

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

BATTLE FOR AFGHANISTAN:
LESSONS FROM THE FIRST ANGLO-AFGHAN WAR

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Introduction and Moderator:

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President
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Featured Speaker:

WILLIAM DALRYMPLE
Historian and Author, *Return of a King*

Discussant:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. TALBOTT: Good afternoon, everybody. I'm Strobe Talbott, and it's my honor to welcome you here for what I think is going to be a terrific hour and 15 minutes or so.

Because we at the Brookings Institution tend to focus quite a bit on the here and now and even look a little bit into the future, we don't get to do as much work in the realm of history as we would like. But today is a fortuitous exception to that. And we'll take advantage of the occasion not only by doing history, but a little bit of literature as well, and I think that's appropriate given our guest of honor, who writes history at a very high degree of literature.

So I'm going to do something that I don't think I've ever done from this podium before, which is start with a poem. And looking around this audience, I can see any number of you who are going to know exactly what poem it is from the first line. But here it goes.

"Remember it's ruin to run from a fight, so take open order, lie down, and sit tight, and wait for supports like a soldier. Wait, wait, wait like a soldier. When you're wounded and left on Afghanistan's plains and the women come out to cut up what remains, just roll to your rifle and blow out your brains, and go to your God like a soldier."

Now you all know that that's Rudyard Kipling, and it also

calls to mind something that a pretty good American writer once wrote, and you know who this is: "History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes." And that, of course, was Mark Twain.

So how's that for an introduction of William Dalrymple? I've known Willie for quite some time, but not for as long as he has been largely resident in South Asia. He's lived in Delhi. He has a farm outside of Delhi. He's been in that part of the world for close to a quarter of a century. He doesn't look enough for that to be the case, but it is.

He's written seven books, and he's here today to talk about his eighth, which is *Return of the King*. It is a riveting, novelistic in its sense of narrative history of the first Anglo-Afghan war, which was from 1839 to 1842. Now the story has been told before, but it has never been told with the use that Willie has been able to make of new primary sources, notably including many that illuminate the Afghan perspective on that conflict. He has also brought to bear, as he has in his earlier books -- I'm thinking particularly of the white Mughals and the last Mughal -- a gripping narrative gift for doing big history.

Now many of the reviews, and I'm sure a lot of you have seen those reviews, and they're virtually all raves, have made the connection between the war that Willie is writing about, which began 169 years before the United States moved in on Tora Bora back in the fall right

after 9/11 and 2001. A lot of the reviews have used some version of lessons unlearned or forgetting the mistakes of history, but I think that it's appropriate that they should do that, because reading the book, it has an eerie feeling of the contemporary in a very minor key.

We're going to have a conversation after Willie gives us a talk that he'll illustrate with some Power Points. And the conversation is going to engage Willie with one of our scholars here at Brookings, Bruce Riedel, who served his country well. You'll see a very small pin on his lapel, and I'm not sure that you all have the security clearances to know exactly what it stands for. But Bruce and I worked together back in the 1990s on the team that worked the triangular relationship between the United States, India, and Pakistan after first and then Pakistan exploded on nuclear weapons. So we're pals and colleagues from way back.

He is the Director of the Brookings Intelligence Project, which is a unit within our Center for 21st Century Security and Intelligence. He's also a Senior Fellow in the Saban Center. And as you will have gathered, he served in the United States government for a long time, both the CIA and the National Security Council.

His latest book, which we're also promoting, is called *Avoiding Armageddon*. And then after a conversation between the two of them that will draw as many of you as we have time for, Willie will be

signing books outside the Falk Auditorium.

So with that, Willie, welcome to Brookings. Welcome back to Brookings.

(Applause)

MR. DALRYMPLE: I'd like you to imagine yourselves on a road in eastern Persia on a hot summer night in 1837. And up this road comes a solitary figure on a horse. It's a young British artilleryman who is also a British intelligence agent. His name is Henry Rawlinson. He's about -- what is he -- 27 years old, and he's been on his horse for two days and a night. Can you hear in the back? Are you all right?

The reason he's been traveling from Kermanshah in the west of the country to Masha in the far northeast is that the new Qajar Shah of Iran, Mohammad Shah, II, is about to launch a border war and try, as he's promised in his coronation speech, to recapture the disputed border city of Herat. And the Qajar army has marched up from Tehran over the course of the spring and is now poised to march over the border and try and attack Herat.

Now what is a Brit doing in this part of the world in 1837? I'm sure all of you know this, but just a little bit of big picture context. After Waterloo, which knocked the French out of the picture, there are two powers competing for the control of Asia. The British have sprung out

from their coastal factories in Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay, and in little over 50 years have conquered more of India than Napoleon conquered of Europe. Except it's not the British. It is actually a public limited company. The East India Company is a company. It has accounts, a board room, shareholders, annual general meetings, all the paraphernalia of any other company that might make chocolate, beer, sherry, or anything else.

The difference is it also has the largest standing army in Asia. It's a very frightening sort of hybrid. It's a sort of company that's also a state and has an army. The modern equivalent would have to be something like Microsoft with nuclear submarines or PepsiCo with fighter jets, which actually isn't a feature of the modern world. And in 50 years, the East India Company has come to gobble up most of the old Mogul empire and is now poised in Ludhiana on the edge of the Himalayas.

At the same time as this has been going on, the Russians have been moving south and using the same sort of modern artillery techniques, scientific artillery techniques, which have proved so effective for the British against the marauders cavalry. The Russians have defeated both the Ottomans and the Persians in the whole succession of conflicts, and they have seized the whole of modern Armenia and Azerbaijan from the Persian empire, the Qajar empire, and Lord Palmerston, the foreign secretary in London, has predicted that within a

decade, he expects the Russians to take both Tehran and Istanbul.

So in order to counter this, the British East India Company does what many other powers do today, is you end up arming your enemy's enemy. And Henry Rawlinson is sent off from Bombay in a ship, lands at Shiraz, and is sent off to train the Persians in enhanced artillery techniques so that they can take on the Russians. It's the same game that millions of people play today arming their proxies.

The British and the Russians are still thousands of miles apart, between Ludhiana, which is the northernmost British outpost in the Punjab, and Orenburg, which is the southernmost Russian outpost on the steppe.

There are whole varieties of states. On the British side of the Himalayas, there's Ranjit Singh, and its very well trained army, the Khalsa, based out of Lahore. And on the Russian side of the Himalayas, there is the whole central Asian caravan cities, Samarkand, Bukhara, Kiva, all the modern "stans." And in between is this unmapped area that we call today Afghanistan.

And there is a whole series of polemics being written in London because anyone sitting in a gentleman's club in Pall Mall or indeed a war room in St. Petersburg looking at the map can see that these two empires are expanding rapidly towards each other. At some point, if

the trajectory continues, they're going to bump into each other somewhere in the Hindu Kush, somewhere in that unmapped space in the middle.

And these polemicists are writing these pieces saying that we must -- the hawks are saying we must seize Afghanistan. We must seize this space on the map. IF we go ahead and beat the Russians to it, we can control the passes between Samarkand and Delhi, the main route between Iran and China. We will be in control. We will have a very firm grasp of Asia if we just seize the moment, if we just move in and take this territory.

