

graveyard of empires

Graveyard of Empires: Unraveling the Mysteries Behind the Legendary Label

graveyard of empires is a phrase that has captivated historians, political analysts, and curious minds alike for decades. It conjures images of mighty powers clashing and ultimately failing in a particular region, leaving behind tales of struggle, resilience, and mystery. But what exactly does this term mean, where did it originate, and why has it become synonymous with certain territories? Let's embark on a journey to understand the deeper significance behind the "graveyard of empires" and explore the historical, geopolitical, and cultural layers that have shaped this fascinating concept.

The Origins of the "Graveyard of Empires"

The phrase "graveyard of empires" is most commonly associated with Afghanistan, a rugged and mountainous country in Central Asia. For centuries, it has served as a formidable obstacle for invading armies and imperial ambitions. The term itself is believed to have emerged during the 19th and 20th centuries, reflecting the repeated failures of various great powers to establish lasting control over the region.

Why Afghanistan?

Afghanistan's geographic and cultural landscape plays a significant role in earning it this daunting nickname. Its topography is dominated by harsh mountain ranges, narrow passes, and vast deserts, making military campaigns logistically challenging. Moreover, the fiercely independent and tribal nature of its people has historically resisted external domination.

The British Empire, the Soviet Union, and more recently the United States have all faced immense difficulty in sustaining long-term influence over Afghanistan. The British fought three Anglo-Afghan wars in the 19th and early 20th centuries, with limited success. The Soviet invasion in 1979 led to a brutal decade-long conflict that drained resources and morale. The US-led coalition's intervention after 2001, despite its advanced military technology, struggled with insurgency and political instability.

Historical Examples of Failed Empires

- **British Empire**: During the Great Game, Britain sought to protect its Indian colony by controlling Afghanistan but faced persistent uprisings and logistical nightmares.
- **Soviet Union**: The decade-long invasion ended with a costly withdrawal, contributing to the eventual collapse of the Soviet regime.
- **United States**: Despite superior technology and resources, the US struggled with guerrilla warfare tactics and local resistance.

This pattern of hardship and withdrawal has cemented Afghanistan's reputation as the "graveyard" where even the most powerful empires falter.

The Geopolitical Significance Behind the Label

Understanding the "graveyard of empires" goes beyond purely military history. It involves recognizing the geopolitical chessboard on which these empires played their games. Afghanistan's strategic location as a crossroads between Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East has made it a focal point for imperial ambitions.

Buffer State and Regional Dynamics

Historically, Afghanistan served as a buffer state between competing empires, particularly during the British-Russian rivalry known as the Great Game. Neither side wanted the other to gain a foothold in Afghanistan due to its proximity to valuable territories. This delicate balance of power meant that any attempt to conquer or fully control Afghanistan was met with fierce resistance and international complications.

Modern Implications

In contemporary times, the concept of the "graveyard of empires" highlights the challenges of nation-building, counterinsurgency, and diplomacy in complex environments. The lessons learned from past failures emphasize the importance of understanding local cultures, political dynamics, and the limits of military intervention.

Cultural and Social Resilience of Afghanistan

One of the most compelling reasons Afghanistan is dubbed the graveyard of empires lies in the resilience of its people and culture. Despite invasions, wars, and foreign interference, Afghan society has preserved its identity through tribal structures, languages, and traditions.

Tribal Loyalties and Social Structure

Afghanistan's diverse ethnic groups — Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, and others — have maintained strong tribal and clan-based loyalties. These social bonds often supersede centralized authority and complicate efforts by external powers to impose uniform governance.

Impact on Military Campaigns

The decentralized nature of Afghan society means that conventional military victories are often temporary. Insurgent groups can blend into local populations, making it difficult for invading forces to distinguish friend from foe. This social complexity has been a crucial factor in the failure of empires to establish lasting control.

Lessons from the Graveyard: What History Teaches Us

The repeated struggles in Afghanistan offer valuable insights into the limits of power and the nuances of international engagement.

Respecting Local Realities

One of the core lessons is the necessity of respecting local customs, politics, and social structures. Attempts to impose foreign systems without adequate understanding often lead to resistance and failure.

