

ICL: Thursday, September 20, 1-3 pm

Great Decisions Topic: “Exit From Afghanistan & Iraq—Right Time, Right Place?”

Suggestions for Supplementary Reading, taken from the Reading Lists for 2010-2011 & 2011-2012, published on the ICL website, together with the 2012-2013 List, presently under development by ICL member, Anita Stables

“THE FAVORED DAUGHTER” by Fawzia Koofi (2012)

Fawzia Koofi is Afghanistan's first female Parliament Speaker in Hamid Karzai's government; she is a noted activist for women's and children's rights. From 2002-4, Koofi was employed by UNICEF as a child protection officer. She writes about growing up in Kabul and the harsh, mountainous Badakhshan province of Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion. She experienced Afghanistan's civil war in the early 1990s and the 1996 takeover of the government by the Taliban. This book provides a history of that period and of the role of women in a Islamic society.

“THE GOOD SOLDIERS” by David Finkel (2009)

Ever wondered what it must feel like to patrol the violent neighborhoods of Baghdad during the surge of 2007-2008? David Finkel, a journalist lives with an Army battalion (average age 19) stationed in Baghdad. He shares with us the reality of life lived under the constant threat of death and bodily injury. It is a spellbinding account of the soldiers' experiences. Finkel captures the terrors of ordinary men enduring extraordinary circumstances. I could not put this book down.

“THE PLACES IN BETWEEN: A WALK ACROSS AFGHANISTAN” by Rory Stewart (2006)

In the winter of 2002, Stewart crosses entirely on foot through territory still shakily held by the Taliban. The New York Times describes this as a striding, glorious book.

“BILLY LYNN'S LONG HALFTIME WALK” by Ben Fountain (2012)

Billy Lynn is a member of the Army's Bravo Company, whose fierce firefight in Iraq is caught on film and subsequently shown on Fox News, thus turning the survivors into instant heroes. Idolized like the flag raisers on Iwo Jima, the men of Bravo are whisked back home for a two-week victory tour, scheduled to climax with a half-time appearance at the Dallas Cowboy's stadium.

Billy narrates his own and his comrades' discomfort in being required to represent America's fighting forces in a strongly contrived cross-country tour, meeting awestruck citizens who mouth patriotic clichés. The soldiers' distress is intensified when they are required to participate with Beyoncé in a ridiculous, military-themed halftime show and to describe the horrors of war at a news conference in the presence of pom-pom-shaking Dallas Cowboys' cheerleaders. A stunning read.

“THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST” by Hamid Mohsin (2007)

The novel begins a few years after 9/11. Change, the narrator, happens upon an American visitor in Lahore, invites him to tea, and tells the story of his life in the months just before and after the attacks. The resulting monologue by the narrator is the substance of Hamid's elegant and chilling novel.

“THE WANDERING FALCON” by Jamil Ahmad (2011)

Ahmad, a civil servant in Pakistan, began his career in Baluchistan in the 1950s. He wrote a collection of loosely interlinked stories about the people and the tribes, among whom he had been working. Ahmad provides a window into the heart and soul of a primitive system where honor and respect are all important, but killings and revenge remain the unfortunate consequences. Ahmad has the ability to combine an affection and respect for this world of tribal discipline with a clear-eyed look at its harshness.

“WASTED VIGIL” by Nadeem Aslan (2008)

Set in Post-September 11 Afghanistan, the book relates the human misery, physical distress, and wounds, both physical and mental, inflicted by the Taliban and the warlords who have replaced the Taliban. An NPR reviewer says that the revelations of misery, hypocrisy, fear, and hopelessness were almost more than he could take, and that the novel made “*THE KITE RUNNER* seem like a Hallmark greeting card.” This well-written book had an impact on me; although troubling, it gives a realistic picture of the dangers inherent in Afghanistan.

“THE WATCH” by Joydeep Roy-Bhatttcharaya (2012)

The setting is Tarsandan, an isolated garrison in the Kandahar province of Afghanistan, which came under attack during a blistering dust storm with zero visibility. The American forces suffer heavy losses. The dust has barely settled when a legless girl pushing a wheelbarrow appears outside the fort to demand the release of her brother's body, which under Pashtun custom requires burial only by a family member. The book describes in gripping detail the girl's descent from the hills to the barren field outside the fort. For two days, she sits in the hot sun, waiting for her brother's body. The reader is given an apt description of the fort, isolated in the desolate landscape. Inside, the plumbing for showers is broken; the soldiers are feeling confined, smelly and dusty; and they wonder when the next attack will occur. Is the waiting girl a terrorist or just a family member come to bury her brother?
