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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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**Can U.S. Forces learn from mistakes made by British during First and Second Anglo-Afghan Wars in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century?**

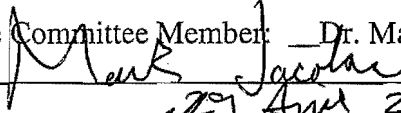
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## *Preface*

The British Empire in the 1800's was vast, and the Army was very experienced in combat. The British fought in Afghanistan twice in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The British found that overpowering the Afghans was not very difficult, but maintaining peace and stability in this rough climate against an intelligent and fierce enemy was very difficult. The Afghans were the only military force to defeat the British over a sixty year period of colonial warfare. Eventually the British gave the Afghans their independence in 1921. The United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001, and we are still engaged in combat operations ten years later.

I hope this paper can be used as a tool by military officers deploying to Afghanistan to learn from history. See what errors the British made in their military campaigns. See the importance of learning about the Afghan culture and sensitivities. Understand the need to work with American, Coalition-nation, and non-government administrations in a collective effort to put the Afghan government in the lead to provide for the Afghan people.

I would like to thank Dr. Mark Jacobsen and Dr. Robert Bruce for their guidance and assistance during this journey. Their knowledge and input were invaluable, and I could have not completed this paper without it. I would also like to thank Lieutenant Colonel Shawn Callahan, USMC, for his mentorship to prepare me for the challenge of writing this assignment. Last but not least, I would like to thank my wife Tracey and daughter Caitlin for their patience and diligence while I spent many hours at the Library of Congress and the Gray Research Center in order to get the materials needed for this Masters Paper.

## Executive Summary

**Title:** Can U.S. Forces learn from mistakes made by British during First and Second Anglo-Afghan Wars in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century?

**Author:** Major Brian P. McDermott, United States Marine Corps

**Thesis:** The United States is making similar errors the British executed in their campaigns over a century ago. There are military and government lessons from those conflicts the United States can learn from and apply in the current Afghanistan conflict today.

**Discussion:** The U.S. and allied nations have been engaged in Afghanistan for over nine years. The British were deeply involved in Afghanistan during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, fighting two wars with the Afghans. The British and Americans had similar motivations. The British wanted to prevent Russia from expanding its territorial boundaries into Afghan territory, while the Americans wanted to eliminate Taliban influence and Al Qaeda forces within Afghanistan's borders. Both countries realized that maintaining a stable Afghanistan is harder than taking control of the country. The British tried to use a military solution during both campaigns and fought the insurgent (not the insurgency). They also bribed various tribal leaders for their loyalty, which did not always work.

The U.S. initially tried to stabilize Afghanistan with the military option only, and did not try to quickly follow with an aggressive nation-building plan different than the Post World-War II Japanese and German models. Lack of security in the years after toppling the Taliban and not aggressively training Afghan security forces contributed to the Taliban regrouping and executing insurgency operations. The post-conflict delays in acquiring appropriate amounts of money and establishing robust Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) hampered winning the hearts and minds of the Afghan population.

The Americans also did not learn to fully appreciate the role warlords played in Afghanistan's past, religious sensitivities, and Afghan tribal culture. The Taliban were able to exploit this gap for recruiting purposes and information operations against the Afghan, American, and coalition forces. After a few years, American military forces have changed the way they prepare for operations in Afghanistan. The Americans learned from the British that the leader of Afghanistan must be respected by the Afghan people; otherwise, the leader's term will not last after foreign troops leave the country.

**Conclusion:** The American government and military leaders failed to use a holistic approach to Afghanistan. However, the security situation worsened after initial combat operations concluded. If the U.S. leadership studied the British campaigns, they would have realized more troops would have been needed right after the collapse of the Taliban for security until enough Afghan forces were ready to take over the mission. The security vacuum allowed the Taliban to recover and re-ignite the insurgency. Tighter security would have enabled Provincial Reconstruction Teams and Non-Government Organizations to improve the Afghan infrastructure sooner.

The U.S. supported the warlords for too long, which stymied efforts to create a western-style government in order to provide governance and law. The U.S. did learn from British errors regarding the political leadership of Afghanistan. American leadership supported Hamid Karzai, who initially had support from Pashtun and other ethnic tribal elders. Even though he was elected by the Afghans in two democratic elections, his inability to prove his government is good for the Afghan population has allowed the Taliban to sway Afghans to their viewpoint by providing what the central government cannot, which is security and peace.

## INTRODUCTION

Military forces from the United States and allied nations have been engaged in Afghanistan for over nine years. They are fighting a tough, elusive enemy in a very demanding geographical environment. The Afghan people are having a difficult time believing the U.S., NATO and non-NATO nations are winning the fight against the insurgency and that their government is providing the services and governance they want. Conflict in this region of the world is not new. The Pathan borderlands of Afghanistan and today's Pakistan have seen numerous campaigns in the past century and a half. The most notable conflicts were the First and Second Anglo-Afghan wars (1839-1842 and 1878-1881). At the conclusion of each, the British declared victory and drew down their forces, only to face rebellion and have to return. Neither did their political achievements meet initial expectations, especially after their first successes.<sup>1</sup> Today the United States is making similar errors. There are lessons from those conflicts the United States can learn from and apply in the current Afghanistan conflict today. The lessons differ in detail but are similar in spirit and consequence.

There are three learning points that American diplomats and military commanders can take from these wars and apply to present day operations. The first learning point is that combat operations' success cannot construct a stable society that a designated ruler can actually control. Ultimately, security can only come from Afghan forces that enable a government in Kabul to secure its control. The second point is that the objectives of both 19<sup>th</sup> Century Britain and 21<sup>st</sup> Century America were negative, that is, both aimed to prevent something from happening, not create a positive good. The British did not care about Afghanistan's internal politics. They wanted to exclude Russian influence from Afghanistan, lest that influence lead to Russian troops enter Afghanistan and threaten British India. After 2001, The Americans wanted to force Al-

Qaeda out of Afghanistan and ensure Al-Qaeda does not re-establish its position. In addition they wanted to prevent the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base by stabilizing Afghan internal policies and trying to modernize the country with creating a western-style democracy to delegitimize the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. The third point is that the leader of Afghanistan needs to be respected by the Afghan people and not depend or appear to depend on an outside power. If the leader of this nation does not have the support of the Afghan people, he will be doomed to failure once foreign military forces depart.