Limitations of Military Might

Superior weaponry and technology do not guarantee success in asymmetric warfare or complex socio-political environments. The "graveyard of empires" metaphor underscores how military dominance alone cannot resolve deep-rooted challenges.

The Importance of Long-Term Commitment

Short-term interventions rarely lead to lasting peace or stability. Sustainable progress requires patience, cultural sensitivity, and genuine partnership with local stakeholders.

Other Regions Called the "Graveyard of Empires"

While Afghanistan is the most famous example, other regions have earned similar reputations due to their historical roles in thwarting imperial ambitions.

Vietnam

The dense jungles and determined resistance of Vietnamese forces turned the country into another "graveyard of empires," as both French colonialists and later American forces faced significant setbacks.

Scythian Steppes

The vast Eurasian steppes historically resisted control by empires such as Persia and later the Mongols, earning a reputation for being inhospitable to centralized rule.

Reflecting on the Legacy of the Graveyard of Empires

The phrase "graveyard of empires" serves as a powerful reminder of the complexities involved in geopolitics and military strategy. It challenges the notion that might makes right and invites a deeper appreciation for the resilience of people and place.

Whether it is Afghanistan's rugged mountains, Vietnam's dense jungles, or other formidable landscapes, these regions tell stories of endurance and resistance that continue to influence global affairs today. Understanding this legacy encourages more thoughtful approaches to international relations and conflict resolution in the future.

Frequently Asked Questions

What does the term 'Graveyard of Empires' refer to?

The term 'Graveyard of Empires' refers to Afghanistan, highlighting its historical reputation as a place where many foreign powers and empires have failed to conquer or maintain control.

Why is Afghanistan called the 'Graveyard of Empires'?

Afghanistan is called the 'Graveyard of Empires' because numerous powerful empires, including the British Empire, the Soviet Union, and the United States, have faced military defeat or withdrawal after prolonged conflicts in the region.

Which empires are commonly associated with the 'Graveyard of Empires' nickname?

The British Empire during the 19th century Anglo-Afghan wars, the Soviet Union during the 1979-1989 Soviet-Afghan War, and the United States during the 2001-2021 conflict are commonly associated with the 'Graveyard of Empires' nickname.

What factors contribute to Afghanistan being difficult for empires to control?

Afghanistan's rugged mountainous terrain, complex tribal and ethnic makeup, decentralized political structure, and strong local resistance have contributed to its reputation as difficult for empires to control.

Has any empire successfully conquered Afghanistan for a long period?

While various empires have controlled parts of Afghanistan at different times, none have maintained long-term, stable control over the entire region due to persistent local resistance and difficult geography.

How has the 'Graveyard of Empires' concept influenced modern military strategy?

The concept has made modern military planners cautious about prolonged foreign interventions in Afghanistan, emphasizing understanding local cultures, political complexities, and the limits of military power in such environments.

Is the 'Graveyard of Empires' label viewed positively or negatively in Afghanistan?

Views vary; some Afghans see it as a point of national pride symbolizing resilience and independence, while others may see it negatively due to the suffering caused by repeated conflicts.

Additional Resources

Graveyard of Empires: Analyzing Afghanistan's Historical Role in Global Power Dynamics

graveyard of empires is a phrase historically attributed to Afghanistan, a country whose rugged terrain and complex social fabric have repeatedly challenged external powers seeking control. This evocative label underscores Afghanistan's reputation as a geopolitical quagmire where once-mighty empires have faltered or collapsed. Over centuries, empires including the British, Soviet, and more recently, the United States have encountered formidable resistance and logistical nightmares within this region, leading to costly military engagements and strategic reassessments.

Understanding the origins and implications of the "graveyard of empires" concept necessitates a deep dive into Afghanistan's unique geographical, cultural, and political landscape. This article undertakes an investigative review of why Afghanistan has earned this moniker, the historical patterns of foreign intervention, and the underlying factors that have consistently complicated efforts at conquest or nation-building. By examining historical case studies and contemporary analyses, we aim to provide a nuanced perspective on how Afghanistan's role as the "graveyard of empires" continues to shape international relations and military strategies today.

