

HIST 5011A

From September 11 to Afghanistan War

Individual Perspective on Good and Evil



Submit to: Professor Yuen-sang Leung

Submitted by: Hongyu Wang

1155009869

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The world nowadays, in terms of terrorist attacks, is safer than it was one to two decades ago. Memories of tragedies may still hang fresh in the minds around the world, particularly in the United States, when the September 11 attack in 2001 took almost 3,000 livesⁱ. Subsequently in 2002 to 2003, suicide bombers attacked the entire world, from Bali/Philippines (Oct 2002) to Riyadh/Casablanca (May 2003), from Jakarta/Baghdad (August 2003) to Riyadh/Nasiriya/Istanbul (November 2003). These bombers were trained and financed by al Qaeda, a loosed affiliated terrorist organization with worldwide influences which was first set up by Osama bin Laden in somewhat between 1988 to 1989 toward the end of Soviet occupation in Afghanistan as a resistance force, whom later in 1996-2001 supported by Taliban Afghanistan in exchange for bin Laden's financial backing to the regime.

United States, on the other hand, took "sand pounding"ⁱⁱ approaches and was for a long period in neglect of these groups of extremists who waged to break all foreign influences in Muslim countries, create a worldwide Islamic caliphate, imposing strict form of sharia law, and to the extent of eliminating heretics, like Christians, Jews, and even non-Sunni Muslims. Sand pounding policy, which maintained until American Airlines Flight 11 and United Airlines Flight 175 flew into World Trade Center, was fully evidenced in Clinton Administration's response to booming in American Embassy in Zambia and Kenya in 1998 and the blowing of USS Co in Middle East in 1999.

Although as a hot debated, reported and researched topic, this article, serves as final exam, will nevertheless go into this series of discussions on al Qaeda, 9/11 attack, to the subsequent Afghanistan War and Bush Administration's global war policy on

terror. As readers will soon find out, my individual perspective leads to the focus on troubled Afghan history, which usually been ignored by most journalists, political analysts and even policy makers nonetheless is crucial in understanding why al Qaeda was harbored in that particular country and why topple Taliban government, the brutal dictatorship, and establish popular election has not dramatically improved security conditions. This article will also focus on George W. Bush (GW Bush) Administration and even himself, the Afghanistan War commander in chief which stood out as the only US President in recent memory who talked so substantially on “good and evil”ⁱⁱⁱ, and launched two wars^{iv} in close vicinity of timing. This essay wish to present a fresh outlook in analyzing this period of complex and controversial history by looking into great detail of the neglected history of the terrorist harboring country and the man who hold the top office when all war on terror decisions were made, especially the particulars around GW Bush from 9/11 attack toward months later when Taliban overthrown and Afghan intern government established. By close examining some “unconventional” elements in this “short” exam article, I wish not to draw a definite conclusion on “this is good, that is evil”, but to present how complex history can contribute to the contemporary, contribute to the scales that usually larger than its own; and how top personalities, even in a democracy, can sometimes alter the trajectory of policy. Indeed, war and peace are never as easy as politicians’ speech, human right activists’ appeal and poets’ dream.

For record on historiographical consideration, details of GW Bush and White House mindset followed 9/11 attack are from Bob Woodward’s 2002 book *Bush at War*^v as well as 2010 memoir of GW Bush himself, *Decision Points*^{vi}. Bob Woodward, a public figure in US as recognized by Willy Wo-Lap Lam^{vii}, serves as Washington Post associate editor, had gained access to considerable insightful information and interviewed 100 top officials in charge of US foreign policy, intelligence operations and military, including two interviews with Bush himself. The rest of information, from a great range which including from Afghan history, 9/11 attack, Afghanistan War, post 2002 Afghan politics and security, to GW Bush doctrine and US Middle East

policy are verified and further consulted during my telephone interview with Professor James L. Perry^{viii}. Jim Perry, professor of public and environmental affairs, Indiana University – Bloomington, editor-in-chief, *Public Administration Review*, is a widely acknowledged expert on war and peace.

