Special Topics in Political Science
Afghanistan and the Politics of International Intervention

POLI SCI 390-CN
Fall 2010, Mondays 6:15pm to 9:15pm
Kresge Centennial Hall 4-435
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Course overview: Nine years after the beginning of the American-led intervention, the world’s most powerful army has yet to prove that it can succeed in Afghanistan. The counterinsurgency strategy is slow to show the expected results and the Taliban seem to grow stronger as time passes by. The growing disenchantment about this "war of necessity" is such that many in the United States and Afghanistan wonder what its purpose really is. This course acquaints students with the important debates about the war in Afghanistan, focusing on issues such as the decision to engage in this war or the evolution of the military strategy. Through the study of previous international interventions in Afghanistan students will gain a better understanding of the current Afghan war. Our study of the consequences of the U.S. engagement in Iraq on the war in Afghanistan will provide us with further lessons to apply to the Afghanistan situation. The course also uses the Afghan war as a vehicle for interpreting the politics of international intervention, making sense of the complexity of the Afghan war, by explaining how things really work. How do American decision-makers deal with warlords? What are the consequences of drug trafficking in the context of a counterinsurgency strategy? How do soldiers interact with tribal leaders? How does the U.S. work with coalition partners? What are the domestic political consequences of U.S. engagement? The course encourages students to think of the necessary trade-offs among the different goals in Afghanistan, as they try to analyze the complexity of international intervention.

Requirements: Course grades will be based upon the following components:

- Class discussion and participation: 20% (including 10% class blog)
- Mid-term paper: 40% (including 5% class presentation)
- Final paper: 40% (including 5% class presentation)

Class discussion and blog: Students are encouraged to speak up in the classroom. Students will also have an opportunity to participate in a public forum blog. Students will use secret code user names. The professor will moderate discussion and will accept suggestions from the class members for topics. This blog will be readable by the wider public, and thus expose students to the possibility that outsiders will be attracted to the discussion. Who knows? Perhaps policy makers, Afghan citizens, or U.S. soldiers may participate. [Blog details to follow].
The mid-term paper: Students will compose a short mid-term paper (6 to 8 pages or so), in response to debates from class discussion and readings. Each essay will have two due dates; the first for a draft and the second for a final version.

The final paper: Students will compose a longer (no more than 15 pages, though it would be hard to convey such thoughts adequately in less than 10 pages) analytical essay that grapples with a “bigger issue” question about US policy in Afghanistan. These questions will be determined later. They can include (but are not restricted to) matters concerning the appropriateness or effectiveness of the military strategy, moral and ethical considerations that are (or should be) associated with policies, the longer-term impact of policies on American political debates, and so forth.

Class presentations: Students will be paired up at the beginning of the quarter. One week before the papers are due, students will be asked to give a short presentation of/critique on their classmate’s draft paper. Presentations should not exceed 5 minutes. Student pairs should coordinate, to make sure they give each other enough time to review the papers. The presentations will be followed by a class discussion, aimed at nurturing the students’ papers.

Required book:
Seth Jones (2009), In the Graveyard of Empires: America’s War in Afghanistan, W.W. Norton.
Week 1: Historical background: Cold War struggles, the collapse of an effective central government, warlord politics and the rise of the Taliban

Readings:

Week 2: The aftermath of 09/11: The US Strategy, Al Qaeda’s ideology and the American-led campaign

Readings:

Week 3: Afghanistan after Bonn: The light footprint, the reconstruction of Afghanistan, the warlord strategy and NATO politics

Readings:

Week 4: The Resurgence of the Taliban: Why and how did it happen? Assessing the U.S. strategy in Afghanistan (2002-2006), Washington’s shift to a focus on Iraq

Readings:
- Seth Jones (2009), In the Graveyard of Empires, from “Collapse of Law and Order” through “National Caveats,” 163-255.
Week 5: The insurgency: Who is the enemy? Old and new Taliban, Hezb-e Islami, the Haqqani network and Al Qaeda

Readings:


Week 6: Learning from Iraq: Towards a counterinsurgency strategy? Afghanistan moves back into the spotlight in Washington

Readings:


Week 7: Counterinsurgency or counterterrorism? The way forward or the way out?

Readings:


Week 8: Regional politics: Pakistan and the new great game

Readings:


Week 9: The politics of drugs

Readings:

Week 10: Afghan politics: Patrimonialism, warlordism and factionalism

Readings:


Week 11: The politics of aid: Rebuilding Afghanistan

Readings:

ONLINE RESOURCES

**National Interest**: reflects a “realist” position in international affairs.

**Center for a New American Security** (CNAS): a Washington think tank founded by Kurt Campbell and Michelle Flournoy in 2007. Some of its associates have found positions in the Obama Administration.

**Small Wars Journal**: not formally associated with the USMC but widely read within the military community and by others who are interested in this topic.

**The US Army Battle Command Knowledge System**: provides training and information on “small wars” and counterinsurgency warfare to deployed units and to link doctrine development with training.

**The US Government Interagency Counterinsurgency Initiative**: has links to materials such as the US Army's Field Manual 3-24 (see readings).

**The Commonwealth Institute's war report**: critical analyses of Administration policies in Afghanistan. Their site also brings together important official reports and reports from think tanks and policy watchdog groups.

**The International Crisis Group** (ICG): produces well-researched reports on political developments in Afghanistan.

**The Afghan Analyst**: gathers together a wide array of useful information and links for further investigation.

**The Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit** (AREU): is a research institute based in Kabul. AREU produces quality reports on political development in Afghanistan.

**Abu Muqawama**: Andrew Exum's blog, who posts under the pseudonym Abu Muqawama. Prior to joining CNAS, Andrew Exum led a platoon of light infantry and then an Army Ranger platoon in Afghanistan at the rank of Captain.

**Ghosts of Alexander**: on the Afghan campaign and politics & society in Afghanistan.