Modeling the Withdrawal of Western-style Forces from Afghanistan
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As NATO and the United States withdraw their combat forces from Afghanistan and consider what stay-behind trainers and advisers, if any, will remain, it is prudent to examine how other Western/European-style armies have conducted occupation and withdrawal from this ancient land. There is, for obvious reasons, much interest in the Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1989) and its aftermath.[1] Another modern, high-technology mechanized military fought the same peoples, with the same weapons, and on the same terrain in an attempt to realize political goals. However, there are two other examples where Western/European-style armies fought extended wars in Afghanistan in the pursuit of political goals, yet they are seldom considered or consulted for lessons on the conduct of an occupation and withdrawal from this mountainous land. These two wars were the First Anglo-Afghan War (1839-1842) and the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-1880).

Why is there lessened interest in these conflicts? To begin with, the armies relied on mules and camels for transport, the weapons fired black powder instead of smokeless powder, and it was all so long ago. Yet, history is relevant in shaping the attitudes and beliefs of different cultures, and local tactics are a product of geography, history and culture. The people of Afghanistan still consider these two 19th Century wars very important and fairly current. Indeed, British forces operating with NATO in OEF bore a stigma left over from these Victorian-era wars.[2] The terrain and the people of Afghanistan are the same and the principles of war have not changed.

An examination of these three wars (see table) makes several salient points. The purpose of Western invasions/incursions into Afghanistan has been about regime change or the imposition of the will of the occupier upon the government of Afghanistan. Occupations are as much about keeping the local population calm as they are about keeping the neighboring countries (Persia/Iran, Russia, Pakistan) and interested non-neighboring countries (USA, Saudi Arabia, China) at bay. Afghan military history normally starts with the defeat of a conventional Afghan force, followed by the uprising of the mountain tribes in opposition to the occupier. At some point the religious differences between the people of Afghanistan and the occupier become important and lead to further difficulties, even *jihad*. Afghanistan is a land of several ethnic groups, and often the degree of resistance to an occupier is defined by ethnicity and urban or rural residency.

The natural form of government in Afghanistan is a confederacy. The king/president provided a balancing function among the various regional commanders ("warlords" pejoratively), throwing the weight of the central government power behind a commander who

was opposed to the problem commander. Administratively, Afghanistan has had provinces and districts, but regional power brokers often have had actual control regardless of bureaucratic

	1st Anglo-Afghan 1839-1842	2nd Anglo-Afghan 1878-1880	Soviet-Afghan 1979-1989	OEF 2001-20??
Purpose of invasion	Regime change	Impose will	Regime Change, Incursion	Regime Change
External threat	Persia and Russia	Russia	USA, Iran, Pakistan	Iran, Pakistan
Resistance to occupier	Army and Tribal	Army and Tribal	Jihad	Ethnic and Jihad
Co-opted new leader	No. Reinstated deposed leader	Yes-Three regime changes	Yes-Two regime changes	No
External resistance to government	Yes. Tribal	No	Jihad against atheist regime	Yes. Ethnic. North-south.
Internal division within government	Barakzai versus Shah Shuja supporters	No	Khalqi versus Parchami.	Pashtun versus North
Reinvasion required	Yes	No. Build-up	No. Build-up	No. Build-up
Occupier overstayed welcome	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Secure LOC for withdrawal	No	Yes	Yes	No
Support package following withdrawal	No	Yes	Yes	?
Successful mission	No	Yes	Yes	?
Advisers remain	No	No	Yes-30 & support	?
Residual benefit to occupier	None	Dictated Afghanistan's foreign policy 30 years	Stability on border 2.5 years	?

Table: Models of Western-style occupation of Afghanistan

boundaries. The Soviets, and now the NATO coalition, imposed a federal centralized form of government. Although many urban Afghans now recognize the value of such a system, it is still an uneasy fit.

Successful occupations involve conducting multiple regime changes during the occupation to determine the best leader and then allowing sufficient time for the leader to prepare for the occupier's withdrawal. Occupations have much more difficulty when the new Afghan government contains contending factions. The occupiers are not normally adroit enough to divide and conquer and end up backing one faction. Information operations were important in all conflicts, but were directed toward a Western or international audience, not the Afghan people.

Afghanistan does not do well with long-term occupations, and the government leader, particularly if he is perceived as a puppet, will try to prove his independence from the occupier. This leads to policies and statements that are contrary to the occupier's position and leads to tension up to and throughout the withdrawal. If the leader's main support is the occupier, his power and options will shrink during the withdrawal.

The occupier may face a fighting withdrawal, particularly if he does not abide by the terms agreed on for his departure. The British lost an army during the First Anglo-Afghan War by not withdrawing its Jalalabad garrison. If the occupying force is strong and takes measures to secure its LOCs prior to withdrawal, the chances of fighting diminish. Shorter secure LOCs are better. Contractors and civilians supporting the occupation army will be a factor during a withdrawal; these outnumbered the military forces in both Anglo-Afghan Wars.

The post-withdrawal period may involve a surge of internal government fighting or attacks against the government as various factions vie for power and control. Stay-behind advisers were employed following the Soviet-Afghan War, but their number was small and they worked primarily at the ministerial level. The Second Anglo-Afghan and the Soviet-Afghan occupations provided a generous long-term post-withdrawal support package.

Two of the three occupations of Afghanistan were successful in that they achieved occupation political goals and left behind a functioning compliant Afghan government. The cost of all these occupations was quite high. As NATO and the United States withdraw combat forces and prepare for whatever post-withdrawal mission they may conduct in Afghanistan, the lessons of the past from all three of these wars should be considered.

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[1] Some of the most relevant English-language books are Rodric Braithwaite, *Afgantsy: The Russians in Afghanistan, 1979-1989,* London: Profile Books, Ltd, 2012; Peter Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan: Messianic*

Terrorism, Tribal Conflicts, and the Failures of Great Powers, New York: Public Affairs, 2011; The Russian General Staff, translation and commentary by Lester W. Grau and Michael A. Gress, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost*, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002; Artemy M. Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye: The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011; Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation & Collapse in the International System,* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995; and Gregory Feifer, *The Great Gamble: The Soviet War in Afghanistan*, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009. Relevant articles are Lester W. Grau, "Breaking Contact Without Leaving Chaos: The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, April-June 2007, Volume 20 Number 2; http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/Withdrawal.pdf and Lester W. Grau and Thomas P. Wilhelm, "The Soviet Withdrawal From Afghanistan: Lessons to Frame Success and Avoid Failures," FMSO-JRIC Occasional Paper, November 2011, http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/Soviet-Withdrawal-Occasional-Paper.pdf .

[2] Ali A. Jalali and Lester W. Grau, "Expeditionary Forces: Superior Technology Defeated-The Battle of Maiwand", *Military Review*, May-June 2001, http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/maiwand/maiwand.htm