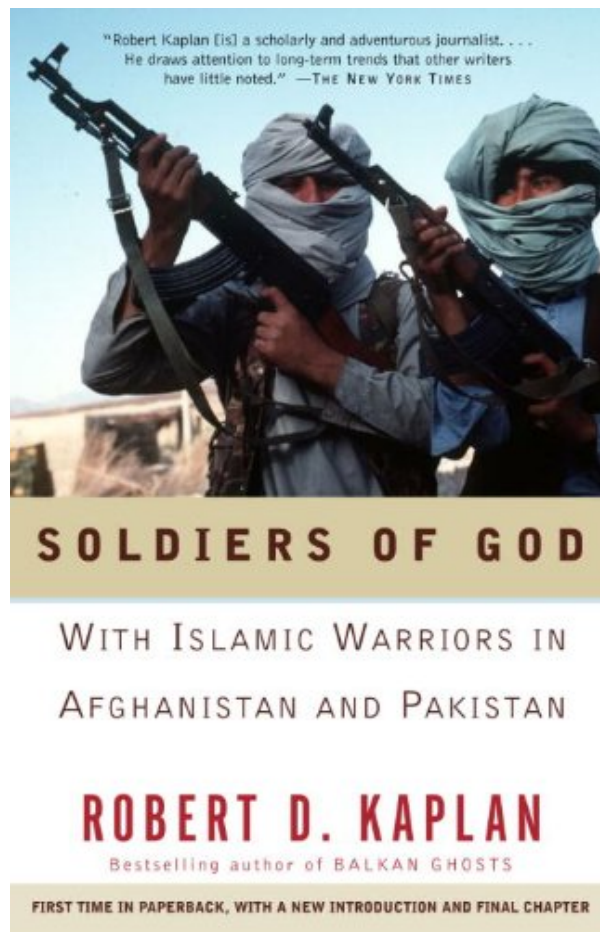


# **SOLDIERS OF GOD: WITH ISLAMIC WARRIORS IN AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN BY ROBERT D. KAPLAN**



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WITH ISLAMIC WARRIORS IN  
AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN

**ROBERT D. KAPLAN**

Bestselling author of BALKAN GHOSTS

FIRST TIME IN PAPERBACK, WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION AND FINAL CHAPTER

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Afghanistan: The Superpower Trap created with perfect 20-20 Hindsight

By Herbert L Calhoun

This was one of the first of intrepid reporter, Robert Kaplan's, many timely and insightful Atlantic Monthly articles turned into a book. Kaplan has "made his bones" (and a stellar reputation) going where the action is. And then, even while measuring the temperature on the ground, never failing to raise his head above the trees to see where the forest leads. This ability to place the events on the ground into geostrategic context has made Kaplan a valuable resource to those of us who like to know how we get our superpower tail caught in so many costly and draining strategic traps.

Here, although we are forced to admit that some aspects of geopolitics are inevitable and almost always unforgiving and irreversible, this story is still about as unflattering as a strategic incursion can get: Severely burnt by the dumb anti-Communist domino geopolitics of Vietnam, the U.S., nevertheless could not wait to repeat the act in the most unforgiving and godforsaken land since Alexander the Great was defeated there in the 4th Century BC.

Thus there is a kind of poetic symmetry that after Vietnam, our next foreign policy folly would be Afghanistan. That it is an unforgiving trap that all the history we know of (and have actually experienced ourselves) tells us it is, with perfect 20-20 hindsight, we nevertheless willingly walked into the same trap. [The Russians must be laughing under their collectivist breaths.]

Because of our colossal ignorance of the lands and peoples we pretend to be assisting while actually in pursuit of our own geopolitical goals, we had no choice but to enlist and rely on the Pakistan intelligence service (CIS) as a proxy in our global plan to eject the Soviets from Afghanistan. This barely transparent

plan apparently worked to perfection, except that none of the "after conflict loose ends" were tied up. It seems that it is a hallmark of U.S. foreign policy that loose ends are never tied up. The conflicts are just allowed to peter out, with the hope that the details will somehow work them selves out in the end. [Remember the last scene in "Charlie Wilson's War?]

As usual, the Pakistani CIS exacted a price for serving as our geopolitical proxy. The price was that they be allowed to hijack our strategic success for their own internal purposes. As a result, in the aftermath of the victory over Russia, the CIS had us back the wrong Afghan tribal horse. When the dust settled, the internecine virus called Afghanistan warlords, had metastasized into Osama bin Laden, who immediately turned on his erstwhile superpower arms supplier and backer.

Nine-eleven sealed the deal and enshrined this folly for perpetuity. Now, we cannot get out, no matter how much its costs in U.S. blood and treasure. There is nothing left to do but to allow it to run its costly and indeterminate course. The loose ends can never be tied up. Obama is not in the driver's seat; the tribal warlords are: as they have always been. We are just a hapless superpower again being dragged around by our tail by a ragtag bunch of "Soldiers of God." God help us. Five Stars

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Please Read Robert Kaplan

By John Dickerman

Really another outstanding book by Kaplan. In depth and personal view of the mujahidin in Afghanistan in the 80's. Kaplan may be a little biased, or wonder struck by the personalities he interviewed and lived with, and at times is self-congratulatory about his prescience, however, he acknowledges both facts in his re-written foreword. Neither of these points dilute the quality of this book, though. For me, it was a great read that illuminated class and clan struggle in Afghanistan, and a wonderful distinction between religious fundamentalism and politically institutionalized religious extremism.

13 of 17 people found the following review helpful.

Interesting, if biased, account of what was up pre 9/11

By RDN

As an American living in several parts of the world in which Islam has a strong influence, I have always had a bit of a problem with the mainstream categorization of Islam as a fanatical approach to solving normal human problems.

Kaplan, once again, gets beneath the surface of things to discover that all is not what it seems. As he himself freely admits in the new introduction to this edition, he was somewhat biased by his visceral experiences on the front lines in 1980s Afghanistan, in which he shared life and death with the mujahidin. His square placement of blame on the US for its blind reliance on Pakistan to provide intelligence and diplomacy on the war in Afghanistan is probably a bit short-sighted.

Nevertheless, if anyone has any curiosity about how Bin Laden and his ilk came to find Afghanistan a safe-have, they should read this book. The updated intro and new last chapter are good additions in light of the prescience which lies beneath the surface of the original prose.

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