

# THE AMERICAN PROJECT IN AFGHANISTAN

## WHAT WENT WRONG?

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This class tells the story of the American attempt to transform Afghanistan into a Western-style capitalist democracy. We start with context—a social portrait of Afghans on the eve of their tragedy; then the build-up—the dramatic events that brought the Taliban to power; and then the story that began with NATO forces driving the Taliban from Kabul and ended 20 years later with a chaotic American withdrawal and the Taliban back in charge. How could this happen and what does it all mean? These are the questions this class tackles.

### SESSION I: THE BACKGROUND

#### 1960-2001

Setting: physical & social geography of Afghanistan  
People: a multicultural kaleidoscope  
Society: compounds, villages, forts, feudal cities, nomads  
The Divided World: Separation of private and public realms  
Global Context: ... Great Game ... Cold War...  
60's: Development, democracy, and the liberation of women  
70's: A society coming apart.  
80's: Communist Coup, Soviet Invasion, the Holocaust  
90's: Fall of Communism: Afghan Civil War, Taliban  
2001: Events of 9/11: America goes to war—in Afghanistan

### SESSION 2: THE AMERICAN PROJECT BEGINS

#### 2001-2004

Taliban flight, Bin Laden's escapes, fight moves to border areas  
Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan.  
Bonn Conference: the American Plan.  
"Nation-building": A Marshall Plan for Afghanistan  
Loya Jirga: A new government for Afghanistan  
Kabul in July 2002: a close-up view  
Neocon Doctrine: "Democracy everywhere!"  
"Shock and Awe": Regime Change in Iraq.  
Global Ripples: Patriot Act, Guantanamo/Fallujah, Abu Ghraib  
Re-election of Bush.

### SESSION 3: DUELING NARRATIVES

#### 2004-2008

Order vs Chaos: Race to the Tipping Point.  
Bonn Project: early achievements.  
Neo-Con Doctrine: Privatize Everything.

## Syllabus – American Project in Afghanistan

Neo-Con Doctrine: Unexpected consequences  
Corruption: petty and grand  
Talibanist rural and urban strategies  
2006: The Turning Point--attacks on schools.  
Rise of the Power Brokers  
Corruption Story: opium, minerals, and banks  
Afghan elections: democracy fraying  
Obama takes charge.

### **SESSION 4: OBAMA’S WAR**

**[2008-2011]**

Pivot to “Af-Pak”  
The new plan: Counterinsurgency  
The new plan: Surge and then withdrawal  
Conquering Afghanistan: the repeating pattern  
Military tactics: networks detection and night raids  
Cultural training for the U.S. Military  
Battles of Marjah and Kandahar  
The Killing of Bin Laden  
Selling a house in Kabul: a personal story  
Afghanizing the war: green-on-blue killings.  
Haqqani Network: waves of suicide massacres  
Afghanistan disappears from view in America

### **SESSION 5: GETTING OUT**

**[2012-2019]**

Global Context: China Rising, Arab Spring  
Kabul in March, 2012: eyewitness report  
Green Zone syndrome  
Wealth and poverty: the stark divide  
Urban legends and conspiracy theories in Afghanistan  
Growth industries: weddings and kidnappings  
Planting trees in Afghan villages  
Afghan businessman: The survivor  
Salang Pass: “Today, say your prayers”  
Journey to Bamiyan (Central Afghanistan)  
3<sup>rd</sup> Presidential election: two winners. Uh oh.  
Global Context: Trump takes office  
Negotiations in Qatar: Trump’s deal with the Taliban

### **SESSION 6: AFTER AMERICA**

**[2020-Present]**

Global Context: Arab Spring turns disastrous  
Global Context: Rise of ISIS

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Global Context: The (Muslim) refugee crisis in Europe  
Putin in Chechnya, Syria, and Ukraine  
4<sup>th</sup> election in Afghanistan: no winner.  
Biden presidency: the withdrawal.  
Taliban take Kabul.  
The Emirate of Afghanistan: Who's in power now?  
Isis K in Afghanistan.  
New Taliban: same as the Old Taliban?  
Where are they now? (Karzai, Ghani, Abdullah, etc.)  
Sunrise TV: A walk through Afghan cities and villages today  
Global Context: China in Afghanistan: The "New Gold Rush"  
Global Context: Afghanistan in the emerging world order.  
The implications of Afghanistan for America and the world

### **Recommended readings:**

Games Without Rules: The Often-interrupted History of Afghanistan  
Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday  
Websites of Interest: <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-war-afghanistan>