Afghanistan Before September 11

Afghanistan was, and to some extent still is, a tribal society. Before 2002 the fall of Taliban, Afghan, the word appears to refer to a particular citizenship, means nothing if no tribal association of the person is identified. In this Central Asia inland country, power rotation usually accompanied with bloody infighting, and the public were at all times being repressed and brutally governed, and punished if necessary by the ruler. No public spheres existed, the only way for one to survive and make a living is to either fight for the ruling government, or for any other oppositions which usually all in war against each other. This part will briefly discuss historical realities in Afghanistan and end with the Taliban's power seizure.

Afghanistan, the formidable sheer terrain country located at the east chain of Himalaya, is well known as the “doom of kingdom”, dated far back to B.C. European conqueror Alexander the Great's “civilization mission” en route India in 329-327, which had to be stopped at the country. Within a century two thousand years later, Three Anglo-Afghan Wars were fought (First 1838-42, Second 1878-80, Third 1919) which all ended with British battlefield victory and military occupation of the country, but for all times British had held back in attempting full scale political administration, despite the second war produced the first modern Afghan emperor, the iron Muslim Amir^{ix} Abdur Rahman (r. 1881-1901) and the third war in 1919 resulted in the independent Afghanistan. History has ample evidences showed that overthrowing whatever dictators established himself in Kabul is quite straightforward, but the profoundly ungovernability due to socio-political-economic backwardness, guerrilla resistance tend to drove invaders out.

Following the end of Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-80), resistance leader Abdur Rahman seized power and established a Tsar Peter the Great style Afghanistan, with personal mission of modernizing the country, as well as entrenching the influence of royal families at all human cost, including savage repression. The only difference was that Rahman's economic strike failed, except scattered infrastructures intended to quickly deploy anti-rebellion troops. In 1947, when British left India, the Muslims were heavily relocated away from Hindus in a new country, Pakistan, who was India's rivalry since then. This geopolitical move was the origin of many Afghan problems in later decades since Islamabad have all time been sensitive of the power in Kabul, a pro-Pakistan Afghan government constitutes vital national security interest of "strategic depth" against India.

Here I would like to present some ethnical complexes and economic failure of the country, before moving on to Soviet Occupation. Afghanistan's great tribal and ethnic diversity and its proudly warlike independent people caused serious ungovernable nature and internal crisis. Pashtun constitutes the largest and most powerful ethnic group in Afghanistan; they themselves are subdivided into at least six major tribes, active in southern part of the nation, centered at Kandahar. An accurate statistics on Afghan ethnicity composition is available in the book *Afghanistan: How the West Lost Its Way*, quoted CIA's 2010 investigation, population: 29,121,286; 42 percent Pushtun, 27 percent Tajik, 9 percent Hazara, 9 percent Uzbek, etc.^x Despite tribal association, the more intertwined social network lies at the village level^{xi}, the *qawn*, a group founded in kinship and patron-client relationships. In war time, *qawn* is the local survival strategy, which villagers must count on to avoid capture or murder. This local network forms the basis of ungovernability for no alien Kabul rulers (including "Afghan" rulers who are alien for ethnic/tribal groups not of their own association) can executive policies at the *qawn* level without mingling with the locals.

Afghan economy was shabby and broken, "with life expectancy among the lowest in

the world, and infant mortality among the highest”^{xii}. For much of its history, Afghanistan was a “rentier state” on foreign aid, by 1970, tax gathering accounted for less than 2 percent of domestic revenue^{xiii}. Problems for this model lies in Afghanistan’s no control over the timing and amount of foreign aid, and in most cases the projects on which to spend the money. Foreign aids were usually initiated at the national interest and geopolitical competition consideration of the providers, thus in no way can them form national plans on systematically developing Afghan economy. An example is the Soviet Union built Kabul airport and United States built Kandahar airport in 1950s-60s. No wonder Afghanistan President Mohammed Daoud put forward his longer term desire on 1973 to continue “lighting American cigarette with Soviet matches”^{xiv}.

