



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: More than 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](#) (CAORC).

Read more about our objectives and bylaws [HERE](#).

AIAS JFR Fellowships 2025

The American Institute of Afghanistan Studies (AIAS) John F. Richards 2025 fellowship is accepting applications now. The [fellowships](#) are divided into two categories:

- Research Travel
- Fellowships and Afghanistan Research Grants

The DEADLINE TO APPLY is **March 14th, 2025**.

Research Fellowships: They are awarded to U.S. Citizens and are available to scholars of all levels to conduct Afghanistan related research outside of the United States and outside of Afghanistan. Maximum award is \$6,000.

Afghanistan Research Grants: It is open to scholars of all citizenship and rank to conduct research and support writing inside the United States. Maximum award is \$3,000.

When submitting your application, please include the following materials:

- Applicants must be individual members of AIAS to apply (Membership information [HERE](#))
- Full CV
- Statement describing the nature of the proposed research or project, including the contribution it will make to Afghan studies, double-spaced and not to exceed 1,500 words
- Full budget narrative
- Three letters of recommendation
- Project timetable with research locations
- Complete the applicant Google Form [HERE](#)

For more information, please visit <https://afghan-institute.org/research/> or contact us at: americaninstituteofafghanistan@gmail.com.

About AIAS Fellowships:

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 American Institute of Afghanistan Studies

John F. Richards Fellowship 2025

DEADLINE TO APPLY: March 14th, 2025

Fellowship Details:

<u>Afghanistan Research Grants:</u>	<u>Research Travel Fellowships:</u>
- Available to scholars of all rank and citizenship	- Available to scholars of all rank, US citizenship required
- Used to conduct research and support writing on Afghanistan from within the United States	- Used to conduct Afghanistan related research outside the United States and Afghanistan
Maximum award: \$3,000	Maximum Award: \$6,000

For more information, please visit <https://afghan-institute.org/research/> or contact us at: americaninstituteofafghanistan@gmail.com

John F. Richards Fellowship 2025 Poster

Stories of AIAS Grant Recipients

Parvez Besmel, the recipient of the 2023 research fellowship grant from the American Institute for Afghanistan Studies (AIAS), conducted important research on responses to war crimes and crimes against humanity in Afghanistan. His article, titled *'The Dilemma of Justice: The International Criminal Court's Political Maneuver,'* was published in the *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, Volume 18, Issue 3, November 2024.

You can read the article [HERE](#).

Article Abstract

This article explores the perspectives of Afghan human rights advocates and academics on transitional justice, focused on the conundrum of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate war crimes and crimes against humanity in Afghanistan. As a judicial entity, the ICC operates in a political environment. The tug of war of the ICC concerning what party to investigate is a testament to this claim. In a recent twist, the new prosecutor, Karim Khan, issued a statement that his office would focus on crimes perpetrated by the Taliban and the Islamic State Khorasan Province, thus deprioritizing other parties, including the Afghan national security forces and the US military, that were determined by his predecessor. The Afghan human rights advocates and academics, while supporting accountability, criticize selective justice. The nature of war, the US–Taliban peace deal in 2020 and the collapse of the Afghan government in 2021 have furthered the dilemma of justice¹.



Journal Cover Page @Oxford University

About Parvez Besmel



Dr. Parvez Besmel is an [Assistant Professor](#) in the Department of Criminology, Law, and Society at the College of Humanities and Sciences, George Mason University. His research focuses on how societies emerging from conflict and repression address the legacies of past atrocities. Utilizing the theoretical frameworks of retributive and restorative justice, he explores why some nations opt for retributive justice through trials and legal mechanisms, while others adopt restorative approaches, such as truth and reconciliation commissions.

Dr. Besmel is a recipient of the prestigious Fulbright Scholarship and was recently awarded the 2023 John F. Richards Fellowship (Afghanistan Research Grant) to further his study of the International Criminal Court's ongoing inquiry into war crimes and crimes against humanity in Afghanistan. He is also a Fellow in the Global Justice Program at Yale University.