Which is why this sole figure on his horse on this hot night is important because he falls asleep. He's been on his saddle two days and a night, and the second night, he kind of passes out with exhaustion, slumps forward on his saddle, wakes up 30 minutes later maybe off the road, and he has no idea where he is. It's dark. This is not the kind of territory even today you particularly you want to get lost. This is between Afghanistan and Iran. It's the debatable land between two rival powers, neither of whom have accepted the boundary. It's on the open smuggling route. There are plenty of brigands, and there's two warring armies amassing either side of this road. So it's a bad moment to get lost in a bad place.

And Rawlinson is very relieved when dawn breaks and the

first light appears over the Kuh-e Shah Jahan Mountains. He then becomes very anxious there because the dawn lights up a large halo of dust ahead of him. The halo of dust resolves itself into a very large body of horsemen riding down the valley towards him. And he's alone except for a groom.

So he does what probably any of us would do in that circumstance. He backs into a little side valley and sort of huddles against the wall of the cliff to make himself as small as possible. And these horsemen get closer and closer. And what he sees in the next five minutes changes the course of Afghan history and indeed the history of Central Asia and kicks off the great game with a start because what he sees is not brigands, is not open smugglers, is not Persians, and is not the Afghans of Herat. Instead it's a body of imperial Cossack horse led by this man, who is known as Ivan Vikovich.

In fact, a much more interesting character. He's not a Russian at all. He's a Pole who is arrested in Vilnius, age 14, for anti-Russian activity at school. He's sent off to the steppe in chains, and he makes the decision that rather remain as a kind of serf soldier that he will put himself at the service of his enemies. And he rises as the first great Russian spy in the great game who is sent off multilingual to undo and expose the intelligence networks that are being set up by the British in

cities like Bukhara and Kiva.

Already there's a character called Sir Claude Wade, who, if you like, is the kind of M, the heart of the British web in Ludhiana who's sending off Kashmiri carpet dealers up into the Himalayas with early mapping material and a whole network of what is called intelligences of this period, who are passing letters back to Wade in Ludhiana.

And Wade has been sitting in Ludhiana for about 15 years, gradually accumulating information, sending it down to Calcutta. And he's the tsar of the Himalayas, and he's quite a ruthless character. He's a rather fascinating guy who I got very interested in the course of writing this book called Charles Madson, who is the first British archaeologist in Afghanistan. He's a deserter from the East India Company army who makes his way like a Sufi or a Dervish into the Hindu Kush, and begins digging up all these Gandharan Buddhist sites in Bagram and so on. Wade discovers he's a deserter and manages to blackmail him into becoming a spy and sending regular reports back to Ludhiana. So all these sort of characters sort of snooping at each other.

And no sooner has Rawlinson reported back these figures on the horseback riding past him are not Russians or Afghans, but are Cossacks heading into Afghanistan led by Vikovich. This is the kind of intelligence golden bullet of its day. This is the kind of the weapons of

mass destruction that no one found. This is the yellow cake. This is the big one. He's seen what the hawks have been predicting will happen, which actually looks unlikely that it would happen, which he actually witnesses a party of Russians heading from Tehran into Afghanistan. And he knows that they're from Tehran because his groom recognizes his counterparts, a groom at the Russian legation in Tehran.

So here suddenly is the solid piece of evidence everyone's been looking at that the Russians are interested in Afghanistan. They are opening diplomatic relations.

What happens next is that that evidence is in a sense tampered with, inflated, and manipulated, nothing that would happen like that today, of course.

(Laughter)

MR. DALRYMPLE: It's impossible to image. We have far too many checks and balances, and stove piping just doesn't happen anymore. But this one citing of the Russians going into Tehran becomes the casus belli. And within 18 months, over the next 18 months, a propaganda war is waged. Some of it sounds vaguely familiar. Here's the British ambassador in Tehran, John McNeill. He writes, "We should declare that he who is not with us is against us. We must secure Afghanistan."

There's a lot of discussion about if we go into Afghanistan, what are the duties and the rights of an occupying army? Here's Claude Wade writing in advance of the invasion: "There is nothing more to be dreaded or guarded against, I think, than the over wheeling confidence with which we are too often accustomed to regard the excellence of our own institutions and the anxiety that we display to introduce them in new and untried soils. Such interference will always lead to acrimonious disputes, if not a violent reaction." In other words, effectively, we don't do nation building.

So the decision is made. Lord Auckland, too, is the rather clever, but naïve, governor general, who is surrounded by a clique of Russophobe, hawkish advisors, is persuaded to embark on an ambitious plan.

The British have one major asset; that is, this man, Shah Shuja UI Mulk. Shah Shuja is the grandson of the founder of the modern Afghan empire. In the 1760s, Amit Shah Durrani, creates an empire based out of Kandahar, which includes all of modern Afghanistan, quite a lot of eastern Koristanists in Persia, modern Pakistan, and Kashmir.

As with many Asian empires of this period, the empire rises to a peak and begins to contract, and poor Shah Shuja, who is the

grandson, inherits this mess, age 14, and finally loses it at the age of 21. And he goes into exile in the Punjab where Ranjit Singh takes the Kohinoor Diamond, the largest diamond in the world, which is his one last remaining asset, and he ends up penniless, a British pensioner, in Ludhiana beside his friend, Claude Wade.

Claude Wade keeps him there, gives him a pension, looks after him, encourages him to stay with his pretensions to the Afghan throne. And basically he's tucked away as a pretender for a rainy day. That rainy day comes when Henry Rawlinson -- incidentally Henry Rawlinson also translated the Cyrus Cylinder, which is now on show in the Freer-Sackler. He's the guy who decoded the cuneiform in his day job, after hours when he wasn't riding around in the desert getting lost and spotting Cossacks.

And the plan is made. Auckland is persuaded. The one man who is actually on the spot, Alexander Burnes, is ignored. Alexander Burnes is this sort of ambitious, oversexed, slightly glamorous Scot, who is sent up in this rather sort of enjoyable proto-intelligence mission. The British want to map the Indus and know the geography of Central Asia, and they come up with a very elaborate ruse with which to do it.

They penetrated India as well as military conquests by using the Ganges as the main artery of trade to get their goods in and out. They

want now to do the same for the Indus. The problem is that no one will let them float a raft up the Indus and explore it. So they come up with an elaborate ruse. Ranjit Singh, the ruler of the Punjab -- we've probably got a picture; here he is. Here's Ranjit Singh on his elephant. He's mad about horses. He actually wages war to capture particularly famous stallions.

So the British decide to give him a present from the king five enormous Suffolk dray horses, these huge plow horses from Suffolk. And they say that we can't get them to you unless we float them up the Indus because they'll get all ragged and hobbled by the time they get to you. And just to add to the whole thing, they then ship over to India the Lord Mayor of London's gilt carriage, which has just been decommissioned. And they hide a team of World Geographical Society geographers inside the carriage. And they begin to take a series of -- very detailed scientific readings of the flow of the Ganges, the depth of the water, all the hydraulics of the river, while purportedly taking these cart horses to Ranjit Singh.

They arrive in Ranjit Singh's home. Ranjit Singh calls them little elephants, sort of thrilled by them, but then find they can't charge and is rather disappointed, and they get sort of put out in a pen.

Burnes continues through Afghanistan and then goes up to

Bukhara, comes back. As well as writing all his intelligence reports, he writes a best-selling travel book. He's feted in salons in London. He's given the royal medal of the Royal Geographical Society. He goes over to France. Fatally it's translated into French, and, therefore, the Russians read it.