## **NARRATIVE**

### **The First Anglo-Afghan War**

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the British and Russians engaged in a strategic chess match in central Asia, termed “The Great Game” (see Appendix A for map of region).<sup>2</sup> The Russians were slowly expanding their empire south towards the Balkans, the Near East, and east into Central Asia.<sup>3</sup> The British figured the best way to ensure security on British India’s western border was to communicate with the princes in the Sind, Punjab, and Afghan territories and ensure they were compensated (through trade and cash payments) to keep the Russians a good distance from India.<sup>4</sup> The leaders of the Sind and Punjab agreed to British terms. However, the Afghan prince Dost Mohammed (who ruled from Kabul) did not like terms the British were offering. He wanted to regain Peshawar (lost to the Sikh kingdom located in the Punjab in 1826), so he asked for military assistance to fight the British Sikh allies and for a subsidy the British could not pay.<sup>5</sup> The British were not ready to abandon a proven ally in the Punjab, and the British refused his terms. Thus, Dost Mohammed was seen as unsympathetic to British interests because he entertained a Russian envoy in 1838.

The Governor-General of British India Lord Auckland thought Dost Mohammed should be removed and replaced by Shah Shuja, whom Dost had earlier overthrown.<sup>6</sup> The British government agreed in October of 1838. Even though Russia recalled its envoy from Kabul late 1838, the British wanted to install a pro-British ruler. In addition, the forceful removal of Dost Mohammed would send a message to other leaders in the region.<sup>7</sup> In February 1839 an Anglo-Indian Army of the Indus marched north from India and invaded Afghanistan. Comprising of Native (Indian) forces and a small number of British troops, the grandly named "Army of the Indus" successfully deposed Dost Mohammed. Shah Shuja arrived in Kabul to take the throne in August 1839 to a cool welcome by the local people.<sup>8</sup> Believing they had secured Kabul, the British withdrew the bulk of their forces.

During 1840 and most of 1841, the Anglo-Indian forces were harassed by Afghan tribesman loyal to Dost Muhammad or incensed that a foreign army was still in their lands. The remaining British troops did not respect local customs, such as drinking alcohol and fraternizing with Afghan women.<sup>9</sup> Beginning in November 1842, the Kabul garrison endured relentless riots and a siege for two months; in early January 1842 the 4,500 British-Indian troops and 12,000 camp followers were allowed to leave Kabul for a 90-mile journey to a British garrison in Jalalabad.<sup>10</sup> This force was annihilated as it made its way east. Dr. William Brydon, the sole survivor, finally arrived to Jalalabad after travelling for seven days.<sup>11</sup> Determined to avenge this incident, a British 8,000-man military force named the Army of Retribution entered Afghanistan in April 1842. This army destroyed small towns, slaughtered livestock, burned crops and chased villagers into the countryside as the army marched to Kabul bent on revenge.<sup>12</sup> When this force reached Kabul in September 1842, they found out that Shah Shuja had been killed in April.<sup>13</sup> British forces hanged those thought culpable and left Afghanistan in December 1842. Great

Britain regained some credibility afterwards but they abandoned their effort to plant a compliant ruler on an unwilling population. Dost Mohammed returned to Kabul as the Amir, and the British left the Afghans to create their own government with the stipulation that the Afghan ruler needed to get permission from the British to talk to any foreign government.<sup>14</sup> Dost Mohammed duly followed this advice.

### **The Second Anglo-Afghan War**

About 35 years later, Dost Mohammed's son Sher Ali was the Amir of Afghanistan. He tried to keep the Russians and British empires at bay by not favoring either government. He did not like the British since Great Britain did not initially recognize him as the ruler of a nearly united Afghanistan (British recognition meant money and weapons for the Amir).<sup>15</sup> However, the British were outraged when Sher Ali refused to receive a British diplomatic mission after he had received an uninvited Russian representative. Fearful that the Russians were trying to establish relations that would gain influence and ultimately move military forces through Afghanistan to attack British India, they sent an ultimatum to Sher Ali stating if another British envoy was denied a second time, the British would move into Afghanistan.<sup>16</sup> Sher Ali refused the British diplomatic mission again because he was fearful of the local population's reaction to British troops returning to Kabul.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, in November 1878, 29,000 British troops moved from India into Afghanistan. Sher Ali abdicated after his army collapsed. His son Yakub Khan negotiated an end to hostilities in May 1879.<sup>18</sup> The British left a small number of troops in Kabul with Major Sir Louis Cavagnari as the political officer.<sup>19</sup> The Afghans did not like the British meddling in their affairs, and Cavagnari's actions made it look like he was in control of Afghanistan, not the recognized Amir Yakub Khan.<sup>20</sup>

After receiving word in September 1879 that the entire British mission had been murdered and the compound was sacked, the British once again sent troops to avenge the loss of their comrades. Major-General Sir Frederick Roberts led a 6,500 man force into Kabul in October 1879, imposed martial law, and punished the locals by destroying the bazaar and publically hanged alleged killers of Cavagnari and his detachment.<sup>21</sup> While Roberts was in control of Kabul, Afghan tribesmen from all over the countryside were heeding the call to arms. In July 1880 a 1,500-man British-led force close to Kandahar was decimated near the town of Maiwand by a composite Afghan army and tribesmen who had over 10,000 troops and fighters.<sup>22</sup> Roberts marched from Kabul to Kandahar and dispersed the insurgents. By this time, the British had found someone to become the Amir of Afghanistan, a grandson of Dost Mohammed, Abdur Rahman Khan.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the British public had grown weary of the campaign, so the government ordered troops out of Afghanistan now that there was a recognized Amir in charge of Afghanistan's affairs. In April 1881 British forces left Kandahar and returned to India.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Abdur Rahman Khan's position did not make him look like a British puppet.<sup>25</sup> Subsequently known as the "Iron Amir", he ruled despotically for the remainder of his life. The Amir permitted the British to manage his foreign relations, and he refused to deal with the Russians.<sup>26</sup> The status of Afghanistan after the Second Anglo-Afghan was the same as it was at the conclusion of the First Anglo-Afghan War. The British failed to dominate Afghanistan, but they achieved their most vital strategic interest in the region—keeping Russia out while demonstrating they could defeat Afghan forces.

After analyzing the two Anglo-Afghan Wars, the British made the following mistakes: 1) Occupation of Afghanistan did not work; 2) They could not impose their chosen ruler on Afghanistan, least of all with their own military presence; 3) Loyalty cannot be purchased, only

rented. Failing to pay subsidies engenders rebellion, but payments directly to the recognized ruler in Afghanistan allow him to dominate his country and make him subject to limit control. The leader can be held accountable by fellow countrymen if he does not live up to his duties. Payments made to lesser tribal chieftains bought only short-term security, undermined the recognized ruler, and destabilized Afghanistan.

