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Introduction by Artemy M. Kalinovsky, Temple University

More than three decades after the Soviet Union pulled its troops out of Afghanistan, new studies on Moscow's intervention and its consequences continue to appear. Although the war still receives only a fraction of the attention afforded to the American war in Vietnam, the last few decades have seen important studies on the intervention, the military history of the conflict, the diplomacy that led to the end of the Soviet war, the war's effects on Soviet society, and more.[1] Few of these studies, however, delved deeply into what was happening in Afghanistan itself, either in the leadup to the intervention or during it. This is not to say that Afghanistani actors never received attention—on the contrary, a number of works in English studied the resistance to Soviet rule, its legendary leaders, and their ties to Pakistani intelligence and the CIA.[2] And most scholars certainly acknowledged the enormous toll of the conflict for Afghanistan itself, which easily dwarfed the losses of the Soviet military. Still, the story of Afghanistani actors—including the modernizing intellectuals who shaped Afghanistan's politics in the 1960s and 1970s and the radical Communists who were able to seize power in 1978—has largely been untold.[3]

Elizabeth Leake's *Afghan Crucible: the Soviet Invasion and the Making of Modern Afghanistan* is thus a welcome contribution to the literature, to say the least. Leake, a historian of South Asia, imperialism, and decolonization, has written the first truly international history of the conflict which shifts between local, regional, and global scales. The book certainly adds to our understanding of the Soviet intervention, but its biggest contribution is perhaps to restore the agency of Afghanistani actors, taking seriously their political ambitions, international ties, and choices in an increasingly turbulent period. Afghanistan no longer appears as simply a quiet and remote land in the decades prior to the conflict, as it often does in other accounts, but rather is portrayed as a place with turbulent politics and internal strife that was driven by actors plugged in to international movements that included but transcended those sponsored by the superpowers.

The participants in this roundtable find much to praise in Leake's work. Robert Rakove emphasizes that the book serves as a "powerful corrective" to popular perceptions—which only grew stronger in the 2010s as the US struggled to implement its own agenda in the country—of Afghanistan "as a 'graveyard of empires' [which] erases the variety and vibrancy of the country's past and consigned it to an unchanging, dismal future." It is, moreover, an "exceptional addition to historical scholarship on the late twentieth century." Mejgan Massoumi agrees, highlighting the "diversity and breadth of the sources used" and arguing that the book's "strengths are in its ability to map and tease out connections between the local, national, regional, and global scales of engagement." She notes that what makes such a book possible is the "author's competence in the field paired with broad erudition."

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[1] Mark Galleoti, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Union's Last War* (London: Frank Cass, 2001); Markus Gorranson, *At the Service of the State: Soviet-Afghan War Veterans in Tajikistan, 1979–1992* PhD diss. (Aberystwyth University, 2016); Artemy Kalinovsky, "Central Asian Soldiers and the Soviet War in Afghanistan: An Introduction" in Marlene Laruelle, ed., *The Central Asia–Afghanistan Relationship From Soviet Intervention to the Silk Road Initiatives* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2017), 3-21; Rodric Braithwaite, *Afgantsy: The Russians in Afghanistan, 1979–1989* (London: Profile Books, 2011); Timothy Nunan, *Humanitarian Invasion: Global Development in Cold War Afghanistan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye: The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011). More recent publications include Vassily Klimentov, *A Slow Reckoning: The USSR, the Afghan Communists, and Islam* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2024) and Anna Reich, *"I Try Not to Think of Afghanistan:" Lithuanian Veterans of the Soviet War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2024).

[2] Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Norton, 2004); and Ali Ahmad Jalali and Lester Grau, *The Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahideen Tactics in the Soviet-Afghan War* (Quantico, Va.: U.S. Marine Corps Studies and Analysis Division, 1998).

[3] Antonio Giustozzi, *War, Politics, and Society in Afghanistan, 1978–1992* (London: Hurst & Co., 2000).

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Wazhmah Osman agrees that *Afghan Crucible* is "a refreshing contribution to the field" but is less convinced by the way that Leake handles the agency of Afghanistani actors. In her review, Osman writes that the "focus on the agency of Afghans, which sometimes feels overemphasized or overdetermined, leads to an under-emphasis of the role of foreign agents of powerful empires who have always had Afghanistan in their sights, from the Great Game to the Cold War to the War on Terror." Leaving aside the question of whether powerful empires have "always had Afghanistan in their sights," emphasizing the agency of Afghanistani actors does not mean negating the role of powerful empires. On the contrary, powerful empires have often intervened in areas where their ideologies or interests are in line with some domestic actors. This was true for the USSR as it was, later, for the US—none of which is to say that the (temporary and contingent) alignment is sufficient to explain the intervention nor the devastation that followed.

Avinish Paliwal and Liliane Stadler both offer praise for *Afghan Crucible* but pose a number of questions. Paliwal wishes that the book had done more to explore constitutional debates and inspirations, as well as the Iranian connections of the Afghan Communists, noting that "the scope of the book affords, even necessitates, a slightly longer meditation on why the 1964 constitution was rejected by [president] Daud [Khan] when he could have built on it, but more so, why the idea of a constitution was not picked up by the [People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan] PDPA…" Stadler writes that the book left her asking questions about the uniqueness of the case, as well as "How unique was the Afghan case? How idiosyncratic were Afghan conceptualizations of modernity during this decade and how did they contrast with those of other Islamic societies at the time? What were the contributions of ordinary people to these debates and how were they received by the public in different parts of the country and beyond?"

In her response, Leake thanks the reviewers for their careful engagement with her book and notes that she wrote it "for international and global history audiences, rather than those already familiar with Afghanistan's history." With regard to the question of agency, she writes,

> I do not disagree that power imbalances were critical to this conflict. However, what became most clear to me in the process of researching and writing *Afghan Crucible* was how utterly complicated and messy the war was, how difficult assigning causation or responsibility to any single group could be, particularly as circumstances changed within Afghanistan, across South and Central Asia, and in the international sphere changed over time.

Contributors:

Elisabeth Leake is the Lee E. Dirks Chair in Diplomatic History and Associate Professor of History at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University. Her book, *Afghan Crucible: The Soviet Invasion and the Making of Modern Afghanistan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022) won the 2023 Robert H. Ferrell book prize from the Society of Historians of American Foreign Relations. She also is the author of *The Defiant Border: The Afghan-Pakistan Borderlands in the Era of Decolonization, 1936–65* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017) and the co-editor of *South Asia Unbound: New International Histories of the Subcontinent* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2023) and *Decolonization and the Cold War: Negotiating Independence* (London: Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2015).

Artemy Kalinovsky is Professor of Russian, Soviet, and Post-Soviet Studies at Temple University and the Principal Investigator of an ERC funded project, based at the University of Amsterdam, which investigates the legacies of socialist development in contemporary Central Asia in order to examine entanglements between socialist and capitalist development approaches in the late twentieth century. He earned his BA from the George Washington University and his MA and PhD from the London School of Economics. His first

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book was *A Long Goodbye: The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* (Harvard University Press, 2011). His second book*, Laboratory of Socialist Development: Cold War Politics and Decolonization in Soviet Tajikistan* (Cornell University Press, 2018), won the Davis and Hewett prizes from the Association of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies.

Mejgan Massoumi is a Lecturer and Fellow in the Civic, Liberal, and Global Education Program at Stanford University. She obtained her PhD in History also from Stanford in June of 2021 with fields spanning across modern Central/South Asia and the broader Middle East. Her teaching and research interests focused on connective histories of media, music, sound, and popular culture across modern South & Central Asia, and the Middle East. She is the author of "Soundwaves of Dissent: Resistance Through Persianate Cultural Production" *Iranian Studies,* Special Issue on "Canon Formation and Persian Cultural Production in the Twentieth Century," 55:3 (2022): 697-718. She is also author of the chapter titled "Radio's Internationalism: A View from Modern Afghanistan" in *South Asia Unbound*, edited by Elisabeth Leake and Bérénice Guyot-Réchard (Chicago: University of Chicago/Leiden University Press, 2023).

Wazhmah Osman is an Afghan-American academic and filmmaker. She is currently an Associate Professor in the Klein College of Media and Communication at Temple University. Her research and teaching are rooted in feminist media ethnographies that focus on the political economy of global media industries and the regimes of representation and visual culture they produce. She is the author of *Television and the Afghan Culture Wars: Brought to You by Foreigners, Warlords, and Activists* (University of Illinois Press, 2020), which won the Activism, Communication, and Social Justice Outstanding Book Award at the International Communication Association. In *Television and the Afghan Culture Wars* she analyzes the impact of international funding and cross-border media flows on the politics of Afghanistan, the region, and beyond. She is also the co-author of *Afghanistan: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University, forthcoming) and the co-director of *Postcards from Tora Bora* (Documentary Educational Resources, 2007). She has appeared as a commentator on Democracy Now, NPR, and Al Jazeera and works with community and activist groups.

Avinash Paliwal is Reader in International Relations at SOAS University of London. He specializes in the International Relations of South Asia and is the author of *India's Near East: A New History* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2024) and *My Enemy's Enemy: India in Afghanistan from the Soviet Invasion to the US Withdrawal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Robert Rakove is a Lecturer in International Relations at Stanford University. He is the author of *Kennedy, Johnson and the Nonaligned World* (Cambridge, 2012), and *Days of Opportunity: The United States and Afghanistan Before the Soviet Invasion* (Columbia, 2023).