(Laughter)

MR. DALRYMPLE: And, in fact, his mission had been to see if the Russians were interfering in the caravan cities of Central Asia. They weren't. There were no Russians there. But there are Russians there after they read his book because they realize the Brits are there. Rather like there was no Al-Qaeda in Iraq until we invaded Iraq to get rid of Al-Qaeda, and then Al-Qaeda was there. So there are no Russians in Bukhara or Kiva until Burnes goes looking for them, publishes a book, and alerts everybody to the fact that he's there. So a lesson there for all of us. You can imagine into being the nightmare that most haunts you.

So Burnes has put out all his superiors' noses out of joint because he is this glamorous young man. He's been received by the queen. He's got the gold medal. He goes back to India, and Claude Wade, who is the man sitting in Ludhiana, never been to Afghanistan, but is nonetheless the big Afghan expert. We know those figures. He is determined to ignore everything that Burnes said.

And Burnes makes a very impassioned case that there's no need to invade Afghanistan, that there's no need to get rid of the existing Emir Dosmar Mikan, who has thrown Shah Shuja out. He says, "Dosmar Mikan is very keen to have an alliance with the British. Given a choice, he'd rather ally with Britain than with Russia. All we have to do is throw him a couple of sweeties in the form of getting him back to Peshawar, which Ranjit Singh has seized, and he's our man. But he's ignored largely over interdepartmental jealousies. Claude is determined that Burnes' advice should be ignored, that he should be the man, that his neighbor, Shah Shuja, should be placed on the throne. And in due course, this is the plan."

The man they put in charge of this operation -- my country is very good at finding men like this -- is a complete idiot called Sir William McNaughton, who has had no experience of government at all. He's a former judge. Poor McNaughton should never have left the secretary's office as deputy. He is ignorant of men even to simplicity, and utterly incapable of guiding administrative measures. The judicial line would probably have suited him, and even then only in the court of appeal judging only written evidence.

(Laughter)

MR. DALRYMPLE: In other words, the ideal man to lead an

expedition into Afghanistan through unmapped territory. And Sir William McNaughton is duly appointed. Burnes is bought off. Burnes, who's opposed to this whole thing -- again, this is a familiar British situation -- he's offered a knighthood, and he says, fine. So he was going to be the deputy of this thing he knows is ill placed and unnecessary, but so Alexander Burnes is fine.

So off they all go to Ferozpur, this huge army, the largest army mounted by the East India Company on the run up since the time of Tipu Sultan in 1799. Fourteen thousand East India Company sepoy, 6,000 regular troops, Rujila cavalry, hired by Shah Shuja, 21,000 troops in all. Thirty-eight thousand camp followers, men to cut the grass, look after the sheep, all these sort of paraphernalia you see in these pictures here.

They take 30,000 camels to carry their baggage. One brigadier need 50 camels to carry his kit. The leading general takes 260 to carry all his uniforms. One regiment brings its own pack of fox hounds, 30 camels --

(Laughter)

MR. DALRYMPLE: -- 30 camels are given over -- I'm not making this up -- 30 camels are given over to claret, six camels carry only cigars and cheroots, and one camel carries only eau de cologne.

(Laughter)

MR. DALRYMPLE: According to General Nott, one of the better generals, many young officers would soon have thought of leaving behind their swords or double barrel pistols than to travel without their dressing cases, their perfumes, their Windsor soap, and their eau de cologne. One regiment has two camels carrying the best Manila cigars, while other camels carry jams, pickles, cheroots, potted fish, smoked salmon, hermetically sealed meats, plate, glass, crockery, wax candle, and table linen.

So off they all go. The only thing they haven't remembered to bring is a map because there isn't one.

(Laughter)

MR. DALRYMPLE: They have absolutely no idea where they're going. They're charging over there. If they want to know where Afghan is, straight ahead.

(Laughter)

MR. DALRYMPLE: And it is really that. They head off in the vague direction of Kandahar. One passing Khan, the Khan of Kalat, says, you're taking an army in, but how do you propose to take it out again? And about a quarter of the army dies of thirst and dehydration, and no one has done any research into whether there's any water holes or any of the rest of it. The Baluchis are busy sniping and taking pot shots at everyone

en route.

But in due course, just by the sheer element of surprise and momentum, the British push out of the Khojak Pass into the Dush, south of Kandahar near modern Helmand, a nice peaceful region. And they arrive behind Kandahar, and the rulers of Kandahar flee rather than pick a fight. And Shah Shuja is able to go and pay his respects at the tomb of his grandfather, Amit Shah Durrani, which incidentally is the place where Mullah Omar went in 2001 when he declared himself the leader of the faithful. And like Shah Shuja, took the cloak of the prophet, which is meant to be in the shrine in Kandahar, and put it on him, and declared himself the Amir ul Mumineen.

And the Afghans flocked to Shah Shuja. Meersa Atta, who is one of the more jolly sources I found raiding the different manuscripts in Afghanistan, Meersa Atta says, "The Afghans of Koristan have an age old reputation that wherever the lamp of power burns brightly, let there like moths they swarm. And wherever the table cloth of plenty is spread, there like flies they gather." Well, the table cloth of plenty is spread all around Shah Shuja, and he begins to accumulate troops very rapidly.

Now, as we all know, British intelligence is faultless and flawless, and word comes through that Ghazni has no walls. So having pulled these incredible cannons up the passes of Khojak and down the

Polan and up Central Asia, they decide to leave them behind at Kandahar, only to find that, in fact, Ghazni does indeed have rather good fortifications.

(Laughter)

MR. DALRYMPLE: There's nothing they could do, so all they can do is to lay bags of gunpowder in front of the front gate and charge it. And this is the one major engagement of the invasion, and they take Ghazni in the night and loot it. And within a fortnight of that, Shah Shuja is back in the Bala Hissar, and he's reinstated on the throne that he last occupied age 21. He's now age 51, 30 years in retirement in Ludhiana.

And to add to the sweetness of all this, the Russians have failed at the same time. They tried to take Kiva as a kind of a pro quid quo, and their expedition has been caught in a blizzard and wiped out. So double win. We capture Afghanistan, the Russians capture Kiva. Everyone is fine, and knighthood for McNaughton.

And the Memsabbs are brought up from Shimla. Lady Sale comes with her unmarried daughter, her grand piano, and seeds from her garden in Rulke. The following spring, she's writing, "My sweet peas and geraniums were much admired. And in the kitchen garden, the potatoes, the specialty, thrive." There is cricket, and horse racing, and open air

amateur theatricals, and as winter draws in, snipe and duck shooting, skating and snowman building, and the foxhounds are taken out to hunt the jackals, while Alexander Burnes throws a Christmas party with Scottish reels and bagpipes and presides over it all in Highland dress, complete with kilt and an enormous sporran. Already there's discreet talk of annexing Afghanistan and making Kabul the summer capital of the British empire and India.

Now in this over confidence and cockiness is sown the seeds of future disaster, because rather than move into the Bala Hissar or build some fantastic fortress, the British just lay out their tents in the valley outside Kabul. And they don't build a wall around it even. They just dig a ditch and put up a palisade, and they're overlooked at all sides. It's a completely indefensible position. It is, of course, now the site of the American embassy.

(Laughter)

MR. DALRYMPLE: And the first six months of the year, it's all okay. And it's only then that the British realize that the main problem of acquiring Afghanistan is not that you can't occupy it. You can if you throw in enough resources. It's that it's a huge hemorrhage of funds to keep it occupied. It's an economic problem rather than a military problem. If you, for the sake of argument, were to occupy Iraq, say, you can run off with

the oil revenues, or if you were to occupy the Punjab, you can tax the farmers or the merchants.