### **MOTIVATIONS**

Great Britain and the United States had similar negative aims regarding the threats each were up against. The British wanted to prevent Russia from expanding to the Indian frontier, especially around Afghanistan because the British were worried about Russian forces attacking British India if the opportunity presented itself. In 2001 the U.S. government wanted the Afghan government to hand over Al Qaeda leaders in order to prevent the training of terrorists in Afghanistan, and ultimately to eliminate Taliban influence in the region.<sup>27</sup> In theory these aims do not require occupation, let alone nation-building but they required assistance to the Afghan government set up by the United States.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the British went into Afghanistan to ensure Russia did not have influence over the Afghan Amir and that the Afghan ruler was amenable to British influence on foreign affairs, enabling the British to safeguard India. In 2001 the United States went into Afghanistan for different reasons. When the Afghan Taliban government refused to hand over Al Qaeda personnel, the Americans invaded Afghanistan in October with assistance from British forces and the Afghan Northern Alliance. Just like British troops over a century ago, within a few weeks coalition forces defeated organized resistance put up by the Taliban and installed Hamid Karzai as interim president. Like the British earlier, the Americans celebrated their victory and drew down most of their forces.

In response the Taliban regrouped and retreated to Pakistan's wild Northwest Frontier, specifically the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and Baluchistan Province.<sup>28</sup> The Taliban and Al Qaeda bided their time to regain strength. They resorted to irregular warfare and seized every opportunity to strike at Afghan, American and ISAF forces. Over the next few years, the Taliban gained ground in eastern and southern Afghanistan, especially in Pashtun areas south of the Hindu Kush.<sup>29</sup> The Taliban today seeks to discredit foreign forces, the current regime, and ultimately re-establish its version of an Islamic state.

Similar to the British campaigns of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, American forces learned that fostering a stable, secure Afghanistan is harder than defeating an incumbent regime.<sup>30</sup> Currently the United States and ISAF nations are engaged in a tough counterinsurgency fight, trying to rebuild Afghanistan and empower the Afghan government to provide security and services to its people. U.S. diplomatic and military leaders made the same mistakes the British did over 100 years ago by trying to solve the problem with military action and thinking military success solved the problem. When Great Britain conducted the two campaigns, it used only military force in an attempt to achieve their objective, which was to place a leader in Afghanistan who would agree to the British strategic interest of protecting India's borders from Russian encroachment. British leadership did not think about trying to coordinate efforts through the Amir to improve the livelihood of the Afghan people, only to strengthen his rule.

Similarly, when President Bush approved the U.S. military's four-phase Afghanistan battle plan in 2001, he made no commitment to rebuild Afghanistan.<sup>31</sup> Quite the reverse, President Bush said, "We are not into nation building, we are focused on justice".<sup>32</sup> In late September 2001 some U.S. Department of State officials urged Secretary of State Powell that a military victory would not be enough and the United States had to be involved in rebuilding

Afghanistan's infrastructure as well as guiding the Afghans into electing new leadership.<sup>33</sup> The United States clearly had not learned from the two British Afghan campaigns that a more holistic solution was needed in order to be successful. The United States was fixated on post-World War II occupations of Germany and Japan as the model and moved on to another quick war against Iraq.

### **POST CONFLICT**

While the British were in Afghanistan in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they did not try to improve the infrastructure of Afghanistan. The British view of successful governance was to install and support a ruler to keep order and control of the population. The British were not interested in transforming Afghan society, having learned in the Indian Mutiny the dangers of such interference. For their part, the Americans assumed that NATO allies, the United Nations, and private NGO's would provide these services. The U.S. government attempted such measures only after a significant delay and pressure from inside and outside the United States. Even then, the U.S. did not devote major resources to such endeavors. Despite a report from the U.S. RAND corporation stating a minimum of \$100 per capita is needed to stabilize a nation emerging from conflict, Afghanistan received \$57 per capita from 2001-2003.<sup>34</sup> By comparison, Bosnia received \$679 per capita and East Timor \$233 per capita.<sup>35</sup>

The United States realized that the outdated model of using the military to rebuild a nation had to be changed. Beginning in 2002 the United States trained small Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT). Their mission was to win the hearts and minds of the local population by completing small construction projects, training the local Afghan government administration, and providing security so foreign and Afghan Non-Government Organizations (NGO) could work.<sup>36</sup> However, these early PRTs were small (about 100 soldiers and civilians)

and not able to provide security, so many of the NGOs were unable to provide assistance to the Afghans. Also, the early PRTs were hampered by small budgets, so their ability to start or complete a multitude of projects was limited. Also, American PRTs were not allowed to mediate conflicts between Afghans, and most of the progress they achieved was due to the relationship the PRT leader had with the local population to coordinate reconstruction projects and secure their area.<sup>37</sup> Even American government agencies such as USAID had trouble with military personnel in the PRTs' reconstruction and development activities. The civilian agencies and NGOs fretted for their safety but worried the Taliban would target them as helping the U.S. military.<sup>38</sup> Had security been better, the NGOs would not have faced retribution from the Taliban.

### **SECURITY**

Another item American leadership did not learn from the failed British Afghan campaigns was the amount of troops needed to maintain security after regular combat operations were concluded. The wretched aftermath of the First Anglo-Afghan War should have provided a strong indication of what to expect. When the British concluded their initial combat operations in the First and Second Anglo-Afghan Wars, they figured only a small number of troops needed to remain behind to provide security for the diplomats and token forces that remained in Kabul. After Shah Shuja arrived in Kabul in August 1839, British and Indian troops stopped actively patrolling the town and pursuing the small pockets of Afghan tribesmen conducting guerilla warfare. They transitioned to garrison living based on the Indian model, enjoying the comforts of colonial life.<sup>39</sup> They were slow to recognize the simmering discontent with their presence.

