SYLLABUS
Afghanistan and the U.S. “war of necessity”

Dr. Thomas P. Cavanna

Draft subject to revisions

Course information
- Fall 2017
- Class meetings: Mondays, 3:20 p.m.-5:20 p.m.
- Room: M235

Course description
- Despite a seemingly brilliant victory in the early days of the post-9/11 era, America’s campaign in Afghanistan has become the longest war in US history, with currently no end in sight. Balancing history, theory, and policy this seminar investigates the mechanisms and critical junctures that led to this entanglement. It explores the collision between the US-led coalition’s objectives, the lasting legacies of the Cold War and the specificities of Afghanistan’ society and regional dynamics. All along, we examine successes, failures, and ambiguities in light of history, theory, and policy, using a broad array of sources. Themes addressed include the war on terror, South Asia’s geopolitics, democratization, state-building, insurgencies, and (grand) strategy.

Instructor
- Dr. Thomas P. Cavanna, visiting assistant professor
- Prior to arriving at the Fletcher School, I was a postdoctoral fellow at Southern Methodist University (Tower Center) and a lecturer in international relations at the University of Pennsylvania. I hold a French “Agrégation” in history, a M.A. and Ph.D. in history from Sciences Po, a M.A. in Management from Audencia Business School, and a B.A. in Modern Literature from Paris III Sorbonne Nouvelle. I was also a Fox International Fellow at Yale University. I write widely on grand strategy and American foreign policy. I am the author of two books: Hubris, Self-Interest, and America’s Failed War in Afghanistan: The Self-Sustaining Overreach (Lexington, Rowan & Littlefield, 2015); and Paradigmatic Volatility: US Foreign Policy towards India and Pakistan in the 1970s (French National Committee for Scientific Research, 2017). I also published an article on U.S. nuclear nonproliferation policy in the Journal of Strategic Studies (“Geopolitics over Proliferation: The Origins of U.S. Grand Strategy and Their Implications for the Spread of Nuclear Weapons in South Asia”, 2016) and various articles in France.

Office hours:
- Fridays, 10:00-11:30 p.m. (if any change, you will be updated in advance via email)
- 114 Curtis Street, conference room (immediately on the left when you enter); if the
conference room is taken, I will be in my office on the 3rd floor
- If you can’t come to my office hours, appointments are an option (please contact me in
advance)

Readings

Required book (buy it ASAP):
- Seth G. Jones, In the Graveyard of Empires: America’s War in Afghanistan (New York:

Other readings (book chapters, scholarly articles, reports, op-eds):
- Available on Canvas
  OR
- Free access on the web

Assessment (SUBJECT TO REVISIONS)

Final grade (for regular Fletcher students):
- Participation (+ attendance, delays, behavior, responsiveness, etc.): 20 %
- Presentation (+ discussion): 30 %
- Reading response memos: 20 %
- Background briefing paper: 30 %
- NOTE: surprise tests on assigned readings are a possibility, I can also interrogate some of
you on specific assigned readings

Requirements for auditing students:
- Participation (+ attendance, delays, behavior, responsiveness, etc.): 30 %
- Presentation (+ discussion): 30 %
- Reading response memos: 40%

Submissions:
- All assignments should be submitted to Thomas.cavanna@tufts.edu, not Canvas (if your
Powerpoint/prezzi presentation is too large, send it in several pieces, I will reassemble it)

Participation (+ attendance, delays, behavior, responsiveness, etc.):
- Attention and active participation during class meetings
- Absences will be excused only if justified with documentation (doctor’s note…) within a
week
- Please arrive on time (part of the grade).

Reading Response Memos (on assigned readings):
- SEE SPECIFIC GUIDELINES ON CANVAS
- You will submit four reading response memos, two between week 2 and week 7, and the
two others between week 8 and 12
Each memo should be submitted on the eve of the corresponding session before 11:59 p.m.
The memos should respond to the readings (only the assigned readings, not the suggested ones) for a given session. They should show that you read all the assigned readings but they should not summarize the readings: rather, the memos should demonstrate your critical thinking about the strengths and limitations of a set of readings.