But Afghanistan, as Dost Mohammad says, is a land that has only stones and men. And there's nothing with which they can pay for the occupation, so they have to finance it from the East India Company funds. And the East India Company finds that the total cost of occupying Afghanistan is almost exactly equal to the profits of the opium trade. And so it is the cost of it.

So what do you when you find that you're spending too much on your military is you do two things. First of all, you cut your troops, troop numbers. Secondly, you train up an Afghan national army so they can do it for you. Again, it's impossible to imagine any of this happening today.

(Laughter)

MR. DALRYMPLE: There again lies the problem, because the Afghan nobility have been perfectly happy to have this guy installed. There's no particular problem for them. What they don't like, however, is having their estates taken to pay for the Afghan national army. They've survived on the kind of feudal basis that they will be given lands in return for giving cavalry. That's no longer needed if you have a standing army. All their lands are cut. Half their estates are withdrawn. This provokes a huge backlash from all the leading noblemen.

Then because of the cost-cutting, the subsidies that have been promised to the Ghilzais, the tribesmen in between Kabul and the Khyber, is cut in half. And this, again, is seen as breaking the covenant that's been made. There is a long tradition in Afghanistan of paying rugari, which is effectively road tax. And the Mughals, who are quite happy to go and attack half the Muratarami and everything else, always pay the tribesmen. Nadir Shah going into New Delhi in 1739 pays the tribesmen in both directions. You pay the tribesmen, and they leave you alone. They keep the roads open.

And they regard this as a contract. They're not being given money for nothing. It's protection money to keep the roads open. But when the British decide to cut their subsidies by three-quarters, this is effectively a declaration of war. The posts stop the next day. Nothing gets through.

The final thing which pisses everyone off is that the British start womanizing. The women of Afghanistan start cavorting into the British cantonment in large numbers and coming back a little richer in the morning. The sepoy, the Indian sepoy, drinking old monk rum or whatever they're drinking in the fields, in the bazaars of Kandahar, the squaddies having a Friday night, vomiting all over the place. And this is sort of terrible sort of, you know, whoring and drinking in public, which is a

feature of modern British Friday night life, is transferred to Kabul.

(Laughter)

MR. DALRYMPLE: And the mullahs are furious. Everyone is offended. It goes against all the ideas of ethics, and etiquette, and good behavior. And the final straw is when Alexander Burnes seduces this girl. This is a very unwise thing to do. She is the girlfriend of Abdullah Khan Achakzai, who is one of the leading noblemen. And he is not going to stand for this. Here is Meers Atta again.

It happened by God's will that in November 1841, the slave girl of Abdullah Khan Achakzai ran away from his house to the residence of Alexander Burnes. When on inquiry it was found that that was where she had gone, the Khan, beside himself with fury, sent his attendant to fetch the silly girl back. But the Englishman, swollen with pride, cursing and swearing, had the Khan's attendant severely beaten and thrown out of the house.

The Khan then summoned the other nobles and said, now we are justified in throwing off this English yoke. They stretched the hand of tyranny to dishonor private citizens great and small. Making love to a slave girl isn't worth the ritual bath that must follow it, but we have to put a stop to it right here, right now. Otherwise, and this is my favorite quote from Meers Atta, "Otherwise, these English will ride the donkey of their

desires into the field of stupidity."

(Laughter)

MR. DALRYMPLE: "To the point of having us all arrested. I put my trust in God and raise the battle standard of our prophet, Mohammad, and let's go to fight. If success rewards us, it is as we wish. If we die in battle, it is still better than to live with degradation and dishonor." The other nobles, his childhood friends, tighten their belts, and gird their loins, and prepare for Jihad.

So first up for the chop is Alexander Burnes, who's up in bed with this girl when Abdullah Khan Achakzai and his men turn up outside. It's rather like a sort of bad version of the barroom student brawl, except that Abdullah Kahn Achakzai sets Burnes' house alight. Burnes gets into his trusty Afghan disguise and runs out the back, but is caught and is cut to pieces. His head is used as a football, and the trunk of his body is hung up on a meat hook in the bazaar. William McNaughton goes out to negotiate in his top hat and blue tinted spectacles and is shot dead by the Afghan negotiating team.

The British have put all their supplies -- their food and their ammunition -- very cleverly in two small forts with only a small sepoy guard to keep them from being captured. Outside the cantonment, the Afghans capture this within the first 48 hours of the uprising. So the

British have lost their governor, their deputy governor, their food, and their ammunition. The only man to keep them here are the Afghans pulling the cannon uphill.

As you can see, the few barrack blocks now are amid the tents, but still a completely indefensible valley floor mess. There's no way the British can defend themselves there.

It's down to William Elphinstone, the trusty British general. Elphinstone was only given his job because he has very good grouse moors in the Scottish borders, and Lord Auckland wants to go shooting there when he retires. He's riddled with gout. He gets on to his horse, and he falls off his horse. The horse falls on him, and that's the end of Elphinstone.

(Laughter)

MR. DALRYMPLE: So to put it short, the Brits are screwed, and they have no option but to surrender within about three weeks. They eat the foxhounds, and then they eat the dogs, and that's it, and then they have to surrender. They're allowed safe passage -- they're promised safe passage back to India, and they're allowed to take their small arms, but not their artillery.

On the 6th of January, 1842, amid heavy flow -- this has been the coldest and bleakest winter in 20 years -- their retreat begins.

Four and a half thousand troops are all that's left after the troop cuts, 700 of them Europeans, and the rest company sepoy from Bangor and Bihar who have never really seen snow before, 12,000 camp followers, about 18,000 men, women, and children in all. Among those in the retreat is my great, great uncle, this man, Colin McKenzie, who, as you can see, was rather a dressy fellow.

(Laughter)

MR. DALRYMPLE: And he writes in his diary: "At 9:00 a.m., the troops moved across, a crouching, drooping, dispirited army, so different from the smart light-hearted body of men that had appeared some time ago, the men sinking a foot deep in the snow with each step. My heart sunk within me under the conviction that we were a doomed force.

I always remembered as one of the most heartrending sights of that humiliating day fixing my eyes by chance on a little Hindustani girl, perfectly naked, sitting in the snow, with no mother or father near her. She was a beautiful little girl, about two years old, just strong enough to sit upright with her little legs doubled underneath her, hair curling and waving locks around her soft little throat, and the great black eyes dilated to twice their normal size, fixed on the armed men, passing cavalry, and all the strange sites that met her gaze.

Many other young children, as young and as innocent, I saw slain on the road. And the women with their long, dark hair, wet with their own blood. The rearguard had to fight the whole way to Bagrami and pass through a literally continuous line of poor wretches, men, women, and children dead or dying from colds and wounds, who, unable to move, entreated their comrades to kill them and put an end to their misery."

The British repeat the mistake of the beginning of the uprising, and they lose their commissariat on day one. Cavalry the first out, followed by the infantry. The baggage comes last. The baggage is landed on by the jihadists and seized. So by the time that the cavalry arrived at the camping ground by about 4:00 in the afternoon, they're ready for some summer, and they want their tent. There's no sign of either. Six o'clock, still no sign. Eight o'clock. By now the temperature is plummeting, and it's minus 20 degrees. Ten o'clock, it's clear that nothing is coming. The baggage has all been lost, so everyone has to jump camp down on the snow without their supper as best they can. They've got six days ahead of them before they reach Jalalabad. And behind them, the cantonment is already ablaze, and there's no going back.

