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Robert M. Cassidy, *War, Will, and Warlords: Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan and Pakistan, 2001-2011*. Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Univ. Press, 2012. Pp. xv, 271. ISBN 978-0-16-090300-7.

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In *War, Will, and Warlords*, Robert Cassidy (US Naval War College) treats central problems of US involvement in Afghanistan since the expulsion of the Taliban. The first is the great difficulty of fighting an irregular force, both in general and in the context of the sociopolitical realities of Afghanistan. The second is Pakistan and the double game it has been playing in the region: supporting American efforts but also aiding, both indirectly and directly, irregular organizations acting against the United States, especially the remnant Taliban movement. Cassidy examines his selected issues at every layer of activity, from the tactical to the political. The support that several parties give to Afghanistan necessitates a political solution, but conditions on the ground require integrating military, economic, and political action.

The removal of the Taliban government, the subsequent war of attrition in a splintered country, and events like the terror attack by the Haqqani network (operating in Afghanistan from its base in the Waziristan tribal frontier) on the American embassy in Kabul, all reflect the complex relationship between the United States and Pakistan, who were allies during the Cold War. A deep dispute over the war on terror now divides them. The United States claims Pakistan is providing safe havens for irregulars operating in Afghanistan. Pakistan accuses the United States of violating its sovereignty by military attacks that harm innocent Afghans and Pakistanis. In recent months, shrill voices in the US Congress have demanded a halt to military and economic assistance to Pakistan, whose Inter-Service Intelligence Directorate is actively helping the Haqqani network. Nevertheless, the two nations are trying to preserve normal relations, since Pakistan is both threatened by radical Islamic terror groups and in need of continued American economic and military aid to strengthen its hand in its chronic struggle with India and in complicated relations with China.

To begin to answer the question why the United States and its allies have not succeeded in bringing political stability to Afghanistan, Cassidy surveys the country's history in his first chapter. He argues that the deposing of the Taliban was not any sort of turning point but another stage in a story of instability stretching back to the establishment of modern Afghanistan by Ahmad Shah Durrani (also known as Ahmad Shah Abdali) in 1747. Historically, changes of government have not brought political stability or economic and social development to Afghanistan, which was labeled a Failed State in 2010.<sup>1</sup> The United States and its allies, known as the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF),<sup>2</sup> are not simply responding to renewed Taliban strength, but continuing a long historical process. In 1979, the issue of Afghanistan's instability grew from an internal or regional matter to one with worldwide impact that drew the intervention of various powers.

Chapter 2 deals with the strife in Afghanistan after the overthrow of the Taliban up to 2009. Cassidy notes that "defeating the Taliban ... was the easy part" (31). The United States achieved an initial military victory, but did not destroy the Taliban organization outright. The ISAF was consequently drawn into a political and military morass reminiscent of earlier conflicts in Malaya and Vietnam. Cassidy quotes a very apt

1. I.e., a country without a monopoly on the use of force; lacking law and order; unable to maintain a legal environment that advances economic ventures, trade, and foreign investments; and failing to address basic needs of its people in health care, education, and other social services. See Amalendu Misra, *Afghanistan: The Labyrinth of Violence* (Malden, MA: Polity Pr, 2004) 56-58, and Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan* (NY: Columbia U Pr, 2008) 15-20.

2. In December 2001, the UN Security Council decided (resolution no. 1386) to set up an international task force in and around Kabul. The mandate of this task force was expanded to all of Afghanistan in October 2003 (resolution no. 1510), the objective being to stabilize the Afghan political system and create conditions for peace. See "About ISAF" - [www.miwsr.com/rd/1308.htm](http://www.miwsr.com/rd/1308.htm).

Pashtun saying: “The war is over, now the real fighting begins” (31), words sadly relevant to most of Afghanistan’s history.