- important note: these readings cannot be from weeks in which you are participating in a presentation

Presentation:
- SEE SPECIFIC GUIDELINES ON CANVAS
- Each presentation should explore its topic thoroughly and relate it to policy issues encountered by the US-led coalition
- Professional level is expected (format, audio-visual details, delivery, bibliography, attention to details, etc.) and will make a major difference on your grade
- A list of topics will be provided by mid-September

Background briefing paper
- SPECIFIC GUIDELINES WILL BE POSTED ON CANVAS IN DUE COURSE
- You brief an incoming official on a specific aspect of the war, investigating the problem from a historical/theoretical perspective and possibly providing policy recommendations

Academic integrity
- Every student must comply with Tufts’ academic integrity policies (https://students.tufts.edu/student-affairs/student-life-policies/academic-integrity-policy)
- Failure to do so will have immediate consequences for one’s success in this class, and possibly beyond it

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION

Content
- Overview of the semester
- Afghanistan’s geography
- Afghanistan as a “graveyard of empires”

Readings

Required:
- Syllabus
WEEK 2: GREAT GAME AND CONSTRUCTION OF THE AFGHAN STATE

Content
- Anglo-Russian rivalry in Afghanistan
- Anglo-Afghan wars
- Central power VS centrifugal forces
- Tradition VS modernity

Readings

Required:
- Go through the syllabus (please let me know if any questions)
- Thomas P. Cavanna, Hubris, Self-Interest and America’s Failed war in Afghanistan: The Self-Sustaining Overreach, “US Cold War and Post-Cold War Policy,” pp. 4-9

Suggested:

WEEK 3: COLD WAR AND SOVIET EMBRACE

Content
- US/Soviet rivalry in Afghanistan till 1979
- Soviet intervention and agenda in Kabul
Moscow’s defeat: security, state-building, counter-insurgency

Readings

Required:

Suggested:


Content
- US responsibilities in the region’s destabilization
- Civil war (1989-1994)

Readings

Required:

**Suggested:**

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**WEEK 5: 9/11 AND OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM**

**Content**

- Clinton, Bush, and 9/11
- Onset of Operation Enduring Freedom
- The “light footprint” and its consequences

**Readings**

**Required:**

Suggested:

**WEEK 6: AFGHANISTAN’S DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS**

**Content**
- Foreign-led democratization: theory and practice
- Afghanistan’s first forays into democracy
- Hollow breakthroughs?

**Readings**

**Required:**

Suggested:
- Matthew Alan Hill, “International Actors and Democratization: Can USAID Deliver a Democratic Culture to Afghanistan?” International Relations, Vol. 24, Issue 2 (June 2010), pp. 155-167 (you don’t have to read the rest).

WEEK 7: AFGHANISTAN’S STATEBUILDING AND RECONSTRUCTION

Content
- Foreign-led state-building and reconstruction: theory and practice
- Afghanistan: a misfit for Western ambitions?
- The US-led coalition’s agenda: promises and ambiguities
- Hollow breakthroughs?

Readings

Required:

Suggested:
- Sarah Chayes, Interview with Bill Moyers, from 7m20, http://billmoyers.com/content/sarah-chayes-on-rebuilding-afghanistan/

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**WEEK 8: AFGHANISTAN’S SECURITY DEGRADATION**

**Content**
- The enemy’s resurgence: terrorism and insurgency
- Pakistan’s growing instability
- US-led coalition’s setbacks

**Readings**

Required:

Suggested:

**WEEK 9: OBAMA, “AFPAK” AND THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE SURGE**

**Content**
- Policy debates during the Bush-Obama transition
- Obama’s strategic review
- The surge: promises and ambiguities

**Readings**

**Required:**
Suggested:

**WEEK 10: THE “NEW COIN” APPLIED TO AFGHANISTAN**

Content
- Counter-insurgency: history (Vietnam, Iraq, etc.) and features
- Emergence of the “new COIN” in America’s national security apparatus
- An overhyped concept?

Readings

Required:

Suggested:

**WEEK 11: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SURGE: DISAPPOINTING RESULTS**

**Content**
- Results of the surge

**Readings**

**Required:**

**Suggested:**

**WEEK 12: OBAMA’S DRAWDOWN: ENDING THE LONGEST WAR IN US HISTORY?**

**Content**
- Security transition and path to coalition withdrawal
- Negotiating with the Taliban: history and prospects
- Afghanistan in the wider regional context
- Persistent insecurity
- Persistent development and political problems

**Readings**

**Required:**
- Amrullah Saleh: Why Negotiate with the Taliban? - WSJ

Suggested:

**WEEK 13: CONCLUSION, LATEST POLICY DEVELOPMENTS, AND PROSPECTS**

**Content**
- Recent developments
- Current policy debates
- Conclusion

**Readings (likely to be updated following policy developments)**

**Required:**

Suggested: