

**J. Alexander Thier** discusses the history and population of Afghanistan, as well as the country's changing role in both the emergence and combating of terrorism.

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## The Speaker

J. Alexander Thier is Director of the Future of Afghanistan Project at the U.S. Institute for Peace in Washington, DC, and a former legal advisor to the Afghan government.

## Review Questions

**CHAPTER 1:** *Thier describes Afghanistan's location and topography.*

1. What historic events influenced Thier's interest in Afghanistan?
2. How have geographical factors shaped Afghanistan's history and role relative to its neighbors?

**CHAPTER 2:** *Thier discusses tensions among tribes in and around Afghanistan, and the impact of colonially-established borders.*

1. What challenges have colonially-established borders historically presented to political and social stability in Afghanistan?
2. Describe and explain Afghanistan's relationship with Iran.

**CHAPTER 3:** *Thier talks about the ethnic diversity of Afghanistan's population and the country's transition to modern politics.*

1. How does Thier describe the Pashtun population in Afghanistan?
2. What does Thier mean when he talks about the "radicalization of the Afghans"?
3. How did the onset of the Soviet-Afghan War reshape organized political opposition in Afghanistan?

**CHAPTER 4:** *Thier describes the Soviet-Afghan War and the international and regional responses it inspired.*

1. Describe the various types of aid that were provided to *mujahideen* during the Soviet-Afghan War.
2. How did concepts of *jihad* differ among Afghans fighting for liberation and others who came to fight alongside them?

**CHAPTER 5:** *Thier talks about "Arab Afghans" and the emergence of Al-Qaeda after the Soviet-Afghan War.*

1. What role did Arab Afghans play in the war, according to Thier?
2. Describe the distribution of power in Afghanistan immediately after the Soviet-Afghan War.

**CHAPTER 6:** *Thier describes the struggle for power in Afghanistan during the aftermath of the Soviet-Afghan War.*

1. What were the initial goals of the Taliban, and how did they change?
2. How did Pakistan help Afghanistan after the war, and what does Thier posit as the motives for this assistance?

### Key Figures and Vocabulary

#### "Arab Afghans"

Arabs and other Muslims who came to Afghanistan during the Soviet-Afghan War (1979 – 1989) to fight against the Soviets.

#### Daoud Khan

President of Afghanistan from 1973, when he overthrew the Afghan monarchy, until 1978, when he was assassinated during a Communist coup.

#### The Durand Line

A section of the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan that was established in 1893 by British forces seeking to establish indirect rule in the region. The Line split up Pashtun tribes and gave rise to tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

#### The Great Game

Term used to refer to conflicts and tension between the British and Russian Empires in Central Asia, which lasted from around 1813 – 1907. In seeking to solidify their power in the region, both sides saw Afghanistan as a buffer territory.

#### Jihad

Term used most frequently today to describe warfare undertaken on behalf of Islam. In its classical understanding, the concept of *jihad* means to struggle or to strive to become a better Muslim, as well as to engage in combat in defense of Muslims or their lands.

## Webcast: Exploring 9/11 – The World Before and After Supplementary Materials

**CHAPTER 7:** *Thier discusses Bin Laden's move to Afghanistan and his influence on the Taliban.*

1. How did Bin Laden attach himself to Mullah Omar, initially as an honored guest, and later as a protected friend?

**CHAPTER 8:** *Thier describes the changes to Afghanistan's governing structure in the immediate aftermath of 9/11.*

1. Why does Thier believe the United States decided to send a limited number of troops to Afghanistan in the aftermath of 9/11?
2. How were Bin Laden and Taliban leadership able to escape Afghanistan?

**CHAPTER 9:** *Thier talks about lessons we can draw from the United States' history with Afghanistan and the country's current state of affairs.*

1. How does Thier believe the United States could have better dealt with Afghanistan after invading in 2001?
2. According to Thier, what is at stake in post-conflict nation building?

### Questions for Further Discussion

1. Thier describes Afghanistan as sitting at the crossroads of empires. How might this affect the history of a nation?
2. What do you think may have been the various motivations of the countries who aided the *mujahideen* during the Soviet-Afghan War?
3. Thier says that tribal hospitality was an initial factor in Omar's decision to welcome and protect Bin Laden. How might international relations and diplomacy benefit from knowledge of another culture's traditions?
4. Thier mentions past examples of nation building. Is there a model for successful nation building?

### Recommended Resources

Thier, J. Alexander, ed. "The Future of Afghanistan." United States Institute of Peace. January 2009. Web. <http://www.usip.org/resources/future-afghanistan>

#### Key Figures and Vocabulary (continued)

##### Khyber Pass

A mountain pass that runs between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Historically, the Khyber Pass has served as both a trade route and a strategic military location.

##### Mujahideen

Refers to one who is fighting for freedom; the literal Arabic translation is "struggler." The term now often refers to armed militant Islamists.

##### Mullah Mohammed Omar

Leader of the Taliban who took power in Afghanistan after the Soviet-Afghan War. He held the title of Head of the Supreme Council from 1996 - 2001.

##### Pashtun

An ethno-linguistic group, mainly based in Afghanistan and the Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan.

##### Soviet-Afghan War (1979 – 1989)

War between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the *mujahideen* - sparked by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The *mujahideen* were aided by many countries (among them, the United States). Soviet forces withdrew in 1989.

##### Taliban

Militant Islamist movement which took power in Afghanistan in the aftermath of the Soviet-Afghan war, ruling from 1996 until 2001.