¹ Parvez Besmel, *The Dilemma of Justice: The International Criminal Court's Political Maneuver*, *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, Volume 18, Issue 3, November 2024, Pages 439–452, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijac026>

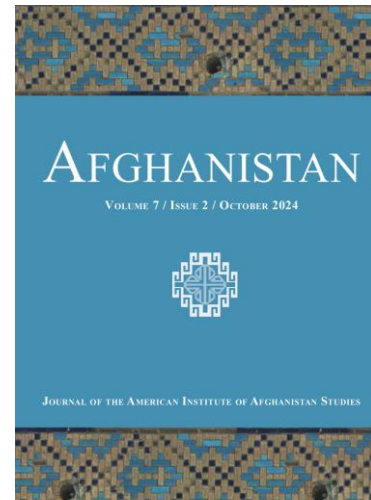
Publications

Afghanistan Journal with Edinburgh University Press

The Journal's Volume 7, Issue 02, published in October 2024, is now available online and is open access. In this volume, you can read the following content:

Articles:

- *Postage Stamps Commemorating Afghanistan's Independence Day, 1920–2019: An Analysis and Interpretation* by Mateusz M.P. Klagisz. Access [HERE](#).
- *The Impact of Political and Cultural Alterations on Crown Designs in the Herat School Paintings of the Timurid Period* by Fahimeh Saravani, Zekrollah Mohammadi and Hossein Sarhaddi-Dadian. Magnus Marsden. Access [HERE](#).



Cover of the Afghanistan Journal, Volume 7, Issue 02

Forum on William E.B. Sherman's *Singing with the Mountains: The Language of God in the Afghan Highlands*

- *Churchill's Heresiography: On the Epistemological Anarchies of Nineteenth-Century Malakand* by Tanvir Ahmed. Access [HERE](#).
- *Poetry on the Periphery: Language, Power, and Islam* by Francesca Chubb-Confer. Access [HERE](#).
- *The Reminders of Representation: Bayazid Ansari and Divine Self-Disclosure in Pashto* by Ali Altaf Mian. Access [HERE](#).
- *Singing with the Mountains: The Mysticism of Language* by Aboo Najafian. Access [HERE](#).
- *History and Apocalypse through Afghanistan* by William E. B. Sherman. Access [HERE](#).

Recent Books relating to Afghanistan

- Barfield, Thomas. *Shadow Empires: An Alternative Imperial History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023.
- Brosh, Naama, and Liza Lurie, eds. *Memories from Afghanistan: The May and Rolando Schinasi Collection in the Israel Museum*. Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 2023.
- Cacopardo, Alberto M., and Augusto S. Cacopardo, eds. *Roots of Peristan: The Pre-Islamic Cultures of the Hindu Kush/Karakorum*. Serie Orientale Roma n.s. 37. Proceedings of the International Interdisciplinary Conference ISMEO, Rome, Palazzo Baleani, 5–7 October 2022. Rome: ISMEO, 2023.
- Canepa, Matthew P., ed. *Persian Cultures of Power and the Entanglement of the Afro-Eurasian World*. Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2024.
- Fani, Aria. *Reading across Borders: Afghans, Iranians, and Literary Nationalism*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2024.
- Fritz, Ian. *What the Taliban Told Me*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2023.
- Marozzi, Justin, ed. *A Thousand Golden Cities: 2500 Years of Writing from Afghanistan and Its People*. London: Head of Zeus, 2023.
- Mobasher, Bashir. *The Constitutional Law and Politics of Ethnic Accommodation: Institutional Design in Afghanistan*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2024.
- Saikal, Amin. *How to Lose a War: The Story of America's Intervention in Afghanistan*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2024.
- Starr, S. Frederick. *The Genius of Their Age: Ibn Sina, Biruni, and the Lost Enlightenment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024.
- Stewart, Peter. *Gandharan Art and the Classical World: A Short Introduction*. Oxford: Archaeopress, 2023.
- Wilks, Ann. *Britain's Man on the Spot in Iraq and Afghanistan: Government and Diplomacy by Sir Henry Dobbs at the Apex of Empire*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2023.

About Afghanistan Journal

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.

You can submit your work to the Afghanistan Journal. A quick submission guide is available [HERE](#).

Events

Afghanistan— A Look Backward, Forward, and Onward

The American Institute of Afghanistan Studies (AIAS), in collaboration with the Afghanistan Student Association, the Future Security Initiative, and the Leadership, Diplomacy, and National Security Lab of Arizona State University, organized an event on August 30, 2024, marking the third anniversary of Afghanistan's fall to the Taliban.

This hybrid event included lectures, keynote speeches, a panel discussion featuring field experts, a short documentary, and a book talk. Over 30 people attended in person, with an additional 45 joining online. Dr. Omar Sharifi, AIAS Country Director, and Dr. Omar Sadr, AIAS 2024 Fellowship recipient, shared their insights during the panel discussion. Other speakers included Congressman Greg Stanton, General Benjamin C. Freakley (U.S. Army, Retired), Ambassador Edward O'Donnell, and renowned human rights advocate Dr. Sima Samar.



