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The Taliban Shuffle

The Taliban Shuffle: Strange Days in Afghanistan and Pakistan is a memoir that gives information of a period of five years of the experience that Kim Barker had working as a reporter in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Afghanistan and Pakistan have been known to be the countries that were hubs of terrorist groups. This is particularly the Taliban Group. Kim Barker presents the information in the book with assuring authority mainly because she experienced the scenes that the book presents in a fast hand manner. The book is not just a story told by one person and written by a different person. It is a detailed account of events covered by Kim Barker as she did his work.

Before heading to Afghanistan and Pakistan, Kim Barker had little experience in overseas reporting because she had only worked once outside the United States of America. However, the advantages of being unmarried and childless made her bid to the Chicago Tribune successful. Kim Barker went to Afghanistan and Pakistan alongside American troops reporting the events that were going on in the war torn areas. The U.S troops had gone to Afghanistan and Pakistan together with other NATO forces to end the violence by rooting out the Taliban. Barker was on professional assignment for the Chicago tribune. In the book, Barker explains the peculiarities of Afghanistan in a fascinating manner. At one point, she says, "...jagged blue-and-purple mountains, and bearded men in trucks hoarded with guns and abhorrence for the government." (Barker 28). This quote from the book helps the reader create a mental picture of the states of

affairs, as they existed in Afghanistan. It is important to state that when Barker went to Afghanistan, the country was at a state of ill governance meaning the terrorist groups, particularly the Taliban, that had made life for the citizens impossible. As she says, the country was filled with tension and fighting. Guns and gunshots were the order of the day. The terrorist groups worked relentlessly to ensure that they overruled the government so that they could take over the country.

When Barker went to Afghanistan, the first thing she noticed was that people were living under deplorable conditions including lack of electricity. However, the foreign aid in the country is not enough. The U.S. troops had left the country to let the people reorganize themselves and form a government that would cater for their needs and offer solutions to their problems. As the U.S. troops left Afghanistan, other foreign troops remained to oversee the country transform itself. However, the government that had just set in was lax and allowed the terrorist gangs, particularly the Taliban, to regroup. The scenario in Pakistan is not so different from Afghanistan because the Taliban started regrouping as the U.S. troops left. The U.S. troops left Afghanistan and Pakistan with the hope and knowledge that the remaining troops and the governments of the two countries would consolidate efforts to get the countries out of the bitter and violent pasts they had. However, as the title of the book *The Taliban Shuffle* shows that, instead of the governments of the two countries taking the leadership of the countries, the Taliban became powerful and overmatched them.

Her experience in the country is made more meaningful in the book through the introduction of her interviews with Taliban warlords and known political leaders like Hamid Karzai and Benazir Bhutto. The book is not just a tale of events that are geared towards entertaining people. It tells and shows the manner in which people suffered in Afghanistan and

Pakistan because of the violence that was the order of the day. People were killed by gunshots and bombs, and the government did a little to save them. This is because the government of Afghanistan was filled with corrupt leaders who only cared for their interests and their close allies.

It is significant the way Kim Barker combines violence and romance in the book. Despite the fact that the book has covered so much violence and death of people in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Barker brings in a different side of issues when she tells of her experience with the former prime minister of Pakistan, Mr. Nawaz. The former prime minister of Pakistan courts her, for her to be involved with him romantically. This breaks the monotony in the story and brings another aspect of the book that makes the reader see a different side of Barker in the tensed environment. After interviewing him, Barker states that Mr. Nawaz would request her to turn off her tape recorder meaning that he wanted to discuss something personal with her. As she writes about her relationship with the prime minister, she refers to him with excessive familiarity meaning that she knew the prime minister not only due to the professional interviews she had with him (Barker 47).

The book is not without humor. The author has used humor and imagery to explain certain aspects to the reader. For instance, referring to the United States of America, she says, “We had no stick.....our carrots were limp after almost eight years of wagging around” (Barker 34). This statement shows that the U.S. foreign policy towards the Afghanistan and Pakistan was bare and without impact. She compares the American foreign policy to an impotent man who could not do anything. After eight years of hard work by the U.S, to root terrorist groups from Pakistan and Afghanistan, the United States of America left without accomplishing the task and let the terrorist gang, regroup and reverse the work that had been done for eight years because of

poor foreign policy. She talks of her experience with mercenaries, alcohol, and social parties she attended while in Afghanistan (Barker 56).

Kim Barker has clearly captured the war that in Afghanistan and Pakistan particularly after the U.S. troops had left. However, she does not lay blame solely on the U.S. for the regrouping of Taliban and the intermittent violence and killings that occurred in Afghanistan and Pakistan. She also puts blame on the international community and the governments of the Afghanistan and Pakistan, as she tells the reader that the regrouping of the Taliban happened as the international community watched, especially with the remaining NATO troops still in the two countries. As the Taliban regrouped, the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan watched as leaders engaged in corrupt deals.

Kim Barker introduces the experiences of the soldiers as they fought in Afghanistan and Pakistan. She tells of the frustrations of a soldier about the weapons they used. For instance, a soldier says, "...not locked and loaded," (Barker 87) referring to his gun. She also talks of a soldier who lost his leg from a bomb, in a battle that ensued in one of the volatile areas.

In conclusion, Kim Barker has clearly presented the experiences she had with the U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan and the life the people experienced. She reflects on the war, violence, and deaths that resulted from the regrouping of Taliban. The laxity of the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan and the lack of commitment on the part of the international community and the NATO forces were responsible for the regrouping and violence. Thus, the book is an excellent piece of literature that informs about the experiences of Afghanistan and Pakistan in the hands of Taliban.

Work cited

Barker, Kim. *The Taliban Shuffle: Strange Days in Afghanistan and Pakistan*. New York:

Random House Incorporated, 2012. Print.