



## President's Message

The American Institute for Afghanistan Studies has for the past twenty years played a vital role in expanding the scope of research on and about Afghanistan and served an ever-larger number of scholars, both Afghan and international. During this period AIAS became a home for a whole new generation of scholars across a wide range of disciplines, so much so that we have been able to sustain for many years the first peer reviewed journal devoted to Afghanistan that includes contributions from both the humanities and social sciences.

While the collapse of the Republic and return of the Taliban in 2021 has upended many lives and brought new suffering to Afghanistan, it has not broken our commitment to its people.

Since I began my study of the country in the 1970s, I have seen seven governments with very different ideologies come to power and none has been able to bring stability to Afghanistan. Despite this political instability, the Afghan people have never lost their unity, pride in their culture, or resilience in the face of difficulties.

Scholarly research on Afghanistan remains vital to understanding its people, culture and politics in good times and bad. With this new newsletter AIAS seeks to broaden the connections within the scholarly community, whose members have much to contribute to the future of Afghanistan, as well as make their work better known to the rest of the world.

Thomas Barfield  
President, AIAS

## Country Director's note

I am writing this update with a heavy heart: Three years after the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, women and girls remain banned from pursuing secondary and higher education. The ruling Taliban regime has been discouraging academic scholarship within the country by replacing qualified professional scholars and teachers with semi-literate clerics. The ruling group has also made significant changes to school curricula, restricting or banning the study of a wide range of academic subjects.

The mass exodus of Afghan scholars, university lecturers, activists, and researchers following the return of the Taliban regime, has further deteriorated Afghanistan's academia. Scholars, professors and educators continue to leave the country due to the Taliban's repression and authoritarianism. Many research institutions, including the Kabul office of the American Institute of Afghanistan Studies (AIAS), have either had to close or forced to cease all their operations.

Despite immense challenges, Afghan researchers and scholars continue their work, offering a glimmer of hope for Afghanistan and its scholarly community. AIAS is proud to be among the very few organizations which continues its operations in exile to support scholarship on Afghanistan despite facing enormous challenges.

As a member of AIAS, I am proud to say that we continue to be one of the leading organizations for academic workshops, seminars and colloquia that allow Afghan and international scholars to present their research and exchange ideas. AIAS continues to provide various fellowship opportunities for scholars conducting work within the field of Afghanistan studies.

Through this newsletter, I am excited to share AIAS's work and broaden our network within the Afghan and international scholarly community to continue the vital work of preserving and developing Afghanistan studies.

Omar Sharifi  
Country Director, AIAS

## Who are we?

The American Institute for Afghanistan Studies is a private, scholarly institution founded in 2003 to support research on all aspects of Afghanistan's history and culture and to promote scholarly ties between Afghanistan and the United States. Since 2008, the Institute has been a member of the Council of American Overseas Research Centers.

## Objectives

- To improve the quality and quantity of research on Afghanistan by providing logistical and financial support for scholars in the United States, Afghanistan, and elsewhere.
- To create opportunities for scholars in the US, Afghanistan, and elsewhere develop their knowledge of Afghanistan by providing fellowships and grants.
- To foster an international community of scholars and scientists who are dedicated to the study of Afghanistan.
- To provide a forum for the exchange of knowledge and scholarly insights through organization of workshops, symposia, and conferences.
- To support dissemination of scholarly production on Afghanistan by any means including newsletters, journals, and monographs in electronic and print media and documentary film.
- To enhance public understanding of Afghanistan and its relationship to the United States through public lectures and activities directed at broad audiences.
- To organize and seek funding for collaborative research efforts, especially between Afghan and US scholars that cannot be undertaken by individual researchers alone.
- To encourage and support identification, authentication, archiving, cataloguing and publication in print and electronic form of significant source materials important for the study of Afghanistan and to build a significant Institute library in Afghanistan
- To forge and strengthen relationships between institutions, scholars, and students in Afghanistan and the United States by identifying common interests and concerns that can serve as the foundation for binational collaboration and exchange.
- To establish and maintain field offices within Afghanistan that can facilitate the work of visiting scholars and serve as vibrant centers for scholarly life accessible to all who are interested.
- To raise funds from public and private sources to support specific activities or to be applied to an endowment aimed at providing permanent support for the Institute.

## AIAS Research Fellowships

The American Institute of Afghanistan Studies (AIAS) offers a variety of fellowship opportunities for scholars conducting work within the field of Afghanistan studies. These fellowships can be used towards short-term projects or other research programs to advance scholarship on Afghanistan. Every year, AIAS awards a series of fellowships through the John F. Richards Fellowship program. The Richards Fellowship program is named in honor of belated Professor John F. Richards, one of the founding members of AIAS and a proponent of scholarship on South Asia. The fellowships are divided into two categories: Research Travel, Fellowships and Afghanistan Research Grants.