Historical Context: The Making of the Graveyard of Empires

Afghanistan's designation as the "graveyard of empires" does not stem from a single event but from a series of military and political failures by foreign powers over the last two centuries. The British Empire's three Anglo-Afghan wars in the 19th and early 20th centuries exemplify early Western attempts to exert influence over this strategically located country. Despite superior technology and resources, British forces struggled against guerrilla tactics, tribal resistance, and the country's mountainous terrain. The British retreat from Kabul in 1842, which resulted in the near-total annihilation of a retreating army, is a stark illustration of Afghanistan's capacity to repel invaders.

Similarly, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 marked another chapter in this pattern. The USSR sought to install a communist government and secure its southern borders during the Cold War. However, a decade-long conflict ensued, characterized by fierce resistance from Mujahideen fighters

supported by the United States, Pakistan, and other nations. The Soviets found themselves mired in a costly and protracted war that drained resources and morale, culminating in their withdrawal in 1989. The Soviet-Afghan war is widely cited as a significant factor in the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union, reinforcing Afghanistan's reputation as a geopolitical sinkhole.

Geopolitical Importance and Challenges

Afghanistan's geographical location at the crossroads of Central and South Asia has made it a strategic prize for empires seeking regional dominance. It borders key countries such as Iran, China, Pakistan, and the Central Asian republics, placing it at the heart of historical trade routes like the Silk Road. Control over Afghanistan has meant potential influence over these critical corridors, which explains why global powers have repeatedly attempted to assert dominance.

However, Afghanistan's topography is a formidable natural defense. The Hindu Kush mountain ranges create barriers that complicate military logistics and communications. This rugged terrain favors decentralized warfare and guerrilla tactics, which local tribal groups have effectively employed against conventional armies. Moreover, Afghanistan's complex ethnic mosaic, including Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks, contributes to fragmented internal politics, making it difficult for foreign powers to establish stable governance structures.

The Modern Era: The United States and the Continuing Legacy

The post-9/11 American-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 exemplifies the ongoing challenges of foreign intervention in the so-called graveyard of empires. Intended to dismantle Al-Qaeda and remove the Taliban from power, the operation expanded into a long-term counterinsurgency and nation-building effort. Despite overwhelming military superiority, coalition forces encountered persistent insurgency, corruption, and political instability.

The war in Afghanistan became the United States' longest conflict, lasting over two decades. The difficulties faced mirrored those of previous foreign powers—local resistance, logistical complexity, and the challenge of winning "hearts and minds" in a deeply traditional society. The eventual withdrawal of U.S. troops in 2021 and the rapid return of the Taliban to power reignited debates about the viability of foreign intervention and the resilience of Afghanistan as a battleground for global powers.

Key Factors Behind Afghanistan's Resilience

Several factors contribute to Afghanistan's enduring status as a graveyard of empires:

- **Geography:** The mountainous terrain impedes large-scale military operations and favors guerrilla warfare.

- **Tribal and Ethnic Fragmentation:** Diverse ethnic groups with strong local loyalties resist centralized authority imposed by outsiders.
- **Historical Legacy:** Centuries of resistance have fostered a cultural ethos of defiance against foreign domination.
- **External Support for Insurgents:** Proxy involvement by neighboring countries complicates internal conflicts and sustains resistance movements.
- **Political Instability:** Weak governance and corruption undermine efforts to build lasting institutions.

These elements create a complex environment where traditional military success does not easily translate into long-term political control.

Comparative Analysis: Afghanistan Versus Other Challenging Theaters

While Afghanistan is often singled out as uniquely challenging, it is instructive to compare it with other regions where empires have faced difficulties. For instance, Vietnam in the 20th century also exemplifies a terrain and socio-political landscape hostile to foreign occupation. However, Afghanistan's combination of geography, tribal dynamics, and external geopolitical interest creates a particularly intractable situation.

Unlike many other conflict zones, Afghanistan's position at a cultural and geopolitical crossroads means that interventions often have ripple effects far beyond its borders. This makes the country a focal point of regional and global rivalries, complicating peace efforts and prolonging instability.