Liliane Stadler is a Lecturer in the History of International Relations at the Department of History and Art History of the University of Utrecht. Her research focus is on small and neutral state diplomacy during the late Cold War period, as well as on the role of non-state actors, transnational networks and private individuals in conflict resolution during the early post-Cold War period. She completed her doctorate in History at the University of Oxford (St. Antony's College) in 2021, where she focused on Swiss good offices and humanitarian diplomacy in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1992.

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Review by Mejgan Massoumi, Stanford University

The past decade has been an intellectually robust time for historical studies of Afghanistan, as the field has been enriched with new theoretical and methodological insights that showcase Afghanistan's engagements with global flows of knowledge and information exchange.[1] Elisabeth Leake's book, *Afghan Crucible: The Soviet Invasion and the Making of Modern Afghanistan,* is among these new works.

It centers on a global history of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, exploring the conflict both within and beyond the framework of the Cold War. The title of the book well indicates the author's conceptual task to attest to Afghanistan's manifold trials and tribulations as a product of integrated global historical processes. As Leake explains, the book "centers events and actors in Afghanistan within a global history of empire and anticolonialism, Cold War and regional calculations, and international institutions and politics" (p. xxii). While scholars working on diplomatic or military histories of Cold War Afghanistan have tended to rely on a multi-country comparative analysis to demonstrate the conflict's global and violent nature, Leake's unique approach combines multiple perspectives of local, regional, and international actors to provide a rich and nuanced view of Afghanistan's role in shaping the foreign policy agendas of great powers. In this regard, *Afghan Crucible* is a solid and complex account of the Cold War with roots in a tangled relationship between international and indigenous visions of sovereignty.

Through nine chapters, each of which presents a different historical analysis of the war through various actors set in specific geographical locations, Leake's multi-scalar and multi-sited approach compliments the global historical perspective of the book. Avoiding the typical chronological order of most historical monographs, Leake organizes the book's chapters by the names of global cities that capture the uneven and often muddled nature of what transpired in the late 1970s and 1980s. Beginning with Kabul, the narrative travels to Moscow, Islamabad, Peshawar and Panjshir, Washington, Nasir Bagh, Geneva, and circles back to Kabul, arriving at competing visions of post-colonial statehood. The contents of the chapters bring to light an array of domestic and foreign actors: Afghan socialists and Islamists, Soviets and Americans, regional players including China, India, Iran, and Pakistan alongside the United Nations and its concomitant High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), all of whom negotiated different interests as the Soviet withdrawal led to the subsequent civil war of the 1980s. The book masterfully balances the local and global forces that coalesced in the prophetic "crucible" of Afghanistan's modernity.

Leake sets the scene of the first chapter, "Afghanistan's Many Pasts," at Kabul University, the country's preeminent institution of higher education, which was created through various international collaborations involving American financers and German technocrats. In 1964, with the introduction of a new constitution that gave way to the establishment of political parties, Kabul University became a key center for political mobilization. Leake traces the formation of two of these important parties that had concomitant visions for the future of Afghanistan. The first is the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) which was based on a socialist model and involved figures including leftist political leaders such as Muhammed Taraki, Hafizullah Amin, Babrak Karmal, and Mohammad Najibullah, who played roles that led to the 1979 Soviet invasion (16-18). The other was based in an Islamist ideology promoted by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and

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[1] For instance, see Faiz Ahmed, *Afghanistan Rising: Islamic Law and Statecraft between the Ottoman and British Empires* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017); Robert Crews, *Afghan Modern: The History of a Global Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2015); Nile Green, ed., *Afghan History through Afghan Eyes* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016); Shah Mahmoud Hanifi, *Connecting Histories in Afghanistan: Market Relations and State Formation on a Colonial Frontier* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011); Benjamin Hopkins, *The Making of Modern Afghanistan* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); and Timothy Nunan, *Humanitarian Invasion: Global Development in Cold War Afghanistan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016.)

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Burhannudin Rabbani, who were major figures in the insurgency that led to Soviet withdrawal (1-28). Here is where Leake demonstrates a careful catalogue of competing visions of modernity and the efforts to make those visions a reality, which eventually clashed in a "political assassination, a coup, and a revolution" (42).

An important critique that runs throughout the book is the problematic discourse of British colonial tropes, including tribalism as the main unit of Afghan state formation, which have shaped a global understanding of Afghanistan's culture and society. For this reason, global foreign policy interests throughout the 1970s and 1980s (and arguably until today) tend to negate a much more complex history, and contribute to a lack of understanding of the nation as a modern political unit. In the effort to showcase Afghanistan's modernity as a product of global historical processes including decolonization and the civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the book does not discuss the inability of the Afghan state to account for the ethnic diversity of its society as a reason for successive failures to unite the country. While Leake observes that from the nineteenth century onwards Afghan monarchs sought to homogenize the state through the conflation of Pashtun ethnicity with Afghan identity, (40-41), what is missing from this discussion is the failure of the state to account for policies that recognized regional or ethnic diversity. The inability of the state to fully recognize itself as ethnically and culturally heterogenous is one of the largest pitfalls in "official" accounts of national integration in modern Afghanistan. Throughout Afghanistan's modern history, the push for state centralization limited efforts to create a stable, heterogenous, and peaceful nation. In the wake of Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and the collapse of the PDPA, fighting among various *Mujahideen* factions was fueled by ethnic and sectarian tensions that limited their ability to share power and form a centralized, diverse government.[2] The manipulation of internal and external actors played a significant role in repressing diversity, equity, and inclusion, ostensibly in the name of peace and stability. This combination of the inability of both internal and external actors to understand a diverse geography resulted in irreparable damage, including that which Leake details in the book: "the ruins of an Afghan state fashioned by Afghan socialists and buttressed by their Soviet supporters, the ruins of an Islamist resistance movement that had devolved into factional in-fighting, the ruins of an Afghan society that has fled conflict and dispersed across the world" (6).

A fascinating chapter on Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan provides an important discussion of the geopolitical fallout from the ensuing refugee crisis and the limitations of international institutions such as UNHCR. Leake raises valid concerns about corruption and the tight control of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), and reflects on the tension between the "modernizing" role of western non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and their attempts to respect "traditional" customs (208-213). An interesting and illuminating point is the competition that existed between resistance groups, the UNHCR, and relief organizations in vying for support from vulnerable Afghans. The refugee crisis became a fundamental facet of the Civil War of the 1980s that Afghan leaders were eager to exploit to elicit sympathies, locally and internationally. Beyond this, the refugee crisis also posed a challenge to the Afghan state. As Leake asserts,

> By fleeing their homeland Afghans brought into question the legitimacy of the PDPA, as well as the issue of who constituted Afghan citizens and where Afghanistan was located. While an ostensibly Afghan territory existed on maps of the world, almost half of its population had fled these boundaries rather than live under its current rulers. So did an Afghan nation exist within these international borders, or were, perhaps, refugee camps the new site of Afghan nationhood? (197).

Indeed, at the core of *Afghan Crucible* is the question of identity both of the state and its people. Whether in the refugee camp or within the country, throughout much of Afghanistan's modern history, various re-makings of the country signaled the struggles of a people who were desperately in search of an identity.

[2] See, for example, Omar Sadr, *Negotiating Cultural Diversity in Afghanistan* (Oxon: Routledge, 2020).

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Today, ongoing debates among intellectuals regarding the national labeling of "Afghan" is a testament to the fractures and disjunctures of that historical legacy, with which society continues to grapple. In the current moment, as more Afghans have had to flee the country in the wake of the Taliban's capture of power in August of 2021, the struggle of adapting and adopting a new home is intensified by the right of safe passage and the concomitant identity crisis in a world that increasingly discriminates against Muslims and people from war zones. What happens when the refugee (the *muhajir*) gets recognized as the outsider (*khareji*)? What do we make of a nation that is formed in the "crucible" of modernity? This is precisely the question Leake wants us to grapple with.

Other important chapters cover the regional background that informed the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan. In the months that preceded Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev's orders to intervene, the Shah of Iran had been toppled, the Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was executed, Vietnam invaded Cambodia, and China invaded Vietnam, which exacerbated tensions with the USSR. Another interesting chapter discusses the Afghan war from the perspective of Islamabad and Washington as well as the attitudes of the leaders of China and Iran. The chapter on Geneva eruditely explores the consequences of intended and unintended policies that resulted in the forced migration of millions of Afghan civilians who fled in response to socialist reforms. In particular, when the United Nations negotiated the Geneva Accords of 1988, neither refugee representatives nor resistance fighters were included in the diplomatic deliberations that eventually led to the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. The accords themselves were designed to enable a "Soviet withdrawal, the resumption of friendly regional relations, the return of Afghan refugees and the affirmation of Afghan self-determination" (245). However, the accords did not address the future form of government for Afghanistan or take into consideration long-standing debates on the nature of Afghanistan's modernity.