Photo of the event day @ASA-Arizona University

"A Novel Model of Mind in Bīdel's Sinai of Enlightenment"

The American Institute of Afghanistan Studies (AIAS), in partnership with the University of Minnesota's Asian and Middle Eastern Studies Department, co-organized an event titled "A Novel Model of Mind in Bīdel's Sinai of Enlightenment" on September 13, 2024.

Held in person at the University of Minnesota campus in Minneapolis, the event attracted over 20 academics, students, and researchers. Dr. Prashant Keshavmurthy, Associate Professor at McGill University, led the discussion on Sinai of Enlightenment, a Persian monsoon verse travelogue composed in the late 1680s by 'Abd al-Qādir Khān Bīdel of Delhi.



Miniature painting of the tomb of Abdul-Qadir Bedil ©GODL-India

Afghanistan Law & Political Science Association (ALPA) in Exile 2024 Annual Conference

The American Institute of Afghanistan Studies (AIAS) co-sponsored the Afghanistan Law & Political Science Association (ALPA) in Exile 2024 Annual Conference, held in Washington, D.C., in collaboration with the MESA Global Academy, the University of Pittsburgh's Center for Government and Markets, the United States Institute of Peace, AU Immigration Lab, and American University College of Arts and Sciences.

The conference took place on October 11–12 at American University and attracted a significant number of scholars focusing on Afghanistan. A total of 84 participants, both virtual and in-person, spanning multiple generations of Afghan and international academics, engaged in diverse panels discussing topics on law, society, and politics.



A group photo of the event participants @ALPA

Dr. Thomas Barfield, president of AIAS, was featured as one of the keynote speakers. During his address, Dr. Barfield underscored the importance of rigorous scholarship on Afghanistan, stating, “*Afghanistan is the graveyard of amateur analysts.*”

Amid the challenging socio-political environment under Taliban rule, the conference served as a crucial forum for fostering dialogue and collaboration among academics. Conferences like this are vital for bridging local and global perspectives, offering Afghan and international scholars a platform to examine critical issues such as human rights, governance, and social justice.

Other updates

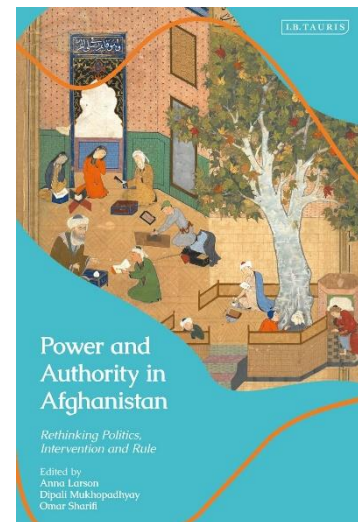
Power and Authority in Afghanistan; Rethinking Politics, Intervention and Rule

Dr. Dipali Mukhopadhyay, Vice President of the American Institute of Afghanistan Studies (AIAS), Dr. Omar Sharifi, Country Director of AIAS, and Dr. Anna Larson co-edited the book titled *Power and Authority in Afghanistan: Rethinking Politics, Intervention, and Rule*.

This volume targets a new generation of students and scholars of Afghanistan—those critically and retrospectively examining the longest military intervention in U.S. history. The book caters to a readership well-versed in the complexities of Afghanistan’s context and the broader dilemmas of international engagement. Moving beyond critiques of a failed intervention and the often-reductive analytical tools applied to it, the chapters introduce novel epistemological approaches to understanding power and authority in Afghanistan.

Breaking new ground, *Power and Authority* amplifies the voices of the first generation of influential Afghan scholars to emerge in over forty years, consolidating their insights in one volume. It also provides these scholars with a platform to engage in dialogue with, and respond to, those who came before them.

You can order the book from Bloomsbury by clicking [HERE](#).

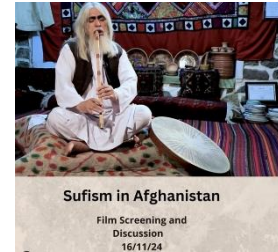


Book Cover @Bloomsbury

Sufism in Afghanistan: A film screening and Discussion

Dr. Omar Sharifi, Country Director of the American Institute of Afghanistan Studies (AIAS), participated as an expert speaker in a virtual film screening and panel discussion on “Sufism in Afghanistan,” organized by the Mahalla Festival on November 11, 2024. The panel was livestreamed via Zoom to the public.

Sufism in contemporary Afghanistan remains a vital and resilient force, providing spiritual solace amid ongoing unrest and socio-political challenges. The panel discussion explored the evolution of Sufism in Afghanistan throughout history, with a focus on its development over the past four decades of conflict.



