There is No Afghanistan –
The Historic Indeterminacy of Afghan Sovereign Identity

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ABSTRACT

This thesis considers how we conceptualize the meaning of state failure with reference to specific so-called failed states. The term implies certain prescriptions in an era of nation-building projects, and as such imposes certain identity aspects on any state labeled as failed. Yet the specific histories, experiences and political culture of those states must also have meaning – not only in understanding how the current conditions came to be but also in understanding how and why we are able to talk and think about that state in whatever particular ways we do. The importance in this is that much of the academic and policy conversation around state failure takes into account the former, but not the latter.

Accordingly, this project will focus on the specific case of Afghanistan. This country is largely seen as a very straight-forward example of classic state failure. Yet it displays attributes which are quite different from many of those often assumed in both liberal and critical scholarly literature. Further, Afghanistan has a long history of interaction with the West, which this thesis analyses in episodic detail by way of critical discourse analysis.

Analysis is leveled on narratives and discourse on Afghanistan through five historic encounters – the First, Second and Third Anglo-Afghan wars, USSR-US competition in Afghanistan during the Cold War, and the post-September 11 intervention. This analysis suggests that Afghanistan has been assigned a certain indeterminacy in its character through the course of those interactions to the extent that assumptions of statehood which necessarily predate state failure are problematic.

This project contributes to academic knowledge by bringing a careful deconstructive treatment to the notion of "state failure". Through the recognition of binaries underpinning the narratives on Afghanistan specifically and its place as a "failed state" generally, this thesis seeks to disrupt certain "settled" knowledges about state failure too often taken for granted in liberal and critical approaches to state failure alike.

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Acknowledgements

Writing an acknowledgements section feels a bit self-congratulatory. This thesis took far longer than I would have liked and to some extent finishing it feels less like an accomplishment and more like a relief. After some reflection, I decided this is mostly a "me" problem and the people I would thank certainly still deserve that acknowledgement.

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Thanks for reading. I hope you walk away after reading this dissertation feeling like you got something from it. That's all I can ask for.

Introduction – There is no Afghanistan?

Afghanistan today is widely considered the epitome of what it means to be a failed state. A perennial top-10 place holder at the Foreign Policy / Carnegie Fund for Peace annual "Fragile States Index" (outside of the list's first year, where Afghanistan placed 11th), Afghanistan is probably the highest profile U.S. intervention since Vietnam and is now beginning to pose quandaries for a third U.S. Presidential administration.

Yet what it means to be a failed state is not immediately clear. What is the nature of state failure? What does it mean to be a failed state? A common approach to answering these questions has been to diagnose political and economic dysfunctions within the state which purportedly led to collapse. Accordingly, categories and severities of failure abound in literature. Yet it has become increasingly clear through interaction with theoretical and policy literature that there are deep underlying issues within the narratives and empowering truth/knowledge regimes underlying the diagnostic and evaluative discourse.

A core issue is the term "failed state" itself. Rather than being definitive in itself, it is rather descriptive – describing a place that is meant to be a state but for whatever reason is not or cannot be. In practice, "failed state" is a term forming one half of a dichotomy (failed / successful state) that is as much about defining success as it is about failure. It serves to highlight the privileged status of successful, generally Western states allowing them to pursue certain policies that affect other parts of the world. The sovereign power of these privileged (Western) states is confirmed by way of focusing on the vacuum that purportedly exists in failed states where their sovereignty ought to be.

In narrative usage, the failed/successful dichotomy is associated heavily with illegitimate/legitimate, Oriental/Western, uncivilized/civilized, illiberal/liberal. Through historical and contemporary association, the moral supremacy of Western statehood is emphasized and interventionist projects in 'failed' spaces made to seem not only justified but just. The power and status differential between these kinds of states is not narrowed by seeing 'failed states' as developing into successful sovereign states; rather it allows for the exertion of Western power.

This exertion is further validated by a dampening effect that comes alongside the failed label. Identification as a "failed state" marginalizes any possible specific identity of that so-called

failed state, in essence substituting itself as fully indicative of the character of that space. Thus, Afghanistan is seen as a failed state and that is more or less all that it is. Any other attribute of Afghanistan's character is either invisible or infected by this label of failure. The manner in which this state of affairs has come to be in Afghanistan is something which that can be better understood through careful analysis of historical interventions on Afghanistan by the United Kingdom and, more recently, the United States.

This thesis is one attempt at that careful analysis, considering five episodes of Western interactions with and attendant perceptions of Afghanistan. Over the course of this consideration it will be shown that perceptions *of* Afghanistan in these interactions have no real focus *on* Afghanistan. No such thing as *an Afghanistan* is recognized as such – Afghanistan is not the referent object even while it is the object of intervention.

Rather, Afghanistan is overlooked as perceptions of the United States and the United Kingdom are instead focused on American / British interests and generalized dichotomies that make justifying that focus easier. Those dichotomies situate Afghanistan as uncivilized/Oriental/savage/empty. That sense of emptiness, the indeterminate nature of Afghan identity, makes it suitable as a space for certain geopolitical and/or ideological projects to be carried out. Those terms, then, are in fact projects generated by Western interests. Afghanistan is never considered in and of itself – rather it is a place that lacks substance from the Western perspective and that insubstantiality is central to all of those interactions and the formulation of strategic/ideological/security policies.

What we find through this consideration is that "failed state" as a label is only the most recent in a long-running series of dichotomous typifications. In each episode, these dichotomies have purported to describe Afghan character accurately when in fact they create a certain emptiness that seems to make legitimate Western interventions. This thesis intends to explore the implications of this enforced emptiness of Afghan character, how it has justified particular interventions on Afghanistan and what this means for the concept of state failure (and policies of state saving / state saving from the privileged Western standpoint). That exploration will be carried out from within a specific theoretical and analytical approach, utilizing a set of three project questions.

Deconstruction and Discourse Analysis
Explaining content

At its most boiled-down form, this dissertation considers how Western interveners have conceived of Afghanistan and what the implications of those conceptions might be. As such, discourse analysis suggests itself as a natural analytical approach. There are positives and negatives to the approach – both on its own and compared to other approaches – which will be discussed later in this sub-section.

Five episodes of Western intervention are analyzed: the first, second and third Anglo-Afghan wars; the USSR invasion of Afghanistan (specifically the US response to same) during the Cold War and the post-September 11 intervention. While a great deal of narrative material is available on the most recent intervention from a kaleidoscope of perspectives, this was not the case for earlier interventions. Availability of narrative material necessarily informed both analytical approach (documentary analysis) and content selection. In interests of creating regularity in content selection, this project considers official government documentation and articles published in major media outlets for substantive analysis. For purposes of historical context - an important consideration when tackling discourse analysis – other documents such as commentary and memoirs are brought to bear. Despite this, the vast majority of research materials comprise of government documents and newspaper articles / editorials[1]

Official government documentation includes but is not limited to: parliamentary and congressional proceedings, white papers, intelligence reports, speeches, official inter-departmental correspondence and treaties. Newspapers used include The Times, The New York Times and to a lesser extent The Guardian. These were chosen based on reach, amount of content and a willingness to publish editorials from influential members of society across the political spectrum. Another aspect of content selection had to do with availability – each of these sources has a *relatively* easily navigable digital archive system. Other sources are at times used, but in these cases content comprises such things as the publication of a Presidential speech or the text body of a treaty.

Except in cases of providing historical context, only documents originating from within the society of the intervening party are used. One of the purposes of this project is to reveal ways in

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[1] Newspapers used are The Times, The New York Times, and to a lesser extent The Guardian. These were chosen based on a number of factors

which agency over the complexion of Afghan identity – and the articulation of that identity – have been denied. As such one might ask legitimate questions over this decision. This decision was come upon for a number of reasons. One reason is content availability. Particularly during the 19th century there is a dearth of written material native to Afghanistan. What exists is largely related to religion and to a lesser extent bureaucracy. This situation is somewhat improved coming toward more contemporary times, but language, archiving and accessibility are still problematic. Those problems might have been overcome, but ultimately it was decided not to make the attempt. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, using discursive material from Afghanistan coming from recent times (where it is more available) and not earlier encounters is methodologically problematic. Secondly, attempting to take on difficult Afghan documentation would make this project's focus uncomfortably broad. After all, the purpose of this project is essentially to deconstruct Western narratives about Afghanistan, revealing their self-referential nature and the mechanisms by which the create a *Western knowledge* of Afghanistan as an empty place. The purpose of this project is not to make clear Afghan self-knowledge, but to show how any why any possibility of a recognized Afghan voice about itself was made fundamentally impossible (to even conceive). All West-Afghan interactions which spurred the production of more documentary materials were included with a distinct chapter. One interaction with less documentation was considered but rejected for a chapter[2]. It was still included as a sub-section of the Cold War chapter as a way of helping to set context.

Interventions were identified based on the availability of documented discourse. That is to say, any action by a "Western" power in or on the geographical space contemporarily called Afghanistan, which saw discussion in either well-circulated (and credible) media or within governmental forums was analysed. Of all the interventions, the first Anglo-Afghan war had the smallest amount of discursive content available. There was very little popular media discussion of the conflict and the bulk of government discourse came by way a set of cables. On the basis of actual documentary materials available a case could potentially have been made for excluding this intervention. It was included on the strength of two considerations: it was Britain's first intervention in/on Afghanistan and analysis found that in many ways it set the "tone" and understanding of Afghan character for later interventions.

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[2] This refers to a set of U.S. diplomatic cables in the first half of the 20th century. These items internally discussed how to handle Afghan overtures of establishing formal diplomatic relations. The notion was eschewed by the U.S. for a few reasons – notably the relative insignificance of Afghanistan and a preference to deal with Afghanistan through British intermediaries, as a concession to British preferences.

Why discourse analysis?

This dissertation uses discourse analysis – or more properly critical discourse analysis – as a tool for understanding how we understand and "know" Afghanistan in terms of state failure. Critical discourse analysis holds that what we say and what we know – and thereby how we act – are mutually constitutive. Thus, understanding how we've come to talk about Afghanistan in particular ways through historical inquiry has the potential to tell us something different about contemporary approaches to Afghanistan as a failed state and security dilemma.

There have been numerous attempts to explain state failure as a phenomenon and suggest policy goals and responses to the challenges therein. These are discussed in some detail in Chapter 2 along with critiques of, broadly speaking, a number of liberal and critical approaches to understanding state failure. In a very general sense, these critiques suggest that most analysis of state failure situates any possible understanding of state failure within an already well-defined knowledge of the social world. Thus, once state failure is explained there is nothing particularly unique or unexpected about it – there are mechanisms which cause it that are already known and understood within the intellectual paradigm used.

At its core this is a problem of specificity versus generalized explanation. One thing this dissertation seeks to prove is that while generalization is an unavoidable aspect of social inquiry it has powerful negative effects. It marginalizes aspects of social phenomena which don't fit within generalized explanations – it makes them unheard and indecipherable. This is a problem of both justice and pragmatism. Harm is done to the marginalized by a certain stripping away of agency. At the same time, relegating certain concepts or places to the margins, by rendering them indecipherable, makes effective policymaking in those areas problematic at best. That is to say, by assuming knowledge we create blind spots in our knowledge. For this reason, disturbing the generalized with the specific is not only a critical operation but a necessary and corrective operation.

It is for this purpose that this dissertation turns to Derrida to inform its discourse analysis. Other approaches have been suggested as plausible as well. From critical theory approaches such as post-colonial inquiry or neo-Gramscianism (post-Marxism) have been suggested. While these approaches have something to offer, they were ultimately set aside in favour of Derrida.

In the case of neo-Gramscianism, the approach is interested in critical discourse analysis and questions the centrality of certain static ideas of state-ness. These are attractive aspects, but the centrality of historical materialism to the approach seems counterproductive in this case. This approach leads to questions of hegemony and a sort of neo-imperialism that leads to staking normative positions that are at the same time unconvincing and unhelpful to suggesting constructive ways forward in Afghanistan.

Post-colonialism is a somewhat trickier consideration. It is a very broad theoretical approach – with many post-colonial authors even mobilizing neo-Gramscianism, for instance. This approach is often concerned with discursive knowledges about the nature and identity of former colonies – and how that informs current policy toward those spaces. In that sense, although Afghanistan was never a colony this project is within or at least adjacent to post-colonial theory. Edward Said's theoretical approach has a lot to suggest it and it would have been an appropriate choice to inform this project. However, much of contemporary post-colonialism is concerned with economic / material inequities, North/South subjugation and repackaged colonial norms. While these critiques raise important points and ask important questions, their underlying assumptions are similarly inappropriate for this project. Finally, this project is less concerned with criticizing specific assumptions about Afghanistan's nature or character and more concerned with proving the externally determined indeterminacy of Afghan character – and the dangers attendant to assuming the correctness of that imposed episodic "knowledge".

Addressing critiques

The use of discourse analysis – informed by Derrida's deconstructive tactics – requires some further explanation in terms of criticisms often leveled at such approaches. This project's analytical approach will be considered "postmodernism" by many academics, and that will be an intentionally pejorative label. It is not a label which this author would claim – to be explained shortly – but it is still a criticism which must be dealt with.

One potential difficulty is Quentin Skinner's "mythology of doctrines". Skinner described it in this way:

> I turn now to [an] of inadequacy which marks the method of concentrating instead on the "idea" itself as a "unit," and so of "tracking a grand but elusive theme" either throughout a period, or even "over many centuries." The danger that such an approach may simply

engender empirically false claims has already been skillfully pointed out for at least one classic case of this tendency to find what has been called "spurious persistence." (Skinner 1969: 35)

Skinner's mythology of doctrines in this sense is a strong warning for this project. After all, this dissertation looks at five different historical cases of intervention, each with its own unique historical context. It would be easy to assume a connection of certain core ideas from one episode to the next and then simply craft analysis to justify that, spuriously. It is a well-taken warning, and this project does strive to avoid such a misadventure. In this case, discourse analysis takes into account the very specific contexts of the times. Further, narrative discontinuities are drawn out and talked about as much as any apparent continuities of ideas. While there does appear to be a sense of borrowing on narratives from previous encounters to "know" Afghanistan in subsequent interventions, that may or may not be the case and is largely unprovable. There are times when previous interventions are referred to as ways to understand Afghanistan, and those are discussed, but it is important to note that this dissertation does not try to argue a specific and continuous discourse on Afghan-ness with one thing leading necessarily to the next. Here the point in drawing out similarities revolves primarily around the way in which Afghanistan and defined, redefined, forgotten and then re-emergent suited to the particular and contextual needs of the particular times in which interventions take place. This is about a historical and continuing indeterminacy rather than a determined set of assumptions which are themselves totally knowable and can explain our interactions with Afghanistan. It's not about what we "know" about Afghanistan as much as it is about how malleable and indeterminate those "knowledges" are, and how our treatment of Afghanistan discursively makes that difficult to recognise.

One common theme in critiquing postmodern approaches is the so-called "vow of silence". Deconstruction, it is said, is concerned with taking apart arguments exclusively… unable to make authoritative statements because doing so would open the author up to the exact same sort of critique which he or she has leveled in the first place. Colin Hay makes a detailed case against postmodernism and, considering his stature in the academic realm, answering his critiques should be sufficient.

Hay argues that postmodernism is faced with tension between two foundations of postmodern thought: epistemological skepticism and normative emancipatory positions. They must either implicitly abandon their desire not to suppress otherness to practice emancipatory

politics, or they must forgo their normative desires in favour of intellectual purity. Postmodernism generally toward the latter, argues Hay. This is dangerous in that it ultimately leads to a certain support for a negative "complicity in the status quo" brought on by this self-imposed silence. (Hay 2002: 246)

It is true that epistemological skepticism and normative emancipatory positions are at some tension. Critical deconstruction is at odds with making strong knowledge claims – it is rather the process of picking apart assumptions underpinning strong knowledge claims. Yet lauding this as a damning critique of critical discourse analysis is an oversimplification and misunderstanding of the aims of deconstructive practice. As argued by Lyotard (Lyotard 1987: 6) and at various times Derrida[3], the goal is not to produce perfect or even authoritative knowledge – postmodern approaches hold that no such knowledge exists. Rather, the point is a kind of *constructive deconstruction* – by bringing to light problematic assumptions within certain discourses on knowledge it is possible to suggest improvements. Not perfections – improvements.

This is the purpose of this project. This project does not seek to make an authoritative statement about where we've gotten Afghanistan as a failed state (and how to fix it) wrong followed by prescriptions to fix those things. The point is to bring to light difficulties in our assumptions about Afghanistan and Afghan-ness and suggest different ways to think which may be both more productive and more just. The key terms here are *more* productive, *more* just – rather than attempting to lay claim to findings that are the epitome of productiveness and justice.

It is the case that there are academics who have taken on epistemological skepticism as an end in its own right. This may or may not be helpful in the broader field of political theory. It is not, however, what this project is about – this project aims for constructive deconstruction with an eye toward pragmatism.

Toward this end, the use of Derrida was deemed felicitous. Many would find this counterintuitive, so it requires some explanation. Few would tend to think of Derrida as a pragmatic scholar and there are those who find his work to be obtuse rather than revelatory. There is some justification for these feelings but there are other considerations. Firstly, Derrida's later works take social problems/questions seriously – and he speaks convincingly on how deconstruction can be used to this end. A central component to this is the concept of

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[3] See for instance Part 1 of Derrida 1992 where Derrida discusses deconstruction and its relation to justice – or deconstruction *as* justice… and justice as a pursuit rather than an attainable concept.

autoimmunity – the tension within an idea construct that causes it to break down (or go into discursive crises) when dominant discourses attempt to assume a single, concrete, authoritative (and unchanging) definition. (Derrida 2005) This is a specific take on the problem of epistemological skepticism versus normative position-taking, and his take on the notion of a democracy (to come) suggests a way to look for constructive progress while being sensitive to the problems of staking a static normative position. Further, Derrida has written extensively around the notion of sovereignty and its internal tensions (Derrida 2005, Derrida 2009) and these works were instrumental to shaping this project's argumentation.

This project is in part demonstrative. Through discourse analysis it shows that what is (believed to be) "known" about Afghanistan is formed by a string of often discordant historical narratives. Those narratives rely on certain tropes and binary conceptualizations which contain internal inconsistencies and tensions. Our contemporary knowledge about Afghanistan relies on stories which are at odds with themselves, self-destructive and internally contradictory. It has worked in large part because Afghanistan is not seen as having a character of its own. The referent object of these stories is rather the Western intervener, be it England or the United States. Stories told about the nature of Afghan identity in each intervention helps to reinforce certain knowledges about the valorous character of the intervener rather than reflecting interaction with characteristics of Afghanistan itself in such a way as to find productive solutions to real issues of the time. This is more easily seen by way of situating the interventions in the context of their given times – so we can see how Afghanistan's "traits" are articulated with reference to the tactical and discursive needs of the geopolitical context of the time rather than anything specific to the Afghan experience in itself. Discourse analysis and deconstruction are most suited to this task.

As an example, one might consider the terms "barbarian" and "savage". In contemporary usage these are for the most part functionally synonyms, with "savage" generally being understood to be a somewhat more insulting label. In 19th century Britain, the words had related but distinct meanings. Contemporarily an historically, the labels have "civilized" as their referent counterpoint. In 19th century Britain, "barbaric" and "savage" had functionally distinct meanings, with "barbaric" referring to social groups with many aspects of civilization but in a crude and underdeveloped sense. Thus, India was barbaric. "Savage" would refer to social groups which had no understanding or experience of anything like civilization whatsoever – tribal groups in Africa

which had neither developed cities and urban government nor been ushered into these things through colonization were savages.

Afghanistan and Afghans were typified by one, the other, or both in turns (and sometimes simultaneously). This speaks to a certain uncertainty about the character of Afghanistan and Afghans which arises again and again in this study. This is in turn indicative of a broader tendency identified by this dissertation – an indeterminacy of Afghan character both empowered by and empowering a lack of engagement with Afghan-ness from a Western perspective in favour of positioning Afghanistan in relation to Western valour.[4]

Project Questions

This thesis posits three questions.

Why are we able to talk about failed states?

Others have argued that the discursive act of labeling outlier states as 'rogue' due to an apparent refusal to integrate into the international (liberal) community of states retroactively brings about a certain rogue-ness in the labeler. (Derrida 2005, 2009)[5] These arguments suggest ways in which we can imagine that the loss of sovereignty implied in the label of 'failure' introduces a crisis in the very notion of sovereignty and success. Sovereignty and statehood, then, are very susceptible to a certain self-destructiveness (auto-immune dysfunction) if not handled carefully. In the case of interventions and state-building, intervening upon a "failed state" in order to rebuild it with a particular conception of how sovereignty should look is at tension with the notion of sovereign self-determination. Whether the intervention itself is justifiable on humanitarian grounds is not at issue. Rather, the way in which we talk about failed states as needing to be intervened on and fixed in a very particular way is destructive to the fundamental concept of sovereignty in itself.

This is particularly difficult in that narratives on liberal statehood seem to offer little choice *but* to talk about failed statehood. Understandings of successful, "functional statehood seem almost to demand a certain differentiation from outliers. "Good" states are defined in some aspects by what they are not – they are not these "failed" states. In the liberal state system

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[4] Afghanistan is referred to in terms of savagery and barbarism. For examples, see: Low (1878) and Times (1871, 1872, 1877, 1878a and 1878b)

[5] The act of labeling a state as 'rogue' strips away the justness of its sovereign power, suggesting its power is wielded illegitimately. However, the notion of sovereignty is conceptually sacrosanct and doing violence to the notion of another state's sovereignty is in itself a fundamentally illegitimate use of sovereign power.

narrative, successful statehood is assumed to occur naturally if a state plays by the rules, adopting particular models of democracy and capitalism.

This both justifies patterns of social relations within the 'international community' and gives grounds to explain how and why some states face dramatic internal crises. States facing these crises are ultimately at fault for their problems because they failed to follow this well laid-out roadmap to success. To understand our social world, we've settled into particular dominant narratives of intelligibility which refer to assumed underlying 'truths' about the nature of states and interstate relations in order to make it intelligible and allow us to make informed decisions about the confusing world around us.

What is assumed to be 'known' about Afghanistan and how do those knowledges empower dominant narratives of intelligibility?

This question appears to be largely descriptive, being filled in with particular character traits of the Afghan polity. Initially that is how this project moved forward. Over the course of analysis, however, it became clear that all the various 'knowledges' about Afghanistan that were assumed to encapsulate its character shared an important discursive touchstone. Afghanistan has always been situated in Western interactions as an indeterminate space, empty of particularity and importance on its own. In different interventions Afghanistan was typified in very different ways – though some threads of continuity are shown to exist in this project's analysis. Those threads of continuity consistently point to Afghanistan's assumed emptiness, as a space which could be defined and redefined at each interaction to fit comfortably within the dominant, West-focused narrative of intelligibility.

Within discourses of successful statehood, state failure and the security concerns / humanitarian crises in the contemporary context of a Global War on Terror, Afghanistan's indeterminacy enables very specific – and self-destructive – conceptions of sovereignty to be mobilized. Afghanistan identity is (re)constructed utilizing empty signifiers of Afghan character which, at the times they were used, were little more than ways of defining the intervener as justified and valorous while having little to do with Afghanistan itself.

How do dominant assumptions about sovereignty and successful statehood by intervening parties limit attempts to understand the specificity of the Afghanistan crisis?

These assumptions are by their nature generalized, intended to be applicable with little regard to context. That is to say, statehood and sovereignty are assumed to have a natural, static state. Assumptions about the nature of sovereignty and statehood are foundational to how the international community and norms of intervention, success and failure are situated. These in some way form the bedrock on which orthodox analyses of various geopolitical situations rest.

These static assumptions about the (natural) nature of sovereignty and statehood may become problematic when held up to individual political events. When specific situations are a challenge to orthodox knowledges about the nature of the social world, that orthodoxy would need to adjust to or marginalize these new specificities. What we find in the case of Afghanistan is that any possible attempt to understand the unique nature of Afghan political character in the context of various interventions in Afghanistan over the years is silenced. This marginalization is accomplished through the use of binary oppositions in which Afghanistan is assigned a certain indeterminacy, made empty. This serves to reinforce those orthodox, largely static notions of successful statehood and just sovereignty.

Mobilizing the Project Questions

This project critiques orthodox assumptions of sovereignty which cast it as a stable and naturalized construct. It calls to account assumptions that failed states occur only because of a sovereign state's failure to maintain its sovereign power/responsibility. Other critical accounts make similar critiques, but may inadvertently reproduce certain orthodox assumptions in cases where, as in Afghanistan, sovereignty proper cannot meaningfully be understood to have ever resided. It is critical to expose the very particular journey that Afghanistan took to "statehood", wherein it was formally considered to be a state but informally "known" to not hold true sovereignty. This deconstructive undertaking shows that narratives and interventions on Afghanistan across time have denied Afghanistan even the possibility of sovereignty. Further, the language which is used to "know" Afghanistan – in orthodox and critical accounts alike – ignores this historical specificity and thus effectively erases it, further reinforcing Afghanistan's indeterminate "nature".

This assumption of Afghanistan's indeterminacy recurs in each intervention from a Western power since at least the early 19th century. Again and again, specifications of Afghan character are made in ways which justify that Western intervention – in the particularly geo-political context of the time – and in ways which reinforce a particular and valorous depiction of

the intervener. In this way, Afghanistan's assigned character traits are distorted reflections of what are taken to be dominant Western character traits. Over time this has brought into being a number of narrative binaries which situate a malleable and changing (indeterminate) Afghanistan persona as definable only in terms of what it was not. And what is was *not*, in these cases, was something cast as quintessentially Western.

One way to give space for understanding the highly specific history and character of Afghanistan is to disrupt naturalized knowledges about sovereignty by which Afghanistan is depicted in the failed state discourse. Recurring and repressive understandings of Afghanistan as essentially empty are reinforced by the naturalization of these dominant notions of sovereignty. In this way, Afghanistan is *made faceless by the face* – stripped of any possible identity by being forcibly identified by signifiers that are ultimately intended to reinforce certain knowledges of the West. This disruption will be carried out through discourse analysis, along with the identification (and deconstruction) of binary oppositions within those narratives.

Narrative Analysis and Binary Oppositions

This thesis disrupts the idea of that staticity by demonstrating how any possibility of understanding events in Afghanistan was subverted by use of these binary narrative constructs. In doing so, this project seeks to demonstrate a certain self-destructiveness in how dominant norms and terms are mobilized in an attempt to justify orthodox approaches to state building and interventionism. Because notions of sovereignty are stabilized by holding them up in reference to a false identity construct (empty, indeterminate Afghanistan), this particular type of straw-man justification in fact subverts the possible usefulness of sovereignty as a concept, undermining it and making it actively harmful to productive international security policy.

Accordingly, this project critically analyzes and deconstructs (non)perceptions of Afghanistan in interactions between the United Kingdom / United States on the one hand and Afghanistan on the other. Five separate interventions are analyzed – three Anglo-Afghan wars, US actions during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the post-9/11 intervention. In so doing, this thesis reviews those relations in terms of a number of binaries:

Continuity/discontinuity. Manners of perceiving Afghanistan over the course of the last 180 years have in many ways not changed significantly. Certain aspects of narratives on Afghan-ness remain quite continuous. Simultaneously there are ruptures in those narratives, discontinuities that can threaten the stability (staticity) of dominant discourses on Afghanistan.

Continuities such as the indeterminacy of Afghan character, a certain savagery attributed to Afghanistan, the centrality of external ideological conflict and underlying Orientalist tropes all suggest that there are fundamental similarities between how Afghanistan is understood in the contemporary age of state building/saving with the former era of colonial subjugation. Further, despite being physically intervened upon Afghanistan has never truly been the referent object of those interventions, but rather a convenient space for those interventions – directed somewhere else entirely - to occur.

Yet discontinuities are inherent to this discourse as well – some internal and some not. Most obviously, at one point discourse flows from a British standpoint and then later from an American lens. Internal to the discourse are tensions wherein justifications for intervention shift – often within a given intervention. At different times in a single intervention Afghanistan might be made up of heroes or villainous savages, intervention might be to save the Afghan, teach the Afghan a lesson, or put the Afghan in his/her place. At other times Afghanistan may be intervened upon but never so much as mentioned except as a set of place names. These discontinuities suggest that any assumedly natural manner of understanding of Afghanistan was never pre-ordained. There are other ways that these historical interactions with Afghanistan could have played out in such a way as the Afghan space could be seen in a completely different light today. These discontinuities will show that the apparent staticity of discursive knowledge surrounding Afghanistan is anything but static or natural. The tensions inherent in these continuities/discontinuities are internal to the rest of these binaries.

Identity/Non-identity. From the very first British intervention on Afghanistan, Afghanistan is seen as an empty space – a non-entity. This emptiness in itself justified intervention during the first Anglo-Afghan war. In later interventions when some more substantive justification was seemingly called for that emptiness paradoxically made it possible for Afghanistan to be assigned differing roles and identities suitable to the wider current geo-political context.

Civilized/Savage. This dichotomy is continuous through all West-Afghan interactions. In this dichotomy, Afghanistan is always savage and the Western intervener is always a force of civility. At times, however, internally some Afghan actors are argued to either represent some bit of civilized gestalt or at least to be a "good savage", working alongside the forces of civilization despite being barbaric and incapable of understanding true civilization as such. Once again

remember that "savage" and "barbarian" are used interchangeably, despite meaning somewhat different things historically in Britain. This is because the terms were functionally used interchangeably within British discourse on Afghanistan – indicative of the discursive malleability of Afghan character.

Western/Oriental. Similar to the civilized/savage dichotomy, this is more straightforwardly a dichotomy of "us versus them". It was particularly resonant during British interventions but can be seen in later American interventions as well. Afghanistan is at times filled with particular Oriental archetypes and situated then against particular archetypes of Western-ness.

Ideology/Security. This dichotomous relationship is somewhat less easily delineated. Afghanistan served as the geo-political site for various power "games", first various iterations of the so-called "Great Game" between the UK and Russia then later between the USA and USSR then the USA and radical Islam. At times these interventions have been justified in terms of security – the security of British India, the security of American allies during the Cold War, the security of the all peace-loving states during the global war on terror. At other times these interventions have been justified in terms of ideology – British civility versus Bolshevism (or previously general Russian crudeness), Democracy versus Communism, Civilization versus Terror. This set of binaries is intrinsically related to:

Actors/Tactical Spaces. In serving as the geo-political site for these various power games, Afghanistan was given no agency. Rather than serving as an actual actor in any of these great struggles, Afghanistan was rather merely the board on which the games were played. Although Afghans themselves were always participants in the conflict, they were always either minor allies or unwitting catspaws of the opposition. This dichotomy then is constituted by the distinction between players and non-players who are used in the game as instrumental pieces.

Formal/Informal. Formally Afghanistan can be seen to be a state, to possess sovereignty and to be accorded treaty rights but in practice and informally its rights and sovereignty are not taken seriously. As a dichotomy, this arose more recently, becoming particularly important as notions of liberal statehood and the universal right to sovereignty became important in the wake of the First World War. This is central to the final two dichotomies highlighted – which are

themselves fundamental to the current intervention in Afghanistan and attendant state-building project. It allows Afghanistan to be perceived simultaneously as a state and a non-state.

Sovereignty/non-sovereignty. Afghan sovereignty is historically never even conceived of or, at best, discussed then dismissed with little real consideration. Sovereignty is something reserved for the forces of civilization and is wrapped up in a mixture of power and the sophisticated understanding of how to effectively / justly wield that power. Later Afghanistan is supposed to be in possession of sovereignty, but that is a largely symbolic supposition, while in practice Western powers could ignore that supposed sovereignty at need – informed and empowered by all previously discussed dichotomies.

Failed/successful state. Since the 1990s, Afghanistan has been considered a 'failed state'. The specificity of Afghanistan's experience with concepts such as sovereignty and statehood undermine this claim. When Afghanistan has routinely been denied any semblance of sovereignty or statehood throughout all its Western interactions it is difficult to countenance this idea that Afghanistan is in fact a state which has failed.

It is important to be mindful that these binary oppositions are not about the opposing terms as such. Rather those oppositions are explanatory of tensions internal to central concepts in the "Afghanistan as failed state" narrative. For instance, the sovereign/non-sovereign binary is central to understanding what is meant by a failed state – a state (thereby deserving of, and naturally holding sovereignty) but one which has failed (lost either the will/capacity or right [rogue states] to sovereignty). A failed state is simultaneously and by turns sovereign and non-sovereign. The binary concept concurrently legitimizes interventions on a non-sovereign failed state by a valorous sovereign intervener, whose sovereignty is underpinned and emphasized by the act of intervention so long as the *point* of that intervention is to return the failed state to its purportedly natural state of sovereignty. In both of these situations there is tension within the binary conceptualization which strongly call into question the validity of underlying 'knowledges' informing this narrative.

Both parts of each opposition are necessary to how their referent object is "known" as well as being in some way autoimmune. They also constitute both Afghan identity and western identity. This being the case, each binary term needs to be talked about in the context of how they both inform and destroy identity knowledge.

Chapter 1 – Statehood, State Failure, and Afghanistan

This chapter broadly discusses narrative themes on Afghanistan and ways of positioning Afghan character from the standpoint of British India as well as more recent American interactions. It describes, with broad strokes, how certain narrative themes that informed British discourses on Afghanistan are still powerful in how we understand Afghanistan contemporarily. This has empowered current policy tropes on state failure and terrorism as they apply to Afghanistan.

Those tropes, typically framed as dichotomies, were discussed in the introduction. What we find through analysis of West-Afghan interactions is that interventions have tended to simultaneously lean on one or more of those dichotomous typifications of Afghanistan while also tending to reinforce the supposed naturalness of those dichotomies. Not every intervention mobilized every dichotomy, but in all instances Afghanistan's non-identity (indeterminacy) is central to the mobilization of all other discursive positioning. This makes it possible not only to assign negative values from those dichotomous relationships to Afghanistan, but effectively to silence any possible alternate manner of understanding the actors and relations involved in that intervention. For instance, when Afghanistan is situated as a space empty of any meaning other than as a home of barbarism and terrorism, then any voices that might arise out of or on behalf of Afghanistan are silenced because terrorism is the enemy of freedom. This effective "silencing" feeds from and reinforces the notion of Afghan non-identity. What's more, that silence is important to the maintenance of dominant discursive stability. To a large extent, the valorous Western identity tied up in a liberal international system of right-acting states relies on a relatively silent, but ominous and dangerous 'other'.

Today Afghanistan has a complicated relationship with these dichotomous tropes, being connected in symbolically powerful (and fundamentally flawed) ways with narratives on both terrorism / civilization and state failure / state building. This contemporary state of affairs did not spring up fully formed, however. Narratives on Afghan-ness formed over many decades and over several West-Afghan encounters. Throughout, Afghanistan has typically been conceived as a place empty of meaning (non-identity/identity), outside of discursive regimes on the nature of the world. During the era of colonialism and British empire, Afghanistan was on the margins of colonial / imperial experiences (savage/civilized & Oriental/Western). It was subjected to certain interventions that seemed to have some colonial and/or imperial complexion without Afghanistan ever actually being a colonial or imperial object. During the

Cold War, Afghanistan was a non-aligned power that became a battleground between the United States and the Soviet Union, both of which claimed to be acting on the behalf of the Afghan people. After the events of September 11, Afghanistan has become ground zero of the War on Terrorism as well as the centerpiece of American state building practice, playing the part of both victim and villain in the piece (ideology/security & actor/tactical space).

Afghan Negativity and Indeterminacy

In each intervention, Afghan identity was conceptualized in different ways that served to justify those interventions, to make them seem natural. Each intervention was different, but there was a certain discursive continuity from the First Anglo Afghan War through today. A central line of that thread revolves around a certain indeterminacy or emptiness. This sense of a malleable Afghan could be moulded to fit into the ideological discursive needs of the time.

The British conceived of the Afghan identity as including all negative attributes of the Oriental with none of the positive (of their favored Orientals). This positioned Afghanistan as an uncivilized hinterland where Britain was justified in carrying out warfare to protect the boundaries of British civilization. (Though how this was expressed changed significantly over the course of the three Anglo-Afghan wars, as following chapters will show.) During the Cold War, the US conceived of Afghans as simultaneously barbaric heroes – naïve and unable to understand the import of the conflict they were a part of – and victims requiring the valorous protection of the United States against the evil Soviet Union. During the so-called Global War on Terror, Afghanistan is now seen simultaneously as victim and villain, with the United States being simultaneously protector and avenger.

This indeterminacy shows itself in both policy and academic debates. Despite acting as a sort of 'ground zero' in both fighting terrorism and saving failed states, Afghanistan is often talked around rather than talked about. What the politician or analyst already "knows" about state failure or terrorism is simply applied to Afghanistan, twisting the history and persona of Afghanistan to fit within the narrative rather than treating Afghanistan's history and character carefully and seeing how it may or may not fit within these other discursive knowledges.

This theme recurs time and again throughout this project. Empirical research of narratives on Afghanistan over the course of three Anglo-Afghan wars and two American interventions highlight a series of discursive continuities and ruptures in narratives about Afghan-ness. The continuities themselves (indeterminacy, emptiness of positive attribution / civilization) make a certain discursive dissonance possible that would otherwise likely be inconceivable. Specifically, it is Afghanistan's

emptiness which makes it possible to constitute Afghanistan's "identity" in contradictory ways, often within the same period of intervention.

During certain British interventions, for instance, Afghanistan was simultaneously depicted within narratives on intervention as being: barbaric and empty of value, mismanaged with great potential as an imperial addition, a swath of land insignificant but for its geological features which make it a perfect security/buffer zone for India. More recently, during the Cold War United States narratives on Afghan character sometimes called Afghan victims, sometimes heroes, and sometimes victims. In the more contemporary post-September 11 context, Afghanistan's indeterminacy is typified within discourses on successful and failed statehood. Afghanistan is taken to be deserving of sovereignty while simultaneously being incapable of it – and at the same time represents the savage / uncivilized forces of terrorism which are an assault on both sovereignty and the liberal international society which is founded on those sovereign principles. Which typification of Afghan identity is expressed changes at different moments in each given intervention – and is often at odds with other typifications within the same intervention – but each also has the effect of justifying that intervention in a different way. "Afghanistan", then, is made discursively meaningless because it is taken to mean whatever is most contextually convenient at the time.

Afghanistan as meaningless speaks to a *perceived* emptiness (from the Western perspective) when it comes to Afghanistan's character. This perceived emptiness play into a certain discursive instability in two ways. First, the assumption of emptiness demands filling – that filling generally comes from outside and reflects the context of whatever intervention is at hand[6]. Second, this perceived emptiness simultaneously makes possible assumptions about Afghanistan as somehow fitting into the world system of states after the First World War and the liberal project of recognizing statehood… while simultaneously making it *im*possible to accept it as true.

These assumptions empower all kinds of interventions in Afghanistan, making justifications easy to come by – but that very indeterminacy also unsettles any projects undertaken within Afghanistan or pronouncements made about Afghanistan. Contemporarily, the course of intervention in Afghanistan undermines concepts (sovereignty, statehood, democracy) which are mobilized to justify that

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[6] Refer again to the proliferation of Afghan "identities" referred to in the previous paragraph. Afghanistan's emptiness demands filling, and it can be filled with almost anything to suit contextual, discursive needs. If the discursive logics of the Global War on Terror demands that Afghanistan be thought of as a rogue polity, and also as a failed (but natural) member of the international community while also being peopled by victims, villains and heroes… then that can be done. Because Afghanistan means nothing and anything.

intervention, but which also in some sense rely on Afghanistan's perceived indeterminacy to operate within the larger discursive concept of the Global War on Terror. This intervention is justified in the context of a war on terrorism – a war *for* democracy, justice, the international system of statehood and sovereignty as much as it is a war against the forces of terror and barbarism. Yet not only the action of invasion but also the active shaping of Afghanistan's perceived character as indeterminate undercuts those same notions of democracy, justice and sovereignty. This is because of how Afghanistan's indeterminate character *came about* discursively, generally speaking in relation to its very absence of these qualities and that foundational concept which underpins them – *civilization.*

We see that the dichotomies underpinning perceptions of Afghan identity are self-destructive (auto-immune). There are seemingly irreconcilable tensions at play in how Afghanistan is conceptualized that are actively destructive not only to any given conception of Afghanistan but also to the narrative concepts mobilized to justify those particular conceptions. One might consider, for instance, how concepts of democracy and national identity played into the state building project in Afghanistan during the Obama Administration – with a community cohesion project being run by USAID as a test field for examination.

Situating Afghan National Character – the Case of USAID's Community Cohesion

Robust democratic political institutions – with significant participation from the citizenry – are central to orthodox understandings of successful statehood. The lack of robust democratic institutions is often a key identifier of a failed state – that absence is generally explained by claiming the government is either unwilling or unable successfully to provide them. In the case of Afghanistan this has often been described as a matter of corruption, or of culture.

> "As do previous years' State Department human rights reports on Afghanistan, the report for
> 2015 attributes most of Afghanistan's human rights deficiencies to overall lack of security,
> loose control over the actions of Afghan security forces, corruption, and cultural attitudes
> such as discrimination against women." (Katzman 2016: 14)

And:

> "We must focus our diplomatic efforts in Kabul on reforming the next government of
> Afghanistan… primarily in the area of anti-corruption…" (Barno 2009: 3)

Analysts suggest that efforts to this end over the past eight years have met with little success.

"That support, however[7], has made many Afghan elites fabulously rich. Despite 15 years of capacity-building, too much of the Afghan government remains predatory and kleptocratic." (Kolenda 2017)

This apparent inability / unwillingness is blamed for poverty and alienation from the state apparatus. (Benn 2004, Natsios 2006, Patrick 2006) This creates political breakdown, a situation ripe with potential for insurgency and humanitarian disaster. The cause of political breakdown is attached to the failed state's identity – to the Western perception, the government has failed on its own, for reasons of its own. A cure for what ails the failed state, then, must come from outside – the failed state's government has proven itself unable to handle its own affairs. The state building project must be successful in reforming the failed state's political culture, in rectifying whatever is "broken" in the character of the failed state or that intervention is in danger of being seen as illegitimate.

"We must focus our diplomatic efforts in Kabul on reforming the next government of Afghanistan… primarily in the area of anti-corruption… If the… next government… is every bit as corrupt as the current one, our efforts will lack legitimacy in Afghanistan and at home." (ibid)

From this perspective, the cause of a given state's failure can be diagnosed in a straight-forward (if not simple) way. A project of nation-building designed to "save" the failed state and reintegrate it into the global society of successful states would generally seek to reform and reinforce democratic institutions and their corollaries. In failed states where the government has been unwilling to create those healthy institutions, programs encouraging a shift in political culture are indicated. In failed states where low capacity is at issue, social/political/economic infrastructures can be invested in and built up. Afghanistan, like most failed states, is seen to suffer from both capacity and willingness gaps. In Afghanistan, state weakness is associated with spillover security concerns as a center for terrorism, drugs and black market activity. (Patrick 2009: 30-32)

Contemporary imaginings of Afghanistan as a space with neither the will nor the capacity for sovereignty have historical roots. Narrative tropes emanating from interventions on Afghanistan from the 19th century through today suggest that Afghanistan is a land occupied by barbaric people incapable of truly understanding civilization and its trappings[8]. They desire to be treated and seen as sovereign equals in the international community of statehood[9] but are ultimately incapable of even a semblance

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[7] This refers to infrastructure and governance works, the vast sums in dollars and manpower invested by the United States – essentially referring to CCI and other similar programs.
[8] See chapters 3 – 5 of this thesis.
[9] See chapters 5 – 6.

of sovereign statehood without either the paternal mentoring by[10] or outright protection[11] of a Western benefactor. These imaginings can be seen through consistent reference to those binaries of civilized/savage, identity/non-identity, Western/Oriental et al. Those binaries, referred to and built up over the course of historical interactions with Afghanistan, can be found in contemporary policy interactions with Afghanistan. Take as an example the Afghanistan Community Cohesion Initiative.

The Afghanistan Community Cohesion Initiative

The Community Cohesion Initiative [CCI] was one policy response to a state building project in Afghanistan during the Obama Administration. It was formulated on assumptions rooted in the conception of Afghanistan as indeterminate, empty of unique character. This assumption of indeterminate character is rooted in the history of historic interactions between the West (Britain and then the United States) and Afghanistan, wherein Afghanistan's substantive character and identity were taken to be different things at different times and always situated in ways that did more to empower particular ideas of a Western identity than to discover that of Afghanistan. This emptiness empowered various interventions on Afghanistan historically, and in the case of the CCI meant that Afghanistan could be slotted into pre-existing narratives on statehood and state failure.

In considering some of the binary oppositions identified in the introduction, it will be possible to see how these binaries interact in assumptions about Afghanistan that informed the CCI – and how they connect with narratives on Afghanistan in historic interactions. An underlying assumption informing the CCI is that Afghanistan is fundamentally broken, but that this brokenness is in Afghanistan's nature. Those who govern are neither capable of proper governance nor are they naturally motivated to build a successful political system. It is thus necessary that help be offered from the outside literally to build up a new political culture that has the chance to be successful.

This touches on a number of binary oppositions previously identified. Most immediately obvious are the Civilized/Savage and Sovereignty/non-Sovereignty binaries. The first to consider has to do with how sovereignty is articulated in this case.

When the Obama Administration took over in 2009, there was a great deal of internal debate as to the best course of action in Afghanistan. Various military and civilian experts testified before Congressional committees, and one argument that appeared to have some currency was legitimacy. In addition to greater military involvement (the surge) a concurrent civil effort to change the political

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[10] See chapter 5.
[11] See chapter 6.

culture in Afghanistan was necessary in order to ensure a government that would enjoy legitimacy in the eyes of its own people and the international community – and thus truly be able to be sovereign.

> "We must focus our diplomatic efforts in Kabul on reforming the next government of Afghanistan… primarily in the area of anti-corruption… If the… next government… is every bit as corrupt as the current one, our efforts will lack legitimacy in Afghanistan and at home." (Barno 2009: 3)

> And:

> "The first [priority] is the primacy of politics, the need to reach political settlements, not just at the national level where the current crisis resides, but at regional and local levels as well. We must redouble our efforts to separate reconcilable insurgents from those who will not forsake violence." (Cole 2009: 1)

These represent calls from both the military and civilization agencies[12] to focus on community and political-culture building as a necessary supplement to war-fighting in Afghanistan. In order to defeat the Taliban, and come out ahead in this particular arena in the global war on terrorism it was necessary for the United States to both reform the government of Afghanistan and build trust between Afghan's and the government on a community and local level. This message was taken to heart with the Community Cohesion Initiative in Afghanistan:

> "USAID/OTI's Community Cohesion Initiative (CCI) strengthens the resiliency of communities in the face of political and social upheaval, insurgent infiltration, and other pressures. Specifically, CCI (1) increases cohesion within and between communities; (2) supports peaceful and legitimate governance processes and outcomes;. and (3) counters violent extremism." (USAID 2016)

Community cohesion as a policy concept was developed in the United Kingdom from 2001 in the aftermath of riots in certain communities. Certain groups, often ethnic minorities and generally suffering from poverty, were seen as excluded from their communities – whether structurally by or self-exclusion. Community cohesion refers to a set of policies which sought to encourage those groups to integrate into the larger community with the idea that it would not only decrease alienation but also improve economic wellbeing.

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[12] Barno is a retired Lieutenant General who held a high command role in Afghanistan for several years and Cole was a member of USAID.

Many scholars have criticized community cohesion projects on several levels. It is broadly argued that community cohesion either destroys (by assimilation) or ignores the character and value of marginal community identities. Communities are absorbed into the larger national cultural framework through bribery - grants for community programs, employment preparation and infrastructure – (Donoghue 2014: 282 – 292) and blame (social problems among the marginal are due to the community's unwillingness to integrate). (Werbner 2005: 747-748, 750)

The Community Cohesion Initiative in Afghanistan did not so much seek to integrate alienated portions of Afghan society into the larger Afghan community as it tried to create an Afghan political community out of a perceived vacuum. The model for that political community was a set of orthodox norms of successful liberal statehood. In essence, the integration aspect of community cohesion traditionally simultaneously meant integrating rural Afghans into a newly formed political culture and integrating Afghanistan as a whole into the wider supposedly "global" liberal political culture. This was to be accomplished by way of encouraging local leaders to work with government officials on infrastructure and community projects, and to become politically active in the context of national elections planned for 2014. Following elections and the program's completion, CCI was hailed as largely successful. Specifically, community elders had been made to realize the importance of education in building peace and prosperity and opportunities for doing so through cooperation with the Afghan government. (ibid: 12-13) It therefor arguably provided marginal communities with powerful incentives to integrate into the national community, thus creating conditions conducive to stability and less vulnerable to advantage-taking by insurgent groups.

The CCI and Legitimacy / Sovereignty / Non-sovereignty

The question of legitimacy was key to the CCI. Intervention on Afghanistan was held to be legitimate because Afghanistan's political institutions were illegitimate. Afghanistan lacked sovereignty the government had no monopoly on coercive force, but also because of a dysfunctional or nonexistent political culture. The Taliban were able to operate so freely in part because the Afghan people did not identify with or trust the government. This lack of identification with the government was problematic beyond the security implications because while the meaning of sovereignty is hotly debated (despite being generally seen as "settled" in political analyses):

> "For over two hundred years the *nation* has been regarded as the proper, indeed only *legitimate*, unit of political rule…" (Heywood 2004: 97) [emphasis mine]

Nationhood is essentially defined by those within the purported nation – members of a nation self-identify due to a shared culture, history, and sense of shared future. While the relationship of a nation and state are often quite indeterminate, a political culture wherein the citizens of a sovereign state recognize the legitimate authority of that sovereign is essential.

Legitimacy – thus sovereignty – is missing in Afghanistan (which we already know as we've been told that Afghanistan is a failed state). The purpose of the CCI was to address one of Afghanistan's deficiencies leading to that lack of sovereignty – the lack of a political community. This lack was something that could only be fixed from the outside, by the United States, which would in turn prove its own legitimacy through this mentorship.

> "I think one of the challenges that we face today with regard to our efforts in Afghanistan is what I would characterize as a crisis of confidence in the United States and among our NATO allies at this particular juncture. In the aftermath of a very deeply flawed Afghan election which was set in the context of rising American and NATO casualties over this summer, the U.S. has some significant challenges in front of us…" (Barno 2009: 1)

This turns the entire question of Afghanistan back on the United States – saving Afghanistan is about US prestige and legitimacy – it is a question of what makes the West a good, particularly legitimate thing.

Afghan History and Legitimacy / Sovereignty / Non-sovereignty

Situating Afghanistan as lacking legitimacy – and sovereignty – is a common theme in historic interactions with Afghanistan. That lack of sovereignty has been justification for interventions in Afghanistan as well as proof that those interventions are ultimately for the good of Afghanistan itself.

The question of whether Afghanistan was entitled to sovereignty first came about during the second Anglo-Afghan war. During the first Anglo-Afghan war, it was taken for granted that if such a thing as an "Afghanistan" could even be said to exist, it certainly had no sovereign character. It was, instead, a land empty of national status but rather a collection of tribes.

> "Though the sovereignty of the Affghans [sic] has passed out of the hands of the descendants of Achmed Shah… [mention of important tribes, with the strongest being headed by] Dost Mahommed Khan, of Cabool [sic]… has connected himself with that powerful body [Persia], and… must trust rather to them than to the native Affghans…" (UK Foreign Office 1839b: 25)

The right of Persia to involve itself in the affairs of Afghanistan in any way it saw fit was recognized by the United Kingdom by way of treaty.

> "If war should be declared between the Affghans and Persians, the English Government shall
> not interfere…" (UK Foreign Office 1814: Article IX)

The idea that Persia had the right to make incursions on Afghanistan was reinforced when, in 1837, the Shah of Persia contemplated just that. The British envoy to Persia wrote in a dispatch that "…there cannot, I think, be a doubt that the Shah is fully justified in making war on Prince Kamran [of Herat]." (UK Foreign Office 1837b: 34) Further, Persia has a fully "justified right" to expand its reach in Afghanistan, but such a state of affairs would be against British interests. (UK Foreign Office 1837a: 2-3) That being the case, Britain eventually decided to intervene, first diplomatically and eventually militarily, to essentially *gift* Afghanistan its freedom, but a very conditioned and contingent freedom.

This was highly desirable, as Russian influence was suspected in Persia's designs on Herat, which stood at a strategic chokepoint blocking access from Persia to India's western frontiers. "…if we save Herat, and secure it, as it is now completely at our disposal, all Affghanistan will be tolerably secure behind it." (ibid: 77)

This was an early positioning of Afghanistan as a tactical space rather than a sovereign space. This speaks not only to an assumption of non-sovereignty for Afghanistan but also its positioning as a tactical space rather than as a political actor in its own right. This was seen as not only natural, but for the benefit of Afghans, as without British sponsorship Afghanistan was vulnerable to any aggressor. During the second Anglo-Afghan war, however, some began to question whether or not Afghanistan might have some claim to sovereign status.

The second Anglo-Afghan war was triggered when Britain wanted to send a diplomatic mission to Kabul. The Afghan ruler at the time wanted no discourse with Britain and warned that a mission would be unwelcome and considered hostile. Britain sent a mission anyway, which was chased out of country by force of arms. It was in response to this insult that the second Anglo-Afghan war was launched, to effect regime change. Some voices were raised in opposition, such as 1st Baron Lawrence, formerly the Viceroy of India from 1864 - 1869.

> "Are not moral considerations also very strong against such a war? Have not the Afghans a
> right to resist our forcing a mission on them?" (Lawrence 1878a)

This voice was ultimately in the minority, while the view that any possible claim to sovereignty that Afghanistan might make was subservient to Britain's national security needs. Furthermore, Afghanistan was barbaric and shouldn't be accorded the same respect and rights as a European power.

