



Little America: The War Within the War for Afghanistan

Rajiv Chandrasekaran

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From the award-winning author of *Imperial Life in the Emerald City*, a riveting, intimate account of America's troubled war in Afghanistan.

When President Barack Obama ordered the surge of troops and aid to Afghanistan, *Washington Post* correspondent Rajiv Chandrasekaran followed. He found the effort sabotaged not only by Afghan and Pakistani malfeasance but by infighting and incompetence within the American government: a war cabinet arrested by vicious bickering among top national security aides; diplomats and aid workers who failed to deliver on their grand promises; generals who dispatched troops to the wrong places; and headstrong military leaders who sought a far more expansive campaign than the White House wanted. Through their bungling and quarreling, they wound up squandering the first year of the surge.

Chandrasekaran explains how the United States has never understood Afghanistan—and probably never will. During the Cold War, American engineers undertook a massive development project across southern Afghanistan in an attempt to woo the country from Soviet influence. They built dams and irrigation canals, and they established a comfortable residential community known as Little America, with a Western-style school, a coed community pool, and a plush clubhouse—all of which embodied American and Afghan hopes for a bright future and a close relationship. But in the late 1970s—after growing Afghan resistance and a Communist coup—the Americans abandoned the region to warlords and poppy farmers.

In one revelatory scene after another, Chandrasekaran follows American efforts to reclaim the very same territory from the Taliban. Along the way, we meet an Army general whose experience as the top military officer in charge of Iraq's Green Zone couldn't prepare him for the bureaucratic knots of Afghanistan, a Marine commander whose desire to charge into remote hamlets conflicted with civilian priorities, and a war-seasoned diplomat frustrated in his push for a scaled-down but long-term American commitment. Their struggles show how Obama's hope of a good war, and the Pentagon's desire for a resounding victory, shriveled on the arid plains of southern Afghanistan.

Meticulously reported, hugely revealing, *Little America* is an unprecedented examination of a failing war—and an eye-opening look at the complex relationship between America and Afghanistan.

From the Hardcover edition.

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