It is widely believed that Soviets’ aggression into Afghanistan was intentional, in fact, to some extent, from the point of preserving national interest (not freedom and communism), it was dragged into Kabul, for once again factional disputes and infighting played a role. This being strong evidence that Afghanistan’s institutions did not exist at all, in all realms. The Afghans communists formed People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) in 1965 and by 1978 two internal factions can be observed as *Khalq*, led by Nur Mohammad Taraki, and *Parcham*, led by Babrak Karmal. On April 27, 1978, Taraki’s deputy, Hafizullah Amin launched a successful coup and killed President Daoud at his palace via an airstrike thus placed PDPA in power overnight. Kremlin were forced to intervene to help PDPA consolidate power, who faced classical problems of communist regime of the resistance on land and property “reform”, nevertheless, Brezhnev refused to send ground troops. Soon after the coup d’etat Babrak Karmal and his *Parcham* comrades were forced in exile. On October 9, 1979, Amin, the deputy assassinated his communist boss Taraki and assumed full dictatorial powers, leading the KGB to believe he might either been a CIA double agent or was ready to defect to the West. Soviet Politburo met on December 12 and ratified to kill Amin and replace him with the more moderate *Parcham* faction leader Karmal, but Soviets’ own hope for a short period of

stabilization fell and those sent to Afghanistan only faced an ungovernable state and their stay protracted until Mikhail Gorbachev instituted genuine reform back home. USSR occupation further deepened Afghanistan's dependence on foreign aid.

Soviet withdrawal began in 1986 and the last troop left on February 1989, while supported puppet Mohammad Najibullah's regime with the possible national reconciliation. The Soviet trained officials and armed forces were severely corrupted, by 1989, Afghanistan and Pakistan were ranked respectively world's largest and second largest supplier of heroin^{xv}. The 1950 Afghan Transit Trade (ATT) agreement, the Pakistani granted duty-free import right from Karachi to the land locked Afghanistan, has become a "personal property" to protecting and defending "private trade" of the highest level officials in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Despite this, national reconciliation seems went on well, by 1990, 40 percent of *mujahidin*^{xvi} have signed ceasefire agreement. But the troubled history seems a destine, in March 1992, when UN negotiations successfully persuaded Najibullah to have stepped down the presidency and a transitional coalition government would have been established, Najibullah's most capable military commander in the north, Dostum, defected and allied with Tajik *Mujahidin* leader Ahmad Shah Massoud for a coup and took over Kabul swiftly. Najibullah, having sent his families to India, found refuge in UN compound in Kabul, which was quickly broken into and Najibullah and his brother were tortured and murdered by Dostum/Massoud ally while their mingled bodies hung from lamp post in Kabul streets. History tells us, when analyzing post 9/11 policies, "what is Afghanistan" could not be forgotten.

Following the fall of Najibullah in 1991 and the withdrawal of Soviet troops and economic aids earlier, a *Mujahidin* multi-polar civil war "all-against-all" erupted. Participates were, factions of *Mujahidin*, mainly Shi'a parties based in Iran and Sunni parties based in Pakistan; and wings within each faction, mainly left-wing moderates and right-wing Islamists; as well as Pakistan's powerful intelligence service, Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI), who for the stakes discussed earlier,

identified the head of a rigidly centralized Hizb-i Islami-yi Afghanistan (HIH), or Islamic Party of Afghanistan, Gulbuddin Hikmatyar to support. Afghanistan was on the verge of collapse. Dostum/Massoud alliance broke out, with Dostun joined Hikmatyar against Massoud^{xvii}. From May to August 1992, Hikmatyar bombed Kabul, the modern conurbation city left by Soviets destroyed, Millions fled, *Mujahidin* quickly downgraded among the public as “worse than the Russians”. Hikmatyar failed to seize power, and subsequently lost Pakistan support, as gradually been seen as a trouble maker for causing economic turbulence, particularly for threatening the Quetta transport route which was used to smuggle opium for Pakistani mafias and corrupted officials. Finally in 1994, Pakistani PM Benazir Bhutto and his adviser on Afghan affairs, Nasirullah Khan turned eyes to an emerging movement, Taliban.