Lessons for Future Engagements

The history encapsulated by the term "graveyard of empires" offers critical lessons for policymakers and military strategists considering future interventions:

1. **Understanding Local Dynamics:** Success requires deep knowledge of ethnic, tribal, and cultural factors.
2. **Realistic Objectives:** Military action must be coupled with achievable political and social goals.
3. **Long-Term Commitment:** Short-term military victories do not guarantee lasting stability.
4. **Regional Cooperation:** Addressing external influences and fostering collaboration with neighboring states is essential.

Ignoring these lessons risks repeating the costly mistakes that have defined past foreign engagements in Afghanistan.

The epithet "graveyard of empires" encapsulates not just a historical pattern but an ongoing strategic reality. Afghanistan remains a complex and contested space where the ambitions of external powers confront enduring local resilience. As global dynamics continue to evolve, Afghanistan's legacy serves as a cautionary tale about the limits of military power and the importance of nuanced, context-driven approaches to international involvement.

Graveyard Of Empires

graveyard of empires: In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan Seth G. Jones, 2010-03-30 Following the September 11 attacks, the United States successfully overthrew the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. The U.S. established security throughout the country--killing, capturing, or scattering most of al Qaeda's senior operatives--and Afghanistan finally began to emerge from more than two decades of struggle and conflict. But Jones argues that as early as 2001, planning for the Iraq War siphoned resources and personnel, undermining the gains that had been made. Jones introduces us to key figures on both sides of the war. He then analyzes the insurgency from a historical and structural point of view, showing how a rising drug trade, poor security forces, and pervasive corruption undermined the Karzai government, while Americans abandoned a successful strategy, failed to provide the necessary support, and allowed a growing sanctuary for insurgents in Pakistan to catalyze the Taliban resurgence--From publisher.

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graveyard of empires: Dirt David R. Montgomery, 2007-05-14 Dirt, soil, call it what you want—it's everywhere we go. It is the root of our existence, supporting our feet, our farms, our cities. This fascinating yet disquieting book finds, however, that we are running out of dirt, and it's no laughing matter. An engaging natural and cultural history of soil that sweeps from ancient civilizations to modern times, Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations explores the compelling idea that we are—and have long been—using up Earth's soil. Once bare of protective vegetation and exposed to wind and rain, cultivated soils erode bit by bit, slowly enough to be ignored in a single lifetime but fast enough over centuries to limit the lifespan of civilizations. A rich mix of history, archaeology and geology, Dirt traces the role of soil use and abuse in the history of Mesopotamia, Ancient Greece, the Roman Empire, China, European colonialism, Central America, and the American push westward. We see how soil has shaped us and we have shaped soil—as society after society has risen, prospered, and plowed through a natural endowment of fertile dirt. David R. Montgomery sees in the recent rise of organic and no-till farming the hope for a new agricultural revolution that might help us avoid the fate of previous civilizations.

graveyard of empires: Imagining Afghanistan Nivi Manchanda, 2020-07-09 Over time and across different genres, Afghanistan has been presented to the world as potential ally, dangerous enemy, gendered space, and mysterious locale. These powerful, if competing, visions seek to make

sense of Afghanistan and to render it legible. In this innovative examination, Nivi Manchanda uncovers and critically explores Anglophone practices of knowledge cultivation and representational strategies, and argues that Afghanistan occupies a distinctive place in the imperial imagination: over-determined and under-theorised, owing largely to the particular history of imperial intervention in the region. Focusing on representations of gender, state and tribes, Manchanda re-historicises and de-mythologises the study of Afghanistan through a sustained critique of colonial forms of knowing and demonstrates how the development of pervasive tropes in Western conceptions of Afghanistan have enabled Western intervention, invasion and bombing in the region from the nineteenth century to the present.