In succeeding chapters, Cassidy divides the last three decades of Afghan history into five phases—Soviet occupation (1979–89); civil war (1989–94); Taliban rule (1994–2001); Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) (2001–5); return of the Taliban (2005– ). In each stage, irregular forces (with external assistance) fought against regular armies. The overall objective was always to replace an existing regime with a government that represented the various insurgent groups. Each phase also saw foreign powers aiding both sides. Even in the initial stages of OEF, when the main war effort was delegated to the militia forces of the “Northern Alliance,” massive American air support was deployed in close cooperation with small teams of Special Operations Forces and the CIA. And, too, at least since 1979, regular armies have controlled large cities and central axes of traffic, while rural areas have remained in the hands of the guerrilla groups and armed militias. In short, no central government in Afghanistan in the period has firmly ruled the entire country. Even under Taliban rule, the Panjshir Valley region remained under Northern Alliance control.

Cassidy’s historical survey isolates five factors that typify successful guerrilla warfare: first, weak central government perceived as or actually lacking legitimacy, whether geographic or sociopolitical. Second, inefficient security forces, whose lack of power stems from the illegitimacy of the central government itself. Third, citizen support for the irregulars, seen as the true legitimate party in the country or at least sections of it.<sup>3</sup> Fourth, external aid, and, fifth, provision of regional havens for irregular fighting groups. In fact, the same factors may be identified in nearly every counterinsurgency (COIN) struggle since World War II. Sometimes, the absence of one factor has led to the defeat of insurgents, but effective COIN operations must take account of all five.

Cassidy stresses that Pakistan has provided both external aid and refuges for various parties in the Afghanistan war. The discussion here becomes important for understanding the intricate relations of the United States with Pakistan and other Islamic countries in central Asia, especially those created after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In all these states, too, radical Islamists seeking power have exerted a strong destabilizing influence.

Cassidy’s astute analyses help clarify the politics of southwest Asia. Pakistan claims that, after the Cold War, the United States abandoned it to its traditional enemy, India, and that only the 9/11 attacks brought a renewal of close ties. Pakistan, which enjoys generous US military and economic aid, exploits America’s close connection with India to apply pressure on Washington while rejecting requests to attack areas adjoining the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Claiming most of its forces must be allotted to securing its border with India, Pakistan hopes to induce the United States to convince India to reduce its forces on that border.

It is a case of political Catch-22 for the United States. Washington views Islamabad as a vital partner in the stabilization of Afghanistan and in the war on terror generally. Pakistan, a nuclear state, has signaled a change in its pro-Western policies by developing closer ties to China, causing Washington to eschew too hard a line against Islamabad. However, in 2011–12, the two exchanged harsh words, though they stopped short of creating an irreparable split. Both countries clearly have an interest in preserving normal relations: Pakistan needs US economic and military aid and the United States recognizes that cessation of such assistance might lead to a collapse of Pakistan’s government or push the country into the arms of China. While Cassidy’s discussion concentrates on Pakistan’s support for Afghan guerrilla and terrorist parties operating from its territory, he also explores relations between the United States and Pakistan more broadly.

*War, Will, and Warlords* is valuable for its well-researched investigation of the problems facing the United States and its allies in their protracted dealings with Afghanistan. But is also usefully situates the Afghan conflict in the wider world of geopolitics. Specifically, it suggests that policy makers in Washington

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3. It should be recalled that the Mujahidin were Islamic groups that began to operate against the central Afghan government in the 1960s. The strengthening of Islamic militias in general and of the Taliban in particular were direct outcomes of Afghan tribal structure. See Andre Brigot and Oliver Roy, *The War in Afghanistan: An Account and Analysis of the Country, Its People, Soviet Intervention and the Resistance*, tr. Mary and Tom Bottomore (NY: Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1988; orig. 1985) 100–102, and Antonio Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society in Afghanistan, 1978–1992* (Washington: Georgetown U Pr, 1999) 198–206.

must fully grasp the political, military, and socioeconomic conditions prevalent in southwest Asian nations, especially Pakistan, to reach any durable solutions in the region. Cassidy offers insights into managing future COIN struggles. The theoretical-academic discussions are grounded throughout in his military experience as a special assistant to the senior operational commander in Afghanistan. We thus get an insider's perspective on decision making in operational ranks. As a historical study, the book also sheds light on the potentially explosive political tensions among three state players—India, Pakistan, and China—that possess nuclear arsenals and have, we should recall, fought one another a number of times in the past half century.