It is believed Taliban was founded in fall 1994 when, for various reasons, a group of outraged religious elders mobilizing local followers, with Mullah Mohammed Omar, a 1980s’ *Mujahidin*, emerged as leader and quickly took over Kandahar on October 12, 1994. This not only demonstrated Taliban itself an alternative spearhead of Pakistani influence into Afghanistan, but also gained considerable bases and weapons (including Soviet tanks and MiG fighter jets) for future aggression. At this stage, not only Pakistan PM, but American and Saudi oil companies Unocal and Delta were supporting Taliban with money and weapons in exchange for the later’s agreement of allowing the construction of oil pipeline when seizing power. Moreover Taliban demonstrated strong *qawm* ability, or local networking ability, by “successfully” bribed a Kandahar opposition Naqib. In January 1995, Taliban defeated Hikmatyar’s HIH around southern Kabul and accumulated 10,000 fighters. After drove back by Massoud’s (the then ruling government) air forces when trying to invade Kabul urban center, Omar chose to make strikes elsewhere in the country. By September 5, 1995, only Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif were still under Massoud’s control. On 26th the same month, Massoud made a strategic retreat by abandon Kabul and preserved most of his armor, artillery and air power, thus formed the famous North Alliance^{xviii} which international coalition collaborated with after September 11.

The new Taliban regime was not without trouble, besides extreme cultural censorship and repression, especially toward women, Mullah Omar's economy made little progress, the little tax sources were struggling to be collected from opium crop and transit trade. By this time, Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda, a primarily *Jihad*^{xix} ideological organization on Western civilization, according to Perry in the interview^{xx}, offered substantial financial support to Taliban in exchange for setting up terrorist training camps all over Afghanistan, which eventually led to 9/11 attack.

Evaluation: Bush Administration's Global War on Terror

The President of "good and evil" had gone for four years, although many influences of his administration are still unclear, we can draw upon a standard war analysis framework to evaluate the justice of Afghanistan War.

Peter Singer in his book *The President of Good and Evil*^{xxi} put forward seven considerations which must be all met to justify a war, they are:

The Cause is Just

The Most obvious "just cause" is defense against aggression; another would be to stop grave violations of the basic rights of whole population.

Competent Authority

War can only be waged by a legitimate government, with responsibility for keeping order.

Comparative Justice

The values at stake must be sufficiently critical to override the presumptions against killing, and when right is not all on one side, the injustice suffered by one party must be sufficiently outweighed that suffered by another.

Right Intention

Force may only be used for just reasons, such as to achieve peace and reconciliation.

Probability of Success

No Matter how just the cause may be, if resorting to arms will be futile, it is wrong to go to war.

Proportionality

The expected costs of going to war, in terms of loss of life and destruction, must be outweighed by the good expected to be achieved.

Last Resort

Force may be used only after all peaceful alternatives have been tried and exhausted.^{xxii}

The first four criteria can be justified. 1. To stop further terrorist attack, plane hijacking and suicide bombers in US and around the world, and to bring those who committed the crime to justice, is obvious a “just cause”. 2. The war was undertaken by US government, which is popularly elected. Both Houses of Congress voted overwhelmingly in granting President the authority to use all “necessary and appropriate forces”^{xxiii}. 3. “Value at stake”, protecting US citizens and the world from suffering further attacks as describe in “1”, is comparatively justified. 4. Given the Obama Administration has set up timeline for retreating troops and handing security issue back to Afghan government in 2014 the latest, it can be believed that US had no intention to occupy Afghan territory. Furthermore, the basic institutions of a modern, democratic polity were established in a country with troubled history as have been detailed traced. Such institutions including, Office of President, with popular election of President, and President appointed, House of the People ratified Cabinet. Representative bodies, including House of the Elders and House of the People, with the later being popularly elected and women guaranteed at least 25 percent seats. It is believed US intention was not to “subvert” Afghanistan.

