For those who are unfamiliar with the history, culture, and politics of the Middle East and are looking for a book that simplifies the region, Jere Van Dyk’s *Without Borders: The Haqqani Network and the Road to Kabul* is not the book one should begin with. While there are aspects and information that a reader new to the topic can glean from this work, what Van Dyk produces here is of far greater value to those who already have a familiarity with Afghanistan and its place in the wider Islamic world. While the Haqqani network is the core focus of this work, the title *Without Borders* is apt indeed, as the overall narrative of the book, as well as the Haqqani network itself, is not limited by national borders. Van Dyk takes the approach that, to understand the Haqqani and their role in Afghanistan, the narrative cannot be limited by either place or time. To explain the Haqqani network of today, one must look at ancient Yemen as much as at the Soviet and later NATO invasions of modern Afghanistan, and many more places and periods throughout the region. While the author is convincing about the necessity of taking the reader through this journey through time and across borders, the impact this has on the overall narrative is that it is often disjointed in location and chronology and can be difficult to follow, especially if the reader is unfamiliar with the topic.

This work is a wealth of information on the role of the Haqqani network in modern Afghanistan; however, readers should be aware going in what this book is and what it is not. First, this is not a “history of” book in the traditional sense that outlines and narrates the overall history of the Haqqani network. While some of that is present throughout the book, and some background on the regional history is provided, this work is more autobiographical in nature, with the author himself having been a journalist covering Afghanistan since the Soviet invasion during the 1980s. Written more as the author’s reflections on his own travels and experiences with the Haqqani and the Middle East in general rather than a historical analysis, the book is less about the Haqqani network itself and more about the author’s jour-
ney to find answers about the Haqqani network. However, this is not to say that approaching this topic from a viewpoint that differs from that of a historian in any way diminishes what the reader can take away from this. In fact, having personally interacted with the Haqqanis during the Soviet-Afghan War when Jalaluddin Haqqani was a US ally, and later having been captured and returned by the Taliban during the US/NATO-Afghanistan War 2001-21, Van Dyk has clear and deep firsthand knowledge of the topic. This provides the reader with a unique perspective and an eyes-on-the-ground view of the complexity of the region in a way that few scholars could replicate.

The goal of the author is to find answers to his questions as he tries to reconcile the Haqqanis he had interacted with during the Soviet-Afghan War as US allies with the Haqqanis who now waged war against the West. After the death of bin Laden, the author sought support and funding on the project that would become this monograph in the hopes of answering the burning questions he wanted to personally present to the Haqqani network leader, Jalaluddin Haqqani: Why did he use suicide bombers and why had they (the Haqqanis) changed (p. 59)? These questions lead the author across the Middle East, from Egypt to Yemen to Pakistan and many stops in between, in search of those who could orchestrate a meeting between himself and Haqqani. Along the way, those the author interacts with provide multiple perspectives on the Haqqani network, the War on Terror, and various and at times fundamentally differing interpretations across the Islamic world of what it means to wage jihad and when and if ever the suicide bombings and kidnappings performed by the Haqqani network are justified. Also explored in this work is how the Haqqani network has managed to operate across borders, both in terms of its ties to Pakistani intelligence and its methods of financing the network. To understand how the Haqqani network funds itself, one principal way this work reveals is a variation of the phrase, “follow the money.” Van Dyk demonstrates here that “follow the honey” is perhaps a more apt phrase as honey, often passed off as Yemeni honey, has been sold by the Haqqanis throughout the Middle East for money-laundering purposes. They also control auto dealerships throughout the region for this purpose as well, often combining these activities as when, for example, after 2011 honey dealers were increasingly found to be driving expensive new Toyotas and changing them out frequently between the expanding number of dealerships (p. 169). This is said to have indicated that the two Haqqani-backed money-laundering enterprises were becoming increasingly linked.

As the author’s journey comes to an end, he is able to gain some insight into his questions about the transition of the Haqqani network’s goals and practices before and after 9/11, how world opinion of Jalaluddin Haqqani changed between the Soviet-Afghan War and the US/NATO-Afghan War, and how jihadists came to venerate Haqqani and justify the terror tactics the Haqqanis employed. As with any questions regarding a war, how it came to be, and the methods employed in its conduct, the author reveals that there are no easy answers and certainly not for a bitter and brutal conflict whose outcome is still unfolding. As mentioned earlier, this work does not simplify the Haqqani network, Afghanistan, the War on Terror, or the Middle East. If anything, this work does the exact opposite. What the author makes clear is that the Taliban, the Haqqani, and al-Qaeda are entangled with one another, yet they are also separate entities who are themselves not monolithic. Those who are unfamiliar with the Middle East and the modern issues and conflicts therein will probably not walk away from this book with a clearer understanding of it. And this is to this work’s credit because, rather, the reader is more likely to walk away with something more valuable: a greater appreciation for just how muddy those waters really are.
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