The United States followed a similar pattern after initial combat operations during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM were finished in December 2001. Many U.S. senior leaders

in the White House and Department of Defense favored a “light footprint” troop strategy over the “Powell Doctrine” (use of overwhelming military force against the enemy to win decisively during stability operations).<sup>40</sup> Reasoning that the mere presence of American troops grated on Afghan sensitivities, the U.S. redeployed home most of its troops in preparation for Operation IRAQI FREEDOM in early 2003. Only a 5,000 troop ISAF contingent remained in and near Kabul.<sup>41</sup> During 2002, the ratio of American and ISAF peacekeeping troops to the Afghanistan population was 0.18 per 1,000 (by comparison, in Bosnia the ratio was 18.6/1,000 and 20/1,000 in Kosovo).<sup>42</sup> Even though U.S. troop levels between FY 2002 and FY 2006 gradually went from 5,200 to 20,400, troop numbers were too small to patrol large swaths of Afghanistan.<sup>43</sup> If the United States and other ISAF contributing nations had provided more troops earlier in this conflict, they might have been able to provide security quicker throughout Afghanistan and stiffen both the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP). In turn, improved security might have enabled reconstruction efforts to rebuild Afghanistan’s infrastructure earlier, thereby showing the Afghans the U.S. was concerned about the population’s welfare.<sup>44</sup>

Because the security in Afghanistan was poor, some of the money that companies were given for reconstruction had to be diverted to increase security.<sup>45</sup> This slowed down efforts to rebuild and decreased the amount of work completed where it mattered most, to the Afghan people. Senior U.S. officials responsible for both Iraq and Afghanistan initially refused to understand that peace keeping and rebuilding nations actually required more troops and resources than winning campaigns.<sup>46</sup>

The leadership of the United States finally realized that security needed to be increased in order for reconstruction to happen faster. In a 2002 G8 meeting in Tokyo, the U.S. said it would

help train and equip a new Afghan National Army (ANA).<sup>47</sup> The Afghanistan leadership knew that this U.S. effort would help build up its long term security concerns, but the Afghan administration did not address the immediate concerns for more security. As this conflict continued, more U.S. troops have deployed to Afghanistan, but the lapse in taking care of the security concerns from 2002 to 2006 allowed Taliban and Al Qaeda forces to infiltrate into most of the country. From 2002 until 2006, insurgent-initiated attacks were up almost 400 percent and the number of killed rose over 800 percent.<sup>48</sup> Many of the local population in the rural areas who cooperated with the government during this period were imitated, killed or driven away with their families toward the larger cities.<sup>49</sup> As villages slowly lost their pro-government personnel, the Taliban gained more traction.<sup>50</sup> Some of the local population reluctantly accepted the Taliban presence and its justice because there were no better options. In 2007 a farmer from Wardak province (near the southern outskirts of Kabul) said, "There was oppression and abuse of power. Since the Taliban came back, the robbers and thieves vanished. Security is good. And now the Taliban are solving disputes that the Karzai government did not solve."<sup>51</sup>

Starting in 2002, the American troops slowly started to train the ANA. In 2003 ANA units started combat operations against insurgent forces in eastern Afghanistan.<sup>52</sup> From 2004 to 2006 the ANA expanded in size, moved into Southern Afghanistan to conduct combat operations, and executed security patrols in the western part of the country.<sup>53</sup> In the spring of 2006, the ANA numbered 37,000 men. The ANA's soldiers demonstrated they were good fighters, effective at acquiring intelligence about the enemy, their support structure, and weapons caches.<sup>54</sup> The training they received from U.S. and coalition forces were critical in improving the ANA<sup>55</sup>, which performed better than the ANP and gained the confidence and respect of the Afghan people.<sup>56</sup>

However training a new Afghan National Police (ANP) force was not given the same urgency as the army. The Germans, who were initially responsible for training the ANP, spent only \$89.7 million between 2002 and 2006 and contributed only 41 trainers.<sup>57</sup> By contrast, when the U.S. took over for training the ANP in 2003, the U.S. spent \$860 million to train and equip forty thousand policemen over the next two years.<sup>58</sup> The U.S. effort greatly increased the number of police officers trained and outfitted the ANP with sorely needed weapons, uniforms, and equipment. An effective police force is critical to establishing a democratic society because it can be involved in the community at every level, from monitoring border posts to patrolling rural areas, villages and highways.<sup>59</sup> Police officers' daily interactions with the local population are crucial to influencing the population over to the government's side and weakening the insurgency.

While the ANA was rebuilt from scratch, the ANP tried to start up with many former police officers, many of whom had ties to warlords or insurgents, and were corrupt.<sup>60</sup> This corruption undermines the legitimacy and utility of the police from the Afghan population's point of view.<sup>61</sup> In 2005 U.S. military officers started to embed with the police similar to what American trainers did with the ANA in order to reset the training with the goal of winning over the trust and respect of the people.<sup>62</sup> Without a strong police force, warlords and political entrepreneurs often flourished and financed their private militias through criminal activity, drug and arms trafficking.<sup>63</sup>

### **REGIONAL WARLORDS**

During both their wars, British commanders secured their Lines of Operations (LOOs) by paying the local tribal chiefs not to attack their military forces or supply convoys. This practice helped greatly in military operations but unintentionally strengthened the chiefs at the expense of

whatever regime the British wished to install. Regional chieftains, not yet called “warlords,” used British cash to bolster their positions while weakening the Amir in Kabul. In their haste to oust the Taliban in late 2001, the Americans repeated this error, strengthening the power of those now termed warlords at the expense of the fragile post-Taliban Afghan government.

During the active phase of OEF, the CIA paid the warlords to work with the Northern Alliance to assist U.S. forces and allies. After the Taliban resistance crumbled, U.S. military, government, and CIA personnel continued to deal with the tribal warlords, not solely with the interim Afghan government. The CIA spent at least \$70 million in bribes to Northern Alliance commanders as well as Taliban commanders. They also paid Pakistani Pashtun leaders not to cross the border.<sup>64</sup> Even though some cooperation between U.S. forces and warlords was useful, the warlords’ power increased while the government’s strength and credibility was weakened.<sup>65</sup> This practice also sent a mixed message to the Karzai government, prompting many to develop alternate sources of income, such as opium cultivation and trafficking. Because the U.S. provided money and other resources to the warlords, many started to feud among themselves for power while helping the CIA and U.S. Special Operation Forces continue their protracted and unsuccessful search for Osama Bin Laden.<sup>66</sup>

Some of the warlords were allowed to become part of the interim Afghan government, such as Mohammed Fahim, a Tajik warlord who was the interim defense minister. He wanted to remain part of the government so other warlord militias on the government payroll would depend on his support.<sup>67</sup> He and other warlords did not want a national army created because that would weaken their militias and power. According to an Afghanistan National Security Council threat assessment, “Non-statutory armed forces and their commanders pose a direct threat to the national security of Afghanistan.”<sup>68</sup> The Afghan government had almost no power to curtail the

regional warlords who controlled the roads and were hindrances to commerce travelling on them.<sup>69</sup>

## **OPERATIONS**

As Mao Tse-Tung stated, “The richest source of power to wage war lies in the masses of the people.”<sup>70</sup> To its credit the U.S. and its partners have tried to separate insurgents from their support base.<sup>71</sup> Unlike the British of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, U.S. military leaders have realized that in order to turn the tide of the insurgency they needed to go and work among the rural population, not stay in a garrison. However, many insurgent groups draw upon tribal kin across the other side of an international border, whether Pakistan or Iran. The very remoteness of much of mountainous Afghanistan makes for numerous sanctuaries within the country itself.