However, the last three standards seem more problematic. 5. This required a definition of “success”. If the believes are to destroy al Qaeda training camps, arrest or kill major terrorists, and “monitor their (terrorists’) movements, freeze their finances and break their plots”^{xxiv}, then this criteria of war justification have been largely met. As Perry pointed out in the interview^{xxv}, after a wave of attacks immediate followed 9/11, al Qaeda influences fades, largely because US poured enormous national resources on anti-terrorists campaign around the world. Perry believed 9/11 was a carefully planned plot and “given the credit” of this carefulness, it is unlikely under suddenly emerged US pressure in post 9/11 era al Qaeda could launch similar scale of attack once more. In addition, Perry further analyzed the declining Taliban, said that the ongoing instability conditions in Afghanistan couldn’t be attributed to a strong Taliban, but to the lack of a strong alternative central political power in the country. Taliban have been in decline, although it is still active around the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan. The problem lies in the inability of Hamid Karzai’s government to enforce public security in a village guerilla stricken country. Moreover, Osama bin Laden had been killed in 2011. But, if the believes are to restore peace, order, full democracy and economic prosperity in a former terrorist harboring countries like Afghanistan, then obviously there is still a long way to go and current strategies from both sides cannot sustain. Criteria 5 is unclear on whether can justify war or not.

6. This factor is also unclear, to date. Let’s first trace back to history. In the 1958 Hungarian people freedom movement against Soviet Union and 1968 Prague Spring, if the only way for United States to defend freedom in Hungary and then Czechoslovakia was to launch a nuclear war with USSR, then of course the “expected costs” greatly outweigh the “good expected to be achieved”. This example is in no way to suggest a comparative nuclear war possibility in the case of Afghanistan, but to illustrate criteria 6 requires a cost and benefit analysis. Civilian causality is a great cost, 12,500 to 14,700 innocent lives had been taken^{xxvi}. But since criteria 5 on the question of “success” are unclear, there have been little logical standing to argue this

unclear consideration.

The last judgment, whether war is used only as last resort by the Administration in response to 9/11, is most clear. No. From Woodward's record and even from Bush's own writing; war was seen as the first priority, which against modern diplomatic principle. As early as on September 14, 2001, Congress, as mentioned, granted Bush war legitimacy. On the 15th and 16th, Bush's foreign policy, intelligence and military cabinet gathered at Camp David where no objection on Afghanistan War proposition was raised. It is believed Bush intended to launch two wars on Afghanistan and Iraq simultaneously but the later was postponed. Over the two days, Vladimir Putin agreed to persuade Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to grant US access of its ground and air forces bases. This is a strong evidence that war footing was prepared before possible negotiation with Taliban was conducted and subsequent bilateral discussion with the regime was not to find a satisfactory solution but to provide excuses for going to war. Again, on September 20 special joint sessions of Congress Bush issued ultimatum to Taliban for shutting down al Qaeda camps and granting US official access to these training centers, as well as handing over bin Laden and top terrorists, while made it clear that "these demands are not open to discussion or negotiation"^{xxvii}. We should note here that Bush never discussed thereafter with State Secretary Colin Powell, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, whom he was supposed consult. Furthermore, Bush ignored Mullah Omar's response for asking evidence of bin Laden's involvement in 9/11 and requesting bin Laden to be tried in a court with at least one Muslim judges, if evidences showed against him. In international law, as Lam suggested^{xxviii}, it is most appropriate to request evidences before a sovereign nation to extradite someone to another nation for trial. By September 29, Bush's war cabinet was all aware that al Qaeda camps were already empty, in order to show American that he was a leader in action, Bush ordered to topple Taliban government instead, as Perry said, "(during Bush's term) every international disputes was restored to war"^{xxix}. Clearly, the last standard shows an unjust side of Afghanistan War.

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Notes

ⁱ Total 2,996 died in the waves of terrorist attacks on United States in the morning of September 11, 2011

ⁱⁱ A derisive term refers to US soft attitude, especially during Clinton Administration, toward terrorists, derived from Clinton's sending of a million-dollar cruise missile into an empty al Qaeda camp in response of US Embassy bombing in Africa

ⁱⁱⁱ Bush himself even acknowledged in farewell address by saying, "I've often talking to you about good and evil, and this makes some uncomfortable".

