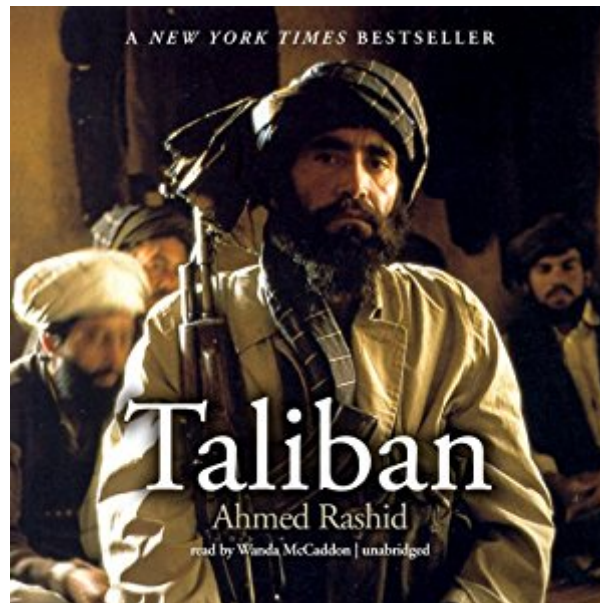




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Taliban: Islam, Oil, And The Great New Game In Central Asia



Synopsis

In this enormously insightful book, correspondent Ahmed Rashid brings the shadowy world of the Taliban, the world's most extreme and radical Islamic organization, into sharp focus. He explains the Taliban's rise to power, its impact on Afghanistan and the region, its role in oil and gas company decisions, and the effects of changing American attitudes toward the Taliban. He also describes the new face of Islamic fundamentalism and explains why Afghanistan has become the world center for international terrorism.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As with his earlier book "Jihad," author Ahmed Rashid illustrates his unbounded knowledge of Central Asia, Afghanistan and Pakistan, along with the relevant players in all the local terrorist groups, including the Taliban. Rashid, whose fluid, conversational style resembles that of Thomas Friedman ("From Beirut to Jerusalem," "The Lexus and the Olive Tree" and "The World is Flat" among others) expertly weaves the group's history in context with the war against the Soviets and, later, the entrance of the United States military into Afghanistan. My only problem with the book (in this case the updated 2nd edition) is the 17th and final chapter, which ruins a lot of what Rashid had written up to that juncture. Cases in point: Throughout the book there are many references and anecdotes of days in which hundreds and even thousands are killed in a single day during the repressive, Sharia-driven Taliban's merciless rule. Yet he waxes on about a day in which nine U.S. soldiers are killed and 15 wounded in a day in 2008, when more than 150,000 troops were in country. Not a tragic loss in proportion to the troops involved and when compared to the days

before they came to the country. The same catastrophic verbiage is used when the U.S. troops, who had "surged" in order to engage more Taliban fighters, lost 91 troops in two months in 2008. Not unexpected casualties considering what was at stake. Rashid goes on a Monday-morning quarterback orgy, fault-finding just about everything to do with the U.S., while never once • not a single time • showing how things had improved in comparison to when the Taliban ruled. He runs on and on about IEDs • as if they were winning the conflict for the Taliban • rather than illustrating the basic reasons, tactical and otherwise, that were holding back victory. Rashid's solution? "A vast new social and economic development program" as a long-term answer to the problems in Afghanistan, Central Asia and Pakistan. Not too abstract or non-specific, right? Rashid never addresses why any country in its right mind would want to invest in offer military aid to a country like Afghanistan, whose troops shot U.S soldiers in the back, or ran, or didn't fight, or weren't double agents. No mention at all of the ridiculously restrictive rules of engagement that prevented U.S. troops from doing something as simple as undertaking night raids because they might upset the Afghanis, who Rashid never bothered to mention hate the U.S. troops and aided the Taliban. While it was addressed, the fact that the Pakistanis refused to take massive action against the Taliban and whined about the few times U.S. troops and drones (which were never mentioned) attempted to do something about the porous border, which sheltered the Taliban and prevented U.S. victory. Afghanistan President Harmid Karzai, while correctly portrayed as corrupt, was never called on the carpet for his endless harangues against the U.S. for inevitable collateral damage while it tried to help his country. Nor was it ever mentioned that Karzai never even thanked the U.S. for its sacrifice. And yet countries should want to throw money at and rebuild Afghanistan? I could go on and on and on, but my point is made. It really is essential reading • and good writing until the final chapter. I'm going to read his "Descent Into Chaos" book next, though I have reservations that it will be a longer version of U.S. fault-finding. Still, the payoff is in the presentation of the history of the Central Asian countries and their peoples, and even Islam. Rashid is the best-informed writer extant on these topics. It's a must-read.

Ahmed Rashid has written the gold standard of books on the Taliban. He charts the rise of Al Qaeda from the Soviet war in Afghanistan to Afghan civil war, to a ruling government of sorts until after September 11th 2001. That alone would be impressive, but Rashid goes a step further by detailing the economic and security impacts the Taliban movement has had on the regional and global

environment. No one from Afghan warlords to United States Presidents comes across as a choirboy in the rise of the Taliban or even as soon as they took power. What really comes across is that Afghanistan has been a train-wreck for decades and that history should be ignored by policy makers at their own risk. Afghanistan isn't just some isolated corner of the map, but as Afghanistan's problems are starting to leak into other countries like Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and other former Soviet Republics, Iran, and even the United States. Although Rashid has added a 2000-2009 section on the Taliban's reemergence, some readers may want to know his thoughts on the post 2009 period try his 2013 release Pakistan on the Brink, but this is still a great backgrounder on the complicated land of Afghanistan.

A most comprehensive and enlightening account of this group's origins, ideology and threat to the West. It is amazing that an organization with no real central leadership is able to take control of an entire country. But without the support of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia they would not have continued to grow.

As the author himself says in his preface to another book of his ,this reads like a reporter's diary. One of the plus points is that the book gives a historical background to the events in Afghanistan, helpful particularly for the readers under thirty. The author makes a good case for the international community's more serious efforts at ameliorating the sufferings of those involved in this human tragedy. Brings out the shorted sightedness of the leaders of the world's most powerful democracy. One feels outraged .As one reads along, too many dramatis personae come in and is difficult to keep track. The author gives in the appendix ,the who's who of the movement and its leadership but the list itself is quite a LONG LIST. The chapter on oil pipelines and the related appendix add another dimension to the problem but do not impress the reader as the major reason for the events in Afghanistan ,particularly the appendix appears superfluous as the battle in Afghanistan appearsto be an outcome of its bloody history and Taliban's reaction to it than oil economics /politics. The date line too, is useful for a more serious student of the history /politics of the region than an interested ordinary reader. May be the appendices will be more useful if one reads the book again for some more serious use. Overall, a good read that gives a comprehensive account of the travails of the region.

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