In the summer of 2004, the head of U.S. forces in Afghanistan introduced a new tactic which involved small groups of U.S. soldiers living in the villages to win the hearts and minds and collect better intelligence.<sup>72</sup> From FY 2006 to FY 2010, the number of troops on the ground increased from 20,400 to 63,500.<sup>73</sup> With more troops on the ground, U.S. forces began clear, hold, and expand operations.<sup>74</sup> They are patrolling farther away from the urban centers such as Kabul and Kandahar, going into what is considered Taliban-controlled territory, providing security for the Afghan people and protecting them from the Taliban and other insurgent groups.<sup>75</sup>

American forces did not commit exactly the same errors that the British military and government leaders did when it came to understanding the enemy and how they fight. Because American military personnel undergo extensive training, they have a basic understanding of Afghan culture. They know what issues are considered sensitive to Afghans. This knowledge can help prevent misunderstandings turn into dangerous situations. American forces interact

with the Afghan population in a different way than British forces did over 100 years ago. U.S. military and political leaders were more aware than their British counterparts the Muslim concept of jihad. American forces knew what the dangers were when the enemy fought with suicidal zeal but were still surprised at the new technique of Islamic extremists committing suicide using hand-carried IEDs to execute maximum damage.

### CULTURE

When the British invaded Afghanistan in the 1830's and 1870's, they had a poor understanding of the enemy forces they were facing. Having had three decades' experience in dealing with the Pashtun tribes of the North-West Frontier, the British understood tribesmen to be "savages," the lowest form of human society. The authoritative *Encyclopedia Britannica* of 1911 described Afghans as:

"Unscrupulous in perjury, treacherous, vain and insatiable, passionate in vindictiveness... Nowhere is crime committed on such trifling grounds, or with such general impunity... Among themselves the Afghans are quarrelsome, intriguing and distrustful... The Afghan is by breed and nature a bird of prey... The European... is charmed by their apparently frank, open-hearted, hospitable and manly manners; but the charm is not of long duration, and he finds that the Afghan is as cruel and crafty as he is independent."

When dealing with Afghan tribal leaders, the British policy was to keep the tribes suspicious of one another by paying subsidies to various leaders and to promise British forces would support them with weapons and troops if they decided to fight the tribes that opposed the British. This was supposed to keep the tribes from attacking British forces and supply convoys.<sup>76</sup> However, many times these forces took the money and still harassed enemy troops when they could, especially when the payments to the tribal leaders were cut.<sup>77</sup> Many times,

some tribesmen (especially when mounted) could be hired by the British to augment their forces prior to attacking. When they realized they were going up against fellow Afghans or Muslims, some would not fight, while others turned against the British as a battle started.<sup>78</sup> Even Indian Muslim troops were hesitant to engage Afghan forces. There were other loyalties underneath the surface the British did not understand, which was people bonded by a common religion are stronger than the relationship between British officers and their native troops.<sup>79</sup> Unlike the Indians with whom the British were familiar, Afghanistan religious and national passions were deeper, so bribing would work only up to a certain point.<sup>80</sup>

British military commanders and troops did not take the time to learn about Afghan culture or religious customs. American military leaders did not follow this kind of logic. As part of the pre-deployment training, cultural awareness classes are given. Combat troops and U.S. Embedded Training Teams (ETT) that will train ANA and ANP forces undergo simulated training in a “town” where actors or other military personnel dress and act like local villagers, religious figures, tribal elders, and insurgents that have blended into the population. For example, the United States Marine Corps sends units to Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, CA to participate in “Enhanced Mojave Viper” as part of their Pre-deployment Training Program.<sup>81</sup> In addition to irregular and conventional warfare training, Marines go through classroom instruction and practical application of understanding Afghan culture, hearing the language (such as Dari or Pashtu), and being able to deal with the local population.<sup>82</sup> This training ensures Marines are better prepared when they are deployed to Afghanistan.

The British also underestimated how Islam could inspire Muslim extremists (*Ghazis*) to rally the Afghan people to fight against foreign invaders. Dost Mohammed declared himself

*Amir al-Mu'minin* - the spiritual leader of not only Afghanistan, but of all Muslims.<sup>83</sup> He signified this by displaying in public a cloak that the Prophet Mohammed owned. The next time an Afghan performed this symbolic declaration was Mullah Omar, leader of the Taliban over 150 years later.<sup>84</sup> During the First Anglo-Afghan conflict, British forces had their first experience fighting *Ghazis* who answered Dost Mohammed's call to fight a jihad, or holy war, against the foreign invaders.<sup>85</sup> They were surprised at how these fundamentalists fought with no regard for their own lives. British forces were also unaware that when a jihad is declared, all Muslims should answer this call to fight the infidels. Similarly Sher Ali called for a jihad in the beginning of the Second Anglo-Afghan War.<sup>86</sup> In mosques the mullahs were urging worshippers to defy the presence of foreign forces. Thousands of Afghans joined the cause to push the alien forces out of Afghanistan.<sup>87</sup> This type of fighting is still prevalent in the current Afghanistan conflict between U.S. and ISAF forces against the Taliban and Al Qaeda forces.<sup>88</sup>

