

Doing the “Taliban Shuffle”

By: Alanna Fulk, Sibille H. Pritchard Global Peace Fellow

On Tuesday, February 9, 2016, the Global Perspectives welcomed journalist and author Kim Barker to UCF. Her presentation, “The Taliban Shuffle,” was a special presentation of the LIFE Global Issues Series and took place in the Pegasus Ballroom.

Barker, a journalist of more than 20 years who is currently with the *New York Times*, has covered a variety of topics both domestic and international. During the presentation, she spoke about her darkly comic book, *The Taliban Shuffle: Strange Days in Afghanistan and Pakistan*. The book details her time spent reporting in both countries as the South Asia Bureau Chief for the *Chicago Tribune* from 2004 to 2009. The book’s title references her time spent “shuffling” between Afghanistan and Pakistan, covering the Taliban.



Barker discusses the success of her book being turned into a movie.

Barker discussed her book and shared important lessons she learned from her time spent reporting and living in abroad. After an overview of the political situation in Afghanistan, she highlighted current problems, including government corruption, the resurgence of the Taliban and the increasing presence of Islamic State (ISIS) in the country. Barker presented the grim realities of life in a war zone through humorous stories. She discussed how she learned to adapt to the local culture and fell in love with the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan. After the *Chicago Tribune* recalled all its foreign correspondents back to the U.S., Barker found she had a hard time readjusting. She had planned to return to Afghanistan, but decided not to after finishing her book. Barker closed the presentation on a positive note, stating, “It’s really hard to change the world. What you can do is change individuals lives and let them change you.”

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In response to an audience member’s question on the role of media in foreign affairs, Barker said that “the media acts a filter as to how we see the world. We don’t have a lot of organizations on the ground overseas anymore, so the nature of the news we’re getting has changed dramatically. This is a problem.” At the end of the event, Barker also highlighted the success of her book, which was recently made into a movie called *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*. The last lesson she shared is that, “If you play your cards right, you might just get to be played by Tina Fey in your movie.”