



**CAMBRIDGE
CONFERENCE
2021
COMMUNIQUE**

LAUNCH OF THE FIRST CAMBRIDGE CONFERENCE SERIES:

**AHMAD SHAH MASSOUD AND THE
FUTURE OF AFGHANISTAN**

On the 24th of September 2021, academics, journalists, ambassadors and military people gathered in Cambridge to discuss “Ahmad Shah Massoud and the Future of Afghanistan”, with elements of the region’s rich history and religious ties. Prof. John Casey of Gonville and Caius College, where the conference took place, welcomed speakers and participants. Prof. Casey reflected on the conference’s scholarly ambitions of becoming an annual/biennial event in Cambridge. About 60 people were present in Cambridge, many of whom were from diaspora community of Afghanistan in the UK, and many more from different parts of the world joined online.

The Cambridge Conference could not have come at a more desperate time for Afghanistan, just weeks after the collapse of the government of Afghanistan, the Taliban takeover and the chaos at Kabul Airport. Ahmad Massoud made his address to participants in a pre-recorded audio message sent from his hiding place somewhere inside the country as he heads the National Resistance Front. Ahmad Wali Massoud compared the current situation of terrorism and extremism in Afghanistan to that of 20 years ago, before the death of Commander Massoud. He explained that as long as freedom and resistance are alive, then Massoud is alive. Viscount Cranborne then reminisced on the 40 year friendship between his family and Ahmad Massoud’s, reminding the audience that the original purpose of the conference was to find a home for Ahmad Shah Massoud’s archives because the past must not be rubbed out, especially such a hopeful one. Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles similarly ended his keynote speech on a hopeful note after a few examples of the West’s incompetence in Afghanistan, particularly the lack of American and British communication with local and regional powers; “what was needed was a long-term political strategy”.

These contributions in the first hour of the Cambridge Conference paved the way for the planned four panels, two on the life and legacy of late Commander Massoud and another two on Afghanistan, the region and Islam. Between the four panels, there was a book launch: Sandy Gall’s biography *Afghan Napoleon: The Life of Ahmad Shah Massoud*. The first panel, chaired by Dr Timothy Nunan, began with a contribution from Prof Michael Barry who gave anecdotes of his encounters with Ahmad Shah Massoud and lately Ahmad Massoud; he heavily critiqued the West’s latest involvements in Afghanistan, particularly the USA’s, by pointing out the state of the Kabul River. Ms Carlotta Gall read excerpts from her father’s book, which gave intimate insights into the character of Commander Massoud from his diaries: his self-questioning; fearlessness; faith in God and love of the Panjshir Valley. Mr Peter Tomsen, former US presidential envoy to Afghanistan, similarly shared his personal encounters with Commander Massoud, giving details about the National Commander’s Shura or council Massoud supported which brought together the Mujahedeen to discuss strategy in the 1990s as well as his last meeting with Massoud in Dushanbe in 2001, months before his assassination.

After the break, Sandy Gall and Abdullah Anas introduced their recent publications (Afghan Napoleon: The Life of Ahmad Shah Massoud and To The Mountains: My life in Jihad, from Algeria to Afghanistan) and each read excerpts from their books. This was followed by a message of support to the conference from Sir Christopher Clarke, read out by Zalmay Nishat, the conference organiser. MP Patrick Grady also declared his support for the day's event.

To begin the 2nd Panel, a pre-recorded video from Steve Coll was shared with the audience in which he touched upon five specific aspects of Ahmad Shah Massoud which illuminate the man: that he was definitely not provincial; he was well educated and an intellectual; a skilful politician in terms of his strategic alliances and skilful negotiations of contradictions; he created alliances which strengthened his independence and therefore the country's independence; and finally his tolerance and clarity in knowing the enemies of Afghanistan. This was followed by an intervention from the Italian journalist, Fausto Biloslavo, who had just returned from a three-week trip to Afghanistan. He described finding the lower Panjshir Valley deserted of its inhabitants, who were making their way to Kabul on foot with all their belongings, and that the Taliban governor had not wanted to speak to him or let him visit Massoud's mausoleum. To finish the session, Bernard-Henri Lévy gave his insights about Ahmad Massoud and his struggle for an independent and inclusive Afghanistan, initiated by his father in the last century. Not only does Ahmad Massoud's determination to follow in his father's footsteps bode well for the future, BHL explained, but also the "organic mix" of the older and younger generation of commanders and the support he has from other regions of Afghanistan are significant factors.