> "Whether in dealing with an Asiatic ruler like Shere Ali the common rules of European international law have any application whatever… [is a question that] though interesting, I shall pass over… [in preference of asking] …whether the probability of a Russian and Afghan alliance make the strengthening of our frontier a matter of pressing importance?" (Stephen 1878a)

The strengthening of British India's frontier, in this case, meant ensuring that a pliable regime was in control of Afghanistan's capital. Ultimately, the "interesting" question of some sort of application of sovereignty to Afghanistan was meaningless in any case, however:

> "[International law is] a collection of usages which prevail between civilized nations, and are rendered possible by the fact that the leading civilized nations are practically for most purposes of nearly equal force… we are exceedingly powerful and highly civilized, and… they are comparatively weak and half barbarous". (Stephen 1878B)

This emerging narrative is explored in much more rich detail in chapters to follow. It is already possible to draw out similarities to aspects of the CCI. Afghanistan is not a sovereign space, and any question of the justice of this situation is subverted by two things: geopolitical security considerations and the much greater sovereign status of the intervener (Britain, then the United States). The greater sovereign status of the intervener was also conceptualized as making that intervention beneficial for Afghanistan. The Afghanistan of 2009 was not sovereign because its rulers were corrupt, the Afghan people felt no sense of connection to the state apparatus (no political culture or conception of state sovereignty), and the state was incapable of looking after itself. Thus the CCI policy could only be seen as beneficial, as the United States – epitomizing sovereign status – worked to mentor, uplift… help to form a liberal political culture where before there was only tribalism.

The CCI and Binary Oppositions

Tribalism, corruption and incapacity to look after itself are all hallmarks of narratives on Afghanistan from the first Anglo-Afghan war up through every intervention on Afghanistan until and including the present one. Those aspects of Afghan identity empower the sovereignty/non-sovereign binary. They also derive support from binaries of civilized/savage and Western/Oriental – as we already

begin to see from the Stephen quotes. They also feed into binaries regarding Afghanistan actors/tactical spaces.

In the case of the CCI, Afghanistan is a place to be acted upon. The United States is an actor, but so is the Taliban. The Afghan government is, at best, a defunct and discredited actor which needed intensive mentoring and reform by the United States in order to become a legitimate actor and Afghanistan itself was a tactical space where a new political culture needed to be formed – partly for the good of Afghanistan but also as a tactic in the Global War on Terror. (Katzman 2013: 9, 12) The CCI was part of that fight against terrorism, as the insurgency was empowered by the political illegitimacy of Afghan governance:

> "The insurgency is essentially an Afghan political problem… a government that is perceived as illegitimate, self-serving… based on tribal or other affiliations." (Waldman 2009: 2)

Indeed, the CCI was explicitly described in part as a way to counter the Taliban insurgency:

> "Through the Afghanistan Community Cohesion Initiative (CCI), USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) seeks to increase resilience in areas vulnerable to insurgent exploitation by (1) strengthening community capacities to promote a peaceful transition; (2) supporting peaceful electoral processes and outcomes; and (3) *countering violent threats to a peaceful transition.*" (USAID 2014b) [emphasis mine]

The other side of the coin, so to speak, is that Afghanistan is conceptualized as being at least morally deserving of sovereignty. Though the Afghan state is illegitimate and incapable of holding sovereignty on its own, the Afghan people are said to have the right to sovereignty, as enshrined by contemporary international custom and law and espoused in the UN charter itself. This results in language of moral imperatives: "moral imperative of not abandoning the Afghan people" and "You Americans are not going to abandon us again are you?" to be used, as regards both saving Afghanistan from terrorism and reforming the Afghan government so that it might be legitimate and sovereign. (Bardo 2009: 1-3)

This speaks to an uneasy tension with sovereignty/non-sovereignty that connects to the binary of Western/Oriental. Specifically, after the First World War it became accepted in discursive orthodoxy that all peoples had the inherent right to self-determination and sovereignty. Yet there was still an underlying "knowledge" that not all people were truly deserving (or at least capable) of effectively wielding those rights. This meant that it was the duty of more enlightened polities to mentor and

develop political civility in what were essentially barbaric (in this case, Oriental) spaces. It also meant that interventions on those spaces were conceptually always for the good of the intervenee, rather than an abrogation of those rights.

This tension is articulated within this project by reference to the formal/informal divide, wherein two "knowledges" about Afghanistan that contradict one another interact uneasily. For purposes of the CCI, Afghanistan does not have sovereignty – and is at fault itself due to its uncivilized nature (tribalism, corruption, incapacity). Thus the United States has the right to intervene – that right is articulated by reference to a state-building project, wherein intervention is a mentoring process to teach the Afghans to be a civilized nation worthy and capable of sovereign identity. That mentoring process is also a civilizing process which makes Afghanistan more culturally resilient against terrorist ideologies, which from a historical perspective Afghanistan apparently needs.

> "…the rule of Islam was never one to encourage the growth of civilisation. Bigotry and a fanatical intolerance were its handmaids… the only Western piece of civilisation that appeals to them – the art of war." (*Guardian* 1919)

> And:

> "Long contact with these subjects had made them [colonizers] believe that Europeans and Orientals were far apart in political capacity and were therefore not entitled to the same political rights. When individuals or parties among the subject populations, inspired through contact with… European ideas… demanded corresponding political reforms, their activities were commonly regarded… as merely imitative…" (Intelligence Bureau 1918: 1)

Those informal understandings of Afghan character were conditioned by a need to formally acknowledge Afghan sovereignty. This need arose partly as the fulfillment of commitments made by the Entente in opposition to the Central Powers in World War I and later in opposition to Bolshevik propaganda. (ibid: 2, 19-23) It was also powerfully articulated in Wilson's Fourteen Points and the formation of the League of Nations. In the aftermath of the third Anglo-Afghan war, where Afghanistan's sovereignty was formally recognized by Britain, the formal requirements of sovereign recognition laid alongside informal knowledges regarding Afghanistan's incapacity to wield sovereignty.

> "…if we would only give Afghanistan an assurance that she had full liberty in her foreign relations she would very soon come back to us in practice, and that we should be her advisors in a more real sense than ever before." (UK Foreign Office 1919: 240)

These informal 'knowledges' about Afghanistan continue into contemporary times (which will be explored more fully in the course of this project). Literature and policy briefings related to the CCI takes for granted the incapacity of the Afghan government – its corruption, tribalism and overall weakness is endemic to the very nature of Afghanistan. There are some suggestions that perhaps the United States bears some responsibility for the Taliban's depredations in Afghanistan due to how it handled the aftermath of the Cold War intervention – but the inability of Afghanistan to fend for itself is both taken for granted and assumed to be wholly a function of the Afghan identity itself. These assumptions rest alongside a formal recognition of the Afghan right to sovereignty, and its legitimacy in theory – both of which are important aspects of emphasizing the legitimacy of the West and the liberal state system itself.

The CCI and Afghan Emptiness

This way of understanding the community cohesion project in Afghanistan highlights the natural emptiness assumed about the place. The project of building a national identity was central to building the government's legitimacy. Legitimacy is the key central aspect to sovereignty – by accepting the government's legitimacy you accept its right to the recourse of legitimate force… thus denying such a right to insurgent groups and helping to foster peace and stability.

Afghanistan is empty. It is a collapsed space that could have / should have been a state (and on some level, by virtue of the assumptions held within the failed state paradigm, Afghanistan's natural position is as a state… even as actions toward Afghanistan suggest that its natural state is empty and barbaric). It is the responsibility of the United States and its NATO allies to instill Afghanistan with the civility needed, the knowledge and the moral fiber, to attain (regain?) sovereignty. These very processes call into question the nature of sovereignty and the state – if sovereignty involves self-determination then it cannot be imposed.

In every case of intervention on Afghanistan, from the 19th century to now, Afghanistan's character has been a blank slate to be filled in based on the needs of the intervener – along with some narrative legacies from what came before, mobilized in different ways according to the exigencies of the present. Afghanistan's savagery was used to highlight Britain's civility, its illegitimacy reinforced Britain's regional place of moral superiority. In the Cold War, Afghanistan's victimhood in the face of Soviet aggression reinforced America's role as champion and protector against the evils of communism. In the post-September 11 context, Afghanistan is both victim and barbaric aggressor – a failed state which is suffering but which failed through its own fault, a center of terrorism because of its

backwardness and inability to plug into the world system. This, then, casts Afghanistan as a dark mirror of the legitimacy of the state system and democracy, as well as the place of the United States as the guarantor of that system against the evils of terrorist ideologies.

This specific example of the CCI is one small instance of this discursive regime of truth. The United States is the only one able to show Afghanistan how to be a state while simultaneously teaching the people of Afghanistan how to be legitimate Afghans… while simultaneously saving them from terrorism and from themselves. This insistence on treating Afghanistan as a reflection of self is complicit in the continuing string of crises which have afflicted Afghanistan for generations. Its long-standing role as a space without meaning of its own, where invasions can be undertaken legitimately call into question the motivations behind those interventions and force us to ask hard questions about our own Western approaches.

Tied in to notions of Afghan legitimacy were questions of American legitimacy. The United States has a: "…moral imperative of not abandoning the Afghan people… depredations of the Taliban… deadly spread of instability". (Barno 2009: 3) U.S. legitimacy relies on changing Afghanistan's character from that of an empty, barbaric place into a "real" state. This is a case of noblesse oblige, a kind of post-paternal imperative.

> "The fundamental flaw in any U.S. approach to Afghanistan… remains the lack of confidence in American staying power: 'You Americans are not going to abandon us again [emphasis mine] are you?'". (ibid: 1)

And

> "We… [can] help the host nation government and its population build rule of law, stable governance, a sustainable economy and the fundamental conditions for well-being." (Cole 2009: 3)

Afghanistan's emptiness is filled up with a need for legitimacy – both Afghan and American. Afghanistan is empty of the civilized traits needed for legitimate, sovereign statehood. The United States' intervention on Afghanistan is justified in large part as articulated by programs such as the CCI. By mentoring Afghanistan and transforming its culture, Afghanistan could have its emptiness filled with legitimacy and the legitimacy of America's leadership role globally (particularly in the Global War on Terror) would be validated.

That legitimacy is embodied in the principles of sovereignty and democracy (with state failure and terrorism as the counter-points). However, packed into the language of state failure are discursive notions which call into question the nature of the sovereign, of the state. These notions are further destabilized by the simple act of intervention – the principles of sovereignty and democracy in themselves forbid acts of intervention. It is only Afghanistan's emptiness which seems to authorize those acts, in the name of sovereignty and in the name of democracy while simultaneously serving to undermine sovereignty and democracy.

In order to understand what makes these very contradictory acts possible, we must understand the discursive legacy of Western intervention in Afghanistan. We must ask how Afghanistan's identity of non-identity was constructed and recreated from the early 19th century (at least) through today. What's more, this needs to be done without reference to pre-existing critical paradigms. Those critical paradigms may well have answers to what makes those contradictory acts possible [colonial / postcolonial discursive knowledges, core/periphery relations, hegemonic logics], but those answers are couched within theoretical models of the world which are not specific to Afghanistan. Thus relying solely on such critical perspectives replicates the ignoring of Afghan identity that outside powers have assumed in denying a unique character to Afghanistan.

Theory: Explaining why the Indeterminacy of Afghanistan Matters

This project argues that the term "failed" in "failed state" obscures the specific identity of states taken to be failing. Rather than describing a specific characteristic of a troubled state that might be useful in helping orient policy, "failed state" takes over the identity of states bearing that label completely. Exploring Afghanistan by way of deconstructive discourse analysis makes it possible to see the specific and unique character of Afghanistan's interactions with the West. This analysis, showcased in coming chapters, reveals these binary oppositions in how Afghanistan's character is constructed and placed. Those oppositions have the function of rendering any appreciation of an actual Afghan character problematic – the possibility of an Afghan character is subsumed by a constructed emptiness that is driven by the constant need to define Afghanistan in relation not to Afghanistan's attributes but to the seemingly compelling strategic and political logics of the time. Thus we find Afghanistan as an empty wasteland of barbarism, a den of terrorism, a geopolitical gameboard to fight Russia and protect India, or to fight the Soviet Union and "save" Afghani victims. In each intervention on Afghanistan, certain discursive tactics are utilized which form threads of continuity from one intervention to the next. These continuities, and the process of marginalizing Afghanistan into an indeterminate empty space to enable

those continuities to continue functioning – make it possible neatly to place Afghanistan in a category that makes sense in a liberal orthodox way of understanding the international arena. This understanding serves to reinforce Western views of itself and justify certain policies and practices, but it also makes understanding the very real problems that plague Afghanistan and the Afghan people all but impossible… because in this conception, one can say that *there is no Afghanistan.*

Yet the very process of marginalizing Afghanistan and positioning it as indeterminate reveals certain tensions within the narrative. Those binary oppositions suffer from an auto-immune dysfunction. The process of "filling up" Afghanistan with character traits necessary to justify given interventions while relying on "knowledges" about Afghan character from previous interventions means that what is "known" about Afghan identity is often at odds with itself. Further, assigning character attributes to Afghanistan and attempting to naturalize them through narrative orthodoxy is in strong tension with the very indeterminacy which is necessary to continuing the narrative marginalization process.

This auto-immune dilemma shows itself in a few ways. First and foremost, Afghanistan's seeming emptiness is filled up with contradictory concepts, each of which is somehow definitional to what it means to be Afghan. At different times Afghanistan has been considered empty and savage, duplicitous, wholly evil, insignificant, barbaric, innocent, heroic… naturally imbued with statehood (and the nationalist spirit), incapable of civilized action or thought. While it might be argued that many national identities comprise of various contradictory concepts, in the Afghan case these concepts are often buried under layers of narrative 'knowing' – and are thus unacknowledged. More tellingly, those often (but not always) hidden concepts are foundational to what legitimized interventionist practices in Afghanistan.

In order to access these discursive tensions, a historical survey of interventionist actions toward Afghanistan (and various narratives around those interventions) has been conducted. This analysis suggests a certain continuity of core concepts regarding Afghanistan. One of these is a concept of emptiness – typified by barbarism (or at least the lack of civilization). Another is this idea that interventions in Afghanistan are always justified by something larger than Afghanistan – an idea made easier by the emptiness paradigm that suggests that most things are, in fact, more important than Afghanistan. These two concepts interact in a way which not only justifies interventions, but also buttresses certain self-conceptions from the Western intervener's perspective. Britain was justified in its interventions because it was a proper state, it was civilized, it has the *power* to operate unopposed, it was protecting civilization in the Great Game (in this case British India). Afghanistan's emptiness was

filled up with geo-political logics on the one hand, and cast as an oppositional way of Britain knowing itself – it could be defined in large part by what it was not, and what it was *not* was barbaric, Oriental, backward Afghanistan.

So civilization – and an emptiness defining lack thereof was one justification for intervention. That continued into American interventions, though how that was expressed changed. That change was empowered by Afghanistan's emptiness, which herein could also be conceived as a certain indeterminacy – because it was empty it could be reconfigured to be almost anything. After the First World War, Afghanistan was suddenly a state. However, on an informal basis it was not and could not be a state because culturally Afghans lacked the capacity to even understand statehood and civilization. Thus, Afghanistan was both a state and not a state.

Being a state, interventions in Afghanistan to follow World War One called for new discursive paradigms to justify those interventions. A legitimate intervention now had to cope with Afghanistan's formal statehood. This was done by appeal to concepts which underlay the informal idea that Afghanistan wasn't *really* capable of true statehood. In the Cold War this was expressed through narratives of the unsophisticated Afghan, and the victimized Afghan in the face of evil communism. In the post- September 11 period this justification comes through narratives of state failure and the Afghan victim. In both cases certain ideologies were strongly mobilized, both relating to democracy. The Cold War was the ideological battle of liberal capitalism versus communism; the Global War on Terror is the battle of liberal democracy versus terrorism. In both cases Afghanistan was the battleground (as during the Great Game) while simultaneously being a victim of the enemy and complicit with the enemy.

These discursive tensions then seem to revolve largely around legitimacy. What legitimizes interventions in Afghanistan? The answer is that, in the absence of talking about Afghanistan very straight-forwardly as a land of barbarians that doesn't matter (as during British interventions), the assumption of Afghanistan's right to sovereignty is what legitimizes interventions. In and of itself this sounds immediately problematic but perhaps not in a new or unique way. The discursive legacy of emptiness and indeterminacy is a big part of what sets the Afghan case apart. Due to its indeterminacy, Afghanistan is simultaneously aggressor and victim, terrorist and (failed) state. Afghanistan simultaneously has a right to sovereignty, to peace and prosperity that are being infringed up (by terrorists, currently) – and is a legitimate target of Western intervention and war-making. Afghanistan is a suitable theater of operations for the War on Terror, where war is waged both on the Afghan and on behalf of the Afghan.

Legitimacy is fundamentally important here – the ambiguities of what "legitimacy" means allows for contradictory standpoints to be taken. Afghanistan has a *legitimate right* to sovereignty. Afghanistan has *legitimately failed* to exercise sovereignty effectively or ethically. This has led to both security (terrorism) and humanitarian crises which the United States is *legitimately* concerned about. Yet the United States cannot intervene unless it can do so *legitimately,* or it will undermine the concept of sovereignty itself.

Orthodox views on sovereignty is figured to be the capacity of a state to possess clear and legitimate political authority to exert power. To be sovereign, the state organs must possess both power and authority, where that authority is recognized and respected as legitimate by the state's people. In this concept, clarity arises out of a definite and authoritative *power* holder and legitimacy derives from the source of *symbolic* authority within the state.[13]

State sovereignty is taken to apply to internal operations and not to its power over other states, which are assumed to exert sovereignty within their borders. By default, interventions on another state are illegitimate and undermine the intervener's symbolic authority, and thus legitimacy. The designation of "failed state" is used to make interventions on that failed state legitimate. Because Afghanistan is a failed state, an intervention on Afghanistan is legitimate – Afghanistan has the right to sovereignty but in effect has no sovereignty – it lacks *authoritative power[14]*.

Even this statement is at considerable tension with itself. This intervention is at odds with standard assumptions of sovereignty. Moreover, the lack of respect for Afghan sovereignty has been a continuous feature of Western interactions with Afghanistan and can be seen as detracting from the *symbolic* legitimacy of Western limited sovereignty. Derrida argues that the designation of some states as 'rogue' by dominant Western states is contradictory because that labeling flouts international recognitive norms. If a state is a state, it cannot be a "rogue" state – and relegating a state to the status of "rogueness" from an external, dominant position is a violent act which is, itself, rogue. The same argument can be applied to the designation of some states as 'failed.'

Beyond narrative positioning, Derrida sees sovereignty in a general way as harboring tensions. On the one hand sovereignty identifies where authoritative power lies within a state and allows for its

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[13] See T. Hobbes, Leviathan ed. M. Oakeshott (London, Macmillan, 1962)
[14] This is functionally almost identical to arguments as to why British interventions on Afghanistan during the second Anglo-Afghan war were legitimate. Afghanistan didn't have the power to demand its sovereignty be respected, thus it was completely legitimate not to respect any claim to sovereignty by Afghanistan.

execution. On the other, sovereignty is held to be legitimate but there is always a gap between the claim to legitimacy and actual concrete measures whereby power is legitimized. Hence if a regime is held to be a democracy and democratic forms of legitimation of sovereign power justify sovereign actions, then these democratic features can be questioned. Through the exercise of sovereign actions, there are some people within the state who will be excluded and some who will be marginalized or made less influential. The ways in which views are developed or actions are decided upon can be questioned. Hence sovereignty - like democracy and justice - can never be completed or supported conclusively. Sovereignty can be thought about but not *known*. It is always at tension with itself, its reduction to a series of dichotomies (sovereign/non-sovereign; rogue/orderly) is illicit. This problematizes the notion of legitimacy which is fundamental to interventions on Afghanistan as a failed state.

This tension is dealt with by relegating Afghanistan to a position of indeterminacy and insubstantiality. Calling Afghanistan a [state/failed state/terror haven/tactical space/humanitarian disaster], all simultaneously (because of indeterminacy) is only possible because there is an imposed silence, an assumption of emptiness, on Afghan identity. That silence hides why and how Afghan identity came to be constructed as something which could be - which *deserved to be* (by way of both salvation and punitive measure) intervened upon. Yet this indeterminacy only distracts from the tensions within the notion of sovereignty generally, and how it is mobilized specifically here. It does not change or do away with those tensions.

This thesis seeks to make explicit what was silent. It seeks to find alternate ways to confront what are very real disasters in Afghanistan without recreating the conditions which were at the very least complicit in making those disasters possible in the first place. Through analysis and exposition of the various binary oppositions utilized in historic interactions with Afghanistan, this project demonstrates how the marginalization and resultant assigned indeterminacy of Afghan identity illegitimizes the very notions of sovereign right which seem to make just and legitimate interventions in Afghanistan.

Chapter 2 – Exploring the Literature and Theoretical Positioning

This chapter considers existing literature on state failure generally and Afghanistan's place in the literature specifically. The aim is to demonstrate how failed states are conceptualized – and how Afghanistan in particular is conceptualized within that broader failed state discourse – plays into themes identified in relation to unhelpful discursive binary oppositions.

Analysis here is arranged in several parts. The first and second sections consider approaches to understanding state failure which focus on internal and then external causes. While both internal and external factors contributing to the crises we identify as state failure are important to analyze, these focuses tend to rely on a generalized theoretical referent. Over-reliance on these foci reinforces particular narratives on "how the world works" rather than speaking to the particularities and unique identity of any given so-called failed state. The third section considers existing literature which seeks to engage specifically with the Afghan case. The fourth and final section situates this dissertation within the literature and makes an argument for deconstructive analyses exploring the very unique and specific way in which Afghan identity was created narratively through interventions over the course of two centuries.

Approaches assuming internal causes for state failure tend to be connected with liberal theories of international relations while approaches assuming external causes for state failure are connected with critical theory. This is not always the case: Edwards and Caron especially don't fit comfortably within those, admittedly binary, labels. This particular binary approach (internal/external causes, liberal/critical theory) is not intended to naturalize particular conceptions of the social world. Nor does it assume all social theory is either/or. It describes dominant trends, identifies outliers and stakes out grounds for the uniqueness of this project's approach. The binary, nevertheless, privileges certain articulations of the social world (sovereignty, statehood) that this project intends to disrupt by suggesting Afghan specificity lies outside those defined boundaries.

Liberal Statehood and the Internal Causes of State Failure

Attempts to understand the phenomena of state failure which focus on internal causes can be broadly identified with a liberal stance. Within what we might very loosely term a liberal umbrella here there are lively debates as to the sort of internal dysfunctions which led to the collapse of state

apparatuses. A trait common to this theme is that external conditions are not seen as fundamentally important to the failure of a state. If the internal conditions of the state were healthy, it is presumed, then even if there are challenging external conditions those could be effectively resisted and – short of outright war – state sovereignty and success could be maintained. These approaches point out flaws in the failed state's internal political culture – how governing institutions interact with the public, with the outside world, and within itself – and work to prescribe cures to these dysfunctions. In this way blame is individuated and there is no perceived need to consider how external pressures – pressures that the West may be complicit in – may have contributed to state collapse. It also reinforces the notion that the liberal system of statehood is not affected by this instance of state failure – rather the opposite, we find that articulations of state failure are important to stabilizing notions of state success.

There were scattered references to failed and rogue states during the final years of the Cold War. However, a certain coalescing of narratives around failed states as a phenomenon which needed specific attention came about in the early 1990's. Early interaction with the notion of state failure had a strong emphasis on 'saving' these failed states. For instance:

> "The long-term acceptance of *limitations on absolute sovereignty*... [allow for] new alternatives for responding to the phenomenon of failed states. The international community should now be prepared to consider a novel, expansive--and desperately needed—effort... to undertake nation-saving responsibilities." (Helman and Ratner 1992: 8)[15] [emphasis mine]

At this point, failed states were seen as a growing issue which had been essentially ignored due to (perhaps exacerbated by) geopolitical concerns of the Cold War. Failed states were those states which did not emerge from the Cold War years with governments competent or moral enough to seize for themselves the benefits of triumphant liberal democratic capitalism.

With the triumph of liberal democratic capitalism, the argument went, it was now possible to turn to helping these so called failed states. They could be revived and reintegrated into a harmonious community of states. There was a recognition of some security-related concerns but the primary discursive focus was on help. This period saw state failure analyzed primarily outside policy making organs, though it was filtering into the policy conversation as the decade matured. For instance, then-US Ambassador to the UN (and later Secretary of State) Madeleine Albright called Somalia a failed state in making an argument as to why intervention there was necessary. (Albright 1993)

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[15] See also Gros 1996, Thurer 1999

The events of September 11, 2001 hurried what had been in the decade prior a slow evolution of the narrative on state failure. At this point, literature began exploring connections between notions of failure and rogueness. Links to terrorism and regional / global threats were explored. Prior to this there had been some movement within the policy community to define this phenomenon of state failure, its parameters and causes (i.e. World Bank 1997), but after September 11 the project gained a whole new urgency. After all:

> "State failure threatens global stability because national governments have become the primary building blocks of order. International security relies on states to protect against chaos… and limit the cancerous spread of anarchy…" (Rotberg 2002: 130)

So, after the events of September 11, saving failed states (which is to say, intervening upon) was necessary both morally – to "save" the state – and also pragmatically, for logics of security. Thus categorizing different types of failed states, deciding what sort of threat different types of failed states might exhibit, understanding potential causes of differing types of failures all became vitally important questions. That is to say, some failed states were threats only to themselves, some were threats to their neighbors, and some were global threats. Some states were intent on improving, others opted for dysfunctionality.

A strong example of how discursive trends were shifting can be seen in the work of Robert Rotberg, who published some work on state failure in 2002 both for Foreign Affairs magazine and for the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations:

> Although the phenomenon of state failure is not new, it has become much more relevant and worrying than ever before. In less interconnected eras, state weakness could be isolated and kept distant. Failure had fewer implications for peace and security. Now, these states pose dangers not only to themselves and their neighbors but also to peoples around the globe. Preventing states from failing, and resuscitating those that do fail, are thus strategic and moral imperatives.

> But failed states are not homogeneous. The nature of state failure varies from place to place, sometimes dramatically. Failure and weakness can flow from a nation's geographical, physical, historical, and political circumstances, such as colonial errors and Cold War policy mistakes. More than structural or institutional weaknesses, human agency is also culpable, usually in a fatal way. (Rotberg 2002: 127-128)

This explains narrative change on state failure – the collapse of successful governance, in the context of the *Global War on Terror*, must now be seen as a security dilemma. Combating state failure had shifted from a wholly moral to a strategic and moral imperative, which also made understanding the causes of failure critical. Importantly, Rotberg allows that some structural factors might be at play but emphasizes that the bulk of culpability lies on the states themselves – this is to say, states fail due to internal causes. Previously possible causes were seemingly glossed over, with focus being on how to save failed states – and assuming that once they'd been helped they would continue to be successful. With security concerns becoming central, a need to diagnose and categorize became ascendant. Others followed in this manner.

Afghanistan specifically was seen as a driver of narrative change on failed states.

"Al Qaeda's ability to act with impunity from Afghanistan changed this calculus, convincing President George W. Bush and his administration that 'America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones.'" (Patrick 2006: 27)

In pursuit of better categorizing these potential national security threats, Patrick advocates new definition sets. These new definitions assume that states fail because governments are either unwilling or unable to fulfill their sovereign responsibilities, and that there are four main areas of responsibility that can be analyzed for failure:

State strength is relative and can be measured by the state's ability and willingness to provide the fundamental political goods associated with statehood: physical security, legitimate political institutions, economic management, and social welfare. Many countries have critical gaps in one or more of these four areas of governance. In effect, they possess *legal but not actual sovereignty.* (ibid: 29) [emphasis mine]

With the war on terror, discourse on state failure came to favor security over humanity.[16] International law doctrine in development at the time tried to find ways to reflect this while still urging pragmatic humanitarian interventions. This found expression in the international legal doctrine of "Responsibility to Protect". (ICISS 2001) The doctrine tries to balance the "right to intervene" for humanitarian goods against the prohibition on intervention espoused by national sovereignty. (Evans 2007: 706) The doctrine defines times when a need to protect an "individual sovereignty" overrides the international community's natural interests in non-intervention and respect of state sovereignty. (ICISS

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[16] For more on this shift, see also Benn 2004, DFID 2005, NSC 2006, and Natsios 2006.

2001: 30) At some point, it is argued, the abrogation of individual human rights override state rights. This not only makes intervention justifiable – it makes it a kind of moral imperative.

R2P contains language which brings to the fore a proposed legal doctrine that imposes a moral responsibility on states to consider their foundational notions of state sovereignty on a level that can be conditioned by individual sovereign rights. It is an interesting evolution of the idea that states are justified in their practice of sovereign power by their just representation of the interests and well-being of their citizenry. It expands this idea of citizenry, arguably, to a global context. This reconditioning of sovereignty is further complicated by the ICISS' determination that intervening states would often – perhaps out of another type of competing moral necessity – take into consideration their own interests on behalf of their citizenry. This was balanced with a recognition that any state would only choose to intervene in another state if it was in its best interest.

> "It may not always be the case that the humanitarian motive is the only one moving the intervening state or states, even within the framework of Security Council-authorized intervention. Complete disinterestedness – the absence of any narrow self-interest at all – may be an ideal, but it is not likely always to be a reality: mixed motives, in international relations as everywhere else, are a fact of life. Moreover, the budgetary cost and risk to personnel involved in any military action may in fact make it politically imperative for the intervening state to be able to claim some degree of self-interest in the intervention [to justify the act to its citizens]…" (ibid: 36)

That doctrine, formulated in the months before the attacks of September 11 and formally published shortly after, reflected internal tensions within the notion of sovereignty the international "community" was struggling with. In the wake of September 11, R2P retained relevance but the interest of intervening parties – in protecting themselves and their allies from security problems associated with failure - became more important than before. "Saving failed states" was no longer as important as "saving *us* from failed states". Failed states were actual or potential havens for terrorism, and terrorism is considered the greatest possible threat to civilization as we know it today. Denizens of those failed states are generally considered victims as well of the evils of terrorism – thereby fulfilling the humanitarian requirement of R2P – but there is an attendant sort of suspicion. The failed state paradigm tends to individuate blame – states fail because their governments did just that: fail. The causes of state failure are internal. This might be because the government is corrupt:

"We call such institutions… extractive economic institutions – extractive because such institutions are designed to extract incomes and wealth from one subset of society to benefit a different subset." (Acemoglue and Robinson 2012: 89)

Alternately, the government might be inept. Patrick (2006) categorizes potentially failing states by way of "will" (in this case, willingness to act legitimately) and "capacity" (ability to govern effectively). Either case justifies intervention – if a government lacks the will to govern effectively then it is not carrying out its sovereign responsibility.

Sovereignty in this narrative is treated inconsistently in a way that is at tension with itself. The concept of sovereignty implies that it is above the law, determining it. Yet all-powerful sovereignty demands justification in terms of how it operates. It must be legitimated but legitimation is in tension with its power. . For sovereignty to work as a concept it must exist outside normal bounds, being exceptional and above laws because it is the natural law-giver. Yet it can only justify this all-powerful nature by recourse to acting justly in the interests of those who the sovereign holds sovereignty over – the very need to justify sovereignty is antithetical to the notion of sovereignty. To wield sovereign power without legitimate political authority is illegitimate and "beastly" or "rogue".[17] If a government fails to carry out its sovereign duties because of a lack of capacity, that lack of capacity is a lack of sovereign power – ergo a lack of sovereignty. If it fails to carry out its sovereign duties because of a lack of will – even though nominally a sovereign power – then it lacks legitimate political authority and is rogue. Rogue states are complicit in whatever evils may take place within their boundaries. Interventions then are justifiable because either no sovereign exists or because the sovereign has degenerated into rogueness – both assumptions are allowed for (often simultaneously) within the failed state paradigm. Yet both are in tension with the assumption within dominant liberal norms of international relations that suggest statehood entails an inalienable right to sovereignty and non-intervention. Doctrines such as the Responsibility to Protect and casting failed states as security problems in the Global War on Terror seek to justify the abrogation of the failed state right-to-sovereignty, but simultaneously suggest that interventions can/will realistically only happen when the political interests of the intervener are at stake.

This is not a problem which goes wholly unnoticed within the literature. Mazarr (2014) focuses on post-September 11 US foreign policy up through 2014, arguing that interventionist state building as typified by Afghanistan and Iraq is strategically the wrong policy for the US.

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[17] For an in-depth analysis on the auto-immunity of sovereignty in the context of rogue states, see Derrida 2006.

"The practical challenges of state-building missions are now widely appreciated… long, difficult, and expensive… The threat posed by weak and fragile states… turned out to be less urgent and more complex and diffuse than was originally suggested… The specified dangers [especially terrorism] were never unique to weak states… nor would state-building campaigns necessarily have mitigated them." (Mazarr 2004: 115 – 116)

He argues that while the events of September 11 brought the focus of US defence policy to terrorism and failed states, state failure is not the cause of terrorism, nor are the two even closely linked. Mazarr suggests that there will still be a place for US policy that advances counter-terrorist operations in failed states as well as a place for policies intended to help foster stability and growth (potentially state-building in nature as well). However, he argues that policy should and will begin to de-emphasize these aspects of security as it becomes more obvious that failed states and terrorism are not intrinsically linked.

Yet we continue to see intervention and state building programs mobilized in so-called failed states as ways to improve security and better fight the Global War on Terror. Perhaps more usefully, Call (2010) argues for conceptual alternatives to that of the failed state while still allowing for a need to intervene in spaces currently thought of as "failed states".

"Certainly the West… has strategically deployed the terms… to justify intervention… reflects the selectivity of the erosion of sovereignty… terms are also Western-centric and patronizing… [However] the prescription to step away and withdraw from international engagement is just as likely to benefit these victimizers rather than their victims or their political opponents." (Call 2010: 304)

Call does not specifically call into question the notion of statehood or sovereignty, though there is an implicit challenge to at least the way in which these notions are often mobilized. He argues for more specificity in understanding the situations of places which we call failed states, arguing that the diverse circumstances under which they operate defy typification by a label like failed state. He argues that there are a number of different gaps (or types of failures) which lead to situations of state collapse and that the failed state paradigm tends to ignore this specificity of types of failure. An interesting conceptual evolution, Call actually upsets standardized notions of statehood while explicitly and strongly supporting those standardized notions of (successful) statehood. Again, this seems to suggest some openness to alternative ways of 'knowing' a place such as Afghanistan. (ibid)

Dissenting voices within dominant discourses on state failure and security are refreshing and do point in the direction of binary problematics. Call brings attention to the strategic deployment of failed state terminology and the uneven application of notions of sovereignty along with a West-centric bias and a certain paternal mindset.

Within dominant liberal literature on state failure, the tensions within the sovereign/non-sovereign and successful/failed state binaries can be explicitly drawn out. Intervention on failed states is immediately justified by Helman and Ratner by invoking a new conditionality of sovereignty, calling the notion of absolutely sovereignty outdated. The doctrine of R2P expands upon this, weighing national sovereignty against individual sovereignty while Patrick argues that failed states are "legally but not actually sovereign". (Patrick 2006: 29)

As much as intervention on failed states – to save *them* or to save *us* – relies on conditioning the sovereign status of failed states it relies just as much on the unconditional sovereignty of the intervener. The intervener is the savior, a torch holder of the epitome of achievement in the liberal order of statehood and must be so in order to rebuild what has broken. The intervener wields ultimate sovereign might not only by its moral and security-derived authority to intervene but also by its assumptive capacity to fix what was broken – a system which was broken by the failed state itself. In this sense, capacity (sovereign power) is seen as a great legitimizer – the intervening state is so powerful it not only is able to arrange itself successfully but to concurrently build a successful state system in a space which is so dysfunctional as that it was unable to even maintain itself. In this way, its power is indicative of its righteousness – state building is legitimate because of the proven success of the intervener. This both reinforces the legitimate sovereign status of the intervening West while also reinforcing the notion of a dysfunctional political culture in the failed state – its broken nature in comparison to the valorous West.

Yet this is at odds with what are broadly said to be accepted norms of sovereignty within liberal narratives on statehood. Sovereignty is meant to rest on the twin pillars of sovereign might and legitimate political authority – this distinction is central to the securitization of the failed state discourse. If failed states are places where illegitimate actors are able to wield sovereign might (absolutely *implicit* in the idea that terrorists use failed states as bases of operation to carry out a type of *global warfare*), then the lack of legitimate political authority is key to state failure.[18]

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[18] This lack of legitimate political authority could derive from weakness in the well-intentioned government or from the bad intentions / corruption / etc… of the government. See Patrick 2006: 29-30 – especially p. 30 where he charts this out.

This suggests that the legitimacy of intervention *cannot* reside primarily on sovereign might, yet in large part it does. Helman and Ratner's conception of intervention tried to get around this by envisioning a central role for the United Nations in saving failed states – a super-sovereign entity acting on behalf of established norms of morality and successful state-ness rather than a given state's political agenda. This idea itself has some problems, but it never came to fruition. R2P wants to reconcile individual state political interests with the moral imperative of protecting individuals' sovereignty in a context of a broken failed state (that has lost its authority by failing to protect fundamental aspects of individual sovereignty). Yet it openly acknowledges that states will only intervene to "save" failed states when their own national interests – be they economic or security – are at stake.

Securitization suggests that failed states do (may) have a legal *right* to sovereignty but only in theory – in the real world where the security of the civilized world is at stake it is important to recognize the reality that those failed states simply are not sovereign. In this conception, failed states can be intervened upon simply for being failed – because their governments don't wield sovereign might effectively or because they are seen to be "bad acting" – in both cases a *potential* threat. In all cases, intervention is justified by the political interests and the sovereign power of interveners, whereas at best the question of legitimate political authority (problematic when abrogating a state's sovereign rights) is answered by claims of a moral imperative to save either the victims within the failed state or civilization at large. This is all underpinned by the assumption that ultimately, failure is a choice.

Critical Approaches and the External Causes of State Failure

Outside those debates on the internal causes of state failure emanating from within liberal notions of statehood are critiques of the whole underlying set of assumptions making those debates possible. Critical approaches to understanding state failure broadly claim that failed states have failed because of systemic faults in the relations between more powerful and less powerful states. States fail because of external factors, outside of that failed state's control. In this approach, failed states are victims of unjust outside forces and cannot rightly be blamed for their situation. The focus on external factors, such as predatory economic systems and uneven political power relations, means that these approaches point out flaws it finds within the liberal system of statehood.

In pointing to external factors causing state failure, critical approaches generally level critiques at what they perceive to be systemic injustices inherent to dominant liberal norms of international relations. This is healthy and fosters debate as to the merits and downsides of differing orthodoxies. Many valid and important points are brought to light, particularly in terms of potential dysfunctions in

aspects of liberal dominant narratives and sensitivity to the importance of history. There are, however, some shortcomings in specific critical approaches to understanding state failure. Even critical approaches often tend to frame generalized explanations of the experience of failed states. This tends to render abstract from unique experiences with the assumption that those specifics are less significant than a grand, and generalized, critique. With this in mind, there are still important lessons to be drawn from aspects of critical literature on state failure.

One example of critical perspectives finding external causes to state failure comes from Wade (2005). Wade's work addresses the notion of state failure from the perspective of world systems theory, and argues that imperialist practices explain why states fail. Through analysis of different economic models and indicators, he argues that the financialization of capitalism has led to a new sort of imperialism. For Wade, states fail because those states which hold power (successful states) 'stack the deck' in political and economic relations to favor themselves in the context of global finance systems, putting undue burden on less fortunate states:

> "The factors considered so far are to do with "structures" that constrain or favor options, not
> with agents. But agents also have an important role in the story. They [the West] have
> created structures (rules and organizations) that help them to win." (Wade 2005: 28)

Wade argues that state failure is a by-product of the North-South, core-periphery structure of economic and political power relations prevalent in the world. For Wade, rather than legacies of imperialistic mindsets embedded in the capitalist structure, there is a continuing and active (financial) imperialistic project being undertaken, and failed states are the most spectacular victims.

Wade's project is rigorously analytical and brings into play a great deal of empirical evidence that supports the idea that the very act of talking about state failure creates winners and losers. This highlights an uneven flow of power relations prior to the labeling of failure as part of his argument that the cause of state failure is external – it *is* that uneven flow of power relations. At the same time, it explains all state failure in the very generalized context of an assumption of global systems of a kind of imperialism by way of finance capitalism. For Wade, predatory market forces pushed by dominant powers within the liberal economic system to leech capital from the Global South / periphery in favor of the United States and its allied global institutions are largely responsible for state failure. (ibid: 18) Market forces may be powerful, but it is harmful and limiting to think solely in these terms.

Morton (2005) offers a post-Marxist critique of state failure and along with a number of important insights. He argues that Western policy toward failed states indicates a pathological view of their problems: the imperfections leading to failure are inherent in these states and, as such, they are "deviants" from the normal (successful) state of affairs. He argues that despite this discursive positioning, the universalization of capitalism is complicit (if not causal) in the existence of the failed state phenomenon. He advocates understanding conceptions of state failure historically, connecting contemporary failed state knowledge specifically with:

> "the historical origins of the genesis of capitalism through processes of primitive accumulation in late medieval and early modern Europe". (ibid: 374)

This is somewhat emblematic of many critical approaches – failed states are cast unjustly as a deviant 'other', broken and sick and outside of success because of their deviance by dominant liberal approaches. Rather than simply accepting this, Morton argues, it is important to take on a historical perspective which suggests uneven power relations in an economic system which privileges some actors over others. While liberal policy making bodies view state failure as a type of aberration or disease (ibid 372-373) state failure can be better understood as a continuing legacy of historical imperial and colonial relationships. For Morton, the compulsory adoption of liberal capitalistic structures among former colonies – regardless of the comfort of the fit – recreates these historical uneven power relations while simultaneously claiming that the era of systemic inequality is over and now all states are as successful as their ability and effort make possible.

This universalization of very particular notions of statehood – and what it means to be a successful state – are problematic for Morton. In order to justify the specific liberal (capitalist) model of statehood, failed states must be diagnosed (medically) as deviant and ill. Morton suggests that by taking on a historical understanding, particularly by tracing imperialist legacies of power relations in the failed state discourse, one can argue that the proper approach is to question static norms of statehood as such:

> "Statehood is assumed to be a universal order achieved through the acceptance of objective conditions of sovereignty shaped in the self-image of Western development. Yet my argument has raised the need to problematise universally recognisable signs of sovereign statehood in order to highlight the 'failed universalisation of the imported state'." (ibid: 377)

Morton makes numerous powerful points. He problematizes the universalization of the state and the viability of "importing" success on the liberal state model. He also explores ways in which

different discursive tactics are used to justify particular conceptions about failed states – particular ways of constructing a general failed state identity. These are all important points and of use to any project to critique dominant narratives on state failure – however the focus here is on the general rather that the particular. There is also an assumption that the state failure phenomenon as a whole can be explained through recourse to post-Marxist accounts of new colonial power relations.

Gruffyd Jones (2008) expands upon Morton's critique of how state failure is conceptualized. She argues that the methodological flaws inherent in the failed state discourse undermine its explanatory power and proposes an alternative framework for analyzing the social conditions inherent to state failure:

> "There are several steps in the development of an adequate critique of the 'failed state' discourse. One step is to focus on the ideological character of the discourse. This requires locating the notion of 'failed state' in a longer history of imperial ideology, and emphasizing its current role in legitimizing intervention." (Gruffyd Jones 2008: 181-182)

For Gruffyd Jones the very *notion* of state failure, the ability to talk about these crises as failed states, is rooted in imperial ideologies. So-called failed states have "failed" due to neo-colonial practices rooted in a global political economy – and they are able to be described as "failed states" due to the legacy of imperial ideologies. Interestingly in terms of this dissertation, she further argues that liberal norms of statehood and state failure lack specificity:

> "One of the most important methodological flaws of the 'failed state' discourse is its inability to identify historically specific social forms and conditions, and their global relations." (ibid: 182)

It is an important point. Yet she relies solely on reference to legacies of colonial discourse and "knowledge" about so-called failed states - justifying this by saying that nearly all failed states were also colonies (ibid 186) – as determinative of how and why it is possible to discuss failed states.

Gruffyd Jones touches on discursive legacies of colonial interaction, not unlike Morton's work. She identifies ways in which those legacies actually make possible the very label of failed state. Yet there must be different types of colonial experience, and there are certainly states which are today conceived as "failed states" – like Afghanistan - which were peripheral to or even wholly outside of the colonial experience. Notions of statehood are affected by colonial and imperial pasts but it is an ideological standpoint to claim that it is the basis of modern statehood.

Desai (2004) makes similar arguments, but goes further in leveling critiques directly on the United States. She argues that the narrative on state failure is, in fact, the evolution of the United States' imperial strategy. Rather than being based on control of finance, the new US imperialism involves more direct control of productive means. The "new" US imperialism, for Desai, is in part a sort of reversion. What's more, a reconfiguration of what nationalism means in the wake of the Cold War was complicit in this imperial project.

> "…if there is a single referent to which these vague concepts (referring to the Third World) relate, and from which they derive programmatic longevity, it was the idea… of the progressive potential of nationalism within capitalist imperialism." (Desai 2004: 169)

This new way of orienting nationalism and state identity – to include state failure – helps to sustain America's imperial hegemony for Desai. Here Desai mingles discourse analysis with Marxist theoretical underpinnings to explain the shifting identity of the 'third world', both in conception and practice. All states of the peripheral Third World are assigned identities in relation to the United States, the imperial hegemon – propping up the notion of the United States as of central importance while ensuring that the identity of the Third World relies on the identity of the United States for solidity.

> "There are, first, 'bully' states, allying with and emulating the increasingly brazen US imperialism regionally. Second, there are 'rogue' states, with no prospects of such alliance and emulation but a substantial capacity for violence. Finally, 'failed' states are in financial and political receiverships to the US or one or another of its local, bully, allies. In this world questions of Third World solidarity, autonomy from imperialism, 'third way' development or non-alignment simply do not arise." (Desai 2004: 172)

Desai's critique focuses on the uneven flow of power relations created and recreated by the state / failed state discourse. For Desai, the idea of sovereign statehood, development and success are a kind of bait for peripheral polities – a promise that if they accept the dominant liberal discourse on statehood they can reap benefits and do well within what she calls a system of "capitalist imperialism". States on the fringe, however, are unable to truly succeed in a system which is in reality, for Desai, a new type of imperialism, and those fringe polities become one of three types of states – bully, rogue or failed – none of which fulfil the purported promise of the liberal state system.

Desai calls attention to a marginalizing tendency inherent in the successful / failed state model, suggesting that external causes – in this case a new imperialist system in which the United States seeks to gain control of more and more forms of production – ensure that peripheral states will never truly be

part of the liberal order. If they have any sort of power whatsoever – the closest to success she deems possible in this system – they will be either 'bully' regimes (i.e. Saudi Arabia) or 'rogue' regimes (i.e. Iran). In this imperialist system, Desai says, there are external pressures on peripheral states' governments, which means that many will not have the strength to be a bully or rogue regime, and those are the failed states. Thus, the failed state paradigm only gives peripheral polities three options and, in itself, creates the conditions of failure by reinforcing a narrative of liberal statehood that is only a cover for a new capitalist imperialism.

Noam Chomsky offers a well-regarded and exhaustive critique of the failed state narrative which in many ways echoes the concerns and findings of this project. He argues that there is a double-standard inherent to the failed state discourse, wherein the intervener (generally the United States for Chomsky) is authorized to do some of the very things that failed states are labeled failed – or rogue, or terrorist – for doing. He goes about his analysis systematically, first considering means of categorization:

> "Among the most salient properties of failed states is that they do not protect their citizens from violence—and perhaps even destruction— or that decision makers regard such concerns as lower in priority than the short-term power and wealth of the state's dominant sectors. Another characteristic of failed states is that they are "outlaw states," whose leaderships dismiss international law and treaties with contempt. Such instruments may be binding on others but not on the outlaw state." (Chomsky 2007: 101)

Here he is referring descriptively to the "will / capacity" analysis leaned upon in liberal state discourse on failed states. He then discusses the securitization of the concept:

> "In 1994, Clinton expanded the category of "terrorist states" to include "rogue states." A few years later another concept was added to the repertoire: "failed states," from which we must protect ourselves, and which we must help, sometimes by devastating them. [but] … problems beset the category "failed state." Like "terrorist state" and "rogue state," the concept is "frustratingly imprecise," susceptible to too many interpretations." (ibid: 107-108)

So, "failed state" is conflated with terrorism and rogue-ness. What is meant by "failed state" is already imprecise, says Chomsky, and this conflation makes it even more so. It also opens up the possibility of intervention on failed states both to save them and to save ourselves. Yet these acts of violence, *sometimes by devastating them*, Chomsky argues, are themselves indicative of the activities used to describe failure and rogue-ness.

This is justified by reference to the promotion of democracy. Democracy is considered such a good in its own right that any means is justified in spreading that democracy. For Chomsky, this is indicative of uneven power relations, the domination of "failed states" by the United States for its own ends, but justified by reference to democracy and justice and a messianic project (ibid: 134-135). Despite the justification of spreading democracy and saving failed states, Chomsky turns to neo-Marxist analysis to suggest that interventions are instead just one more example of a new economic imperialism.

> The major task in the subversion of Iraqi democracy is to pressure political elites to accept
> "vague promises" and to retain as much as possible of the illegal economic regime imposed
> by the invaders, based on the standard principle of opening the country and its resources to
> foreign control (primarily US and UK), under the guise of "economic liberalism." (Chomsky
> 2007: 165)

Each of these examples of critical approaches have something important to offer. Yet they also all refer to a general theory of economic and political power in order to explain the failed state narrative and associated phenomena within it. They all rely on generalized theories of international relations which are useful but which cannot hope to capture the very unique situation of Afghanistan and its specific place within the failed state discourse.

This thesis draws on many of the critiques laid out by critical approaches such as these, but rejects a generalized explanation for Afghanistan's place in the failed state narrative. This act of generalization tends to reproduce certain basic assumptions about sovereignty espoused within orthodox approaches. Specifically, these generalize explanations turn to uneven power relations and coercive systemic structures which can be blamed for the phenomenon of state failure. This fails to recognize the persisting indeterminacy informing Western perceptions of Afghan identity – and how contemporary mobilizations of a particularly determined "sovereignty" reinforce that indeterminacy and its attendant marginalizing of any possible recognized Afghan identity. Afghanistan has a very specific history of interaction with the West, often acting as a seemingly empty tactical space on which various geopolitical projects are carried out *in ways that do not fit neatly into standard imperialist / post-imperialist explanations*. This thesis differs specifically because of its intention to recognize Afghanistan's historical indeterminacy and lack of specific character in Western conceptualizations, and analyzing how those perceptions make justifiable specific interventions which serve Western interests.

Escaping Assumptions of State-ness

In addition to marginalizing possible interrogations of Afghan specificity, reference to generalized models to critique the failed state paradigm can have other negative effects. Morton and Chomsky move towards a questioning of the very notion of statehood and sovereignty as it stands. This is an important specification, as the normalization of a central concept of "the state" is important to the normalization of the failed state. The binary of successful/failed state is co-constitutive, and to critique the notion of state failure in specific cases as this project intends to do in the case of Afghanistan requires that binary be upset. The tendency to critique state failure from a generalized theoretical perspective can serve to overshadow this problematization which – in practice if not in intent – can itself help to stabilize and naturalize statehood. That is to say, in proving that states fail due to external circumstances, it is too easy to take for granted that there is a well-defined and understood "state" which can fail in the first place.

In a broad sense this problem is shared with that of liberal approaches assuming internal causes of state failure. Assuming the "state" as a viable and well-understood object of analysis closes off avenues of questioning. This closing off is an inherently dangerous act - especially when it subsumes the identities of these states in crisis - relegating recognized as well as unseen potential understandings or knowledges to the margins without even the slightest consideration. This is the basic rationale behind Derrida's call for deconstructive critical projects.

That rationale is one which this project shares. This thesis seeks to illustrate how standard notions of sovereignty have been applied to Afghanistan's specific situation in a way that embeds and obliterates Afghanistan's potential for specific (one might even say sovereign) identity within this dominant notion of sovereignty. Derrida's work is often referred to because of these connections, particularly in his problematization of "rogue" and "failed" state designations.

Accordingly, this thesis critically analyzes history and meaning in discourses and assumed knowledges – such as the assumption of a natural form for statehood. This is a questioning that seemingly Morton and Chomsky would find compelling but which their projects nevertheless make subservient to – a mere part of - economic and imperial explanations of how international relations operate. This project, on the other hand, sees economic and imperial discursive knowledges to be *parts* of a rigorous critique of the failed state discourse – at least in the case of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's unique indeterminacy and determined emptiness are made possible in part by imperial / colonial norms and in part by strategic choices by the West. Yet those are only parts of the

story. It represents a small sample of the discursive binaries utilized which (re)enforce Afghanistan as an indeterminate space empty of specific character. By focusing too heavily on these imperial/colonial norms one obscures Afghanistan's very specific history – and thereby its unique identity.

What follows are some critical accounts which do attempt to make space for some kind of historical specificity as a way of critiquing the failed state discourse, though we will find that here too there are shortcomings when attempting to give deep analysis to Afghanistan's particular situation.

Literature Exploring the Specificity of the Afghan Case

Some critical theory has improved on these identified difficulties, with an attempt to move away from orthodoxies and/or toward more focused specificity. Much of this emerges from post-colonial traditions. There are rich intellectual resources on which to draw from within these wide traditions, though one must not too closely equate (implicitly or explicitly) colonialism with state failure. While there are very often connections, the nature of those connections cannot be assumed to be the same across specific cases. Indeed, many states argued to be 'failed' have questionable if any connection to colonial pasts. Illustrative examples come from the work of Hill (2005), Maroya (2003), Stanski (2009) and Hagmann and Peclard (2010).

Hill (2005) provides a broad post-colonial critique of the state failure notion, arguing that colonial and imperial discursive legacies interact with the notion of state failure to empower a continued valorization of the idea of the superior West and a continued subjugation of the Global South. Hill rests his argument on the notion that colonial relations inform the whole of first/third world power relations. However, he differentiates himself from previously mentioned approaches in that he focuses on problematizing sovereignty, identifying notions of positive and negative sovereignties. For Hill positive sovereignty denotes freedom from outside interference and having the wherewithal to order things within its own borders on behalf of its citizenry. Negative sovereignty is only freedom from interference. This is contrary to the very notion of sovereignty, which lies beyond restrictiveness. "Negative" sovereignty could be more readily reckoned a recognition of the right to sovereignty, whereas "positive" sovereignty is the actual power of the sovereign. For Hill, former colonies become failed states because they had their actual sovereign power stripped by colonial and neo-colonial relations whilst simultaneously being given the responsibility/right of sovereignty (without the tools to exercise it).

In addition, Hill talks about the universalizing problem of the "failed state" label:

Underpinning the failed state literature therefore, is a European or Western universalism. Identification of failed states is achieved through the construction of a state/failed state dichotomy built on a fixed, universal standard of what constitutes a successful state. Success is defined as the possession of certain capabilities and by the nationhood of the population of that state's population. Western states represent the normative, universal standard of success and it is the inability of certain African states to replicate the political, economic, social and cultural conditions within Western states that has, according to the failed state literature, resulted in their failure. (Hill 2005: 148)

This is a well taken point. One might think of this as taking Morton's critique of a universalized notion of sovereignty and of statehood a bit further. This exploration of problems with the generalizations inherent in this universalism is unfortunately cut short by reference to an alternate universalism. That is to say, Hill critiques these universalizing aspects of the failed state discourse with reference to a generalized / universalized answer of neo-colonialism. Failed states are failed states because of colonial and neo-colonial practices. This may well be true in many cases, but not every failed state is a former colony. It is important not to suppose that colonial interactions explain every facet of becoming a so-called failed state, because that supposition leads to assumptions and false equivalencies.

Maroya (2003) offers a different take, positing that states on the fringe of 'the colonial experience' are far more likely to fail than other states. This is more sophisticated, accepting that not only are there different types of colonial experience but that colonial experience does not necessarily explain all state failure. Maroya argues that certain former colonies were better positioned to take part in the liberal state system than others, with the difference being how significantly the colonial power imprinted its European values on that colony's civil society. Thus, the European notion of a successful nation-state does not come so easily to these places; the neo-liberal state-building narrative then just doesn't work for these states. Instead, the ruling classes of these states instead misuse aid for predatory interests, leading to a further erosion of civil and political institutions. There are striking similarities between this initial analysis and certain prescriptive liberal analyses, such as in Acemoglu and Robinson (2013).

"…we as chroniclers of the nation-state system's history have tended to view its expansion as the vehicle of progress. In the context of post-Second World War decolonisation, such a view is readily understandable, given the manifest failings of the colonial system and the compelling logic of self-determination as a principle of international justice." (Maroya: 268)

But –

> "…countries [on the fringe of colonial administration] are not simply struggling to be states
> (the 'failed state' thesis), but are struggling with the very concept of statehood as understood
> in the contemporary world." (ibid: 267)

He bridges these prescriptive sensibilities with critiques of colonial norms. However, he focuses only on the extent to which Western norms that came along with colonialism were embedded into the culture before the end of colonialism.

> Studies into the legacies of colonialism have most usually generalised from the experiences of
> major colonies… It seems likely, however, that… frontier territories, would have a different
> and distinct legacy. The alternative suggested here is to look at structures within colonialism
> — we could think of them as cores and peripheries within the periphery — that may help
> explain varying postcolonial outcomes. (ibid: 271)

The work does ask some interesting questions about the connection between colonialism and statehood among former colonies. It also calls into question certain general explanations sometimes mobilized within postcolonial studies of statehood and state failure. In a manner similar to Hill's work, Maroya pushes toward more specificity but still does so from within a generalizing model – *some type* of colonial explanation is still the best explanation for state failure, thus situating all of the failed state discourse within broader discourses on postcolonialism.

Stanski (2009) pursues Afghanistan's specific history of interaction with the West as a model of understanding Afghanistan as a failed state. He analyzes the inconsistent manner in which important Afghan figures – Warlords – are typified from a Western perspective. This begins to review closely how Afghan identity is conceived and situated. He approaches this from a historical and genealogical analysis, drawing out strong connections with Orientalist archetypes. This specific analysis and its general connection to Said's work then allows for far wider reaching conclusions on the nature of West-rest interaction.

> "…Orientalist assumptions of a violent Afghan 'Other' colour US understandings of 'Afghan
> warlords'. It shows how US officials and commentators employed these cultural constructions
> to advance the armed intervention, at first by validating certain major militia leaders as
> valuable allies and later to justify a more invasive role in the troubled state-building project.
> (Stanski 2009: 77)

Stanski shows us how at times these so-called warlords are heroes, and at other times they are villains – with typifications being strategically deployed depending on the needs of the time. This goes a considerable distance toward articulating Afghanistan's indeterminacy. Yet the historical depth of analysis is somewhat limited, bringing focus to Orientalist archetypes as broadly explanatory. Analysis of all major Western interventions on Afghanistan in the past two hundred years uncovers narratives which recourse to Orientalist explanations alone (ibid: 89-91) do not adequately explain.

Other critical takes show more interest in the limits and potential harms in the very gestalt of the failed state discourse. This moves further toward one aspect of this dissertation's aim, considering the foundational underlying assumptions of successful and failed states as they pertain to the Afghan case.

Caron (2006) speaks to one specific instance of US policy toward Afghanistan as a failed state which is highly instructive. Part of the Bush Administration's failed state doctrine, Caron says, argues that failed states have lost all rights and protections accorded to states – in addition to losing claim to statehood Afghanistan has lost recourse to, for instance, the Geneva Convention on Human Rights (and all other associated international law and custom).

> "The four 1949 Geneva Conventions do not apply – the memorandum answers – because Afghanistan is not a party to the treaties… Do we take this reply to mean that Afghanistan never ratified the treaties? No, it did so in September of 1956. Do we take this to mean that Afghanistan has withdrawn from the treaties? No, it did not. The answer is that Afghanistan is not a party because it is no longer a "state"."
> (Caron 2006: 215)

Caron here is speaking to an internal memorandum for the Bush Administration looking at the legality of things like torture in Afghanistan. He argues that the most bothersome aspect of this memorandum is not that it argues for the legality of torture, however. Instead the most bothersome idea is that the so-called failed state doctrine assumes that when a state fails, it completely ceases to exist in terms of international law. This leads Caron to make the captivating statement – "If Afghanistan is failed, then Afghanistan is dead". He moves on from this to examine international legal doctrine and sovereignty. Caron effectively captures one problem within the failed state narrative, which supposes that statehood is the only effective measure of character and rights in the international arena. He argues that what constitutes statehood is less precise and clear than this, and that using labels of state failure as justification for intervention conflates political science analysis with international law solely for the political gain of the intervener.

"…It is important to emphasize that the definition of failed state was constructed for political science analysis. If it had been developed in a context where the consequence of meeting the definition would be that the state no longer existed, one can be sure that the definition would be far more demanding and precise… I very much doubt that any of these scholars or analysts would have stated that those states because of their 'failed' status no longer existed as states in a legal sense." (ibid: 218-219)

This constitutes a powerful critique of the failed state narrative, but it focuses exclusively on legal analysis. That is to say, Caron is concerned with the nature of statehood and sovereignty from a legal perspective. Those are important and interesting considerations, but they fail to consider the actual specificity of the Afghan situation. In other so-called failed states, would an intervening party have such a disregard for that failed state's character in international law? Perhaps or perhaps not, but in the case of Afghanistan there is a historical tendency to treat the Afghan space as without character – it is not caused by the failed state label but predates that label and thus interacts with the label and concept in very unique and specific ways.

Edwards (2010) contends that Western models of state building have failed and examines efforts in Afghanistan after the events of September 11 as a case study in why that might be. She explores what is supposed to constitute state failure and identifies some gap between conceptualization of what constitutes a failed state and the goals of state building.

"Various interventions by the international community have taken place in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Haiti, and Iraq, with 'state-building' perceived as the dominant 'solution' for places deemed to have 'failed'. A variety of definitions exist, which encompass 'failure', 'weak', or 'fragile', but there remains a vagueness and sometimes a blurring of distinctions between these." (Edwards 2010: 971)

State building, Edwards contends, has not been successful in Afghanistan particularly, but also in a general sense, because what a successfully rebuilt state (in terms of a state-building project) looks like is conditioned by Western security interests:

"'fragile states are seen through the dominant lens of Western security interests' and that in this context they appear as little more than fertile breeding grounds for the export of terrorism or safe havens for terrorists. As such they become a threat to 'the national security of the USA' and to 'international security'. Hence, 'rebuilding states' is seen as a challenge that US policy must take on." (ibid: 972)

Edwards' work suggests that processes of state building and concepts of state failure are only related in the sense that the one justifies the other. Definitions of state failure encompass a number of broad and unclear traits, but the implication of state failure is an inability to exercise sovereignty. This justifies state building projects – but those projects are generally tied directly to security interests and the complexion of these *imposed* state building projects directly reflect that aim.

Situating this Project in Relation to the Literature

This thesis is a critical project that has an affinity with much of what the critical literature explored in this chapter has to say. The empirical research chapters that follow form the basis of a fundamental critique of assumptions on statehood, sovereignty, and Afghan identity represented in this chapter's review of liberal narratives on state failure. Many of this project's critiques will echo specific critiques leveled by other critical authors mentioned above. At times, this project will lean on other critical scholars' works, such as that of Weber (1995)[19], to articulate particular critiques of sovereignty. This project, then, must be considered to lie within the broad umbrella of critical scholarship.

Critical scholars have captured aspects of the uneven relations between Afghanistan and the West in some important ways. Chomsky and Morton bring out neo-colonial aspects of the situation, Stanski identifies Orientalist influences in the narrative, Caron critiques sovereign domination while Edwards critiques imposed state building and Hill levels a post-colonial lens. These approaches are all important, but tend to frame generalized explanations.

This study is a part of critical literature, but stands apart from these approaches in its determination to draw out indeterminacy and insubstantiality in Western perceptions of Afghanistan. This is important because that indeterminacy makes possible a set of often internally contradictory justifications for intervention on Afghanistan which often seem to be more reflective of valorous self-imaginings of the West than of Afghanistan as a referent. These internal contradictions are reflected in contemporary reliance on a stabilized and naturalized understanding of sovereignty which underpins the state system but is itself contradictory. This suggests that a state-building project in Afghanistan-as-failed-state is not only unlikely to have lasting positive effects but also recreates practices of marginalizing Afghanistan's potential (sovereign?) character. Thus, any project to confront the terrible problems which clearly plague the polity of Afghanistan must be undertaken from a position that works to understand rather than obscure Afghanistan's specificity – which may make possible a uniquely Afghan solution. Drawing this out requires a deconstructive history of Western interactions with

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[19] See chapter 6.

Afghanistan, and this deconstructive approach – and its focus on Afghan indeterminacy / identity assignation – is what differentiates this project.

In conducting a historical analysis of Afghanistan, a variety of binary oppositions have come to light which frame the relations between Western powers and Afghanistan. The critical literature considered earlier in this chapter at times makes – explicitly or implicitly – reference to some of these binaries. A great deal of attention is paid to the West/other (or Oriental) binary in particular, to the extent that this binary view of a "West" and an oppositional "Other" is the core analytical referent. In this view, "failed states" can be labeled and treated as they are because this failed state narrative occupies one small place within a normalized structure of power relations between the West and its oppositional Other.

This is not the only binary referred to in the critical literature (though it is the most widely referenced). Each critical approach appears to privilege one or another general binary opposition to the exclusion of others. This project intends, through its deconstructive historical approach, to give space for all of these discursive objects – and their inherent tensions – and show how they interact within the broader Afghan narrative, exhibiting Afghan indeterminacy and its specificity within the broader failed state discourse.

Chapter 3 – First Anglo Afghan War

"If the Shah should take Herat, he will undoubtedly have a game before him in Affghanistan, aided as he is by Russia… He cannot be thwarted in these views except by England, and this he well knows."

UK Foreign Office (b)

Nascent Narrative - Britain Comes to 'Know' Afghanistan.

Afghanistan in the first half of the 19th century was politically divided, with a number of factional leaders in charge of regions within Afghanistan but no dominant figure or unifying polity. Accordingly, Britain had no formal or specific way of talking about Afghanistan. Afghanistan occupied a non-space far outside the popular Western imagination at the time, only coming to Britain's attention even tentatively due to a Persian invasion which seemingly could have implications on British India's security. Prior to this, interaction with Afghanistan was limited to leveraging ways to ensure outside powers did not gain influence in Afghanistan (once again, as a way to protect British dominion in India). This is a trend which would continue for over a century up to the state-building and war-on-terrorism eras of international relations.

The first Anglo-Afghan War took place between 1839 and 1842, at a time when the Shah of Persia was pushing forces into Afghanistan and laying siege to Herat. Documents from the time suggest that Britain saw no real problem with this as such – Persia's claims on Afghanistan were seen as legitimate if Persia were able to press them home. Not only was this a generally accepted idea, it was written directly into an 1814 treaty between Britain and Persia.[20]

"If War should be declared between the Affghans and Persians, the English Government shall not interfere with either Party, unless their mediation to effect a Peace shall be solicited by both Parties." (UK Foreign Office 1841: p 263)

Britain's particular interests were such, however, that they preferred to see Persia's ambitions fail. Within Afghanistan ruling factions of various cities had overlapping and competing alliances; some were related to and friendly with Persia's ruling groups while others were not. Persia's advance had the

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[20] Article IX of the "DEFINITIVE TREATY of Friendship and Alliance between Great Britain and Persia", 25 Nov 1814.

potential of pushing Afghanistan into a general state of internal conflict and Britain strongly believed that Persia's rulers had been suborned by Russian interests. (UK Foreign Office [b]: pp1-12)

Unlike during future conflicts with Afghanistan, there is no attempt at arguing that British intervention in Afghanistan was legitimate. In the first phase of British intervention, before actual conflict involving British forces, a representative of the British government sought to bring Persia's invasion to a close through diplomatic means. This slowly shifted into a situation where Britain considered giving material support to certain friendly Afghan groups (particularly in Herat). Ultimately, the decision was made to depose the ruling figure in Kabul (Shah Soojah) in favor of Dost Mahomed Khan. Soojah was friendly with Persia, supporting Persia's designs on certain portions of what is today Afghanistan (and were under sway of cities held by his rivals). Khan had formerly been Amir of the whole of Afghanistan (to the extent that there was any centralized government) but had been deposed by a coup which saw Soojah gain power. Khan had been friendly with Britain, and this was purportedly at least a significant part of why he'd been deposed. (Kaye 1871, pp 100 – 110)

Prior to this time, the absence of a leader friendly to Britain on the throne of Kabul wasn't seen as a problem. Referring back to the 1814 treaty between Persia and Britain, India's security from its west was secured.

> "The Persian Government judges it incumbent on them, after the conclusion of this Definitive Treaty, to declare all Alliances contracted with European Nations in a state of hostility with Great Britain null and void, and hold themselves bound not to allow any European Army to enter the Persian Territory, nor to proceed towards India[21], nor to any of the Ports of that Country; and also engage not to allow any Individuals of such European Nations, entertaining a design of invading India, or being at enmity with Great Britain, whatever, to enter Persia. Should any European Powers wish to invade India by the road of Kharazm, Tartaristan, Bokhara, Samarcand, or other routes, His Persian Majesty engages to induce the Kings and Governors of those Countries to oppose such invasion, as much as is in his power, either by the fear of his Arms, or by conciliatory measures." (UK Foreign Office 1841: p262)[22]

There is a lot to be gleaned from this *first* article of the treaty. Its essence is to gain Persia's guarantee that routes into India through all environs near to Persia would be proofed from European

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[21] i.e. through Afghanistan, which wasn't even given a mention.
[22] See article 1 of the "DEFINITIVE TREATY of Friendship and Alliance between Great Britain and Persia", 25 Nov 1814.

aggression. This is primarily aimed at ensuring roads into Afghanistan were secure – Kharazm, Tartarstan, Bokhara and Samarkand are all in Central Asia along (though outside) the northern borders of contemporary Afghanistan. Although Afghanistan was an apparent focus of this article, it was never mentioned by name nor were any of its cities mentioned (though Herat figures as perhaps *the* key geographical point in all narratives to follow). Afghanistan is only mentioned in Article IX wherein Britain promises not to involve itself in any conflict between Persia and Afghanistan, without Persia's permission.

By the late 1830's things had changed. It was feared that Persia was acting as an intermediary for budding relations between Soojah and Russia. (Foreign Office 1839a: pp. 26-33) Worse from Britain's view, there was growing evidence that Persia intended an invasion of Afghanistan for the purpose of taking Herat and its environs at the urging of Russia: "The lately contemplated against Herat, if it was not prompted, was, as is well known, strenuously urged on the attention of the Persian Government by the Russian Ambassador…" (ibid: 34) This feared invasion did go forward, with Britain's emissary to the Persian Shah's court attempting to play some sort of peacemaking role. At length the emissary, Mr. McNeill, argued that Britain would need to support Herat directly, arguing that:

> "If the Shah should take Herat, he will undoubtedly have a *game* [emphasis mine] before him in Affghanistan, aided as he is by Russia… He cannot be thwarted in these views except by England, and this he well knows." (UK Foreign Office 1839b: 20-21)

Also:

> "A general, indeed an [sic] universal, opinion prevails in all those countries, that Persia is pushed on and supported by Russia in her schemes of conquest." (UK Foreign Office 1839a: 86)

And:

> "…it is no secret to any one that the British Government has been desirous to prevent its [Herat's] fall; and that Russia, on the contrary, has been solicitous to see it in the hands of Persia." (UK Foreign Office 1839b: 46)

And:

> "It is reported and believed at Tehran, that the Russian Minister has announced the intention of his Government, if the Shah should succeed in taking Herat, to release Persia from the engagement to pay the balance of the debt due her by Russia… the Emperor desires to

contribute that amount towards defraying the expences [sic] of the campaign… [and] the Russian Minister had lent the Shah fifty thousand tomauns [additionally] to enable him to proceed on this campaign." (UK Foreign Office 1839a: 79)

It is then not surprising to learn that Mr. McNeill made a recommendation that important terms of the 1814 treaty with Persia were to be breached.[23]

"I see no reason why we should conceal from Persia that we cannot rely with sufficient confidence on her means, to entrust her with the defence [sic] of all the countries lying between the Arras and the Indus; and that the necessity of providing for our own security, compels us to require that she should abstain… that the terms offered by the Herat Government, secure to her all she had a right to demand, and that the British Government could neither sanction nor permit the prosecution of a war against Herat for the purpose of demanding more." (ibid: 82)

This, along with evidence that Russia was cultivating ties with certain Afghan leaders who were friendly with Persia (see Foreign Office 1839a: pp. 26-33, 119-120)[24] made Britain acutely uneasy about India's security. The rulers particularly of Kabul and Kandahar were Shia, with historical and familial ties to Persia. There was evidence of collaboration between these leaders and Persia, as well as Russia. (ibid: 26-7) Thus, in a sense, the invasion of Afghanistan was seen not so much as an invasion of Afghanistan but an action against Persia and, by extension, Russia. It is in this context that the first Anglo-Afghan war was launched with an eye to placing a united Afghanistan under the rule of an Ameer friendly to Britain.

In analyzing examples of discourse from the period, we find that there are a few recurrent themes that are echoed in other, later interactions between Afghanistan and first Britain then later the United States. Documented discourse from the period is fairly sparse and typifications of Afghanistan (and even the 'Orient' generally) were not yet well developed. As such, there is a prevailing sense of emptiness in regards to Afghanistan (which remains present throughout subsequent interactions), buttressed by assignations of emptiness and positioning vis-à-vis the "Great Game".

Deciding Afghanistan

Already there are signs of what will be a running theme throughout this project – that of Afghanistan's emptiness and indeterminacy. When deciding Afghanistan's fate (will it be absorbed by

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[23] Further argued in (ibid: 100-101)

[24] The latter reference includes a draft treaty between Russia and the Sirdar of Kandahar promising that Herat would be given over to the Sirdar if Persia were to capture it, and that Russia guaranteed Persia would not amalgamate any Afghan territory into Persia.

Persian conquest, or would Britain "save" Afghanistan for its own reasons?) there was little talk about Afghanistan itself. There is little indication of a recognized sovereign identity for Afghanistan, a situation arising from the various Afghan rulers' inability to protect themselves from Persia's aggression.

This is not a new idea. Sovereign identity has long been reserved by political philosophers for those polities with the power to demand their identity be respected. The notion of sovereignty has long involved competing and/or complementary norms of justice and coercive power.

> "It is just that what is just be followed; it is necessary that what is strongest be followed. Justice without force is impotent; force without justice is tyrannical…" (Marin 1986 in Derrida 2008: 8)

Sovereignty and the possible recourse of Afghanistan to the rights and protections involved in claiming sovereignty is a theme which comes to light specifically during the second Anglo-Afghan war. It is a claim that even at that later date is not taken particularly seriously – what may or may not be just is not merely subsumed by what is powerful (though also that), but it is also *decided* by what is *powerful*. What is right, what is just, what *matters* is decided by what is powerful – the sovereign decides what is sovereign, the sovereign makes itself known by its ability to do so. Hobbes sees sovereignty as arising out of a recognition that the sovereign must wield effective power over subjects so as to provide peace.[25] As Derrida argues on this basis:

> "…sovereignty, domination, or sovereign power is said to be *indivisible*… So we have here a configuration that is both systematic and hierarchical: at the summit is the sovereign (master, king, husband, father: ipseity itself), and below, subjected to his service, the slave, the beast, the woman, the child." (Derrida 2008: 49-50)

Perhaps more succinctly:

> "Right over non-rational animals is acquired in the same way as over *persons* of men, that is, by natural strength and powers. In the natural state, because of the war of all against all, any one may legitimately subdue or even kill Men…"[26] (ibid: 50)

For better or for worse, sovereign power is assumed to go along with effective power– that power bestows a certain right to do as one will. Conceptions of limits on this exist, at least moral limits

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[25] see T. Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. M. Oakeshott, (London, Macmillan 1962)
[26] Quote from Hobbes; *On the Citizen* pp 105 – 106.

bestowed by the notion of the sovereign as a guarantor of certain rights for those it represents.[27] There is a concept of what constitutes legitimate authority – but during the first Anglo-Afghan war this question was never asked (and when it was asked in the second Anglo-Afghan war it was quickly dismissed). From Britain's point of view, Persia's invasion of Afghanistan was moral because Persia's sovereign ruler was acting in the national interest of Persia, as agreed upon by treaty between two political entities whose power made them legitimate. At issue was whether it was in Britain's national interest (in this case that interest would be the preservation of British dominion in India) to stop that aggression. Afghanistan had no power here, and thus had *no sovereign identity*. Afghanistan would be absorbed by Persia – or not – based on the decision of its sovereign betters. In a way, this is a state of affairs which we will come to find doesn't change much over the next 180 years.

Afghanistan the Non-existent

This is an early conflation of two problematic binaries – that of *sovereign/non-sovereign* and *identity/non-identity*. Afghanistan was not sovereign because it did not have the power to successfully exert a claim to sovereign status. With no sovereign status, Afghanistan had no claim to an identity of its own (UK Foreign Office 1814: Art. VIII and IX). Indeed, Afghanistan was referred to as nothing more than Persia's frontier lands in the Simla Manifesto, a very important document released by the Governor General of India when Britain embarked on actual war to place a new ruler on the throne in Kabul. This lack of identity was further empowered by certain Orientalist tropes – the Afghan understood and respected only violence, seeing it as a type of strength:

> "I need not inform your Lordship, that in these countries, where the insecurity of person and property has still preserved a state of society in many respects nearly resembling that which prevailed the feudal ages in Europe… the public infliction on a servant of the British Government, of such indignities… I have little doubt that the object of the whole proceeding was to exhibit… an apparent contempt for the English, with a view to diminish the moral effect… by the general belief that we were opposed to the conquest of Herat by the Persians." (UK Foreign Office 1839a: 68)

And:

> "A desperate attack had been made by a body of Affghans… our men… fell an easy prey to our barbarous and bloodthirsty foe." (Sale 1843 :254)

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[27] See J. Locke, Two Treatises of Government, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970)

At this point, however, little is said about any characteristics of the Afghan people specifically. Even the first entry refers generally to both Aghans and Persians, speaking to the sort of cruel and uncivilized tactics that are seen as effective amongst them. What we find instead in an exhaustive search of literature available on the time is that Afghanistan's apparent character is notable most succinctly by its apparent absence. Afghanistan, it turns out, is not worth talking about as a rule. It is already an empty space which is, at discursive need, filled up with temporary meaning. Here was reference to Afghan savagery. Later tactical discussions about Afghanistan's value will be situated largely with regard to Afghanistan as a hinterland or frontier of important places, and is spoken of only in geo-strategic terms in relation to those important places (India, Persia, Russia). At times, individual Afghan groups will be spoken of as victims, or heroic, or otherwise worthy of aid when the speaker argues for intervention. This malleability of assignated character is something we will see time and again through analysis of Afghan narratives – especially during the Cold War intervention on Afghanistan (see Chapter 6).

It was possible to intervene on Afghanistan, invading and putting a Britain-friendly ruler on the throne of Kabul because Afghanistan's identity was not believed to matter (if in fact it even existed). Afghanistan was a place empty of any gestalt of civilization to lend it legitimacy. Interestingly and highly differentiated from all future interactions with Afghanistan, there is little emphasis given on its alleged uncivilized nature. Much more prevalent is a manner of typifying Afghanistan as a non-entity and a tendency to situate Afghanistan's geographic space in reference to the Great Game. Both of these are aspects of 'knowing' Afghanistan which will come up time and again throughout interventions in the future. In future interventions, Afghanistan's barbaric nature is presented as justification for those interventions – in the case of the first Anglo-Afghan war this was not seen as necessary. Afghanistan's emptiness is taken as such a given that it need not even be justified.

When it became known that Britain was involved in a conflict in Afghanistan, the awareness came from a publicly released document called the Simla Manifesto. The whole of the Manifesto was published in the *Times*, along with some commentary.

An article from the *Times* dated 22 December, 1838 presents and analyzes a government document which explains "the grounds on which the expedition to the *frontier of Persia* [emphasis mine][28] has been undertaken, and an exposition of our relations with the native princes in that part of India." The document was what has come to be known as the "Simla Manifesto" which is considered

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[28] Note – this is Afghanistan. Referred to not as a place in its own right, only "the frontier of Persia".

separately in this chapter. The *Times* goes on to discuss the context in which the document was released, in which Afghanistan was in a state of confused turmoil, with leaders of different major Afghan cities at odds with one another, some backing a targeted Persian invasion of Afghanistan with certain rival cities as targets.

> "…that the chiefs of Candahar [sic] have avowed their adherence to the Persian policy, with the 'full knowledge of its opposition to the rights and interests of the British nation in India', and that they have openly assisted in the operations before Herat. Had the place then fallen before the power of the SCHAH [sic], the means of further advance were immediately open to him, through the friendship and cooperation of these chiefs. With Runjeet Singh a treaty of alliance is stated… [and] Schah Soojah, the exiled prince of Cabul, is made a party… [to a three prong alliance with Persia]" (*Times* 1838)

The article goes on to explain that "Russia is adverted to in an obscure manner only…" in the Simla document, though we've seen sufficient evidence outlined earlier suggesting that the British government saw Russia behind the treaties. (See earlier mentioned documents naming Russia as guarantor of certain treaties, payments and provisions.) At issue then, is that there is unrest on Persia's frontiers with certain warlords in that area allying with Persia and Russia to gain influence, which was seen as a clear threat to British interests. Afghanistan itself was not a place – the frontiers of Persia was simply a wild space with wild city rulers fighting among themselves. It was this state of affairs that the Simla Manifesto suggested changing.

The Simla Manifesto is a document written and released on order of the Governor General of India at the time, Auckland. It laid out the official justification for the first Anglo Afghan war. The manifesto is highly critical of the then shah of Kabul, Dost Mahomed Khan. Khan, it was alleged:

> "…had made a sudden and unprovoked attack on… our ancient ally… it was to be feared that, the flames of war being once kindled in the very regions into which we were endeavouring [sic] to extend our commerce, the peaceful and beneficial purposes of the British Government would be altogether frustrated…" (MacNaghten 1838)

And:

> "It subsequently came to the knowledge of the Governor-General that a Persian army was besieging Herat; that intrigues were actively prosecuted throughout Afghanistan, for the purpose of extending Persian influence and authority to the banks of, and even beyond, the Indus… in designs wholly at variance with the principles and objects of its alliance with Great

Britain… It was now evident that [the British government could not] bring about a good understanding between the Sikh ruler and Dost Mahomed Khan, and the hostile policy of the latter chief showed… so long as Caubul [sic] remained under his government, we could never [have a secure border to India]." (ibid)

Thus, Dost Mahomed Khan was acting savagely toward neighbors as part of a coordinated effort with Persia, which was laying siege even then to Herat. Regarding Herat, the Afghans holding the city were situated as being simultaneously heroic and powerless. This is a theme which will be eerily echoed nearly a century and a half later in how the United States' Reagan Administration talks about Afghanistan during the Cold War era Soviet invasion.

"The Governor-General deems it in this place necessary to revert to the siege of Herat… The attack up on it was a most unjustifiable and cruel aggression… continued, notwithstanding the… just and becoming offer of accommodation had been made and rejected. The besieged have behaved with a *gallantry and fortitude* [emphasis mine] worthy of the justice of their cause…" (ibid)

This idea of the gallant (friendly) Afghan is seen a number of times in cables from McNeill. See for instance UK Foreign Office (1839a: 121): "The defence [sic] of the town [Herat] is still gallantly maintained…" against the aggression of Persia. Every time in the cables the status of Herat is brought up, it is with a sense of incredulity that the defenders of Herat are still somehow heroically holding out against hopeless odds. As we will see later in the case of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, those peoples within Afghanistan that first Britain and later the United States would intervene on the behalf of were heroically fighting against an evil sort of aggression – but they would be ultimately powerless without salvation from outside. Thus we see a particular manner of using this label of valor and heroism in such a way as to *really* stand in for powerlessness and emptiness.

For instance, immediately following the previous quotation:

"…it is obvious, that if he [Persian Shah] can maintain his troops in their present position for an indefinite length of time, he must ultimately succeed in reducing it [Herat's defenses, which would profoundly hurt British interests in Kabul]. (ibid: 122)

AND

"…brought a letter from Yar Mahommed Khan[29] giving me full powers to conclude for the government of Herat *any arrangement I might consider advisable*…" (ibid: 126)

Speaking of Herat's ultimate powerlessness without British help and emphasizing a sort of admittance of British superiority (on the part of Herat) was commonplace in these cables, with praise for the valor of the defenders often following shortly after.

"He [Shah of Herat] was very desirous that I should take a part in the negotiation [to end hostility between Persia and Herat], as the *only means* he could devise of obtaining some security…" (ibid: 42)

Giving McNeill power to speak on behalf of Herat to Persia-

"In like manner, the whole of the Affghans, appreciating your kindness, commit themselves and their country entirely to your judgment and discretion; and they will not, by neglect or remissness, act in opposition to whatever arrangements your enlightened judgment may deem it expedient to make…" (ibid: 69)

This represents one way in which a certain powerlessness and emptiness of character was assigned to (or assumed upon) Afghanistan. There was no right to sovereignty to be even implied here, and sovereignty is the character and identity of a state. Any modicum of independence and succor to be had for Herat could only come from Britain:

"…if I could succeed by any means in preserving the independence of Herat, I should have secured from danger our influence in all the *countries* [emphasis mine] between the frontiers of Persia and the Indus." (ibid: 128)

We can further see how there was never even a question of whether or not Afghanistan might have some character or identity of its own to take into consideration through British Parliament. Queen Victoria opened Parliament with reference to the invasion of Afghanistan, presenting it as urgently important business… but in the whole never once doing so much as mentioning Afghanistan itself.

"Differences which have arisen have occasioned the retirement of my Minister from the Court of Teheran. I indulge, however, the hope of learning that a satisfactory adjustment of these differences will allow of the re-establishment of my relations with Persia upon their former footing of friendship.

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[29] Then Shah of Herat

"Events connected with the same differences have induced the Governor-General of India to take measures for protecting British interests in that quarter of the world, and to enter into engagements, the fulfilment of which may render military operations necessary. For this purpose such preparations have been made as may be sufficient to resist aggression from any quarter, and to maintain the integrity of my Eastern dominions." (Victoria 1839)

Queen Victoria here refers to an actual invasion of Afghanistan with the expressed purpose of completely rearranging the internal power structure of the country, imposing a central government of some sort that was friendly to British interests. The whole purpose was to ensure that India's border was secure, yet even so Afghanistan is never mentioned. There is only mention that there was a disagreement with Persia that put India's security at risk, and actions are being taken to fix things. This brings along a certain specter of imperialism. That is a ghost which is often present in British interactions with Afghanistan – there are always questions if *this* will be the time that Britain formally colonizes Afghanistan, or absorbs it into the British Empire. It is a ghost which never becomes more than ephemeral, however – Afghanistan is never quite worth the effort. Its emptiness, being assured and natural, is not worth filling (generally because it is peopled by an uncouth and undesirable people).

The collection of Parliamentary debates which follow took place over two sessions and were notable for a great volume being said, with very little on Afghanistan. A recurring theme in these debates was a tendency to talk about Afghanistan without mentioning Afghanistan. For instance, Landsdowne said that in deciding whether the policy of British India toward its hinterlands was justifiable, it was necessary only to ask the question "whether the empire, as founded upon opinion, was not sounder and safer than at any former time". (Lords 1839a) Somewhat similarly Viscount Melbourne argued that even discussing the "great affairs of the Oriental Empire" was unnecessary, calling on his colleagues to:

 "suspend their judgment on these matters till we have full information and knowledge of all the various circumstances… the Address… has been so framed as to call on no Member of the House for a decided opinion on the subject." (ibid)

In opposition to this was a suspicion that the government was making decisions and starting wars without sharing fully their reasons for doing so. Peel said that:

"he could not consider this question [war involving British India] without the greatest anxiety. He hoped that her Majesty's Ministers would give them the fullest information – that the House would be informed of the causes which had led to the interruption of our amicable

relations with Persia… he trusted to receive such information as would afford satisfaction to the public mind in England… he would not then utter one word in condemnation of it; but he required that the House should be furnished with every particular… if we feared incursion from Russia, we should have reason to apprehend greater evil if we took a wrong view of intentions with Persia…" (ibid)

Indeed, in the later Lords (1839b) document, which was the last time Afghanistan was even discussed during this period in Parliament, no documentation had been provided regarding the invasion of Afghanistan other than the Simla Manifesto, which we also know had been published publicly. Regarding this lapse, the Earl of Aberdeen said:

"…we were at war there [Afghanistan, though again it is never named or mentioned], and have been since the month of October, and it did not seem to be very unreasonable that their Lordships should know what we were fighting about, and the causes that had brought about this condition…" (ibid)

The Duke of Wellington and Lord Ellenborough echoed the sentiments, calling for:

"all the information with respect to Persia, since the mission of Mr. Ellis, should be laid on the Table of the House" and noting that "the House had been sitting for more than two months, and surely the noble Lord had had time to lay the papers on the Table of the House". (ibid)

Thus we have simultaneously a situation where the government was comfortable invading Afghanistan without adhering to normal legal proceedings regarding warfare, and the Parliament was more interested in procedural concerns than they were in an actual state of war. In general, there was an underlying question of whether conflict in Afghanistan would make India more safe. Debate surrounded not whether the invasion of Afghanistan was moral or even effective, but rather whether it was necessary to the defense of India and, if it was, why evidence substantiating that had not been laid before Parliament. A concern over Afghanistan as a place was never even considered.

At play alongside this notion of emptiness – made possible by the emptiness of Afghanistan but also authorizing the viewer to see Afghanistan as empty, overpowering any sense of wanting humanely to think of the rights of the Afghan with instead the dreadful immediacy of geopolitical survival was the question of Russia. In Parliament questions were asked as to whether the intervention on/invasion of Afghanistan was necessary to India's security. This was essentially a question of whether doing so was necessary to keep Russia safely distant from India's borders. If this action was taken in order to secure

India from Russia, the thought went, then anything was justifiable. If not, then Afghanistan was simply not worth British lives, money or time.

Afghanistan the Game Board

It is by now obvious that the greater part of discussions over the first Anglo Afghan war and events surrounding it were carried out with an eye toward Russian aggression. This was made possible by assumptions of a certain emptiness/non-sovereignty/indeterminacy on the part of Afghanistan. Here we find reference to the binary opposition referenced as *actors/tactical spaces*. We find that Afghanistan is not an actor – rather it is a tactical space which is acted upon. Its emptiness means that it is of no interest unless there are national priorities at issue – when it was determined that the security of India was at stake, Afghanistan – empty of meaning in itself – *gained* a certain meaning in this sense: it became a tactical space. In order to *be* a tactical space, it was necessary that Afghanistan not be anything else of note – in order to be a tactical space Afghanistan must not be a legitimate actor as that legitimacy would bring up uncomfortable questions about sovereignty and thus the legitimacy of British strategic aims in the region.

This is not, however, done lightly. Parliamentary debates from the time suggest that there was little taste for conflict in Afghanistan on principle – though some incidental imperial expansion was generally to be expected (i.e. Lords 1839b among others)[30]. Conflict in Afghanistan was justified by the overriding need to combat the threat of Russian expansion on British India's frontiers. For the British, Afghanistan was a place to carry out the much more broadly fought war against Russia – the Great Game.

Following the narrative on Afghanistan as a place to fight Russia, we can see first that Afghanistan was an area of great sensitivity for Britain whether or not British narratives gave voice to Afghanistan as a place at all.

> "The Persian Government has openly expressed a belief that the possession of Herat would give such a hold upon England, that she would no longer be able to deny anything they might demand, for that the possession of Herat would give the power to disturb us in India, or to give a passage to our enemies, whenever the Persian Government should think proper to do so." (UK Foreign Office 1839a: 79)

> AND

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[30] To recap: UK foreign office 1839a pp. 79, 82, 86 and UK Foreign Office 1839b pp. 20-21, 46

[Instructions relayed to McNeill] "I have to instruct you to state to the Shah of Persia, that whereas the spirit and purport of the Treaty between Persia and Great Britain, is, that Persia should be a defensive barrier for the British possessions in India… it appears… that the Shah is occupied in subverting those intervening States between Persia and India, *which might prove additional barriers of defence for the British possessions*; and that in these operations *he has openly connected himself with an European Power*, for purposes avowedly unfriendly, if not absolutely hostile, to British interests…" (ibid: 125)

Thus we see that Afghanistan was in fact very important to Britain, but not for any quality that it had in itself. Rather, it was a security space existing, for the British narrative, wholly to ensure the safety of its British dominion. Not only was that security at risk, but it was threatened by Russia.

"…in the event of Herat's being reduced, I cannot doubt that the Chief of Kandahar will consider it to be for his advantage to connect himself with Persia and Russia, rather than with England. I, therefore, continue to be of the opinion that the fall of Herat would destroy our position in Affghanistan and place all or nearly all that country under the influence or authority of Russia and Persia. I need not repeat to your Lordship my opinion as to the effect which such a state of things would necessarily have on the internal tranquility and security of British India…" (ibid: 119)

Not only did McNeill believe that Persia would be quick to turn to Russia – he believed that Russia was encouraging that mindset. Indeed, McNeill was deeply suspicious that Russia was pressing Persia to carry out its siege of Herat (and some associated conspiracies with the rulers of Kandahar and Kabul).

"The Russian Minister furnished a sum of money to be given to the Persian soldiers; and his countenance, support, and advice, confirmed the Shah in his resolution to grand no conditions to the Affghans of Herat." (127)

AND

"Relieved from the serious apprehensions he had entertained on this subject, and urged on by the Russian Minister with so much eagerness that the Shah feared it would give umbrage to the Russian Government, if he desisted till Herat should have been taken…" (130)

In more public discourse there is a certain amount of care taken when referring to Russia on the part of Britain. However, implications were certainly to be found in both the news and in Parliamentary debates. In the *Times*: "Russia is adverted to in an obscure manner only, and not named in this Indian

manifest. The direct cognizance of her designs is judiciously left to the authorities at home." (*Times* 1838) In Parliament, questions were whether or not India was secure. If India was secure as things stood, then there would be no reason for conflict in Afghanistan. If India was not secure, and if conflict in Afghanistan could remedy that, then Parliament wanted only to see proof of this and would then give the conflict in Afghanistan its full blessing. (Lords 1839a, Lords 1839b, see previous entries)

Indeterminacy and Tactical Spaces

Stanski argued that in the post-Sept. 11 conflict in Afghanistan, Afghan leadership figures were conceptualized in confusing and often internally inconsistent ways, at times lauding Afghan warlords as heroes fighting against the Taliban and at other times, conceiving of them as wild, uncontrollable and barbaric. (Stanski 2009: 73-75) This thesis will continue to refer tohis work in various ways later – of interest here is his focus on the first Anglo-Afghan war and the inconsistency of how Afghan identity is situated according to his work.

Stanski argues that certain Orientalist archetypes were mobilized during the first Anglo-Afghan war, though somewhat unevenly, as a way of constructing a violent "other" who it is justifiable to level violence upon.[31] This was accomplished in part questioning the legitimacy of any possible Afghan polity, claiming it was culturally inherent to the Afghan to be corrupt and dishonorable:

> "Unlike British colonial troops, who fought on behalf of Queen Victoria and the British Empire, tribal structures or local communities failed to exemplify, espouse or enforce any 'civilized' values, such as honour [sic], justice or the rule of law, that might restrain their members… The lack of any meaningful political order, British commanders believed, meant tribal leaders could be easily *co-opted into their imperial project*…" [emphasis mine] (ibid: 86)

Stanski identified particular articulations of these Orientalist assumptions about the violent other, and argued these perceptions continue in the present intervention on Afghanistan. Stanski also implied a tendency toward duplicity in the Afghan character, meaning that when the situation turned against Britain (after installing Dhost Muhammed Khan on the throne), Afghan duplicity was to blame rather than any mistakes made in British policy. Western perceptions of Afghanistan, he says, rely on assumptions that the Afghan people are *naturally* violent and untrustworthy and that this assumption continues from the first Anglo-Afghan war until today. This is a compelling concept which deserves

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[31] Stanski relies primarily on memoirs written 10-40 years after the war to draw on the most egregious examples of Orientalis tropes. These pieces of documentary evidence are narratively very similar to what we find during the second Anglo-Afghan war but far more explicit and "out in the open" than much of what was published in the immediate time frame surrounding the first Anglo-Afghan war.

exploring, having some apparent connections (which Stanski draws out) to the current set of interventions in Afghanistan.

Stanski's work raises important questions which are echoed in this project. In the context of this thesis, there are two cautionary notes that need to be made about Stanski's work. His focus on a very narrow question and his assumption that the results of his analysis are applicable in a very general fashion both create some issues. He focuses on how Orientalist – racist – conceptions about Afghan – and Global South – identities allow the replication of imperialist activities.

> "…patterns identified in this article are demonstrative of Orientalism's lasting influence in
> how the West attempts to manage the Global South. First, imperial powers return to
> Orientalist patterns to justify their expanding influence across the Global South." (ibid: 90)

This narrow focus leads directly to the wide generalization – the idea that revealing how Orientalist tropes in interventions in Afghanistan justify imperialist practices can be applied to imperialist practices across the Global South. There is certainly a wide and rich body of work demonstrating different ways in which Orientalist norms empower particular and uneven power relationships, but this narrow focus / broad generalization duality misses the very specific and different way in which Afghanistan is perceived. Afghanistan is not just barbaric, it is also empty, and non-sovereign, and a game-board for ideological/geo-strategic conflicts. It is all of these things simultaneously, but in being all of these things at once there is a great tension within narratives about Afghanistan that calls into question if it is anything at all – here is the problem of Afghan *indeterminacy* which calls into question the most basic unit of identification in relation to Afghanistan – Afghanistan as a (failed) state.

Imperial logics might be argued to have informed some portions of interventions on Afghanistan through the years – but Stanski argues that all interventions on Afghanistan have been essentially imperialist in nature. (ibid: 74-75) For Stanski, then, conflict in Afghanistan can best be described as one more act of imperialist aggression in a broader Global North – Global South metanarrative wherein overlapping imperialist projects define systemic power structures. Yet we find through a longer and more particular reading of interventions on Afghanistan that Afghanistan is, at best, on the fringe of imperial games – affected and intervened upon but not the referent of intervention. The Afghanistan of the first Anglo-Afghan war did not *deserve* a justification for British aggression – justifications were given only because it was necessary to justify to the British *people* why the British empire should exert itself in such a meaningless space. Invading Afghanistan and effective regime change did not gain anything for

Britain in itself – but it did deny a potentially very important *tactical space* to Britain's geo-strategic rival, Russia. Afghanistan was simultaneously meaningless and extremely important – but its importance had nothing to do with its character.

This project aims to understand Afghanistan's unique place in the failed state paradigm. It seeks to explain particular underlying imaginings of Afghan character, how those notions allow for intervention and importantly how those articulations of Afghan identity undermine any possibility of meaningfully addressing the terrible problems facing Afghanistan. The assumed emptiness of Afghan character and the indeterminate, malleable nature of its assigned identity are central to this – and simply situating Afghanistan within existing broader critical narratives of neo-imperialism is injurious to that project.

In exploring the idea of Afghanistan as an empty place and how that empowers certain interventions, it is necessary to consider the context in which Britain saw Afghanistan at that time. India's security was of paramount concern, and Russia was the biggest threat to that security. Afghanistan's importance began and ended there.

At issue is not whether or not Russia had designs on Afghanistan [historical evidence suggests they did], nor is it particularly relevant the reasons Russia may have had those designs. What is important in this context is that Britain saw Russia as a threat, not only in Europe but to its Indian holdings. That Britain chose to use Afghanistan as the place to resist any possibility of Russian expansion on India requires deeper thought. Rather than closely defining the boundaries of India and resolving to secure those boundaries in the case of external aggression, Britain chose to use Afghanistan as a tactical space, a buffer zone which must be denied to Russia while also remaining more or less free of direct British influence. In this way, a buffer zone could be taken to be more or less the same as a geopolitical vacuum as well – or at least that may well be seen as the ideal. With Russian aggression, however, Britain felt that it had no choice but to assume a sort of primacy over the future of Afghanistan, while doing so at the greatest remove possible.

It is clear from the treaties signed with Persia, wherein Persia's right to invade and take over parts of Afghanistan was *explicitly acknowledged* that Britain had no philosophical objection to a foreign power holding control over Afghanistan. Keeping Russian influence from Afghanistan had nothing to do with Afghanistan – Britain did not care who held power in Afghanistan so long as there was no threat to India.

Once Persia became an unreliable partner in ensuring India's security, Britain was forced to decide how best to use Afghanistan, now, to ensure India's protection. This basic question is repeated over and over, through the course of all three Anglo-Afghan Wars. It is repeated again in both the Cold War and after the events of Sept. 11, though how the question is phrased has changed. During the Anglo Afghan wars, the question was one of how Britain could best use Afghanistan as a geopolitical space to ensure the security of its very important Indian dominion. During the Cold War, we will find that the question was how Afghanistan could best be used to hurt the Soviet Union – here the philosophy of liberal, capitalist democracy took the place of India, needing protection (and Afghanistan provided the best geopolitical theater for it at the time). After the Sept. 11 attacks, Afghanistan again became a geopolitical space for security games to be played out that didn't really involve Afghanistan or the Afghan people. Here, the enemy was neither Russia nor the Soviet Union, but the notion of terrorism and a more contemporary conception of liberal, capitalist democracy was to be protected. Afghanistan was not in itself the wrong doer or the target; terrorism had some connection there but the same could be said for dozens of other political spaces, some of them in fact allies to the United States and its western allies.

None of these decisions were made in a vacuum. There is a discursive legacy in which Afghanistan is situated as an empty space which is more or less without intrinsic value or meaning. Afghanistan was indeterminate; other political spaces had identities and ideas attached to them that, while not stable or absolute were assigned stable/absolute attributes discursively. This indeterminacy was, in some sense, filled in with a tactical space or game board conceptualization. Afghanistan might be filled with certain conceptual properties in keeping with larger societal contexts at a given time (post WWI we see Afghanistan more or less given sovereignty and labeled one of the world's free states by unceremonious default, then left to fend for itself). Yet whenever a situation arose in which a sort of proxy conflict could be fought, Afghanistan had become a very natural place for that conflict to be carried out. This legacy can be traced at least from the first Anglo Afghan war, and in the post-September 11th era we can see that legacy's influence still both in intervention practices and in notions of rights, justice and sovereignty.

British strategic interests were the justification for invading Afghanistan and creating a change in leadership. For much the same reason as Britain considered Persia's designs on Afghanistan to be ethically legitimate, Britain's designs were considered the same. Afghanistan didn't have any right to be left alone if it couldn't press that right by force. It was not considered a legitimate sovereign space.

British interests demanded that a ruler friendly with Britain rule in Kabul. Britain had the means to press its interests by force. This was unproblematic and acceptable. Geopolitical logics of the Great Game and preservation of British India were overriding concerns. Paternalistic justifications we would see later were lacking. So were appeals to a sort of higher morality (civilization versus barbarism, western liberal values, secularization, etc.) These were for a time when it would be necessary to legitimize actions which denied Afghanistan any sense of sovereign identity and right. During the first Anglo-Afghan war, there was no need for that – the question never even came up.

There is a strand of thought in theoretical treatment of state failure that suggests assignations of state failure are a new turn in colonial relations (Stanski 2009, Gruffyd-Jones 2008, Wade 2005). Failed states are diagnosed and then certain cures, state building measures, are prescribed – but those prescriptions intend to remake the failed state in such a way as it serves some purpose advantageous to the intervening parties. Most often this is thought to be for resources or as part of a geopolitical security project. If this were to be the case, then one might argue that Afghanistan was the first example of this set of 'rules' for intervention and prescription – in the early years of classical colonialism!

Afghanistan, seen as something other than a sovereign entity, was intervened upon by Britain in order to create a geopolitical secure zone for its economic interests elsewhere. While the logic of colonialism and empire play some role here, it is hardly similar to how Britain interacted with its colonial holdings. Rather than building or taking over anything within Afghanistan, Britain was interested only in ensuring that the place remained as much a vacuum as possible, and that it not be filled by other European powers. When Persia proved (to British eyes) not up to the task, it became necessary to back some sort of centralized government, stripped of as much power as possible, to ensure that no other European power could gain influence on the Indian hinterlands.

Considering Empty Afghanistan

These debates emphasize a certain emptiness in Afghanistan. The earlier wires conceived of Afghanistan as an empty space wherein geopolitical competition could take place safely removed from meaningful spaces. Afghanistan was empty of character and devoid of sovereignty because it was weak. Its weakness allowed Britain to exert some control over Afghanistan with a veneer of legitimacy; its weakness acted as a double layered justification for intervention.

Firstly, Afghanistan was too weak to stop any such intervention and, as discussed in the first chapter sovereignty emanates from strength. This is, again, a phenomenon with regard to sovereignty that Derrida supports. (Derrida 2005, 2009) Sovereignty is meaningless without a sovereign strength,

without both the power and the willingness to utilize that power to ensure there is no viable threat able to challenge that sovereignty, be the threat internal or external. This ultimate reliance power tends to undercut notions which lend sovereignty legitimacy; sovereignty is justified in that it is protective and not aggressive. Take for instance Derrida's argument about the notion of sovereignty in democratic society.

> "Now, democracy would be precisely this, a force… in the form of a sovereign authority… having the power to decide… and to give the force of law… and thus the power and ipseity of the people. This sovereignty is a circularity… This circularar or spherical rotation, the turn of the re-turn upon the self, can take either the alternating form of the by turns, the in turn, the each in turn… or else the form of an identity between the origin and the conclusion." (Derrida 2005: 13)

To be legitimate, it can be argued, sovereignty must be the sovereignty of *the people*, and on *behalf* of the people, putting the popular will into action, putting the necessary force behind it. Yet Derrida argues plausibly that this very accountability is contrary to the primacy of sovereign power.

> "…this sovereign cause of itself and end for itself, would also resemble… pure Actuality, the Energeia of Aristotle's Prime Mover… Neither moving itself nor being itself moved, the actuality of this pure energy sets everything in motion, a motion of return to self, a circular motion, Aristotle specifies, because the first motion is always cylindrical." (ibid: 15)

Its power is intended to set into place certain rules of conduct and not to flaunt customs and rules… but its position as the highest possible power simultaneously sets it outside of constraint, allowing it to act outside of those constraints and break those constraints. However, the act of breaking those constraints breaks not only the legitimacy of sovereignty (breaking the very rules which are its reason for existence) but also breaks its very power, in that its power is most expressed in the imposition and maintenance of those constraints.

Secondly (and this is important to the justification for a particular exercise of power by Britain, lending legitimacy to its particular sovereignty), Afghanistan's weakness allowed it to be conceived of as requiring external intervention. Indeed, Britain could position itself in the position of a popular sovereign force here – casting its sovereign shadow temporarily over Afghanistan to give power to those people's will to freedom (from Persia). That this also served Britain's national interest has no negative value in this conception, nor does the idea that British national interest is of greater import here – Afghanistan hasn't the character to *make* one care.

The Simla Manifesto and the Queen's speech both play along these legitimizing lines. Yet this is only acceptable if Afghanistan itself is without any right to sovereignty. In the time of the First Anglo Afghan War, notions of sovereignty were still up in the air. What sovereignty meant, who it applied to, who could hold it… these were questions which were debated in some circles but which hadn't even become a wide debate. (This would change during the Second Anglo Afghan War, to some extent.) In this case, Afghanistan's very assumptive character of emptiness allows this question to be completely deferred. No, Afghanistan does not have sovereignty by default because the notion of an Afghan sovereignty is never even raised. It simply did not have the power, the strength to ensure that any such character might be considered.

It is this very final aspect of emptiness which seemed to carry the day, discursively. Ultimately narratives of heroic Britain as savior of Afghanistan gained little traction. Afghanistan was simply… somewhere. A place that simply did not matter, so its character was not worth considering. Debates on the First Anglo Afghan War were concerned simply with whether or not Britain should be putting forth the resources to expand its empire (though all evidence suggests that imperial expansion was never a goal of this war), and whether the conflict was actually likely to make Britain's Indian holdings safer. *Was the action in Afghanistan going to be worth the price it exacted of Britain?* This was the only question worth considering.

Implications and Revisiting the Central Questions

Afghanistan as an empty space is a much more fundamental and extreme narrative hook during this intervention than any to come. Perhaps this is because up to this point very little has been said about Afghanistan so little discursive 'knowledge' had been built up. Thus, it *was* an empty space, or at least a *blank* space insofar as how the British 'knew' the world. Thus, this early intervention was taken upon wholly by way of strategic thinking… wherein the strategies had nothing to do with Afghanistan whatsoever and everything to do with what was at the time considered *actual* geopolitical threats.

These strategic aims were conceptualized in loftier terms of humanitarianism and justice for public narrative. Interestingly, attempts to tell that story were just… ignored. It wasn't important to justify this exercise of power; *the exercise of British sovereignty required no justification*. The notion that the intervention on Afghanistan was for Afghanistan's own good didn't seem to matter, though it was an idea which would come to matter progressively more as time passed and other interventional came to be.

Revisiting this project's central questions in terms of these analytical points largely reinforces the earlier consideration of same. Most important of the three questions at this moment is the first: *"Why are we able to talk about failed states?"* It seems reasonable to argue that in the case of Afghanistan a very strong enabler for talking about state failure is this sense of emptiness. Indeed, the sense of emptiness is so strong that at this point in history it was far easier to just… not discuss Afghanistan at all. If we can trace that legacy through the years to something contemporary, we have to match this legacy with an international context wherein virtually every political space is considered a state. We face a situation where Afghanistan can *only* be conceived in terms of statehood, but the Afghanistan of the first Anglo-Afghan war could *only* be conceived of as an empty space suitable for geo-strategic practices. If these assumptions of emptiness continue through time, as this project's analysis will show is the case, then this state/non-state tension seems to *demand* we call it a failed state. Talking about Afghanistan as a failed state is the *only* way, with this legacy of emptiness, that we can talk about Afghanistan as a state at all in the dominant narrative on statehood and sovereignty.

Yet that very emptiness obscures Afghanistan's historical legacy – a past which does not easily fit into the dominant liberal discourse on statehood. How can a political space which, as we will find in later chapters was never *really* considered to have the character of a state become a failed state? Is not statehood a precondition? Is not sovereignty, in dominant discourse, a given? Yet if Afghanistan was not and is not a state, then how can it have had a sovereignty, how can that sovereignty be lost? How can we justify intervening in Afghanistan in order to rebuild its statehood and reinstitute its sovereignty when the very act of intervention is both: an impingement on an Afghan sovereignty which is never really acknowledged… and an act that problematizes the sovereignty of the intervener?

This speaks to the second major question of this dissertation. *What is assumed to be 'known' about Afghanistan and how do those knowledges empower dominant narratives of intelligibility?*

Here we see reference to those problematic binaries which will be replicated in varying ways throughout interactions between the West and Afghanistan. While barbarism versus civilization will be a well-articulated rendition of this in later interventions, at this point we see something more foundational – *emptiness versus existence* (non-identity/identity). Emptiness could mean any number of things, and indeed what emptiness means at different places and times changes in Afghanistan, reinforcing the indeterminate nature of Afghan identity. Here, however, emptiness represents the absence of a sovereign gestalt (sovereignty/non-sovereignty) – an assumption which impacts on any other notion of emptiness or existence as it might apply to Afghanistan. In saying Afghanistan is not a

place, that it has no sovereignty, one also does away with the possibility of a sovereign will of the people, of a character that is effective or meaningful on the scale of an international society of states. This authorizes any sort of intervention that a powerful sovereignty entity may wish to undertake. It is important to note that this *includes discursive interventions*. That is to say, once it has been decided that Afghanistan's identity is one of absence it becomes acceptable to (one might argue irresistible, impossible to avoid – one has no choice but to) configure that identity with traits garnered from something internal to the first British and then American cultural history and experience.

The third question of this dissertation needs to wait for now, to be confronted as this analysis moves closer to contemporary times. This is a good place to note, however, that these deeply rooted discursive legacies need not be permanently reproduced. Indeed, for Derrida the nature of the auto-immune dilemma confronting this notion of sovereignty is such that it cannot be Sovereignty involves the tension between power and its justification and so it is distortive to try and fix Afghan identity and how sovereignty is to be exercised by an outside power.

Sovereignty (as it is contemporarily and dominantly understood) must involve the interaction of supreme power with popular will in a *by turns* basis.[32] This turning, this internal discursive interrogation is constantly unsettling. However, stabilizing particular conceptions of sovereignty in such a way that abrogates this *by turns* mechanism introduces a stability that, while seductive, increases internal auto-immune pressures until there is a kind of collapse. Afghan popular will cannot be imposed upon Afghanistan, it must come from Afghanistan – but this discursive legacy of Afghanistan's indeterminacy and emptiness ensures that only silence can come from within Afghanistan. Resolving to question sovereignty as it is applied to Afghanistan is a necessary first step to restoring the possibility of a particular Afghan sovereign identity.

> "If ever this double bind, this implacable contradiction, were lifted (i.e. in my view never, by definition, it's impossible, and I wonder how anyone could even wish for it), well, it would be… it would be paradise. Should we dream of paradise? How can we avoid dreaming of paradise? If, as I have just said, it's impossible… this can mean that we can only dream of paradise and that at the same time the promise or memory of paradise would be at once that of absolute felicity and of inescapable catastrophe." (Derrida 2009: 302)

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[32] Refer once again to Locke's argument that a state's sovereign might is justified by its resolution to act as an expression of its citizenry's interests and will.

This paradise is a theoretical thing that can only be truly believed in by those who believe in a telos, a natural destination. It *can* never be arrived at, because announcing one's arrival immediately destroys the possibility of that paradise as it destroys the *by turns* mechanism which is vital to progress. At issue then is that a falsely naturalized notion of stable sovereignty is being imposed on Afghanistan, which marginalizes any possibility of understanding the specificity of the Afghanistan crisis. Yet that false stabilization is self-destructive, and that self-destruction offers a possible avenue of change. Rather than relying on a West-imposed notion of what it means to be sovereign, any project which seeks to remedy Afghanistan's historic (apparent) lack of sovereign character must make space for that sovereign expression to come from a space that is uniquely Afghani. No notion of sovereignty can be categorically imposed without seriously unsettling the basis of understanding that sovereignty.

These tension points are in this project identified by way of binary oppositions. Afghanistan's place as a successful/failed state is justified through naturalized norms of sovereignty/non-sovereignty which are self-destructive, but which are in turn further stabilized by recourse to a certain Afghan indeterminacy (identity/non-identity). That Afghan indeterminacy is filled up, fixed, and exacerbated by recourse to other binaries which serve to assign Afghanistan a place within various, sometimes competing narratives on the social world. In the case of the first Anglo-Afghan war this was primarily in reference to actor/tactical space but also, implicitly and to some extent, Western/Oriental and civilized/savage. Afghanistan *could* be intervened upon because Afghanistan did not exist as an actor, but was rather a tactical space – the intervention was *on* Afghan space but it was *about* Russia. Britain was waging war on Russia by proxy. Afghanistan was only a tactical space because it was nothing else – or if it could be said to be anything else it was something negative: Oriental, savage, not worthy of sovereign status.

Chapter 4 – Second Anglo Afghan War

"[International law is] a collection of usages which prevail between civilized nations, and are rendered possible by the fact that the leading civilized nations are practically for most purposes of nearly equal force… we are exceedingly powerful and highly civilized, and… they are comparatively weak and half barbarous". (Stephen 1878B)

"Force may overbear weakness, as it has done at times in Europe; but the eternal principles of right and wrong should influence us in all parts of the world". (Lawrence 1878C)

Stephen 1878B & Lawrence 1878C (respectively)

The Second Anglo-Afghan War took place between 1878 and 1880. Afghanistan was now ruled by Sher Ali Khan, son of Dost Mohammad Khan, who had been helped to the throne of Amir by Britain in the First Anglo-Afghan War. Sher Ali Khan had a less Britain-friendly policy, looking to find ways to limit both Russian and British influence in Afghanistan. British forces moved into Afghan territory in 1878 following an encounter in which an envoy from Britain to Afghanistan was turned away. Britain viewed this as a move hostile to British interests and presumably feared the Amir was growing too friendly with Russia. Unlike the previous war in Afghanistan, this encounter caught the popular British mind and there is a rich body of civil discourse on the war and Afghanistan's character to examine.

Discourse analysis of archived newspapers, books and cabinet debates revealed several narrative threads with some consistencies reaching backward to the First Anglo Afghan War and forward to the Third. These were all tied in some way to a narrative situating of the Afghan character in a particularly negative fashion. One tendency was to justify harsh action against Afghanistan as the only thing savages will understand – a "prestige as strength" argument. Second was a tendency to situate Afghanistan specifically in a geopolitical perspective as an ideal place to play out the Great Game and as having no other important character. Third was a sort of 'Afghans as poor caretakers' argument, which legitimized British intervention (and potentially annexation) on Afghanistan because they've squandered Afghanistan's natural riches. Last was in fact a discourse/counter-discourse debate over Afghanistan's place in the international community vis-à-vis rights and sovereignty, which functionally came down on the side of Afghanistan not having any right to sovereignty (or if it did, then it was not as important as Britain's right to intervene).

The vast bulk of discourse analyzed is civil rather than governmental. Very little was said in any official capacity within the cabinet. Most discussion was focused on partisan concerns (did the government make the decision to go to war properly, or should the government have consulted more closely with the opposition first?) There was some discussion, however, and interestingly the very few cases where Afghanistan was mentioned in a way referring to its character managed to touch on each of these topics in a particularly negative way.

The civil discourse analyzed in this project was carried out largely by way of newspaper articles and letters to the editor within *The Times*. Each coming sub-section discussing a different thread of civil narratives on Afghan identity follows arguments laid out by various British citizens – many being individuals of social consequence such as politicians, practitioners of law, or military men.

Prestige as Strength/Barbarism.

This was hugely prevalent in dealings between England and its colonies throughout the 19th century. There was a strong preoccupation with national pride and British strength completely separate from interaction with the so-called Orient in the first place[33]. This had a certain discursive synergy with notions of the Afghan as uncivilized and savage. Britain's image must be upheld in dealings with savages, it must be seen as strong and something to fear (because savages were incapable of respect for civilized reasons such as the arts or admirable codes of law). Thus the *appearance* of weakness endangered their sovereign power over their colonies, over savages, because those people were too ignorant to understand the benefits of civilization.

Afghanistan was, in this narrative strand, considered essentially the same as every other 'Asiatic' or 'Oriental' set of peoples. The Orientals, in this narrative, only respect strength. To uphold the prestige of the British empire, it must be seen as strong and unwilling to allow any insult to stand. (Havelock 1878, Beloochee 1878, Murdo 1878, *Times* 1857a, *Times* 1857b, *Times* 1858) Insults must be punished in order to ensure the security of British imperium – a hard line must be taken against barbarians because all they understand is retribution: restraint is seen as weakness. (Havelock 1878, Murdo 1878) Indeed, restraint and civil treatment of savages functionally becomes weakness because it encourages rebellion, such as with the Sepoy Rebellion. (*Times* 1858) Thus:

> "British power can never afford to be suspected… The belief that on any point, whether 10 miles or 1,000 miles away, the authority of England can be overthrown for a day by *Asiatics* of

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[33] The classic example here is Macdermott's War Song (1878) from which the term "jingoism" was coined. It also included a powerful obsession with Britain's duty to counter Russian might.

any race or creed will go far to nullify all our character of superiority and all the authority of civilization." (*Times* 1857a)

This also means that to even wish for conciliation or civilized relations was nothing more than a weak tendency among some sheltered civilized peoples to fool themselves. For instance, "…the Christian-like standard of policy suggested by Lord Lawrence [respect of sovereignty and rights] is not understood at all [by Asiatics]". (Murdo 1878) Thus, conciliation is:

> "…a "weak and wretched sham", a "…mean, cowardly, and treacherous cry". In Asia, "the miserable effort to 'conciliate' an alien race [can only] miserably fail…" with that "mongrel brood of dusky semi-civilized aliens". Afghans "regarded the policy [conciliatory] as a sign of weakness and timidity." (*Times* 1857b)

In this way a very negative view of the Afghan identity was paired with this requirement of strength and retribution to retain prestige. For Havelock and Beloochee, the Afghans were 'barbaric' and understood nothing else. (Havelock 1878, Beloochee 1878) Others went further. Wheeler performed an extremely racist ethnology. For him, Afghans inherited all bad traits of Jews with none of the good, being vengeful, untrustworthy and barbarous. (Wheeler 1878) Vambery went further still, calling Afghanistan empty due to "greedy Afghans" who were "poor caretakers" and "rulers of *horror*". Afghanistan's emptiness empowers but does not demand British imperial expansion; Vamberry says that Afghanistan would be a fine place for war because of how awful Afghans are. (Vambery 1871)

Savage Afghanistan in Critical Literature

The idea that Afghans were situated negatively in relation to a certain Western superiority or civility is not novel, with many theorists having talked about it. One postcolonial theorist, Jonathan Hill, talked about a similarity between contemporary failed state analysts and colonial powers in the 19th and 20th centuries in this light. He said that the 'third world' identity is characterized as flawed while the Western identity is characterized as meritorious, and this deviancy is used to justify economic and political dominance by the West. (Hill: 139) His understanding of West-'third world' relations suggests that negative characterizations are ways to perpetuate colonial actions/intentions. In a contemporary sense he uses that as an argument for doing away with certain negative labels surround state failure and in many ways shares similarity with this work. Hill's arguments play out in a way that suggests a particular logic underlying West-Third World relations that span back to colonial times with a strong thread of continuity in a way highly suggestive of neo-colonialism.

"It is the continuation of 'colonial' power relations after the demise of the colonial era that has given rise to ideas such as neo-colonialism and neo-imperialism… At the heart of postcolonial analyses and works therefore, is a concern with understanding the temporal and geographical linkages between colonies and their Metropoles, ex-colonies and their former Metropoles, and the First World and the Third World." (ibid: 144)

Stanski's case, presented previously, has some striking similarities. He asked:

"…[how] do US observers understand what constitutes an 'Afghan warlord'? Why are warlord figures cast in such stark and varied terms? How have these patterns of thought hindered or enabled the United States' violent intervention in Afghanistan?" (Stanski: 74)

So he was deeply interested in early British interactions with Afghanistan and understanding how those logics underpinned certain policy decisions… and how those logics are connected to contemporary logics. While this is a welcome analytical specificity, a limited scope of analysis (First Anglo Afghan War with the post-9/11 intervention) led Stanski to couch Western interactions with Afghanistan within the premise of Orientalism (ibid: 75-6) and leave it there as if an important question were answered.

Both approaches have something to offer. Hill would situate the discourse on Afghanistan within a larger West – Third World narrative which does tend to highlight how certain patterns of power relations within Afghanistan are in some ways replicated in many other interactions globally. Yet that doesn't really tell us all that much about the Afghan case specifically; it is not particularly useful to a project looking for a way forward in Afghanistan to say how negative understandings of the Afghani people are similar to negative situating of character in other instances. Stanski is interested in giving a particular telling of a particular (Afghan) story, yet he only goes far enough to tell us that it fits perfectly within the wider Orientalist critical narrative on international relations.

In a way, what both of these authors discuss fits with the discursive strand of strength as prestige when dealing with barbarians who don't understand civility and restraint. This is definitely a theme which we find playing out in different colonial and quasi-colonial interactions across space and time. But they don't provide a framework for trying to understand why these particular interactions were happening with Afghanistan.

What we find through deeper analysis is that this discursive thread, saying that retribution is the only way to make a point in Afghanistan, authorizes and even makes imperative very specific

interventions that in themselves have nothing whatsoever to do with Afghanistan. Generally, the sort of power relations that Hill and Stanksi refer to act as a precursor to a colonial intervention, an act of colonizing, an acquiring. In this case, the negative situating of Afghanistan's character authorizes that it be used as a space to fight a way against a completely different opponent, for the protection of a completely separate colonial holding. This is a specific type of emptiness not often dealt with in literature. It is not a matter of declaring a place empty of civilized people, thus authorizing a colonial project wherein that land would be filled by a civilized colonial administration and the land would be utilized in a fruitful way. No, this is a matter of declaring Afghanistan empty and without use, thereby making it the idea place to carry out a set of geopolitical games.

This is not to dismiss the usefulness of their analysis. For instance, Hill says:

> Underpinning failed state literature therefore, is a European or Western universalism. Identification of failed states is achieved through the construction of a state/failed state dichotomy built on a fixed, universal standard of what constitutes a successful state. Success is defined as the possession of certain capabilities and by the nationhood of the population of that state's population. Western states represent the normative, universal standard of success and it is the inability of certain African states to replicate the political, economic, social and cultural conditions within Western states that has, according to the failed state literature, resulted in their failure. (Hill: 148)

In a lot of ways, this represents the sort of critique of the failed state discourse that most postcolonial analysts would agree with. Indeed, it is not far from the analysis offered in this project: failed states are deviants; they are other; they are wrong and they are failed because they were unwilling or unable to evolve and become like us. Yet, in Hill's critique, this has something to do with the way in which these states were formed. Due to the nature of colonial administration, many of these states were simply not able to take negative sovereignty (the sudden absence of outside interference) and transform it into positive sovereignty. They simply weren't given the tools. Further, for Hill, the failed state paradigm has no explanatory power (why do states 'fail'?) Of course, this is no new criticism from either critical viewpoints or orthodox viewpoints. Indeed, this is what much of contemporary orthodox debate on state failure aims to remedy (in various ways, most of which critical scholars would find problems with). Hill finds these problems to lie within colonial and neo-colonial relations. The identities of colonies and former colonies are mutually constitutive. (ibid: 140)

This analysis has potentially powerful ways to think of state failure in certain specific cases. Yet surely there are cases where assuming that colonial interactions, the nature of colonial administrative as constitutive of internal issues which lead to state failure is either misleading or even marginalizing. To what extent can we compare Afghanistan's interactions with the West as colonial? Certainly there was never a foreign administration in place, nor was there any sense of foreign intervention as to how internal laws and society would be aligned. In many ways, Hill's suggestions here are similar in vein to what was discussed in regard to Maroya in the last chapter, but in Hill's analysis there is less flexibility for considering different types of colonialisms than even with Maroya (and this assumption of colonial mechanism was a problem identified in Maroya's work as well).

Furthermore, interacting with these narratives on Afghanistan from within the assumption that colonial and/or imperial power relations are sufficient to explaining these discursive dynamics closes off some other possibilities. For instance, we begin to see here an evolution of how Afghanistan's emptiness is being filled through narrative interpolation. Previous notions of Afghanistan suggested that it was justified to intervene in Afghanistan when and as necessary, because Afghanistan had neither the power nor the legitimate moral claim (and perhaps we ought not to differentiate between the two) to object. Now, however, Afghanistan is being assigned a very particular character – the character of the unruly Oriental who must face harsh punitive measures when they fail to show the proper deference for their betters. This is a logic underpinning certain colonial power relations as well, of course. What this particular conceptualization of the Afghan identity means, however, is not determined under a framework so easily identifiable as colonial in power relationships. Instead, situating Afghanistan as Oriental should be seen as indicative of an indeterminate character. Afghanistan's character is always interruptible, always changeable, never specific or definite or possessing of any character/power/importance in its own right. The subject of a colonial power interaction is robbed of a certain agency, which is justified through certain typifications of persona that are insular and racist. That same subject also can be assumed to have a somewhat static identity or character, making the continuation of particular colonial interactions possible/justified/sensible. In this, Afghanistan is quite different – even within the context of this same war.

Great Game

As in the First Anglo Afghan War, the context of conflict in Afghanistan was heavily shaded by geopolitical considerations that lay far outside of Afghanistan's borders. While the apparent *insult* leveled on Britain by Afghanistan came in refusing to receive a diplomatic envoy, the *threat* posed by

this insult was that it might mean Afghanistan was becoming too close to Russia. The Second Anglo Afghan War came in the years following the Crimean War, and popular British sentiment held that only Britain could check the growing might of the Russian bear. Alongside this was the long-standing fear that Russia had designs on British India.

Aspects of the narrative thread identified with prestige and strength touched on Afghanistan's place in the Great Game already. Afghanistan was either empty of character or negative in character in any case, and the rulers of Afghanistan were poor stewards. Thus, there was no reason that the space shouldn't be a geopolitical space for fighting a proxy war against Russia, if it was convenient. The apparent insult from the Afghan court further seemed to invite this kind of anti-Russian intervention (if not demand it, according to the narrative).

When talking about a possible war in Afghanistan, it was made clear throughout civil discourse in both explicit (Low 1878, Dalrymple 1878, Havelock 1878, Stephen 1878A) and implicit (Vamberry 1879, Malleson 1879) manners that the real reason to worry about Afghanistan was Russia. "The prestige and strength" portion of civil discourse did seem to suggest that punishing Afghanistan was important in order to keep the peace on India's borders (by keeping the civilized boot firmly on the barbaric throat), but the truly weighty reason to consider Afghanistan at all began and ended with Russia.

Intrinsic to this in all instances was a sort of emptiness ascribed to Afghanistan. The importance of Afghanistan was simply that Russian influence there would harm security in India. "…[B]ut her [Russia's] influence in Afghanistan is not compatible with our safety in India. *Let us secure our boundaries, if necessary, by a rectification of our frontier…*" (Low 1878) Dalrymple suggested tactics, emphasizing the importance of Herat: "with a fortress at Herat, and a garrison of 20,000 men there… India would be as firmly locked in our grasp as if surrounded by ocean [in regards to European war]. (Dalrymple 1878) Put even more succinctly, "…the Afghan question… is only another phase of the Eastern Question; of the unavoidable and undeniable rivalry for position between England and Russia in the East." (Havelock 1878)

Any possible character or rights that Afghanistan might be ascribed by the most sympathetic is essentially overruled by the powerful logics of geopolitical conflict. Questions of that character is, for Stephen, "interesting" but not worth considering with the weightier concerns of British security in the Great Game looming. He is wholly preoccupied with the possibility that Russia might "obtain an

ascendancy throughout Central Asia, including Persia and Afghanistan, which would enable them... to form an army... [making] India open at any moment to an invasion". (Stephen 1878A) Thus we see that the geopolitical demands of the Great Game, the paramount need of physical security for India's frontiers marginalizes all other concerns, thus emptying Afghanistan of agency or character.

In the interest of greater security vis-à-vis The Great Game, some went further and called for some sort of occupation of Afghanistan or expansion of borders. Low hinted at the possibility of a rectification of boundaries if necessary for security. (Low 1878) Others argued that it was, in fact, necessary (while simultaneously arguing that the emptiness of Afghan character justified such an expansion in itself). For instance, "...the British Government should be compelled, by the recent Russian encroachments, [note: those encroachments were only that Russia had an emissary at Afghanistan's court]... to undertake if only a temporary occupation of the city [Herat] on the Heri river." (Vambery 1879) Earlier, Vambery spoke more forthrightly on the importance of Herat. "Considering Herat in the light of importance, - namely, as a town which is situated on the main road between Central Asia and India... [there would be dire] consequences in case that fortress [the city of Herat] should fall into the hands of [Afghans who have some sympathy with Russia]." (Vambery 1871] It is perhaps also worth noting that both of Vambery's pieces were full of very negative typifications of Afghan character (barbarians, rulers of horror and so on). Finally, Malleson gave us one of the earlier references to Herat as "the gate of India", and argued that taking it into British dominion would be very good for British security in India (and that British government in Herat would bring wealth to a horribly mismanaged place). (Malleson 1879)

Thus there is broad body of discourse suggesting that Afghanistan is empty of character and worthless. Whether that applies to the people, the leadership, or the 'country' as a whole varies somewhat, with some arguing that taking over certain parts of Afghanistan would be beneficial to Britain for a variety of reasons. Others simply considered Afghanistan to be empty by nature, not by mismanagement, and thus its only utility was as a place to fight a war. In any case, its emptiness empowered a whole set of possibilities in the case of intervention and war, a way to bypass any concerns over whether it was right or just or fair to the Afghans themselves. This indeterminacy means that Afghanistan can and must be punished – but it also can justifiably be the battle ground on which Britain's important, ethically mandated battle against the Great Power Russia can be played out.

Analyzing Legacies of Emptiness and Geopolitical Games

We've already seen something of how Afghanistan is typified with a certain emptiness and discussed how in the Afghan case that is somewhat unique in the context of colonial experiences. JK Baral wrote about the legacy of historical interventions in Afghanistan in a context that may have something to offer from this perspective. He suggested that British imperial interventions, the later Cold War intervention and the post-9/11 intervention each colored how we 'know' Afghanistan. (Baral: 701-703) British assumptions about Asiatic character were used to fill an otherwise blank spot in British knowledge of the world, colored liberally by the context of the Great Game. Because of this blankness, Afghanistan could be situated in such a way as that it was justifiable to carry out tactical conflict, security 'games' with Afghanistan as the game board. This discursive 'knowledge' built up during British interventions had legacy effects on later interventions, which built on those knowledges and altered them in the course of those newer interventions.

Indeed, Baral describes current geopolitical conflict in Afghanistan as a new iteration of the Great Game.

> "Not only the Taliban but also several stakeholder states have opposed this [a contingent of NATO troops remaining in Afghanistan]. The unfolding drama in Afghanistan is likely to have significant implications for the *'New Great Game'* [emphasis mine], which many think will play out in the coming years in the adjacent region of Central Asia and South Asia.

For Baral, current projects intended to 'save' Afghanistan as a failed state will themselves fail because now – as in ages past – the character of Afghanistan was misunderstood by interveners. An "identity" for Afghanistan is imagined and imposed on Afghanistan in the context of each intervention, rather than from a historical context or from a place of understanding. Afghanistan's actual character, Baral argues, is either too complicated or too unimportant to be articulated. Essentially, Afghanistan is envisioned as more or less empty by intervening powers and ready to be filled up with whatever sort of meaning those interveners prefer. This was true in the past when Afghanistan was conceptualized only in reference to its utility first in the Great Game power struggles and later in the ideological struggles of the Cold War. He suggests that these legacies are echoed in current policy objectives toward Afghanistan. An external power (the US/NATO) intends a certain intervention on Afghanistan to create

regional stability in pursuit of Western interests. Baral argues that this has always and will continue to fail because interveners don't truly understand what they're dealing with.[34] (ibid: 701)

Baral suggests that Afghanistan is primed to play a similar role in a wider geopolitical conflict in South Asia today. Afghanistan is conceived by the West as being an important center for conflict in the Global War on Terror, but it is also a site of struggle between India and Pakistan – each of which has specific interests in Afghanistan's future that conflict with one another. (India wants to see stability under Northern Alliance supremacy; Pakistan wants stability under a framework of Taliban and Haqqani Network power.) (ibid 706-707) China apparently has a sort of wild card role in this as well, seeing Afghanistan as a place to make free economic gains (ibid: 707) but uncertain mid-term policy goals.

Baral argues that NATO should avoid thinking of Afghanistan in the way that outsiders have typically viewed Afghanistan. Intervening in Afghanistan without understanding its role in the regional political struggles between Pakistan, India and China can only lead to failure. The West must understand Afghanistan as a space in which wider geopolitical games which aren't immediately obvious to the Western eye are being / will be played out. NATO policy in regards to Afghanistan needs to take those other players into consideration.

British thinkers during the Second Anglo-Afghan War considered Afghanistan to have no inherent character or value of its own. It had no agency and was only of interest because of its geographical placement – a place for the Great Game to be played. This seems to fit with Baral's analysis; Britain filled up Afghanistan's seemingly empty vessel with a set of character traits that fit through 'knowledge' of barbarous Asiatics and through the 'knowledge' of its geopolitical conflict with Russia. This had important repercussions at the time, that is to say it empowered Britain to invade Afghanistan simply because the Ameer refused to accept a British diplomatic mission (and because that refusal made Britain afraid for India's safety from Russia). Yet as Baral warned, interventions have repercussions which don't just disappear in a generation. Afghanistan's emptiness became naturalized, 'known'. We can project this into more contemporary times and think of how Afghanistan is labeled as a 'failed state' and things are kind of left there. Analysis of how or why it failed (such as advocated by

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[34] There are assumptions that Baral makes which should not be taken uncritically. For instance, British India did remain safe from Russian incursion throughout the 19th and early 20 centuries. Specific objectives of British interventions may not have had perfect success, but documentation shows that the geopolitically Britain was primarily interested in Afghanistan as a buffer zone to keep India safe. It is also pretty clear that Russia wanted influence in Afghanistan, for whatever reason. Finally, for so long as Britain held India, Russia had limited influence in Afghanistan. This doesn't take away from his typification of Afghanistan as an apparent playing field for geopolitical games, but it is an important side note to keep in mind.

Patrick 2006, Benn 2004 and National Security Council 2006) would tend to piggyback off the discursive institutional 'knowledges' built up about Afghanistan over the course of these coercive, subjugating interventions. Even policy that is focused on helping to uplift 'failed states' such as Afghanistan from impossible situations such as advocated by Natsios (2006) could tend to take on a certain paternal air because even these analyses will tend to rely on these discursive legacies wherein Afghanistan has no positive character or meaning in itself other than was is given it through coercive intervention. Yet despite these warnings, he falls into the same trap as he warns against, positioning Afghanistan as the natural center of geopolitical conflict rather than wondering if Afghanistan might have something uniquely about *Afghanistan*.

Paternal Caretaking / Imperial Expansion

Afghan character or the lack thereof is a running theme that made possible conversations on punishment, intervention and geopolitical positioning. Implicitly tied to punishment and especially to Great Game logics was a question of imperial expansion. For Britain, Afghanistan was useful primarily because it provided a safe place, a tactical game board on which the Great Game could be played out without endangering its Indian dominion. There were those that argued that formally annexing all or parts or Afghanistan would be particularly advantageous. We already saw some of those arguments in a tactical sense; holding Herat particularly would be a great strategic boon according to many. (Vambery 1871, Malleson 1879, Low 1878) The general lack of any meaningful and agential character in Afghanistan meant there was no real inherent consideration dissuading such adventures. Thus, there were those who thought on other reasons it might be beneficial to the British empire to expand its reach to include Afghanistan. These ideas were particularly empowered by a negative view of the Afghan character, wherein Afghanistan's constitutive emptiness was largely due to mismanagement by natives. The enlightened and civilized stewardship of the British could perhaps make Afghanistan into some place that has some sort of intrinsic value. (Vambery 1871, Vambery 1879, Malleson 1879, Wheeler 1878)

It may be that motivations for expansion tap some romantic yearning for an exotic Oriental past, with much attention focused on Herat. In addition to being the strategic gateway to India, it was also historically one of the most important stops on the old Silk Road. Vambery talks about the history of Herat as consisting of great beauty and prosperity which have been ruined by the long time mismanagement of the Afghan people after violently wresting control from the Safavid Dynasty.

"Now these nationalities [various ethnic groups not members of the ruling tribes] all detest the rapacious, greedy and cruel Afghan, and would hail the day which would deliver them from the burdensome tutorship of the Barukzais." (Vambery 1879)

Malleson goes into further detail, describing Herat in its heyday and suggesting that Britain could bring those days of glory back.

"The position I claim for Herat is one of very ancient date. The prosperity of that city… 12,000 retail shops, 350 schools, 144,000 occupied houses, and 6,000 baths… Looking at the enormous disadvantages under which she has labored [with Afghan rule], at the fact that she has been governed by a race of *mountain robbers*, who know *no rule but that of extortion*… it is clear that were she administered on the principles which characterize British rule in India she would speedily attain a position far exceeding in splendor that which she reached… [at her heights]." (Malleson 1879)

So, Malleson asks – "Why not take it now? The possession will solve every difficulty." (ibid) Doing justice for the oppressed peoples living there, increase British revenue, restore Herat's glory, and deny it to the Russians.

This is a basis of the argument for expanding the British Empire's domain to include some of Afghanistan. Afghans didn't deserve to rule in Afghanistan; they had wrecked its fantastic potential. They were vengeful, untrustworthy, barbarous rulers who were poor caretakers that wrecked their land. (Wheeler 1878) Afghanistan was important because of how it stood directly in the only road between cultivated Iran and India, and was a place that could become great again in its own right if taken away from the "greedy Afghans", those "poor caretakers" and "rulers of horror". (Vambery 1871) Here the underlying message as laid out by Low 1878 is that Afghanistan's character doesn't really matter – it just isn't an existing concern in strategic thinking. What was important was denying Russia a strong foothold there, and if that involved expanding the British Empire then so be it.

Afghanistan on the Fringes of Empire

Here, it seems, is the imperial, a colonial approach to Afghanistan averred to by some critical scholarship. Here are narratives that yes, Afghanistan is a land empty of meaningful character of virtue, but it could be so much more under the correct, enlightened rule. British rule could bring a better life to the people of Afghanistan – it could also help to make the British empire more rich… and serve to make India even more secure all at once.

Radhika Desai considers how assignations of otherness, emptiness, of negative marginalizing empowers imperial pursuits. In a 2004 article, Desai draws out what she finds to be similarities between imperial pursuits during the age of colonialism and after the Cold War. This could be useful both in a general sense and in drawing discursive connectivities between British interventions on Afghanistan and American interventions. She identifies three types of states in what used to be the Third World.

> "There are, first, 'bully' states, allying with and emulating the increasingly brazen US imperialism regionally. Second, there are 'rogue' states, with no prospects of such alliance and emulation but a substantial capacity for violence. Finally, 'failed' states are in financial and political receiverships to the US or one or another of its local, bully, allies." (Desai: 172)

For Desai the first group consists of states which act as proxies and/or friends of Western powers. Rogue states are those which are on unfriendly terms with the West, but which are too powerful to be directly intervened upon. Failed states are simply those states which are intervened upon by the West, especially the United States, and are essentially inseparable (in Desai's argument) from colonial client states or objects of empire. Yet the language of modern discourse makes it nearly impossible to recognize it as such: "In this world questions of Third World solidarity, autonomy from imperialism, 'third way' development or non-alignment simply do not arise." (ibid)

Desai argues that these discursive narratives make possible modern imperial projects. They are made possible by way of making them inconceivable – we see intervening on failed states as saving them rather than subjugating them. Failed states are described in such a way as that Western intervention is justified, and these typifications are naturalized through a long discursive history of liberal theories of development economics, modernization theory and the like. (ibid: 172-173)

Linkages with discourse on Afghanistan appear fairly straight forwardly. Desai argues that the manner in which we situate failed states is just a new way of talking about colonial clients. Drawing on her example in comparison to Afghanistan in the period of the second Anglo-Afghan war, it might be that it is not such a new way of talking at all. In order to justify designs on imperial expansion into Afghanistan, discourse in this period referred to the unsuitability of Afghanistan's current rulers as well as the wasted potential of the land itself. By taking direct stewardship of the land, Britain could do great things for the Afghan people. If at the same time it enriched Britain and granted regional stability that could only be a good thing to be celebrated, not seen as a nefarious and cynical reason for taking stewardship in the first place.

Labels of failure suggest that the failed state shouldn't be where it is. Following lines of reasoning inherent in neoliberal economic theoretical norms, these failed states were given the tools to succeed in the process of decolonization and interaction with various IGOs and INGOs. Thus, the term 'failed state' is both a descriptive label and a *judgment* – these states could have succeeded but failed to do so through their own negligence. Thus, labels of failure are also a prescriptive label – they were unable to do things right on their own, now somebody civilized who knows what they're doing has to step in and right their mistakes. Of course, these state building projects have the side effects of being profitable for certain segments of the intervening population and bring about regional stability in a way that is beneficial to the intervening group, but that is a natural side effect.

The comparison is compelling on its face but involves certain assumptions that need to be recognized. While Desai's arguments regarding how we perceive success and failure have merit, relying on economic theory as a sole explanatory mechanism is in itself problematic from a perspective of discourse analysis. Desai pits certain proto Marxist theories against development and modernization theory (172-175) as a way to situate contemporary failed state discourses as a modern iteration of imperial activism, in this case pushed primarily by the United States. Yet the critical / Marxist versus orthodox / liberal theoretical debate itself is heavily West-centric and assigns Afghanistan, then and now, a very specific and undesirable discursive identity. Colony. Imperial holding. Powerless and empty.

Yet Afghanistan was neither colony nor imperial holding at the time of the second Anglo-Afghan war. The question of whether or not Afghanistan is victim of a colonial or imperial project at present is by no means settled either – assuming that by being contemporarily labeled as a 'failed state' Afghanistan is therefore a colony or an imperial holding prematurely ends a conversation that is worth having. This is done by *assuming a place for Afghanistan*, a pre-defined place in an already existing discursive battlefield among competing ideologies which leaves no place for Afghan-ness. That is, it reproduces some of the very problems this project decries within orthodox narratives on Afghanistan.

Ways of talking about Afghanistan empowered the possibility of expanding Britain's imperial domain. However, *Britain did not expand its imperial domain* or, at least, not into Afghanistan. What the conversation inarguably did have the effect of doing, however, was empowering certain interventionist practices. We can draw on those similarities between these historical events and today without assuming a final meaning to those similarities. Some part of the British discourse saw Afghanistan as an empty space where British empire could expand profitably (in various senses of the word), but the discourse itself had the effect of empowering an intervention, not necessarily an *expansion*.

This particular type of intervention was empowered by a conceptualization of Afghanistan as completely empty of unique character. Afghanistan was simply not worth dominating for any intrinsic value it might have, thus it was not worth colonizing. Instead interventions always had some other end as their referent object.

Afghanistan is not unique in being on the fringe of imperial/colonial experience. Nor are all colonial experiences the same. Nor, for that matter, do these allowances mean that colonial tropes and knowledges had no part to play in interactions on Afghanistan. Rather, we might think of Afghanistan as exemplifying a place that was never straight-forwardly colonized whilst being variously and unevenly inscribed within and outside of colonial relations. Pursuant to this, it is vital to recognize certain colonial tropes as they are applied to Afghanistan – and indeed those tropes underlie particular aspects of what is *known* about Afghanistan even today. Yet it is equally vital not to accept that critique on (neo)colonial grounds alone (no matter how sophisticated) comes to grips adequately with Afghanistan's specificity.

Rights and Sovereignty

Each of the previous three strands of discursive 'knowledge' about Afghanistan highlights either null or negative typifications o Afghan character and agency. By and large this was unacknowledged and accepted without question. That is to say, the discursive examples above only in a few instances even considered the idea that there might be another side to Afghan identity, that there might be some agency or identity to fill the void assumed within their discourse.

Yet there was a bona fide debate taking place at this time about sovereignty, statehood and rights. It was unfortunately only a civil debate which never influenced policy in a discernible way – furthermore the tone of civil discourse to follow the war suggests that this civil debate didn't significantly influence civil narratives either. The whole of the 'debate' took place over about a month's time in letters to the editor of *The Times* before disappearing and not being taken up again until after the First World War.

Note that this is a set of questions regarding whether Afghanistan has a place within the schemata of Eurocentric international law. This is a question asked today by critical scholars for perhaps very different reasons. But it is interesting that at this point of history, the idea of treating Afghanistan under Eurocentric law and custom was a way to *protect* Afghanistan – today critical scholars see such placement as *injurious* in its own right. Both, in their proper context, have validity.

The debate was set off by a letter to the editor written by Lord John Lawrence, former Viceroy of India. He spoke out against war with Afghanistan saying that "We ought not, indeed, to be surprised that the Ameer has acted as he has done…" (Lawrence 1878A) After all, according to Lawrence Afghanistan had refused to allow a British diplomatic mission in Kabul since 1857. While still considering Afghans to be "uncivilized" and "barbarous", he also considers it folly to presume that Britain knows what is good for Afghanistan better than Afghanis do. Indeed, his letter is an impassioned call to consider that Afghanistan has a set of inherent rights that Britain was guilty of violating.

> "Have not the Afghans a right to resist our forcing a Mission on them, bearing in mind to what
> such Missions often lead, and what Burns's Mission in 1836 did actually bring upon them?"
> (ibid)

There was a rapid and strong reaction to this. General Murdo (Murdo 1878) accused him of misleading the public: "…express my regret that his letter was written, for I fear that its plausibility will mislead people at home who are ignorant of the Asiatic character". Insofar as Afghans (and other Asiatics) cannot understand restraint and civility, any reaction to the refusal of accepting the British mission would only be seen as weakness, which the Afghans would capitalize on. An even more outraged response came in under the pen name of Political. He argues that anti-war arguments are fallacious because they treat the Ameer as if he were a European ruler, whereas he is in fact qualitatively different. Thus Afghanistan had no rights to be considered or recognized.

> "He is, besides, a barbarian and ignorant of the common amenities which govern the political
> relations between two independent States. [According Afghanistan rights] would be to enact
> a political farce for the amusement of the world and our own humiliation [as it would accord
> Afghanistan] "the international privileges and consideration due to an [sic] European State
> without any of its responsibilities being demanded from him." (Political 1878)

Other, less hostile voices also were raised. Viscount Howick supported Lord Lawrence's position, even taking the argument further. He argued that it was "the right of every *independent nation* [emphasis mine] to refuse to receive an Envoy from another" (Howick 1878) and that this was a right that Afghanistan had been exercising for two decades already. Furthermore, he argued that Britain's tendency to ignore Afghanistan's rights as an independent nation were to blame for the 'insult' of refusing Britain's envoy.

Stephen opposed Lord Lawrence's stance, though he allowed that there was something to be had in the conversation.

"Whether in dealing with an Asiatic ruler like Shere Ali the common rules of European international law have any application whatever… [is a question that is interesting but] though interesting, I shall pass over." (Stephen 1878A)

So Stephen felt that there might be an interesting and useful debate to have over whether Afghanistan should be accorded rights and responsibilities as under European international law, but it wasn't actually a germane question in the current circumstances. This reads as an outrageous claim; surely when considering whether or not it is right for Britain to make war on Afghanistan for refusing an envoy rights and sovereignty in the case of Afghanistan should be of central concern. Instead, for Stephen, the question was whether war with Afghanistan was to *Britain's advantage.* He answered that there was such an advantage and that the advantage was in fact an overwhelming imperative.

"The danger which I apprehend is that the Russians may… obtain an ascendency throughout Central Asia… If such an army were formed… India would be open at any moment to an invasion which would tax the strength of the Empire to the utmost." (ibid)

Thus, the geopolitical logic of the Great Game was too powerful, too imperative a concern to worry about such humane concerns as the right to sovereignty held by Asiatic rulers.

Lord Lawrence and Stephen had a short back and forth around these claims, with no real further input from other figures at the time. Lawrence responded that the question of whether Afghanistan should be treated in accordance with European international law has generally just been passed over. He argues that it shouldn't be:

"If international law has no application in this case, then what is the law or principle on which the cause between Shere Ali and ourselves is to be tried? Are we to be judges in our own cause? Are we to decide in accordance with our own interests? Is this an answer which Englishmen will give in so grave a matter?" (Lawrence 1878B)

It is worth noting that he doesn't give an opinion on the action from an international law standpoint. He just argues that Britain ought to adopt that framework for thinking about interactions. Stephen responds arguing that international law is not, in fact, law. Rather it is:

"a collection of usages which prevail between civilized nations, and are rendered possible by the fact that the leading civilized nations are practically for most purposes of nearly equal force." (Stephen 1878B)

His notion of international law is essentially a gentlemen's agreement among civilized nations of largely equal power. These agreements are that states are permanent, equal and independent. They *may* have some value in Europe and among rulers of actually equal states. They do not apply to rulers that are little more than tribal chieftains. Instead, Britain's relations with them must be based on this:

> "…we are exceedingly powerful and highly civilized, and that they are comparatively weak and half barbarous". (ibid)

With this different set of rules, for Afghanistan to have acted in a friendly manner toward Britain's known-rival Russia (which, by the way, is in a similar set of power dynamics with Afghanistan) – "the prima facie inference is that he has done everything but formally declare war on us". (ibid) Thus, for Stephen, invading Afghanistan was legal and moral and all that. Great Game. This reflects in many ways contemporary debates over the very nature of international law and the unassailability of rights. Stephen essentially dismisses any right of sovereignty as meaningless against harsh logics of interstate conflict. In such situations, it is the lot of weaker political spaces to be dealt with as their more powerful 'betters' see necessary.

Lawrence makes one final response in sovereign rights argument, saying that international law needs to be considered because *some* sort of actual ethical framework (outside of "we're powerful and they're being nice to people we don't like") must be applied. He says that: "Force may overbear weakness, as it has done at times in Europe; but the eternal principles of right and wrong should influence us in all parts of the world". (Lawrence 1878C) Here Lawrence falls back on a notion of natural right, seemingly influenced to some degree by Kant as an underpinning way of ordering relations between states.

Indeed, it seems as though Lawrence was somewhat ahead of his time. His arguments are very similar to the narrative underpinnings that inform the discursive shift we see after the First World War, and that shift has an impact on relationships with Afghanistan as well. That, however, is in the future. This very interesting debate falls silent and British policy carries forward more or less as General Murdo would have advocated.

One could argue that we can see aspects of both sides of these arguments in international relations today. International law is given some credence, but what exactly it means and to what extent it applies differs based on power and assumed civility. To an extent, this coincides with the formal/informal discursive divide we identified in several other places in this dissertation. Stephen

offered a wonderful example for how we might look at this formal/informal divide (though it didn't necessarily operate in a formal/informal structure at this time; it simply resembles the formal/informal structure which is identified and discussed more in depth with analysis of the Third Anglo Afghan War). For Stephen, there might be some validity to the idea that Afghanistan has rights as an independent nation, and in a kinder place and time it is something definitely worth of consideration. However, in the world as it exists one must look at the reality; British security demands that Afghanistan be treated as a space with no sovereignty or character. Afghanistan does not have the power to stop that. Therefore, it is the right thing for Britain to do.

Afghanistan the (no, not really) Sovereign

It is worthwhile to immediately point out strong connections we might make between the Stephen/Lawrence debate and Derrida's work on sovereignty. The tension between coercive power and rights/justice in sovereignty is central to Derrida's treatment of the idea.[35] The entirety of his compilation of lectures in The Beast and the Sovereign (Derrida 2009) deals with this auto-immune relationship. Here he asks the question:

> "So it is the concept of *law*, and with it that of contract, authority, credit, and therefore
> many, many others that will be at the heart of our reflections. Is the law the reigns… in all the
> so-called animal societies a law of the same nature as what we understand by law in human
> right and human politics? And is the complex, although relatively short, history of the concept
> of sovereignty in the West… the history of a law, or is it not, the structure of which is or is
> not, also to be found in the laws that organize the hierarchized relations of authority… in so-
> called animal societies?" (Derrida 2009: 16, emphasis in original)

Here Derrida asks if sovereignty is primarily based on coercive strength, or if it is primarily based on a concern for protecting rights and justice. There is a mechanism in the operation of sovereignty, he argues, whereby it tries to (and has to try to) do both:

> "…a certain power to *give*, to *make,* but also to *suspend* the law; it is the exceptional right to
> place oneself above right, the right to non-right…" (ibid)

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[35] and Derrida in turn reflects the ways in which sundry theorists, such as Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau see sovereignty as about achieving effective rule while also maintaining legitimacy. See discussions of these thinkers in G. Browning, A History of Modern Political Thought, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016)

There are aspects of the discourse on Afghanistan at the time of the second Anglo-Afghan war which exhibit fascinating similarities to what Derrida drew out here. British sovereignty, in pursuit of a certain sense of justice for British interests and notions of right, because it was powerful could (and was justified in) suspending other notions of right. Even if those other notions of right had at least some theoretical just basis. The need of Britain was of a higher order precisely because British power was great enough to make it possible, thus the coercive nature of (British) sovereignty was powerful enough to subsume the right to its own sovereign self-rule that should be enjoyed by Afghanistan. This was done, ultimately, in pursuit of what was considered to be a just end of British sovereignty (the protection of its Indian dominion, which was typified as more enlightened and civilized than Afghanistan in any case, and thus more important to see protected and nurtured).

Governmental Narrative

There is a voluminous set of records available on governmental discourse in this era. Parliament met often and debated a wide range of issues in depth. Yet discussion of Afghanistan is almost non-existent. British imperial holdings on the Arabian Peninsula and in India see a lot of discussion, as do other political spaces bounding those holdings. Yet Afghanistan, despite actual military conflict being undertaken there by British forces, is only mentioned in two debates during the late 1870's. The vast bulk of speeches that mention Afghanistan during these two debates are more concerned with whether or not the ruling party in government sufficiently informed opposition of their plans, rather than whether or not a conflict in Afghanistan was right or desirable policy. There are only three instances of Afghanistan being mentioned in the context of conflict and their justification. Their brevity does not make them inconsequential, however. The opposite is true; they tend to reinforce observances in the civil discourse rather strongly.

Queen Victoria addressed Parliament on a number of what was considered by the government to be the year's most pressing issues. Afghanistan took up a significant amount of space in her speech, and she gave it a great deal of weight. She even invoked international law in regard to Afghanistan, though it was not in the role of Afghan rights as in the civil discourse. Rather she used it to question the validity of Afghanistan's actions in turning away Britain's envoy. "I do not know whether, as a simple matter of International Law, it might have been justifiable for Shere Ali to receive a Russian Mission, and to reject an English one…" (Victoria 1878) She claims that the act of denying the British diplomatic mission *in itself* was an insult which may not be ignored and must be responded to. She also claimed that Britain doesn't want territorial expansion… with the possible exception of expansion into tribal

areas not directly under the Amir's control anyway (for greater security). These points touch on each and every single point drawn upon in the civil discourse in interesting, revealing ways. It is *also* worth noting that, of all responses given to the speech on that day, all but one were partisan debates over internal governmental handling of the Afghan situation. None so much as mentioned Afghanistan as a character or actor in its own right. This very absence speaks to the underlying theme of Afghan emptiness.

Lord Ravensworth was the only speaker following the Queen's Speech to acknowledge her comments on Afghanistan.

> "Her Majesty's Gracious Speech has informed us that we are at war *in* Afghanistan… we are not at war *with* [emphasis mine] Afghanistan – we are at war with the Amir, but not with his subjects." (Ravensworth 1878)

Afghanistan then is situated as not being any sort of sovereign space, just a warlord with subjects. It does appear as though perhaps the Afghan people have some character, some meaningful identity in this quote – a popular sovereignty? It is possible, though the idea is never expounded upon (though we've seen there is some civil debate in Britain at the time regarding some right to sovereign character within Afghanistan so it's not beyond the pale). In any case, functionally Afghanistan is seen as an uncontrolled space with prominent individuals. Ravensworth makes an interesting argument that the Amir was forced into friendliness with Russia: Britain wasn't willing to recognize him as a sovereign and Afghanistan as his legitimate realm. Russia was encroaching. Britain hadn't made strong enough guarantees to support Afghanistan against Russian aggression. Thus, Afghanistan had little choice but to cater to Russia's apparent demands, though Ravensworth is in no way protesting against the war. He saw it as a sad necessity. There is an implication in his argument that might be drawn; Afghanistan is not a state, but it could have been if Britain would have empowered it to be.

A later meeting of Parliament involved the loyal opposition within Parliament yet again protesting the way in which war was decided upon without adequately consulting with the opposition. During these procedural debates, Estanhope makes some comments that resonate with earlier analysis. He touched on the points of geopolitics (Great Game) and prestige. "…if such conduct were tolerated, a feeling might get abroad that we were losing our strength". "…Afghanistan under a foreign Power might prove a constant menace to our safety in the East…"

The sparsity of discussion on the invasion of Afghanistan by Parliament is in itself instructive. One might generally suppose that putting national resources and manpower into armed conflict would require some manner of political discussion. Yet the idea of putting troops in Afghanistan in response to a perceived insult by way of refusing to accept a British emissary was so natural, so unobjectionable as to require little to no discussion. Indeed, discussion over taxes on bread in Ireland engendered more discussion over the period analyzed.

What little was said tended to follow trends identified in civil discourse. The Queen felt that international law, if at all applicable, must naturally be on the side of Britain. Further, Afghanistan's insult to British prestige required a strong response. Ravensworth supposed that it was possible to be at war in Afghanistan without that war actually being with Afghanistan – which begs the question who Britain could have waged war with and what the differentiation was. Estanhope later revisited the need to guard both British prestige and the security of India to the east.

Summary and Revisiting Central Questions

This project first asks why we are able talk about failed states. Is there anything from this second Anglo-Afghan war which can also be applied to understanding how we talk about state failure in a contemporary context, particularly in the instance of Afghanistan? Desai argued that pejorative labels such as failure (and in the case of Afghanistan in the historical context we can talk about labels of barbarism) empower notions of intervention, making them seem necessary and even humane. Baral warns of a disturbing continuity between how Afghanistan has been envisioned by Western interveners in the past and today (underscoring the continuity by falling into the same pattern).

Both of these are powerful points well worth taking on board. Neither alone adequately explains Afghanistan's failed state identity, nor does acceptance of those points obligate one to accept Desai's or Baral's conclusions as natural. Rather than interpreting Afghanistan through a lens that gives it a determined spot within a well-developed view of how power relations in our social world work, it might be more useful to look again toward how these conceptions shaped and required Afghan indeterminacy. A recurring theme in this chapter, throughout the various threads of narrating Afghan-ness has been this sense of indeterminacy. The only determinate and constant aspect of Afghanistan's apparent character in this narrative has been emptiness – which is in itself indeterminate. That is to say, Afghanistan was talked about in a variety of ways (barbarians to be punished, potential for imperial expansion, Great Game) which share little in common other than the assumption that Afghanistan is empty of character.

At the same time, narratives surrounding the second Anglo-Afghan war demonstrate that there were questions about Afghanistan and a sovereign identity. Whether that sovereign identity existed and where it may lie (Institutions? Borders? Rulers? People?) are undeveloped questions. Yet there are arguments that some kind of right to Afghan sovereignty exists, and these are arguments which will slowly develop and become "settled" in later chapters (without ever really coming to grips with anything particularly Afghan about the Afghan sovereignty question). This then is the gestalt of thinking of Afghanistan as a state, albeit not much of a state and a state which one might easily describe as lesser or failed. What's more, discussion on the elite of Afghanistan (which is what fills the space of an Afghan 'government' in this discourse) is focused primarily on how those leaders have failed a wide set of responsibilities both domestically and with reference to Britain.

There are certain "knowledges" about Afghanistan that we see developing here which will resonate through future interventions and which touch on this project's second central question: "what assumptive discursive knowledges empower dominant narratives of intelligibility?". Uncivilized Afghanistan, Afghanistan the almost-sovereign, Afghanistan the corrupt, Afghanistan the tactical space – these are all themes which resonate powerfully with orthodox scholarship on state failure and / or on Afghanistan today. They also serve to (re)empty Afghanistan of any possibility of meaningful identity.

Dominant discursive decisions on how to envision Afghanistan all emphasize its absence of meaning. A decision is made by the Afghan ruler to turn away a diplomatic emissary of the British and rather than a political move, this is seen as an insult from a barbarian not properly equipped to truly understand how civilization works. This barbarity was of such a nature as that it could not be dealt with in a civilized fashion – only strength would do – and only violence is strength to such barbaric peoples.

The conflict thus arising was justified in a variety of ways beyond simply the need to teach Afghanistan (or its rulers) a lesson in manners. One thread was a discussion of ways in which the Afghan ruling groups through their own barbaric customs, their cruelty, their corruption and ineptitude ruined the vast potential of Afghanistan. They were unfit rulers for Afghanistan – the best thing that Britain could do would be to intervene. Indeed, Britain would be well within its rights to seize Afghanistan and make it a colonial dominion, but at the very least a regime change was in order.

Touching on this project's third question – "how do particular assumptions about sovereignty, justice and successful statehood by intervening parties negatively impact attempts to understand the

specificity of the Afghan crisis, currently conceptualized primarily through the discursive lens of state failure?" – consider:

As to whether or not such an intervention was just, sovereignty and its nature under international law was discussed. A very interesting discussion which is a haunting precursor to post-Cold War discussions on the nature of sovereignty ultimately demonstrated that when a powerful country felt it was in its national interest to ignore any notion of sovereign rights in a weaker country, it would certainly do so. Justifications included arguing the notion that a place like Afghanistan has no right to sovereignty, because it is not civilized, it *does not qualify as a state*. Furthermore, geopolitical demands for the very survival of vital British interests were at stake – India's security was at risk so ignoring the moral question of whether Afghanistan should have any right to sovereignty had to be delayed for another day – thus by default the idea that in fact Afghanistan had no inherent right to sovereignty carried the day.

An Afghanistan without sovereign rights was a place where outside powers could play. In this case the game to be played was the Great Game – Afghanistan's empty character and indeterminate nature meant that it could be situated as a tactical space for geopolitical competition. It is the emptiness that draws a common thread through narratives on Afghanistan during this time, in the previous Anglo-Afghan war, and we will see that it continues in varying forms through present times.

This assumed emptiness empowered a certain way of talking about Afghanistan, a marginalizing set of discursive logics which ensured that Afghanistan itself would remain powerless and without character or agency in determining not only its own fate but its very identity. If we are able to draw strong connections between discursive logics in the period of the Anglo-Afghan wars and the post-Sept. 11 world, then we will have strong insight into what empowers our particular conversation about Afghanistan and set of interventions in Afghanistan as a failed state today. The indeterminate nature of Afghanistan was reinforced – Afghanistan was either unwilling or unable to act in a civilized manner and thus was not worthy of sovereign rights. Thus it was natural and just that it be intervened upon – thus it was natural and right for Afghanistan to stand in as a battleground against Russian interests (which were seen as likely complicit in Afghanistan's failings in the first place… along with its typically savage nature). Not only was Afghanistan indeterminate, but it was not even in itself the focus. Afghanistan was a means to an end: punishing Afghanistan was not only the right way to ensure continued respect from a savage culture but it was also the means by which the end of keeping Russia out of India could be attained.

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Chapter 5 – Third Anglo Afghan War

"The fight of nations to determine their own destiny… is regarded as the birthright of

Europeans…"

Intelligence Bureau (1918)

Afghanistan in an Emerging Global Meta-narrative

The 3rd Anglo-Afghan War occurred at a time of great change globally, coming on the heels of the first World War. Britain's relationship with Afghanistan up to that point was relatively stable. The introduction of the Treaty of Gandamak following the 2nd Anglo-Afghan war had Britain firmly in control of Afghanistan's foreign affairs. Their relationship was generally stable and peaceful for around half a decade. Yet in the period surrounding the first World War that was beginning to change. Amir Abdur Rahman Khan was perceived as too potentially friendly to Russia following the Bolshevik revolution. During the war itself, Afghanistan remained neutral but maintained some form of diplomatic relations with representatives of both the conflict's sides– undermining Britain's claim of influence over Afghanistan's foreign policy.

However, it wasn't until the first World War had come to a close that things came to a head. Amir Habibullah Khan was assassinated in 1919, leading to a short internal fight for power between Habibullah's brother Nasrulla and his son Amanulla. This reawakened fears of Russian influence in Afghanistan. What's more, nationalism was in general on the rise across many regions where statehood previously wasn't part of the conversation in the 'western' sense. This too was particularly concerning to a Britain which following World War One not only had a much expanded empire but was full of a sense of national heroism itself.

Fallout from the internal conflict meant that Amanulla, having won, still did not enjoy the full support of the various Afghan tribes. This, the British believed, led him to incite the various tribes to Jihad, as well as informally declaring Jihad amongst his subjects, specifically against British rule in India as a bid to solidify his domestic support. (UK Foreign Office 1919: 3 March and 21 May) In addition to inciting border tribes, Amanulla commanded or led attacks on Indian interests himself – though specifics at the time were unclear and are a matter of some debate still today. By mid-May, Afghanistan had

asked India for a formal declaration of cessation of hostilities. This was denied, and it was in the discussion over this where the cabinet of UK was formally informed that they were in conflict with Afghanistan once again. (War would go on until August of same year, though with few additional actions.)

The 'war' in itself was short lived and one-sided. Hostile acts were carried out by Afghanistan against border areas of India. Indian forces – including British national forces based in India, responded. Conflict lasted several months, though after May negotiations for some lasting peace began. These negotiations were initially quite informal and included attempts to fact find by the British. Cables from the time suggest a certain amount of confusion as to how and why the conflict started in the first place, as well as what the apparent and real motivations behind the conflict were.

This confusion must be taken in context of a muddled international situation at the time. Britain's relationship with Russia and with India were both troubled places. India was restive, no longer as content to be part of the British Empire. There were increasing calls for autonomy and self-rule which had led both to reforms in colonial administration and questions within Britain about the future of its empire. Russia had gone through its Bolshevik Revolution and was still in the midst of civil strife. What Russia's place would be in the world was at question, and there was a certain amount of anxiety over the nationalistic ideologies espoused within Bolshevism, at least in how it was articulated toward the peoples of central and southern Asia. These anxieties exacerbated anxieties over the future of the British Empire. What's more, how Britain viewed itself and its place in a world that was seemingly changing dramatically in the wake of the first World War likely impacted narratives on Afghanistan and Afghan-ness. World War One was hard on Britain's economy and had put strain on its ability to administrate its empire. On the other hand, there was a growing sense of British exceptionalism – a heroic Britain at the forefront of happenings in the international arena. These tensions in how Britain viewed itself and other anchor-identities (Russia and India, in this case) impacted on Britain would respond to Afghan calls for independence and recognition as a sovereign state. It influenced a discursive pathway which this chapter identifies and informs the formal/informal divide on Afghan sovereign identity.

Relations with Russia were confused at the time, with some domestic voices saying the Russian threat was gone and others saying it was larger than ever – official policy tended to fall in with the latter view. Though there was a hopeful reaction to the abdication of the Tsar of Russia in 1917, the Bolsheviks' actions on gaining power in Russia had a souring effect. Particularly, the peace made by

Russia with Germany in 1918 (allowing Germany to concentrate its forces on the western front); the nationalization of all foreign enterprises in Russia without notice or compensation; and the refusal to repay war debts incurred to Britain by the previous Russian regime turned public and especially official governmental opinion against the Bolsheviks. This expressed itself in a few ways. For instance, British troops that had been in Murmansk and Archangel to ensure war supplies that had been sent there by Britain were not also nationalized took part in the Russian civil war on the part of the "white" forces. In a more general sense, British foreign policy was completely hostile toward Russia from 1918-1920. (Farmer: 27)

India had probably even gained in importance to the British mind after the war. "[In the interwar years] all [British] governments … saw the Empire as a considerable, or potentially considerable, economic asset… in the interwar years, the Empire was increasingly important to Britain's trading position." (ibid: 47) Furthermore, India was "Britain's largest and most important colony. The loss of India, and the Indian army, would have a far-reaching effect on Britain's prestige and power." (ibid 56) Indeed, popular unrest in India associated with a wish for home rule (and the perceived harsh British response to this agitation) which to appearances played a large role in Afghanistan's actions leading up to the 3rd Anglo-Afghan War.

As for Britain itself, there was a growing sense of self-identity as a nation of heroes. In the aftermath of WWI, Britain and its government was caught up in a patriotic fervor, with "glittering forecasts of a Great Britain fit for heroes". It was a position largely imposed on the Prime Minister due to popular public opinion but certainly saw its expression in Britain's foreign policy. (Ward: 526) This will find expression in the tenor of popular discourse shown in the chapter, as well as within formal military documents and, especially, dispatches between British and Afghani officials in the wake of hostilities.

Balanced against this was a sudden gain in territory (taken from Germany at the end of the war) as well as a burgeoning debt… with an accompanied near beggaring of most of Britain's continental trading partners. (ibid: 538) There was, at the time of the writing of the referenced history book, a realization that peace in Europe was absolutely imperative, and a hope that the League of Nations would be the vehicle making that possible. (ibid) However, in the short term, there was the difficulty of a great deal of debt, a zealously patriotic domestic constituency and a very large empire.

All of this, of course, was happening in the context of a post-WWI world that was entering into the infancy of a dominant discourse on liberal statehood.

This chapter explores discourse on Afghanistan and its proper place in the world (with relation to Britain and India specifically) with the context of these turbulent times in mind. Discourse analysis includes newspapers, government memoranda and cables as well as parliamentary debates. This is a time of great narrative change and here we find assumptive legacies of Afghan identity embedded into new dominant conceptions of sovereignty, statehood and the right to self-rule.

Analysis of narratives on Afghanistan at the time found a significant amount of continuity. Afghanistan's importance is still measured in relation to its usefulness in securing India, which is still seen largely in relation to Russia. Afghans are still seen as unimportant in themselves – their barbaric, uncivilized nature means that they are not to be taken seriously in their own right. Rather than taking into account their particular rights, Afghans and Afghanistan are seen in relation to their utility to the civilized world. This impacts with a discursive shift we see. Afghanistan itself is pressing for sovereign respect on an international scale – and it's not just Afghanistan. This is a time when Britain's imperial holdings are larger than ever, and at a time when Britain's view of self in the wake of WWI is self-complimentary. Coming to terms with movements across its dominion (and in areas where it was used to wielding considerable influence without claiming sovereignty itself) calling for sovereignty, respect, equality… It is a jarring time.

Yet the underlying assumptions empowering Britain's historical understanding of Afghanistan's character seem to maintain themselves through this change. This leads to a sort of formal/informal divide of *knowing* Afghanistan. Eventually, Britain agrees that it will no longer impose its will on Afghanistan in any way – recognizing its sovereignty. Yet Britain discursively tries to position itself as a benefactor and teacher for Afghanistan in a sort of precursor to modern nation building. It justifies these positions by explaining that places like Afghanistan can only pretend to be civilized, mimicking their betters… but suggesting that perhaps through the right kind of nurturing Britain can eventually instil the actual attributes of civilization in a place as inherently bereft of civility as Afghanistan.

This benefactor model of understanding can be seen through future interventions. In the case of the Cold War, the United States is saving Afghanistan-the-victim from the cruel oppression of the Soviet Union and communism, giving Afghanistan the opportunity to follow America's example and take on democracy. In the case of the Global War on Terror, Afghanistan-the-failed-state is conceived partly as victim, partly as failure and partly as villain. Afghanistan as victim and as failure is again met by a beneficent United States which seeks to physically save those innocent Afghan citizens from terrorism

while teaching both its people and its government how to successfully exist as a state / liberal democratic society.

Savage Afghanistan

Envisioning Afghanistan as a land of savages is not new. There is some change, however. Afghan elites have by this time become part of the narrative on Afghanistan.

References to the character of Afghanistan are less central to discourse during this time. References are quite often in passing, as justification for given policies. When Afghanis are mentioned specifically at all, those mentions tend to echo earlier typifications. The uncivilized attitudes of Afghans have led to a serious situation where the land is in danger, both of dissolution and of intrusion by Russia:

> "Reports regarding the general situation in Afghanistan… are not of a reassuring character.
> …there is also a strong belief that things are gradually drifting into a serious position… The old
> sore of Khost, originally caused by the grosses misgovernment, remains unhealed… It is the
> old story of clemency being mistaken, among *ignorant* and *semi-barbarous* Orientals, for
> weakness." (*Times* 1914)

This is a fairly straightforward echo of the 'prestige as strength' discursive thread identified during the second Anglo-Afghan war. The article also speaks of "frightful misgovernment and injustice… corruption… a hateful yolk." Afghanistan "is very isolated, backward, ignorant…" (ibid) This plays into a contention that they are uncivilized and not yet ripe for reforms and civilizing. (*Times* 1919a) Afghanistan itself is a "bigotedly backward country" (*Times* 1923) that Britain had been forced, so it was said, to treat with undeserved respect because of the fear that otherwise Russia would assert influence and threaten India. What's more:

> "…the rule of Islam was never one to encourage the growth of civilisation. Bigotry and a
> fanatical intolerance were its handmaids… the only Western piece of civilisation that appeals
> to them – the art of war." (*Guardian* 1919)

This expands upon the idea of Afghanistan as bigoted and backward. Despite almost a century of interaction with Britain, Afghanistan has had opportunities to learn something of Western civilization. The only thing that Afghanistan has cared to learn, however, was better ways to be violent.

Perhaps obviously, then, there were conflicting notions regarding Afghanistan's ability to ever become civilized. At issue was the question of whether "Orientals" who sought things like sovereign nationhood, secularism, education and other trappings of civilization were actually learning to crave the

civilized, or whether they were simply mimicking something they knew to be better than what they had naturally.

In 1918, the UK's Intelligence Bureau wrote an exhaustive report analysing self-determination movements among the "Muslim world", which Afghanistan was folded into.

> "Long contact with these subjects had made them [colonizers] believe that Europeans and Orientals were far apart in political capacity and were therefore not entitled to the same political rights. When individuals or parties among the subject populations, inspired through contact with… European ideas… demanded corresponding political reforms, their activities were commonly regarded… as merely imitative… The ruling peoples admitted that their subjects might develop in the end the real qualifications for self-government, as well as the desire for it, but they regarded this development as almost infinitely remote, and as only attainable through the continuation of the existing regime." (Intelligence Bureau 1918)

Thus, we have a contention that Orientals are functionally, probably incapable of being civilized. They only want to act civilized because they see their betters and want what they have. There is, however, perhaps a very slight chance that one day in the future these Orientals will evolve a capacity for real civilization – though this would only come through intensive continued patronage from the civilized West.

These general themes are echoed among popular discourse as well, with some arguments that Afghanistan specifically is barbaric and will never change… alongside arguments that Afghanistan is in fact changing and showing at least the potential for something better.

Afghanistan was still widely seen as a savage place. A report entitled "The Closed Book of Afghanistan" for the *Guardian* called Afghanistan a place "never… to encourage the growth of civilisation. Bigotry and a fanatical intolerance" were its primary attributes. (*Guardian* 1919) Despite being barbaric and inferior, Afghans themselves are arrogant and insolent, demanding rights and sovereignty which are not natural for them. (Lords 1919a, *Times* 1923, Lords 1919b)

Nevertheless, there seemed to be some hope. Due in no small part to the enlightened leadership of certain Afghan elites… who had managed to imbibe many of the mores and mannerisms of civilized Britain, there was a chance that backward Afghanistan could be civilized. The assassination of Habibullah in 1919 (which was a precursor to the 3rd Anglo Afghan war) was a setback to this – Habibullah's many wonderful attributes were celebrated after his demise (which echoes the first Anglo

Afghan war as well). However, the manner of celebration causes one to wonder how seriously this was all taken:

> "Habibullah… became enthusiastic about motor-cars and race meetings… even developed a weakness for tea parties… could sing a song or two… tried waltzing… and astonished everybody by showing that he could play an uncommonly good game of bridge… There can be no doubt that he was head and shoulders above any man in his State in intellectual capacity and progressive tendencies; but he was wont to say that he feared to introduce reforms into Afghanistan because his people were not ripe for them." (*Times* 1919a)

Also, somewhat less patronizingly:

> "[Habibullah] pursued his father's [Britain friendly] policy with a loyalty, consistency, and skill which did him infinite credit. He was a man… of a genial and affable temperament. He had a great taste for European civilisation, and was thoroughly imbued with the need of introducing all the instruments of modern progress into his rather backward country." (Lords 1919a)

In a more general sense, there was some talk of Afghanistan becoming more open to outside civilizing effects. There were remarks on Afghanistan's "progressive spirit" (*Times* 1922) and, four years after the bemoaned death of Halibullah, a celebration of the progressiveness of his successor.

> "And he and his principle [sic] advisers are bitten by the desire to introduce the instruments of Western progress into Afghanistan… it is a notable day when an Amir is bold enough to break with the traditional Afghan policy of seclusion, whatever obstacles the experiment may find – and there will be no lack of them – in a primitive and undisciplined people." (*Guardian* 1923)

The future of civilization in Afghanistan was seen as being in the hands of a few enlightened Afghan rulers and the patronage of their Western idols. How seriously the prospect of civilization was taken is somewhat unclear, in keeping with the running theme so far. Any hope of civilization relied on forcing the backward common Afghan into civility against their will, and it was surely seen as a long and arduous process. These typifications tended to implicitly justify Britain's involvement in Afghanistan previously as somehow good for Afghanistan – because now there is a chance it can join the civilized society of nations. It suggests a Britain which is somehow a kind benefactor to the benighted Afghan, even as it pursues its own enlightened self-interest in maintaining India's security.

This interplay on the ability of Afghanistan to become 'more civilized' is central to consideration of the formal/informal divide which will be discussed at the end of this chapter. Formally there is a

resolution that Afghanistan has both the capacity and the right to develop its sovereignty and join the civilized society of states. Informally there is a feeling that Afghanistan only pretends to civility and is fundamentally different from the 'real' states of the world. Afghanistan requires tutelage even to approach civility, and there is very real question as to whether such patronage can even civilize the savage Afghan or whether barbarism is simply within that country – those peoples' – nature.

Afghanistan's Determined Negativity (and determined indeterminism)

By this point negative readings of Afghan-ness have become more or less embedded in the narrative. It has the effect of empowering a certain paternal frame of understanding. This is also the most classically colonial form of interaction with Afghan identity that we see. Taking the backward and barbaric nature of Afghanistan as a given, praise is heaped on the few elites within Afghan society who at least try to imbibe Western civility. This acts to justify accepted modes of Western interaction with Afghanistan and is an argument for a continuation of that particular state of affairs.

It would be difficult to argue that in some way this is wholly unique and different from straight forward discursive positioning of colonial activities on the part of Britain. Indeed, there is no need to make that argument. The negative typfications of Afghan identity in the past were not so terribly different from negative typifications of other 'Orientals'. The sort of identity construction those typifications empowered is what differed.

Postcolonial theory is often times interested in what sort of harmful interactions paternalism makes possible as well. An aspect of paternalism which postcolonial theory is particularly interested in is its hidden nature. Strands of paternalist thought can be found both in development aid discourse and in narratives on multiculturalism. (Kayatekin 2009) Kayatekin is interested in bringing a postcolonial perspective to bear very specifically on economic analysis:

> Colonial and imperialist hegemonies have relied crucially on the constructions of the 'conquered' cultures and of the subject populations as different from and in opposition to an assumed norm of modernity, which may or may not be achieved, but nonetheless represents a more advanced stage of development… A postcolonial critique of economics, therefore, entails the recognition and contextualisation of the modernism of its fundamental concepts such as 'rationality,' 'economic agency', 'economy' and, of course, 'economics'. (ibid: 1114)

Kayatekin is pointing to a small movement within the postcolonial umbrella to uncover how these very west-centric concepts are used in particular ways to describe marginal spaces as lacking. In

turn, these typifications justify paternal interactions between the developed, civilized, advanced West and the benighted other.

The idea that outside concepts are introduced, one might even say forced upon, a marginalized political space in order to make it slot into a system regardless of fit is one that this project fits with. Touchstones of success, of civilization – which the marginal space lacks – are justifications for continued intervention of various types. In current times this comes in the form of development aid, state building and the like – and which postcolonial theory argues are hugely problematic.

One can look at these postcolonial arguments and find striking similarities reaching back to the events of the third Anglo Afghan war. British intervention in Afghanistan was justified on any number of levels during the first and second wars and continued to be in the third. Other justifications will be dealt with momentarily in the next sections, but this paternal turn can be traced further back to the second Anglo Afghan war. There were numerous arguments detailed in the previous chapter regarding Afghan mismanagement of Afghanistan, throwing away such potential that the British could certainly have realized with their enlightened government. Although this never came to pass (because Afghanistan was not seen as having enough intrinsic value to consume), in the wake of the third Anglo Afghan war we now see that - thanks to intensive interaction between Afghan elites and British culture – a certain move toward civility can be seen among certain Afghan elites. This, in itself, is a very particular and early type of "development aid", a gift of high culture to the benighted Afghan.

This also allows us to trace a discursive shift that accompanies the global shift in context to a liberal system of sovereign states that all could join. Paternalism after the First World War expressed itself in a fairly "hands on" manner with many colonies and former colonies – and even this to different extents with powerful ramifications as to how well different former colonies adapted to the state system. (Maroya 2003) In the case of Afghanistan, this paternalism was unfolded in a very hands off manner. No direct interaction between Britain and Afghanistan was desirable – Afghanistan was left to fend for itself in modernizing… but it was well and proper to praise how well certain Afghan elites mimicked high culture. As we will find in the following chapter, this hands off approach became widespread with attempts by Afghanistan to build relations among the community of states repeatedly rebuffed by the civilized West. Paternalism, in the case of Afghanistan, was passive – it worked well enough as a moral justification for intervention if the need arose (i.e. geopolitical necessities of the Cold War).

Afghanistan itself was not seen to be worth the sort of hands on paternal interactions seen between Britain and its dependencies in the wake of the First World War It was granted, on a pro forma basis, recognition of some sort. That very recognition played into a formal/informal discursive divide (to be discussed later in this chapter) wherein Afghanistan was formally given certain recognition, respect, rights – but informally it was ignored and ostracized from the very society of statehood it was ostensibly deemed worthy of joining.

The Great Game, v3

Russia was an ever-present bogey man as a threat to British India, from the early 19th century through the end of the First World War. Afghanistan was discursively situated accordingly as a strategic space to be utilized in geopolitical gamesmanship. The specific way in which this has been expressed has changed. The level or type of Russian threat has changed over time, and with the third Anglo Afghan war the pattern remains.

With the 3rd war, Russia still plays a role of aggressor to the British mind. This has somewhat receded or at the very least shifted with the Russian turn to Bolshevism. Further, during WWI much of this fear was replaced by a fear of German intrigue. Before the Russian shift, and then after the 3rd Anglo-Afghan war Russia is conjured up time and again as being responsible for British problems and warranting intervention in Afghanistan. (Whereas justifications for problems and interventions generally lie in the character of the Afghani people and space.)

At the end of the 19th century, Amir Abdurrahman Khan had just died. Shortly after this, Russia began 'experimenting' with troop movements along rail lines in the central Caucasus. Although nothing came of this, over the next several months there was hand wringing in the public discourse. For instance, the *Times* decried what it called "veiled threats of a Russian occupation of Kashgar" (*Times* 1900a) Further, by June there was a far-reaching debate on what to do about Russia's apparent encroachment and there were calls for "a policy to meet the exigencies of the situation". (*Times* 1900b) Namely, the situation was that now, more than ever, alarmist views must prevail in regards to Russia in Afghanistan. "The… progress of Russia towards India… had been frequently discussed and alarmist views had been often pooh-poohed. The time, however, had passed for so treating it…" (ibid) This was because there was a sense that the geo-political situation had shifted somewhat away from the accepted notion of Afghanistan as a buffer state… "The old theory of buffer states had gone long ago, and that was entirely understood in Russia, but did not seem to be… in this country". (ibid) So now, rather than Afghanistan being seen as an acceptable neutral space for neither Russia nor Britain to

directly rule, it had become the site of a zero sum binary game in which there could only be an "increase of Russian prestige… and the decline of British influence" (ibid) or the opposite. This amounted to a call, hearkening in a way back to some of the discourse from the second Anglo-Afghan war for direct British control over some areas of Afghanistan; "…we were bound to go forward with British capital, British railways, and British enterprise, and distinctly with the *support of British force*, for where *we* do not go *Russia will go*." (ibid) [emphasis mine] In 1914 when there were concerns that the Amir's control in Afghanistan was slipping and the state was being cast in terms highly reminiscent of how we talk about failed states today, this conversation was happening in context of fears of Russian advantage taking: "…local subordinate Russian officials have not been slow to take advantage of [unrest and weakness in Afghanistan]." (*Times* 1914)

A period of relative silence regarding Russia followed, with the Bolshevik revolution and the First World War. However, the uncertainty following the 3rd Anglo-Afghan war (aided by a certain uncommunicativeness by the government) saw a resurgence of concern over Russia.

> "They mystery about the situation on the Indian frontier continues to deepen, and the
> Government throw no light upon it… there can be no doubt that Bolshevist intrigue had much
> to do with the recent invasion of India". (*Times* 1919b)

This uncertainty went alongside worry over the move by the British government to potentially give over Afghani foreign relations control to the government of Afghanistan. This is bolstered by fears regarding Bolshevik rhetoric, wherein it was argued that Afghanistan is a tactical space in that it can act as an ideological gateway, a way in to India for Bolshevik rhetoric. (*Times* 1919c) This is suggestive of the changing face of the Russian threat. Now the threat is ideological – Afghanistan is a buffer state not only in a military sense but also as a way to keep Bolshevism (and its disdain for empire) out of India. Evidence that Afghanistan's aggression was part of a push for recognition of Afghan sovereignty is completely overlooked in favour of Russian alarmism.

> "Earl Curzon says that our original control of Afghan external affairs was meant to counter
> the old Russian menace, which has disappeared. That is true, but it has been replaced by a far
> more formidable menace, for there can be no doubt that Bolshevist intrigue had much to do
> with the recent invasion of India." (ibid)

Further, there was something of a debate as to the nature of Bolshevik Russia's threat. "Neither diplomatic overtures, nor even heavy payments, will suffice to keep the Afghan quiet for long if Bolshevism… finally dominates Russia." (Holdich 1919) This represents a fear of Bolshevik propaganda

that seems fairly settled in the discourse. (*Times* 1919c) Yet what Britain ought to do to guard against the threat implied is disputed. In the view of Holdich guarding militarily, "look to it that our armour is bright and our defenses secure, for so long as we have… a well-organized and well-officered Indian Army no [aggression] will ever make much impression on India" (Holdich 1919) is enough. Only the Afghans are likely to fall prey to Bolshevik propaganda in this view (which says some interesting things about the naivety of Afghans in this view, perhaps). In contrasting view, "if the insidious poison of Bolshevist propaganda once permeates the ranks of the Army, neither shining armour nor secure defences will prove of much avail". (*Times* 1919c) Indeed, the Bolshevik propaganda inclusion of self-determination as a right makes it all the more dangerous, with Afghanistan acting as a potential portal of such propaganda into India. Thus, strong disagreement existed as to the exact nature of Afghanistan's importance in a security sense. Was there a threat to physical security, or a threat to discursive security? The second fear is interesting in that it engenders a certain awareness of the fragility of the dominant British discourse regarding India and Afghanistan of the time.

> "There is… not the slightest doubt that should the Bolshevists succeed [with a propaganda campaign in Central Asia]… as a jumping-off ground for the propagation of their ideas in adjacent lands, much as one may sympathize with oriental aspirations for self-determination, such a situation is fraught with immense danger." (*Times* 1919c)

Whatever the outcome of Bolshevik propaganda though (whether it be a physical or discursive security threat, that is) there is no doubt that there was widespread trepidation about its effects. Indeed, both the propagation of the 3rd Anglo-Afghan war (*Times* 1922) and the outcome (*Guardian* 1921) were argued to be directly caused by Bolshevik propaganda. In the first case, Afghans were the dupes. "Bolshevism spread from Central Asia into the fastnesses of Afghanistan, and in 1919 the Afghans made futile war upon India". (*Times* 1922) In this case, Afghanistan is now a space for ideological competition – one might say the soul of southern Asia was at stake:

> "The Afghans are… watchful still, and on their guard to maintain their independence… Nevertheless the country is opening out now to many and various influences [including] Moscow. [Afghanistan's progressive spirit] deserve[s] close attention and sympathy… It is high time that more strenuous efforts should be made to recover lost ground in Afghanistan." (ibid)

In the second case, the British government was duped (and Afghanistan gained). Specifically, the Bolsheviks were the first to call for some sort of self-determination for Oriental peoples, and the British have imbibed that propaganda, wilfully or not.

"The Bolsheviks… were for giving them [Oriental peoples] back full liberty and assisting them, so far as possible, to stand erect and independent. The non-Bolshevik Foreign Offices would not admit it… [but] in the Afghan Treaty we are already doing it." (*Guardian* 1921)

Geo-strategic Conflict and Ideology

This turn to Afghanistan as a place to provide a geo-strategic battle space in an ideological struggle is a significant shift from its place as a physical buffer state previously. The physical aspect lingers, but this shift will have profound implications, echoing in narratives on Afghanistan during the Cold War and after the events of September 11. Ideology as a driver for conflict has been well covered by critical and liberal scholars alike. Most literature from the post-September 11 period does not reach back further than the Cold War to talk about ideology. In a general way, this seems to make sense – much of the state system as we know it has been heavily influenced by decolonization and the Cold War. History did not begin with the end of World War II and limiting our consideration of ideology's role in conflict to such a constrained time frame may tend to assign a certain unhelpful causality to Cold War era political systems.

This problem was grappled with to some extent by Bilgin and Morton (2002). They warn against applying Cold War logics in a sort of "plug and play" manner into analysis of contemporary analyses of rogue and failed states. Their analysis suggests that most scholarship on rogue and failed states relies on historical understandings of international relations only reaching back into the Cold War era, which not only naturalizes those Cold War era logics but also makes invisible other possible understandings with a more situationally specific historical basis. This article is dealt with in some depth near the end of Ch. 6

In the case of Afghanistan, ideology became an important driver of intervention by the third Anglo-Afghan war. To an extent, one might argue that ideology was already at play from the very first. Nineteenth century Britain was awash in narratives of heroic Brittania – the only power able to stand up to the threat of nefarious Russia. One might consider Macdermott's War Song (1878), the chorus of which follows:

We don't want to fight but by jingo if we do...

We've got the ships, we've got the men, and got the money too!

We've fought the Bear before... and while we're Britons true,

The Russians shall not have Constantinople...

Accordingly, "jingoism" has come to mean extreme, warlike nationalism with strong overtures of racism. The Great Game was to some extent a war of empires, but to another extent it could be conceived of as a type of culture war. It is hard to authoritatively make that argument, but it could be said that ideology (rather than simply imperial manoeuvrings by two great powers) had an important role to play in justifying conflict in Afghanistan. Be that as it may, by the third Anglo-Afghan war ideology – and the fight against Bolshevism – was central.

Keeping in mind Afghanistan's very particular history with ideology in interventions, then, it can still be useful to consider what scholars have said about the role of ideology in more contemporary conflicts.

Prominent London School of Economics securitization professor Barry Buzan wrote on ideology in the Cold War and the Global War on Terrorism – and the evolution of fundamental concepts therein.

"The rhetorical move to the concept of a 'long war' makes explicit what was implicit in the GWoT [global war on terrorism] from its inception: that it might offer Washington a dominant, unifying idea that would enable it to reassert and legitimize its leadership of global security… When the Cold War ended, Washington seemed to experience a threat deficit… The terrorist attacks of 9/11 offered a solution to this problem. (Buzan 2006: 1101)

For Buzan, ideology can create powerful justifications for military activism. Buzan was primarily concerned with the security state and using fear to justify what he considered to be certain government overreaches. Yet the idea that ideology is a powerful way to construct identities is important to consider. He talks about the subjective nature of this narrative, explicitly separating it out from traditionally materialist threat analysis. He says that despite a popular belief that the events of 9/11 changed everything – "the only thing that changed is the belief that something had changed". (ibid 1102)

The Taliban hadn't suddenly appeared, nor had it suddenly become more (or less) of a threat. The same is true of al Qaeda. Indeed, the US government had been trying to find Osama bin Laden since at least the US embassy bombings of Tanzania and Kenya in 1998. Buzan argued that ideological conflict creates a certain stability in international systems, justifying the pooling of uneven power in particular

entities (in this case, the United States). Broad ideological narratives marginalize and make unimportant specific details, justifying broad policy strokes without regard to the particular.

During the third Anglo-Afghan war this mean that Afghanistan must be controlled, intervened upon, in order to deny it as a *tactical space* to Russia's Bolshevism. Bolshevism was a political disease, which could spread unrest throughout the rest of the British Empire and lead to a breakdown in civilization. Here, Afghanistan was not an actor or a victim. It was solely a tactical space – concern was not over Afghanistan's well-being but over the well-being of more important places… the British empire. This underscores the lack of a specific political character for Afghanistan and its vulnerability to being discursively positioned in ways that make tactically advantageous interventions wholly justifiable – ideology played a big part in that during the third Anglo-Afghan war and that role will not decrease in future interventions.

To the concerns of this chapter, however, we see an evolution of the old civilized/barbaric binary that was so ubiquitous previously to a binary based on ideological geostrategic conflict. Previously the civilized/barbaric dynamic made possible interventions on Afghanistan for geostrategic reasons – the Great Game. The Great Game persists, but its expression has shifted from a matter of physical security for India to a matter of moral/ideological security for the British Empire. Admittedly, the broader Great Game was always a question of who should rightfully hold greater sway in Europe – Britain or Russia.

Now the question had become whether Bolshevism or British notions of civilization ought to be ascendant. Interestingly, and not unrelated to Dutta's contention that the very exposure to these ideological binaries infects everybody involved, Britain was forced in the course of waging this ideological conflict to "grant" Afghanistan some of the rights and considerations that were seen to be part and parcel of Bolshevism at the time – sovereign nationhood and freedom from colonial practice. Despite having been defeated roundly by British forces in the course of the third Anglo Afghan war, over the course of making a peace treaty Afghanistan was, in fact, granted full recognition of its sovereign status and freedom from uninvited British interventionism in the future. These were formally granted, but on a deeper level there was never any real belief that Afghanistan could 'handle' sovereignty on its own. Thus, Britain still conceived for itself a major role in Afghanistan in the future as a friend and a mentor.

Britain the Beneficent

One facet of discourse related to Afghanistan during the second Anglo Afghan war involved paternal caretaking as justification for imperial expansion. This didn't seem to gain a great deal of traction in regards to Afghanistan – Britain remained at a remove in its interactions with Afghanistan compared to its varied colonial holdings. However, the notion of Britain as beneficent, as a sort of civilized mentor to unruly Afghanistan continued to evolve.

By way of noblesse oblige, British discourse suggested that the liberties it took with Afghan governance (such as insisting on total control over Afghanistan's foreign relations) were simultaneously very good for Afghanistan. By way of this interaction, primarily with Afghan nobles, some civilization and enlightenment was bestowed upon the poor benighted Afghan. In response to the notion that Britain might give up its control over Afghan foreign policy:

> "it [control of Afghanistan's foreign relations] should never have been surrendered… the *abandonment of our rights* gave the Afghans an entirely false idea [of their relationship with us]". (*Times* 1919b) [emphasis mine]

Those rights were control over Afghan foreign policy as well as a *presumed* care for Afghanistan's security – though this was a fringe effect of protecting Britain's Indian interests. Indeed, Afghanistan was powerless without this sponsorship; Afghanistan was a vacuum which was be filled either by Britain or by Russia. A piece in *Times* (1900b) called attention to this, warning that if Britain didn't begin taking seriously its influence over Afghanistan, then Russia would.

> "The slow but steady progress of Russia towards India was no new subject; it had been frequently discussed and alarmist views had been often pooh-poohed. The time, however, had passed for so treating it, for Russia was in the valley of Herat…" (Times 1900b)

Such a shift would be tragic, not only for British interests in India but for Afghanistan's future hope of civility, which was already "almost infinitely remote, and as only attainable through the continuation of the existing regime." For this reason, "The European democracies therefore maintained their system… with a perfectly clear conscience…" Indeed, it was only propaganda first from the Central Powers during World War I and Bolshevik ideology after which encouraged Oriental pretensions toward sovereign nationhood on their own. (Intelligence Bureau 1918)

Indeed, it was due to the ill influence of Bolshevik ideology that the third Anglo Afghan war took place.

"A new Amir has arisen in the land… and the influences from the North have acquired a new and unexpected character. Bolshevism spread from Central Asia into the fastness of Afghanistan, and in 1919 the Afghans made futile war upon India." (*Times* 1922)

It was partly a matter of luck that Bolshevik ideology didn't short circuit negotiations on a peace treaty to follow.

"At one time it seemed possible that Bolshevist influence… would defeat the efforts of the British negotiators. Fortunately closer acquaintance with Bolshevism made the Afghans cautious… They are watchful still, and on their guard to maintain their independence [garnered in the treaty]… Nevertheless the country is opening out now to many and various influences." (ibid)

Those influences did still include Bolshevik influences, and so it was imperative that even after the war and Afghanistan's formal independence that Britain still work to maintain its influence. This was partly argued for the security of India but also argued for the sake of the Afghans themselves, who had displayed a "progressive spirit" and an "eagerness to develop the resource of the country, and to send the young men abroad to study… British prestige has suffered heavily… during the last few years. It is high time that more strenuous efforts should be made to recover lost ground in Afghanistan." (ibid)

This jealous behavior about influence over Afghanistan would continue over the next several decades. Attempts by Afghanistan to form relationships with other powers generally failed. Only after the Second World War did Afghanistan succeed in opening up relationships with various powers – the United States alone refused half a dozen overtures from Afghanistan (more on this next chapter).

Despite this, the particular era of outright paternal tutelage from Britain onto Afghanistan was at an end. For instance, in discussing the Anglo-Afghan Treaty of 1921, "We recognise that Afghanistan has passed the stage of our *tutelage*… it is to our benefit that she should be strong and prosperous and that we will do our best to help her." (*Guardian* 1921) Thus we see that intervention in Afghanistan's foreign and domestic affairs was a sort of 'tutoring'. What's more, the sort of civilizing effects which were mentioned in (*Guardian* 1923) were more than merely implicitly a matter of British tutoring (as was implied in said article). When a leader of Afghanistan was painted in a positive light, it was always with reference to how this or that British influence brought him to that pass – as highlighted in this chapter's first section. In venerating the recently murdered Amir Habibullah, it was opined that he was not only a loyal and strong leader, he was also quite civilized, being "enthusiastic about motor-cars", having "developed a weakness for tea parties… [playing] the piano… waltzing" and "astonished

everybody by showing that he could play an uncommonly good game of bridge." (*Times* 1919a) These accomplishments typified his civility, which was a marked difference from earlier in the century, when his uncivilized ways in dealing with matters of the state hurt British prestige. These fixes came due to a visit to India, during which he came into contact with Lords Minto, Kitchener and Lemington, all "Englishmen who made a marked effect upon the Ameer". (ibid)

Further, although "any suggestion of national or racial inferiority is most bitterly resented by all the influential classes in [Afghanistan]", the Afghanis "realiz[e] that she must learn from Europe". (*Times* 1923) Educational and social reforms began to commence after a certain amount of elite interaction with British elite in India, "after his visit to India" (ibid) and successfully at that. "For five years now the present Ameer has boldly faced the consequences of a policy of reform and progress, and has achieved considerable results… in so bigotedly backward a country." (ibid) Yet there was still a great deal further to go, which Afghanistan "recognizes with a scarcely disguised anxiety… that she is contending against economic and political forces of great magnitude" and that failure to become a viable, civilized state introduces a danger "of becoming once more the plaything of British and Russian rivalry". (ibid) Thus Afghanistan knew it had no choice but to look to some sort of Western tutorship to achieve these ends. It is best for Britain to go ahead and fill that role because "we should prefer her produce be sold in, or exported through, India…" (ibid) as well as for earlier discussed fears of Russian ideological and political influence in Afghanistan. This rests alongside the earlier assertion that Afghans as a whole were generally seen as savage almost beyond hope, while at times a leader might be enlightened (through his contact with the West) and so have an opportunity to introduce some reforms which might, potentially, have some marginal effect. Indeed, this was also expressed quite explicitly in an analysis of the civilizing of Afghanistan in stating that "when we speak of Afghanistan, therefore, in a sense implying Afghan opinion, we mean the Ameer himself and his Ministers". (ibid)

A Discursive Shift…

A number of themes have come up over the course of this chapter's analysis. There has been a great deal of continuity in narratives on Afghan identity carried over from the first and second Anglo Afghan wars. Emptiness and indeterminacy are still central to situating Afghanistan's character, both enabling and empowered by typifications of a savage Afghanistan without the political character to look after itself. Thus not only did Afghanistan need Britain's intervention but that intervention was also justified. That very emptiness also made Afghanistan the ideal staging ground for geopolitical conflict.

Yet with the third Anglo Afghan war there is a dramatic and important shift in how these old themes were expressed.

Ideology has taken center stage in the aftermath of the First World War Bolshevism must be resisted, being a threat to the potential growth of Afghanistan's inner character and an ideology that would harmfully rouse the passions of Orientals all over against their European betters. The need to counteract Bolshevism was seen both as self-defence – Bolshevik rhetoric was considered likely to cause civil unrest in the British empire and along the periphery, as was argued to be the case in the third Anglo Afghan war – and as a service to the benighted savage who was too naïve to understand how harmful Bolshevism could be. Far from replacing emptiness and indeterminacy as a justifier for intervention, it feeds off of and simultaneously strengthens the typification of emptiness. Afghanistan is an empty vessel waiting to be filled by whatever outside power might have access to it. Only by completely denying Russia access to Afghanistan could Britain save Afghanistan – only by continued cultural patronage of Afghanistan could Britain civilize Afghanistan.

This indeterminacy was thus both a problem and an opportunity. Afghanistan was perceived as not having a strong identity of its own, no fundamental character which would allow it to affirm its own identity. This perception meant that it was a natural place for competing ideologies to attempt to gain acceptance – and note here correlations that we can easily identify even now in the Cold War to come. Afghanistan's empty nature meant that it was a weak spot in the armour of British India – if Bolshevism could gain traction there then it would have the potential of causing civil discord in an already restive India. Yet that emptiness invited, justified, seemed to *demand* British intervention as a moral imperative on its own. Afghanistan *needed* beneficent Britain to look after it because Afghanistan simply wasn't equipped to look after its own soul. Thus, Britain could defend India and its own interests by way of carrying out noblesse oblige.

History was not to allow things to remain so static, however. Three events ensured that Afghanistan could not remain completely as it had been. During World War I, the Central Powers used anti-colonial rhetoric and the idea that the Asiatic polities ought to be recognized as states in a bid to bring areas peripheral to the Ottoman Empire to their side. (Intelligence Bureau 1918) Secondly, Bolshevism as an ideology did decry colonialism and called for a new nationalism among former colonies. Further, Russia itself was looking to build relationships with rulers in central and south Asia, including the provision of subsidies. (ibid, also *Times* 1919, *Times* 1922) Finally, on a global level there was an emerging and strengthening narrative on the rights and responsibilities of states – and the idea

that self-determination should be seen as a natural right of peoples. There is no doubt that Afghanistan itself craved self-determination. Though at the time the cause of the final Anglo Afghan war was somewhat unclear, documents now show that it was a bid to bring Britain to the bargaining table so that Afghanistan might gain control over its own affairs. Specifically, at length a proclamation to the Afghan people by the new Amir in early 1919 was recovered:

> "…I declared to you with a loud voice that I would accept the Crown and the throne only on the condition that you should all cooperate with me in my thoughts and ideas. Firstly that the Government of Afghanistan should be internally and externally independent and free, that is to say, that all rights of Government that are possessed by other independent Powers of the world should be possessed in their entirety by Afghanistan…" (India Office 1919: No. 2)

There was a great deal of pressure on Britain to give Afghanistan this independence. This was in part because of the cost of Britain's newly expanded empire. It also followed that Afghanistan would become an increasingly expensive asset if the status quo were to be maintained, though there were many within government who fought hard to maintain that status quo. Russia was no longer considered the existential threat to India that it once had been, however. As an ideological threat it remained, but granting Afghan independence and putting Britain in a place to maintain a strong friendship with Afghanistan was figured to be the best way to battle the Bolshevik ideology. Thus it was decided by the British government to find a peace with Afghanistan that would keep the maximum informal influence possible for Britain while giving away the fewest possible substantive concessions. This was to come in the form first:

> "What we want is an early peace that will make clear to Afghans and to world generally our sense of outrage at Amir's wanton aggression, but which at the same time will not close door to establishment thereafter of friendly relations with Afghanistan…" (UK Foreign Office 1919: 342)

Then later, with the concession in an informal letter from the British delegation to the Afghan delegation:

> "You asked me for some further assurance that Peace Treaty which the British Government now offer contains nothing that interferes with the complete liberty of Afghanistan either in internal or external matters. My friends, if you will read Treaty carefully you will see there is no such interference… the said Treaty and this letter leaves Afghanistan officially free and independent in its internal and external affairs… friendship and subsidy would depend largely

on way in which Amir conducted his foreign relations and sought and accepted our advice."

(ibid: 501)

Britain was ready to recognize Afghanistan's formal independence. However, if Afghanistan wanted to remain on friendly terms with Britain and to receive aid, it would be necessary that the leadership of Afghanistan seek out and follow British advice in relevant matters. This promise was made on an informal basis and, while Afghanistan's independence was ultimately acknowledged, that acknowledgment came primarily in the form of the absence of any demands on the part of Britain that Afghanistan formally surrender certain aspects of its sovereignty (as had been done in the past).

Here is another iteration of the formal/informal divide. Formally Afghanistan would be recognized as a self-determined and sovereign state. Informally, Britain had great reservations about Afghanistan's ability and right to carry out all aspects of sovereignty. To understand where this two-level approach comes from, it helps to look more closely at the historical context – and how that historical context contains still more examples of Afghanistan's positioning as an empty, indeterminate space.

As the First World War drew to a close, Britain was turning its eyes toward what the post-war geopolitical situation would look like. Pivotal to this consideration was the outlook for the so-called Muslim world – those portions of Asia peopled primarily by those of the Muslim faith. At issue was a fear that Russia's ideological turn to Bolshevism would find purchase here and create all manners of geostrategic mischief. There was a fear that a sense of Muslim solidarity might induce some regions, such as Afghanistan, to support the Central Powers or, after a successful conclusion of the war, to become areas of unrest and trouble. (Intelligence Bureau 1918)

In this sense, then, continuing a sort of stewardship over British dependencies was good not only for the British, but it was paternally justifiable. 'Orientals' at the moment simply don't actually have either the capacity or the desire to self-govern (despite agitation for same, this being imitative rather than substantive, as discussed earlier in the chapter). However, perhaps through very long term contact with Europeans, this civilization might 'rub off' on them. In this state of progress, India was seen as being most advanced (ibid: 13) though still far off. Afghanistan was hardly worth mentioning.

There was fear for the future of the Muslim world in particular due to what was assumed in Europe to be a strong sense of Muslim solidarity.

"In one sense this Islamic consciousness is no new thing. Islam – a simplified version of Christianity lagging half a millennium behind its prototype – is still in the stage of Christianity

in the Middle Ages, when it was the strongest bond of union between those who professed

it." (ibid: 21)

This is emblematic both of the European sense of Islamic unity, and of the European sense of paternal protectiveness toward Muslims. Muslims are defined here, largely, by their simple and laggardly religion. At the same time, their sense of group consciousness is dismissed as a primitive, simple thing that Europeans were getting over in the Middle Ages. In addition to these ideological and narrative pressures for self-determination (which were refuted in this paternalistic manner) there was also an economic argument for giving greater self-determination in at least some cases.

Britain's holdings increased dramatically at the close of the first World War. Yet it was in massive debt due to the War, and its traditional trading partners were in no better shape. (Ward 1923: 538) Thus, it was important to British national interest to be on as friendly terms as possible with the Muslim peoples, not simply for short term interests in the War, but for long term economic interests after as well. If Afghanistan was no longer needed to act as a physical barrier between Russia and India, and if Afghanistan was likely to continue proving rowdy in its quest for independence, then continuing with the status quo would not work.

"The remaining alternative is to find some trustee for the area covered by the non-Turkish territories of the Ottoman Empire, as well as Persia and Afghanistan, who would be acceptable to British interests and to Moslem public opinion… The trusteeship might conceivably be administered in the name of the League of Nations… the only satisfactory solution in this part of the world is to be found in the intervention of the United States." (ibid: 31)

As a contextual whole, this suggests several things. What was discursively seen by Britain as unavoidable geo-political changes necessitated a change in the way they interacted with 'Orientals', with Afghanistan falling under that classification. However, that need to change the manner of interaction did not necessarily coincide with a shift in the underlying truth/knowledge assumptions about the character of 'Orientals'. A notion of progressive paternalism intermingled with geopolitical and (potentially, and to a lesser extent) economic policy goals. Positioning European, and specifically British, intervention in 'Oriental' governance was something which had to be done in a way, now, that was agreeable to those 'Orientals'. At the same time, this does not admit that there was anything wrong with the way Europe had interacted previously; 'Orientals' were still simple and laggardly, politically unsophisticated – empty of any real character from a civilized point of view. However, their wants had

regrettably increased dramatically, and thus it was necessary to at the very least give an appearance of greater self-determination.

This approach, then, was one of dual intent: formal and informal. Formally, 'Orientals' should be given greater degrees of self-determination because their want for this was greater than ever before. Informally, there was a sense that 'Orientals' were not yet ready or able to self-govern thus it was only natural and right to position Europeans in such a space as to be able to intervene, guide and, paradoxically, protect. In the case of Afghanistan, we can see this playing out in a dialogue between the Viceroy and Secretary of State for India.

...to a Promise of Empty Statehood

In discussions within the British government of how peace with Afghanistan should be crafted there is an obvious layering of how Afghanistan would be treated formally and informally. In itself, a formal/informal mix is nothing unusual in international relations. However, the manner in which this layering embeds discursive legacies of 'knowing' Afghanistan in the early phases of Afghanistan as a 'state' is both unique and of great import.

The war itself began with Afghan hostilities ostensibly intended to lend support for Indian Muslims who, it was contended, were discontented with British rule. In the process, Amir Amanulla intended that Afghanistan should finally gain its full independence and operate on an even level with the Powers of the day. (India Office 1919: No. 2) Jihad was incited; some of the border tribes rose in revolt in concert with Afghanistan, and the war resulted. The battles generally ended in favour of the British, and eventually the two sides made bona fide movements toward peace. After it became clear that some sort of summit would happen to discuss peace, in June of 1919, the Secretary of State made it clear that the Afghan delegates "should not be allowed to put forward proposals of their own" and that the best way of ensuring this was that the British government have its terms considered and laid out ahead of time. (UK Foreign Office 1919: 207)

The plan, then, was for negotiation of peace and treaties commencing thereof to follow a format by which Britain was imposing terms rather than a situation wherein an actual dialogue existed. This in itself is indicative of British feelings toward Afghan sovereignty. What follows is a concise summation of internal conversations as negotiations (or impositions) went on.

The Viceroy of India gave these instructions for how negotiations should be carried out, first with an outline of general demands (as averred to earlier):

"What we want is an early peace that will make clear to Afghans and to world... our... outrage at Amir's wanton aggression, but which... will not close door to establishment... of friendly relations... all we really require of Afghanistan [is the] exclusion of foreign... influences, coupled with friendly co-operation on the common border." (UK Foreign Office 1919: 342)

Secondly the Viceroy outlined a two-step plan for a treaty process. The first step would be to force Afghanistan to agree to a treaty formalizing the demands just laid out, though in vague terms to make them more palatable. A second, informal set of demands was compiled to inform the Amir how Afghanistan could regain Britain's trust and friendship. These demands included expelling hostile foreigners and non-British approved foreign agents, the reversion of Afghanistan's foreign relations control to Britain, and improved status for British representatives in Afghanistan. (ibid) We see a clear separation between the formal and informal, with formal positioning of Afghan identity left vague in a way that it could be interpreted in a friendly fashion – while informally Afghanistan's "government" was held to be unworthy of sovereign respect.

In response, the Secretary of State for India said: "his Majesty's Government... are inclined to favour an alternative method of attaining desired result". (UK Foreign Office 1919: 216) That alternate method was to take the informal proposal from the Viceroy and make it both more harshly worded and more formal. The reservations of the government appear to be in the vagueness of the Viceroy's suggested 'formal' layer, believing that it would give the Amir too much room to interpret British intentions in a way that Britain would not like, thus putting the future of their relations in doubt. Instead:

"The real terms of peace seem to us to be contained, not in your draft Treaty, but in your six points; and we would prefer therefore to incorporate them with as precise a definition as possible, and with certain additions, in first draft of Treaty straight away... Question might, of course, still arise whether terms had been strictly complied with [which was one of the complaints about the vagueness of the Viceroy's proposed draft treaty]. But there would be no need for second meeting of delegates, or renewal of negotiations, since only points to be decided would be [how to handle Afghanistan's compliance/noncompliance]." (ibid)

This strips away the Viceroy's formal layer of vague respect. Rather than a treaty, it is a straight forward list of demands – an obvious imposition of terms of surrender rather than a treaty of peace. In other words, there is a resistance in His Majesty's government to taking on this formal/informal approach which is a dramatic shift away from the old status quo in Anglo-Afghan relations. These

disagreements play out in a conversation that spans several cables. Ultimately, however, it is the formal/informal approach which wins out. A number of arguments were advanced which seemed to have been important.

Firstly, circumstances are such that Afghanistan has to have a sponsor amongst Powers, and Russia cannot provide that, so Britain is the only choice. Thus, Afghanistan will come to Britain of its own will, once given a chance to realize this. Next, the first, formal treaty also does involve a concrete offer of friendship "if Amir will only play the game." (UK Foreign Office 1919:357). Lastly, this approach does give space for the inevitability of the Amir not completely meeting the conditions of friendship, and allows for some sort of flexibility in dialogue on how Britain would handle that going forward… whereas if the conditions of friendship were made public and formal (as the Secretary of State wanted) it would force Britain to take Afghanistan to account if Afghanistan was seen to not meet those conditions perfectly. The vagueness of the two-tier approach works for Britain, then, on several levels. Further, following a more coercive path would prove impossible.

> "During the past year there has been a profound change in political outlook in… Afghanistan. General unrest awakened Nationalist aspirations, President Wilson's pronouncement, Bolshevik catchwords and other influences have been at work. This… is evidenced in Amanulla's first utterance as Amir, basis of which was the sovereign independence of Afghanistan, and the complete freedom of his external relations." (ibid)

Thus, continuing in the status quo was impossible for a variety of reasons. Acknowledging Afghanistan's independence while informally remaining aware that Afghanistan was by nature incapable of carrying out the processes of sovereignty was key. It kept Afghanistan docile and positioned Britain to remain influential, being the only possible source of aid in Afghanistan's quest to become a civilized place. Formally, Afghanistan would ultimately be recognized as a sovereign state, eligible to join the international community of nations. Informally, Afghanistan was *known* to remain ill-suited to statehood, being savage and unrefined. Unfortunately, from the viewpoint of Britain, this divide was necessary. Only through pretending to believe that Afghanistan was in fact by right and nature a state with total sovereignty could it continue to use Afghanistan as a tactical space in the manner that British interests demanded.

In the treaty of 1919, Afghanistan's sovereignty was not formally recognized – but there was an informal recognition of it by way of no claims over Afghan sovereignty from Britain. Alongside this was a

promise that, if things went well, Britain would sign another treaty (which did happen and came into force in 1921) formally acknowledging Afghanistan's sovereignty.

> "I had made it clear several times both verbally and in writing that friendship and subsidy would depend largely on way in which Amir conducted his foreign relations and sought and accepted our advice." (UK Foreign Office 1919: 501)

These were conditions which Afghanistan was willing to accept. Ali Ahmad argued hard for the promises of independence to be formal (UK Foreign Office 1919: 240) but, in the end, assured Maffey that:

> "…if we would only give Afghanistan an assurance that she had full liberty in her foreign relations she would very soon come back to us in practice, and that we should be her advisors in a more real sense than ever before." (ibid)

Summary and Revisiting Central Questions

This chapter served to survey how and why old assumptions about Afghanistan's nature and identity were folded into new narratives on Afghanistan as a full member of the international community of sovereign states. Secret and hidden, assumptions about Afghanistan as an essentially characterless space remained – its sovereign status was never truly believed because the Afghan culture was incapable of handling sovereignty. Both strategic and political necessities dictated a formal narrative shift, however, and this interplay between formal/informal is something we will see through the Cold War and post-9/11 periods.

The very emptiness assigned to Afghanistan both made possible and ensured the necessity of this formal/informal divide. Afghanistan's indeterminacy meant that it must be protected from opposing ideologies lest it move to mimic Bolshevik nationalism rather than Western civility. It also meant that any actions taken on Afghanistan by Britain, be they physical or symbolic, were justified – Britain's depiction of Afghanistan was justified as the only way to help "fill" Afghanistan up with some sense of identity that might one day be positive for it. Afghanistan's indeterminate nature is reflected by the formal/informal divide – somehow Afghanistan is able to simultaneously be a sovereign state and a land so bereft of civilized character as to only be playing at statehood. It must be treated as a state, but can also be ignored and stripped of sovereign persona (or simply continue to be denied that persona) by the action of ignoring.

The implications for the failed state discourse are profound. Confronting this project's central questions, we ask first: "Why are we able to talk about failed states?"

We are able to talk about Afghanistan today as a failed state because formally, Afghanistan was given this assignation of statehood while on an unacknowledged level Afghanistan was never expected to be anything but a failure. Afghanistan, after all, was peopled by barbarians who wanted sovereignty only because it was a trapping of civilization that Afghans could not understand but knew was somehow prestigious. Thus the closest Afghanistan could come to true statehood, to true sovereignty, was a sort of mimicry. Further, it was only through the constant enlightened tutelage of a civilized benefactor could Afghanistan manage to mimic the forms of statehood. Thus, Afghanistan's failure as a state was a sad inevitability – when Afghanistan rejected Western sponsorship it chose to fail. This is the identity which filled Afghanistan's indeterminacy at the close of the third Anglo Afghan war, and we see echoes of it today. The label of failed state, once again, suggests that Afghanistan failed – it did not succeed when it could have, when it should have, when it was its sovereign responsibility to do so. Afghanistan accepted that responsibility when it pushed for independence, but its failure to live up to that responsibility was foreseen by civilized Britain which was able to see through Afghanistan's mimicry to the uncouth barbarism that lay beneath.

Next we ask "what assumptive discursive knowledges empower dominant narratives of intelligibility?"

This follows from the previous point. There were two meta-narratives at play that Afghanistan was placed within at a formal and informal level, respectively. Statehood had come to be "known" to be the right and responsibility of every polity in the world. An emerging liberalism after the First World War demanded the self-determination of people as the only way toward a just global society that might be able to avoid another global war. Afghanistan then was by default a state. It came upon statehood, was *gifted* with statehood not because of its claims but because that was the new accepted global norm and, unlike the case of India, it was not worth the effort involved for Britain to retain any formal or informal control over Afghanistan's future. Yet it was also "known" that Afghanistan wasn't really civilized. It wasn't really "up" to the pressures of statehood. It could only ever be, to lend a paternalistic patronizing air to it, a child playing with his father's tools. Thus, again, Afghanistan's eventual cast identity as 'failed state' is quite inevitable. It was Afghanistan's indeterminate nature which made this very direct formal/informal divide possible, that it could be imbued simultaneously with two such radically different "knowledges".

That is relatively straight forward. Yet it wouldn't do to leave out another important aspect of what empowers dominant narratives of intelligibility. Ideology and binarism have a role to play as well. Buzan argued that there was a binary nature to the ideological structures after World War Two. Not only were these binaries about two different sides in an ideological struggle (communism/democracy and terrorism/civilization) but also about an imagined moment of genesis. With that moment of genesis, ideological struggle comes about in response to a sudden pivotal moment of existential threat – the Iron Curtain or the World Trade Center attack. One might extend this binary moment to that of statehood for Afghanistan. It creates a divide between statehood and non-statehood and purports that Afghanistan crossed that divide at a sudden pivotal moment in history, that moment post World War One when so many states were recognized where none had been before. Yet what actually changed in Afghanistan? Britain agreed not to "meddle" in its foreign affairs but other established states (as we will see in the next chapter) refused to interact directly with Afghanistan – preferring to go through a more legitimate intermediary (at the urging of Britain, in fact). Did Afghanistan's nature change in any way? Both the informal aspect of the formal/informal divide and actual practice after World War One argue that despite this apparently pivotal moment which is referred to in orthodox discourse on statehood (where Afghanistan became a sovereign state, and thus able to fail) suggest that this change was at best ceremonial.

This leads to the final question posed by this project: "how do particular assumptions about sovereignty, justice and successful statehood by intervening parties negatively impact upon attempts to understand the specificity of the Afghan crisis, currently conceptualized primarily through the discursive lens of state failure?".

Sovereignty in the post-World War One context was expressed as an inalienable right of the world's polities and culture groups. Sovereignty was also conceived, then, as something to be granted to these groups as if it would be a transformative moment. This ceremonial handing over of a torch (of civilization) imbued sovereignty with a certain meaningfulness and impactfulness. While suggesting it was fulfilling a natural right of peoples and avoiding future war, this granting of sovereignty also validated the specific interpretations of what it is to be sovereign that became dominant orthodoxy and still has a profound impact on international norms today. At the same time, this fundamentally transformative moment did not represent an actual fundamental change.

Perhaps more important in this case is the binary relationship packed within sovereignty. Sovereignty is at the same time absolute (power) and conditioned (rights). The conditionality justifies

the absolute[36], but renders each problematic. Here, Afghanistan was seen to have a 'right' to sovereign power – thus sovereign power was 'gifted' to Afghanistan. Yet if sovereign *power* is absolute, it can hardly be given because that implies that it did not necessary have to be given… also, it might be taken away. The very giving of sovereignty conditions it, and that in a way quite unlike the conditionality packed into sovereignty in the basis of the word.

Arguably then, what was "given" to Afghanistan was not sovereignty but a presumed and contrived sovereignty. A simulacrum, a mimic, an echo that is not quite the same. That suggestion is made more powerful by informal 'knowledges' of Afghanistan. Thus this foundational moment of change involved little real change while empowering an ideological shift. Indeterminate Afghanistan was now determined to be a state, part of the state system with all the rights and responsibilities thereof. Yet Indeterminate Afghanistan was only able to be repositioned in that way because of its indeterminacy, and its indeterminacy further undermined any possibility of imbibing that sovereign identity in any meaningful way.

Finally, it deserves mention that the formal/informal divide is itself a sort of binary construct. Its usage in this project is descriptive of a binary mechanism which was being discursively mobilized as a way of determining Afghanistan's indeterminate nature, of filling up its emptiness. Afghanistan was not really simultaneously a civilized state with full sovereign powers and rights while also being a savagely uncivilized vacuum with barbarians mimicking their civilized betters. That was rather a way of discursively placing Afghanistan so that it was understandable and could be interacted with in the changing context of an evolving global narrative on liberal statehood and democracy.

The formal/informal divide then is an attempt to stabilize inherently unstable idea construct. It is an attempted "treatment" of the auto-immune "disease" afflicting these typifications of the Afghan identity, both sovereign and savage. The attempt cannot be successful, as in its execution it is further proof and cause of discursive instability in the construct of Afghan identity.

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[36]   See J. Locke, Two Treatises of Government, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970)

Chapter 6 – Cold War and Afghanistan

"In other words, during the cold war the states of the 'Third World' were generally viewed as 'pieces' or 'objects' to be 'taken' or 'lost' in a global contest between the US and the USSR, as 'bit players in the larger drama of superpower conflict."

Krause (1998)

Afghanistan as a game-board on an ideological battlefield.

Following the full independence of Afghanistan after the Third Anglo-Afghan War came a period widely considered a time of progress for Afghanistan. Political reforms were undertaken in the realms of secularization, education, and women's rights. Following World War II Afghanistan found itself in what on the surface was a familiar situation: trying to find a balance between competing powers seeking influence. During the Cold War, Afghanistan tried to keep cordial relations with both the United States (and its NATO allies) and the Soviet Union while accepting aid packages in exchange for influence and reforms from both sides. Which direction Afghanistan leaned more toward changed from time to time in a balancing act reminiscent of several other South Asian states at the time seeking to remain unaligned. This balancing act eventually came to an end when a heavily pro-Soviet government came to power.

The conditions of that rise to power are still contested today, with competing narratives claiming it was a primarily democratic ascent or that it was a Soviet sponsored coup. The Western perspective suggested that this power transition came by way of Soviet sponsored coup. There is no hard evidence today to answer the question authoritatively, and Western assumptions in this matter rely and well-entrenched and recurring historical understandings of Russia (and communism) as antithetical to democracy and free choice. Taking either assumption to hand is intrinsic to the idea of Afghanistan as an ideological battlefield. The Soviet viewpoint supposed that the West was interested in economic imperialism, denying a nation's sovereign right to throw off the chains of capitalist oppression and choose socialist freedom and equality. The Western viewpoint supposed that the Soviet Union was only the most recent expression of Russia's long-standing expansionist and authoritarian aims. In both cases, the narrative was more important than the Afghan - there were larger questions of capitalism versus communism at issue with Afghanistan as only the most recently battleground for that grand ideological war.

Accompanying this political transition was a military intervention by the Soviet Union (either friendly assistance at the bequest of the Afghan government or a de facto invasion, depending on the narrative you accept). One way or the other, this chain of events led to an insurgency-dominated civil war in the late 1970's.

This was a civil war which the United States involved itself in more and more, from money to direct arms shipments (which grew in size and sophistication) to covert training. Prior to this time, Afghanistan was essentially unknown to the citizenry of the United States. There were a handful of experts who interacted with Afghanistan in the United States, while the majority of the population (and even policy makers) had little conception of what/where/who Afghanistan was. There is ample evidence that nascent conceptions of Afghan-ness were adopted from the British as both a conscious policy choice and by way of unconscious discursive legacy. Western knowledge of Afghanistan appears to have been largely inherited from dominant British discourse – as discussed in the next section.

The United States had an unsteady and often internally inconsistent notion of Afghanistan and the Afghan people. This is suggestive of the formal/informal divide (and continued Afghan indeterminacy) which became evident toward the end of the Third Anglo-Afghan War. There was a public stance on what sort of government/state/people Afghanistan represented. Then there was a less nice, but perhaps more 'believed' version which underlay that. In this particular case, however, the public, official stance itself morphed over time. That is to say, the initial public stance was quite consistent with the British official stance on Afghanistan at the end of the Third Anglo-Afghan War. Yet toward the end of the insurgency and civil war this had shifted so that the public stance on Afghanistan looked much more like the unofficial, hidden, and not particularly admiring notion of Afghanistan which existed alongside the official British one.

A Step Back – Revisiting the "Formal/Informal Divide"

One of the challenges faced in this project lies in proving the cohesive existence of a recognizably continuous discourse on Afghanistan and Afghan identity. This difficulty is substantially increased when taking into consideration the span of time analyzed as well as the shift from a British to an American dominant 'voice'. This shift across era and culture group has a number of ramifications. Specifically, we often see discourses categorized by era and by dominant actor. Viewing Afghanistan solely in the 19th century it would be very tempting to situate it primarily in discourses concerned with colonialism. Considering Afghanistan solely after the third Anglo Afghan war would lead one to consider Afghanistan's story in the context of decolonization and nascent conceptions of secular liberal

statehood. Looking only at this section, on Afghanistan in the Cold War it is tempting to think in terms of bi-polar international systems and geopolitical maneuvering in that context.

The previous two chapters have justified their place in this dissertation by examining how conceptions about Afghan-ness (and how those conceptions made possible / justified certain interventions) by pointing out ruptures in discourse but emphasizing the importance of central continuities within narratives. This process was somewhat straightforward then, as the context of each of the three Anglo-Afghan wars had powerful continuities. It is a much trickier proposition to argue that central continuities exist when we shift from Britain to the United States, to a period after colonialism was formally closed off, to a period when Afghanistan is no longer considered a wild hinterland but a legitimate state in a world system wherein international law enshrines certain rights and responsibilities attached to sovereignty and statehood.

Yet there is an argument to be made about facets of understanding Afghanistan as strikingly similar to what was experienced in earlier times. Parallels of civility and barbarism as well as particular conceptions of the Cold War as the Great Game can be wielded with some effect. Indeed, much of this chapter will look in that direction. That is fine, but drawing parallels can be done with nearly any two discrete events one might want to identify through history. In order for these parallels – which certainly exist – to really *mean* something substantial to this project it is necessary to show not only how a coherent, cohesive narrative on Afghanistan evolved from the third Anglo Afghan war to the Cold War era, but also how Afghanistan's place within the broader Cold War discourse is highly discrete from other proxy battlegrounds as a result of that narrative cohesion.

This can best be accomplished through an exploration of the formal/informal divide. One can argue that iterations of that divide exist in many particular discourses on a whole range of ideas and identities. That is true – and we can link the concept of the formal/informal divide to impactful deconstructive concepts such as the simulacrum and auto-immunity. The mere existence of a formal/informal divide in the discourse on Afghanistan is not unique – how it is expressed and how it interacts with broader discourses (sovereignty, decolonization, development, democracy versus socialism) is unique and key to understanding how the current state of affairs in Afghanistan came to be.

Continuity in the Formal/Informal Divide

Documentary analysis of US government wires along with a selection of newspaper articles from the *New York Times* has helped bridge the discursive gap between post WWI and the late 1970's. Here we see some important continuities in thinking about Afghanistan from Britain to the United States. This

also provides contemporary hindsight as regards America's initial encounters with Afghanistan. These analyses support the notion that Afghan-ness was essentially devoid of importance or meaning except when geo-political contexts dictated otherwise. In the absence of an already existing sense of what/who/why Afghanistan was, the US reached into Britain's discourse in order to fill in knowledge gaps. Here we have strong examples of Afghanistan's indeterminate nature – without a sense of Afghanistan as a place having its own important identity external events fill in for identity. So in a very real way, America's discourse on Afghanistan is the 'spiritual successor' of Britain's. Some of this is a product of direct inheritance – Britain's attitudes toward Afghanistan are mentioned in some of the earliest cables and there is evidence of central aspects of British narratives on Afghanistan throughout the documents analyzed.

This section pulls text directly from diplomatic wires and newspaper articles fairly heavily in order to show continuity in the discursive shift with as little analytical embellishment as possible. For purposes of diplomatic wires, which will be discussed first, all excerpts are in chronological order beginning with the first approach of Afghan officials to the US, seeking to build a relationship between states.

> "Apparently we have hitherto had no relations with Afghanistan directly as formerly our dealings with that country were through Great Britain… Our Embassy in Paris was also advised by the British Ambassador at Paris that… the British Government did not look with favor on [the Afghan mission's] activities or its endeavors to conclude agreements with other Governments inasmuch as Afghanistan, *although ostensibly independent*, was still within the British 'sphere of political influence'". (US Department of State 1921: 258)

An Afghan delegation was received at the White House, with friendly but inconclusive (and informal) result. In an official follow up to the in person meeting, the office of the President of the United States sent a letter to the Afghan Amir:

> "It is my wish that the relations between the United States and Afghanistan may always be of a friendly character, and I shall be happy to cooperate with Your Majesty to this end. I am constrained, however… that with respect to the United States the question of the creation of a Diplomatic Mission and of the appropriate action to that end… must be reserved for further consideration." (ibid: 261)

This was to set the tone of the relationship between Afghanistan and the United States for over two decades. Afghanistan sought cordial and formal diplomatic relations with the United States – the

United States made polite noises and was willing to informally interact with Afghanistan but no formal interstate relations were to take root. This seems to have been related both to a sensitivity for British preference and for a belief that there was little to gain from relations with Afghanistan.

Four years passed before any mention of Afghanistan is again found in the US Department of State's diplomatic cable archives. At this point, Afghanistan approached the United States with a formal proposal for establishing diplomatic relations to include a draft Treaty of Friendship. This approach, which appeared to have been encouraged by the American Ambassador to France, received an off-putting response not dissimilar to the previous approach:

> "I have been instructed to convey to Your Excellency my Government's deep appreciation of the friendly sentiments… careful consideration will be afforded the draft treaty which you have presented. I need not assure Your Excellency that my Government recalls… the visit to the United States in 1921 of the Afghan Mission… assured His Majesty of his [President's] wish that the relations between the United States and Afghanistan might always be of a friendly character…" (US Department of State 1926: 559-560)

Despite assurances that careful consideration would be given the Afghan proposal, it was not until another eight years had passed that the possibility of a formal set of relations with Afghanistan was again raised. When it happened, it came once again as an overture from Afghanistan:

> "I have the honor to report that on the occasion of the call which the Afghan Minister… paid on me… [he] raised the question of future relations between the Afghan monarchy and the United States. He expressed the hope that these relations might be established on a permanent basis as soon as possible and that to that end a treaty of friendship should be concluded." (US Department of State 1935: 555)

However, the United States was not desirous to bring a formal relationship into play.

> "Although this Government is not averse in principle to concluding a treaty of friendship and commerce with the Government of Afghanistan, it considers that the purposes… might be accomplished more expeditiously and satisfactorily by the conclusion of a less formal agreement." (ibid 556)

The Afghan government disagreed:

> "The Afghan Minister called yesterday stating that he had submitted the matter of an accord to his Government which preferred a formal treaty. I pointed out that the ratification of a

treaty was a matter that would consume considerable time… In my opinion, this counter-proposal [put forward by the Afghan Minister, which would establish formal relations] need not be taken very seriously." (ibid: 559)

A certain amount of bickering entailed, during which Afghanistan agreed to move forward with an informal treaty of friendship and commerce without the appointment of legations. However, even this was not to come to be – the United States required certain wording that strongly suggested that Afghanistan was within the United States' sphere of influence, and Afghanistan refused to include that language on the basis of preferring to be left out of disagreements involving the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom:

"…Afghanistan desires to leave out the most-favored-nation clause. The reason… for this omission is that the most-favored-nation clause was omitted by Afghanistan in its treaties with Great Britain and the Soviets and that it does not wish to involve itself later with these powers." (ibid: 560)

This label caused the entirety of the deal to fail. Although the State Department did consider relations with Afghanistan formally opened in 1935, this came in the form of the US Ambassador to Tehran presenting his credentials to the Afghan government, while remaining based in Tehran. (Office of the Historian 2016) However, an actual mission to Afghanistan was not undertaken for nearly another decade. In this way, for twenty years from the first time Afghanistan approached the United States the relationship was kept as at far a remove as possible. The reasoning behind this was two-fold: on the one hand the United States was interested in avoiding any insult to Britain. On the other hand, there seemed to be little economic gain to be found in Afghanistan. (US Department of State 1921, 1926, 1936)

This state of affairs, which was demonstrably unsatisfying to the Afghan government, held until the second World War had progressed to a very troubling place. In 1941 it appeared as though southwest Asia would become a major theater of operations in conflict over resources there. Afghanistan had been given importance once again by the specter of presumed geopolitical necessity. Even here, however, the initial instinct of the US government was to forego setting up a mission to Afghanistan, preferring to cement a formal friendly relationship without benefit of a formal legation.

In guidance from the State Department to a diplomat in Iran regarding a closer relationship with Afghanistan:

"You are doubtless aware of the reasons why an American diplomatic mission has not been established in Kabul up to the present time, and realize the unlikelihood that one will be established in the future so long as our interests in Afghanistan continue to be slight…" (US Department of State 1941: 256)

The response from the US mission in Iran suggested that, in fact, American interests in Afghanistan were not slight at all – for a number of reasons.

"I venture to recommend the immediate opening of a Legation at Kabul for the following reasons-first and most important the United States should accept the hand of friendship offered it by this small and independent nation in keeping with its world responsibilities; secondly this is an opportunity which should not be missed of establishing ourselves solidly in a strategic position in Asia… It may be pointed out that Germany has established herself well in Afghanistan…" (ibid 259)

Officials in Washington acquiesced to this advice.

"In view of recent developments in the Near East, it is considered highly desirable that the office at Kabul be opened as soon as possible…" (US Department of State 1942: 45)

However, there was still resistance to the idea of setting up a robust mission to Afghanistan. At this point, it was decided to appoint a Charge d'Affaires rather than an actual Minister Plenipotentiary who could act as a true head of mission. This was justified with the argument that appointing a Minister Plenipotentiary would be far too time consuming. Afghanistan, however, took exception to this, seeing it as an insult:

"When you were in Kabul I discussed with you the wishes of my Government concerning the opening of Legations and exchange of Minsters in order to strengthen relations between our countries. The views of my Government have remained unchanged. It is the usual practice in Afghanistan until a Legation is opened by a Minster not to give the privileges of opening a Legation and use of codes to a Military Attaché or other person." (ibid: 48)

In a matter of days after Afghanistan took this stand, President Roosevelt ordered a regular Minister from another embassy, already confirmed by Congress, simply be reassigned to Afghanistan. Within a few weeks this was accomplished, with an embassy being opened in Kabul in June of 1942 – Roosevelt's command was dated March 16.

Here we witness a reticence to accord full respect to Afghan as a sovereign state, an equal – despite a perception that with the strategic situation in the region the United States "needed" Afghanistan. This reticence could only be expressed implicitly, informally, under a certain formal veneer. The reticence was justified by reference to logistic and legal difficulties – difficulties that disappeared immediately when it was clear that Afghanistan would refuse to be set aside in this manner. In a way this is similar to what Britain faced in the third Anglo Afghan war, where Afghanistan had some form of leverage and was unwilling to have terms dictated to it in quite the way as had been traditionally assumed.

On the whole, we see that the United States formally treated Afghanistan as a sovereign and respected/able nation. Yet over the course of two decades, Afghanistan approached the United States multiple times with an eye toward opening diplomatic relations on the same footing as the United States accorded any number of other states (including "Oriental" states such as Turkey and Iran). At every turn, the United States put Afghanistan off, saying for public consumption that formal relations were unnecessary and would be far too heavy a legal burden to undertake. Even when the strategic demands of World War II compelled the United States to seek Afghanistan out, the US still preferred a formal-but-low-ranking mission. When Afghanistan refused what it felt to be an insult to its character as a sovereign state, this political and legal process that the United States had regularly objected would be lengthy was decided upon and enacted within weeks, with a physical mission being opened within a matter of under three months.

When we lay these considerations alongside examination particularly of earlier documentary evidence, an iteration of the formal/informal divide exposed at the end of the third Anglo Afghan war can be clearly seen. Britain's objections to the United States interfering in its "sphere of influence" and US protestations that there were not sufficient economic inducements to involve itself in Afghanistan suggest that Afghanistan's relevance as a sovereign state in a supposed international community of states was not taken seriously.

A survey of newspapers during those decades seems to support this notion. Very little attention was paid to Afghanistan, excepting when Amir (sometimes called King) Amanullah was the focus. Amanullah captured European and American attention because he was seen as a figure who wanted to reform his backward country, making it more European and civilized. This is exemplary of a narrative in which most Afghans are hopelessly barbaric, with a few enlightened elites mimicking Western norms. Other common themes include Afghanistan's relationship with Russia and with Britain.

Afghanistan became newsworthy over the course of 1928, when the Amir of Afghanistan was traveling Europe to promote Afghanistan's "modernization" – during which time a coup overturned his government in Afghanistan.

> "… the Ameer, who is one of the most picturesque figures of the Old World, due to his vigorous Occidental reforms in his own country… [is making a European tour which] is closely bound with Afghanistan's need for industrial expansion" (*New York Times* 1928a)

And:

> "King Amanullah of Afghanistan during his visit here [will take part in] a stag hunt…" (*New York Times* 1928b)

There was a tone to discussion of Amanullah at the time which is substantively similar to how the murdered Amir Habibullah decades earlier was talked about. It appears as though there was a wistful imagining that some few Afghan elites had soaked up Western civility (or perhaps more correctly, learned to mimic it) and were thus a very interesting oddity not terribly dissimilar from a well-trained animal at the circus. Amanullah was praised for his ability to move easily among European society, and his every move was a matter of interest – even something so whimsical as plans to hunt stag.

There were also echoes of earlier tendencies to connect Afghanistan and its stability with the dangerous Russian specter. There were rumors of unrest in Afghanistan (which would later turn out to be well founded, as at the end of 1928 a coup would force Amanullah to abdicate the throne). That unrest immediately brought the Soviet Union to mind.

> "It is believed… that conditions in Afghanistan are disturbed and a plot of some kind has been discovered. According to high authority these conditions have nothing to do with the Soviet Government." (*New York Times* 1928c)

And:

> "No alliance between Russia and Afghanistan has resulted from the Ameer's sojourn at Moscow… [instead there have been a set of agreements] forming a continuous buffer between the Soviet territories and British territory in Asia." (*New York Times* 1928d)

In late 1928, following the completion of Amanullah's tour of Europe, there was civil strife in Afghanistan. Amanullah's West-oriented reforms were harshly criticized by certain aspects of Afghan

society. The revolutionaries are typified as ignorant, while Amanullah himself is a benefactor – though a benefactor who was eventually deposed. Western narratives turned Amanullah into a hero:

> "I feel sure that 100 years hence a monument will be erected at Kabul.. to King Amanullah, to commemorate his patriotism and great reforms… the priestly classes… were extremely ignorant… [and] objected that Amanullah's Westernization program was contrary to the Islam faith." (*New York Times* 1930)

Following the coup which removed Amanullah from power, dozens of articles appeared in the *New York Times* over the next two years. There was great interest in Amanullah himself and his unique position as a modernizer and friend of Europe who was viciously thrown out of Afghanistan for his enlightened ways. Only rarely is Afghanistan itself referred to – when referred to it is only to emphasize the strange and violent nature of the place with little exposition of what was doubtless a time of great internal political turmoil. Needless to say, political revolution in any European or "important" Asian country would have been covered assiduously for its impact on the notion of stateness and the then still young international society of nations.

Transitioning Narratives on Afghanistan

Narratives on Afghanistan in this transition period have a number of notable features. Firstly, Afghanistan was undertaking a project of developing its infrastructure and internal civil and political institutions over this period. Government wires spoke of Afghan nationhood and referred to a vague sense of friendliness toward Afghanistan (but in the sense of the sort of friendliness the United States would feel as default toward any non-hostile nation). This friendliness did not have an important enough character to bring about an effective relationship however – Afghanistan had little or nothing to offer, it was still more or less a British protectorate, its character was without important meaning. This only changed when the strategic requirements of World War II dictated.

Popular narratives toward Afghanistan were heavy on language of mysticism and 'old world' wonder. Yet the country itself was also a place inhabited by the backward, by the ignorant, by those who hated progress. The Afghan government's programmes were situated as "modernization" or "Westernization" programs. Afghanistan was seeking aid in becoming a true state – only through a program of Westernization could Afghanistan become a real state with real character. The only true character is Western character. These notions, as well as remnants of unease regarding Afghanistan's relationship with Russia, informed attitudes toward Afghanistan at the time. The Amir cut a dashing and romantic figure, a savage king who sought to understand the West and wanted to make Afghanistan

more European. Progress, it would seem, is impossible without a shift toward the West. Civilization is a Western artifact.

These attitudes rest naturally alongside the way in which the US government set aside Afghan approaches in the 1920's and 1930's. Afghanistan was a romantic place, perhaps, but one without real character even if it must be treated as a state. Yet formally treating it as a state did not mean partaking of formal interstate relations – relations could only be handled at an additional remove, through delegations in more civilized lands. (Through the middle of the 1930's, the United States went through European intermediaries to treat with Afghanistan – after that conversation with Afghanistan flowed through Persia.)

Afghanistan remains typified primarily by its indeterminacy. Orientalist language and typifications abound in filling up the character of Afghanistan as before, with references to the romantic savage being prevalent. As was the case in previous interactions between Britain and Afghanistan, that indeterminacy and the specific way in which Oriental norms filled in for an Afghan "character" empowered a very specific power relationship. The United States understood Afghanistan to be a state that was vaguely, formally just *there* but not particularly worthy of its attention. When outside pressures dictate US / Afghan interactions, there was a sense of displacement – Afghanistan was a mystery and there was a struggle to fill in the blanks as it were. Not only is this typical of interactions between Britain and Afghanistan, but the way that the United States filled in the gaps looks very similar to how Britain did – always in reference to something else which was better known. Even Orientalist archetypes were lifted from other places where they were more well established. Here, Afghanistan was simply one more part of the "Old World", the wild and unconquered periphery of the old British empire. Previously, Afghanistan was essentially a more savage and less culturally useful adjunct to India.

This emptiness, this indeterminacy, this sense that *there is no Afghanistan* (as such) shows itself in the narrative positioning of Afghanistan in both the Cold War intervention and the United States invasion of Afghanistan following Sept. 11. Typifications of Afghanistan in both cases are dictated primarily by the perceived strategic needs in a conflict that was outside of, larger than, and definitional to Afghanistan. In some way this emptiness is masked by a tendency in both interventions to reach back to British interventions in Afghanistan to "fill in the gaps" of discursive knowledge.

In the cases of both Britain and the United States, Afghanistan was / is a space which in general is not worth thinking about or interacting with – it has no relevance in the normal course of

international relations between states. That very emptiness has positioned Afghanistan (arguably alongside its unfortunate geographic placement) as primarily a place for geostrategic competition to be played out – first as an arena for the Great Game, then for the Cold War, and in contemporary times the War on Terror. Afghanistan's identity is filled up with the logics of these geostrategic conflicts – it is conflict which gives Afghanistan importance to the international community of states it is purportedly a part of. Yet it is Afghanistan's inherent separation from the character defining that international community of states which empowers its status as an arena of conflict. Afghanistan is not the focus of conflict – it is merely a convenient place for conflicts far larger than it to be carried out.

Afghanistan in the Cold War

In the aftermath of World War II, there was an international reconsidering of borders, sovereignty, and alliances. Individual state sovereignty seemed to be gaining currency in some regions and losing importance in others. Afghanistan's place in this changing landscape was uncertain, and as Cold War political maneuvering extended to 'unsettled' political spaces, Afghanistan gradually gained geopolitical significance once again. Both Soviet aligned and NATO aligned interests interacted far more heavily and seriously with Afghanistan than the country had perhaps ever seen. Material and intellectual aid transformed Afghanistan's social landscape and capped off what at the time seemed to be Afghanistan's great move into modernization and "legitimate" statehood.

The aid was a means of wielding influence as a weapon in the mostly ideological 'warfare' of the Cold War. As assayed in the previous chapter, an ideological element to interventions in Afghanistan has some historical continuity. The heightened interaction with and interest in Afghanistan resulted ultimately in occupation of its sovereign space by Soviet forces. There was disagreement at the time over the purpose and legality of the USSR's involvement, but in the logic of Cold War geopolitics Afghanistan was very important symbolically and strategically to both Soviet and NATO aligned interests.

With this in mind the remainder of this chapter considers how Afghanistan and the resulting conflict there were understood in the eyes of the American government and public. Analysis reveals a shifting set of narratives regarding the nature of the Afghan people and the Afghanistan conflict. Early on there is an emphasis on heroism and cross-cultural similarity between Afghanistan and the United States. This gives way over time to more distant and often disdainful notions. The narratives are tied together by discursive legacies which emanate from British 'knowledges' about Afghanistan's character and nature, as well as what the proper time for/method of civilized intervention into this 'wild' space

ought properly to be. This American narrative on Afghanistan during the Cold War is, for the sake of clarity, divided into governmental and media discourse.

Savage Victim / Barbaric Hero

Afghanistan is conspicuous primarily by its near absence by way of governmental documentation prior to the Soviet invasion in late 1979. Between 1976 and 1979, there are a total of 17 government documents that reference Afghanistan, according to the Catalog of U.S. Government Publications[37]. Over the next four-year period this had almost tripled, to 43. This holds fairly constant until 1990, when official publications drop off significantly. The manner in which Afghanistan and Afghanis are cast is also interesting. Early in the conflict, narratives of heroism are prevalent. Later in the conflict these are largely missing. Early in the conflict, these narratives are about the Afghan people and freedom fighters. Later in the conflict, the narratives are about the Afghan people as mujahidin. There is some overlap, but there is a sort of tipping point somewhere in the mid 1980's. Of note are conceptions of the Aghan vs conceptions of the mujahidin. Early on in the conflict, there was not even a mention of the mujahidin. Later, Afghan and mujahidin were used as synonyms. Contemporarily, we talk about the mujahidin of the time as foreign fighters, who then became the Taliban. Throughout the entirety of the period analyzed, geopolitical considerations were acknowledged as a primary motivator, though geopolitics and questions of justice/morality had a great deal of cross-over at this time. This suggests an insuperable quality to the manner in which Afghanistan was typified as a land of heroic, if barbaric, victims and Afghanistan's geo-strategic importance to the Cold War ideological conflict with Afghanistan.

Speeches made by government officials, particularly the President, provide insights into positioning of the Afghan identity. Several trends become evident in speeches ranging from 1980 to 1990. Early speeches were somewhat vague and confused regarding the specificities of Afghanistan but were stark clear regarding Soviet issues. Further into the 1980's, as the United States became more engaged with supporting anti-Soviet forces in Afghanistan the tone changed to one of shared patriotism and highly valorous connotations. Toward the latter part of the 1980's we find another discursive shift wherein language takes a cold and clinical tenor, creating distance from the identities/forces considered almost familial previously.

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[37] See catalog.gpo.gov

Initial reactions to the Soviet incursion into Afghanistan had little to do with Afghanistan and a lot to do with the Soviet Union. Here, Afghanistan is essentially a characterless victim. (Binder 1980) Little reference is given to Afghanistan or its character, save for a nod to their "fiercely independent" nature. (Carter 1980a) This first speech was followed three weeks later by President Carter's State of the Union address, which was far more developed in terms of moral and legal arguments regarding why the Soviet invasion was wrong and therefor why it was the duty of the West to intervene. Despite this more articulated argument, there is actually *less* reference to Afghanistan as a place holding any character. Instead, focus is on American character.

> "…tonight, as throughout our own generation, freedom and peace in the world depend on the state of our Union… the real danger to their [Iran's] nation lies in the north, in the Soviet Union and from the Soviet troops now in Afghanistan[38]… The implications of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan could pose the most serious threat to the peace since the Second World War." (Carter 1980b)

Afghanistan is mentioned several more times during this speech, yet not once are Afghanistan's rights or Afghanistan's character referenced. Instead, all mentions of Afghanistan come in regard to strategic implications in a struggle against the evil of the Soviet Union. The referencing back to American character is something that is seen again in an interview with the President which follows:

> "Mr. President, your critics say that the Soviets are moving [on Afghanistan] because they've seen weakness on your part. They don't believe you or the American people will fight…" (*New York Times* 1980e)

The invasion of Afghanistan isn't about Afghanistan – it's about the United States and a balance of power between the US and the USSR. This theme of an evil Soviet Union and gallant United States can be found in popular media at the time as well. The *New York Times* (1980a) characterizes Afghanistan as symbolic of a wider Muslim world which has been betrayed by an untrustworthy Moscow. (More on similar characterizations in the next section.)

This discursive stance of vagueness toward Afghanistan in favor of self-reference would quickly give way to a sort of symbolic solidarity, (though it would come out again toward the end of the 1980's). Nine further Presidential speeches and proclamations considered Afghanistan at length. Most of these revolved around a proclaimed 'Afghanistan Day', first announced on 10 March 1982 as a symbol of

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[38] This was during the hostage crisis in Iran – the President is making an argument that Iran should be more concerned about the USSR's presence in Afghanistan than anything the U.S. might do.

solidarity between the United States and Afghanistan in the fight for freedom against Afghanistan. The first four proclamations on 'Afghanistan Day' (Reagan 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985) were full of the language of heroism.

> "The Afghan people have defied the Soviet Union and have resisted with a vigor that has few parallels in modern history. The Afghan people have paid a terrible price in their fight for freedom. Yet their fight goes on… Every country and every people has a stake in the Afghan resistance, for the freedom fighters of Afghanistan are defending principles of independence and freedom that form the basis of global security and stability." (Reagan 1982b)

And:

> "The tragedy of Afghanistan continues as the valiant and courageous Afghan freedom fighters persevere in standing up against the brutal power of the Soviet invasion and occupation… The Soviet forces are pitted against an extraordinary people who, in their determination to preserve the character of their ancient land, have organized an effective and still spreading country-wide resistance. The resistance of the Afghan freedom fighters is an example to all the world…" (Reagan 1983)

And:

> "We stand in admiration of the indomitable will and courage of the Afghan people who continue their resistance to tyranny. All freedom-loving people around the globe should be inspired by the Afghan people's struggle to be free and the heavy sacrifices they bear for liberty." (Reagan 1984)

And:

> "Afghanistan Day will serve to recall the fundamental principles involved when people struggle for the freedom to determine their own future and the right to govern themselves without foreign interference… Let us pledge our continuing admiration for their cause and their perseverance…" (Reagan 1985)

Heroic characterizations of Afghan character are found in other places, both governmental documents and popular media. Those characterizations are often accompanied by something which looks a lot like a call to action. In the examples just cited that call to action is quite straight forward – in other cases it is less obvious, more exemplary.

"…America's deep and continuing admiration for the Afghan people in the face of brutal and unprovoked aggression… Today, we recognize a nation of unsung heroes whose courageous struggle is one of the epics of our time. The Afghan people have matched their heroism against the most terrifying weapons of modern warfare in the Soviet arsenal…" (Reagan 1982a)

Also:

"But we should not be too surprised at the will and determination of the Afghan people. Since at least the time of Alexander the Great, the Afghan people have demonstrated their extraordinary willingness to bear hardships and make sacrifices in long and bitter resistance against foreign invaders in all directions. They are, perhaps, the original national liberation movement in the true and most meaningful sense of the term." (Kirkpatrick 1984)

These praises rarely exist in a vacuum. Alongside valorization of Afghan character are other messages. In keeping with the internal tensions found in the formal/informal discursive structure on Afghanistan, there is a tension in how these praises are conditioned. At all times, these praises reflect in some way on the speaker and the audience in some way. Often there is reference made specifically to the ideals of the United States which, in some way, the Afghan people were upholding themselves.

"Few observers would have predicted… that in 1982 the Afghan people would still be fighting for their freedom, and more strongly than ever. It is time for Washington to make the American public aware that for more than three years the stubbornly independent Afghans, struggling alone and almost unaided against the Soviet Union, have been fighting *our fight*. [emphasis mine] (Klass 1982)

This quote is reflective of American identity - though an argument might be made that all the language of heroism is intended in the same way. Afghanistan is heroic not because it is a land of heroes, or because it is the nature of the people. Afghanistan is heroic because it is fighting the Soviet Union – *Afghanistan is doing exactly what America had built the entirety of its post-World War II identity on.* To be sure, the vile depredations of the Soviet occupiers are almost universally highlighted along with the heroism of the Afghan fighters. The Soviet position is very often explicitly juxtaposed to American values – oppression versus freedom – and Afghanistan is situated as aligning clearly with American values.

However, that heroism is not without some conditioning. Not only do we see the valorization and the sympathy for victimization – there is also ample reference to the Afghan barbaric nature.

"…the courage and determination of the Afghan freedom fighters who have fought so valiantly… the heroism of the Afghans themselves… The nation of Afghanistan [is]… a land of primitive people undisposed to governance… fierce hostility. In Afghanistan, nationalism is essentially an expression of tribalism. [reference is made to the Kipling verse] When you're wounded an' left on Afghanistan's plains, An' the women come out to cut up your remains, Just roll to your rifle an' blow out your brains, An' go to your Gawd like a soldier." (Ritch 1984)

Afghans were both heroic and savage. To be respected but also to be feared.

"It was a country that seemed to have been bypassed by progress… what I remember most is not the backwardness and poverty but the harsh beauty of this strange and haunting land… I think of them, of their independence and passion and open-heartedness, and I wonder how they are, and where they are." (Carlson 1980)

This confusing state of affairs was best explained by reaching back to British understandings of Afghanistan. This was the case in both official governmental discourse and in the popular media. A Congressional report in 1982 spoke of the history of the Anglo-Afghan wars and how the fractious Afghan tribes, unable to agree on anything like a government in normal times would nevertheless come together to fight off invaders. (US Congress 1982) Very specific language is used as well, which looks familiar:

"Afghanistan is indeed full of bellicose tribesmen with a long tradition of successful resistance against foreigners… Moslems, more than most, also admire martial strength… Moslem mobs reveal as much realpolitik as unguided fanaticism in their outbursts." (Luttwak 1980)

This resonates strongly with British narratives equating prestige and strength when dealing with barbaric Orientals. Afghans were considered to be simple people, savage and unsophisticated in their tastes but very jealous of their freedom. During the Anglo-Afghan wars this was justification for treating Afghans with a firm hand and explanation for why at times Afghan fighters seemed far more capable than one might expect from savages. In this Cold War era, Afghan savagery explains how freedom fighters are able to keep the Soviet Union at bay… but it also serves to separate out Afghan character from American character. That's a handy trick, particularly in that earlier examples of narrative tended to draw Afghan and American character quite closely together – another example of tension internal to this discourse on Afghan-ness.

"After four years of brutal occupation, that primitive society remains unpacified… The wild card in this speculation [that Soviet advance to the Persian Gulf is inevitable] is the Afghan resistance. Neither *imperial Britain* nor czarist Russia was able to turn these tribesmen into docile subjects. A marveling Churchill wrote in 1897: "Every influence, every motive, that provokes the spirit of murder among men, impels these mountaineers to deeds of treachery and violence… to the ferocity of the Zulu are added the craft of the Redskin and the marksmanship of the Boer. Soviet experience has confirmed Churchill's grudging tribute."
(*New York Times* 1984a)

This is a tribute to Afghan independence as well as a hearkening back to the old Great Game and British representations of Afghan-ness – finding those old archetypes to be wise and true in the 1980's. What's more, this reference to the Great Game is hardly unique. Particularly toward the end of the 1980's there was a narrative shift – the tension within narratives on Afghan-ness had been temporarily resolved in a manner which created distance from American-ness and Afghan-ness.

By the late 1980's, sympathy with the Afghan plight had receded. No longer were narratives extolling the virtues of the heroic Afghan – they were talking about cold analyses of power with Mujhadin as one more faction more or less synonymous with Pakistan in importance. These factions could be set aside in a manner that allowed the United States and the Soviet Union to negotiate over the future of Afghanistan, with the ultimate goal on the United States' part being to remove both powers from association with Afghanistan and allow the Mujahidin, Pakistan, and perhaps presumably Afghans themselves (though Afghan natives receive little to no mention by now) to determine the fate of that beleaguered country.

This narrative shift is on one level a return to initial reactions to the USSR invasion/intervention in Afghanistan. Focus is taken away from the Afghans and centered on the USSR (though this might be seen now as more pro-active as compared to where it was previously re-active). This is not to say that in the early 1980's the Soviet Union was somehow not talked about. Rather, Afghanistan in the early 80's was assigned a certain identity in relation to the Soviet Union – which is explored in the next section and is connected to what this section has already talked about. Afghanistan in the later 80's was no longer the object of narratives, however – rather it was very straight forwardly just a place where a larger narrative was playing out. In the next section we explore how this game-board typification actually empowered and informed typifications of the Afghan as a savage hero.

It seems that how the two concepts interplay with one another is suggestive of a completely different discursive focus. Situating Afghans as (heroic, barbaric) victims of Soviet aggression reminded Americans that the character of America – its identity and great value – depended on resisting the ideological evils that the Soviet Union represented. When the United States had become actively involved in the Afghan crisis, the Afghans themselves no longer needed to be put into a sympathetic role – a role which there is some discursive precedent for but which is a relatively uneasy fit. Instead, Afghanistan is able to be placed back into its normal role of a non-space in the margins.

> "Finally, the success of U.S. policy in Afghanistan is, in large measures, attributable to the sustained, bipartisan support for that policy in Congress. Our ultimate success in ending the Soviet occupation and restoring Afghanistan to the Afghan people…" (Tinker 1988: p9)

The conflict in Afghanistan ended in a victory – but a victory for the United States. With that victory, there was little more to do.

> "When American policy makers are asked [if the US should continue to care about Afghanistan after the USSR pulled out], there is an almost standard reply. The United States wants the installation of a stable, non-aligned representative government… the stability of the region, particularly of Pakistan, is at stake. But they also say Afghanistan has little intrinsic strategic significance." (Sciolino 1989)

This article then goes on to discuss the manner in which the US was distancing itself from the future of Afghanistan, largely handing off its concern for the situation there to a local proxy (Pakistan). This is seen in the process of the Geneva Accords, wherein Pakistan itself was a signatory along with the Soviet-backed Afghan regime. Afghan freedom fighters and Mujahideen were excluded from the accords – from the US perspective the fate of the Afghan state was to be decided by a Soviet proxy and a US ally. This was a state of affairs quite amenable to Pakistan, which saw Afghanistan as a potential client state (rather than a victimized space deserving of justice and a sovereign future).

> "We have earned the right to have a very friendly regime in Kabul. We won't permit it to be like it was before… It will be a real Islamic state, part of a pan-Islam revival, that will one day win over the Moslems in the Soviet Union, you will see." (Interview of Pakistani Gen. Muhammad Zia ul-Haq, in *New York Times* 1989a)

From that point, the United States essentially dismissed Afghanistan, which would return to the status of an unknown and wild, savage land until events in the late 1990's and then Sept. 11, 2001 would bring it back into stark focus. Rather than follow on with a concern about Afghan rights to

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sovereignty and justice, the US saw its job as done once it defeated the Soviet invasion (which it was narratively positioned to have been somehow solely responsible for). Thus we see that this concern for Afghan sovereignty and distress at the victimization of the Afghan people must be seen only contextually within the logic of the Cold War – which was referred to fairly widely even at that point as a reiteration of the Great Game.

Westphalian Sovereignty and the Third World

Clapham (1999) has set out an analysis of how so-called third world states dealt with sovereignty. He approaches it from a fairly orthodox position at a time when international security scholarship was struggling to identify causes and cures of/for state failure.

For Clapham, third world states have a particular relationship with the notion of sovereignty. Referring both to the Treaty of Westphalia and colonial practices emanating from Europe, he identifies sovereignty as a primarily European construct, designed primarily for European states.

> "Westphalian sovereignty provided the formula under which territories did not 'count' as
>
> states according to the criteria adopted by the European state system…" (Clapham 522)

This speaks to the history of the sovereignty construct, though there has been something of a turnabout with the end of colonialism. Sovereignty, Clapham says, has been particularly strongly embraced by states of the third world, even to the extent of trying to expand what is meant to be protected under sovereign considerations. He points, for instance, to the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1974, wherein sovereign rights and responsibilities of states were extended toward the regulation of the global economy (and practices of economic relations). (ibid 523)

As a whole, Clapham argues that particularly in the context of the Cold War, third world states often enthusiastically embraced sovereignty as a survival tactic.

> "Sovereignty was, moreoever, far more critical as an instrument of state consolidation for
>
> third world states in the Cold War era, than it had been even during its heyday in early
>
> modern Europe… third world rulers… were often heavily dependent on the outside world
>
> both for their artillery and for their bureaucracy… economic resources… sovereignty was all
>
> the more important as a device for asserting a measure of autonomy from the very external
>
> states and other international actors to which they were subordinate." (ibid 526)

However, Clapham argues, within this sovereignty-as-defense mechanism was the seeds of its own destruction. It relied on external actors (already deemed "above" them by the author) continuing to respect third world sovereignty claims. It also relied on internal stability in states which often struggled to stave off the bugbears of autocracy and misgovernment. (ibid 530) This has led to a situation wherein the formality of sovereignty remains, but situations on the ground are somewhat different.

> "…in most of the Third World… the formal attributes of sovereignty remain in place… Most states continue to maintain formal representation at the United Nations… most… of the mechanisms through which the autonomy of states… has been reduced continue to operate in ways which respect at least the fig-leaf of national sovereignty…" (ibid 530)

Eventually, argues Clapham, the untenable nature of domestic polity in former colonies would prove too much for most of the Third World. Misgovernment alongside societal dysfunction from an often poorly managed decolonization process set up most of these states to fail.

In a way, then, the 'third world' wasn't ready for sovereignty, but was obliged by the logic of the Cold War to embrace sovereignty tightly. The adherence to formal trappings of sovereignty went a long way toward disguising internal dysfunctions which were eating away at the state apparatus, until a time came when state after state began to collapse.

This is indicative of underlying assumptions that this project has attempted to bring to light through a historical discourse analysis in Afghan relations. Clapham assumes that sovereignty, for whatever reason, is for some and not for others. In this case, the majority of third world states which embraced the notion of sovereignty were simply not ready for it – and the blame was both individuated and systemic. The process of decolonization created significant internal tensions in states which were often created with little historical or identity-based logic. Logics of the Cold War obliged third world states to cling tight to the formal protection of sovereignty in a system of international relations where Great Powers were at conflict, and third world states were pawns in that game. But also, elites were simultaneously unwilling and unable to govern well – and were able to hide both their corruption and their incompetence behind the veil of sovereignty.

This shows strong continuity with the notion highlighted in the third Anglo Afghan war of the desire for sovereignty as mimicry. Third world states were simply not able to exercise sovereignty, but insisted on doing so anyway (in mimicry of and warding protection from their 'betters', as Clapham put

it). This also connects to the notion of a formal/informal divide. Formally, sovereignty must be respected with these third world states. Informally, it is known that they are unable and unwilling to wield true sovereignty. Thus they continued to be pawns in the Cold War, and thus they began to fail at the end of the Cold War when their betters no longer worked to prop them up.

Rather than criticize this viewpoint here, it is useful to take it as somewhat representative of orthodox scholarship regarding the mysterious, marginal third world during the latter Cold War and in its aftermath. In this light, Afghanistan had a sovereignty which was recognized formally. Both the Soviet Union and the United States formally respected that sovereignty – for the USSR they were there on request of the legitimate government of Afghanistan to help defend against foreign interference. The United States saw the Soviet presence there as initiating an illegitimate coup, and the freedom fighters / mujahideen represented Afghans with a true claim to sovereign rights. Yet those formal concerns were suborned to the logics of the Cold War and, once there was no longer a geopolitical reason to intervene, Afghanistan was left to exercise its sovereignty as best it could without real regard to the effects that those external interventions had on the possibility of any real exercise of sovereignty.

Afghanistan's right to sovereignty was central to the ideological struggle of the Cold War. The United States and its NATO allies stood for a liberal-democratic-capitalist ideology, wherein sovereignty and self-determination were fundamental to the functioning of the international state system. This did not mean that they took on some sort of moral or ethical responsibility for the success of every state in the system – part of self-determination in that formulation includes the possibility of failure. For that ideological stance, however, that failure could not be allowed to come about from the Soviet Union. Thus, the ideological conflict of the time was such that certain discursive legacies about the nature of Afghanistan were hidden behind the formality of sovereignty as particularly conceptualized in that particular historical context.

Afghanistan as Game Board

References to Afghanistan in a strategic sense have already been quite obvious in the section on savagery, victimhood and heroism. Afghanistan's heroism, indeed, relies on the willingness of the Afghan people to act as de facto allies to the United States in the ideological struggle against the Soviet Union and communism. Ideology has become a major part in how conflicts are positioned in Afghanistan by this point, an evolution in degree but not kind from the situation at the end of the third Anglo Afghan war.

Afghanistan's sovereign rights are only brought up in order to chide the Soviet Union. Outside of that context, Afghanistan is only discussed as a puzzle piece. Part of the Cold War game. Either a strategic piece to be used, or a piece under attack from the USSR, or a piece that can / should be manipulated and see its nature altered for its own benefit.

> "The nation of Afghanistan was delineated by the famous 'Great Game' of nineteenth century geopolitics… a land of primitive people undisposed to governance… became a buffer." (Ritch 1984)

In the context of the Cold War era, Afghanistan's neutral status is actually denigrated, with much made of Afghanistan's going "back and forth between the United States and Soviet Union for aid"; when one wasn't willing to give some type of needed aid, Afghanistan turned elsewhere. Despite a healthy wariness of the Soviet Union and possible aggression, turning to the USSR for aid opened the door to Soviet encroachment. (ibid: 5-6) As such, Afghanistan's unwillingness to pick a side and foolishness in associating with the Soviet Union was to blame for their current troubles.

Afghan victimhood (and the Afghan status of hero) is ultimately subordinated to strategic considerations. Clinical language describes the strategic situation -"In many ways 1987 can be described as the year of the mujahidin, a year in which the resistance began to seize the initiative from the Soviets." (Karp 1987: 2) With these barbaric, but useful, agents on the ground the United States could concentrate on funneling them some material support but more substantively put political pressure on the USSR to withdraw, which would be the United States' main contribution to supporting Afghanistan. (ibid: 22)

In a way, this was cast as a return to a more natural order of things. The United States and its allies could withdraw to a more comfortable position of applying political pressure on the Soviet Union to cease misbehaving. Pakistan, as a local ally acting on the behalf of the United States, could bargain directly with the USSR's puppet regime in Afghanistan. The Mujahidin movement – despite being fractured and at internal conflict - both added violent pressure to the question and stood up directly for the oppressed Afghan people. (Tinker 1988) Rather than settle questions as to Afghanistan's character in the international system, the United States deemed disengagement the better option, supposing that violent opposing factions it helped to create and arm within Afghanistan would sort it out somehow although the greater proportion of those factions were, in fact, foreign to Afghanistan. Rather than meaningfully engage with an actual Afghan future, it was decided that Afghanistan was only of interest

when it was an ideological battleground with the Soviet Union. As the conflict died down and the position of the USSR weakened, so did talk of brotherhood, enlightenment, and salvation.

There was considerable narrative pressure for the United States to find ways to support Afghanistan (and it was not pre-ordained that this aid would come only by way of political pressure and covert material support). Old 'Great Game' metaphors were drawn on heavily, as were comparisons to Vietnam. (Luttwak 1980, Gwertzman 1979, Pipes 1980, Taubman 1980, *New York Times* 1984a) In this iteration, it was a moral imperative that the United States resist Soviet aggression.

"The Russians have torn it. They have defied the unwritten code that a generation of Soviet and American leaders had evolved to contain their global rivalry." (*Times* 1980c)

Here, the author asked what lay broken in Afghanistan. He answered this question in saying that by invading Afghanistan, the Soviet Union betrayed the United States and brought the world to the brink of catastrophe. Others take it further:

> "President Carter has defined the Afghan situation as a superpower military confrontation –
> 'the most serious threat to world peace since the Second World War'." (Fischer 1980)

And:

> "….But in Afghanistan, for the first time, Moscow has asserted its power to intervene
> outside the Soviet bloc – an assertion that president Carter has now acidly
> denounced as false. Western leaders are right to condemn the Soviet aggression."
> (*New York Times* 1980a)

The Soviet Union, by invading Afghanistan, had upset a delicate balance which ensured world peace. This invasion upset that system, and it was the duty of the United States to underscore the inviolability of the right to self-determination.

> "…the stubbornly independent Afghans… have been *fighting our fight* [emphasis mine]. [The
> United States must] face a stark fact: Afghanistan is a key to eventual Soviet expansion in
> South Asia and the Indian Ocean… But the Afghans cannot carry out such an extended
> struggle unaided and alone." (Klass 1982)

What begins to surface is a sort of horror that the poor, benighted Afghan has been left to carry the United States' great burden. The United States then has no choice but to step in and shield Afghanistan from the interventionary practices of the Soviet Union. The United States job was to act as a

savior, to create a situation wherein Afghanistan would be able to succeed or fail as a sovereign state *on its own*. This is the condition demanded by the ideology underpinning Cold War logics.

Thus, Afghan sovereignty was an idea which needed to be conjured and spoken of. Soviet aggression and violation of Afghan sovereignty is protested time and again. (United Nations 1980, *New York Times* 1980c, Klass 1982, *New York Times* 1980a) This apparent concern for Afghanistan's right to be master of its own destiny is at tension with how the United States treated the situation, however.

> "It was Moscow's intervention… that transformed Afghanistan into a *playing field* [emphasis mine] for superpower rivalry, thereby bestowing an exaggerated geopolitical importance on the country." (Scioling 1989)

Afghanistan, which Sciolino quoted American policymakers as saying had little intrinsic significance, was suddenly the focus of US security policy. With such weighty concerns as carrying out this Great Game, this ideological conflict in the Cold War, the sovereignty of such a marginal political space as Afghanistan could be ignored (particularly if ignoring that sovereignty meant saving it). Thus:

> "The United States intends to pursue discussions with the Soviet Union on Afghanistan and other issues… 'A continued dialogue is definitely in the cards' [a US official said]." (Gwertzman 1980)

The United States, then, was engaged in bargaining over Afghanistan's future over the course of its usual negotiations with the Soviet Union over weighty matters affecting the whole of the world. The President had already defined the Afghan "situation as a superpower military confrontation". (Fisher 1980) Indeed, Afghanistan's very character was malleable in the face of the United States' great purpose of protecting Afghanistan from the evils of Soviet influence.

> "All who are gravely concerned about the dangers to peace that arise in consequence of the Russian invasion and occupation of Afghanistan cannot but approve… [of a plan wherein] Afghanistan will assume a political and diplomatic status comparable to that of Switzerland and Austria." (de Hevesy 1980)

Afghanistan's nature could be changed, then, without its consent. This was for the good of Afghanistan, certainly, but also because the nature of the Cold War was such that conflict in Afghanistan risked world spanning war if the situation proved too intractable for the United States and USSR. Afghanistan, then, was in a familiar position. During the interventions on Afghanistan by Britain during the three Anglo Afghan wars, the logic of the Great Game was such that Afghanistan's character was

meaningless and empty. The geopolitical struggle with Russia was of far great import – and this held true once again during the Cold War. This changeable Afghan nature speaks further to its indeterminacy and further undermines notions of Afghan sovereignty.

Cold War Narratives and US Security Policy

An article by Bilgin and Morton analyzes the outsize effects of Cold War narratives on scholarship (and by implication, policy). Their focus is somewhat different, looking at legacies of Cold War narratives on contemporary issues and as such, this article will be revisited later as well. However, it has strong relevance to this chapter. They argue that labels such as 'rogue' and 'failed' states are ways of recreating / reinforcing discursive knowledge norms inherited from the Cold War in contemporary times.

> "It will be argued in this article that the notion of 'rogue states' is merely the latest in a series of representations of post-colonial states that have arisen in and beyond the context of the Cold War, namely, 'weak', 'quasi', 'collapsed' and 'failed' states [not to suggest interchangeability of the terms]. What such labels have in common, however, is that they are all representations of post-colonial states; representations that enable certain policies which serve the economic, political and security interests of those who employ them." (BIlgin and Morton 2002: 55)

and

> "…consider the wider rise of various representations of postcolonial states across the social sciences to highlight how thinking and practice, rooted in cold-war dynamics, still persist in the present ostensibly post-cold war era." (ibid: 56)

This is in line with the findings of this project, which suggest that discursive legacies impact current policy decisions in ways that are not always obvious. For Bilgin and Morton, the use of 'rogue' and 'failed' labels situates the conversation in a Cold War-esque geo-strategic narrative, suggesting discursive links between Afghanistan as we understood it in the Cold War context and Afghanistan as we understand it in a contemporary, "Global War on Terror" context. The point is well taken, though this project suggests that the geo-strategic understanding of Afghanistan's importance is much older than the Cold War.

Bilgin and Morton argue that this discursive trap is a result of poor interdisciplinarity reflective of an academic division of labor that came about in Cold War era academic practices. This has led to a

situation where different academic 'knowledges' about, for instance, the social causes of state failure, are not shared. (ibid) This has intriguing implications for alternative ways of understanding state failure which does coincide with the aims of this project – opening up discussions of state failure and Afghan identity to allow for possible alternative conceptions and understandings.

Most specifically, they argue powerfully that certain historical logics can become a kind of narrative structure which is difficult to recognize, let alone escape from. The speak of labels of 'rogue' and 'failure' as being embedded within Cold War logics. This is a concept probably worth exploring (as is their more general point on the interdisciplinarity deficit in academia). While it does also speak to connectivities between Cold War and Global War on Terror discourses, relying on this as a means of understanding Afghanistan's specific case would recreate certain problems this paper identifies. There is, arguably, an impact of Cold War logics on today's security discourses. However, this project also finds that Cold War era discourses on Afghanistan were further influenced by historical understandings of Afghanistan as an indeterminate and empty space – Afghanistan was readily situated within Cold War logics specifically because of its history of being treated as without character, empty, indeterminate. Other polities were also situated within the overriding Cold War narratives of the time, surely – but how and why that situating happened and what the effects might have been are conditioned by historically specific situations.

Stokes (2003) is interested in testing continuity and discontinuity in US security policy. In doing so, he measures what he identifies as orthodox discontinuity theory against Chomsky's hypothesis of continuity, wherein Cold War policy is measured against policy in the War on Terror. For Stokes:

> "[Orthodox theory tends] to view the Cold War in bipolar terms and work with an orthodox
> historical interpretation of its origins and operation. They also emphasize the discontinuity
> characteristic of US foreign policy in the post-Cold War period. An orthodox historiography
> views the Soviet Union as having had expansionist tendencies throughout the Cold War, and
> as fundamentally hostile to Western security. Conversely, US foreign policy is viewed as
> principally driven by a defensive reaction against Soviet expansionism [exemplified by
> doctrine of containment." (Stokes 2003: 571)

This is a fairly uncontroversial description of Western narratives toward the Cold War conflict. For this, Afghanistan is another example of Soviet aggression being countered by Western foreign policy seeking to counter this evil aggression. Stokes turns to Chomsky for a critique of this notion (and it is a critique which he takes on board in analyzing a contemporary case in Colombia).

"[Chomsky] contends that US foreign policy is overwhelmingly driven by the geoeconomic interests of US capital and the construction of a world order conducive to those interests… the mainstream understanding of the Cold War has a particular ideological effect. The Soviet threat, and the US's need to contain it, was overstated during the Cold War to serve two primary purposes… Second, and more importantly for this article, the Soviet threat served as a convenient pretext for justifying US military interventionism in the Third World, which, according to the logic of North–South relations, was necessary to maintain access to raw materials and markets and ensure cheap labour, to maintain regimes favourable to US interests, and to stifle or overthrow movements considered inimical to US interests." (ibid: 575)

Stokes provides support for Chomsky's argument in analyzing US actions in Colombia as part of the contemporary War on Terror. He argues that the US insistence on supporting the Colombian military, which in turn supports paramilitary groups which carry out atrocities in the name of the 'War on Terror' is proof that the discontinuity thesis is correct. It essentially plays into Chomsky's narrative on US foreign policy as mobilizing a sort of liberal ideology as justifying oppressive international relations policies intended to further its own economic interests, in the classic North-South problematic.

Stokes (and Chomsky) essentially argue that liberal ideology and "knowledge" about peripheral spaces are parts of a neo-imperial project. Conversely, this project argues that narrative structures of knowledge as to liberal statehood and how those knowledge structures interact with historically informed knowledges about the nature of Afghanistan form a kind of constraint. Some actions toward Afghanistan are empowered and made possible whereas other possibilities are marginalized. Afghanistan's historical indeterminacy has situated it as a tactical space which, time and again, is used both as a geo-political (ideological) battlefield where world powers fight over great questions and as a sort of mirror where concepts core to Western self-knowledge are buttressed.

For this project, the point is not to critique liberal ideologies as such, nor is it to make assertions of neo-imperialism. It is to unpack discursive "knowledges" specific to the Afghanistan case in an attempt to make alternative knowledges, policy and practice *possible*. Stokes offers a compelling and critical take on narrative connections between security discourse during the Cold War and during the current "Global War on Terror" era. However, this is once again a broad approach which, if taken on board, would pose the risk of recreating the problem of treating Afghanistan's history and specificity as unimportant. It would, then, reinforce notions of Afghan emptiness and indeterminacy.

Narrative Tensions: Ideology and the Formal / Informal Divide

Here questions of sovereignty/non-sovereignty are increasingly becoming a focal point of narratives on Afghanistan. In previous interventions on Afghanistan, the question of sovereignty was never seriously raised as a respectable argument against intervention. In those interventions, the question was obviated by recourse to narratives of emptiness and barbarism – Afghanistan was not civilized enough to warrant the rights and duties of a sovereign state.

Following the third Anglo Afghan war, this *formally* changed. Afghanistan was formally recognized as a sovereign state with all the rights and responsibilities that implies. Those rights, that sovereign character is the *justification* by which the United States chose to support the mujahidin resistance. There are some few references to Afghan sovereignty as a way to drive this observation home: (United Nations 1980, *New York Times* 1980c, Klass 1982, *New York Times* 1980a) Yet if the USSR ignored Afghanistan's sovereignty, the United States appears to have done the same thing whilst formally (ceremonially?) paying tribute to the very sovereignty it ignored. This was made possible by reliance on *informal knowledges* about Afghanistan with unseen historical roots. In imbibing discursive legacies of savagery and Afghanistan-as-game-board the United States was positioned discursively to dismiss Afghanistan's substantive character as a state in its own right. When Britain was involved with Afghanistan, its relations were informed by the geopolitical logics of the Great Game and some of the discursive phenomena described in Orientalism. At that time, no notion of Afghan sovereignty needed to be handled – there were tensions in Britain's treatment of Afghanistan narratively, certainly, but in the wake of the third Anglo Afghan war (and Afghanistan's newly recognized sovereign status) intervention presumably should have become more difficult.

At the same time ideology became much more obvious in its importance. Relations with Afghanistan during the third Anglo Afghan war were informed in no small part by fear of the Bolshevik ideology – indeed much of the force behind Britain's decision to recognize Afghanistan's sovereignty was as a way to 'combat' Bolshevik norms of nationalism. Ideology plays a large part in this Cold War intervention as well. As Britain's interactions with Afghanistan were informed by the geopolitical necessities of the Great Game, the United States' intervention with Afghanistan here was informed by the geopolitical/ideological necessities of the Cold War (and later was informed by the geopolitical/ideological necessities of the War on Terror).

Particularly if Afghanistan is a place that deserves the label of "failed state", it is necessary to query *where is the space for Afghan sovereignty in this instance*. For a state to fail, it must be a state.

What is the nature of Afghan sovereignty during the Cold War? We should first consider the Geneva Accords, which ended the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan – signaling American "victory" in the proxy conflict.

The Geneva Accords were agreed upon in 1988, with Pakistan and the Soviet supported government of Afghanistan as the signatories and the United States and USSR as "guarantors". There had been some efforts to have the Mujahidin in some way represented at the talks – this never materialized by decision of the Mujahidin. It is generally agreed upon that the anti-Soviet movement in Afghanistan saw the so-called Afghan government as nothing more than a Soviet puppet (*New York Times* 1989a, *New York Times* 1989b, Karp 1987, Tinker 1988) and there was a strong sentiment against negotiating with the USSR. With the help of hindsight, we do know that Mujahidin forces did continue to fight against the (Soviet installed) Afghan government after the Accords. We also know that the Mujahidin movement was extremely fractious – there were secular Afghan nationalists, representatives of different tribal groups, Pashtun Islamists and foreign Islamists – all of which had cross-cutting alliances and rivalries.

The choice of signatories is interesting. The conflict in Afghanistan was typified in various ways. On some level, it was considered to be a civil war – indeed the "great powers" called it that. Yet the signatories to the Accord were actors generally considered "proxies" of the USSR and US. In any circumstance, an international accord signed by multiple states is an extraordinary occurrence as a way to end a civil war – particularly when one of the two primary parties to the conflict (if it was in fact a civil war) was not party to the Accords at all.

It is further notable that, from the Western perspective, there was *no legitimate speaker for Afghanistan* present at the talks. The Soviet backed government was a puppet and illegitimate – not representative of Afghansitan at all (if it *were*, then the US intervention would have been illegitimate). No faction of the Mujahidin or other Afghan anti-Soviet forces were deemed legitimate parties to the talks either. That is to say, there was *no competent Afghan representative* to speak for the Afghans. Afghanistan was, indeed, empty of character.

This is a very practical and concrete manifestation of the tensions within the informal/formal discursive phenomenon by which Afghanistan's identity was situated. The conflict in Afghanistan was something quite outside of what we might consider orthodox understandings of international law, with actors involved in the conflict who held marginal and in some ways perhaps unknowable characters.

That the USSR and United States were "guarantors" to the treaty could have two implications. Both implications suggest that without the signatures of the guarantors the Accords would have had no relevance or force.

On the one hand, it could be that the parties to the Accords were of such weak character (in the sense of state-ness and sovereignty) that their signatures alone were not of solemn and trustworthy enough nature. On the other hand, it could be that the Accords were much more about the United States and USSR making a deal to back away from yet another Cold War flare up. With this in mind, either Afghanistan had no possible sovereign identity, or Afghanistan's sovereign character was not the point. Afghan sovereignty was either very important but also at present completely non-existent, or any question of Afghan sovereignty paled beside the much greater question of Democracy versus Communism. The notion of a formal/informal discursive knowledge regime fits well in any combination of these options.

Formally, there must be recourse to international law but informally the parties who ought to be actors within international law didn't quite have the character for it. The mujahidin were not even in the equation, despite having been the whole justification for US involvement in the first place. The mujahidin were, in fact, given the mantle of "the Afghans" in the eyes of the United States – yet in the process of the Accords they were stripped of any semblance of agency. The Afghan government, whether we see it as representative of an Afghanistan or not, signed an Accord with a neighboring country which had some geopolitical interest in the outcome of the conflict but no explicit involvement (other than the vehicle by which the US funneled funding and arms to the Afghan resistance).

Thus, formally there is a sense that an Afghanistan is there in name, but informally neither the conflict nor the Accords were about Afghanistan in itself. This is justifiable only by way of the narratives referred to through this chapter. The Afghan crisis was suborned by the geopolitical logic of the Cold War, which was itself understood explicitly as another iteration of the old Great Game. The Afghans themselves were perhaps heroic in their resistance to an evil ideology, but had no significant character when it came to acts of actual sovereign will.

This is reminiscent of tensions within the construction of sovereignty previously mentioned. Cynthia Weber argues that sovereignty is always an interpretive moment:

> "Intervention practices participate in stabilizing the meaning of sovereignty. This is so because discussions of intervention invariably imply questions of sovereignty… When

intervention practices occur, they are accompanied by justifications on the part of an intervening state to a supposed international community of sovereign states. In offering justifications for their intervention practices, diplomats of intervening states simultaneously assume the existence of norms regulating state practices and an interpretive community that will judge intervention practices in accordance with these norms. But just as in the case of international regimes, it is international practice that constitutes the boundaries and capacities of both sovereign states and international interpretive communities." (Weber 1995: 4-5)

The meaning of sovereignty for Afghanistan is constituted each time it is invoked, even though arguments are made that it is a natural, crystallized, permanent meaning. This is done by way of appealing to a mythical agreement agreed to by a community of states, a community which is defined by its agreement on sovereignty. The internal tensions of sovereignty are stabilized in large part through an enforced, an agreed upon, an ignored silence.

For Derrida, this is explicated through a specification of the 'beast' and the 'sovereign', but the beast is not separate from the sovereign. Rather it is what adds both force and meaning to the sovereign. The beast represents force, unchained and unmatched force without bound – this is the power of the sovereign but it is also, simultaneously the roguish, the unruly and destructive power which it is the responsibility of the sovereign to guard against. To protect the citizenry from. For the shepherd to protect his sheep from the wolf, he must himself have the aspect of the wolf – but that aspect must be silent, hidden, *bound* by rules of right and justice… even while the nature of the wolf's power is that it is wild and unbound.

"…the silent voice commands him to command, but to command in silence, to become sovereign, to learn how to command, to give orders, and to learn to command in silence by learning that it is silence, the silent order that commands and leads the world. With dove's footsteps, on dove's feet… What the dove's footsteps and the wolf's footsteps have in common is that one scarcely hears them. But the one announces war, the war chief, the sovereign who orders war, the other silently orders peace." (Derrida 2008: 4)

This binding, this order for peace and for justice is unnatural to the unfettered sovereign power of the wolf, yet without that conditioning the power of the wolf is destructive, unjust, unjustified – illegitimate. Sovereignty can only exist when it has the savage force necessary to lay its claim, but it can only be just when it refuses to use that power unjustly – and when it hides the very possibility of doing so behind constructs such as the rule of law. One must say "hides" because for the power of the

sovereign to be real, it cannot in fact be bound by the law it creates. It cannot create the law and then be governed by it, because then sovereign power lies in something else, something uncontrolled, something unable to actually wield power. The sovereign can only guarantee the law if it stands outside the law, but its existence outside the law must remain an enforced, agreed upon silence. (ibid 17)

If Derrida's argument holds, then Afghanistan has a problematic relationship with sovereignty. There is a generally accepted idea that states all have the right to sovereignty, but that supposed right can only exist within a given polity if that polity has the power to enforce that claim. On the other hand, if one sovereign power intervenes upon another polity, metanarratives on the liberal state system suggest that an extraordinary situation must exist for that intervention to be legitimate. There rises this uneasy tension where "weak" states loudly emphasize the rights of state sovereignty whereas in cases of intervention interveners emphasize the responsibilities of sovereignty – abrogated by the polity which is being intervened upon – thus making that intervention legitimate by its humane necessity.

Further, Weber argues that while sovereignty is assumed to have a specific and enduring character, it is in fact a concept which shifts in relation to historic and geographical context. In analyzing the interaction between concepts of intervention and sovereignty, Weber says:

> "With respect to statehood, sovereignty refers to what a state must do (performative criteria) in order to be (receive intersubjective recognition as) a sovereign state… What a state must do to be sovereign is to organize its domestic affairs in such a way so that its ultimate source of sovereign authority is authorized to speak for its particular domestic community in international affairs. Yet the source of sovereign authority has changed historically." (Weber 1992: 200)

Interventions come about, for Weber, when how sovereign power is situated (or, presumably, fails to be situated) within a state becomes an international issue. This might be seen as a humanitarian issue or a security issue and can be explained in terms of both as regards state failure. A failed state has either such an ineffective, corrupt, or ill-meaning source of sovereign power that it becomes an international issue – either on behalf of the victim-citizens or because a deteriorating domestic situation is creating regional (or, with the Global War on Terror, global) security threats. This constitutes a loss of sovereign authority.

What makes a domestic situation constitute an international issue – and thus a loss of sovereign authority – has changed significantly over time and in relation to different geopolitical contexts.

"How meanings take shape and are put to work - by whom and on whose behalf - has implications for just what forms international practice legitimately can take. The examples of interventionary activity in the 1820s and 1910s are cases in point. They bring to the fore the importance of casting meanings in particular ways which enable specific forms of practice to take place legitimately in the eyes of a supposed interpretive community." (ibid: 203)

In this way, the decision to authorize an intervention (and rendering the judgment that a polity has surrendered its sovereign *authority* to act on behalf of its people) is an interpretive moment which crystallizes, for that moment and place, a particular articulation of sovereignty. That is to say *interventions produce sovereignty*. That interpretive moment is also a reflection on the sovereign status of the intervener. How and why a certain conception of sovereignty is ascendant at a particular time must be contextualized in the international political climate and especially in the context of those intervening parties and their articulations of sovereign authority.

These specific articulations are complicated – both empowered and made self-destructive – by Derrida's analysis of sovereignty. Intervention is possible, but also ultimately problematic - due to the interaction of beastly *loup* and virtuous protector, of limitless power and ethical constraint, of residing outside of and defining law but finding legitimacy only within the bounds of that law. Intervention on behalf of a particular articulation of sovereignty intends to privilege and naturalize that conception of sovereignty, as well as the intervener's place as epitomizing that sovereign notion.

In the case of the Cold War, Afghanistan had to be saved from an illegitimate government propped up by what was considered ideologically to be the greatest evil in the world, Communism. The United States, as epitome of righteous sovereignty (in this ideological narrative), had *no choice but to intervene*. Narratives in the West at the time spoke of the United States' responsibility to stand up against the evils of communism, to save Afghanistan, to help it reclaim its rightful place as a responsible and legitimate member of the society of right-acting states. The very act of intervention – itself the denial of a right to sovereignty and the forceful destruction of sovereign status – *creates* sovereignty. The United States, in this instance, is cast as a sovereign force, enforcing sovereign dictates from outside and above constraint – thus being authorized to do the unauthorizable and intervene – but also bound by a code a conduct which itself was seen to be definitional of a particular articulation of liberal capitalist-democratic sovereignty.

An interventionist act both constitutes particular instances of sovereign definition and simultaneously makes that articulation of sovereignty problematic for the intervener. The intervener

acts on behalf of a particular conception of sovereignty, champions and epitomizes it and attempts to infuse the failed state with a new sovereign authority based on those sovereign principles.

These arguments can be situated in terms of this project's central questions. "Why are we able to talk about failed states?" It is possible to talk about failed states, in this depiction of sovereignty, because failed states simply don't have the power to shape the narrative on their identity. More than that, though, it is imperative that failed states be talked about *as* failed states in an intervention, because that intervention must be seen as legitimate in order to avoid undermining the sovereign legitimacy of the intervener. Thus in Afghanistan during the Cold War, Afghanistan was a victim of the Soviet Union which abrogated its sovereignty, invading and occupying and visiting atrocities on the Afghan people. Afghanistan naturally would / should hold sovereignty, but it had been stripped away by the evil Soviet Union – thus it was left for the valorous United States to reluctantly intervene on behalf of the Afghan victim.

Secondly, "what assumptive discursive knowledges empower the dominant (orthodox liberal / policy) narrative(s) of intelligibility?"

Each aspect of that justification is important. It is important that the Soviet Union be seen as evil, as a loup, as representative of the illegitimate use of sovereign power. Afghanistan, the victim, is the focus of that illegitimate use of sovereign power. In a normal, natural state of affairs Afghanistan would hold sovereignty itself, over itself. In a normal, natural state of affairs we see that Afghanistan is discursively positioned as the friend of America (even though there had been little friendship before) by way of being a member of this society of good-acting sovereign states. Thus the intervention by the United States is not only just, but it is actually an act that reinforces the legitimacy of this so-called international society of states. By intervening on Afghanistan, dominant conceptions of sovereignty are reinforced even as they are disrupted by the very act of intervention.

Then, "how do particular assumptions about sovereignty, justice and successful statehood by intervening parties negatively impact upon the specificity of the Afghan crisis, currently conceptualized primarily through the discursive lens of state failure?"

In this intervention, the United States intervenes in order to restore sovereignty to Afghanistan. Yet the nature of Afghanistan's sovereignty – and perhaps of sovereignty in general – is constructed anew in an interpretive moment. Even more tellingly, that interpretive moment itself has little to do with Afghanistan, purportedly the subject of the moment. Rather, this interpretive moment is more

accurately focused on the ideological struggle between the Soviet Union and the United States and its European allies. Both the USSR and the US intervened on Afghanistan, claiming justification by way of protecting/restoring Afghan sovereignty in the face of illegitimate interference from the US/USSR respectively.

Justice in the very specific case of Afghanistan is generalized within the much wider ideological conflict of the time. The USSR must intervene on Afghanistan to guarantee its legitimate government's primacy in a country being disrupted by US influence. The US must intervene on Afghanistan to counter the unjust invasion of Afghanistan by illegitimate Soviet actions. Afghanistan is present but invisible, silent, a victim with no agency or character. As a sovereign, it is a failure – it has failed to be powerful enough to protect itself and now is the subject-space of an ideological conflict, both sides of which claim to be interested only in returning sovereignty to Afghanistan.

Chapter 7 – Post Sept 11 Afghanistan

"After the September 11 attacks, the Bush Administration decided to militarily overthrow the

Taliban… President Bush articulated a policy that equated those who harbor terrorists to

terrorists themselves, and judged that a friendly regime in Kabul was needed..."

Katzman 2013

In the post- September 11 context, Western interactions with Afghanistan are typically seen through two lenses: state failure/building and the War on Terror. Both approaches resonate strongly with historical ways of 'knowing' Afghanistan wherein its indeterminacy is a decisive factor in how it is positioned. The idea of civilization and Afghanistan's place outside of the civilized world is key, though how the concept of civilization is mobilized has changed in some ways.

Afghanistan is situated within broad, orthodox understandings of the international security landscape. Yet there is a tension between two contexts – is Afghanistan a legitimate state which has failed and is in need of rehabilitation? Or is Afghanistan a tactical space, an ideological battleground where the War on Terror is naturally played out? The specificity of interactions between the 'West' and Afghanistan make possible interrogations as to how and why Afghanistan's identity is twisted in different ways to make it 'fit' within both narratives despite tensions within them.

Contemporary discourse on Afghanistan is situated in ways that have nothing to do with Afghanistan itself. In an apparent departure from earlier narratives, Afghanistan's character itself is rarely spoken of in obviously positive or negative terms. On the rare instances in which Afghan character is brought up, it is largely conceptualized in the sense of victims and uncivilized people. Continuity from previous narratives come from the way in which Afghanistan's indeterminacy and lack of character is emphasized.

Afghanistan is at all times situated as an *ideological battleground*. In turns it is situated as a failed state which requires nation-building (in which the liberal state model is valorized) and as a battleground between the forces of civilization and terror. The first instance mobilizes Afghanistan's indeterminacy to assume a 'natural' history of statehood which has been interrupted by a period of failure. In the second instance, Afghanistan is understood often in the context of Vietnam rather than

via serious attempts to understand Afghanistan through its own history. Both represent a continuation of discursive trends we see historically in relation to Afghanistan in which the formal/informal dichotomy plays a key role.

Civility and legitimacy are strongly tied together in contemporary narratives. Terrorism is barbaric and illegitimate. Western action is in the name of civilization, legitimate, and designed to fill Afghanistan's emptiness in with legitimacy. Afghanistan's place is indeterminate, by turns legitimate and illegitimate – wishing after and reaching for legitimacy while beset on all sides with illegitimate power. Further, narratives on Afghanistan in the contemporary sense as well as the historical narratives from which knowledge on Afghanistan is drawn assume barbarism and illegitimacy of the space. The very notion of state failure is packed full of these same notions.

This findings chapter explores contemporary discourses on Afghanistan briefly, in order to expose continuities to historical narratives on Afghanistan. Those connections exist, but are not necessarily obvious due to the mechanisms of the formal/informal divide which began seeing expression in the aftermath of the third Anglo-Aghan war. This will allow for considerations of the state of Afghan narratives generally and how these particular conceptions of Afghanistan are destructive to any project intended to help Afghanistan overcome the numerous difficulties faced. Alternative conceptions of Afghanistan's challenges will be suggested through recourse to Derrida's conceptions of democracy, sovereignty and justice.

Every intervention analyzed for this project thus far has involved a sort of casting about, discursively, for ways to situate and know Afghanistan – that exotic, alien, *empty* place. This final chapter sees a repeat of the same phenomenon. Similar to the Cold War narratives on Afghanistan, there is a tendency to reach to Vietnam for ways of understanding Afghanistan… as well as to notions of Afghanistan as a savage, barbaric space.

Afghan Indeterminacy - Afghanistan as Vietnam

The temptation to draw parallels between Afghanistan and Vietnam is not surprising. A rallying cry during the Cold War intervention in Afghanistan was to make Afghanistan into the Soviet Union's Vietnam. Those calls grew more triumphant as the USSR became more and more bogged down in its Afghan invasion. With that in mind, it's not surprising that by the time President Obama took office there was a plethora of discursive material comparing Afghanistan with Vietnam – this time in an American context fretting that Afghanistan would become yet another Vietnam for the United States. For instance:

> "Could Afghanistan become another Vietnam? …Premature the questions may be, [but]… unreasonable they are not… echoes of Vietnam are unavoidable." (Apple 2001)

This article was part of a series in the *New York Times* in October, 2001, analyzing possible implications of a conflict in Afghanistan. It discusses a number of apparent similarities in how the government at the time was treating the idea of invading Afghanistan compared to Vietnam early in the days of that intervention. Further, the character of such a conflict is considered to be substantively similar, the possibility of a backbreaking quagmire, and the question of what a future would look like for Afghan governmental leadership.

These concerns reflected worries that the United States was getting involved in a military action that wouldn't be easily resolved. Those fears become all the more pointed when considering the outcomes of historic entanglements in Afghanistan. Yet that very history raises questions as to why it would be necessary to resort to stories about Vietnam to understand Afghanistan – looking at Afghanistan itself provides numerous and more specific analogies. Yet that has rarely happened in post-September 11 narratives on Afghanistan. When it has happened, analogies have tended to refer back to Orientalist strands of narrative.

Around the time President Obama took office and began working on a reworked Afghanistan policy, media typifications of Afghanistan as Vietnam gained significant popularity.

> "…the L.B.J. model — a president who aspired to reshape America at home while fighting a losing war abroad — is one that haunts Mr. Obama's White House… Just as Mr. Johnson believed he had no choice but to fight in Vietnam to contain communism, Mr. Obama last week portrayed Afghanistan as the bulwark against international terrorism." (Baker 2009)

Baker discusses apparent similarities between the conflict in Afghanistan and Vietnam, particularly in the context of leadership and decisions in policy making. The character of Afghanistan itself is not important, except that it is a quagmire which is sucking in more forces than most people believe it should. Justifications for involvement are considered to be the same as well, by both media and President. The war is seen as a sub-optimal burden, but it is cast as a matter of absolute ideological necessity. That seeming necessity is set alongside growing public disaffection for the war, as in Vietnam, and the correlation seems complete from this limited approach.

This view of Afghanistan as Vietnam wasn't limited to the United States. British newspaper The Telegraph featured a similar piece:

> "He added: "Afghanistan is becoming our Vietnam. I have had emails from Vietnam veterans, saying 'This is just the same as we experienced.'… Just as American politicians then argued

the Vietnam War was essential to stop the spread of communism, a threat which never materialised, so he thought the British Government had "hoodwinked" the public over the need to be in Afghanistan." (Adams 2009)

The Telegraph takes on board this Afghanistan – Vietnam comparison, highlighting an interview with the British father of a deceased Afghan veteran. The idea here is that Afghanistan, like Vietnam, is being justified by an ideological struggle that the public should be wary of. This may or may not be true, but is again indicative of the inability of the dominant narrative to treat Afghanistan and the intervention there as a unique occurrence.

The Afghanistan/Vietnam narrative became so pervasive that the *New York Times* put together a conglomeration of expert analysis using Vietnam as a touchstone. (Etheridge 2009) Respected publication Foreign Policy followed suit:

"But the Soviet experience in Afghanistan isn't what everyone is comparing Obama's current predicament to; it's Vietnam. The president knows it, and part of his speech was a rebuttal of those comparisons. It was a valiant effort, but to no avail. Afghanistan is Vietnam all over again."

…and:

"To suggest that the two conflicts will have different outcomes because the U.S. cause in Afghanistan is just (whereas, presumably from the speech, the war in Vietnam was not) is simply specious. The courses and outcomes of wars are determined by strategy, not the justness of causes or the courage of troops." (Johnson and Mason 2009)

Foreign Policy strongly endorses the comparison between Afghanistan and Vietnam from policy and strategic standpoints. It criticizes various arguments of what makes the Afghan conflict different, arguing that in all substantive ways they are highly similar conflicts. It does accept the idea that there is a moral difference – there is moral justification for the US to be in Afghanistan – but even that moral justification isn't enough to substantively separate the conflict from the Vietnam conflict.

This last piece was in response to an Obama speech. That speech itself came about in response to this overbearing weight of narrative suggesting that Afghanistan was, in fact, another Vietnam. The President tried to articulate why they were dissimilar:

""Unlike Vietnam, we are joined by a broad coalition of 43 nations that recognizes the legitimacy of our action," Obama said during his speech at West Point Tuesday night." (Hornick 2009)

The article itself made arguments about the similarities between Afghanistan and Vietnam, without really breaking any new ground from previously highlighted articles. What is striking here is the argument President Obama puts forward for the uniqueness of the Afghan conflict. President Obama's

quote suggests the difference is in legitimacy – the US intervention in Afghanistan is more legitimate on both moral and international customary grounds. Nothing to do with particular character of Afghanistan. This is yet another emphasis of the basic emptiness and indeterminacy of Afghanistan's persona.

Afghan Indeterminacy - Empty/Barbaric Afghanistan

Emptiness is a recurring theme – the years following the attacks of September 11 involved numerous accounts of Afghanistan as an empty space, a wild land populated by the barbarous. The *New York Times* ran a feature series entitled 'a nation challenged: Afghanistan' in which persons of note – be they experts or individuals with personal experience of Afghanistan – wrote about the unique challenges facing Afghanistan. (Apple 2001 mentioned previously was part of the same series.) A 2002 article in this series emphasized the empty and untamed nature of Afghanistan – a place which not even Afghans could conceive of or control.

> "Along this desolate frontier said to be teeming with Al Qaeda and Taliban fighters, the border with Pakistan seems as elusive as the fugitives themselves." (Dexter 2002)

There is no control of Afghanistan's borders, be it by choice (not worthwhile) or by simple lack of capacity – or both. The Afghan government forces were further cast as both provincial and ineffective.

> "Mr. Wali, the commander at the post, said his men checked the documents of every truck and driver that crossed the border. But as he spoke, cars and trucks passed through… given a quick glance by the guards and sent on their way. None were searched. When the guards' performance was pointed out… Mr. Wali smiled and shrugged. ''Most drivers around here don't have documents; most people don't have any identification at all,'' he said. ''This is not England, France or America.''" (ibid)

This suggests a certain amused exasperation at the rustic officials who seemingly don't even understand simple security procedures. Interestingly, there are echoes of the formal/informal divide in the wake of the third Anglo Afghan war here. Afghans are seen as playing at civility and sophistication but at their heart are naïve and irresponsible, children compared to the mature civility of the West playing at games they don't understand. Any of those vehicles might have held Al Qaeda operatives, or explosives and arms. The response of this provincial, we are told, is to smile and shrug, suggesting that if we want things done properly we should look to England, or France, or the United States. Further to this theme:

> "Armed by two decades of war, unimpeded by a weak government, the warriors Afghans mustered to fight first the Soviets and then the Taliban are fighting one another for coarser causes these days: land, money, power." (Walden 2003)

The Afghans are used to fighting and when not fighting to keep foreigners out of Afghanistan will turn on one another. This resonates with 19th century typifications of the Afghan persona. Indeed, there were outright appeals to 19th century voices to help understand Afghanistan today.

> "The problem is that Afghans - especially the majority Pashtun tribe - will always fight... Tribalism, kinship, blood-feud and skirmish are part of the national psyche. We forget this at our cost."

> And:

> "...as he [the "hero" Brigadier General Henry Brooke] put it: 'I fear we could not hope to change the nature of an Afghan, who is born a treacherous, lying, murdering scoundrel.' Well, I would not go that far. Yet... [one can] empathize with the Victorian commander..."

> And:

> "Small wonder in the past that British soldiers in-theatre preferred to shoot themselves than fall captive to the people Henry Brooke dubbed 'savages'. Modern insurgents are quite as ruthless as their forebears." (Jackson 2010)

These quotes are taken from an argument that the United States and its NATO allies must leave Afghanistan. The country is doomed to 'die' because of its nature, which hasn't changed all that much since 1880 (and presumably earlier, as it is barbaric in its fundamental nature). The article reaches into the past to quote a British officer who was involved in the 2nd Anglo Afghan War, and who was killed there, tapping into his narratives on barbarism and savagery to "help" understand today's Afghanistan and why it's hopeless to believe it can ever be anything more than a catastrophic place of violence. Indeed, attempting to save and uplift Afghanistan is a foolish prospect at best.

Barbaric Afghanistan is not the only trope borrowed from the 19th century to transmit knowledge about Afghanistan today. There were also references to mystical and mysterious Afghanistan. Following is an account from an American who had travelled in Afghanistan in 1971.

> "Everything about Afghanistan was terrifying and thrilling from the pockmarked faces of the men... (we never did see the faces of any women) to the daggers all the men wore in their waistbands in Kandahar. ...the horse and buggies that served as taxis in Herat... Maybe somehow Afghanistan can be restored to a magical, mysterious and majestic land, too foreign to know, too fantastic to forget." (Cohen 2001)

This is a wistful voice longing after a mystified Afghanistan not at all dissimilar from narratives on the wonders of Afghanistan during the second and third Anglo-Afghan wars. At those times, this longing for a better time was justification for intervention, though a rather different sort of intervention.

Yet in both cases the idea of intervention is deemed acceptable because those currently in power in Afghanistan (at the time of each respective statement) had mismanaged Afghanistan into a complete disaster. Perhaps more interestingly in the case of this project, however, is the way in which it suggests that Afghanistan's value is in its quaint eccentricity. Afghanistan should be restored to its mystical baseline because it is so charming to the Western eye.

Not all typifications of emptiness reached back so far, however. Others suggest threads which tie straight forwardly with contemporary descriptions of state failure in orthodox policy literature. That is to say, the emptiness here purportedly derives from a capacity gap and / or a lack of political will (arising most often from corruption or ignorance).

> "Afghanistan will be a functioning democracy only when citizens can take their grievances against the central government to elected local representatives instead of to armed local warlords. Those grievances are real. Some governors and police chiefs Mr. Karzai has appointed are thuggish and corrupt. Antidrug efforts go after poor farmers while traffickers thrive. Alternative development lags. A lack of judges stymies the rule of law." (New York *Times* 2005)

Discursive Legacies of Indeterminacy

Indeterminacy is a seemingly ever-present driver to the narrative on Afghanistan. In any given intervention, Afghanistan is (once again / for the first time) an unknown. It represents an empty space – not only on the map but in what the popular mind 'knows' about the region and the world. Afghanistan is mystical, magical, bizarre... unknown. Thus in every intervention this dissertation has analyzed, there has been a tendency in Western speakers to reach externally for comparisons, other knowledge regimes to apply to the Afghan case. Though Afghanistan is demonstrably not empty – there are (many) people there with a (multitude of) history (histories) and a culture(s) – it is made functionally empty by layering of outside knowledges without recourse to concern over Afghanistan's specificity.

This takes place not only in popular and policy discourse, but also in academic attempts to insert some specificity into policy considerations regarding Afghanistan.

> "The unfolding drama in Afghanistan is likely to have significant implications for the 'New Great Game', which many think will play out in the coming years in the adjacent region of Central Asia and South Asia. As well as the US and Russia, several other states such as China and India have interests in this region Transition, talking about Afghanistan as a space for ideological conflict." (Baral: 700)

Baral talks about Afghanistan in terms of Great Game, Vietnam, and likens geopolitics in the area as a game. About terrorism, but also power struggles between US/Russia, US/China, India/Pakistan. While being critical of normal way of doing things in Afghanistan, draws its knowledge of Afghanistan from the same discursive knowledge structures.

> "Afghanistan is difficult both to defeat and to control, but it has seldom shown a serious inclination to control itself… Its people are afflicted by chronic poverty, backwardness and ignorance." (ibid: 701)

Baral argues that Afghanistan's history as a victim of external intervention comes largely because of its nature.

> "Afghans are ardent nationalists, but their actions weaken national unity and integration. They are known for their spirit of fierce independence, but this independence may have been jeopardized by the intermeshing of internal conflicts and external intervention." (ibid: 700)

Afghanistan, then, is not an appropriate partner in its own reconstruction. Attempts to rely on Afghans in some way to be part of the Afghan solution is, for Baral, part of why as of 2013 all attempts to install something democratic in the country had failed. (ibid 703) Thus, falling back on underlying assumptions of Great Game metaphors, Baral argues that Afghanistan must be understood and policy must be formulated in the context of interests that external actors hold in Afghanistan. He focuses primarily on competition between India and Pakistan, suggesting that while the United States sees Afghanistan as a place to play out its war on terror, these two countries see everything the US does there in the context of their regional competition. Further, both India and Pakistan make their own geopolitical moves within Afghanistan with an eye toward their conflict, rather than the ideological conflict of civilization versus terrorism (though both use that language to differing extents). (ibid: 704-706) Thus, even the project of nation building cannot rightfully involve the nation which is to be (re)built. It is acted upon, its agency or potential for agency denied.

While the exposition of regional motives in Afghanistan is helpful, Baral's work relies on legacies of British narratives on Afghanistan to understand that space. Every action in Afghanistan from the 19th century until today is, in essence, another iteration of the Great Game.

> "The three Afghan wars constituting the first Great Game demonstrated the strong nationalism and fighting spirit of the Afghans. In the second Great Game they were able to defeat the Soviet Union with the support of the US and its allies. The third Great Game is apparently heading towards America's defeat." (ibid 711)

This is not an uncommon issue. Not only do we see a significant amount of discursive material leaning on old positioning of Afghan identity as barbaric and wild, but that positioning has quite widely enabled Afghanistan to be positioned as a geostrategic game board, devoid of specific character on its own without outside – and more important – conflicts to give it identity.

Afghanistan the Game Board – the War on Terror

A source of significant continuity in narratives on Afghanistan is derived from its seeming indeterminate emptiness. In the contemporary sense, Afghanistan has been filled up with notions of geostrategic necessity and ideological imperative. Afghanistan is once again being thought of primarily as a tactical space, a game board whereupon geopolitical games are properly carried out. These geopolitical competitions are not simply about power or protecting one's dominion, however. Since the third Anglo-Afghan war, Afghanistan has been a place where interveners felt that conflict over certain core tenets of the international system were at stake. Civilization has been a key thread for some time. Democracy and justice also became important motivators during the Cold War and those continue on. Those successive layers still seem to exist but the moral imperative underpinning conflict in Afghanistan has changed.

Communism was figured to be a source of great evil which only the United States could successfully lead the fight against. This holds true with terrorism as well. Despite a seeming surface similarity, this ideological imperative seems even stronger in that very few countries consider themselves 'neutral' and even fewer align themselves with the interests identified as terrorist in nature. Rather than a conflict between two different potential futures of the international system as was the case in the Cold War, the global war on terrorism is cast as a war for the very survival of an international system in itself. It is a struggle at the center of which lies Afghanistan – a place where the war on terror should be fought because for reasons that seem to make sense to a lot of people if we fight terror over there then we won't have to fight terror at home.

This is a justification brought out from time to time by leadership figures. President Bush spoke regularly in defense of this war on terror:

> "There is legitimate debate about many of these decisions. But there can be little debate about the results: America has gone more than seven years without another terrorist attack on our soil." (Bush 2009)

> And:

"We can decide to stop fighting the terrorists… but they will not decide to stop

fighting us… If we leave, they will follow us." (Bush 2006)

This was a recurring theme which saw expression frequently in civil discourse debating US interventions in Afghanistan as well as Iraq – and anywhere else involved in the global war on terror. It plays in very strongly with the idea that this was a clash, a global clash, between civilization and barbarism. It is an ever-present and unending threat.

"[In reference to events in Iraq] I had started to become concerned about two other

phenomena. The first was… Islamic extremism and terrorism… Afghanistan was its training

ground." Worse still, "In Afghanistan al-Qaeda trained its recruits in the use of poisons and

chemicals…" (Blair 2004)

And the threat is unending.

"…terrorists [will] redouble their efforts… they carry on killing in Afghanistan." (Blair 2004)

And:

"The murders in Madrid are a reminder that the *civilized world* is at war…" There is no neutral

ground – no neutral ground – in the fight between civilization and terror, because there is no

neutral ground between good and evil, freedom and slavery, and life and death." (Bush 2004,

emphasis mine)

The threat, not to put too fine a point on it, is to civilization itself. To be against terrorism is to be for civilization (and not to forget the portion of the Bush Doctrine in the war on terror that suggests one was either an ally of the United States or an enemy of civilization.) Fighting terrorism was part of the conflict – the other part was democracy.

"The rise of democratic institutions in Afghanistan and Iraq is a great step toward a goal of

lasting importance to the world… in the greater Middle East as alternatives to fanaticism,

resentment, and terror." (Bush 2004)

Democracy was held up as a banner of civilization – the alternative to terrorism and the greatest weapon against terrorism. So Afghanistan is a battleground for the soul of the world. With such momentous concerns there seems to be no place for consideration of Afghanistan itself – what sort of character or identity Afghanistan in itself might have. At most, at best, it is a space made empty of anything but victimhood by the evils of terrorism. At worst, it is representative of terrorism itself. If Afghanistan can take up the mantle of democracy and become an ally in the war on terror, then

Afghanistan was a victim. If Afghanistan remains a failed state then it may be populated by many victims, but it will continue on as little more than a battleground.

The Heritage Foundation, a think tank which was very influential in the first decade of 2000, got in on the matter rather strongly as well.

> "In the issue that matters most--our survival, the civilized world's survival, the spread of democracy, the war against terrorism and radical Islam…" (Bennett 2004)

Terrorism is an existential threat to civilization. The United States is basically a champion of civilization. Islam, here, is also seen as fundamental to terrorism:

> "The problem is radical Islam. Not terrorism, radical Islam. Let's get it exactly right: radical Islam, of which there is too much. Moderate Islam – *where and if it exists* – must raise its voice against that radical call." [ibid, emphasis mine]

Where and if moderate Islam exists, it must successfully help to fight against terrorism. Failure is tantamount to complicity. If Afghanistan is a failed state, then Afghanistan is a fundamental cause of terrorism – and, by turns, a victim. Also, the Middle East is full of thugs. The invasion of Iraq (and Afghanistan) were good because:

> "The Middle East has one less thug leading one less thuggish state… Our efforts in Iraq rank among the crowning achievements of our nation, of our democratic will against tyranny, and of our goodwill for human rights." (Bennett 2004)

There is some kind of connection between the region and barbarism. Terrorism is prevalent here because here is a region that is hostile to civilization. Conflict is the only way forward – no identity can exist other than "them" or "us" – one is either for civilization or for terror, and thus a barbarian.

> "It [terrorism] is an ideology that cannot be appeased or negotiated with, but which must be defeated. The terrorist [attacks]… were not the consequences of U.S. or British foreign policy, but part of an epic confrontation between the forces of barbarism and the forces of civilization." (Gardiner 2006)

This then is the justification for interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. It makes civilization safer. The war on terror is a war between civilization and barbarism. Afghanistan is expected to pick a side, as if Afghanistan is somehow personified and not, as a character, involved in this yet. Afghanistan is by turns a battleground and breeding pit for terrorism on the one hand, while on the other it is seen as a potential ally in the war on terror: "Afghanistan's yearning to rejoin the civilized world…" (Burns 2002)

This change in character would come about if Afghanistan is able to take up the mantle of democracy, if it is comprised of moderate Muslims who throw off the yolk of terrorism. It is, somehow, boiled down to an apparent choice that is so simple to conceive of. Yet at the same time, Afghanistan is a failed state. Empty. Collapsed. A victim. Helpless before the scourge of terrorism. Thus, it requires saving (but violence on Afghanistan is justified because it is simultaneously victim and villain).

Situating Afghanistan within the Global War on Terror

Critical legal scholar Nick Sciullo wrote on the indeterminate nature of terrorism and the destructive effects the struggle to cope with the notion of terrorism has on law and security policy. His purpose was to:

> "…engage in a macro-level analysis of the way the legal academy conceptualizes terrorism-
> not how it discusses acts of terrorism… terrorism has an absent referent, i.e., the idea of
> terrorism has been disembodied from the act of terrorism… the GWOT has far-reaching
> implications that threaten to debase our legal system and our civil rights regime." (561)

He wrote that concern with terrorism in the United States as a focus of policy only became prevalent in the mid 1990's. More intricate and potentially invasive legislation has been introduced in the wake of successive terrorist incidents in the United States. In each instance, government authority has increased at the cost of civil liberties.

> "This fight against terrorism has problematized our modern world because it positioned us in
> a complex battle against an unknown… Seemingly, it is us versus them… This dichotomous
> thinking forces an oversimplification of relations and demands diametrical opposition, instead
> of careful analysis..." (564)

Policy as relates to terrorism has tended to be both reactionary and heavy handed. In this dichotomous 'us versus them' theme – often articulated as civilization versus barbarism / terrorism / evil – the overriding necessity of defeating terrorism means that all means are justifiable. Sciullo is particularly interested in how this allows for a coalescing of additional powers being reserved for the government at the expense of civil rights, traditionally associated with the safeguarding of justice on an individual level. Thus, the imperatives of the war on terror require that concerns with justice be set aside in the face of a much larger threat to the fundamental nature of justice – a threat to the notion of civilization itself.

Sciullo describes this problem with reference to Descartes and his "ghost in the machine" concept. In this case, terrorism acts as a ghost in the machine of U.S. national security – being itself vague and largely defying settled definition while simultaneously informing wide swaths of not only security policy but other policy areas that are only tenuously related to security.

> "[T]he all-encompassing fear of terrorism has morphed itself into a battle against the unlocated specter of terrorism's reality. In this regard, the United States is battling ghosts… further complicated when, as Jacques Derrida describes, 'every terrorist in the world claims to be responding in self-defense to a prior terrorism on the part of the state…'[39]" (565)

Terrorism, Sciullo argues, defies definition. It is well documented within the legal and policy professions that there is no definitive definition of terrorism. Individual government agencies within the United States have their own unique definitions of terrorism by which they order their particular policy responses to challenges of terrorism as they see it, in the context of their duties. This situation replicates itself with various governmental and quasi-governmental organs worldwide at various levels. Despite this well-known and widely accepted lack of clarity of what terrorism actually means, it is used as a fundamental linchpin of policy making and security protocols across agencies and nations. It is used to justify both domestic and international interventions. Sovereignty is impinged upon – both the sovereignties of external states and the supposed sovereign civil rights of citizens of these "civilized" states which are engaged in an existential struggle against terrorism. Sciullo argues that this nebulous nature to terrorism in fact encourages this wider governmental overreach:

> "This inability to define terrorism makes it difficult to engage terrorism constructively by forcing us to battle an ephemeral specter. Without a firm base upon which to build a legal regime to address non-state actors that engage in terrorism, law is bound to fail." (566)

Yet law acts, as we see in various legislative and interventionist actions. Thus the failure is not in a failure to act, but a failure to fulfill its purpose. Alternately, it represents the unmasking of sovereign power, the removal of a mask of legitimacy from the coercive power of the sovereign. The unmasking, for Derrida, of the 'loup'. (Derrida 2009: 6) That is to say, the loup is associated with the wolf, the powerful coercive aspect of sovereignty – the predator, a power which is sensed but unseen, and which observes all from behind a veil of anonymity and respectability. That veil of respectability is the law, which must act to be seen as protecting of and sensitive to justice.

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[39] Sciullo quotes Derrida from Borradori (2003): 103

In this sense, the existential struggle of civilization against terrorism authorizes, in fact demands, such a strident use of sovereign authority that the loup is stripped of its mask of legitimacy. Sovereign actions are required which are so drastic that they directly contradict the justifications of legality and civil right which have made the exercises of those powers legitimate. Indeed, in the case of Afghanistan this exercise of sovereignty has also been an exercise of stripping sovereignty, denying sovereignty – indeed denying personality and character and existential magnitude to Afghanistan.

The indeterminacy of terrorism and the indeterminacy of Afghan identity have thus been situated in a way as that they fill one another with meaning. Afghanistan has typically been situated, ideologically, as a space where civilization struggles against barbarism. Terrorism is depicted in a similar manner. The character of Afghanistan in this struggle is made further indeterminate, in that it is the stage for this struggle of civilization versus barbarism, and it is the object of violent intervention in this struggle. In being the object of intervention, Afghanistan is both enemy and victim – simultaneously needing to be vanquished and saved.

Thus there is a discordant tension within this narrative. If the struggle against terrorism is an ideological struggle in which the goods of civilization must be saved from the evils of barbaric terror, then its legitimacy must be unimpeachable. There are attempts to resolve this instability in the discourse, this auto-immune mechanism, by situating such interventions as state-building exercises. In the case of Afghanistan, it is the site of an ideological struggle of civilization versus barbaric terrorism – but the gestalt of Afghanistan itself is an object for which the West seeks salvation. In this war on terror, there is a simultaneous state-building project wherein Afghanistan-the-failed-state will be salvaged and *returned*, somehow, to legitimate statehood and respectability. This is, unfortunately, propped up on very tenuous supports that further introduce an untenable tension within this narrative.

Afghanistan the Uncivilized Victim – State-building in Afghanistan

Victimhood as an aspect of Afghan character then helps to justify intervention in Afghanistan, echoing particularly narratives during the Cold War but with some resonance to earlier interventions as well (i.e. Afghanistan ruled by Afghans is a horrible place – enlightened Western rule would make it safer and wealthier). Afghanistan is simultaneously the victim of terrorism and itself a wellspring of terrorism. The appropriate response to both of these is considered to be military intervention and a project of state-building. Afghanistan is a failed state, meaning it has lost its sovereignty and can be intervened upon. Afghanistan is a failed state, meaning it naturally would be a state if it had not, in itself and on its

own, failed in some important way. Afghanistan is a failure – Afghanistan is both a victim and the architect of its own victimhood – terrorist and terrorized.

It is for the West to intervene, to defeat terrorism both physically and as an ideology. The rebuilding of Afghanistan is central to this, but only if it can be conceived of as *re*building. Afghanistan must have its legitimacy restored – it must have its statehood *re*stored, rather than built up anew. Democracy and justice and sovereignty are things which can be restored, but only through Western beneficence. This simultaneously justifies the intervention in Afghanistan and validates dominant discourses on the character of Western civilization. Afghanistan, a place historically characterized from the outside as indeterminate and empty, is filled with meaning in a way that fills the United States and its allies with a particular character as well.

Central to this project is the notion of legitimacy and sovereignty. In order to be sovereign, the government must be legitimate – particular types of democracy and systems of justice must be in place for this to happen. Much was said in the media about the role of the United States in Afghanistan – its obligations and best strategies.

> "…if a majority of Afghans do not consider the president and his government to be legitimate,
> the military campaign [is a failure]…" (Rahel 2009)

Despite the complicated nature of the intervention and the cost involved, it is an intervention of extreme importance. Contemplating a pullout at any time was dangerous in the extreme.

> "The international community is risking the collapse of efforts to install a stable and
> legitimate government in Afghanistan…" (McWilliams 2002)

It was the duty of the international community and particularly the West to save Afghanistan and restore its legitimacy. This was both a moral responsibility and an important strategic consideration – one which held stable over time into the Obama Presidency.

> "President Obama now faces a new complication: enabling a badly tarnished partner to
> regain enough legitimacy to help the United States find the way out of an eight-year-old
> war." (Sanger 2009)

In terms of government policy, there is a great deal of material available – speeches, debates, policy papers, research papers for Congress. For the sake of brevity, we here consider a number of items from a 2009 policy discussion on Afghanistan and the most recent Congressional Research Service report

on Afghanistan. The 2009 discussion could be considered fairly pivotal – a new general had been put in charge of operations in Afghanistan and the Obama administration was working to find a unique approach to what was seen as an untenable dilemma in Afghanistan inherited from the previous regime.

General McCaffrey spoke before Congress on newly appointed NATO forces commander for Afghanistan Gen. McChrystal and policy in Afghanistan going forward from that point (2009). He spoke largely in terms of fighting terrorism:

> "General McChrystal is probably the most successful and courageous counter-terrorism fighter in the past 25 years." (McCaffrey 2009: 3)

And:

> "Our objective is to prevent the fall of the Afghan government to the Taliban and prevent al Qaeda from operating unchallenged in either Pakistan or Afghanistan. Afghanistan *must not again be a base for terrorists who want to kill Americans*. [emphasis mine] A return to Taliban rule in Afghanistan would… leave Afghanistan in perpetual violence… The people of Afghanistan and Pakistan have suffered the most at hands of violent Islamic extremists." (ibid: 2)

He spoke of that objective going hand in hand with state building – putting Afghanistan back on its feet as a better, stronger state.

> "*Enhance* the military, governance and economic *capacity* of Afghanistan. …strengthen *democracy* and build critical infrastructure…promote a more *capable* and *accountable* Afghan government… Address weaknesses of Afghanistan's elected government - *corruption* and *inability*…" (ibid: 2) [emphasis mine]

Central to this project is legitimacy – not only must Afghanistan's legitimacy be built up in order for it to be a successfully saved state, but that legitimacy is key to winning the ideological battle against terrorism.

> "In an insurgency, civil-military operations are centered on the socio-economic-political arena… the insurgency center of gravity is *legitimacy*…" (ibid: 4)

A common element in policy debates and testimony at this time was in its clinical language. Afghanistan's ills are diagnosed when it comes to fixing Afghanistan as a failed state. Afghanistan is diagnosed in line with contemporary orthodox narratives on state failure – thus Afghanistan must be fixed and made viable within the context of our liberal state system. Clinical language is used to diagnose Afghanistan's lack of will and capacity within the state failure paradigm, whereas more

emotional language is used in terms of terrorism and violence / threat to American ideals. However, it ignores questions of how/why Afghanistan ended up in this situation in the first place. Empty space for tactical games, then abandoned to its own fate again and again. Language of salvation is seen again and again in terms of interventions – when those interventions are necessary it becomes a moral imperative to save Afghanistan. Saving Afghanistan, here, is both a tactic in the ideological conflict / War on Terror as well as justification for that conflict.

In this narrative, what constitutes a successful government in function is dictated by an orthodoxy of civility which has historically purposefully excluded Afghanistan. Tracing the history of that alienation suggests that the individuation of blame inherent in the failed state discourse is very ill-placed. This strongly suggests a tension within the narrative of saving Afghanistan – this is true in two senses. First is the sense that 'saving Afghanistan' has been bandied about as the reasoning for interventions previously which had the effect ultimately of seeing Afghanistan pushed further to the margins. Secondly, Afghanistan is to be 'saved' in the sense of bringing it into this orthodox of civility, this society of nation-states which not only has it been intentionally excluded from up until now but also in a quite paternal 'civilizing the savage' sort of way which is at odds with the purported idea of the insurgency being beaten only by an Afghan solution. We may well find strong agreement with the idea that an Afghan solution is required, however an Afghan solution is simply not possible within the limits of discursive knowledge regarding Afghanistan as that narrative is currently framed.

A number of other policy experts gave testimony before the House Armed Services Committee at the same time. There is some variation as to the focus of individual experts, but a common theme is that the United States must reform Afghanistan and restore it to legitimacy – the legitimacy of the United States itself is at stake.

Barno supplies the most overt concern over US legitimacy – success is vital in Afghanistan to legitimacy. The United States has a: "…moral imperative of not abandoning the Afghan people… depredations of the Taliban… deadly spread of instability". (Barno 2009: 3) This moral imperative arises from Afghanistan's identity as a victim. Yet it is also a failed state which lacks sovereign legitimacy.

> "We must focus our diplomatic efforts in Kabul on reforming the next government of Afghanistan… primarily in the area of anti-corruption… If the… next government… is every bit as corrupt as the current one, our efforts will lack legitimacy in Afghanistan and at home." (ibid)

US legitimacy relies on changing the nature of Afghan governance away from corrupt, savage, tribal… and toward the civilized manners of governance espoused in dominant Western narratives on state-ness. In this, the United States has pure noblesse oblige – with the benighted savage turning to us for help:

> "The fundamental flaw in any U.S. approach to Afghanistan… remains the lack of confidence in American staying power: 'You Americans are not going to abandon us again [emphasis mine] are you?'". (1)

This emotional appeal which speaks to America's self-image continues in a more clinical way in testimony from a US Institute of Peace representative.

> "We… [can] help the host nation government and its population build rule of law, stable governance, a sustainable economy and the fundamental conditions for well-being." (Cole 2009: 3)

Here, the USIP talking about the role of civilians in helping to rebuild Afghanistan and set its government up right. Sounds good in many ways, but once again it's arguing that only through Western intervention can Afghanistan be fixed. Again, not in and of itself evil or even necessarily wrong – it's hard to argue that Afghanistan won't profit from assistance. However, this prescriptive approach ignores history – Afghanistan's specificity. Specifically, Afghanistan can and should be treated like every other society ever to suffer through conflict: "At the end of the day, in every society emerging from conflict, and *Afghanistan is no exception* [emphasis mine]…" (ibid: 5)

In order to save Afghanistan, the USIP argues before Congress that they and other civilian organizations like them just have a key role in uplifting the Afghan government. Teaching it how to govern properly – external expertise is needed in part because it is this expertise which allows proper diagnosis of Afghanistan's ills (which are, remember, the exact same as that of other societies emerging from conflict). Afghanistan needs:

> "a safe and secure environment, the rule of law, stable governance, a sustainable economy and social well-being…" (ibid)

And:

> "We must redouble our efforts to achieve the condition of a *legitimate monopoly over the means of violence* [emphasis original] by Afghans for Afghans." (ibid: 7)

Both quotes emphasize the notion that only Western intervention, and strong intervention, can establish security and legitimacy for Afghanistan. Builds up identify of America / West as seat of civilization with not only moral authority but moral obligation (noblesse oblige) to save poor, benighted Afghanistan. Simultaneously emphasizes the helpless and empty character of Afghanistan. Without the West, Afghanistan would only be a lawless land, home to terrorism and atrocity. Not only does this ignore Western responsibility for the Taliban's ascendancy in Afghanistan, but it is completely oblivious to narratives on Afghan-ness built up through Western interaction over the past 200 years enabling this state of affairs where Afghanistan is seen as nothing but an empty space.

However, even within this dominant narrative there are threads which suggest a potentially more inclusive 'alternate' way of thinking. Chatham House associate fellow Matt Waldman acknowledges the same basic set of problems identified in orthodox narratives, but argues that the fixes suggested up to present have been insufficient. He offers this scathing criticism of policy in Afghanistan:

> "…much of the government is corrupt and ineffective, and the rule of law weak or non-existent… The reasons for this are varied and complex… the initial international approach was manifestly insufficient… International aid has been fragmented, supply-driven and often inappropriate, rather than responding to Afghan needs and preferences. It has tended to focus on physical and technical outcomes rather than the crucial task of promoting Afghan capacity and ownership." (Waldman 2009: 1)

Metric driven goals which rely on a quantitative diagnosis and cure are heavily problematic for Waldman. Instead, he argues that some measure of sensitivity for Afghan character and preference are essential.

> "The insurgency is essentially an Afghan political problem… a government that is perceived as illegitimate, self-serving… based on tribal or other affiliations. Thus, it demands a political response that is *indigenous, inclusive and addresses injustices and legitimate grievances*. [emphasis mine] It should involve Afghan society at large, and include longer-term efforts to promote truth and reconciliation, while ensuring respect for justice and fundamental rights." (ibid: 2)

These metric driven goals are heavily prevalent in both popular discourse on Afghanistan and, especially, in policy discourse. It is hopeful to see this sort of cautionary voice being raised before Congress. On the other hand, it is questionable to what extent that voice was heeded. After all, the policy which the US government adopted toward Afghanistan in 2009 was that of the now well-known

'surge', itself reliant heavily on metrics and which would then serve to signify a "win" in the war on terror.

Congressional research documents in 2013 and 2016 reinforce narrative trends identified here. Early on, Afghanistan's persona as a failure is made clear:

> "The Administration remains concerned that Afghan stability after 2014 is at risk from weak and corrupt Afghan governance and insurgent safe haven in Pakistan…" (Katzman 2013: 11)

At the same time, metric-driven goals are central to the US plan to "fix" Afghanistan as a failed state. Afghanistan must be made into an economically productive state that integrated into regional trade and investment patterns. (ibid) Nation building was the accepted means by which this would be accomplished:

> "…try to build a relatively strong, democratic, Afghan central government and develop Afghanistan economically. The effort, which many outside experts described as nation-building…" (ibid: 9)

Here again we see echoes of a sort of paternalistic approach which has been emphasized from a variety of critical sources, very notably feminist and post-colonial literature. For instance, Dutta relies on critical discourse analysis informed by feminist theory to examine the binary nature of terrorism and state failure, suggesting it exemplifies a 'return' to binarism not unlike the binaries between male and female or civilized and savage. (Dutta 2004: 443-444) Nation building here represents a sort of "paternalist generosity". (ibid: 445) Moreover:

> "Following the September 11 episode, all international, national, and local incidents of terror have been regarded in terms of binary oppositions stemming from the basic division between perpetrators and victims, and calls to combat terrorism have had recourse to a rhetoric of binarism / medieval and modern, barbaric and civilized…" (ibid: 434)

For Dutta, this binarism strips away the "face" of the other, making them all the same, barbaric and backward and waiting to be uplifted. Indeed, identifying the Afghan is both central to policy on Afghanistan and hugely problematic within that policy. Katzman equates Afghanistan with the Karzai government, widely considered both incompetent and corrupt. Other groups within Afghanistan are, generally speaking, terrorists or victims. Victims are Afghan, but stripped of Afghan-ness, perhaps because the Karzai government has failed to make itself properly representative of those people. (Katzman 2016: 13-18) Thus, again, it is for the West to fill that role, protecting the victims of

Afghanistan while forcing the Afghan government into a more suitable mould, one suggested under principles of nation building which is applied more or less levelly, as a single cure-all in all situations for all 'failed states'.[40]

This underlying leveling effect is not unique to policy literature or to popular media. The more influential orthodox scholarship on failed states is quite similar. The recently published "Why nations fail: the origins of power, prosperity and poverty" offers an economist perspective on the cause of state failure. Here, Acemoglu and Robinson suggest that state failure is reducible to economic and/or political institution failure within the state, suggesting a private/public dual intervention tactic. From this view, state failure comes about when the government is more interested in extracting wealth from the state than building its institutions[41]. State failure is directly attributable to how a state's economy is arranged:

> "We call such institutions… extractive economic institutions – extractive because such institutions are designed to extract incomes and wealth from one subset of society to benefit a different subset." (Acemoglue and Robinson 2012: 89)

Thus the citizenry is not motivated to work hard, to save, or to trust in their government. Furthermore, external actors (and particular private investors who can bring money into a state and help build its social and economic infrastructure) are dissuaded from investing in such an environment. In an extractive system, the elite ruling groups are interested in short term profit rather than long term, healthy growth.

> "The growth generated by extractive institutions is very different in nature from growth created under inclusive institutions, however. Most important, it is not sustainable. By their very nature, extractive institutions do not foster creative destruction and generate at best only a limited amount of technological progress. The growth they engender thus lasts for only so long." (ibid: 166)

This dissuades external investment, it is argued, because the investment climate is just not right. Outside investors require long term growth prospects and a stable environment.

This view, as Dutta would argue, strips away the face of the other. All failed states are failed states because their governments are corrupt and worried only about enriching themselves in the short term. The societal aspect of the state itself is ignored by the government, which if anything sees its

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[41] Indeed, in 500 pages of text, the word "extractive" is used 469 times – significantly more than 'failed' or 'government'.)

citizenry as a resource from which to wring further profit. While this description may well have currency in various situations, assigning this descriptive account as causal and thereby fitting as the basis for a prescriptive cure falls into this trap of binarism. Binaries have been fundamental to the ad hoc determination of Afghan character, filling its seemingly empty and indeterminate nature with something suitable to then-current narrative conceptions.

Chapter 8 – Findings – Afghan Indeterminacy and the 'Loup' of Sovereign Legitimacy

Through the indeterminacy which has been imposed on Afghanistan it has become hugely problematic to come to terms with what Afghanistan actually "is". Afghanistan as a failed state reinforces that indeterminacy even as it undermines it. This undermining emanates from Afghanistan's relationship with orthodox notions of 'sovereignty' (a problematic label even without specific reference to Afghanistan's unique character). Afghanistan was "given" the mantle of statehood under the auspices of a discursive aporia which this project has called a formal/informal divide.

Formally, Afghanistan has been imbued with the ceremonial mantle of statehood – packed inside of this are certain assumptions of sovereign power, internal shared identity, and some kind of shared view of the external world as well (at least on some level). Informally, those states which are foremost in the international society of states never really took Afghanistan all that seriously. This dismissiveness both emanates from and recreates Afghanistan's indeterminate nature. That dismissiveness – and that indeterminate nature – are complicit in Afghanistan's labeling as a failed state. Interventions on Afghanistan from Britain and the United States[42] have had a hand in shaping Afghanistan's internal social and political dynamics. To say that Afghanistan arrived at its current state of crisis solely because *Afghanistan failed, as a state* – because it was unable to properly use (and was thus unworthy of) sovereignty ignores history and makes impossible any project to move forward.

Interventions in Afghanistan have often – and especially during and after the Cold War – relied in some way on rescuing Afghanistan. There is no question that today's Afghanistan is in a state of crisis. That crisis has not come about only from outside military and political interventionism – those interventions have played a role and no serious scholar or policy maker who is serious about Afghanistan is likely to argue otherwise, but to suggest those interventions are causal full stop is too simplistic to be the full truth. However, understanding exactly how and why Afghanistan came to be in the state of crisis it is in today is beyond the purview of this project. Rather, this project has highlighted how the discursive positioning of Afghanistan has justified intervention after intervention on Afghanistan in ways that close off any alternative positioning. Afghanistan has been emptied of meaning, becoming a label that means more or less what the situation demands.

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[42] As well as, I must say, the Soviet Union though it was not possible (or useful, probably) to explore Soviet narratives on Afghanistan in this project.

Recognizing the discursive legacies which not only inform language on Afghanistan (barbaric, uncivilized) today but have robbed Afghanistan of any specific possibility of a character offers a way to see alternative ways forward. From a political standpoint this would involve rejecting labels like "failed" or "rogue" state for Afghanistan. It would also involve fundamentally questioning what is meant when referring to Afghanistan as a state. In other words, state building projects that seek to build up Afghan institutions currently have no choice but to visualize a future Afghanistan informed by the knowledge constructs deconstructed in this dissertation. That can only recreate the problem – the problem being not that Afghanistan is a failed state but that *there is no Afghanistan*. There is no Afghanistan because it has been consistently denied the (fundamentally discursive as well as physical) function of sovereignty while draping it in sovereignty's (interpreted) form/responsibility.

Giving meaning to emptiness – Western assumptions and the failures of the CCI:

One aspect of the discourse on state failure after September 11 is a turn toward clinical language. There is some postcolonial literature which has commented on this previously[43], though further analysis is called for. There is a discrete tendency within dominant narratives to assume the disease (state failure) is a well understood phenomenon with a well understood template for cures potentially allowing Afghanistan to be restored to nationhood. From within that metaphor set (and without taking it on board), it seems problematic to make these assumptions while ignoring the specific needs indicated in a 'patient history'. Central to these narrative strands is the suggestion that only Western intervention can return legitimacy, minimizing the need to understand more specifically the character of the "patient" state. That is to say, statehood and the disease which plagues statehood is understood by the West, which can offer remedies and guide erstwhile failed states back to success – if they are willing to rehabilitate. Though the failed state is the object of discussion, focus is primarily on the West - indeed state failure and state building could be argued to hold the West as the referent object. This is arguably the case in an Afghanistan that is historically acted upon without ever being the reason for action. The notion of an empty Afghanistan fits comfortably within this template, never raising any questions on its indeterminate nature because in general the only "nature" that need be known is that of failure.[44]

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[43] See, for instance, Manjikian (2008).

[44] See the Failed State Index 2007 for language on the communicability of the "disease" of state failure (http://fsi.fundforpeace.org/rankings-2007-sortable). See also Acemoglue and Robinson (2012) for an example of fiscal prescriptions for a failed state "cure" that relies specifically on liberal principles as the only possible cure.

This is what prescriptive behavior does. It arises from the formal aspects of the formal/informal dichotomy. Formally Afghanistan is known/assumed to have been a legitimate state with equal rights and responsibilities to all other states. Informally, it was always 'known' that Afghanistan wasn't effectively a state, it wasn't civilized, it didn't really have the tools. (And these knowledges are empowered/stabilized/assumed true by deferral by reference to auxiliary binaries[45] that in this case act as chained signifiers.) Due to that knowledge, Afghanistan never really had the opportunity (if indeed that was an opportunity that Afghanistan would have ultimately chosen for itself) to be a state. It would be wrong to imagine the discursive and material problems of Afghanistan as arising out of the 'malign' intentions of Western powers.

We can return once again to USAID's Community Cohesion Initiative as an example. Activities for the CCI were carried out in the south and east of Afghanistan in some of the most violent areas with the least local trust toward Afghan and NATO power structures. The greatest focus was on five provinces: Ghazni, Kandahar, Helmand, Khost, and Kunar. The goal of the initiative was to create/strengthen ties between and among local and regional groups, as well as the central government. (USAID 2014a: 5) This was carried out through different teaching workshops, carried out by USAID employees and contractors, as well as various Western funded infrastructure projects awarded to areas that had acceptable levels of interaction with workshops and teaching programs. It was hoped that by increasing community cohesion, the program would "support peaceful and legitimate governance processes and outcomes, and counter violent extremism." (USAID 2016)

Others have suggested that community cohesion projects, generally centered in the United Kingdom, try to "bribe" outlier communities to integrate into the dominant British sensibility of community, leaving their marginal identities aside. (Donoghue 2014) This may or may not have applicability to the Afghan case – more interesting here is the assumptions of a specific lack of character and history. It is a job of the enlightened West to show Afghans that if they can only work together, they can have peace. The idea appears benign, but ignores historical regional and tribal tensions – as well as the possibility that cross-sectional cooperation isn't a uniquely Western idea that could never have occurred locally before.

Rather than speak abstractly on the matter, we can turn to actual outcomes that can be seen. USAID declared the program successful and discontinued it in the wake of the 2014 Afghan elections. Publicly, USAID credited CCI with mitigating electoral violence through its teaching and peacebuilding

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[45] West/Oriental, civilized/savage, successful/failed, actor/tactical space, etc

messages along with infrastructural projects. (USAID 2016) Internally, USAID admitted something much closer to defeat for the CCI:

> This quarter witnessed a continued increase in insurgent incidents across CCI's target provinces. The operating environment became steadily less permissive to Creative-CCI activities. As the project moved to close its remaining activities this quarter, various activities had to be compressed in light of security concerns and some were outright cancelled…"
> (USAID 2014b: 2)

The program, originally slated to run into the middle of 2015, wrapped up instead during the last quarter of 2014, being cut even shorter than the intended earlier cut-off date in some areas due to exactly the same violence USAID had claimed was successfully mitigated. Indeed, after elections that were widely lauded as being a major success for democratic governance in Afghanistan, violence has been on the rise ever since across the country. By far the greatest spikes in violence have happened in four of the five provinces that CCI was focused on: Kandahar, Ghazni, Hilmand and Kunar (along with Nangarhar, which was not covered by the CCI). (EASO 2016: 31) Violence in 2015 was at its highest level since the initial US and NATO intervention.

The CCI did not work, despite generally positive reviews and public protestations of success. Every measure of success laid out by USAID for the program was ultimately not met. How is it that this duality could exist? How can success and failure exist side-by-side, totally at odds with one another while policymakers ignore that tension?

Sovereignty's Black Mirror – There is no Afghanistan

America's most recent intervention in Afghanistan rests its legitimacy on certain pillars: civilization versus terrorism, sovereignty versus failure / vacuum and ultimately, particularly conceptions of a yearned-for democracy on the behalf of Afghanistan. That is to say, notions of civilization and sovereignty that are mobilized in conjunction with this intervention are justified in reference to the seemingly naturalized dominant orthodoxy of liberal democracy. All of these terms suffer from a certain emptiness, in the sense that they have an assumed meaning but seem to mean different things at different times in different places.

Tensions exist within how these concepts are mobilized in such a way as to suggest the actual object of these narratives is the U.S. itself. The way in which a certain vagueness in the concepts are filled in relation to the intervention in Afghanistan reflects back on what seems to be the nature of American character – American sovereignty, American civilization, American norms of democracy are

legitimized through its attempt to restore Afghan sovereignty, to save it from terrorism, to uplift its political consciousness so that it might embrace civilized democracy. Discourse here, then, is intended to underscore American legitimacy in these various aspects. Afghanistan is here positioned as just a mirror. Moreover, how Afghan identity and character are situated finds its basis on historical interactions with Afghanistan on the part of, initially, Britain. Legacies of these interactions inform current conceptions and are themselves possibly contrary to current conceptions of American-ness.

It is Afghanistan's indeterminacy which empowers this discursive relationship. This project has shown through narrative analysis how Afghan identity has been again and again filled from a West-assumed emptiness to fill the narrative needs of a particular intervention. This has always seemed to be on an ad-hoc basis, but there are demonstrable threads of continuity flowing from one interaction to the next. We have seen how Afghanistan is positioned as a tactical space where geopolitical games are played out. We have seen how Afghanistan is an empty land of exotic barbarians, ignorant and by turns villainous and victims. We have seen how Afghanistan was folded into the notion of an "international community of states" through a formal/informal divide, wherein formally Afghanistan was "gifted" all the rights of sovereignty and equality among natures while informally it was "known" to still retain its emptiness and barbarism – and thus could be ignored or acted upon in whatever manner was most useful to the powerful. This formal/informal divide is powerfully at play when we consider Afghanistan as a failed state.

For Afghanistan to be a failed state, one must assume statehood as a given – a sort of adoptive state of nature. This can be traced back to the formal acknowledgment of Afghan sovereignty and statehood at the end of the third Anglo-Afghan war. This formal acknowledgment must be accepted as valid and on all levels true in order for this failed state narrative to work – failed state narratives assume that states fail because they weren't good enough. States fail because they are either too weak or too corrupt to take on board the trappings of civilization and internalize them – to adopt the right kind of democracy, rule of law, and relationships with other nations. These assumptions fail to take into consideration all the knowledges about Afghanistan packed within the informal portion of this formal/informal divide. Afghanistan was still *known* to be not quite right in the international community. No important states wanted to form real relationships with Afghanistan. Its preferences and voice in the international arena were ignored – Afghanistan and others of its ilk were *known* to be barbarians pretending that wearing the trappings of statehood made them like the rest of us. Afghanistan was only important after assuming the mantle of statehood at the same sort of time it was important when it was

on the margins of British empire – when it was deemed important for the security of the powerful. Thus Afghanistan went from the margins of British empire, never part of empire or colony – never really anything… to being on the margins of international society. Not quite a state, ever, but a failed state for certain.

Taken broadly, the post-9/11 intervention in Afghanistan seeks to concretize notions of justice and democracy through particular conceptions of sovereignty. This is made possible specifically with reference to Afghanistan's indeterminacy. It can be conceptualized simultaneously as meanings which cannot possible exist together – Afghanistan cannot be both empty void and state, but it is assumed to be exactly that. How the failed state narrative is articulated specifically in relation to Afghanistan suffers from all the symptoms of auto-immunity. The post-9/11 intervention in Afghanistan both uses this failed state narrative to justify the intervention while also appealing to higher ideals to justify uneasily both the intervention and the specific articulation of state failure in this case.

It is circular and self-referential in its logic. It is also a recent iteration of interventions in Afghanistan which follows the discursive patternings we've identified in four previous interventions. The continuous threads in narratives about Afghan identity paradoxically underpin and empower this conception of Afghanistan as an empty space – as indeterminate but constantly determined and re-determined from the outside. Interveners "fill" Afghanistan with whatever character is needed at the time to legitimize the intervention and to help buttress particular conceptions (already settled conceptions, assumed natural conceptions) of the intervener itself. It is for this reason that we can say that, in a sense, there is no "Afghanistan".

Yet there must be an Afghanistan, or at least there is a physical space inhabited by real people that is referred to by this apparently emptied-of-meaning signifier. What alternate articulations could possibly exist of Afghan identity are relegated to the margins by this dominant discursive specification of Afghanistan as empty, as barbaric, as failed, as a battlefield or game board. It is ironic then that, in the wake of shifts in international discursive norms that the formal/informal divide tried to settle in Afghanistan's case, interventions in Afghanistan are legitimized by recourse to high handed values such as democracy, such as sovereignty, such as civilization and justice.

If Afghanistan is a staging ground for this war on terror and thus continues in its old role as a game board on which great geopolitical games are played out, it is by turns also a space to be acted upon. Intervention is by turns an act of ideological war against terrorism and a state-building enterprise

whereupon Afghanistan must be saved and brought 'back' into civilization. For a number of reasons this by-turns function is internally inconsistent. Not only is Afghanistan simultaneously a space for terrorism (and therefore the place terrorism must be fought) that must also have its legitimate statehood saved, but it is also a touchstone of the failed state discourse that failed states, when saved, are generally speaking being brought *back* into civilization. In this narrative, liberal statehood is naturalized – even if a political space has never been a state in the liberal mold, such a situation would be its natural state if internal barriers to such a condition could be removed.

Both of these ideas are problematic. In the first instance, Afghanistan must represent terrorism in order to be legitimately invaded. But Afghanistan must also be saved and brought back into the fold of civilization. Afghanistan is simultaneously the focus of an act of (justified) aggression, but also the focus of an act of (moral) salvation. One can understand the thought process which situates some actors in Afghanistan as representative of terrorists and other actors as representative of peaceful people who want a normal existence free from strife. Yet this is functionally a difficult differentiation to make. Due partially to the nature of asymmetric warfare and partially to the problems of cultural unfamiliarity, victim/friend/foe identification is problematic at best. This internal tension is seemingly dealt with by way of recourse to the pre-existing failed state narrative. Prior to the September 11 attacks Afghanistan was in the failed state discussion but without consensus – the Washington Institute for Near East Policy in September of 2000 argued that Afghanistan could not and should not be considered a failed state at all. (Rubin 2000) The Taliban government's refusal to extradite Osama bin Laden after September 11 led to an end of this debate – Afghanistan was a failed state.

Afghanistan as a failed state meant that it must be situated cogently within that policy narrative. This dissertation has established that, while there is not a wholly accepted manner of understanding state failure, there are certain key features which are held in common. Central to this is the notion that the "failure" is a failure *of* that particular state – that successful liberal statehood is the natural state to which all states in the current system would gravitate without whatever internal problems they have. Those problems, while possibly exacerbated from the outside, are inherently the problem and fault of internal dynamics. Thus, saving failed states is a matter of diagnosing their particular problems and removing those problems, allowing the failed state to resume its place in the international system as a successful, liberal state.

Resume is an important word here – this dissertation's historical narrative analysis shows that there is no 'return' in the case of Afghanistan. Afghanistan's nature has been situated as that of a non-

entity from at least the early 19th century. Particular characterizations of Afghan identity are assigned in context of current regional meta-knowledges and tactical/ideological imperatives. If we look at Afghanistan within the failed state narrative from the context of these analytical insights we can see that Afghanistan as a failed state is ultimately another iteration of this tendency to 'fill' Afghan indeterminacy to fit the situation.

This being the case, a far more productive way of talking about Afghanistan would be to remove it from the failed state narrative. Rather than trying to situate Afghanistan within a metanarrative which is at best an uncomfortable and subversive fit, it would be useful to face the legacy Afghanistan carries from the West's historical interventions upon that space. Afghanistan is not a failed state – Afghanistan is not a state as we typically think of statehood. Indeed, in the sense that we think of identity at all, *there is no Afghanistan*.

From this basis, it may be possible to undertake a very specific project of interacting with Afghanistan with an eye toward what a more just future would look like in that space, for the people who call that space home. If we accept that most of what we 'know' about Afghanistan is at the very least corrupted[46] by quasi-colonial and meta-ideological preconceptions then it might become possible for Afghanistan to have a say in building its own identity within the context of our current international system. The United States (and, let's say, the international community as such) has an interest in seeing stability in the region, as do the people of Afghanistan. There is no doubt that conflict and bloodshed will remain a part of this in at least the near term. However, how we go about thinking about/acting via this intervention and working toward that stability can either recreate/reproduce the underlying problems in Afghanistan that we are at least complicit in – or it could form the basis of a more just and democratic future for the peoples inhabiting that empty space called Afghanistan.

The Afghanistan that we imagine does not exist. It is a chain of representations imposed upon a space that, from the Western perspective, appears to be empty and devoid of any intrinsic character or meaning. By filling Afghanistan in with particular meanings and character traits at different times, we've created a sort of simulacrum – a false copy of what Afghanistan could be based on the historically contextualized idea, imposed from the outside, of what it *should* be. In this way, particular conceptions of Afghanistan are privileged which suit broader ideological and geopolitical logics rather than any specific interaction with Afghanistan on its own basis. It is seen as either unnecessary or impossible to interact with Afghanistan on its own basis, because Afghanistan has no meaning – except that meaning

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[46] …and covertly corrupted, at that, due to the formal/informal divide.

which it is assigned, externally, by reference to and empowered by historical understandings of Afghanistan which were informed by the same discursive patterns. In understanding how this emptiness of specific Afghan character and meaning is empowered and replicated, it is possible to resolve to find another way.

Determining indeterminacy – a final consideration of this project's questions

This thesis posited three central questions. Here we endeavor to provide answers.

Why are we able to talk about failed states?

What is assumed to be 'known' about Afghanistan and how do those knowledges empower dominant narratives of intelligibility?

How do dominant assumptions about sovereignty and successful statehood by intervening parties impact upon to understand the specificity of the Afghanistan crisis?

Why are we able to talk about failed states?

We are able to talk about failed states, and about Afghanistan as a failed state, by referencing an idealized theory of statehood and its attendant sovereignty on the dominant liberal model of understanding. States have the natural right to sovereignty, to a place within the international community on the basis of sovereign power and authority. When a state's government loses either its power or its authority, it loses its privileged status within the international community. Its sovereign status – which prohibits intervention – is considered to be eroded (though it still seems to exist theoretically as a right, particularly in that intervention in failed states is justified by recourse to a project to rebuild the conditions of sovereignty.

We can talk about states as failures because they have somehow lost sovereignty. This authorizes or even mandates discussions and policies for intervention and state-building purposes. Because liberal understandings of statehood rely on an assumed natural and static gestalt of sovereignty, that sovereignty must be privileged – making it important that sovereignty be in some way reinstated in political spaces where it has lapsed.

This thesis has demonstrated how sovereignty has not served as a stable concept in regard to Afghanistan. The attributes of sovereignty which are privileged have changed over time. Cynthia Weber has worked extensively on concepts of sovereignty and its relationship with interventionist practices. Weber argues that while sovereignty is assumed to have a specific and enduring character, it is in fact a

concept which shifts in relation to historic and geographical context. In analyzing the interaction between concepts of intervention and sovereignty, she says:

> "With respect to statehood, sovereignty refers to what a state must do (performative criteria) in order to be (receive intersubjective recognition as) a sovereign state… What a state must do to be sovereign is to organize its domestic affairs in such a way so that its ultimate source of sovereign authority is authorized to speak for its particular domestic community in international affairs. Yet the source of sovereign authority has changed historically." (Weber 1992: 200)

Interventions come about, for Weber, when the way in which sovereign power is situated (or, presumably, fails to be situated) within a state becomes an international issue. This might be seen as a humanitarian issue or a security issue and can be explained in terms of both as regards state failure. A failed state has either such an ineffective, corrupt, or ill-meaning source of sovereign power that it becomes an international issue – either on behalf of the victim-citizens or because a deteriorating domestic situation is creating regional (or, with the Global War on Terror, global) security threats. This constitutes a loss of sovereign authority.

Yet when and why a domestic situation constitutes an international issue – and thus a loss of sovereign authority – has changed significantly over time and in relation to different geopolitical contexts.

> "How meanings take shape and are put to work - by whom and on whose behalf - has implications for just what forms international practice legitimately can take. The examples of interventionary activity in the 1820s and 1910s are cases in point. They bring to the fore the importance of casting meanings in particular ways which enable specific forms of practice to take place legitimately in the eyes of a supposed interpretive community." (ibid: 203)

In this way, the decision to authorize an intervention (and rendering the judgment that a polity has surrendered its sovereign *authority* to act on behalf of its people) is an interpretive moment which crystallizes, for that moment and place, a particular articulation of sovereignty. That is to say *interventions produce sovereignty*. That interpretive moment is also a reflection on the sovereign status of the intervener. How and why a certain conception of sovereignty is ascendant at a particular time must be contextualized in the international political climate and especially in the context of those intervening parties and their articulations of sovereign authority.

These specific articulations are complicated – both empowered and made problematic – by Derrida's analysis of sovereignty. Intervention is possible, but also ultimately self-destructive due to the interaction of beastly *loup* and virtuous protector, of limitless power and ethical constraint, of residing outside of and defining law but finding legitimacy only within the bounds of that law. Intervention on behalf of a particular articulation of sovereignty intends to privilege and naturalize that conception of sovereignty, as well as the intervener's place as epitomizing that sovereign notion.

In the case of the Cold War, Afghanistan had to be saved from an illegitimate government propped up by what was considered ideologically to be the greatest evil in the world, Communism. The United States, as epitome of righteous sovereignty (in this ideological narrative), had *no choice but to intervene*. Narratives in the West at the time spoke of the United States' responsibility to stand up against the evils of communism, to save Afghanistan, to help it reclaim its rightful place as a responsible and legitimate member of the society of right-acting states. The very act of intervention – itself the denial of a right to sovereignty and the forceful destruction of sovereign status – *creates* sovereignty. The United States, in this instance, is cast as a sovereign force, enforcing sovereign dictates from outside and above constraint – thus being authorized to do the unauthorizable and intervene – but also bound by a code a conduct which itself was seen to be definitional of a particular articulation of liberal capitalist-democratic sovereignty.

We can talk about failed states because the (various) ways in which sovereignty is articulated within models of liberal statehood require it. When a sovereign state loses its sovereignty and becomes 'failed', there is *no choice* for the international community but to attempt to restore that sovereignty – which is assumed to have a stable and natural character – or risk an eroding of the discursive legitimacy of sovereignty within the liberal state model.

What is assumed to be 'known' about Afghanistan and how do those knowledges empower dominant narratives of intelligibility?

These critical understandings of sovereignty and its internally problematic nature require unique discursive positioning in each instance of intervention. Afghanistan's indeterminacy lends itself to this. Historically speaking, Afghanistan has regularly been conceived from the Western view as being empty – empty of character, empty of meaning, empty of anything worth having. Other objects of intervention during the 19th century were generally (but we cannot assume *always)* situated within imperial and colonial logics. Afghanistan is different – it was never the *object* of any intervention… it was incidental

and convenient to an intervention which had something else (Great Game, Indian stability, Bolshevism, Communism, terrorism) as its referent object.

This history of "creating" an Afghanistan with each intervention has led to this seeming indeterminate nature. Each intervention has relied upon, purposefully at times and unwittingly at others, on discursive legacies of certain 'knowledges' about Afghanistan. Situations changed, geopolitical contexts changed, but this dissertations has demonstrated that some legacies of 'knowing' Afghanistan all the way back from peripheral-imperial understandings of Afghanistan influence contemporary knowledges. This emptiness and the indeterminacy it empowers are at odds with dominant narratives of intelligibility – that is to say, liberal understandings of statehood and sovereignty. Yet that very assumption of emptiness, that 'knowledge' of Afghanistan as a place without a natural legitimate character, seem to make it a compelling example of state failure indeed.

This is reflective of the formal/informal binary. Formally Afghanistan can be articulated as deserving of statehood and sovereignty – it has a place in the international community of liberal states if it is only able to develop the capacity and sovereign authority to take up that spot. This is, as we see from Weber as well as from narratives on Afghanistan through history, only possible through the intervention by a Western power which is capable of restoring (creating?) that sovereignty from its privileged place as the epitome of what that sovereignty should look like.

In this way, knowledges about Afghanistan – which seem to make it the epitome of failed statehood – reinforce the discursive positioning of the West generally (and in this instance the United States particularly) as epitomizing those attributes necessary to success and sovereignty. Articulations of Afghanistan's failure, and what we 'know' about Afghanistan in relation to that failure, define success and sovereignty. Even here, Afghanistan as a failed state seems not to have Afghanistan itself as the referent object – but rather the liberal understanding of statehood and legitimacy itself as the referent.

How do dominant assumptions about sovereignty and successful statehood by intervening parties impact attempts to understand the specificity of the Afghanistan crisis?

This project has also demonstrated the internal inconsistency and tensions within these typifications of Afghan character. Taking Afghanistan to be empty and filling it up with various character traits as historical and geopolitical contexts require may have made it possible to situate Afghanistan in such a way as to empower contemporary understandings of state success, state failure and sovereignty.

Yet it is an unstable foundation on which to situate those norms, central to liberal notions of statehood. This is dealt with by recourse to explaining Afghanistan – and through its reflection explaining statehood and sovereignty – by way of binary oppositions. These binary oppositions, found throughout historical interactions with Afghanistan, are still operating in contemporary articulations of Afghan identity.

We can turn to Nandana Dutta for an exploration of how binarism operates within the geopolitical and ideological context of the Global War on Terror. Dutta argues that violent acts carried out by states or by terrorists in the context of the GWoT render the victims invisible.

> "…the prevalent mode of terror - affecting on a large scale - with the increasing resort to weapons and modes of mass destruction and killings of faceless 'enemies' in great numbers becomes significant, because the perception of the other as faceless is a necessary step in the justification of the self's actions vis-a`-vis the other. Terror (its practice and production) is a component of the world that affects constructions of self and other. The other must still be 'governed', must still be 'translated' into familiar terms or into the universal language."
> (Dutta 2004: 433)

We are simultaneously saving and ignoring Afghanistan… or saving Afghanistan *while saving ourselves from* Afghanistan. In violence related to terrorism – termed in this fashion to more clearly refer both to violence carried out by terrorists and acts carried out by governments in response (real or perceived) to terrorism – there is a certain impersonal dynamic. Often the victims are not seen, particularly in that violence of this kind often results in mass casualties. Victims often include both those who would be perceived as wrong-doers but also so-called "collateral damage" (itself an interesting term that dehumanizes people who were killed without being actual targets themselves). The victims, then, are invisible. Yet the victims are also the justification for intervention – victims are invisible in the Global War on Terror but they are also the reason why we *must wage* that war.

Dutta further argues that a tragedy of this discursive recourse to binarism is that it surprisingly wide reaching effects. Not only the victims (or potential victims) are affected.

> "I feel compelled to address the assumption within the discourse of terror that not everyone suffers from it – 'we' suffer from terror, 'they' do not. This is a limited interpretation precisely because of my contention that terror affects our discursive practices. The idea of suffering has to be stretched to include not only the 'victim', but the 'perpetrator' and the 'observer' who uses the language developing out of it, who participates in the production and use of the discourse of power." (ibid: 433)

Everyone who is touched by the narrative of the GWoT is affected by it – it has become a dominant way of understanding the world… and it introduces this harmful process of dehumanizing and making invisible the other in such a way that mass killing becomes acceptable and impersonal. Indeed, one might argue that there is a certain discursive creep wherein complete nationalities (or other identity groups, religious or ethnic) are rendered invisible and dehumanized. Thus, air strikes killing hundreds in Iraq, Syria or Afghanistan is seen as business-as-usual in the West because it is a part of the GWoT.

Ideological binarism empowers certain power relations which give a clear structure to international relations privileging certain materially powerful actors – who pursue that binarism accordingly. This does not necessarily suggest that the GWoT narrative was adopted with the cynical intention of recreating uneven power constructs by the United States and its allies. Instead one can look to Derrida for explanations of how binaries are adopted as a way to *create discursive stability* so we can better understand our world and operate within it – but at the same time those seeming stable binaries are problematic (and often hidden).

The discursive positioning meant to create discursive stability in conditions of narrative auto-immunity by recourse to binaries is referred to as chained signifiers. (Derrida 1978) A particular concept, which is problematic and unstable because of its insubstantiality (or its auto-immunity when substantiated), is made to seem stable by reference to a chain of other descriptive binary concepts. Dutta discusses the Global War on Terror in terms of the civilization/terrorism binary – which is central to the GWoT. It is also connected to how Afghanistan's identity is situated in the context of the GWoT.

Afghanistan's assigned identity as a 'failed state' (and the concurrent reinforcement of norms of successful statehood privileged in liberal models of statehood) is understood in reference to specific articulations of sovereignty. Yet sovereignty, as a concept, is unfixed and attempts to naturalize / stabilize it create a condition of auto-immunity – one cannot hold supreme and unconditional power while also conditioning it with the necessity of legitimate authority! The problematic, referred to by Derrida and Weber among others, requires reference to other binaries in an attempt to create a condition of discursive stability that functionally stabilizes particular norms of sovereignty without addressing those self-destructive tendencies within the concept.

Understanding Afghanistan as a failed state seems to explain how and why it does not have a sovereign identity. Yet asking questions about the nature of statehood in this context can only be answered by further reference to other chained signifiers – binaries. This draws us into conversations

about the Global War on Terror and civilization versus terrorism. Conceiving the GWoT in terms of civilization versus terrorism is intrinsically connected to and empowered by binaries discussed in this project: civilized/savage and Western/Oriental. So understanding state failure and sovereignty within the wider context of the GWoT relies on these discursive legacies that emanate from interventions on Afghanistan that occurred two centuries ago. In order to stabilize discursive understandings of sovereignty and Afghanistan as a failed state we are unwittingly referencing conceptions of Afghanistan that empower and justify a kind of cultural subjugation and marginalization as explicated in this project's empirical chapters.

Afghanistan is situated as a tactical space, wherein geopolitical or ideological conflicts are carried out – it is not an actor or a place with character – it is simultaneously victim and villain and thus can be neither. (See Cold War typfications, but also think of Dutta's conversation on silencing of victimhood in terrorism.) Afghanistan is a savage land, where the rules of civilization don't apply nor are they understood. Afghanistan has Oriental attributes, wishful of mimicking Western civilization but incapable – implying the need for a sort of paternal project from the West to caretake and develop that Oriental culture. Afghanistan has no identity, or an indeterminate identity, or an identity which means one thing at one time and another thing at another time.

All of these are indicative of one side of the sets of binary oppositions identified and discussed in this thesis. These binary oppositions are not about the opposing terms as such. They are explanatory of tensions internal to central concepts in the Afghanistan as failed state narrative while working to defer any confrontation of those tensions. Deferral is the only way to stabilize those concepts, and the stability of those concepts is deemed of high importance as they both fill up Afghanistan with meaning but also stabilize particular conceptions of the meaning of what it is to be successful/sovereign/Western/civilized.

Implications for further study

This dissertation used discourse analysis to reveal the extent to which our "knowledge" about Afghanistan is more a set of negative spaces than actual knowledges. Certain binary tropes have been at play over time. Those tropes both empowered a continuance of this assumption of knowledge (overlaying the actual indeterminacy of an Afghan character) and are, in themselves, self-destructive. This imposed indeterminacy has been more reflective of the specific self-image of interveners during episodes of intervention than reflective of anything inherent or specific to Afghanistan.

The effect of this has been to render Afghanistan unhearable and indecipherable. This silence not only strips away Afghan agency (from a Western perspective) but empowers an indeterminate malleability. Because Afghan is silent, powerless, without character it is also malleable – defined and redefined in reference to the intervener's needs which are themselves informed by self-image and geopolitical externalities. Making those episodic assumptions creates blind spots in our knowledge. It is to be hoped that this dissertation has upset those comfortable assumptions about Afghanistan and Afghan-ness to an extent that allows for fundamental rethinking of what we think we know about the Afghan character.

Where does that leave us? There can be no denying that Afghanistan is in the midst of a deep and enduring crisis and this project in no way advocates the kind of disengagement undertaken at the end of the Cold War intervention. The current discursive context justifying the intervention in Afghanistan, however, has now been demonstrated to recreate and reinforce crisis conditions. It is beyond the purview of this thesis to suggest a cause of Afghanistan's current political and humanitarian crisis, but it is hard to overlook a historical complicity on the part of first Britain and then the United States. Rather than condemn the West, however, it would be far more useful to use this historical deconstructive analysis as a way to learn and "do better". If the United States and its allies are committed to the defense of – necessarily vaguely defined – humanitarian and political rights in Afghanistan, this it is clear that the current path cannot be continued upon. Any attempt to move forward in Afghanistan – any attempt to "save" Afghanistan requires that Afghanistan no longer be assigned a persona of determined indeterminacy.

We also see that the interpretation of Afghanistan as empty of meaning and indeterminate in nature is integral to how the West conceives of itself in the context of liberal understandings of statehood. This suggests that in the specific context of Afghanistan, there is a need to reconsider how and why Afghanistan is conceived in these particular ways in regard to statehood. Why is Afghanistan assumed to be a particular state of particular character? How and why were its borders decided? Where does this Afghan identity come from, and how and why was it externally imposed on the people inhabiting those borders?

Western objectives in Afghanistan and its conditions of "victory" must be reconsidered. Why a coalition of Western powers headed by the United States can be justified in this Afghan intervention requires reconsideration outside the bounds of the failed state discourse. Nor can a meaningful future

for the people and polity of Afghanistan be worked toward if Afghanistan is primarily seen as the ground-zero tactical space in the Global War on Terror.

Up to now, Afghanistan is a name given to a political space, but from the Western perspective it has never had effective meaning. Afghanistan does not need to continue to *be* Afghanistan, because *there is no Afghanistan*. That being the case, it would appear that a state-building project in Afghanistan can be more constructively seen as a project to *create* Afghanistan where before nothing existed. This must have profound implications – is it right for the West to decide how to create Afghanistan? Are there legitimate stakeholders within Afghanistan who should have a say in Afghanistan's *identity* rather than just the complexion of state organs it adopts within the dominant liberal state framework? Could there be many Afghanistans? Is there another way that the space conceived of as Afghanistan might be politically arranged – in a project that is inclusive to internal Afghan identities that have to now been marginalized and ignored – which does not rely on a state-building project intended to reinforce Western conceptions of self?

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