

**History 858/753, Religious Studies 858**  
**Afghanistan from the Great Game to the Taliban, 1747-2009**

Tuesdays, 3:30pm – 5:30pm  
Spring 2010

University of Wisconsin-Madison  
5245 Humanities

Course web site: <https://learnuw.wisc.edu>

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**Course Aims**

This is a graduate reading course designed to explore the modern history of Afghanistan and the wider world. The course will study the intersections between national/regional and international/transnational research. It will also examine how historical knowledge can contribute to better understandings of present policies and future challenges.

The faculty co-directing this course embody these aims. They mix area expertise with a global focus, and they seek to synthesize these perspectives in a fruitful and dynamic way. The assigned readings, the weekly discussions, the required response papers, and the final research project are all designed to further our empirical and methodological analyses of the intersections between regional and global dynamics. The past and future of Afghanistan is of obvious importance in the early twenty-first century, but we also believe this is a case where the modes and insights of a multidimensional historical examination might serve as a model for other regions. In this sense, we see our course as a starting point for blended historical investigations of various parts of the world.

We have chosen readings and topics that open all of these issues in a long chronology from the mid-eighteenth century to the immediate present. We have also chosen writers who are themselves regional and global thinkers at the same time. In their research papers, students will follow the conceptual and empirical paths of the writers they encounter, with more focus and more attention to future scholarly work.

### Assigned Readings

The books are available for purchase at the University Bookstore.

The books are also on reserve at the College Library, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Reserves Room.

W. Vogelsang, *The Afghans* (Blackwell, 2nd. ed., 2008).

*The Baburnama. Memoirs of Babur*, tr. W.M. Thackston (Modern Library, 2002).

B. Macintyre, *The Man Who Would Be King. The First American in Afghanistan* (FSG, 2004).

Patrick Macrory, *Retreat from Kabul* (Lyons Press, 2007).

P. Hopkirk, *The Great Game: On Secret Service in High Asia* (Murray, 1990).

Brian Robson, *Crisis on the Frontier: The Third Afghan War and the Campaign in Waziristan, 1919-1920* (Spellmount, 2007).

B. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan* (Yale, 2nd ed., 2002).

Mohammed Kakar, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response, 1979-1982* (University of California Press, 1997).

L.P. Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War. State Failure, Regional Politics and the Rise of the Taliban* (UWash, 2001).

Peter Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama Bin Laden* (Free Press, 2002).

R. Stewart, *The Places In Between* (Harvest Books, 2004).

S.G. Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires. America's War in Afghanistan* (Norton, 2009).

A. Rashid, *Descent into Chaos. The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* (Viking, 2008).

### **Reading Assignments**

This course includes a heavy load of weekly reading – a full book per week. Students are expected to read all of the assigned materials carefully and critically *before each seminar meeting*. Focus on each author’s key arguments and how they relate to larger historical concerns and debates – how is the author trying to change the way we think about the history of Afghanistan, the region, and international relations? Interrogate narrative strategies – how does the author assemble his or her story for the purpose of convincing the reader? Pay close attention to sources – how does the author “prove” his or her point? Most important, as the semester progresses think about how the assigned readings relate to one another – how is each author responding to other scholars?

### **Weekly Response Essays**

Each week by 5:PM on the **Monday before class**, all students should post a short response essay on the course website. This response essay should include 3 basic paragraphs. The first paragraph should summarize the key arguments in the readings and their significance. The second paragraph should analyze how the week’s readings relate to other course and outside texts. The third paragraph should offer the student’s critical assessment of the week’s readings: What was most persuasive? What was least persuasive? Which are the issues and questions that need more attention? What kind of new research do the readings inspire?

### **Final Research Essay (due 5/10)**

At the end of the semester, each student should complete a 20-page research paper, examining a topic from the course in more detail. The purpose of this research paper is to explore a particular area of student interest, displaying knowledge of the basic historiography surrounding the chosen topic, familiarity with some of the available primary sources, and attention to potential new research contributions. We expect the research papers to make a persuasive and well-supported argument, to explore the implications of this argument for historical understandings, and to speculate about further research that would build on the work of the student paper. These papers might explore local, regional, or international topics related to the course. They might also explore the intersection between any of these three. In the end, the papers should stand as mini-journal articles, contributing new research and critical thought to the modern history of Afghanistan and the wider world. We expect these papers to reflect polished writing, clear argument, and elegant organization. We also expect students to submit these research papers by the due date: **Monday, May 10**.

- 1/19 Introduction and bibliography
- 1/26 The land and peoples of Afghanistan  
W. Vogelsang, *The Afghans* (Blackwell, 2nd. ed., 2008).
- 2/2 Afghanistan in the Islamic period  
*The Baburnama. Memoirs of Babur*, tr. W.M. Thackston (Modern Library, 2002).
- 2/9 Safavids, Mughals, Nadir Shah and the foundation of modern Afghanistan  
B. Macintyre, *The Man Who Would Be King. The First American in Afghanistan* (FSG, 2004).
- 2/16 The First Afghan War and Dost Mohammad  
Patrick Macrory, *Retreat from Kabul* (Lyons Press, 2007).
- 2/23 Afghanistan in the Great Game  
P. Hopkirk, *The Great Game. On Secret Service in High Asia* (Murray, 1990).
- 3/2 The First World War, the Russian Revolution, and Modernization  
Brian Robson, *Crisis on the Frontier: The Third Afghan War and the Campaign in Waziristan, 1919-1920* (Spellmount, 2007).
- 3/9 Afghanistan in the 1970s: Da'ud Khan's republic and the 1978 revolution  
B. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan* (Yale, 2nd ed., 2002).
- 3/16 The 1980s: the Soviet invasion and Afghan resistance  
Mohammed Kakar, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response, 1979-1982* (University of California Press, 1997).
- 3/23 The rise of the Taliban  
L.P. Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War. State Failure, Regional Politics and the Rise of the Taliban* (UWash, 2001).
- 3/30 SPRING BREAK
- 4/6 Al Qaeda in Afghanistan  
Peter Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama Bin Laden* (Free Press, 2002).
- 4/13 The aftermath of 9/11: the defeat of the Taliban  
R. Stewart, *The Places In Between* (Harvest Books, 2004).
- 4/20 The attempt at reconstruction: the Karzai presidency  
S.G. Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires. America's War in Afghanistan* (Norton, 2009).

- 4/27 Taliban resurgence: the Obama plan and the future of Afghanistan  
A. Rashid, *Descent into Chaos. The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* (Viking, 2008).
- 5/4 Wrap-Up
- 5/10 **Research Papers Due**