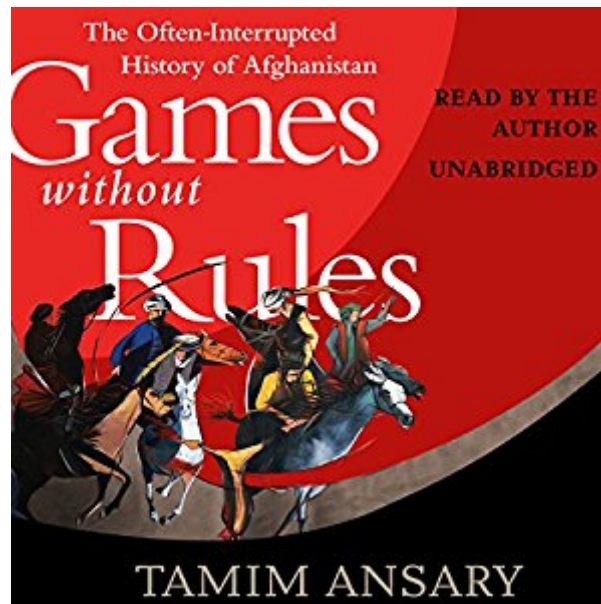


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# Games Without Rules: The Often-Interrupted History Of Afghanistan



## Synopsis

Today, most Westerners still see the war in Afghanistan as a contest between democracy and Islamist fanaticism. That war is real, but it sits atop an older struggle between Kabul and the countryside, between order and chaos, between a modernist impulse to join the world and the pull of an older Afghanistan - a tribal universe of village republics permeated by Islam. Now, Tamim Ansary draws on his Afghan background, Muslim roots, and Western and Afghan sources to explain history from the inside out and to illuminate the long, internal struggle that the outside world has never fully understood. It is the story of a nation struggling to take form, a nation undermined by its own demons while every 40 to 60 years a great power disrupts whatever progress has been made. Related in storytelling style, *Games Without Rules* provides revelatory insight into a country at the center of political debate. Tamim Ansary is the award-winning author of *Destiny Disrupted* and *West of Kabul, East of New York*. He has been a major contributing writer to several secondary-school history textbooks offering an Islamic perspective.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Of all the histories I have read on Afghanistan, and I have read more than a few, Tamim Ansary's is absolutely the best. Whether your knowledge is a clean slate and you are looking for one book that will explain this complex nation, or you are fairly conversant in the country, but want a brief refresher, Mr. Ansary will lay out everything you need to know in his latest offering. *Games without Rules* begins with the rise of the Durrani line and brings the reader up through the present, with reporting through May of 2012. Tamim Ansary does a number of things in his book that make it

especially accessible for readers, but chief among them is linking events in Afghanistan to events with which his readers might be more familiar, such as the fact that the opening of his work, the dawning of the Durrani Empire, with its founder Ahmad Shah Baba, known as Afghanistan's Founding Father, happened in 1747, roughly the same time as the founding of the United States of America. Over the course of reading the book the reader will also learn a great deal about the histories of India, Pakistan, and the neighboring central Asian republics, as the destinies of these nations and that of Afghanistan are all inter-linked. Another fact about Mr. Ansary's writing that becomes quickly apparent is that this is not the writing of a dry, boring scholar or a historian. While never stooping to comedy or disdain, he manages to always keep a storyteller's mien, full of adventure and humor and at times even anger and despair.

America's twelve year war in Afghanistan has sprung a veritable cottage industry of books dubbed "required reading" for those involved in or seeking to understand the "why" behind America's seemingly Sisyphean struggle against the Taliban. Tamim Ansary's *Games Without Rules*, is the latest addition to this volume of work. The title refers to the uniquely Afghan game of Buzkashi- a violent contest in which a mounted individual attempts to carry a goat carcass through a goal, against the opposition of all other players. There are no rules, no teams, and no set number of players. Each individual plays for his own glory alone. Ansary's work, while full of interesting metaphors and pithy insights such as the one above, fails to tell a coherent narrative of Afghanistan's modern era. The core thesis of *Games* is that Afghan history is at its core a struggle between the modernist, centralizing, and imperial impulses of Kabul and the "timeless," Islamist, and de-centralized tribal system of the countryside. Ansary considers global events, such as the imperial competition between 19th century Great Britain and Russia, the Cold War, and America's "War on Terror," through what he considers to be an Afghan perspective. This theory and unique perspective gave the work tremendous potential as an Afghan version of Odd Arne Westad's *The Global Cold War*, a revolutionary book in Cold War historiography because of its unique Third World perspective on what was previously viewed only through the lenses of the dueling superpowers. Ansary, however, spoils this potential with his flippant tone, lack of academic research, and bold but unfounded generalizations. *Games* possesses a narrative style that intentionally resembles a Pashtoon's storytelling.

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