In this edition, we have featured our John F. Richards 2024 fellowship recipients.

### Afghanistan Travel Awards:

- Charles Ramsay

Charles holds a PhD in Theology and Philosophy. The John F. Richards 2024 Travel Award will support his study on Afghan repatriation from Pakistan. His research will explore the experiences of Afghan families affected by Pakistan's deportation policy.

- Katherine Wolf

Katherine holds a PhD in Musicology and Ethnomusicology. The John F. Richards 2024 Travel Award will support her study of music, language, and representation in Tajik Badakhshan. Her research explores diverse musical-poetic practices and identity formation among ethno-linguistic minority communities in Tajikistan's Autonomous Region of Mountain Badakhshan, both historically and in contemporary contexts.

- Munazza Ebtikar

Munazza is a PhD candidate in Asian and Middle Eastern Studies. The John F. Richards 2024 Travel Award will support her study on how memories of the wartime past are preserved, developed, and reshaped among recently exiled Afghans. The focus of her research is to understand the impact of exile on the varied memories and experiences of wars, and the development of individual and collective identities in the aftermath of the state's collapse and the Taliban's second takeover.

- Saleh Keshawarz

Saleh holds a PhD in Civil Engineering. The John F. Richards 2024 Travel Award will support his field visits to the Amu Darya riparian countries. His research will focus on the Qosh Tepa Irrigation Canal in Afghanistan and its effects on the water resources of neighboring countries in Central Asia.

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### Afghanistan Research Awards:

- Agnik Bhattacharya

Agnik is a PhD candidate in the Department of Art History and Visual Studies at the University of California, Irvine. The John F. Richards 2024 Research Award will support his study on the significance of Afghanistan in the late 19th and early 20th centuries for the development of competing scholarly paradigms concerning several premodern empires.

- Mateusz Klagisz

Mateusz holds a PhD in Linguistics. The John F. Richards 2024 Research Award will support his ongoing research involving 107 photographs from the first and only Polish ethnographic expedition to Afghanistan, conducted between June and September 1976. These photographs have remained largely unexplored and unknown. The goal is to make them freely accessible through an online catalog.

- Omar Sadr

Omar holds a PhD from South Asian University. The John F. Richards 2024 Research Award will support his participation in three

political science conferences, where he will present two of his works. The first examines how the collapse of the Third Republic (2001 – 2021) in Afghanistan and the failure of the American-led state-building project were rooted in the absence of pluralism as a political agenda. His second work focuses on political Islam in Afghanistan, arguing that the state's failure is inherent in its inability to develop a suitable model of pluralism to manage the role of religion in both polity and society.

- Tahmina Sobat

Tahmina is a PhD candidate in Feminist Studies at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. The John F. Richards 2024 Research Award will support her project on the role of grassroots feminism in demilitarization and peacebuilding in Afghanistan. Her research will specifically examine the unique situations of Afghan women and how their gender and exclusion from the peace process have been shaped and utilized by international politics.

## Publications

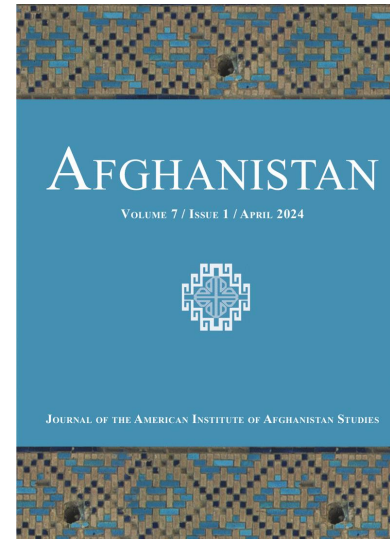
### Afghanistan Journal with Edinburgh University Press

**Afghanistan** is the [journal](#) of The American Institute of Afghanistan Studies, dedicated to the cross-cultural study of Afghanistan and its surrounding regions. It explores Afghanistan's rich history from a variety of humanities-focused perspectives, covering subjects such as history, art, archaeology, architecture, geography, numismatics, literature, religion, social sciences, and contemporary issues from both pre-Islamic and Islamic periods.

Afghanistan Studies bridges Near Eastern, Central Asian, and South Asian Studies, publishing articles that connect these areas' pre-modern histories and cultures. The journal aims to engage scholars and students with the region's rich past, highlighting Afghanistan's role in major cultures and empires throughout history and its significant architectural and art-historical legacy.