What makes *Afghan Crucible* a highly recommendable book is the author's competence in the field paired with broad erudition. The book presents a skillful combination of diverse materials extracted from government documents from the United States and Russia, newspapers, memoirs, and state archives. While the book would have clearly benefited from local sources in the native languages of Afghanistan, Leake attests that the work "does not represent an Afghan perspective" (283). There are no strong assertions of how or why Afghans responded to socialism or Islamism, nor is the claim of this book to be an on-the-ground history of the Soviet invasion. Rather, its strengths are in its ability to map and tease out connections between the local, national, regional, and global scales of engagement. An impressive bibliography makes this work a very helpful reference source.

Written in a very transparent language and easily comprehensible, *Afghan Crucible* brings to light a highly complex global history of the Cold War in Afghanistan. This book breaks new ground in the exploration of entanglements with war, empire, socialism, Islamism, and democracy through a multi-scalar and multi-sited approach. It will be of particular interest to students and scholars of history, and it also will appeal to a broad spectrum of fields across the humanities and social sciences, including international relations, political science, development, and theory, among many others. It is accessible and will be an excellent addition to undergraduate syllabi and graduate reading lists.

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Review by Wazhmah Osman, Temple University

"Between Agency and Imperial Subjectivity: A Rereading of the Afghan Social Movements of 1970s, the Soviet Invasion, and its Aftermath."

Elisabeth Leake's *Afghan Crucible: The Soviet Invasion and the Making of Modern Afghanistan* delves into the conflicts that defined Afghanistan's attempts to shape a modern state, both internal disputes and violent neocolonial interventions by foreign powers. She does this by focusing on the Soviet invasion and occupation of 1978–1989, though the final chapter looks briefly at the years following this period and the epilogue looks forward to the 2000s and the lasting effects of this conflict. The chapters are titled and organized around central locations of the war, like "Peshawar–Panjshir" (chapter 5) and "Kabul" (chapters 2 and 9), and the war's power brokers and their counteroffensives and operations, such as "Moscow" (chapter 3), "Washington" (chapter 6), and "Islamabad" (chapter 4).

Leake recognizes that in the Western canon, the dominant view of Afghan history is one of a people and culture that are bound by regressive traditional practices, tribalism, despotism, and failure. In order to justify Western colonial and neocolonial rule and violence, this narrative represents the people as militant, isolationist, and opposed to the forces of cultural exchange and progress. As postcolonial scholars from a variety of disciplines have shown, the overriding sentiment behind this narrative is that the Global South and East, and in this case Afghanistan, have failed to imitate the West and that successful imitation would have resulted in a successful modern nation.[1] As Helena Zeweri writes in a review of new books on Afghanistan, "the copious amount of literature on Afghanistan in the post-9/11 landscape has not yielded a better understanding of the country or its people—in fact, in this case, more knowledge in the form of war and imperial narratives has produced a more intense silencing of Afghan voices."[2] Yet, Afghanistan studies are undergoing a moment of reckoning, one that I hope is a revisionist turning point in the field. A number of publications have emerged that challenge the prevailing discourse of failure and despotism.[3] Elisabeth Leake

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[1] Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and Abrahamian, *The Coup: 1953, the CIA, and the Roots of Modern U.S.-Iranian Relations* (New York: The New Press, 2013); Lila Abu-Lughod, ed., *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) and Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Partha Chatterjee, "Our Modernity," in *South-South Exchange Programme for Research on the History of Development and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa* (Selangor, Malaysia: Vinlin Press, 1997), 1–20; Khaled Fahmy, "Modernizing Cairo: A Revisionist Account," in *Making Cairo Medieval*, ed. Nezar AlSayyad, Irene A. Bierman, and Nasser Rabbat, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1997), 173–201; Timothy Mitchell, ed., *Questions of Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), Mitchell, "McJihad: Islam in the US Global Order," *Social Text* 70:4 (2002): 1–18, and Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

[2] Helena Zeweri, "Between Imperial Rule and Sovereignty: Rethinking Afghanistan Studies, Interventions," *International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 24:1 (2022): 1–11, DOI: 10.1080/1369801X.2021.1885465

[3] Purnima Bose, *Intervention Narratives: Afghanistan, the United States, and the Global War on Terror* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2020); Noah Coburn, *Losing Afghanistan: An Obituary for the Intervention* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016); Robert Crews, *Afghan Modern: The History of a Global Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015); Crews and Wazhmah Osman, *Afghanistan: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming); Jamil M. Hanifi, "An Alternative Approach to Afghanistan," *Zero Anthropology*, 2011, https://www.zeroanthropology.net/2011/01/29/an-alternative- approach-to-afghanistan/; Hanifi and Shah Mahmoud, "Quandaries of the Afghan Nation," in Shahzad Bashir and Robert Crews, eds., *Under the Drones: Modern Lives in the Afghanistan-Pakistan Borderlands* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 83–101; Benjamin Hopkins, *The Making of Modern Afghanistan* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Alessandro Monsutti, "Anthropologizing Afghanistan: Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42 (2013): 269–285; Nivi Manchanda, *Imagining Afghanistan:*

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situates her book within this decolonial turn in the field, writing in the prologue, "[T]his [book] nuances narratives that focus on Afghanistan as a 'fragmented' or 'failed' state" (xxiii).

Indeed, Leake's *Afghan Crucible* is a refreshing contribution to the field. She writes, "rather than thinking of Afghanistan in isolation or as a powerless, peripheral state in twentieth-century world politics, this book centres events and actors in Afghanistan within a global history of empire and anti-colonialism, Cold War and regional calculations, and international institutions and politics" (xxii). This is a compelling project that is brought alive by engaging prose. Leake has done impressive archival research and shaped it into a narrative that pulls the reader in. She crafts a history-from-below that captures the everyday experiences of ordinary Afghans in their broader context. To be clear, this is not an ethnographic account of the Soviet-Afghan War. Nor does it provide firsthand accounts or interviews, like the prominent Afghan American historian Mohammed Hasan Kakar's classic book, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response, 1979–1982* (1995): he not only lived through the war but was active in dissenting against foreign aggression.[4] Leake is a historian by training, and the book is first and foremost a historical account of the Soviet-Afghan War.

She has used that training to expertly cull from oral histories and other archives the stories of a diverse group of Afghans, and she intersperses their disparate accounts of historical events throughout her book. The prologue describes the day that the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, 24 December 1979, through the vivid accounts of a half-dozen bewildered Afghans from Kabul who were trying to make sense of the fighter jets that filled the skies and the gunfire as 50,000 Soviet troops poured into the country. Chapter 2 opens with the recollections of a man who arrived in school on 27 April 1978, to be told "today is the revolution" (43). His memories are quickly followed up by a poem written by an activist and civil servant. These moments provide textual details and insights into the war and its effects that other methods do not provide.

Like the anonymous voices that Leake shares, I too have vivid memories of the Saur Revolution or Saur Plot and subsequent Soviet invasion, albeit those of a child. These events threw a poor but relatively peaceful country into a half-century of war and bloodshed that is still ongoing, interrupting not only the mundane activities of those particular days but the rest of the lives of all Afghans. It is important to highlight my positionality vis-à-vis the history recounted in the book because the events that Leake analyzes directly impacted my family and communities. Like half of the population of Afghanistan, my family escaped and became refugees in the bordering countries. We were refugees for four years in Peshawar, which is the site of Leake's chapter 5. Like many other Afghans, we have family members who were killed, imprisoned, and disappeared by the Soviets and their Afghan allies. Given this experience, I keenly read new scholarship on Afghanistan as part of my larger advocacy work addressing xenophobia and problematic representations of marginalized communities including my own. Narratives that perpetuate fallacies and dangerous stereotypes can provoke real, physical violence.

Leake's commitment to centering the experiences of ordinary people has the potential to draw attention to lived accounts like my own. The book's framing of the conflict in Afghanistan as fundamentally a result of internal divisions rather than external intervention might be understood as similarly returning agency to Afghans. Yet, this focus on the agency of Afghans, which sometimes feels overemphasized or

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The History and Politics of Imperial Knowledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) DOI: 10.1017/9781108867986; Timothy Nunan, *Humanitarian Invasion: Global Development in Cold War Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Wazhmah Osman, *Television and the Afghan Culture Wars: Brought to You by Foreigners, Warlords, and Activists* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020); and Zeweri, "Between Imperial Rule and Sovereignty."

[4] Mohammed Hasan Kakar, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

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overdetermined, leads to an under-emphasis of the role of foreign agents of powerful empires who have always had Afghanistan in their sights, from the Great Game to the Cold War to the War on Terror.

Leake's use of the term "Afghan civil war"—rather than "Soviet occupation"—to refer to the ten-year period she studies reflects her view of this history as fundamentally driven by Afghan society. And while the underlying motivation is laudable, and we do see some of the real complexities of Afghan society outlined in her work, I would argue that this interpretation does not take into consideration the full weight and impact of US and especially Soviet imperialism. While Leake repeatedly credits Afghans with creating "new visions of a postcolonial future" (4), it can be difficult to square this framing with the responsibility her narrative places on various groups in Afghan society for not doing enough.