graveyard of empires: *In Search of Monsters to Destroy* Christopher J. Coyne, 2022-12-08 Imperialism and militarism build empires, not liberalism. So says Christopher Coyne, Senior Fellow at the Independent Institute and professor of economics at George Mason University, in this eye-opening, must-read book on America's recent foreign policy failures. The attempt by the United States since 9/11 to establish liberal political regimes in the Middle East and in the mountains of Afghanistan was doomed to fail. And the logic is simple: illiberal means can lead only to illiberal ends. What else are the hundreds of thousands of dead and mutilated civilians the US military left behind, from 2003 to 2021, in these regions? The destroyed ancient cultures and nearly obliterated nation-states? Coyne also points out that the illiberal perpetrators also can end up, not only nearly bankrupt and humiliated, but also profoundly less secure. If we do not absorb these hard truths, says Coyne, the rest of the twenty-first century will be a repeat of its bloodstained, unstable beginning. But Coyne is no isolationist. A vocal champion of global engagement, Coyne insists there are workable, proven alternatives to imperialism, militarism, and empire—ones, deeply rooted in human experience, that preserve freedom, promote security, and foster mutually enriching friendship among the nations of the earth. Read *In Search of Monsters to Destroy*, and you'll never look at the nation state or international relations the same again.

graveyard of empires: *Myth and Narrative in International Politics* Berit Bliesemann de Guevara, 2016-06-13 This book systematically explores how different theoretical concepts of myth can be utilised to interpretively explore contemporary international politics. From the international community to warlords, from participation to effectiveness – international politics is replete with powerful narratives and commonly held beliefs that qualify as myths. Rebutting the understanding of myth-as-lie, this collection of essays unearths the ideological, naturalising, and depoliticising effect of myths. *Myth and Narrative in International Politics: Interpretive Approaches to the Study of IR* offers conceptual and methodological guidance on how to make sense of different myth theories and how to employ them in order to explore the powerful collective imaginations and ambiguities that underpin international politics today. Further, it assembles case studies of specific myths in different fields of International Relations, including warfare, global governance, interventionism, development aid, and statebuilding. The findings challenge conventional assumptions in International Relations, encouraging academics in IR and across a range of different fields and disciplines, including development studies, global governance studies, strategic and military studies, intervention and statebuilding studies, and peace and conflict studies, to rethink ideas that are widely unquestioned by policy and academic communities.

graveyard of empires: Afghanistan Barnett R. Rubin, 2020-07-01 Afghanistan, a landlocked country in Central Asia, has improbably been at the center of international geopolitics for four decades. After the Soviet Union invaded in 1980, Afghanistan descended into an unending conflict that featured at various points most of the world's major powers. In the mid-1990s, the country entered a new phase, when the Taliban took power and imposed order based on a harsh, repressive version of Islamic law. Infamously, the sheltered Osama bin Laden, whose attack on 9/11 Towers ushered in the Global War on Terror, drew tens of thousands of American troops to the country, where they remain today. In *Afghanistan: What Everyone Needs to Know®*, leading scholar Barnett R. Rubin provides an overview of this complicated nation. After providing a concise history of Afghanistan, he explores the various peoples and cultures of the country and its relations with

neighbors like Pakistan and Iran. He also provides an authoritative overview of the conflicts that have plagued the country since the Soviet invasion. Both wide-ranging and pithy, this book explains why Afghanistan matters and what its possible future might look like.

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graveyard of empires: Hubris, Self-Interest, and America's Failed War in Afghanistan Thomas P. Cavanaugh, 2015-07-22 This book describes the conduct of the US-led post-9/11 war in Afghanistan. Adopting a long-term perspective, it argues that even though Washington initially had an opportunity to achieve its security goals and give Afghanistan a chance to enter a new era, it compromised any possibility of success from the very moment it let bin Laden escape to Pakistan in December 2001, and found itself locked in a strategic overreach. Given the bureaucratic and rhetorical momentum triggered by the war on terror in America, the Bush Administration was bound to deploy more resources in Afghanistan sooner or later (despite its focus on Iraq). The need to satisfy unfulfilled counter-terrorism objectives made the US dependent on Afghanistan's warlords, which compromised the country's stability and tarnished its new political system. The extension of the US military presence made Washington lose its leverage on the Pakistan army leaders, who, aware of America's logistical dependency on Islamabad, supported the Afghan insurgents - their historical proxies - more and more openly. The extension of the war also contributed to radicalize segments of the Afghan and Pakistani populations, destabilizing the area further. In the meantime, the need to justify the extension of its military presence influenced the US-led coalition into proclaiming its determination to democratize and reconstruct Afghanistan. While highly opportunistic, the emergence of these policies proved both self-defeating and unsustainable due to an inescapable collision between the US-led coalition's inherent self-interest, hubris, limited knowledge, limited attention span and limited resources, and, on the other hand, Afghanistan's inherent complexity. As the critical contradictions at the very heart of the campaign increased with the extension of the latter's duration, scale, and cost, America's leaders, entrapped in path-dependence, lost their strategic flexibility. Despite debates on troops/resource allocation and more sophisticated doctrines, they repeated the same structural mistakes over and over again. The strategic overreach became self-sustaining, until its costs became intolerable, leading to a drawdown which has more to do with a pervasive sense of failure than with the accomplishment of any noble purpose or strategic breakthrough.

