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Fifteen years ago, southern Afghanistan was in even greater chaos than it is now. The Russians, who had occupied the country throughout the 1980s, were long gone. The disparate ethnic and religious leaders who had united to eject the invaders - the famous *mujaheddin* - were at each others' throats. For the rural poor of Kandahar province, life was almost impossible.

On 12 October 1994 a small group of religious students decided to take matters into their own hands. Led by an illiterate village mullah with one eye, some 200 of them surrounded and took Spin Boldak, a trucking stop on the border with Pakistan. From this short and unremarkable border skirmish, a legend was born. The students' numbers swelled as news of their triumph spread. The Taliban, as they now called themselves - *taliban* is the plural of *talib*, literally 'one who seeks knowledge' - had a simple mission statement: the disarmament of the population, and the establishment of a theocracy based on Sharia law. They fought with a religious zeal that the warring mujaheddin could not match.

By February 1995, this people's revolt had become a national movement; 18 months later Kabul fell, and the country was effectively theirs. James Fergusson's fascinating account of this extraordinary story will be required reading for anyone who wishes to understand the situation in Afghanistan, now and for the future...

Taliban Details

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Author : James Fergusson

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From Reader Review Taliban for online ebook

Cameron says

I enjoyed this book. Very thorough look at their history and origins. Does seem biased towards the taliban at times. Use in conjunction with other similar history books to maintain a balanced position.

Rory Braybrook says

With the Taliban now reaching out for peace, the suggestions in this book are slowly becoming reality. No foreign power - from Alexandra the Great through the British Empire and Russia to the USA has ever won here.

Osman says

Fergusson gives a good analysis about the Taliban in general. He makes excellent points where the western strategy failed and why the conflict is still ongoing. Many misconceptions the west has established are corrected and potential alternatives are drawn as to how the Taliban could have rather been engaged then fought.

Aravindh Sundaragopalan says

This gives a different perspective of the taliban community itself. More like seeing LTTE from their perspective. One thing i learnt from this book, It is all about perspective in a war. Nobody is right or wrong.. Good read to begin with but after a while it gets really overwhelming with data.

Najam Saqib says

This is an excellent book which gives real insight into Afghan dynamics. It is a worth reading book. James Fergusson has an amazing and attractive writing style. One of best books I have read.

Michael Flanagan says

James Fergusson brings us a refreshingly different view on the Taliban and their history and role in Afghanistan. A well researched book debunking some of the common myth's associated with the Taliban.

After reading this book I feel I have a much better understanding of Afghansitan and the issues facing the troops on the ground. I take my hat off to the author for a gutsy realistische look at the Taliban.

Justus says

Give readers another view of Taliban. maybe other might see this as justification of world misunderstanding of them. But what i see is, this book show us how Afghani people life their live. we cant see this thing from our morale point of view. To execute people in public,to amputate hand of a thief in public. These kind of punishment might seem harsh in our "peaceful environment". but in Afghan where one day mob can invade your house and do terrible thing to your family, this kind of punishment is applicable.

Yes, we know there are still corruption and other problems in their reign, but these things happen in all kind of reign all over the world.

Deep says

Finished today, quite interesting and overwhelming, changed my belief about Taliban, previously, lured into believing what they were showing us. The book shows the life of an Afghanistan man- his thinking, his survival and sustenance amidst of all chaos that came with the fall of Soviet, rising of Taliban and then the invasion of foreign troops in the name of saving west from terrorism, his theory of war and invasion to his country.

As one plunges deeper into book, we see stories of innocent beings killed, captured and sent to jail where they receive inhumane treatment that later aggravates them to join the force and fight against foreigners.

Astounding book, liked to read; and by reading to mend my views.

Claire says

I haven't rated this higher due to the latent fear not only brought by Al-Qaida but also semi-traumatic episodes of mine in political science and history.

At least I was able to withstand this apprehension to poke my way through Fergusson's work to get the information. This Library book has been underlined and bracketed in a distracting way in red pen.

I approached this book asking why the Taliban and Al-Qaida are so frightening. It's not necessarily they're anti-American or even that they don't subscribe to the realist PSC theory as much as when I hear of them I tense and don't understand what people are trying to tell me.

Sofi Hakobyan says

I am really astonished! We consider so many things for granted, basing ourselves on the erroneous and propagandistic tv programs. This is an attempt to show the point of view of the opposite party, making it clear that they act according to their religion and traditional believes against foreign intruders. Although it can't make me think that their terroristic and cruel actions are so right. Why don't they adopt a more peaceful behavior of contrasting the same colonialist plans of the West and of clearing forever this bloody mark from their identity? It seems easier to answer the cruelty with other cruelties. May be this is the cause of their

being considered the same as the Al-Qaeda terrorists? I have so many questions without answer.... The fact is that during a war nobody is completely right or wrong.