Film screening & Discussion poster @Mahalla Festival

The Quest for Inclusive Peace in Afghanistan

Dr. Dipali Mukhopadhyay, Vice President of the American Institute of Afghanistan Studies (AIAS), moderated an event organized by the Afghanistan Policy Lab at Princeton School of Public and International Affairs in Washington, D.C., on December 13, 2024. The event brought together experts and key stakeholders to discuss how Afghanistan can build an inclusive political system while addressing deep-seated wounds from past conflicts.



Photo from the event @Princeton University

The panel tackled complex questions, including how to break the cycle of violence, ensure the safety of all Afghans, and identify political proposals necessary for meaningful transformation. Designed as a public forum, the event provided an opportunity for speakers to share key insights and policy recommendations with a wider audience.

Imagining and Reimagining Afghanistan: Discussing How Narratives are Shaped and Realities are Shifted

Dr. Omar Sharifi, the Country Director of the AIAS, joined as an expert speaker at the virtual panel discussion "Imagining and Reimagining Afghanistan," organized by Cornell University and the Afghanistan Law and Political Science Association. The discussion explored two main themes: first, how colonial and external narratives have shaped global perceptions of Afghanistan, focusing on stereotypes, biases, and misconceptions prevalent in global literature influenced by colonial powers.



Event Poster @Cornell University

The second theme addressed the challenge of redefining Afghanistan through indigenous perspectives, experiences, and visions. The event aimed to present a multidimensional view of Afghanistan, emphasizing its agency and moving beyond oversimplified representations. Around 60 individuals attended the virtual event on August 23, 2024.

Understanding Political Leadership among SWAT Pathans: Rereading Fredrick Barth’s *Swat Pathans*

Dr. Omar Sharifi participated as an expert speaker in a virtual panel discussion alongside four other panelists on September 8, 2024. The event, organized by Insan Foundation based in Toronto, Canada, marked the launch of the Pashto translation of Fredrick Barth’s book *Swat Pathans*. The discussion was livestreamed, and over 100 people tuned in to watch.



Event poster @INSAN Foundation

State-Building in the Shadow of Counterterrorism: A Gendered Perspective, with Dipali Mukhopadhyay

Dr. Dipali Mukhopadhyay, Vice President of the AIAS, delivered a talk titled *State-Building in the Shadow of Counterterrorism: A Gendered Perspective* at an event co-organized by AIAS, the BU Center for the Study of Asia, and the Pardee School of Global Studies.

In her presentation, Dr. Mukhopadhyay examined America's longest war as the latest manifestation of liberalism-as-empire, focusing on the paradox of precarious sovereignty as a goal of intervention. She highlighted how this paradox explains the trajectory of a mission that aimed to "save" Afghan women, ultimately resulting in their abandonment and near-total exclusion from public life.



Event Poster @BU

Socio-Political Trends: Navigating Peripheral & Mainstream

Dr. Dipali Mukhopadhyay, Vice President of the AIAS, moderated an event organized by the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS) in Washington, D.C., on September 26, 2024. The event focused on *Post-Islamism: Conceptual, Social, Political Trends, and Policy Framework*. During the discussion, panelists explored both mainstream and peripheral trends surrounding post-Islamism, offering insights into its evolving social and political dimensions.



Photo from the event @AISS

Afghanistan War Commission Virtual Roundtable with Afghan Scholars

Dr. Omar Sharifi, Country Director of the AIAS, participated in a virtual roundtable with the Afghanistan War Commission (AWC), alongside other Afghan scholars. He discussed the impact of U.S. interventions and state-building efforts in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2006. This event was part of the AWC's ongoing dialogue with stakeholders representing diverse perspectives on Afghanistan.

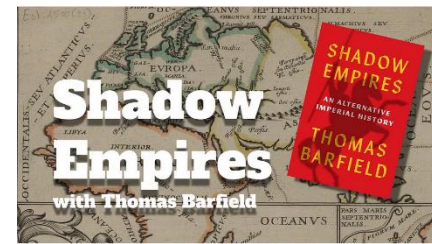


Photo from the meeting @AWC

Dr. Thomas Barfield's interviews

Listen to Dr. Barfield, President of the American Institute of Afghanistan Studies (AIAS), as he discusses various topics, including Afghanistan, empires, and imperial strategies in several interviews:

- Interview with *School of War* show on Empire and imperial strategy today. Listen on Spotify [HERE](#). (59 minutes)
- Interview with *Byzantium & Friends* show on shadow empires. Listen on Spotify [HERE](#). (1 hour and 15 minutes)
- Interview with *Background Briefing with Ian Masters*. Listen on Spotify [HERE](#). (1 hour and 2 minutes)



Interview poster with Dr. Barfield @Byzantium & Friends

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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