The Journal's Volume 7, Issue 1, published in April 2024, is now available online and is open access. In this volume, you can read the following articles:

- *Conservation of Buddhist Heritage in Afghanistan, 2016–2022* by Jolyon Leslie. Access [HERE](#).
- *The Legacies of Afghanistan's Urban Cosmopolitanism: Sikhs, Muslims and Markets in London* by Magnus Marsden. Access [HERE](#).
- *The Pashtun Borderlands, 1944–1947* by Robert Nichols. Access [HERE](#).



*Cover of the Afghanistan Journal, Volume 7*

## Events

### The joint colloquium on Afghanistan

The American Institute of Afghanistan Studies organized a joint colloquium titled “Generating a Political Process in Afghanistan” in collaboration with the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame and the U.S. Institute of Peace on April 25–26, 2024.

The aim of this initiative was to remind the international community of the ongoing political, social, and economic conflict in Afghanistan amidst the wars in Gaza and Ukraine, as well as other global crises and natural disasters.



*Group photo from the event. ©Kroc Institute*

This two-day program, held at the University of Notre Dame's campus in South Bend, Indiana, welcomed 32 scholars, particularly young Afghan scholars from various countries. They workshoped their papers on generating a political process in Afghanistan and received peer and expert feedback.

## Iran and Afghanistan: A Connected Literary History

The American Institute of Afghanistan Studies supported an expert talk titled “Iran and Afghanistan: A Connected Literary History” in collaboration with the University of Minnesota's Department of Asian & Middle Eastern Studies on April 26, 2024.

Held at the University of Minnesota campus in Minneapolis, MN, the event featured Aria Fani, Assistant Professor at the University of Washington, Seattle, who discussed his book, *Reading Across Borders*.

His book demonstrates how the cultural forms of Iran and Afghanistan as nation-states arose from their shared Persian heritage and cross-cultural exchange in the 20th century. It reveals how nationalism intensified—rather than severed—cultural contact between the two Persian-speaking societies. This interconnected history, now largely forgotten, has shaped many of the cultural disputes between Iran and Afghanistan today.



Map of present-day Afghanistan and Iran. ©UMN

## Other updates

### Insights on U.S. state-building efforts for the Afghanistan War Commission

Dr. Omar Sharifi, the Country Director of the American Institute of Afghanistan Studies, provided his insights on the U.S. efforts for state-legitimizing and democracy-promotion in Afghanistan for the Afghanistan War Commission in April 2024. In this discussion, Dr. Omar Sadr, the recipient of AIAS's John F. Richards 2024 Research Award, also shared his insights on the U.S. state-building efforts.



©Afghanistan War Commission

### Dr. Thomas Barfield's interviews

Watch Dr. Barfield, President of the American Institute of Afghanistan Studies, in an interview series with Afghanistan International TV station on Afghanistan's political history, the Taliban, and the future of Afghanistan. The interviews are translated into Persian/Dari.

- [Episode One](#) (25 minutes)
- [Episode Two](#) (25 minutes)



Dr. Thomas Barfield Interview with ©Afghanistan International

Watch Dr. Barfield's interview (1 hour and 49 minutes) with Roh Yakobi on Afghanistan [HERE](#). In this interview, Dr. Barfield shares the story of his five-decade fascination with Afghanistan and his thoughts on its past, present, and future.

**Dr. Dipali Mukhopadhyay, AIAS's Vice President appointed as the Afghanistan War Commission's Commissioner**

Dr. Dipali Mukhopadhyay, Vice President of the American Institute of Afghanistan Studies, was appointed as a commissioner of the Afghanistan War Commission by the Senate Armed Services Committee in March 2024.



Dr. Mukhopadhyay also serves as an Associate Professor at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, where she teaches courses on political violence, non-state armed actors, state formation, the politics and law of military intervention, and qualitative research methods. Additionally, she is a Senior Expert on Afghanistan at the U.S. Institute of Peace.

AFGHANISTAN  
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She is the author of *Warlords, Strongman Governors, and the State in Afghanistan* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), which was shortlisted for the biennial Central Eurasian Studies Society Book Award in the Social Sciences, and, with Kimberly Howe, *Good Rebel Governance: Revolutionary Politics and Western Intervention in Syria* (Cambridge University Press, 2023).

**How to become an AIAS member?**

Members of the American Institute of Afghanistan Studies are connected to a growing network of American and foreign scholars interested in promoting scholarship in Afghanistan. Members also receive exclusive rates and access to AIAS facilities. You or your institution can become a member.

For more information, please click [HERE](#).

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