That is not to say the book does not analyze foreign intervention. Leake's critique of US imperialism is particularly strong: she notes how the US perpetuated "British colonial-era tropes that deemed Afghanistan 'backward,' 'feudal,' and 'tribal'—in essence fundamentally un-modern" and she details how this "viewpoint rejected by most actors in the 1980s … went mainstream in the 2000s" (xxii, 278) Indeed, modernity is at the center of the internal conflicts that Leake cites, and she does a commendable job engaging with a longer Afghan history of modernity, writing, for example, that "Afghans envisioned and made Afghanistan the crucible for new and competing visions of modernity, the potential archetype for a truly postcolonial state" (xxiii). However, Afghan elites and leaders are held responsible in this account for fomenting division and ill-conceived plans that would have prevented those visions from becoming a reality.

I have argued that Afghans' agency in their own modernization process—and any chance at success—was effectively quashed by foreign intervention.[5] Any analysis of the "failures" of Afghanistan's modernist reforms must take into consideration how Soviet imperial agents effectively threw a wrench into Afghanistan's internal affairs. The Afghan government, which was in a weaker, dependent, subject-colony position with respect to imperial superpowers, did not have the capability to thwart the Soviet invasion from happening. For the US and the Soviet Union, Afghanistan became yet another proxy war and the final staging ground for their Cold War. The effects were such that even the elite Afghans and leaders whom Leake critiques for misleading the population could not exercise their agency against much more powerful forces that were at play. For example, when Daoud Khan, then self-appointed president of a new Communist republic, aimed to free himself and Afghanistan from Soviet debt and dependency by expunging Soviet consultants and paying off Soviet debts, Soviet agents orchestrated the killing of Khan and his entire family.[6]

While individual Afghans and social and political groups had agency, they fundamentally did not have the same power as the United States or the Soviet Union. Accounting for this asymmetry between imperial countries and the weaker countries they interfered in is a cornerstone of postcolonial historical critiques.[7] This imbalance includes US/Soviet geopolitical and military dominance, war profiteering, and the extraction of wealth. While it is true that Afghanistan's asymmetrical positionality is not simply one of unilateral subjugation, we see evidence of Afghans' agency in their doing the best they could to survive in the face of powerful historical events and forces they had little control over, as they had to negotiate and compromise with oppressive structures and violence. Imperialist forces essentially overturned the Afghan crucible in a raging fire and then balked when it failed to take shape as they would have liked.

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[5] Osman, *Television and the Afghan Culture Wars*
[6] Kakar, *Afghanistan*, 7–15.
[7] See footnote 1.

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Review by Avinash Paliwal, SOAS University of London

Fondly called "*Sheru*" (lion) by his course-mates at the Indian military academy in Dehradun, Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai reached India for training just before Soviet tanks rolled into Afghanistan. In 1982, after completing his training, this former postgraduate in political science from Afghanistan was commissioned as lieutenant in the Afghan National Army. But shortly after, he defected and joined the Mujahideen resistance against the Soviet-supported People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). English-speaking, urbane, conservative, and versed in the craft of war, Stanikzai moved to Quetta and became the liaison between Abdul Rasul Sayyaf's Islamic Union for the Liberation of Afghanistan and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

Stanikzai is now deputy foreign minister in Kabul, and the face of "moderate" Taliban. His journey from being a young Afghan army officer to a resistance fighter and a senior Taliban official is not uncommon for Afghans struggling for survival or nursing ambitions in the country's fraught societal, sectarian, and political landscape. These are, in essence, stories of contradictions, personal and political, nurtured by competing visions of modernity. Stanikzai thrived in the Islamist space of Afghanistan, despite being a source of "gossip" for Mujahideen after visiting restaurants with his wife in 1980s Pakistan.[1] Today, he is a source of global indignation for offering his daughter an education and opportunities abroad while stifling similar rights for Afghan girls writ large.[2]

A quintessential product of a shattering struggle for modern Afghanistan, Stanikzai is, in some ways, at the heart of what Elisabeth Leake terms the *Afghan Crucible*. In her latest book, Leake offers an extremely valuable new global history of the Soviet-Afghan war.[3] Based on online archives released by Kabul University and on the Arthur Paul Afghanistan Collection at the University of Nebraska-Omaha, among others, she weaves a compelling history of the Afghan civil war that began long-before Moscow decided to join forces with its purported PDPA allies.

For a topic that has been studied extensively by historians and international relations scholars, one would think that offering new insights is challenging.[4] But Leake successfully, and sensitively, unpacks Afghanistan's domestic struggles for political expression and its leaders' drive for economic upliftment by lending focus to debates within and among the PDPA, the Mao-inspired *Shola-e-Javed*, and multiple hues of Islamists ranging from the Burhanuddin Rabbani-led Jamiat-e-Islami, a Tajik-led armed Islamic outfit, to the Gulbuddin Hekmatyar-led Hizb-e-Islami, a Pashtun-centric armed Islamic outfit, throughout the 1970s and after. Somewhat mistakenly treated as adjunct to Soviet-American Cold War binaries, the political ideas espoused by Afghan elites had tremendous local inspiration and national value on their own merit.

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[1] Mujib Mashal, "The President, the Envoy, and the Talib: 3 Lives Shaped by War and Study Abroad," *The New York Times*, 16 February 2019: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/16/world/asia/afghanistan-ghani-khalilzad-stanekzai.html.

[2] Praveen Swami, "School Ban for Afghan Girls, but Taliban Leaders' Daughters Play Football, Study medicine abroad," *The Print*, 13 April 2022: https://theprint.in/world/school-ban-for-afghan-girls-but-taliban-leaders-daughters-play-football-study-medicine-abroad/913150/.

[3] Elisabeth Leake, *The Defiant Border: The Afghan-Pakistan Borderlands in the Era of Decolonization, 1936-1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[4] Artemy M. Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye: The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Amin Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan: A History of Struggle and Survival* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007); Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012); Antonio Giustozzi, *War, Politics, and Society in Afghanistan* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2000); Timothy Nunan, *Humanitarian Invasion: Global Development in Cold War Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

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Leake's meticulous treatment of former Afghan president Nur Muhammad Taraki's blood-soaked rise, in a coup that involved assassinating his predecessor Daud Khan and his entire family, offers insight into the deeper tumult in Afghan society as the 1970s ended. Conscious of his ethnic bearings, but unaware of the limits of PDPA's political power and administrative reach beyond urban centres, Taraki engaged in overreach with social and economic reforms that few Afghans could cope with. That the PDPA was under illusion about its own power is not surprising. In a country that had long been a monarchy unable to manage the aspirations of a growing but suppressed educated class, it was easy to become entrapped by the notion that power flew from top to the bottom.

The 1980s Afghan war, to that effect, was a painful, prolonged exposé of a flawed conception of state power and authority that was unmoored from societal acceptability. The mujahideen resistance with all its international links made a simple but brutal counterpoint to Taraki's reforms and Karmal's high-minded socialism, i.e. none of it is possible without a willing populace. This is one area where Leake's work offers true value, making the point that for all of their intellectual contests over modernity, identity, statecraft, and diplomacy, the Afghan Communists did surprisingly little thinking about building an enduring state-citizen contract. As Najib's desperate attempts to salvage his position in 1991 show, he reduced PDPA to little more than a Pashtun-dominated conservative party and renamed it *Hizb-e-Watan*. It lasted just as long as Moscow picked up the check, and collapsed shortly after the Soviet Union did in April 1992.

If somewhat indirectly, Leake underscores the fact that most contemporary debates around modernity in Afghanistan have been divorced from the realities of a broken state-citizen contract; and that this disconnect has deeper underpinnings than just an ethnically diverse demography. Daud Khan's ouster of former king Zahir Shah in 1973 clarified the lack of authority Kabuli elites enjoyed beyond urban confines, regardless of ethnic networks. Unsurprisingly, it was Kabul University that emerged as a laboratory and springboard of political entrepreneurs from across the spectrum; a lot of these ideas had limited popular uptake, and lesser practical viability.

On this specific aspect, Leake discounts the centrality of university campuses as an active site of politics across South Asia. Viewed from India or Pakistan, Kabul University and the political leaders it launched during the 1970s were nothing out of the ordinary. Jawaharlal Nehru University and the Lahore University were epicentres of political ideas and activism throughout the Cold War—and the former remains so today. It is true that Daud's political policing limited the scope for open dialogues in Afghan society, but his tolerance of university politics was as much a tactic of keeping safety valves open as much as it was a tacit admission of failure as an autocrat.

The Afghan Communists, just like their Soviet counterparts, understood the cost of a divorce between party-line and reality the hard way. But the Islamic right-wing resistance that pivoted from university politics to armed resistance learned the lessons in even more unfortunate ways during the 1990s. The final chapter of this book offers a snapshot of how competing ideas of Islamic conservatism became reduced to myopic, partisan identity and sectarian politics over a small set of resources, with the prime minister of the country (Hekmatyar) bombing Kabul to rubble because his defence minister (Ahmad Shah Massoud) would not let him control the capital.

Leake's organization of the book, which is chronological at first, but then pivots to world capitals with direct stakes in the Afghan crucible before returning to Kabul, helps unpack global debates around governance, geopolitics, economics, land distribution, humanitarian aid, and piety in public life. The rise of the Islam-*pasand* (Islam-loving) military dictator Zia-ul-Haq in Pakistan in 1977 was far from a historical accident. Critical of the left-leaning populist Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, whom he executed after a kangaroo trial, Zia salvaged (if that's the right word) his international reputation in the West by aligning his personal belief systems and military interests with those of Afghan Islamists and the US-led anti-Soviet efforts.