The second session, focusing on Afghanistan: the region and Islamic scholarship, was launched by an impromptu poetry reading by Mitra Savari about being a woman in Afghanistan today. Dr Dagikhudo Dagiev, as chair, then introduced the speakers of the third panel. Sir Nicholas Barrington described the successive leaders of Afghanistan from Zahir Shah to the Taliban takeover in the 1990s and recalled life in Kabul during his time at the British embassy there in the 1960s. Tim Winter (Sheikh Abdal Hakim Murad) explained how the Maturidi Islamic tradition of Central Asia has nothing to do with the modern extremism that has been imported into Afghanistan lately; this comes from other parts of the world and has a dangerous tendency to eliminate the pluralism in Islam to establish unified orthodoxy and therefore eradicate tradition. Contrary to this, for Prof Winter, late Commander Massoud, who was steeped in Persian classic and tassawuf, represented tolerant Islam. To conclude this third panel, Nasir Ahmad Andisha shared notes of a conversation that had been recorded between Commander Massoud and Mullah Omar in 1998 from which he elaborated on two aspects of the Commander's policy: a multi-party parliamentary democracy as a system of governance ("a pluralistic, publicly-accountable government") for Afghanistan, and a balanced foreign policy in terms of good economic relationship all round but no military alliances.

Dr Shivan Mahendrarajah chaired the final panel which began with a leap back in time with James Pickett's remarks about Islamic education in Central Asia in the long 19th century, focusing on Bokhara madrasa curriculums. Making parallels with the current Western university system, Pickett explained how madrasa education at the time was a rigorous process that could lead to a life-time of learning for some. Thomas Barfield then analysed the present situation in Afghanistan with reflections from the past 40 years of the country's history, commenting on Commander Massoud's unique positions on issues such as knowing when to retreat; how to stand up to patrons; and putting the good of the people of Afghanistan before any private gain. To round off the panel, Chris Alexander clearly outlined the elephant in the room: Pakistan's malicious interference in Afghanistan, earlier hinted at by Peter Tomsen, and which had been the subject of many questions from the audience.

To close off this first Cambridge Conference of what will hopefully be many, Rory Stewart remarked on the international community's involvement with the presidents of Afghanistan; this could have been managed in a more disinterested fashion. Better choices could have been made, such as supporting leaders like Ahmad Shah Massoud who had a vision for Afghanistan and strong values to support it.

GUEST SPEAKER AND PANEL CHAIRS



AHMAD WALI MASSOUD

Politician, Diplomat, and Chair of Massoud Foundation

Ahmad Wali Massoud is the chairman of the Massoud Foundation in Afghanistan and is the younger brother of the late commander Ahmad Shah Massoud. Massoud obtained a degree in diplomatic studies from The University of Westminster, London in 1989. He has served as Afghan ambassador to the UK, special representative of Ahmad Shah Massoud in Europe, and the representative of the Jamiat-e Islami Party in London.



VISCOUNT CRANBORNE

Son of the Marquis of Salisbury

Viscount Cranborne is the son of Robert Michael James Gascoyne-Cecil, the 7th Marquess of Salisbury and a British Conservative politician.



SIR SHERARD COWPER-COLES

Diplomat

Sir Sherard Louis Cowper-Coles is a British former diplomat. He was the Foreign Secretary's Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2009-2010. After leaving the Foreign Office, he worked briefly for BAE Systems as an international business development director. He left BAE Systems in 2013 and is now a Senior Adviser to the Group Chairman and the Group Chief Executive of HSBC.



TIMOTHY NUNAN

Author, Scholar, Lecturer

Timothy Nunan is a scholar of international and global history. His work looks at how actors from the former Soviet Union, Iran, and Afghanistan have sought to challenge the Western-dominated world order. Since October 2016, he has worked as an Assistant Professor (Wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter) at the Center for Global History at the Free University of Berlin. In 2020, he was awarded the Heinz Maier-Leibnitz Prize, the major prize for early-career researchers of the German Research Foundation.