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military experience firsthand, from the American Revolution to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Military service can shatter and give meaning to lives; it is rarely a neutral encounter, and has contributed to a rich outpouring of personal testimony from the men and women who have literally placed their lives on the line. The often dramatic and always richly textured first-person accounts collected in this book cover a wide range of perspectives, from ardent patriots to disillusioned cynics; barely literate farm boys to urbane college graduates; scions of founding families to recent immigrants, enthusiasts, and dissenters; women disguising themselves as men in order to serve their country to African Americans fighting for their freedom through military service. A work of great relevance and immediacy—as the nation grapples with the return of thousands of men and women from active military duty—*A People's History of the U.S. Military* will become a major new touchstone for our understanding of American military service.

graveyard of empires: *War & Peace & War* Andrew North, 2024-08-01 'Andrew North has a deep empathy and understanding for Afghanistan and has seen sides of it - both good and horrifying - that very few international observers have encountered' - Rory Stewart 'By weaving personal stories into a modern history of Afghanistan, Andrew North provides a touching and intimate portrait of the country he grew to love. His beautiful illustrations add a unique perspective on how war has destroyed or transformed generations of Afghans' - Lindsey Hilsum In early 2022, veteran journalist Andrew North was kidnapped by the Taliban. By the time he found himself imprisoned in a jail cell, he had been reporting from Afghanistan for two decades, coming to know hundreds of Afghans along the way. This book brings together both his and their stories. Farzana was banned from attending school as a child, but education would take her further than she could have imagined. Bilal's dream of becoming a journalist came true, but at a cost. While Abdul's ambition to become a doctor was thwarted, Jahan's prospects transformed radically for the better. And in a quiet province, the life of a boy called Naqibullah was shattered. Witness to both the country's transformation and the mistakes that eventually led to its collapse, in *War & Peace & War* North vividly evokes a country where foreign powers and internal forces have been on a collision course for over two centuries.

graveyard of empires: *The 9/11 Wars* Jason Burke, 2011-09-01 DAILY TELEGRAPH, ECONOMIST AND INDEPENDENT BOOKS OF THE YEAR Throughout the 1990s a vast conflict was brewing. The storm broke on September 11th 2001. Since then much of the world has seen invasions, bombings, battles and riots. Hundreds of thousands of people have died. Jason Burke, a first-hand witness of many of the conflict's key moments, has written the definitive account of its course in his acclaimed book *The 9/11 Wars*. At once investigation, reportage and contemporary history, *The 9/11 Wars* is an essential book for understanding the dangerous and unstable twenty-first century. Whether reporting on the riots in France or the attack on Mumbai, suicide bombers in Iraq or British troops fighting in Helmand, Jason Burke tells the story of a world that changed forever when the hijacked planes flew out of the brilliant blue sky above Manhattan on September 11th. Reviews: 'The best overview of the 9/11 decade so far in print' Economist 'A magisterial history of the last decade ... The long patient sentences of *The 9/11 Wars* are suffused with the melancholy of a man who has learned a great deal from long exposure to atrocity and folly' Pankaj Mishra, Guardian 'The 9/11 Wars warrants great respect' Metro 'Pacy, well-researched, and packed with telling anecdotes, this book's strength is in its detailed, balanced overview ... At a time when there are more books out on terrorism than ever before ... this is likely to be among the best' Sunday Telegraph '[Burke] is one of the most respected and experienced foreign correspondents in the business ... A major authority on the politics and organisation of Islamic extremism and ... a talented writer with the rare gift of joining effortless prose to challenging scholarship ... [*The 9/11 Wars*] is a magnificent achievement' Irish Times 'A reader wanting a more dispassionate survey of how 9/11, and the response to it, may have shaped parts of the world will do no better than invest in [this] brilliant book' David Aaronovitch, The Times 'This remarkably balanced, well-sourced and very well-written book ... will be turned to in the future ... [Burke] has demonstrated impressive expertise as a historian who has had the advantage of having been present on many of the battlefields he