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Leake lays out the convergence and divergence in the awkward tripartite alliance between the mujahideen, Pakistan, and the US in chapter six on Washington. Here, she lays out the lack of American interest in managing or uniting the resistance, and the American assessment that fratricidal violence amongst the Islamic and secular resistance to the PDPA would fail to unite even after the Soviets withdraw. If day-to-day management of the resistance was erroneously outsourced to the ISI, with catastrophic aftereffects in terms of the relationships of Pakistan (and the US) with India, the latter assessment was blindingly accurate.

This chapter also indicates that of all the world capitals that were invested in Afghanistan, the US was arguably the least interested in redefining Afghan modernity. President Jimmy Carter's push against the Soviet Union was driven primarily by the Cold War geopolitics. To find ideological overlap on the definition of "modernity" between a liberal democracy, those arguing in favour of making Afghanistan a religious theocracy, and a conservative India-obsessed Pakistani *junta*—as post-Soviet Afghanistan credibly shows—would have indeed been impossible. Such tensions between ideas and realities is a constant feature in other chapters which investigate in the Nasir Bagh refugee camp, or Geneva, Moscow, and the Peshawar-Panjshir resistance corridor.

The one aspect I think the book could have further explored—other than the Iranian connection, which is more important for Afghan Islamists than the book suggests[5]— are constitutional debates and inspirations. Leake mentions Zahir Shah's 1964 constitution, which sought to pave the way for democratic deepening in Afghanistan, in passing, but the scope of the book affords, even necessitates, a slightly longer meditation on why the 1964 constitution was rejected by Daud when he could have built on it, but more so, why the idea of a constitution was not picked up by the PDPA (if not the Islamists, who would have viewed it as apostasy), which even kept its own Marxist-Leninist constitution a secret till 1978?[6] It was only in 2004 that Afghan elites, under pressure from the US and its allies, introduced an ultimately abortive constitutional project.

Unlike independent India, and briefly, Pakistan, and despite historical and regional precedent, this lack of consensus around a constitutional project is both a symptom and cause of a tormented state-citizen contract in Afghanistan. In some ways, this breakdown is reflected in the journey of Stanikzai, who could well have been a character in Leake's history. His opportunistic but farsighted defection from the PDPA's faux socialism and his strategic jumps into positions of power from one mujahideen faction to another, and the more recent socially uncomfortable fixture in the Taliban's corner is a case in point of what could go wrong when the politics of a country are hostage to the whims of a few rather than the consensual will of the many.

[5] Alireza Nader, Ali. G Scotten, Ahmad Idrees Rahmani, *Iran's Influence in Afghanistan: Implications for the US Drawdown* (Washington D.C.: RAND Corporation, 2014).

[6] David S. Law ed. *Constitutionalism in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 89-112.

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Review by Robert Rakove, Stanford University

Historians approaching Afghanistan wage a dual struggle. On one hand, they confront a country that remains relatively under-studied for key stretches of its history. The historian Nile Green laments a dearth of works on the period between 1929 and 1979, terming that half-century the "missing middle" of Afghan history.[1] Somewhere in this interval—even as Afghanistan largely evaded enlistment in a world war and Cold War, expanded its diplomatic horizons, and successfully elicited aid and technical advice from both blocs—the project of Afghan state-building came calamitously undone. Profound and dispiriting gaps in the evidentiary record, and at times outright redaction and classification, make the study of modern Afghanistan a difficult task. Were that not enough, historians face a relentless public discourse shaped by decades of warfare, marred by cliches, catchphrases, and conspiracy theories. The persistent but rather recent notion of Afghanistan as a "graveyard of empires" erases the variety and vibrancy of the country's past and consigns it to an unchanging, dismal future.[2]

Elisabeth Leake's *Afghan Crucible* is a powerful corrective to such treatments and an exceptional addition to historical scholarship on the late twentieth century. It chronicles the point of rupture in Afghan history: the country's descent into a civil war that was freighted with regional and global implications. Moving adroitly to depict an array of Afghan and foreign actors, it establishes three core interrelated themes: the contingency of Afghan history, the ambitions of Afghan and foreign actors, and—contrary to the graveyard trope—the non-exceptional nature of Afghanistan.

A sense of contingency emerges in Leake's evocative first chapter, which opens in 1965, on the campus of newly constructed Kabul University, in the wake of Afghanistan's first national elections. The setting and its description offer a fresh perspective. Pre-crisis Afghan politics were, as she puts it, "[d]iverse yet fundamentally forward-looking," fertilized by transnational currents, diplomatic connections, and the travels of a small, but influential corps of Afghan students and professionals. It is a picture that is more poignant than ominous, even as she notes that Kabul University housed the future leadership of Afghanistan's Marxist and Islamist parties (7-9). One of the capital's frequent earthquakes, timed and situated differently, could have changed history.

Her frequent, concise discussion of Afghanistan's wider region meanwhile serves to illuminate a broader wave of upheaval. The political crisis that beset Afghanistan in the following decade was anything but an isolated event, occurring alongside Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's emergency, the post-Chairman Mao Zedong scramble in China, the overthrow of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in Pakistan, and the Iranian Revolution. Against this backdrop, turmoil in Kabul scarcely appears to have been extraordinary; the difference, according to Leake, is one of timing and circumstance. The Marxist victors of the April 1978 coup—who had barely survived a preemptive wave of arrests by the government of President Mohammed Daoud Khan—were ill-prepared to exercise power.[3] Numerous other parties were ill-disposed to wait for them. Brief counterfactual interjections by the author serve a valuable purpose. If some degree of civil conflict was to be expected, it was hardly foreordained that Afghanistan would, shortly after it commenced,

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[1] Nile Green, "Locating Afghan History," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45, no. 1 (February 2013): 132–34.

[2] On these and others, see Nivi Manchanda, *Imagining Afghanistan: The History and Politics of Imperial Knowledge* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[3] In the immortal phrasing of Louis Dupree: in the April coup, "Foul-up followed foul-up and the side with fewer foul-ups won." Louis Dupree, "Red Flag Over the Hind Kush Part II: The Accidental Coup, or Taraki in Blunderland," *American Universities Field Staff Reports* 45:5 (1979).

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be flanked by neighboring powers that were inclined to support Islamist parties,[4] or that a change of regime would occur amid a dramatic and largely unrelated unraveling of the US-Soviet détente regime.

Afghanistan's neighbors and the United States discerned both risk and opportunity in the unfolding struggle. More important than any innate Afghan conditions, in other words, were the choices of these other parties: each determined to make Afghanistan the proving ground of one doctrine or another. While no one actor or coalition could claim preponderant power in the ensuing struggle, each enjoyed a veto over the attainment of rival agendas. Exercised collectively, if not simultaneously, their vetoes condemned Afghanistan to further decades of warfare.

In concise, compelling, and broadly researched chapters, Leake introduces us to the various external parties who turned the Afghan civil war into something both locally destructive and globally significant. This poly-centric approach is not new in her work. An earlier book, *The Defiant Border*, analyzes the stakes ascribed to Pakistan's North West Frontier Provinces across three decades from the vantage points of policymakers in Britain, the United States, Afghanistan, and British India and its successor states.[5] In *Afghan Crucible*, the scope widens further, taking the reader from Kabul to Islamabad, Moscow, Washington, and Geneva, with concise treatment of decisions in Tehran, New Delhi, and Beijing as well.[6] Consequently, while this is not the first account of the eighties-era Afghan war, it is absolutely the broadest.[7]

Ambition rather than desperation defines this account. Leake challenges us with her early declaration that "the Afghanistan of the 1980s was a place of potentials" (5). Although it is a study of war, *Afghan Crucible* focuses on acts of creation, and does so in conscious rebuke of some earlier works—Leake detects a "morbid fascination" with battlefield events in much of the historical literature (69).

Central to this account is a nuanced, but not exculpatory, examination of the much-maligned People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). "A party of contradictions," the PDPA was wracked by vicious infighting and yet somehow managed to survive in power for fourteen years (44). Its 1978 reform program was ambitious, but departed little from the promises made by Daoud. Provocatively, Leake suggests that little distinguished the PDPA's controversial land reform policy from that of other governing parties in the post-colonial world—Marxist or otherwise. Profound ignorance of the Afghan countryside and a lack of administrative capacity undermined the PDPA, as did its frequent reliance on mass violence, yet by her

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[4] It is worth noting that Pakistan, under President Mohammed Ayub Khan, had previously dabbled with religious assaults on the Kabul government. A 15 February 1960 broadcast leveled the same accusations heard two decades later: "These rulers of Kabul, the enemies of Afghanistan, listen to the voice of coins and forget Islam and its teachings. First, they extended friendly relations with the infidels they illuminated the Hindu temples of Bamian and in this way teased the spirit of Mahmud-i-Ghaznavi, the iconoclast. After these infidels the rulers of Kabul made friends with the atheists, the Communists, who were allowed to enter Afghanistan and to start propagating Marxism in every corner of the country." See Despatch 174, Kabul to Washington, 23 February 1960, Record Group 59, Central Decimal Files, 689.90D/2-2360, U.S. National Archives, College Park, MD.