MICHAEL BARRY

Scholar, Lecturer

Michael A. Barry is a Princeton University professor and historian of the greater Middle East and Islamic world. He is an established authority on Islamic art and the history and culture of Afghanistan, on which subjects he has written extensively in both French and English. Barry's works include a standard French-language history of Afghanistan and a biography of the late commander of the Afghan Northern Alliance, Ahmad Shah Massoud, which won France's Prix Femina in 2002.



CARLOTTA GALL

Journalist

Carlotta Gall is the Istanbul bureau chief for The New York Times, covering Turkey. Her recent work has also included investigations into Saudi Arabia's influence on the post-conflict societies of Kosovo and Afghanistan, as part of a series on the Gulf Kingdom, and another on growing Iranian interference in Afghanistan, as part of a series on Iran. She was part of a team that received a Pulitzer Prize for its coverage of Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2009.



PETER TOMSEN

Diplomat

Peter Tomsen is a retired American diplomat and educator, serving as United States Special Envoy to Afghanistan from 1989 to 1992, and United States Ambassador to Armenia between 1995 and 1998. Ambassador Tomsen's thirty-two-year diplomatic career covered South and Central Asia, Northeast Asia, and the former Soviet Union.



SANDY GALL

Author, Journalist

Sandy Gall is a British journalist, author, and former ITN news presenter. His career as a journalist spans over fifty years. Sandy Gall has written several books about Afghanistan and made three documentaries about the country during the Soviet War (two of which were nominated for BAFTA awards).



ABDULLAH ANAS

Politician, Scholar

Abdullah Anas is an Algerian Politician and scholar. In the 1980s he joined Commander Ahmad Shah Massoud to fight the Soviet invasion. He runs Almagharibia, an Akgeruan channel in the UK. He is also son in law of former Palestinian politician Abdullah Azzam. Anas is written a memoir, *To The Mountains: My Life in Jihad*, from Algeria to Afghanistan which is published by C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd.



SIR CHRISTOPHER CLARK

Historian

Sir Christopher Munro Clark is an Australian historian living in the United Kingdom and Germany. He is the twenty-second Regius Professor of History at the University of Cambridge. In 2015, he was knighted for his services to Anglo-German relations. Clark received his PhD at the University of Cambridge, having been a member of Pembroke College from 1987 to 1991 and is the author of 'The Sleepwalkers'.

GUEST SPEAKER AND PANEL CHAIRS



FAUSTO BILOSLAVO

Journalist

Fausto Biloslavo (born in Trieste, 13 November 1961) is an Italian journalist. As a correspondent and freelance journalist, he witnessed conflicts from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan to the Balkans and Africa. Most recently he reported from Iraq and the Middle East.



BERNARD HENRI LEVY

Philosopher, Journalist, Filmmaker,

Bernard-Henri Lévy, byname BHL, is a French philosopher, journalist, filmmaker, and public intellectual who was a leading member of the Nouveaux Philosophes (New Philosophers). He is the author of over 30 books, including works of philosophy, fiction, and biography. He was appointed by French President Jacques Chirac to head a fact-finding mission to Afghanistan in 2002 in the wake of the war against the Taliban, a war that Lévy supported.



STEVE COLL

American Journalist

Steve Coll, a staff writer, is the dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University and reports on issues of politics and intelligence. He was the managing editor of the Washington Post from 1998 to 2005, having earlier been a feature writer, a foreign correspondent, and an editor there; in 1990, he shared a Pulitzer Prize. Coll is the author of several books, including Directorate S and Ghost Wars: The Secret History of C.I.A.



PATRICK GRADY

Politician

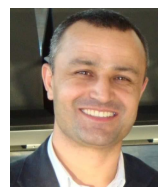
Patrick John Grady is a Scottish National Party (SNP) politician. He was elected at the 2015 UK general election as the Member of Parliament (MP) for Glasgow North. He was re-elected for the same constituency in the 2017 general election on 8 June 2017, and in the 2019 general election on 12 December 2019.