^{iv} Afghanistan War, September 2001; Iraq War, March 2003

^v Bob Woodward, *Bush at War*, 2002 (New York: Simon & Schuster)

^{vi} George W. Bush, *Decision Points*, 2010 (New York: Crown Publishers)

^{vii} Professor Willy Wo-Lap Lam, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Akita International University (Japan), senior fellow at Jamestown foundation, Hong Kong based China Watcher, veteran journalist of South China Morning Post and CNN

^{viii} Telephone interview with Professor James L. Perry of Indiana University – Bloomington, editor-in-chief at Public Administration Review, interview ran for 45 minutes, US Central Time Dec 19 11:00-11:45, Beijing Time Dec 20 0:00-0:45

^{ix} Emperor of Muslim countries

^x Tim Bird and Alex Marshall, *Afghanistan: How the West Lost its Way*, 2012 (New Haven: Yale University Press)

^{xi} Afghanistan is a predominately rural society, with only 23.5 percent urban population in 2011

^{xii} Tim Bird and Alex Marshall, *Afghanistan: How the West Lost its Way*, 2012 (New Haven: Yale University Press), p.19

^{xiii} Tim Bird and Alex Marshall, *Afghanistan: How the West Lost its Way*, 2012 (New Haven: Yale University Press), p.19

^{xiv} Tim Bird and Alex Marshall, *Afghanistan: How the West Lost its Way*, 2012 (New Haven: Yale University Press), p.20

^{xv} Tim Bird and Alex Marshall, *Afghanistan: How the West Lost its Way*, 2012 (New Haven: Yale University Press), p.35

^{xvi} Muslim guerrillas, especially refers to Afghan resistances during Soviet occupation (1979-89)

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- ^{xvii} Dostum ultimately rejoined Massoud's "North Alliance" when Kubul fell to Taliban in 1996, discuss later
- ^{xviii} Head of North Alliance (Taliban resistance force) Ahmad Shah Massoud was assassinated by Taliban on September 9, 2001, two days ahead of 9/11 attack
- ^{xix} Islamist holy war
- ^{xx} Telephone interview with Professor James L. Perry of Indiana University – Bloomington, editor-in-chief at Public Administration Review, interview ran for 45 minutes, US Central Time Dec 19 11:00-11:45, Beijing Time Dec 20 0:00-0:45
- ^{xxi} Peter Singer, *The President of Good and Evil: The Ethics of George W. Bush*, 2004 (New York: Dutton)
- ^{xxii} Peter Singer, *The President of Good and Evil: The Ethics of George W. Bush*, 2004 (New York: Dutton), pp.147-148
- ^{xxiii} Authorization for Use of Military Forces, Houses of Representatives: 420 Ayes, 1 Nay, 10 Not voting; Senate: 98 Ayes, 0 Nay, 2 Not Voting (presented), votes in both Houses were casted on September 14, 2001
- ^{xxiv} GW Bush, farewell speech
- ^{xxv} Telephone interview with Professor James L. Perry of Indiana University – Bloomington, editor-in-chief at Public Administration Review, interview ran for 45 minutes, US Central Time Dec 19 11:00-11:45, Beijing Time Dec 20 0:00-0:45
- ^{xxvi} [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_in_Afghanistan_\(2001%E2%80%93present\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_in_Afghanistan_(2001%E2%80%93present))
- ^{xxvii} GW Bush, September 20, 2001 address to joint session of Congress
- ^{xxviii} Professor Willy Wo-Lap Lam, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Akita International University (Japan), senior fellow at Jamestown foundation, Hong Kong based China Watcher, veteran journalist of South China Morning Post and CNN
- ^{xxix} Telephone interview with Professor James L. Perry of Indiana University – Bloomington, editor-in-chief at Public Administration Review, interview ran for 45 minutes, US Central Time Dec 19 11:00-11:45, Beijing Time Dec 20 0:00-0:45