[5] Elisabeth Leake, *The Defiant Border: The Afghan-Pakistan Borderlands in the Era of Decolonization, 1936-65* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[6] Necessarily, the actions of some foreign actors are more easily charted than others. While the broader contours of Pakistani policy are discernible, the inaccessibility of official records precludes close analysis of Zia's evolving perceptions. The discussion of Iran's policy, which considerably mirrored Pakistan's but has commanded far less attention, is intriguing. More, yet, could be uncovered of Saudi policy toward the conflict.

[7] It bears some resemblance to Asher Orkaby's excellent international history of the war in Yemen during the 1960s. Asher Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War: The International History of the Yemen Civil War, 1962–68*, Oxford Studies in International History (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

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account it proved surprisingly adaptable—even as the Red Army acted as its principal bulwark. Its post-1989 endurance surpassed that of President Ashraf Ghani's government in 2021.

Surprising and imitative similarities also link the Afghan Marxists with their Islamist nemeses. As Leake observes, both factions came of political age on the campus of Kabul University in the 1960s and early 1970s. Both movements faced repression after Daoud's coup in 1973 and adopted the tactics of revolutionary struggle. The Islamists notably developed extensive party programs, often in competition with each other, as tenuous alliances fractured. Internecine conflict between the parties sapped the Afghan resistance, but also bolstered the ambitions of rebel leaders like Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Burhanuddin Rabbani, and Ahmed Shah Massoud, prodding each to elucidate his vision of the Afghan future, while cultivating patrons outside of the country. Hekmatyar's Hizb-i-Islami promised Afghan laborers a better standard of living; Massoud undertook ambitious efforts to organize civil society in the Panjshir Valley. The wartime competition between parties—at times as vicious as their struggle against the Communists—seeded further violence after the fall of the PDPA.

Meanwhile, foreign actors launched their own Afghan enterprises, meanwhile. One of the distinct contributions of the book is its study of Soviet state-building under fire, which complements earlier work by Tim Nunan, Bob Crews, Rodric Braithwaite, Paul Robinson, and Jay Dixon.[8] Considering the wariness with which the Kremlin viewed Afghanistan, the extent of its state-building efforts is startling. Leake's sensible conclusion is that the Soviets simply did not know what else to do and fell back on an established socialist playbook: thus, as the 40th Army cast about in search of the elusive mujaheddin, a civilian army embarked on its own extensive mission. Moscow held a comparative advantage in terms of Afghanistan expertise, but not nearly enough personnel for the task. As in *The Defiant Border*, ideology and the limits of prior knowledge yielded misguided policy.

The same could, of course, be said for the Americans, whose intellectual reliance on British notions of a primitive, tribalized society precluded consideration of what Afghanistan's postwar future might be, or closer examination of their mujaheddin allies. Distant from the action, always reliant on Pakistani middlemen, and—in the case of President Ronald Reagan—sentimentally invested in the Afghan struggle, US officials clung to the image of a tribal country, overlooking the salience of Islam within the resistance. This reversion, it could be said, reflected the shocks of 1978–1979. Up to the fall of Daoud's republic, American leaders had invested their Afghanistan policy in the strivings of a cosmopolitan but small elite centered in Kabul. The unexpected triumph of the PDPA turned allies and partners into refugees, prisoners, or names on an interminable list of the dead.[9] Deprived of the familiar faces who had made Afghanistan briefly legible, their recourse to longstanding tropes had an almost kneejerk quality.

International actors, meanwhile, pursued expansive agendas in the refugee camps that dotted the Pakistani borderlands. Perhaps the book's finest chapter details the parallel Afghanistan that arose in the camps, where millions of Afghans took up residence. Leake notes the irony that international actors—working from a far less expansive vision—wrought far more extensive change than their Marxist or Islamist counterparts. For

[8] Robert D. Crews, *Afghan Modern: The History of a Global Nation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2015); Timothy Nunan, *Humanitarian Invasion: Global Development in Cold War Afghanistan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Rodric Braithwaite, *Afgantsy: The Russians in Afghanistan, 1979–1989* (London: Profile, 2011); Paul Robinson and Jay Dixon, *Aiding Afghanistan: A History of Soviet Assistance to a Developing Country* (London: Hurst, 2013).

[9] Before meeting the newly seated Afghan President Nur Mohammed Taraki, US Ambassador Ted Eliot was received by the same deputy chief of protocol who had served Daoud, and belonged to his extended family. Eliot's well-intentioned question about the official's family elicited weeping. Telegram 3619, Kabul to Washington, 6 May 1978, Archive of American Diplomacy.

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international organizations, the camps provided a site for humanitarianism along Western lines, but their everyday administration eroded earlier identities and structures, substituting new ones. In place of traditional notions of Afghan mobility or the Islamic tradition of the muhajir, they substituted a notion of refugee status conveying helplessness and desperation. The Afghanistan-in-exile that emerged served as a rebuke to the government in Kabul, but also a challenge to subsequent efforts to reunite the country. "Afghanistan is finished. Finished for good," one refugee concluded (197).

Perhaps not, but Leake's book describes the irrevocable internationalization of Afghan politics by actors who did not take the time to understand it: the collapse of meaningful borders between the domestic and the international—lines of demarcation that had stood stoutly until Daoud's overthrow. It implicates the international community in the ensuing maelstrom. If there is an Afghan exceptionalism, it may be this: the willingness of a diverse range of foreign actors to ascribe extraordinary significance to the country, for reasons only occasionally related to the aspirations of Afghans themselves.

Afghanistan's plight—then and now—reveals the conceits and choices of the world around it. As in the 1980s, the consequences emanate globally. *Afghan Crucible* powerfully illustrates the perils treating this country as a special canvas for doctrines and suppositions, or of isolating its history and experiences from those of the world at large. It is a vital addition to histories of Afghanistan and its place in the wider world.

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Review by Liliane Stadler, University of Utrecht

Elisabeth Leake's *Afghan Crucible* is one of the more comprehensive recent accounts of Afghanistan under Soviet occupation from 1979 to 1989.[1] It is a valuable publication for any student or scholar of global, Central Asian and Afghan Cold War history, as it reconceptualises the way in which the implications of the occupation for Afghan governance have conventionally been understood. It portrays the occupation and the concurrent civil war not as a descent into prolonged and unresolved military conflict in a powerless, peripheral state during the late Cold War period, but rather portrays this pivotal episode of Afghan history as a sustained and severe test for competing interpretations of the meaning of modernity in Afghanistan and beyond (xx). What is more, it situates those actors, events and ideas that may hitherto have been known primarily to seasoned observers of Afghan politics within a global context of empire, decolonization, and struggling international institutions.

According to Leake, the war in Afghanistan was primarily a clash between different Afghan, as well as foreign, visions of the future (xxii). It was the cumulation of an ongoing debate on the nature of Afghan politics, the role of Afghan citizens therein, as well as the relationship between state sovereignty and the international system of states (xxii). It is a history of ideas, of the interplay between socialism, Islamism, constitutional monarchism, and parliamentarianism within a political context that had arguably been exempted from, but which was nevertheless deeply affected by, the global expansion of European empires during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The book itself is divided into nine chapters. Each offers a different lens of analysis and examines how different groups of actors approached the war in their specific geographical locations (1). Chapter one sets the stage by delving into the intellectual and political discourse that shaped existing perceptions of Afghan modernity prior to the Soviet invasion of 1979. By 1964, Afghanistan was a constitutional monarchy and under its ruling monarch, King Zaher Shah, parliament passed legislation which allowed the formation of various political parties, one of which was the Communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA, 14). The PDPA was a party of deep internal contradictions. It split into two competing factions as early as 1967. The so-called *Khalq* faction, led by Mohammad Taraki, promoted a workers-led revolution along Leninist lines, while the *Parcham* faction, led by Babrak Karmal, advocated more moderate, national-democratic reforms (20).

Both factions re-united in 1977. However, as chapter two goes on to show, the PDPA's most fundamental problems intensified. Its leaders tended to associate organized religion with feudalism and backwardness, blaming it for the absence of a strong, centralized state in Afghanistan (61). After gaining power in a *coup d'état* in 1978, the PDPA introduced sweeping economic, political, and social reforms, which were met with resistance both from the general population, as well as from diverse armed resistance groups (45). What is more, in an internal coup of September 1979, Hafizullah Amin upstaged and removed President Mohammad Taraki. Leake notes that the Soviet invasion of December 1979 took place primarily to reinforce the unstable socialist government under PDPA rule, and was arguably not even intended to become a war (69). Rather,

[1] This review was first published on line in *Cold War History* (23 January, 2023; DOI: 10.1080/14682745.2022.2158711) and appears here with the kind permission of Molly Pucci. See also Vassily Klimentov, "In Search of Islamic Legitimacy: The USSR, the Afghan Communists and the Muslim World," *Cold War History* 23:2 (2023): 283-305, DOI: 10.1080/14682745.2022.2103114; Conor Tobin. "The Myth of the 'Afghan Trap': Zbigniew Brzezinski and Afghanistan, 1978-1979," *Diplomatic History* 44:2 (2020), 237-264, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dhz065; Timothy Nunan, "Graveyard of Development? Afghanistan's Cold War Encounters with International Development and Humanitarianism" in Stephen Macekura and Erez Manela, eds., *The Development Century: A Global History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 220-239.

