

---

*Humanitarian Invasion: Global Development in Cold War Afghanistan.* Timothy Nunan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2016. 326 pp. (ISBN-13: 9781107112070)

Afghanistan occupies a vital geostrategic location bordering the former Soviet Central Asia, Iran, Pakistan, and China through the Wakhan Corridor. Due to this geopolitical whereabouts at the crossroads of civilizations, Afghanistan is also characterized as the “graveyard of empires.” On the one hand, since the mid-19th century, this region at the center of Eurasia has been a battleground for major global powers, respectively the United Kingdom, Russian/Soviet Union, and the United States. Although the coining of the term “Great Game” to describe the Anglo-Russian rivalry in Central Asia is credited to Captain Arthur Conolly in the early 1840s, Rudyard Kipling’s novel *Kim* in 1901 made it prevalent around the world, and then subsequent new versions were formulated to illustrate the strife for dominance and power in Central Eurasia. On the other hand, another notable feature of the region is related to the fact that it is an active playground for international humanitarian NGOs and aid agencies of all sorts. This battleground and playground metaphoric correlation is reflected through the title of the book under review and forms the genesis of the research.

Timothy Nunan’s *Humanitarian Invasion: Global Development in Cold War Afghanistan* is as relevant a question as ever in 2018 following 17 years of U.S. occupation. Recent Western-centric attempts to rebuild the country through the manufacture of Western-style democracy are again good illustrations indicating a lack of ingenuity regarding development assistance in general and Afghanistan in particular. However, contemporary history since the mid-19th century unmistakably illustrates that no foreign power or alliances have been able to exercise full control over Afghan territory or for that matter uphold durable cohesion in the country. Following the decolonization(s) period, throughout the Cold War, Afghanistan became a playground of contending ideological frameworks for various development models. Nunan draws irrefutable conclusions about the role played by American, Soviet and German advisers during the 1960s vis-à-vis their envisaged humanitarian assistance or development schemes without addressing local needs and the mentality of the population coherently. Moreover, Afghanistan is also subject to the new Chinese-invigorated Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) since any envisaged Eurasian connectivity cannot be realized without a stable and peaceful central Eurasia. Consequently, this timely book sheds light on the recent history of Afghanistan through an exploration of the global history of development and humanitarianism from the early years of the Cold War until the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of the Taliban to a position of preponderance in Afghanistan. His work is ingrained with extensive archival research of primary sources in several diverse languages. The author delves into Central Asian, Russian, and Indian archives as well as interviews with the local populace in order to provide a much-needed refined pathway to the historiography of development and humanitarian intervention in contemporary Afghanistan. *Humanitarian Invasion* produces an unusual and sound depiction of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

The book is comprised of seven chapters. In the first chapter, the author details the historiographical traditions and problems that tormented historical narratives of Afghanistan and Central Asia throughout the Cold War. The second chapter examines Soviet, West German, and American development schemes. Nunan, by displaying the differences between these three undertakings, demonstrates the diversity and overabundance of ideas that penetrated Afghanistan in the 1950s. Chapter 3 presents the struggle as an outcome of Soviet attempts to reconstruct society through education and humanitarian efforts in the 1970s. Chapter 4 features the role assumed by Soviet advisors in occupied Afghanistan and the erratic closing of three decades of state-led developmental programs in the country. Chapter 5 provides an in-depth analysis of the discussion on women's rights and feminism. The remaining two chapters concentrate on the absence of borders or ever-changing borders. Nunan's query starts with the Soviet military within Afghanistan and the problems that faced local Afghans, Soviet soldiers, humanitarian NGOs, and the mujahidin confronted with a fluid border situation inside Afghanistan. Nunan extends his analysis to the 21st century by extrapolating the inquiry through American involvement in Afghanistan after 9/11 and the American idea of "failed states" as the greatest security threat to the free world.

The book shows the reader an unusually original perspective and will be acknowledged as a significant addition to the history of geopolitically induced development agendas at the core of Eurasia. However, this captivating and prodigiously researched work neglects to some extent the importance of certain aspects such as the role performed by Islamic aid and charitable organizations on the ground. Moreover, it would be valuable to have more local Afghan oral histories or testimonies. In the absence of that sort of valuable input, the book in question sounds like another Western-centric endeavor to question developmental studies.

Cagri Erdem  
*Keimyung University*