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## Toby Dodge and Nicholas Redman (Eds.).Afghanistan To 2015 and Beyond. London: Routledge, 2011.

Saroj Kumar Rath Ph.D.  
University of Delhi, Saroj1saroj@gmail.com

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**Toby Dodge and Nicholas Redman (Eds.). *Afghanistan To 2015 and Beyond*. London: Routledge, 2011.**

Toby Dodge and Nicholas Redman's edited *Afghanistan To 2015 and Beyond* is a collection of 12 analytical essays, where the authors have tried to decipher how the future of Afghanistan will look. The editors have tried to estimate the impact of troop withdrawal on the governance of the country. In their introductory explanation, the editors have observed there is ambivalence among the stakeholders, especially the US on the question of how long the foreign powers should stick to Afghanistan, particularly in the backdrop of a reduced domestic public opinion in their respective countries in favor of troop mobilization in Afghanistan.

Since the volume is devoted to the future of Afghanistan, the authors have tried to analyze the policies of international players as well as the impact of such policies on Afghanistan along with the reactions and activities of Afghan actors. The editors have claimed that the manuscript is divided into the following three themes: history of foreign intervention in Afghanistan; analysis of contemporary Afghanistan; and Afghanistan's relationship with key regional players. But in reality, all the essays are more or less routine analytical papers about the ongoing foreign intervention and domestic reaction. The history of international intervention segment is entirely missing, while there is little futuristic study or analysis in the complete volume. The book has not referred enough existing literature or highly acclaimed writings on similar subject. Therefore, the assertion and analysis more or less revolve around the 9/11 attacks, US action in Afghanistan, and the retaliation of al Qaeda and the Taliban.

The first chapter by Alexander Nicoll is just a restatement of what has already been said in numerous other books, newspaper articles and journal papers. The argument forwarded by the author is mostly based on contemporary news reporting. The author has proclaimed that NATO's intervention in Afghanistan is against the country's historical settings, where no interventionist foreign power ever succeeded. But he did not favor the reader with reason and there is less discussion on the theme why NATO's role is against the historical expectation of Afghanistan. The second chapter, which debates the US intervention from President Bush to President Obama, critically examines how the US was dragged into a bad war. This chapter scrutinizes changing US policy from application of force and troops in Afghanistan to winning of hearts and minds of Afghans through the offer of aid and training on a larger scale.

Toby Dodge in the next chapter describes the politico-economic landscape of the country and states that institutional corruption and lack of societal infrastructures like social institutions, local community bodies and participatory bodies of people in decision making has impeded the viability of Afghanistan as an independent state. While Dodge's narration is mostly focused on the prevailing problems with institutions and individuals of Afghanistan, he devoted precious little, only one paragraph, to the proclaimed topic of the book, "Afghanistan beyond 2015." Nicholas Redman's evaluation of Afghanistan's economy has the customary actors like foreign-aid-induced economic growth, lack of domestic economic avenues, and the menace of opium cultivation and narcotics. Redman suggests that mineral resources are the only viable available economic activity which possesses the potential to support the economic need of a portion of the country's population in the foreseeable future. Ben Barry, in his investigation of the joint capacity of a NATO-Afghan army, has dealt with the strategic limitations under which the international forces are working and the plethora of problems surrounding the nascent Afghan army. He delves into the rising standard of insurgents, especially the resurgence of the Taliban. However, his analysis of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-i-Islami is faulty because he wrongly

portrayed the group as an arm of the Taliban. In his final analysis, the author has portrayed an ambivalent picture where both the army and insurgents will have some degree of sway in the country.

Nigel Inkster's analysis of the ever-changing dynamic of insurgent groups in the Afghanistan and Pakistan region has focused on the triangular factors of state support (from Pakistan), strength of insurgent groups in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region, and supportive infrastructure for terrorism in the region. His analysis mostly focused on Pakistan's interaction with terrorist groups like the Haqqani Network, the Taliban and al Qaeda and how these groups have adapted to the evolving circumstances.

In the final part of the book, the authors debated the policies and politics of neighboring countries vis-à-vis Afghanistan. Out of the six chapters which deal with the policies of nine neighboring countries, Rahul Roy-Chaudhury and Emile Hokayem have scripted two chapters each. Rahul Roy-Chaudhury in his analysis of India and Pakistan, in two separate chapters, provided generic views and never appreciated fully the depth of the two countries' involvement in Afghanistan. India has already started dialogue and communication with the Taliban and this fact was conspicuous in Roy-Chaudhury's analyses which see India through the prism of the 1980s and 1990s. Similarly, Emile Hokayem has offered the traditional overview of Iran's and Saudi Arabia's policies towards Afghanistan. The analysis of Central Asian states, Russia and China supply no new vista into the existing literature or any fresh analysis on the same topic.

The conclusion of the book is rather vague, open-ended and without any clear finding. The editors wanted to portray a picture of hope in Afghanistan after 2015, which they term as "cautious optimism." Nevertheless, amidst the "cautious optimism" the editors have never discounted the return of insurgency after 2015. Resultantly, they neither had a firm opinion about the future nor provided a realistic analysis of the present. While doing so, they actually left the readers bewildered and undecided about what the editors conclude about the future of Afghanistan. The editors have cited myriad variables at play to arrive at a firm opinion. However, considering the name and theme of the book, readers could reasonably expect sound academic reasoning behind Afghanistan's present state of turmoil and a gutsy, in-depth prediction about the future of the country. On both these counts the book remained wanting. Finally, the book is in the league of coffee table deliberations, a generic academic exercise without the robustness of high-level intellectual debate expected from an institute of international repute.

Saroj Kumar Rath, PhD  
Sri Aurobindo College  
University of Delhi  
[Saroj1saroj@gmail.com](mailto:Saroj1saroj@gmail.com)