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Soviet observers had reasons to doubt both Amin's devotion to socialist ideology and his loyalty to the Soviet Union (75). As chapter three shows, Soviet decisionmaking with regards to Afghanistan was not without precedent. In 1968, General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev had dispatched troops into Czechoslovakia for similar reasons and during the 1970s, Soviet support for Communist movements in Angola and Ethiopia had been partially successful (72).

Chapters four and five outline many of the obstacles that the Soviet forces faced in achieving their original aims. Most notably, they and their Afghan counterparts faced a complex web of shifting alliances among scarcely coordinated Islamic resistance groups, which are collectively known as the *mujahideen*. A number of these groups emerged in political exile in Iran and Pakistan prior to the Soviet invasion itself. Yet, while many resistance groups were united in their opposition to the Soviet invasion, Marxism, and atheism, they disagreed over a number of other substantial issues. What would an Islamic Afghanistan entail, for instance? How would Afghanistan reconcile its ethnic, tribal, religious, and social diversity? What role would the resistance play in the event of a Soviet withdrawal (145)?

Leake demonstrates in great detail that many resistance movements had fundamentally different visions of what Afghanistan's future political hierarchy ought to look like. This proved to be detrimental to the pursuit of Afghan modernity in the aftermath of the Soviet withdrawal of 1989. Whereas the intellectual and political discourse of the pre-war period had developed around competing ideas for the best form of government, disagreements among the resistance descended into arguments that primarily revolved around power distribution among competing factions.

Chapters six, seven, and eight add an international dimension to this dilemma by introducing the involvement of the United States, characterizing the predicament of Afghan refugees, and analyzing the role of the United Nations (UN) in negotiating the so-called Geneva Accords of 1988. By 1987, Leake estimates that the United States provided an annual US$700 million in military assistance to the resistance (170). Yet unlike Soviet leaders, American policymakers demonstrated limited interest in the future development of Afghanistan (172). Funneling covert assistance to the Afghan resistance primarily prolonged the Afghan conflict at the expense of the Soviet Union, but also to the detriment of peace in Afghanistan, and of a previously vibrant discourse over the meaning of Afghan modernity.

Meanwhile, the situation of millions of Afghan refugees and internally displaced civilians became increasingly permanent. Interestingly, chapter seven argues that refugee camps in neighboring Pakistan and Iran also became sites of competition over Afghan modernity. In Pakistan, for instance, the authorities required foreign aid to be provided through government channels. At the same time, the Pakistani authorities also channeled foreign military aid to the resistance, and refugee camps became recruitment grounds for competing resistance parties, undermining "UNHCR attempts to keep the camps apolitical" (208).

Neither refugee representatives nor resistance fighters were included in the diplomatic deliberations that eventually led to the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. Between 1982 and 1988, representatives of the Soviet-installed Afghan regime and the Pakistani government periodically met in Geneva under the auspices of the UN. Chapter eight discusses the incremental progress of these talks and addresses the reasons why they eventually produced an agreement that was insufficient to restore peace to Afghanistan. The accords themselves were designed to enable a "Soviet withdrawal, the resumption of friendly regional relations, the return of Afghan refugees and the affirmation of Afghan self-determination" (245). They did not address the future form of government for Afghanistan or take into consideration long-standing debates on the nature of Afghan modernity. Chapter nine correspondingly covers the renewed descent into civil war after the collapse of the Soviet-installed Afghan regime of Mohammad Najibullah in 1992.

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Overall, *Afghan Crucible* provides several substantial insights into the roles of local, regional, and international actors during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989. Similar to Timothy Nunan's investigations into the role of humanitarianism in the Afghan context, Leake's book introduces a new conceptual lens through which to examine this critical period in Afghan history.[2] By focusing on competing ideas of Afghan modernity, she sheds light not only the plurality of views on this subject at the time of the Soviet invasion, but on how these have struggled to co-exist and evolve under the oppressive weight of the Soviet occupation. Ultimately, socialism, Islamism, constitutional monarchism, and parliamentarianism withered "on the field of battle", yet as Leake convincingly shows, this was by no means a foregone conclusion.

Afghan Crucible argues that the war in Afghanistan was "a battle for the future" of the country, a "conflict driven by ideas and aspirations that receded into the background and into the past" (270). The paradox behind this realization is inherent in Leake's definition of modernity, which she understands as a claims-making project "to transition from a past to a different future, to change the individual's, the community's, and ultimately the nation's practices and understandings of their role in politics and society" (4). In essence, Leake shows that there was no shortage of potential for the modernization of Afghanistan during the 1980s. However, instead of fulfilling this potential, the "tangled intersection between domestic, regional, and international affairs at a moment of broader global change" led to a long-winding descent into civil and transnational conflict (270).

This descent also had important consequences for the international system of the late Cold War period. The emergence of Afghan socialism and Islamism was a direct consequence of earlier decades of political reform and change. Chapter one of *Afghan Crucible* illustrates this in substantial detail. Yet these developments did not take place in a vacuum. They took place after the demise of most of the European empires, at time when the nation-state became globally accepted as the principal building block of the international system enshrined in the UN Charter of 1945. The Soviet invasion of 1979 challenged the basic principles of international law and violated the sovereignty and self-determination of an ostensibly independent country (229). As Leake points out, this was not an issue that the UN was able to resolve. Its membership was restricted to independent nation-states and its most powerful members were given the prerogative to block UN action on some of the most basic tenets of its charter. Consequently, the Soviet invasion was not sanctioned by the Security Council, and the civil war, which continued after the Soviet withdrawal of 1989, remained unresolved.

Afghan Crucible leaves a few questions open for further research. How unique was the Afghan case? How idiosyncratic were Afghan conceptualizations of modernity during this decade and how did they contrast with those of other Islamic societies at the time? What were the contributions of ordinary people to these debates and how were they received by the public in different parts of the country and beyond? Last, what does the Afghan case tell us about the broader conceptual relationships between sovereignty, modernity and conflict at the end of the Cold War? By indirectly raising these questions, *Afghan Crucible* extends an invitation for further research into the concept of modernity in areas of the globe that require more sustained scholarly attention.

[2] See Timothy Nunan, *Humanitarian Invasion: Global Development in Cold War Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

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Response by Elisabeth Leake, The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Artemy Kalinovsky, Mejgan Massoumi, Wazhmah Osman, Avinash Paliwal, Robert Rakove, and Liliane Stadler for their thoughtful engagement with *Afghan Crucible* as part of this roundtable, and to H-Diplo for organizing it. It is a real privilege to have such a formidable range of scholars read my work and take its ideas seriously, even more so given the breadth of expertise they collectively bring to the roundtable. I wrote *Afghan Crucible* in an effort to bridge the gap between area studies, on one hand, and global and international histories, on the other. As such, it is satisfying to see a roundtable that represents Afghanistan specialists, South Asianists, and international historians, and brings these different perspectives together.

Afghan Crucible was a project I first began contemplating more than a decade ago, and its gestation has paralleled huge changes in the fields of both Afghanistan studies and international and global history. Perhaps the greatest challenge of writing this book was trying to find a balance between these different subfields, and I will focus on this issue in my response.

Afghan Crucible was largely written for international and global history audiences, rather than those who are already familiar with Afghanistan's history. An issue that struck me as I wrote was the lack of diversity in how many scholars have approached the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as an event of international concern. This is particularly obvious in comparison to the Vietnam War, which has dominated so many international histories of the twentieth century. While the Vietnam War has been covered extensively and through various registers—its military and political facets, social and cultural impacts (in both the United States and Vietnam), Cold War strategy, US and French empire, forced displacement, and environmental impacts, to name but a few[1]—the same cannot be said for histories of the war in Afghanistan. The war has often been told through the lens of *either* a history of foreign (Soviet, US, Pakistani) intervention *or* an Afghan conflict (Timothy Nunan's work is a key exception here).[2] Likewise, in international context, it has been analyzed overwhelmingly as a Cold War battleground, which consequently narrows the analytical framework. Such an approach cannot adequately demonstrate the interplay between local, regional, and international factors that created a devastating war that has continued, in evolving form, into the present day.

The war in Afghanistan was not an "either-or" story of foreign intervention or local conflict. In this regard, a multi-scalar and multi-locational approach provided the best way to tease out some of the key issues at play, and global history methodologies, with their emphasis on comparisons and connections, were especially helpful. In her review, Osman poses the critical question of which actor(s) were most responsible for the war's devastating consequences. She points to the power imbalances at play which, she argues, made the Soviets particularly responsible for Afghanistan's plight. I don't disagree that power imbalances were critical to this conflict. What became most clear to me in the process of researching and writing *Afghan Crucible*, however, was how utterly complicated and messy the war was, and how difficult assigning causation or responsibility to any single group could be, particularly as circumstances within Afghanistan, across South and Central Asia, and in the international sphere changed over time.

On the Soviet side, I emphasized the sheer magnitude of the intervention, both military and civilian. The scale of the Soviet invasion went far beyond a military campaign, and the nation- and state-building aspects of

[1] See, for example, Simon Toner, "Interminable: The Historiography of the Vietnam War, 1945-1975," in Christopher R. Dietrich, ed., *A Companion to U.S. Foreign Relations: Colonial Era to the Present* (New York: Wiley, 2020), 855-887.