Having encouraged Muslims to fight the Russians in Afghanistan during the 1980s, American knew that when a jihad is declared, many Muslims would answer this call in order to drive out the Russian invaders. In 2001, however, Americans convinced themselves that they were liberators, seeking only to expel extremists and harboring no designs on either Islam or Afghanistan. Americans believed that democratic institutions, female emancipation, and even popular culture would liberate the people held down by the Taliban. However the U.S. military and political leaders were not prepared for the volume of people who would respond to the call. Indeed, modern communications served the Taliban better than the would-be modernizers. Thousands of Muslims travelled to Afghanistan so they could wage war against U.S. and ISAF forces in the name of Islam. Prior to the start of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, Taliban forces were supplemented by 3,000 Arab fighters from 13 different nations, over 9,000 Pakistani

militants, and hundreds of Chechens and Uyghurs.<sup>89</sup> American forces were not prepared for a new type of weapon Taliban or Al Qaeda groups would use: *Ghazis*, more commonly known as suicide bombers. In addition to those who fought to the death on the battlefield, Islamic extremists would drive a vehicle laden with explosives or even wear clothing that has explosives attached to it in order to maximize casualties. The United States military and political leadership also did not learn from the British forces that fought in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that simply razing rebel strongholds and camps did not destroy the movement.<sup>90</sup> Many Taliban leaders used history as part of their motivation for young men to fight against U.S. and coalition troops, pointedly asking if they wanted to be remembered as a son of Dost Mohammed or Shah Shuja.<sup>91</sup>

### SUCCESSION

When the British conducted both Anglo-Afghan Wars, they looked for a leader of Afghanistan who would accommodate their policies and strategic interests. Judged wholly by British criteria, this leader might have ruled effectively, but he could not disguise his being a tool for foreigners. If the leader of Afghanistan lacked the respect of the Afghan people, especially tribal headmen, he lacked the respect necessary to govern. All too plainly, he depended on British forces stationed in Afghanistan. Prior to the First Anglo-Afghan War, Dost Mohammed had emerged as one of the most powerful men among the Afghan tribal leaders. He gained the respect of fellow Afghans by being courageous and brutal in a civil war.<sup>92</sup> When the British pressed Dost Mohammed for concessions that served only British interests, he refused to give in. This frustrated the British government, but Dost Mohammed maintained the Afghan people's loyalty. The British found Shah Shuja, whom Dost had overthrown, and installed him in power.<sup>93</sup> British politicians did not consider the reactions of the Afghans to foreign forces invading their country, seeing their popular leader evicted and replaced with a previously

deposed ruler.<sup>94</sup> Shah Shuja reclaimed the title of Amir in 1839 and did nothing to reach out to the Afghan people. Shah Shuja depended entirely upon British military support, so he did as they asked. Afghans loyal to Dost Mohammed tried to exploit this by asking the British to leave and let him rule if he could.<sup>95</sup>

It might have seemed the British learned from the First Anglo-Afghan War when they started negotiating with Sher Ali in the 1870's. The British tried to send envoys to sway him to become a British ally, insisting Sher Ali needed permission from the British before talking to other foreign country dignitaries.<sup>96</sup> Sher Ali kept the respect of the Afghan people by refusing and fled ahead of the resulting British invasion in 1879.<sup>97</sup> However, he did place his son Yakub Khan on the throne. Wisely, the British had no intention of replacing Yakub Khan; they only wanted him to accept the demands his father had refused, and Yakub Khan did. However, when the British envoy appeared to act as the power behind the throne, Afghans rose against the British and their tool.<sup>98</sup>

In 2001 U.S. officials wanted a competent, popular mujahidin leader named Abdul Haq to be the front running candidate to be elected president of the post-Taliban regime.<sup>99</sup> He was placed into the Afghanistan's southern region prior to the collapse of the Taliban in 2001, where Taliban officials discovered his location and killed him before he could escape.<sup>100</sup> After this unfortunate incident, American government officials backed Hamid Karzai. On the face of it, Karzai was nearly ideal. He was a Pashtun, which was the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan (forty-two percent of Afghanistan's total population).<sup>101</sup> Although the Northern Alliance was predominantly Tajik and Uzbek, Karzai gave the new coalition an acceptable Pashtun face. Moreover, a Pashtun president could appeal to the residents of southern Afghanistan, which was also the Taliban's home territory. The U.S. political leadership wanted a leader from the largest

ethnic bloc from the enemy's home turf be the leader of the Post-Taliban Afghanistan. In addition, he resisted Russian rule and had later fallen out with the Taliban.

The U.S. supported a Loya Jirga meeting of prominent elders that anointed Karzai as the new interim Afghan leader. Theoretically, the Loya Jirga demonstrated to the Taliban and Afghan people that Karzai was selected by fellow Afghans, not by the United States. The Americans and Karzai did not want to postpone the country's first elections because Karzai wanted this mandate for the legitimacy it gave him in the eyes of the international community.<sup>102</sup> This election reinforced the notion that he is not just a figurehead installed by a foreign government, indeed a government of unbelievers. The Taliban have since tried to shake Karzai's credibility by comparing him with the hapless Shah Shuja.<sup>103</sup> Unfortunately, his administration failed to establish itself outside the capital and northern regions. In late 2007, U.S. observers had concluded that Karzai's government was broken, and without support from U.S. and ISAF forces it would fail quickly.<sup>104</sup>

### **CONCLUSION**

American government and military leaders have made some of the mistakes the British made from the two Anglo-Afghan Wars the British fought, but they have also learned a couple lessons that have been applied to the current Afghanistan conflict. Like the British, The United States did not think about taking a more holistic approach when constructing the battle plans of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. Also, U.S. political and military leaders paid too much money and attention to the warlords. The United States military and government leaders did learn from some of the mistakes the British made regarding the political leadership of Afghanistan during the First and Second Anglo-Afghan Wars. American military and

government leaders had a better understanding of the enemy's culture than their 19<sup>th</sup> century British counterparts.

The biggest error the United States repeated was trying to execute the campaign in Afghanistan based solely on a military solution. The U.S. fought a kinetic campaign in a difficult environment but relied too much on payoffs to various elements unlikely to support a stable government in Kabul. Had the U.S. military and government officials studied the British campaigns, they would have realized that applying the "Powell Doctrine" would have been a better choice than the "light footprint." The security vacuum allowed the Taliban to recover and re-ignite the insurgency.<sup>105</sup> Now, however, they stand to reap the anger of Afghans who see the troop surge as evidence of an enduring American occupation. Undeniably, tighter security from 2001 until 2007 provided by more U.S. troops would have enabled PRTs and NGOs to start improving the Afghan infrastructure sooner. In turn, such enhancements might have allowed the Afghan government time to gather resources and build administrative infrastructure to provide services to the people. Companies doing reconstruction projects would have been able to invest more into projects and not divert money for security.

