings

- William J. Astore, “Losing a War One Bad Metaphor at a Time,” *istan’s* , http://www.tomdispatch.com/blog/176248/tomgram%3A_william_astore,_in_afghanistan,_america%27s_biggest_foe_is_self-deception/
- Andrew J. Bacevich, “The Never-Ending War in Afghanistan,” *The New York Times*, March 13, 2017
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/13/opinion/the-never-ending-war-in-afghanistan.html>
- Thomas Barfield Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History, Introduction, Chapter One & Two
- Wikipedia article on Afghanistan, 1-2.2 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghanistan>
- Wikipedia article on Ahmad Shah Durrani, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmad_Shah_Durrani

CLASS II–MARCH 23, 2017 – 1747-1973–226-YEAR HISTORY OF THE KINGDOM OF AFGHANISTAN

First hour: Ahmad Shah’s Durrani empire reaches Delhi, then falls on hard times. Britain becomes the first of three western modernizing agents in Afghanistan. Difficult 120-year “up-close-and-personal relationship” results in: three wars, British subsidies to Afghan rulers, “Great Game” of competition with imperial Russia and consequent establishment of Afghanistan as a buffer state with defined borders, and blood-soaked state-building by the “Iron Amir” Abdur Rahman Khan, who ruled for 20 at the end of the 19th Century years and was one of the very few Afghan monarchs to die of natural causes while still in office. **The British light footprint in the fractious Northwest Frontier area of British India presages Afghanistan’s modern-day demand that that area, which successive governments in Kabul call Pashtunistan,**

Second hour: The Muhammadzai era: Following the failure of King Amanullah’s ambitious reforms and the execution of a Tajik “usurper,” King Muhammad Zahir succeeded his assassinated father and cautiously presided for 40 years (1933-73) over the longest period of peace and relative prosperity Afghanistan has ever known. Two elements in this success story were: 1) the American and Soviet aid essential to the survival of Afghanistan’s *rentier* state; 2) King Zahir’s “experiment in democracy.” The latter included a new constitution barring royal family members from holding high government office, two reasonably free elections for a bicameral parliament, and toleration of political parties among them the pro-Soviet People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). In 1973, former Prime Minister Prince Muhammad

Daud, King Zahir's cousin and brother-in-law ended Afghanistan's monarchy with a peaceful *coup d'etat*, while the King was visiting Rome. He stayed there in exile for the next 30 years.

Suggested Readings

-Barfield: [Afghanistan](#), Chapters Three and Four (to page 225)

-Carlotta Gall, "An Afghan Secret Revealed Brings an End to an Era," *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/01/world/asia/01afghan.html>

-The National Security Archive, Volume IV, "The Once and Future King," FROM THE SECRET FILES ON KING ZAHIR'S REIGN IN AFGHANISTAN, 1970-1973, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 59, Edited by William Burr. Oct 26, 2001, particularly Documents 6-9 <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB59/>

-"Pashtunistan," Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pashtunistan>

-UN Human Development Report (2016), "Afghanistan" <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/AFG>

CLASS III – MARCH 30, 2017 – JULY 1973-SEPT 10, 2001 – AFGHANISTAN'S NIGHTMARE: THE FIRST 28 YEARS

First hour: Prince Daud seeks better relations with the USSR. The more radical *Khalq* (masses) faction of the PDPA seized power in a bloody *coup d'etat* in which Daud and his family were murdered. The PDPA's radical social and political reforms produced a religiously-based reaction in which holy warriors (*mujahidin*) mounted a growing insurgency. A minority within the Politburo of the Soviet Communist Party ordered the invasion of Afghanistan which began on December 27, 1979. The Soviet occupation lasted 10 years (although Moscow's decision to withdraw was reliably reported to have made in 1985). The US and Saudi Arabia financed a multi-billion Pakistani-run operation. The Pakistan government allowed little US involvement in aid distribution though a small USAID effort was tolerated by Islamabad. Many in the U.S. political establishment saw the war as unwinnable but payback to the Soviets for their support of the resistance to the occupation of Vietnam became deeply popular across the American political spectrum. For some it was a validation of the Reagan Doctrine urging support of opposition to leftist regimes worldwide, and support for all forms of aid, inc to the *mujahidin*, including supplying them with Stinger surface to air missiles, was strong in almost all quarters in Washington. From 1985-88, the instructor was involved in trying to carry out a program of helping the resistance become a certifiable "national liberation movement."

Second hour: Following complex negotiations, Soviet forces withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989 leaving the country in the hands of the last communist government which proved much more resilient than had been imagined. The seven Afghan resistance parties found it impossible to cooperate thanks largely to the machinations of one still-active leader, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar whose Pashtun-based Islamic Party was focused primarily on defeating his rival, Ahmad Shah Massoud, of the Tajik-dominated Islamic Society. In 1994, the communist government finally fell and its leader was taken from his safe haven in the United Nations headquarters in Kabul, murdered and hung up on a city street. Out of the

ashes created by the subsequent civil war rose the Taliban (religious students) movement and its leader Mullah Omar. The Taliban took Kabul and the reins of government, but Massoud's Northern Alliance held firm in the north. Massoud was assassinated by two Tunisian al-Qaeda operatives on September 9, 2001.

Suggested Readings

- Barfield, *Afghanistan*, Chapter 4, pages 225-270
- Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, Times Books, Random House, 1995
- Fitchett, Joseph and *The International Herald Tribune*, "What about the Taliban's Stingers," *The New York Times*, January 26, 2001, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/26/news/what-about-the-talibans-stingers.html>
- Alan J. Kuperman, "The Stinger Missile and U.S. Intervention in Afghanistan," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 114, No. 2 (Summer 1999), pp. 219-263, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2657738?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents **Note: Opening this link enables you to read a paragraph about the controversy surrounding the decision to supply Stinger missiles to the Afghan resistance. To read the article, use the Read Online (Free) button on the linked page to create a JSTOR account (also free)**
- Wikipedia, "Ahmad Shah Massoud" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmad_Shah_Massoud
- Wikipedia, "CIA Activities in Afghanistan," https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1985/01/13/us-covert-aid-to-afghans-on-the-rise/cf0e7891-d900-4421-b72f-7760af19256d/?utm_term=.546d53aee357
- Robert Woodward *et al*, "U.S. Covert Aid to Afghans on the Rise," *The Washington Post*, January 13, 1985 https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1985/01/13/us-covert-aid-to-afghans-on-the-rise/cf0e7891-d900-4421-b72f-7760af19256d/?utm_term=.546d53aee357

CLASS IV – APRIL 6, 2017 – SEPTEMBER 11, 2001-present – AFGHANISTAN'S NIGHTMARE: THE WAR TAKES ROOT

Hour One: With applause from much of the world ("We all Americans," *Le Monde*, September 12, 2001), the US responded to the 9/11 attacks, *inter alia*, by calling on its NATO allies for their support under Article 5 of the NATO Charter (an attack on one is an attack on all). It is the only time in the history of the alliance that Article 5 has been invoked. Having first received what was at best an equivocal response to its demand that the Taliban government hand Osama bin Laden over to the United States, US forces gave close and devastatingly effective air and ground support to the Northern Alliance's swift occupation of Kabul. The Taliban government, like the *mujahidin* before them, fled to safety in Pakistan, and Osama bin Laden and his entourage was supported by Pakistani intelligence personnel in making a similar exit. With the benefit of a decade and a half of hindsight, it appears that the initial military success and the beginning of a political transformation process were points of light set against a gloomy backdrop of stalemate and failure.

Hour Two: Several points about the military side of the conflict are: 1) the "NATO-ization" of the American-led military assistance operation under the once marginalized International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) commanded by a series of American generals 2) the "great

debate” of 2010 about whether and on what terms to increase the size of the American force; 3) the multiple problems associated with building the Afghan National Army and Police into effective fighting and law enforcement forces; 4) the of the inability international and Afghan troops to convince people in the countryside of the staying power of those forces – the Marine Corps troop surge in Helmand Province in the southwestern part of the country in 2009 is a case in point; 6) the slow development of an Afghan-army helicopter force essential for rapid response to insurgent attacks; and 7) above all, Pakistan’s geopolitical role in the conflict

Suggested Readings

-Barfield, Afghanistan, Chapter 5

-Seymour Hersh, “The Getaway,” *The New Yorker*, January 28, 2002,

<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2002/01/28/the-getaway-2>

-Gretel C. Kovach, “What the Marines Did in Helmand Province,” *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, November 8, 2014 <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/military/sdut-marines-battle-history-helmand-afghanistan-2014nov08-story.html>

-Luke Mogelson, “Which Way Did the Taliban Go,” *The New York Times Magazine*, January 17, 2013

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/20/magazine/which-way-did-the-taliban-go.html>

-Eric Schmitt, “Envoy’s Cables Show Worries on Afghan Plans,” *The New York Times*, January 25, 2010

Note: Use the hyperlink in the second paragraph of Eric Schmitt’s article linked below to view Ambassador Eikenberry’s “NODIS” (“no distribution”) cables opposing a proposed troop surge in Afghanistan

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/26/world/asia/26strategy.html? r=0>

CLASS V – APRIL 13, 2017 – 2001-present – AFGHANISTAN’S NIGHTMARE: STATE-BUILDING

Hour One: The process of rebuilding the Afghan state began with a conference in Bonn, Germany led by a senior United Nations diplomat, Lakhdar Brahimi and attended by representatives of a wide range of Afghans representing political factions from inside the country and the Afghan diaspora. Mr. Brahimi cajoled/coerced a consensus that produced a document called the Bonn Agreement outlining the country’s political future. Despite the strength of the Northern Alliance, a Durrani Pashtun Hamed Karzai who had made his way to Bonn was sworn in as the head of a transitional administration. Lakhdar Brahimi, who had become the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative in Afghanistan, presided over a series of *loya jirgas* and elections which made Hamed Karzai President and organized a constitutional referendum and a parliamentary election. Five million refugees from the Afghan-Soviet war returned to Afghanistan, and schools reopened to students of both genders. Fueled by the billions of dollars being spent in Afghanistan by the international community, the country and its capitalist class prospered, and the positive affect on life in the cities was apparent.

Hour Two: Two parliamentary and two presidential elections were held with charges of fraud in each. In the 2009 presidential election, the losing candidate Dr. Abdullah Abdullah lost to President Karzai and contested the result. Under heavy US and UN pressure, a run-off election

was ordered only to see Abdullah charge that he could not get a fair election and withdrew leaving the field to President Karzai. In the 2014 presidential election between Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, the Pashtun candidate, Dr. Abdullah ran second and again charged fraud. After long, bitter negotiations, then US Secretary of State brokered an extra-constitutional deal in which Dr. Abdullah became Prime Minister. President Ghani has largely ignored his rival. As it became clearer that the Afghan army was not winning the war and that the government was not able to address the problem of corruption, confidence in the country's future declined, and the withdrawal of most of ISAF's personnel and foreign aid workers and contractors has caused Afghanistan's *rentier* economy to shrink dramatically.

Suggested Readings

-Mark Fields and Ramsha Ahmed, "A Review of the 2001 Bonn Conference and Application to the Road Ahead in Afghanistan," Institute for National Security Studies, Strategic Perspectives No. 8, National Defense University Press, November 2011 <http://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/inss/Strategic-Perspectives-8.pdf>

-United Nations, "Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan pending the Re-establishment of Permanent Government Institutions"

<http://www.un.org/News/dh/latest/afghan/afghan-agree.htm>

-Wikipedia, "International Conference on Afghanistan, Bonn (2011)"

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Conference_on_Afghanistan,_Bonn_\(2011\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Conference_on_Afghanistan,_Bonn_(2011))