[2] Timothy Nunan, *Humanitarian Invasion: Global Development in Cold War Afghanistan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

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the Soviet project were perhaps even more critical for leading to long-term instability. In contrast, I would argue that US *in*action played perhaps an even greater continuing role. The Reagan administration's lack of interest in seeking a political resolution to the war, whether through pressure on Pakistan and the Afghan resistance or via the United Nations, allowed the war to persist into the 1990s and beyond. Nevertheless, the decisions of these two superpowers cannot be disaggregated from those of their regional partners (Pakistan, Iran, India, China, as well as Saudi Arabia, whose interests I only touched upon in passing); the lobbying and negotiation strategies of local Afghan groups and civilians; or the actions of the international community, particularly as represented by the UN. International histories, particularly of the Cold War, have often focused too heavily on great power politics and actors rather than recognizing the multilateral, multidirectional nature of decisionmaking and its consequences, as well as the significance of local agency, though this has changed in recent years.[3]

Trying to write a book that brought together so many different perspectives (historical and historiographical) was a real challenge, and I appreciate the fact that the reviewers have seen the merits of my chosen approach, and particularly the attention paid to both state and non-state actors. A history of the war is incomplete if it focuses solely on top decisionmakers in the US, Soviet, or Pakistani governments or the leaders of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. State claimants, such as the Afghan resistance parties that were based in Pakistan and Iran, played a crucial role, even as they often were denied a seat at the bargaining table because they were not formally state leaders. So, too, did representatives of international organizations, mid-level officials and bureaucrats, and civilians in and around Afghanistan and across the world. The chapter on Afghan refugee experiences was a particularly important one in *Afghan Crucible*. This history of human suffering was one that I found to be frustratingly absent from many histories of the conflict. While scholars in refugee studies have acknowledged the Afghan refugee crisis as one of the largest in modern history,[4] its consequences are often referred to only in passing (if at all) in Cold War and international histories. And yet this facet of the conflict has had some of the most profound consequences for Afghanistan and the Afghan diaspora.

Following the actors, themselves, often provided the best way for highlighting local, regional, and global interests and the effects of the war. One problem that became clear as part of this process was that of terminology. It is difficult to find a term for a conflict that was *both* a civil war and an external invasion. I agree with Osman that "civil war" does not quite do justice to the conflict and its international dimensions, but I ultimately chose this term to more fully emphasize Afghan agency and ideas and to move away from narratives that have focused heavily on Soviet, US, or Pakistani decisionmaking, in turn reinforcing histories of the war in Afghanistan that overlook Afghans. I would certainly welcome fresh terminology that allows historians and social scientists to more adequately discuss conflicts that are neither purely intrastate nor interstate. Navigating between these scales—or tracing the "intermestic"—is often challenging, intellectually and structurally, as well as in terms of the required (often multinational) research.[5]

On the specificities of Afghanistan, Massoumi, Osman, and Rakove rightly point out how the state of historical studies has changed drastically during the past decade. Scholars have done much more to trace Afghanistan's complicated, vibrant history, pushing back against tired tropes, such as Afghanistan as the "graveyard of empires." Indeed, Massoumi's and Osman's own research on Afghanistan's musical and

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[3] See, for example, Lorenz M. Lüthi, *Cold Wars: Asia, the Middle East, Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), though this text still focuses overwhelmingly on state actors.

[4] See Peter Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), chapter 9.

[5] I have attempted to study the "intermestic" in a different regional context. See Elisabeth Leake, "Where National and International Meet: Borders and Border Regions in Postcolonial India," *International History Review* 44:4 (2022): 856-873.

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communications landscapes, respectively, has done much to contribute to new cultural, social, and political histories of Afghanistan,[6] and it is exciting to see them joined by young scholars like Munazza Ebtikar, Marjan Wardaki, Rahman Mohammadi, Kyara Klausmann, and Ping-hsiu Lin, among others.[7] So, too, has Afghanistan's history become increasingly internationalized, as demonstrated by Paliwal's work on Indo-Afghan relations, Stadler's research on Swiss humanitarian engagement with Afghanistan, and Rakove's excellent new history of US-Afghan relations, which join works by scholars like Nunan, Artemy Kalinovsky, Nile Green, and Robert Crews.[8]

In this context, *Afghan Crucible* is part of a growing corpus of scholarly work that seeks to reveal Afghanistan's rich history—within its physical borders, regionally, and internationally—and I am happy that it contributes to the "moment of reckoning" in Afghanistan studies noted by Osman. I hope that *Afghan Crucible* helps spur additional work on Afghan history in the 1980s. Klausmann's forthcoming book on Kabul University speaks to Paliwal's point about the crucial significance of university campuses in the formation of (trans)national political thought up to and during the 1980s, which I only had space to address in my first chapter.[9] The question of constitutionalism, also raised by Paliwal, offers another exciting lens for examining the 1980s. While I have touched on this topic in a limited way in another publication, I agree that this is another subject in need of additional research.[10] Moreover, as Massoumi points out in her review, there is still huge scope—and necessity—for additional histories of the war that delve further into its regional, ethnic, and linguistic specificities and the ways in which various parts and peoples of Afghanistan experienced the war differently. Osman points to Mohammed Hasan Kakar's text, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response, 1979–1982*, as a must-read for anyone interested in firsthand Afghan accounts of the war.[11] This is certainly true; but that book was published in the 1990s, and it is time for an update by other scholars.

Of course, we must acknowledge the terrible circumstances in Afghanistan that make much of the ethnographic work or collection of oral interviews that would underpin such a history extremely dangerous—especially for Afghans living under Taliban rule. We cannot forget that there is a moral aspect to the types of

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[6] Mejgan Massoumi, "Soundwaves of Dissent: Resistance Through Persianate Cultural Production in Afghanistan." *Iranian Studies* 55:3 (2022): 697-718; Mejgan Massoumi, "Radio's Internationalism: A View from Modern Afghanistan," in Bérénice Guyot-Réchard and Elisabeth Leake, eds., *South Asia Unbound: New International Histories of the Subcontinent* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023), 269-288; Wazhmah Osman, *Television and the Afghan Culture War : Brought to You by Foreigners, Warlords, and Activists* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020).

[7] Marjan Wardaki, "Rediscovering Afghan Fine Arts: The Life of an Afghan Student in Germany, Abdul Ghafur Brechna," *Modern Asian Studies* 55:5 (2021): 1544–1580; Kyara Klausmann, *The Global Cold War on Campus: Student Activism at Kabul University, 1964-1992* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023); Ping-Hsiu Lin, "Precious Economies: Gems and Value-Making in the Pakistan-Afghanistan Borderlands," Ph.D. diss. (Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2021).

[8] Avinash Paliwal, *My Enemy's Enemy: India in Afghanistan from the Soviet Invasion to the US Withdrawal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Liliane Stadler, "The Transfer of Soviet Prisoners of War from Afghanistan to Switzerland, 1982–1986," *Contemporary European History* (2022): 1-17; Robert B. Rakove, *Days of Opportunity: The United States and Afghanistan before the Soviet Invasion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023); Nunan, *Humanitarian Invasion*; Artemy M. Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye: The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011); Robert D. Crews, *Afghan Modern: The History of a Global Nation* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2015); Nile Green, "The Trans-Border Traffic of Afghan Modernism: Afghanistan and the Indian 'Urdusphere'," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 53:3 (2011): 479-508.

[9] Klausmann, *Global Cold War on Campus*.

[10] Elisabeth Leake, "Constitutions and Modernity in Post-Colonial Afghanistan: Ethnolinguistic Nationalism and the Making of an Afghan Nation-State," *Law and History Review* 41:2 (2023): 295-315. See also the excellent Faiz Ahmed, *Afghanistan Rising: Islamic Law and Statecraft between the Ottoman and British Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2017).

[11] Mohammed Hasan Kakar, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response, 1979–1982* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995).

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research we do, and current events, more than ever, force academics to wrestle with the research we conduct, how we complete it without putting people at risk, and how, in turn, this shapes the questions we ask or the works we produce. (This is true far beyond work on Afghanistan, as recent debates about conducting research in Russia have shown.)[12] I appreciate that the reviewers took seriously the "Note on Sources" that I included in *Afghan Crucible*, through which I explained what research I could and could not complete in the pursuit of this book. I also want to thank *History Workshop Online* for providing me with a forum in which to wrestle at further length with some of the moral and contingent natures of historical research.[13]

Despite being one of the most important crises of the twentieth—and, I would add, twenty-first—centuries, the Soviet-Afghan war has yet to be explored with adequate breadth or depth. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to make one intervention, and I appreciate the reviewers for their additional contributions, both in their own scholarship and their reviews of *Afghan Crucible*. I look forward to seeing the field develop even further.

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[12] Susan Smith-Peter, "Rethinking: 'The Russian Archives'," *Ab Imperio* 2 (2022): 63-69. See also Ping-hsiu Alice Lin, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Ethics of Fieldwork in Northwest Pakistan," *International Quarterly for Asian Studies* 53:4 (2023): 587-612.

[13] Elisabeth Leake, "(In)accessible Stories and the Contingency of History Writing," *History Workshop Online*, 27 May 2022, https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/museums-archives-heritage/inaccessible-stories-and-the-contingency-of-history-writing/.

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