Salih Dogan says

A quite impressive account on Taliban.

Lukas says

Extremely intelligent and comprehensive look at what the Taliban are, what the misconceptions about them are and why they are reemerging in Afghanistan. The book is very fair and shows the good and bad sides of the Taliban, the mistakes of the US and the other troopsending countries in Afghanistan and offers solutions on how the conflicts MIGHT be solved.

Overall an excellent book.

Srinivas Veeraraghavan says

Utterly fascinating, perspicacious and highbrow account of one of the most notorious regimes in the world that makes for essential reading.

Casual reading? Look elsewhere. Took me the best part of a month to assimilate, soak in and ruminate on the various POVs presented and I could compile an enviable essay on the book's (And the author's) merits and pedigrees, but for anyone interested in Afghanistan and THATWHICHMUSTNOTBENAMED, this is a feast.

Niklas says

Luin aikaisemmin The World's Most Dangerous Placen, eikä tämä James Fergussonin aikaisempi kirja oikein yllä sen tasolle. Siinä missä Somalian sisällissotaa käsittelevä The Most Dangerous Place perustuu pitkälti henkilökohtaiseen kokemukseen, haastatteluihin ja empiriaan, on Taliban enemmän ylätasoa esitys, jossa harvoin päästään paikan päälle kuulemaan miten ja miksi Afganistanissa soditaan. Kirja on silti hyvä ja koukuttava kertomus sisällissodasta ja sen jälkimainingeista. Hämmästyttävää on, ettei Afganistanista syntynyt läheskään niin kaoottinen kuva kuin Somaliasta, ehkäpä Afganistanin vahvan kylänvanhinkulttuurin vuoksi, joka on puolestaan Somaliassa pyyhkäisty olemattomiin. On Afganistanissa ja Somaliassa silti paljon yhteistäkin: heimokulttuuri, väestön todella nuori keski-ikä, vuosikymmeniä jatkunut sisällissota, kuivuus ja länsivaltioiden sekaantuminen. Talibanissa oli uutta minulle Pakistanin ja sen "tiedustelupalvelun" ISI:n rooli sisällissodassa, sekä myös useimpien haastateltujen Taliban-veteraanien varsin humaani katsantokanta vuosien sisällissodan jälkeenkin.

Matt says

This is an important book that deserves readership, consideration, and discussion.

Its most important contribution is a plea for Westerners to realize that the Taliban are *not* the same as al-Qaida! Al-Qaida is an extreme movement of Wahabi Islam, itself the most conservative sect of Islam. Its mission is indeed to take the fight of "jihad" to the West's doorstep. The Taliban, on the other hand, are a movement of largely Pashtun Sunni Muslims, whose two goals have ever only been the expulsion of armed foreigners from their homeland and the implementation of Sharia (Qur'anic) law. The Taliban have no imperial ambitions--simply the desire for self-determination in their homeland.

One shocking revelation from this book is that the Taliban only hosted bin Laden out of their Muslim obligations of hospitality (and because they received much-needed cash infusions from him), and that they were in negotiations with the U.S. to turn over bin Laden to them if evidence could be furnished of bin Laden's involvement in terrorist attacks (which would therefore not qualify as a valid jihad). These negotiations were ongoing when the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan began. It's appalling to think we could've attained our ostensible aim in Afghanistan without the destruction of the ongoing war that ensued.

Another key point of this book is that the Taliban must be judged as a revolutionary movement that occurred in a context of the appalling violence, tribalism, and danger in the society of the day. In other words, while the Taliban may have engaged in some revolutionary excess, they actually succeeded in bringing security to a nation that was rife with violence, drug production, and corruption. The author wrestles with difficult questions such as whether women were more repressed under the Taliban because they had to cover up, or more repressed by the prevalence of rape and violence against women in pre-Taliban Afghanistan.

However, this book is no simple work of propaganda. It gives honest consideration to the brutalities of the Taliban and the ambiguities of all politics in the region. Almost at the end of the book is a story about the author and some Taliban going to investigate an apple tree that the Taliban said had been bombed by the U.S. with depleted uranium ammunition and thus wasn't growing back normally. When they arrive by the tree, the Taliban are embarrassed to discover that the tree is healthy and recovering. They even make a joke about it.

In terms of structure, the book loses momentum after the first half, once the story of the rise and fall of the Taliban is finished. In fact, the second half of the book could be called, "Random Conversations with Various Taliban Members." However, the conversations are often interesting and insightful.

The central message of this book is that the U.S. needs to enter into serious negotiations with the Taliban, who are seen by most Afghans as their natural leadership, and all more so with time and the continued violence of the U.S. occupation. It indicates the futility of attempting to occupy a country against the general population's wishes and suggests withdrawal as the only plausible option.

This is certainly a book that warrants consideration, not least because it will add complexity to most readers' understanding of this region, group, and the war.
