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The Punishment Of Virtue: Inside Afghanistan After The Taliban



THE PUNISHMENT OF VIRTUE

SARAH CHAYES



Synopsis

A National Public Radio reporter covering the last stand of the Taliban in their home base of Kandahar in Afghanistan's southern borderland, Sarah Chayes became deeply immersed in the unfolding drama of the attempt to rebuild a broken nation at the crossroads of the world's destiny. Her NPR tour up in early 2002, she left reporting to help turn the country's fortunes, accepting a job running a nonprofit founded by President Hamid Karzai's brother. With remarkable access to leading players in the postwar government, Chayes witnessed a tragic story unfold-the perverse turn of events whereby the U.S. government and armed forces allowed and abetted the return to power of corrupt militia commanders to the country, as well as the reinfiltration of bands of Taliban forces supported by U.S. ally Pakistan. In this gripping and dramatic account of her four years on the ground, working with Afghans in the battle to restore their country to order and establish democracy, Chayes opens Americans' e --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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Customer Reviews

This highly readable book is part memoir and part political analysis. The author, a former overseas NPR correspondent, describes her sojourn over the years 2001-2005 in Kandahar, the ancient capital of Afghanistan, where she worked for an Afghan-based NGO and, as an instinctive investigative reporter, formed her own assessment of the political forces at work in that post-Taliban city. Her conclusions are both alarming and disheartening. She comes to believe that Pakistan is the

root cause of political instability in Afghanistan and that through its support of warlords it uses resurgent Taliban forces to manipulate and regain control of large parts of the country. More discouraging is the author's portrayal of President Hamid Karzai as an intelligent, gifted, and cultured man who is often ineffectual as a leader. The book is framed by the account of an assassination of the Kabul chief of police, a man of unusual integrity and ability (hence the book's title) and its subsequent coverup as a suicide bombing. Set against him is the power-hungry and corrupt governor of Kandahar, who has won the confidence of the Americans while secretly amassing a fortune that he uses to fund a private army, meanwhile working deals with Pakistan to keep alive the threat of Taliban terrorism that makes the Americans even more dependent on him. There are large swathes of Afghan and Persian history woven into this modern-day accounting, which reveal patterns of political and cultural forces at play that go back to Alexander the Great. Vividly written, the book provides a disturbing portrayal of failed leadership on the part of both the U.S. and the current government in Kabul. Read it and weep.

Sarah Chayes has crafted a powerful book that well explains why reconstruction in Afghanistan, after several years and the expenditure of much blood and treasure, languishes. She is scholarly in creating a narrative that describes the geo-political realities affecting the region, and intensely personal as she describes her own experiences resulting from those realities. Her journalistic prowess shines as she makes some necessary history lessons flow. Her access to key players and the personal danger with which she lives on a daily basis give her the gravitas to make "Punishment of Virtue" a serious indictment of those she places in her cross-hairs. Sarah Chayes has masterfully written a book that exposes the buffoonery and corruption in the rebuilding of a country that was and is the stage of revolving wars by proxy. If you have read Sheehan's "Bright, Shining Lie" about Viet Nam, you will experience *deja vu* as you read "Punishment of Virtue".

Sarah Chayes' provides an excellent look at America's post-9/11 involvement in Afghanistan. Chayes' portrayal of how Gul Agha Shirzai became the governor of Kandahar province and Hamid Karzai became the president of the country is thought provoking. Chayes neatly ties the history of Kandahar province to the creation of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. 'The Punishment of Virtue' is a good supplement to the works of Thomas Barfield, Ahmad Rashid, and Steve Coll. The book is also an excellent parallel read with Rajiv Chandrasekaran's 'Little America.' I highly recommend this book when read in conjunction with some or all of the foregoing works on Afghanistan.

Wonderfully written giving the perspective of someone with practical experience embedded within the actual environment within Afghanistan and interacting with individuals living there on an everyday basis their entire lives. A must read for all American citizens.

Starting and ending with the death of an honest Afgan, his friend Sarah Chayes, NPR reporter-turned Afgan activist, gives a well written, often warm, and often shocking account of the warlords, friends of Pakistan, and some-time friends of the US that made up Afghanistan after the Taliban fled and before they had fully returned. The fact that a woman reporter could become friend and advisor to so many people in power in Afganistan - including, the president, several governors, several warlords, a chief of police (the murdered one), AND US Military Officers-helped to show the depth of leadership vacuum that existed. Nobody knew what to do, really, except the Warlords, and their occupation was making themselves rich and getting rid of their enemies, often with the help of the conned US Military, and usually with the help of Pakistan, who played both ends against the middle - the most shocking revelation. Well worth reading, and if as true and well-supported as it seems, worth a Pulitzer!

Excellent. This book should be made into a movie.

Sarah Chayes is one of my favorite writers. I feel like I have a much clearer understanding of the complexities of Afghanistan.

I was so pleased with the information I read, discouraged with the impact of our participation in the war, but more upset with the fact that we appears we had only poorer choices as options>

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