The Afghanistan troops, because there's a lot of Afghans who are with the British on the British side with the Shah Shuja's men, the Jezulchis, know what to do. They dig a circle in the snow. They build a

fire in the center. Then they fan out body to body with their feet against the fire, and put all their cloaks and their turbans, whatever they have with them, over their bodies. That way it's not a very comfortable night, but they've still got their bits in the morning.

But the poor old Hindustanis, who have never seen snow before, just go down to sleep on the cold in their boots and wake up the following morning to find that their fingers and their toes look like charred logs of wood. They've got unbelievable frostbite. It hits minus, whatever, 30 or something, and they've been sitting on the snow, and they're completely incapacitated.

The following morning, the Afghans come up behind Wazir Akbar Khan, who's leading the resistance, drives the British into the Khoord-Kabul Pass, which just sits outside where these guys are waiting. The British can't see any Afghans. All they can hear is there's some strange metallic ringing noise, a noise so unmistakable in its character that it can never be forgotten by those whose ears have once been startled by the unfamiliar ringing. And this is the noise of the long-barreled jezails -- the ramrods being shoved up the barrels ready for firing.

The British have got this old musket called the Brown Bess, which is an ideal weapon for a European battlefield, but has half the range of a jezail. So the Afghans who have noticed this just put their trenches

halfway up the hills and fired down, and there's nothing the Brits can do to fire back.

Lady Sale and her daughter are with the cavalry at the front. "The confusion was fearful. We had not proceeded half a mile when we were heavily fired upon. The pony my daughter rode was wounded in the ear and the neck. I fortunately had only one ball in the arm. Three others passed through my pashmina near the shoulder without doing me any injury. The pass completely choked up and for a considerable period we were stationary under heavy fire. The sepoy and camp followers, half frozen, tried to force their way not only into our tents, but into our beds. Many poor wretches died around the tent in the night. Many women and children were abducted."

My great uncle at this point is taken hostage and driven back down the Khoord-Kabul Pass past the sign of the ambush that night. "We came across many bloody scenes: sepoy and camp followers who had been stripped and plundered on all side, and such who refused to give up their money and valuables were instantly stabbed and cut down. On seeing us, the poor creatures cried out for help, many of them recognizing me and calling me by name. But what could we do? The Ghilzais had now tasted blood, and clearly showed their tigrish nature, becoming very savage and fierce in their demeanor towards us, demanding that we

should be given up to them for sacrifice, brandishing their long blood-stained knives in our faces, and telling us, 'Look upon the heaps of carcasses around you, though you shall still be among them. You came to Kabul for fruit, did you? How do you like it now?'

As we proceeded, we were met by numbers of the enemies on horse and foot, returning to Kabul, laden with plunder of all kinds. One miscreant had a little Indian girl seated on the horse beside him."

Eighteen thousand men, women, and children leave the British cantonment on the 6th of January. By the second night, they marched up onto the heights of the Tezine Pass, where they're caught in yet another blizzard. There's a second big ambush as they come down the hill. The third night, the Afghans erect a holly hedge covered with spikes and thorns across the narrowest part of the pass at Jegdalek. The troops come to it at dusk, just as it's getting dark. They can't see what's going on. The cavalry tramples the infantry.

From 18,000 left on the 6th, it's down to about 15,000 by the second night. It's down to about 5,000 on the third night. Only 200 make it over the holly hedge in an ambush as they're struggling, impaling themselves on these thorns. And those 200 are exposed at dawn on the hill of Gandamak. They fight on to their last bullet, and then fight on with bayonets. And all of them are slaughtered, except one man, Thomas

Souter, after whom Camp Souter in Helmand, the British base, is now named.

Fifteen cavalrymen make it on another five miles to the Anemelia Gardens built by Shah Jahan, at the same time he built the Red Fort. Here they're offered yogurt and bread by the gardeners. They get off their horses. They accept the gift, and they're clubbed to death. One man makes it on, Assistant Surgeon Dr. Brighton. He survives only because he's rolled his literary magazine in his forage cap to keep him warm, or possibly because he wanted to read it, *Blackwoods Magazine*. And when they have a swipe at him, it goes through the leather spine of the book, but it doesn't go through his skull. He arrives at the gates of Jalalabad where General Sale asks where is the army? He says, I am the army.

That night, Sale puts up lamps on the battlements and blows a bugle to try and help any stragglers in from the valley, but no one comes. "A strong wind was blowing from the south, which sent the bugles all over the town. The terrible wailing sound of those bugles, I will never forget. It was a dirge for us lost soldiers and heard throughout the night had an expressively mournful and depressing effect." This is the young officer, Thomas Seton.

Meanwhile, the other hostages are being driven back, Lady

Sale among them. Describes seeing unbelievable scenes of horror. "We passed 200 dead bodies, many of them European, all naked, covered with large gaping wounds. As the day advanced, several poor wretches of Hindustanis, camp followers who has escaped the massacre of the night before, made their appearance from behind rocks and within caves where they had taken shelter from the murderous knives of the Afghan, and then clemency of the climate.

They had been stripped of all they possessed, and few could crawl more than few yards on their hands and knees, being frostbitten on the feet. Here Johnson found two of his servants, the one had his hands and feet frostbitten and had a fearful sword cut in one hand and a musket ball in the stomach. The other had his right arm completely cut through to the bone. Both were utterly naked, destitute of all covering, had not tasted food for five days. Wounded and starving, they had set fire to the bushes and grass and huddled all together to impart warmth to each other.

Subsequently we heard that scarcely any of those poor wretches escaped from this defile. And driven to extremes of hunger, they had sustained life by feeding upon their dead comrades."

The Afghans divide the sepoy's in two, those that are frostbitten or in other ways incapacitated are simply stripped of their clothing and driven off into the snow where they die. Those who were

able bodied are taken off as slaves to the slave markets of Central Asia, to Uzbekistan. The Uzbeks slave drivers have a particularly hideous way of keeping their slaves in order. They sew a horsehair rope through the clavicle of their captives and attach the other end to their saddle. They then tie the captives' hands behind their back, and you have to run behind the horse to keep up; otherwise, your whole chest frame is wretched open. This breaks a man's spirit within an hour or two.

About 5,000 sepoys end up in the slave markets of Pokhara, reducing the price of slaves for five years. But for the Afghans, this is an almost miraculous delivery, and it's remembered in Afghanistan today in the same way as you remember Yorktown, we remember Trafalgar or the Battle of Britain, the way the Irish remember the Easter Rising, or the Indians remember Gandhi and the Salt March. This is the supreme moment of national liberation. And Shah Shuja, Karzai's ancestor and direct tribal forbearer as head of the Popalzai tribe, is regarded as the quisling, who sold out Afghanistan, while the resistance, encapsulated by Wazir Akbar Khan, is remembered as the supreme national hero. To this day, the diplomatic area of Kabul is known as Wazir Akbar Khan.

Here's Meers Atta again. The story grows, of course, with the telling. "It is said that 60,000 English troops, half from Bengal, half from other provinces, without counting servants and camp followers, went

to Afghanistan. Only a handful came back wounded and destitute. The rest fell with neither grave nor shroud to cover them, and lay scatted in that land like rotting donkeys. For the English loved gold and money so much that they cannot stop themselves from laying their hand on any area productive of wealth. But what prize did they find in Afghanistan except, on one hand, the exhausting of their treasury, and on the other, the disgracing of their army.

It is said that 40,000 English troops had been in Kabul. Many were taken captive en route. Many remained as cripples and beggars in Kabul. The rest perished in the mountains like a ship sunk without trace, for it is no easy thing to invade and occupy the Kingdom of Horasan.

The British had hoped to establish themselves in Afghanistan to block any Russian advance, but for all the treasure they expended and for all the lives they sacrificed, the only result was ruin and disgrace. If the English had been able to take and keep Afghanistan, would they ever have left this land where 44 different types of grape, and other fruits as well -- apples, pomegranates, pears, rhubarb, mulberries, sweet watermelon and musk melon, apricot and peaches, and ice water, ice water that cannot be found in all the plains of Hindustan?

These Indians know neither how to dress nor how to eat.

God save me from the fire of their dull and their miserable chapattis."

(Laughter)

MR. DALRYMPLE: So the British can't have this, so they send their best general, General Pollack, to revenge the dead. The army of retribution assembles in Peshawar, and when the snows melt, up they go. They cut down every tree. They burn every field. They unroof every house. And as a final farewell, having liberated the hostages who had been rather well kept by Wazir Akbar Khan, they destroyed the greatest building in Central Asia, the Char Chatta bazaar built by Shah Shahan the same time as the Taj. They dynamite it, they put Kabul to the flames, and they march out again.

Dost Mohammad, who's been on house arrest in Mussoorie in Bha Dehradun, is let loose. He returns via Lahore, and receives a hero's welcome. There's a deal stitched up with Lord Ellenborough before he sends him back. He says if you do not interfere with us, we will not interfere with you. And the man who the war was fought to unseat is returned to power by the British in a series of negotiations, and he keeps that deal. In 1857, when the first Indian uprising, the Indian mutiny, the first war of independence breaks out, led by soldiers who had been deserted by their -- sepoy who had been deserted by their officers in the Khoord-Kabul Pass, led by Subida Bakht Khan, inspired by Afghan

accounts like Jagnama and the Akbarnama written in the aftermath, published in Persian presses in Lucknow, Agra, and Delhi.

When that war breaks out, the rebels ask for help from Dost Mohammad, and he doesn't send it. He keeps his agreement. When he dies in 1862, Afghanistan assumed its modern boundaries, and many ways, it is this war that creates modern Afghanistan in its current shape. Within a few years of 1862, the phrase "Afghanistan" is being used by Afghans. They used Afghan as a generic term for themselves, but the country as such only really comes into use as a phrase by the 1860s and 1870s.

Afterward, when I was researching this, I thought I couldn't do this properly without retracing the root of the retreat. So the trouble is at Gandamak where last stand took place, this is Tora Bora in the background, and it's Taliban territory today. So to try and get there, I was very lucky. I got hauled in by Amrullah Saleh, Karzai's chief of security, who had read my last book, *Last Mughal*, and he disapproved of it. And he said, you've got to do a better job this time.

(Laughter)

MR. DALRYMPLE: So he kidded me about this fantastic character called Anwar Khan Jagdalak, who was the former Afghan Olympic wrestling champion, and whose about 11 foot tall by 12 foot wide.

And we set off past the American embassy down the route of the retreat. And the point was to reach Gandamak, but by the time we got to Jegdulek where the holly hedge was, the locals had spotted Jagdalak and they demanded he have dinner. They killed a couple of sheep, all the usual stuff, carpets rolled out (inaudible) and mulberry -- six hours of feasting took place, by which time at 4:00 in the afternoon, it was quite clear we weren't going to make it to Gandamak.

And rather disappointingly, we headed back to Jalalabad by Sirobia, by the main road, only to discover that, in fact, we had had an incredibly lucky save because that morning after several months of peace, the police had come out to burn the poppy crops of Gandamak that morning. The villagers had already had their crop burned last year. The compensation that they were due hadn't arrived. They had already warned the government if they tried it a second time, they'd resist. They did resist. They killed, I think, seven policemen, took about 90 hostage, and destroyed five police vehicles. That was all about 10:00 in the morning. So if we hadn't turned up burping at 5:00 in the afternoon, I think I wouldn't be probably standing here with you.

The following day, the elders from Gandamak came into Jalalabad to discuss the jirga. They had a jirga to discuss, negotiate, their hostages, and Jagdalak, who knew them, brought me along. And when

the jirga was on, we sat there with all these all sort of Predator drones taking off from Jalalabad Airport, circling as we had this long jirga. And then at the end of it, the elders came up. And I talked to them through Jagdalak, and I said, you know, do you see any similarities between this war and the old one. And Jagdalak said, it's exactly the same. Both times the foreigners say they come here for their own interest, not for ours. They say we are your friends, we want to help, but they are lying. Whoever comes to Afghanistan, even now, they will face the fate of Burnes and McNaughton, said Mohammad Khan, the elder.

"We are the roof of the world. From here you can control and watch everywhere. We are like a crossroads to every nation that comes to power. But we do not have the strength to control our own destiny. Our fate is determined by our neighbors."

Last month, one of them told me, "Last month, some American officers called us to a hotel in Jalalabad for a meeting. One of them asked me, why do you hate us? And I replied, because you blow down our doors, enter our houses, pull our women by the hair, and kick our children. We cannot accept this. We will fight back, and we will break your teeth. And when your teeth are broken, you will leave, just as the British and the Russians left before you. It's just a matter of time."

"What did he say to that," I asked. He turned to his friend

and said, "If the old men are like this, what will the younger ones be like? In truth," he said, "all the Americans know their game is over here. It's just their politicians who deny it. This is the last days of the Americans," he said. "Next, it will be China."

Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. TALBOTT: We've got about 25 minutes. I wish we had an hour and 25 minutes. I suspect the group here does as well. I cannot imagine a more appropriate visual segue from history to what I referred to at the beginning of the afternoon as the here and now and the future.

So I'm going to ask Bruce, who has lived part of that much more recent history, to provide a kind of pivot or actually pick up on the pivot that you were offering at the end, Willie, and get us into your contemplation of what the lessons were, why they weren't learned, and how belatedly we can maybe apply some of those lessons.

MR. RIEDEL: First, a brilliant book.

MR. DALRYMPLE: Thank you.

MR. RIEDEL: I enjoyed reading it. I enjoyed the talk even more.

The sad tragedy of modern Afghan history, the last 35 years of Afghan history, is that there's at least two, maybe three, maybe four

wars in Afghanistan in the last 30 years that we can say, "which one is the best analogy for the first Anglo-Afghan War?" That's not a good thing. That's the tragedy of the Afghan people today.

I want to focus just briefly on the Soviet war in Afghanistan because during the fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan, it was mandatory reading in the CIA to study the first Anglo-Afghan War and to become an expert on it because that was the role model for what we were going to do the Soviet Union. And there are many parallels. For one, the polemicists who convinced the British that the Russians were coming can be found in the KGB in 1979, who were convinced the CIA was coming to Afghanistan --

[AUDIO GLITCH.]

MR. RIEDEL: There's another parallel. The supreme arrogance that we can do this, this is a simple mission. The Russians decided to invade Afghanistan and try to occupy it with 80,000 men. They used a quarter of a million to invade and occupy Czechoslovakia in 1968. They assumed that Afghanistan must be a third as difficult a problem as Czechoslovakia.

The stupendous lack of interest in learning about the enemy, and then, of course, one other parallel. The Army of Retribution that the British sent after they had been defeated in the Soviet case was the initial

army that they sent in, and army that drove five million Afghans out of the country and became refugees, and in the end, ended up killing one million Afghans.

So I think there's almost a perfect match, parallelism, between the Soviet experience and the first Anglo-Afghan War. And since my next book deals with the Soviet experience, I'm very happy to have that overlap.

But, of course, the \$64 million question that you're here for today is how much overlap is there to the American -- Anglo-American invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. There's one difference that I'll highlight right from the beginning: the British in the 19th century and the Soviets in the 20th century fought long and hard, maybe not very hard, but they fought long about whether they'd do it. It was a calculated, premeditated decision to go in.

I would argue the United States in 2001 invaded Afghanistan in a fit of emotion in response to an attack on ourselves, with very little thought about where we were going, who we were fighting, what we were going to do when we got there, or, indeed what we were going to do when the first American CIA officers arrived on the scene. We frankly went in with no plan whatsoever. The Pentagon was asked for a contingency plan, and they said we don't have one, so George Bush turned to George

Tenant, who at least had some idea of what to do.

That's a significant difference, but it doesn't excuse the ignorance since then. We have, in my view, studied Afghanistan as pitifully little as the British in the 19th century and the Soviets in the 20th century. One concrete examination of that is the Taliban, our enemy. The number of books written by American authors about the Taliban is pitifully small. There isn't a single serious biography of Mullah Omar, our enemy, that's been put out by anyone. And what you see in the unclassified arena is pretty much matched by what you see in the classified arena. Take it from me, I've tried to find it. It isn't there.

The difference that -- the parallel that we didn't hear today, but it's in the book, which is even more eerie, is the first Opium War. The British go into Afghanistan in 1839 and then promptly take their eye off the ball, and decide to go to war with China. And the East India Company's resources are all devoted there. If that doesn't have a parallel for us, I don't know what does. I understand why in the book you put not much attention on that, but from the standpoint of looking at it in retrospect, taking your eye off the ball seems to be almost a congenitive disease for people who go into Afghanistan.

Will it end up in the same place? This is still a work in progress. I don't think there is an inevitability. History is not an inevitable repeat of

previous ones. But we are in a very scary place where we may be finding ourselves in a situation perhaps not like the British army of the Indus, but a lot like the Soviet 40th Red Army.

And here's the scary thing to think about that. The British East India Company survived this disaster, went on to be quite prosperous, won the first Opium War, and made a buck -- made a lot of bucks on it. The Soviet 40th Red Army did not do as well for the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. It did not survive its adventure in Afghanistan. And, in fact, the communist Najibullah government that the Soviets left behind outlasted the Soviet Union by several months.

All of which is pretty scary stuff to think about when you think about the course that the United States and its allies are now embarked upon in 2014. History is not inevitable, but the parallels from the past should give one pause as to how successfully we're going to "transition" in Afghanistan.

MR. TALBOTT: Willie, you didn't mention the Opium Wars, perhaps except in passing. But at the end of your talk, you did mention the Chinese. If you can elaborate a little bit on that.

MR. DALRYMPLE: I'm not an expert on China's position in modern Afghanistan, but from what I've been able to gather in press cuttings, the Chinese have played a bit of a blind there in this one. They

haven't sent in a single soldier. They haven't fired a bullet. They haven't spent much, if any, on development or anything. But they have managed to buy up the entire mineral rights of the country, including, most notably, the Mes Aynak site, which is underneath the silk route Gandaran Buddhist site with about 19 monasteries and one of the great repositories of frescoes and Buddhas in Central Asia, lies the largest copper deposit in the world, which alone is worth 15 times the entire Afghan economy. They've got a 30-year lease on the site. There is a large mining camp already built, which I visited two weeks ago.

And there was a visit last year by some of the security people in Beijing. There are also plans afoot. They're building a railway up the Wakhan corridor to extract all this stuff. They're building road, and it plans to build -- not yet, but there is a plan afoot to build a railway from Mazar to Meshed via Herat, and various road building plans ahead.

I think this, if it happens, is a very optimistic thing, although it's irritating for all of us. Obviously we've lost blood and treasure to see the Chinese mopping up. But the Chinese are probably the one power in the world who really can put pressure on the Pakistanis to reign in the Taliban. And if the Chinese really invest properly in Afghanistan and see a future there for their investment, then there's a possibility the Pakistanis will be pressurized to reign in the Taliban, and we won't have the Taliban

running amuck in the way that they might do. That seems to be a possibility of hope.

There is also, though, a school of thought that says, I've been talking to people in Kabul. Lately they say that the Chinese future is possibly an exaggeration in that certainly the Mes Aynak site hasn't gone ahead. The camp is built. The lease is bought. But the miners are not in place. In fact, many of the miners who were here have gone away after they were attacked by rocket attacks by the Taliban. And one of the archaeologists who tried to liaise with the Chinese miners said to me that, you know, far from being this sort of fearsome, ruthless force all set to sweep in when we sweep out, the Chinese were slightly hopeless, and none of them spoke Dari or English or could communicate in any way with the Afghans. And that the real story was that the Chinese were actually rather failing to live up to all these grandiose plans that they were making last year. And so far, certainly there hasn't been much progress.

So that's an open question, but certainly there is a possibility in the medium term that Afghanistan could become like Burma, like many of these countries, a Chinese satellite providing raw materials for the Chinese industrial machine.

MR. TALBOTT: I'm going to throw this open to as many of you as we can, but I'm going to ask one question that just begs to be

answered, and I wouldn't be surprised if one or two hands that went up would've asked the same question. And that is, that cannot be a happy prospect in the city where you and Olivia live.

MR. DALRYMPLE: The Indians won't be thrilled by that, no.

MR. TALBOTT: To put it mildly, because I assume they, too, have a major strategic interest in what happens in Afghanistan. And if that brings them up against the Chinese, as it were, and there is still a zero sum dynamic to that relationship, that could be a complicating factor.

MR. DALRYMPLE: Karzai told me that he -- I asked about the mineral rights, and he said the liberty to sell them to the Chinese acts as a balance. And he presented it himself as a --

MR. TALBOTT: Balance against the Indians.

MR. DALRYMPLE: Against the Indians, against the Pakistanis. He said that one of the achievements of his rule, as he looked at it, was the way that he had managed to avoid Afghanistan so far becoming an outright proxy war between its neighbors. He said we could've had the Iranians and the Americans fighting here. We could've had the Indians and the Pakistanis using us as a battleground. And my policy, he said, has always been balance our neighbors, and that was the reason he said that he authorized the selling of so many of the minerals to China. Quite a smart move.

MR. TALBOTT: Sir. Please identify yourself.

MR. MALAKA: My name is Oka Malaka. I'm an Assistant Professor, National Defense University. And recently right here as a (inaudible) South Asia Program.

For history's sake, I'm Ali de Durani, originally from Helmand, and I've been to Afghanistan many times doing my research. For the last 10 years or so, the Pashtun have felt they've been sidelined and they're very disaffected. Their hold and power has been waning for a while throughout the war for the last 35 years or so. However, Karzai is not seen as a strong ruler. I personally think he's an idiot, but that's my opinion.

