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## Book Review: Afghanistan's Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban by Larry P. Goodson

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Larry P. Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 264 pp.

A growing literature on the Taliban was emerging prior to September 11, which included fascinating books by John Cooley, Peter Marsden, William Maley, Michael Griffin, M.J. Gohari, and Ahmed Rashid. As the larger American community suddenly discovered Afghanistan after the attack, a spate of books appeared on the heinous regime that seized the country in 1996. The best of these are by S. Amjad Hussain, Neamatollah Nojumi, and three books on the plight of Afghan women under the Taliban by Anne M. Pont, Latifa and Shekema Hachemi, and Rosemarie Skaine. Although all the books above are insightful, arguably the most scholarly, analytical, and instructive is *Afghanistan's Endless War*.

Goodson, a professor of international studies at Bentley College in Massachusetts, conducted fieldwork in Pakistan in the late 1980s for his dissertation on Afghan refugee insurgency in the region. He incorporates that work as he brings the story forward and places it in an analytical framework in which he explains how Afghanistan's ethnolinguistic, religious, social, and geographic characteristics have historically and today limited the development of a strong and viable Afghan state. He also addresses how war, outside state and religious actors, and geopolitical and geo-economics rivalries have affected the state. He analyzes how the ethnic Pushtan Taliban fit into the contemporary mix (at the time that he wrote the book), and he concludes with several scenarios about an Afghan future. In larger context, he discusses what state failure means for the failed states and for the stability of the regions in which this occurs.

Writing before American intervention, Goodson concluded that the short-term future in Afghanistan would probably be continued warfare between the contende for power and the outside agents in surrounding countries who are intimately involved. He foresaw several scenarios that envisioned the fall of the Taliban, who were decidedly unpopular outside of Pushtan areas. In his treatment of the horrors of this barbaric regime, he gives only passing references to Osma bin Laden.

Goodson explains that unless a meaningful peace could be achieved in the country, it would be a destabilizing force throughout the Central, South, and Southwest Asia region. In sum, Afghanistan provides a good example of a weak state that has suffered state failure in the post-Cold War era. Goodson predicts that the intractable problems in the country would most likely forestall stable government well in to the twenty-first century and it would even longer before Afghanistan could return to twentieth-century levels of development. It is doubtful that he would change this prediction were he writing today.

This is a very good book which provides both basic information and cogent analysis. It would serve well in a comparative politics course that deals with the problems of national building. The append, which provides brief sketches of the major organizations and individuals in Afghanistan during the last quarter of the twentieth century, and a glossary of other terms are essential attributes. Although other books on the Taliban and the continuing plight of Afghanistan undoubtedly will continue to appear, this fine study will remain among the best.

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