The American political and military leaders understood that development of security was important to stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan, but they were very slow to realize this. The Taliban regained strength and influence because the Karzai government, U.S. and coalition nation supporters failed to deliver justice or fair, uncorrupted policing.<sup>106</sup> Much of rural Afghanistan has been swayed to follow the Taliban and Sharia law so order and justice could be provided in light of foreign forces and Karzai's government failures.<sup>107</sup> Foreign troops and Afghan security forces have to continue attacking insurgents to push them out of Afghan territory, and then stay in place to win back the confidence of the Afghan people.

The length of time the U.S. government supported the warlords and backed their appointments into the Afghan government was a poor decision. In the summer of 2002 the warlords were becoming stronger while the Karzai regime lacked the resources to compete.<sup>108</sup> The struggles for power among the warlords caused more instability and insecurity among the countryside, delaying the essential reconstruction projects that would have given the Afghan government credibility among its citizens. This hampered efforts to quickly establish a western-style government that had the ability to provide governance and laws stronger than the warlords' influence. Americans did back one politician that had developed respect from the Pashtuns and most of the international community, but he was suspect to other ethnic tribal leaders. As a result of the inability to improve the lives of most Afghans, they have become suspect of Karzai's ability also.

The U.S. did learn from the British errors of placing someone as the leader of Afghanistan when that person does not have the respect or backing of the people. In late 2001 the Secretary of State Powell appointed James F. Dobbins to head negotiations with the Northern Alliance to find a leader.<sup>109</sup> He was able to find out other countries (such as Iran and Russia) and the Northern Alliance would back Hamid Karzai.<sup>110</sup> American political and military leadership did support the Afghan leader and let the Afghan and democratic processes decide who the leader was so there was credibility to the process. However, Karzai needs to stamp out the rampant corruption his administration has been plagued with. Top Afghan officials have repeatedly stymied Afghan legal officers in their attempt to bring suspects to court.<sup>111</sup> Corruption gives the Taliban insurgency information that they use in their information operations, and complicates efforts to influence Afghans to side with leaders in Kabul.<sup>112</sup>

U.S. senior government and military leaders did not realize the extent of Islamic extremism in 2001. Once American leadership knew that the U.S. military had to increase the number of troops to expand Afghan security forces competency and conduct counterinsurgency operations, U.S. military leaders understood the importance of troops gaining basic knowledge of Afghan culture and tribe structure prior to deploying to Afghanistan. The Taliban promoted themselves as the defenders of Afghanistan against another wave of foreign invaders.<sup>113</sup> This resulted in large numbers of extremists that came to Afghanistan to wage a jihad against U.S. and ISAF forces, and the influx continues to this day. By taking a holistic approach to the complex situation in Afghanistan, the United States and allies will be able wrest territories from the Taliban's grip, and enable Afghanistan's government to show the local population that an Afghan solution with assistance from the U.S. is a better choice than the Taliban.

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<sup>2</sup> Standard accounts include Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia*. (New York: Kodansha International, 1992); see also Karl E. Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows*. (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 111-136.

<sup>3</sup> W. K. Fraser-Tytler, *Afghanistan: A Study of Political Developments in Central and Southern Asia*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 80-81.

<sup>4</sup> David Gillard, *The Struggle for Asia 1828-1914*. (London: Methuen and Company Ltd., 1977), 50.

<sup>5</sup> Fremont-Barnes, 15.

<sup>6</sup> Fremont-Barnes 16.

<sup>7</sup> Lawrence James, *Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India*. (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1997), 90.

<sup>8</sup> Fremont-Barnes, 24.

<sup>9</sup> Fraser-Tytler, 113-114.

<sup>10</sup> Fremont-Barnes, 28-29.

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- <sup>11</sup> Fraser-Tytler, 118.
- <sup>12</sup> James, 97.
- <sup>13</sup> Fraser-Tytler, 119.
- <sup>14</sup> James, 97.
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- <sup>19</sup> Robson, 118.
- <sup>20</sup> Fremont-Barnes, 62.
- <sup>21</sup> Robson, 120-121, 129-130, 132-133.
- <sup>22</sup> Robson, 219-244.
- <sup>23</sup> James, 377-378.
- <sup>24</sup> Robson, 267-268.
- <sup>25</sup> Fremont-Barnes, 68.
- <sup>26</sup> Fitzgerald, 48.
- <sup>27</sup> George W. Bush, "Transcript of President Bush's address", *CNN.com*, September 20, 2001, <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/> (accessed 20 January 2011).
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- <sup>30</sup> Loyn, 37.
- <sup>31</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *Descent Into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia*. (New York: Viking Penguin, 2008), 74.
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- <sup>33</sup> Rashid, 74.

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<sup>34</sup> Carl Robichand, "Remember Afghanistan? A Glass Half Full, On the Titanic", *World Policy Journal*, Volume XXIII, No. 1 (Spring 2006): 17-18.

<sup>35</sup> Robichand, 18.

<sup>36</sup> Rashid, 198.

<sup>37</sup> Seth G. Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*. (Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation, 2008), 107. Cited hereafter as "Jones, Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan".

<sup>38</sup> Jones, "Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan," 108; see also Rashid, 199-200.

<sup>39</sup> Fraser-Tytler, 113.

<sup>40</sup> Jones, "Graveyard of Empires," 113-118, 123-124.

<sup>41</sup> James Dobbins and others, *America's Role in Nation-Building from Germany to Iraq*. (Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation, 2003), 135-136.

<sup>42</sup> Dobbins, 136.

<sup>43</sup> Amy Belasco, *Troop Levels in the Afghan and Iraq Wars, FY 2001-2012: Cost and Other Potential Issues*, CRS Report for Congress R40682 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, July 2, 2009), 9.

<sup>44</sup> Fitzgerald, 289-290.

<sup>45</sup> Fitzgerald, 253.

<sup>46</sup> Rashid, 133.

<sup>47</sup> Rashid, 197.

<sup>48</sup> Jones, "Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan," 48-49.

<sup>49</sup> Jones, "Graveyard of Empires," 164.

<sup>50</sup> Jones, "Graveyard of Empires," 164.

<sup>51</sup> Rashid, 207.

<sup>52</sup> Jones, "Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan," 72-73.

<sup>53</sup> Jones, "Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan," 74.

<sup>54</sup> Jones, "Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan," 74-75.