Do you feel that when the Americans leave, and there's already talk that after 2015, the funding will probably die down, and it'll be repeat of 1992, that the Pashtun will consolidate control again for the fact that for the last 250 years, they've been the dominant force there. It is part of our culture to dominate, and they would want that back. And that might cause a lot of repercussions.

What do you feel about that?

MR. DALRYMPLE: Me?

MR. MALAKA: Bruce.

MR. DALRYMPLE: I think, yeah, hard to argue with that. I

think the Pashtun undoubtedly feel excluded from power, that they regard this as a northern regime with a Pashtun fig leaf. They're already -- the government has a very limited writ and great sway with the south already. It's not going to increase after 2014.

The question is, it seems to me, there's no inevitability. As Bruce said, there are all sorts of possible outcomes at this stage. Whether there can be a negotiated settlement between Karzai or his successor government and the Taliban and Pakistan, or whether it is going to be a repeat of 1992, and we're just going to see another civil war, or whether it's going to be repeated of Najibullah and Fortress Kabul. Any of those options are possible, and I think negotiations over the next few months will decide which of those three it's most likely to be.

What I think is not going to happen, and I feel strongly about this, is that I think we're extremely unlikely to see the Taliban roll through Afghanistan as they did in the late 90s. I think the Northern Alliance is too well armed. I think the Taliban are too unpopular.

And the crucial change, which isn't often mentioned, is the degree to which Afghanistan is urbanized in the last 10 years. There's a very, very large increase in the urban population in Kabul, Jalalabad, Herat. Even small provincial cities like Farah have quadrupled in size. And the Taliban have no support in the cities. Even the Pashtuns in the

cities are possibly vaguely sympathetic, but basically unwilling to see themselves march back into that world and all its economic misery.

I think when westerners talk about the Taliban, they object to their treatment of women and the football stadium executions. When you talk to Afghans about the Taliban, they object to the fact there's no electricity, there's no mobile phone network, the economy was a complete mess, and it was a medieval darkness economically. And no one wants that back again, and there's a whole generation of young Afghans of all ethnicities who are now wired up watching the Internet, connected with the world. The world of the little valleys has expanded, and I think it would be very difficult to roll back all that.

MR. TALBOTT: Bruce, a quick addition?

MR. RIEDEL: Just one quick addition. Our mutual friend, Amrullah Saleh, is absolutely determined that the Taliban won't be able to roll back. And they're not going to let it be a repeat of the 1990s, and they're not going to see themselves defeated. And if the United States won't help them fight against the Taliban, then they will look for someone else, and the someone else who's already there -- the Indians, the Iranians, the Russians coming back again. Now the Russians won't make the mistake of putting a big footprint on the ground, but they'll be sure happy to sell as much ammunition to the Tajiks and the Uzbeks as they

possibly can.

And I think that the nightmare that we have avoided for the last decade, a proxy war becomes more and more likely with Pakistan on the one hand and the neighborhood on the other hand.

MR. TALBOTT: That gentleman first, and then we'll come to you. Yes. Please keep it short because we only have about 10 minutes.

MR. KADIAN: Thank you, Mr. Talbott. I'm Rajesh Kadian. I've done some writing on Afghan history as well. Between 1907 and 1937, Turkey was a dominant trainer of the Afghan military, and it's one country that we haven't talked about, including Djemal Pasha for instance. So would you talk something about possible role of Turkey in the near future?

MR. DALRYMPLE: When I was in Tehran two and a half weeks ago, the Turkish president was there -- or the vice president. I can't remember which it was. And there had been tie-ups. And when I interviewed Karzai, I asked about the Turks, and he said that this is very much a power that they're thinking of turning to, and the Turks are very keen on buoying Turkistan on the greater Turkey.

So I think, yes, I think it's an important addition to the discussion.

MR. TALBOTT: And that, unlike some other things that you

raised, would probably be welcomed in some capitals, including this one, I would think.

MR. DALRYMPLE: Yes, fewer objections to that.

MR. TALBOTT: Yes, right here.

MR. ZEITLAND: My name is Arnold Zeitland, and I had the pleasure of reporting on Afghanistan for the Associated Press 40 years ago during a more peaceful time.

How effective do you believe an Afghan national army will be with only 10 percent of Pathans in its ranks?

MR. RIEDEL: I'm not sure your number is correct, to be honest with you. What I have been briefed by our commanders is that overall the numbers are not that distant from the overall Afghan population. But when you get higher up in the officer corps, you obviously have far more Tajiks than you have Pashtuns.

It's a gamble. This is a gigantic gamble they're embarking upon. Back in 2009 when I played a small role in looking at this, my judgment was that the gamble had a 50/50 chance of turning out an acceptable outcome. But by "acceptable," I don't mean victory. I mean acceptable, something that we could feel we have achieved minimal national interest -- 50/50. Today I think those odds are much worse than that. I won't say how much, but they're worse than they were.

MR. TALBOTT: There's a gentleman in the back of the room there. I want to make sure -- great. Sorry. I didn't realize we had mics in the back, too. Good, yes.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: A very quick question. Given the fact that Pashtuns are going to come back to power, and given the fact that the Northern Alliance is too strong right now to repeat the scenario in '92, how big are the odds that Afghanistan is going to split in two parts, Pashtuns and non-Pashtuns, after U.S. withdraws?

MR. DALRYMPLE: Again, that's one of the unqualifiable questions which none of us really know the answer to. I mean, certainly it's a possibility. A fractured state, a civil war, some sort of patched up ethical solution. These seem to be the three options. I don't know which is least likely. What do you think is the least likely?

MR. RIEDEL: Well, let me add one more level of complexity to this. We have been fighting an insurgency in Afghanistan now for 12 years. For the last five years, we've also been fighting an air war in a neighboring country, Pakistan. We call it the drone war. The drone war shows no sign of coming to an end. I think that the odds are that the drone war is going to go on well past 2014.

In the scenario you are laying out of a divided Afghanistan, I can easily envision a civil war going on in which the United States is also

still in the business of fighting a drone war over Pakistan. It's a very, very unpleasant outcome.

Now what's the happy solution? There is a happy solution, and you've alluded to it, which is some kind of negotiated end game. But right now, nobody sees any reason to negotiate. The Americans are going to cut and run. Why not wait until they go and then decide if there's anything to negotiate about?

MR. TALBOTT: I know that there are other questions and very good ones, and I wish we have more time. We're going to have to bring this to a close. But I'll end with a notice about the future that I hope will bring as many of you as possible back here for other conversations, including some I hope with Willie.

Brookings is going to initiate a new digital publishing venture in the early part of the summer. It's going to be called the Brookings Essay, and it'll be available on our website with a lot of good enhancements, as well as through other media.

This is the inaugural author of the first Brookings essay, and I have a little bit of a sense of what Willie is going to be writing about in that piece. And picking up on this last round of questions, he will be looking not only at the shadow on the future of Afghanistan that the next stage of this drama implies, but he'll also be looking at the implications for

Pakistan, which is a very important part of the historical story, of course.

As you said, the lines on the map, both, I would say, in the 19th century, but also in the 20th century, and even in the beginning of the 21st century, don't necessarily tell you where the real politics merge and divide.

So keep an eye on brookings.edu in June. You will see more evidence of what a treasure. Both for our understanding of history and our understanding of current events and what we can glean about the future, this gentleman is here. So please join me in thanking him for being with us this afternoon.

(Applause)

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CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

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