CLASS VI – APRIL 20, 2017 – 2001-THE PAKISTAN DIMENSION; AFGHANISTAN'S GREATEST CHALLENGES

Hour One: The US-Pakistan relationship coexists with differing national security priorities. The two governments were treaty allies at the start of the Cold War, and Pakistan facilitated then National Security Advisor Kissinger's flight to China from Pakistan to start of President Nixon's opening to China. Not long after that came the US tilt towards India in Bangladesh's struggle for independence from Pakistan. Relations were again close when the US was supporting the Afghan resistance to the Soviet occupation in the 1980s but have foundered on Pakistan's need for having "strategic depth" in Afghanistan against India. This means keeping the Kabul government off balance. For its part, the US could ingratiate itself with Pakistan by seeking greater Indian flexibility on Kashmir, but Washington has made it clear that it is not interested in such an initiative and that its relationship with India predominates its interests in South Asia and beyond.

Hour Two: Beyond its struggle to improve Afghanistan's security, the Afghan government must deal with at least four very thorny problems two of which – the influx of refugees and economic transformation and diversification – are urgent. They will require a high level of outside support and an improvement in the security environment (the former is more likely to become a reality than the latter). The other two – reducing and eventually ending opium/heroin production and export and corruption – may be even more intractable. The cultivation of poppy cultivation provides large numbers of subsistence farmers with a level of income that cannot be generated in

the short term at least by any other crop. Rapid eradication of the poppy crop is unsustainable in human or social terms and would disrupt an already disrupted economy. Crop substitution and purchase of opium for medicinal purposes are probably part of the answer but require improved security. Corruption will likely be reduced in absolute terms as Afghanistan's economic rents decline.

Suggested Readings

-Charles Dunbar, "Squaring the Circle," *The American Scholar*, Volume 72, Number 3, Summer, 2003

-Carlotta Gall, *The Wrong Enemy: America in Afghanistan 2001-2014* (2014)

-International Crisis Group: a compendium of the Crisis Group's Reports on Afghanistan
<https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/afghanistan>

-Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR), 30 Jan 2017 Quarterly Report to Congress

<https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2017-01-30qr.pdf>

CLASS VII – APRIL 27, 2017 – PRESIDENTS KARZAI AND GHANI; GREATEST CHALLENGES
(CONTINUED)

Hour One: It is hard to imagine two personalities more different than those of Afghanistan's first two elected presidents. Karzai is a member of Afghanistan's political class long accustomed to the affairs of state. He has considerable political skills and seemed intent on remaking the Afghan state in a way his American benefactors appealing. When confronted with Afghan political and societal realities, however, Karzai sought accommodation while at the same resenting his countrymen mocking him as a powerless "mayor of Kabul" hopelessly beholden to the Americans. As time passed, his resentment at American high-handedness grew as did his anger at the seeming US failure to take seriously the ghastly "collateral damage" caused by errant American military operations. That anger was reciprocated, fueled by the blind eye Karzai turned to the pervasive corruption for which his brothers were poster children. By contrast, Ghani is a Ghilzai Pashtun and thus a political outsider. He has spent years in the West studying development and applying his technical knowledge to designing and carrying out development projects for the World Bank. His acerbic personality has made him many enemies, and it remains to be seen if he can deal effectively with the realities of Afghanistan and his countrymen.

Hour Two: This hour will be used to provide more specifics about the problems outlined in the second hour of the previous week's discussion.

Suggested Readings

-George Packer, Afghanistan's Theorist-in-Chief, *The New Yorker*, Letter from Kabul, July 4, 2016

-Jonathan Partlow, *A Kingdom of Their Own: The Family Karzai and the Afghan Disaster* (2016)

-Wikipedia, Hamid Karzai

CLASS VIII – MAY 4, 2017 – SUMMING UP: THE WAY FORWARD? LESSONS LEARNED?

The final segment of the course is a work in progress.

Suggested Readings

-Barfield, Chapter 6

-James Dobbins, “Ending Afghanistan’s Civil War,” Testimony Before the Foreign Relations Committee on Foreign Relations of the United States Senate, March 8, 2007, published by the Rand Corporation <http://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT276.html>

-Stephen Biddle, “Ending the War in Afghanistan,” *Foreign Affairs*, Sept-Oct 2013

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2013-08-12/ending-war-afghanistan>