



Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan 2002-2007 (Columbia/Hurst)

Antonio Giustozzi

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Since the Allied invasion of Afghanistan in 2002, the Bush administration has celebrated the imminent demise of the Taliban, with claims of a "moral and psychological defeat" playing a prominent role in the presidential elections of 2004. Some commentators suggested that "reconstruction and development" had won over the Afghan population, despite widespread criticism of the meager distribution of aid and failed attempts at "nation building," not to mention the infamous corruption of Kabul's power-hoarding elites.

In March 2006, both Afghan and American officials continued to assert that "the Taliban are no longer able to fight large battles." Unfortunately that theory would soon collapse beneath the weight of a series of particularly ferocious clashes, causing the mood in the American media to turn from one of optimism to one of defeatism and impending catastrophe. Suddenly faced with a very sophisticated and creative form of guerilla warfare, the West found itself at a loss to fight an insurgency that bore little resemblance to its former enemy.

In the first book ever to be published on the neo-Taliban, Antonio Giustozzi provocatively argues that the appearance of the neo-Taliban should in no way have been a surprise. Beginning in 2003, a growing body of evidence began to surface that cast doubt on the official interpretation of the conflict. With the West cutting corners to maintain peace within the country, which included tolerating Afghanistan's burgeoning opium trade, the Taliban was able to regroup and grow in strength, weapons, and recruits. Giustozzi's book poses a bold challenge to contemporary accounts of the invasion and its aftermath and is an important investigation into the rise and dangerous future of the neo-Taliban.

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