TIM WINTER

Scholar, Researcher, Academic

Abdal Hakim Murad (Tim Winter) is an English academic, theologian and Islamic scholar who is a leading proponent of Islamic neo-traditionalism. He is the Founder and Dean of the Cambridge Muslim College, Aziz Foundation Professor of Islamic Studies at both Cambridge Muslim College and Ebrahim College, Director of Studies at Wolfson College and the Shaykh Zayed Lecturer of Islamic Studies in the Faculty of Divinity at University of Cambridge. His work includes publications on Islamic theology and Muslim-Christian relations.



DAGIKHUDO DAGIEV

Scholar, Lecturer

Dr Dagikhudo Dagiev is a Senior Research Associate in the Department of Academic Research and Publications. He obtained his PhD in the Department of Political Science from the University College London (UCL). His PhD thesis was entitled The Process of Transition in Post-Soviet Central Asia and its Challenges. His research area includes contemporary societies in post-Communist Central Asia, their history and religion, the re-emergence of Islam as a faith, the appearance of Islamist ideologies, and nationalism.



NASIR AHMAD ANDISHA

Diplomat

Dr. Nasir A. Andisha PR and Ambassador. Prior to his appointment as Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the UN in Geneva, Dr Andisha served as the Deputy Foreign Minister for Management and Resources for over three years. Earlier he was the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to the Commonwealth of Australia, New Zealand and the Republic of Fiji. (2011-2015).



SIR NICHOLAS BARRINGTON

Diplomat

Sir Nicholas Barrington was a career diplomat for 37 years prior to his retirement in 1994. He has served in a variety of posts overseas including Afghanistan, Iran, Egypt and Pakistan, where he ended as High Commissioner. He also served in Japan and Brussels. His home postings included three and a half years as a private secretary to two British Foreign Secretaries. In retirement, he has been active in building bridges between East and West. He is the author of A Passage to Nuristan: exploring the mysterious Afghan hinterland, an account of his travels to remote areas of Afghanistan in the 1960s. He has also published two books of memoirs, including Envoy covering his diplomatic career and periods dealing with Afghanistan.



SHIVAN MAHENDRARAJAH

Historian

Dr. Shivan Mahendrarajah, FRHistS, is a Research Fellow (2021-24), School of History, University of St. Andrews, Scotland. Shivan has traveled throughout the Islamic world, from Morocco to Malaysia. He was educated at Columbia University and the University of Cambridge (Ph.D. in Middle Eastern & Islamic History). He studied Persian at the University of Tehran and Arabic at Damascus University. Before August 2021, Shivan traveled regularly to Afghanistan.



JAMES PICKETT

Author, Historian, Lecturer

James Pickett is an assistant professor of Eurasian history at the University of Pittsburgh. He holds a PhD in history from Princeton University, an MA from Georgetown University, and a BA from Carleton College.

GUEST SPEAKER AND PANEL CHAIRS



THOMAS BARFIELD
Author, Lecturer

Thomas Barfield is a social anthropologist and Professor of Anthropology at Boston University, who conducted extensive ethnographic fieldwork among pastoral nomads in northern Afghanistan in the mid-1970s. Barfield is the author of several books, including, *Afghanistan: A cultural and political history*.



RORY STEWART
Academic, Diplomat, Explorer, Soldier and Politician

Rory Stewart was an independent candidate for Mayor of London and was Member of Parliament for Penrith and The Border – the largest geographical constituency in England – between 2010 and 2019. In May 2019 he was appointed Secretary of State for International Development, having previously been the Minister of State at the Ministry of Justice, Minister of State for Africa in both the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for International Development (DFID) (June 2017-January 2018), and Minister of State in DFID (June 2016-June 2017) and, prior to that, Minister for the Environment and Rural Affairs at DEFRA (May 2015-June 2016).



CHRIS ALEXANDER
Diplomat

Christopher A. Alexander, PC is a former diplomat and former Conservative Party of Canada politician. He served as Canada's Minister of Citizenship and Immigration from 2013 to 2015. He represented the riding of Ajax—Pickering, in Ontario, in the House of Commons of Canada from 2011 to 2015. He was defeated by his Liberal predecessor Mark Holland in the 2015 election. Alexander spent 18 years in the Canadian Foreign Service and served as Canada's first resident Ambassador to Afghanistan from 2003 to 2005.