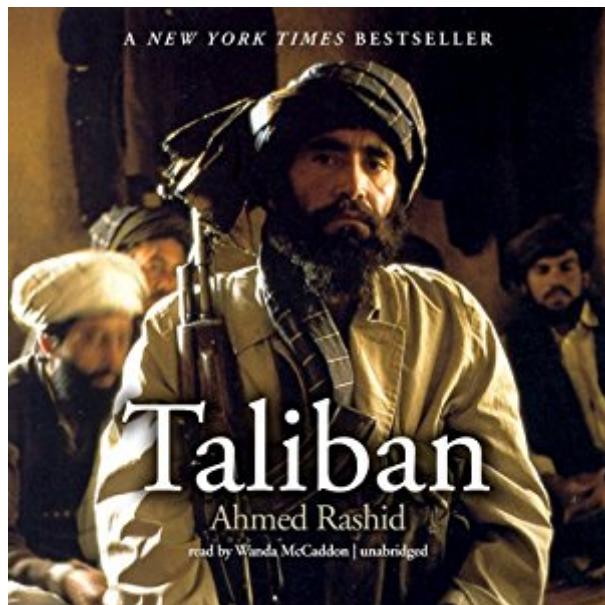


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# Taliban: Islam, Oil, And The Great New Game In Central Asia



## **Synopsis**

In this enormously insightful book, correspondent Ahmed Rashid brings the shadowy world of the Taliban, the world's most extreme and radical Islamic organization, into sharp focus. He explains the Taliban's rise to power, its impact on Afghanistan and the region, its role in oil and gas company decisions, and the effects of changing American attitudes toward the Taliban. He also describes the new face of Islamic fundamentalism and explains why Afghanistan has become the world center for international terrorism.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Ahmed Rashid's book "Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and the Fundamentalism in Central Asia" is an excellent book for those who would like to understand the Taliban, its background, rise to power as well as US and Pakistan's support of the fundamentalist regime. Published in 2000, it is a very timely book given the tragedy of the World Trade Center plane attacks on September 11th. The main factor contributing to the strength of the book is Rashid's extensive access to Afghanistan and key players who have shaped the policy of the country. He has spent the better portion of the last 21 years in the country and knows it intimately. Although himself Pakistani, he is very critical of his country's role (and that of the the United States)in nurturing the most radical elements in the Afghan opposition that fought the Soviet Union in the 1980's as well as the Taliban. The most important chapter of the book for our purposes today is Chapter 10 which deals with the rise of Osama bin Laden in the context of the Afghan-Soviet war and US/Pakistani support of the opposition. Rashid explains in detail American support for the ISI's involvement in drug trafficking as a means to raise

money for the anti-Soviet resistance. He laments the American-Pakistani practice of consistent and unwavering support for the most radical elements in the Afghan opposition, virtually ignoring the more moderate opposition. The result: thousands of radical Muslims, armed and trained by The US and Pakistan, sparking "holy wars" against countries deemed anti-Muslim. As I re-read the book after the terrible attack on the US on September 11th, I couldn't help but be disappointed with the lack of foresight the United States policy-makers had in supporting these radicals.

Rashid is successful in collating a massive amount of information into a well-organized, readable book. Although at times journalistic, with glib analysis at the end of his quasi-historical recitation, this book gives a thorough accounting of all the players and interests that have brought Afghanistan to where it is today. It is useful as a single volume that recounts the rise of the Taliban that is concise and clear. Rashid is a veteran journalist who has covered Afghanistan for years. His connections and interviews from all aspects of Afghani politics and society give the book a depth that as been hard for other books to accomplish. Sources and appendices are excellent. The organization of the book is in three main parts: 1) 'History of the Taliban Movement,' which is a useful recounting of the Taliban's rise in a chronological fashion. The five chapters each represent one year; 2) 'Islam and the Taliban' explores the origin and nature of the Taliban in thought and practice in the context of other Muslim movements, how it is organized, how it functions in making decisions, and how it administers policy socially and militarily; 3) 'The New Great Game' treats all of the international actors' behaviors and motivations, and the consequences for Afghanistan. Although his perspectives of all of the relevant actors -the Taliban, the anti-Taliban factions, the UN, regional countries, Western powers, oil companies, Russia- are undeniably put forth for the reader, they only enhance the educational value of the book. Rashid is highly successful in imparting the motivations and values of all the ethnic and religious tensions in Afghani society, and their interlinkages (and the consequent perspectives and involvement of foreign nations with the various contending forces).

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