describes' Andrew Roberts, *Evening Standard* '[A] lucid, sane account ... taut, careful reporting ... Remarkable' Scotsman 'Potent ... journalism of a high order. Like all good reporters, Burke is something of a scholar, drawing meticulously on interview notes years old, and on extensive background reading. He excels, too, in describing the experiences of ordinary Muslims; such insights make this book essential for understanding the past decade' *Sunday Times* About the author: Jason Burke is the South Asia correspondent for the *Guardian*. He has reported around the world for both the *Guardian* and the *Observer*. He is the author of two other widely praised books, both published by Penguin: *Al-Qaeda* and *On the Road to Kandahar*. He lives in New Delhi.

graveyard of empires: *Losing the Long Game* Philip H. Gordon, 2020-10-06 One of *Foreign Affairs'* Best of Books of 2021 and Books For The Century! Book of the Week on Fareed Zakaria GPS Financial Times Best Books of 2020 The definitive account of how regime change in the Middle East has proven so tempting to American policymakers for decades—and why it always seems to go wrong. It's a first-rate work, intelligently analyzing a complex issue, and learning the right lessons from history. —Fareed Zakaria Since the end of World War II, the United States has set out to oust governments in the Middle East on an average of once per decade—in places as diverse as Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan (twice), Egypt, Libya, and Syria. The reasons for these interventions have also been extremely diverse, and the methods by which the United States pursued regime change have likewise been highly varied, ranging from diplomatic pressure alone to outright military invasion and occupation. What is common to all the operations, however, is that they failed to achieve their ultimate goals, produced a range of unintended and even catastrophic consequences, carried heavy financial and human costs, and in many cases left the countries in question worse off than they were before. Philip H. Gordon's *Losing the Long Game* is a thorough and riveting look at the U.S. experience with regime change over the past seventy years, and an insider's view on U.S. policymaking in the region at the highest levels. It is the story of repeated U.S. interventions in the region that always started out with high hopes and often the best of intentions, but never turned out well. No future discussion of U.S. policy in the Middle East will be complete without taking into account the lessons of the past, especially at a time of intense domestic polarization and reckoning with America's standing in world.

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graveyard of empires: *The Day After* Brendan R. Gallagher, 2019-09-15 Since 9/11, why have we won smashing battlefield victories only to botch nearly everything that comes next? In the opening phases of war in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, we mopped the floor with our enemies. But in short order, things went horribly wrong. We soon discovered we had no coherent plan to manage the day after. The ensuing debacles had truly staggering consequences—many thousands of lives lost, trillions of dollars squandered, and the apparent discrediting of our foreign policy establishment. This helped set the stage for an extraordinary historical moment in which America's role in the world, along with our commitment to democracy at home and abroad, have become subject to growing doubt. With the benefit of hindsight, can we discern what went wrong? Why have we had such great difficulty planning for the aftermath of war? In *The Day After*, Brendan Gallagher—an Army lieutenant colonel with multiple combat tours to Iraq and Afghanistan, and a Princeton Ph.D.—seeks to tackle this vital question. Gallagher argues there is a tension between our desire to create a new democracy and our competing desire to pull out as soon as possible. Our leaders often

strive to accomplish both to keep everyone happy. But by avoiding the tough underlying decisions, it fosters an incoherent strategy. This makes chaos more likely. The Day After draws on new interviews with dozens of civilian and military officials, ranging from US cabinet secretaries to four-star generals. It also sheds light on how, in Kosovo, we lowered our postwar aims to quietly achieve a surprising partial success. Striking at the heart of what went wrong in our recent wars, and what we should do about it, Gallagher asks whether we will learn from our mistakes, or provoke even more disasters? Human lives, money, elections, and America's place in the world may hinge on the answer.

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