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- <sup>63</sup> Jones, "Graveyard of Empires," 162.
- <sup>64</sup> Rashid, 97.
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- <sup>69</sup> Fitzgerald, 265.
- <sup>70</sup> Mao Tse-Tung, *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-Tung*. (Peking, China: Foreign Language Press, 1963), 260.
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- <sup>73</sup> Belasco, 9.
- <sup>74</sup> Jones, "Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan," 94-95.
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- <sup>78</sup> Loyn, 43.
- <sup>79</sup> Loyn, 42.
- <sup>80</sup> James, 91.
- <sup>81</sup> "Marine Corps Training Blocks Lead to Enhanced Mojave Viper", *IITSEC Showdaily*, November 30, 2009, 4. [http://www.iitsec.org/about/PublicationsProceedings/Documents/IITSEC2009\\_Day1\\_Final.pdf](http://www.iitsec.org/about/PublicationsProceedings/Documents/IITSEC2009_Day1_Final.pdf) (accessed 21 January 2011).

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- <sup>84</sup> Loyn, 31.
- <sup>85</sup> Loyn, 42.
- <sup>86</sup> Fremont-Barnes, 58.
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- <sup>88</sup> Loyn, 41.
- <sup>89</sup> Rashid, 80-81.
- <sup>90</sup> Loyn 199.
- <sup>91</sup> Loyn, 204.
- <sup>92</sup> Fraser-Tytler, 70-74.
- <sup>93</sup> Fraser-Tytler, 103, 106-115.
- <sup>94</sup> James, 90.
- <sup>95</sup> Loyn, 41.
- <sup>96</sup> Robson, 48.
- <sup>97</sup> Fremont-Barnes, 53.
- <sup>98</sup> Robson, 119-121.
- <sup>99</sup> Loyn, 204.
- <sup>100</sup> Loyn, 204.
- <sup>101</sup> Rashid, xviii.
- <sup>102</sup> Rashid, 255.
- <sup>103</sup> Loyn, 204.
- <sup>104</sup> Fitzgerald, 289.
- <sup>105</sup> Fitzgerald, 287.
- <sup>106</sup> Loyn, 207.
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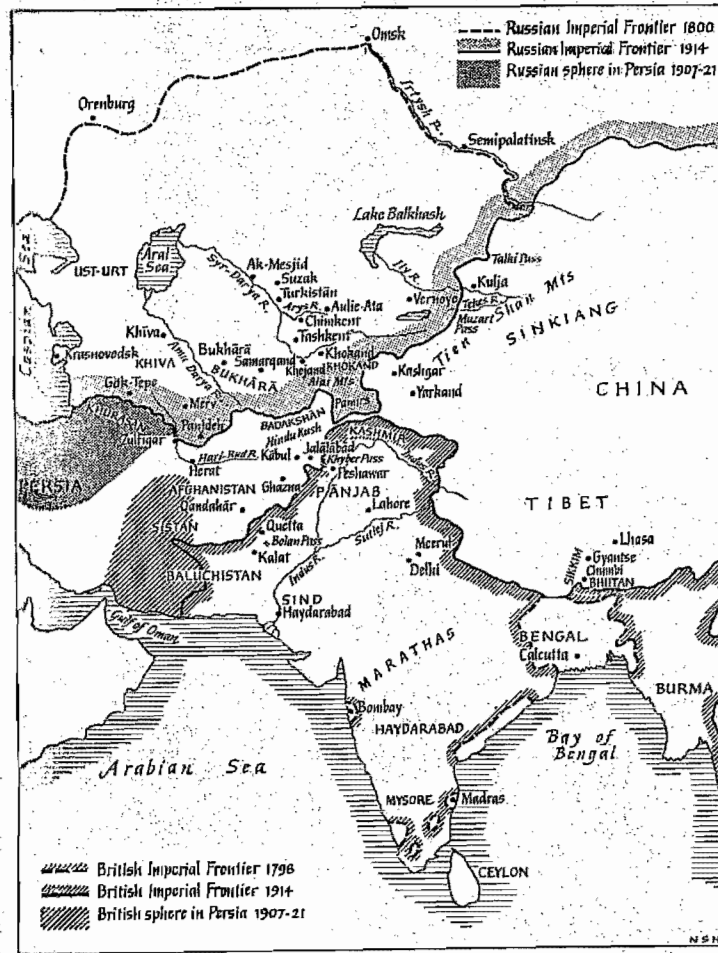
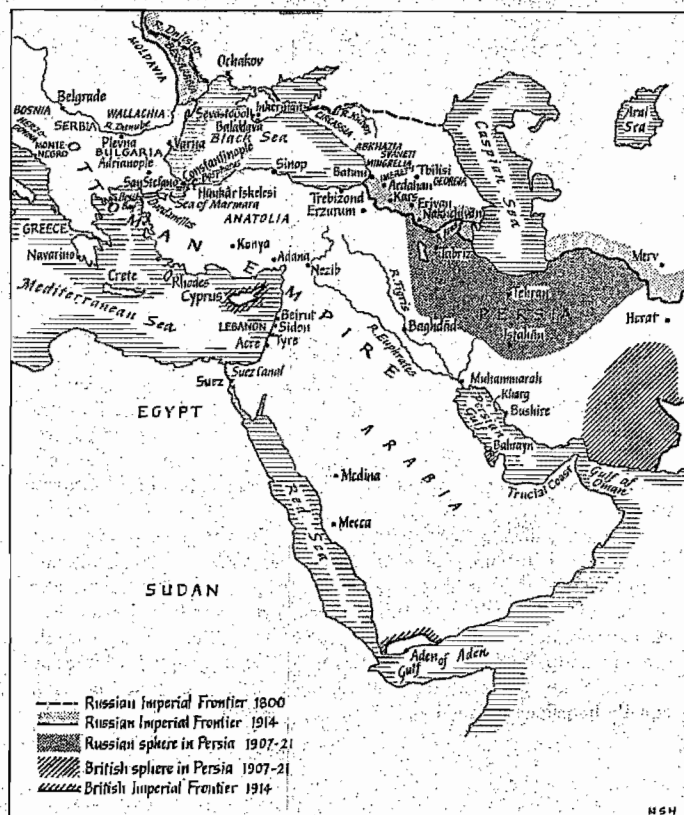
<sup>109</sup> Bob Woodward, *Bush at War*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), 314.

<sup>110</sup> Woodward, 314-315.

<sup>111</sup> Greg Miller and Ernesto Londono, "U.S. officials say Karzai aides are derailing corruption cases involving elite," *washingtonpost.com*, June 28, 2010, 1. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/27/AR2010062703645.html> (accessed 23 January 2011).

<sup>112</sup> Miller, 1.

<sup>113</sup> Loyn 229.



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