

Book Reviews



Return of a King: The Battle for Afghanistan, 1839-42

By William Dalrymple

NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013,

515 pages

Reviewed by LTC Dan Kirk and
LTC Mark Ivezaj

"You have brought an army into the country, but how do you propose to get it out?"

— Mehrab Khan, 1839, page 145

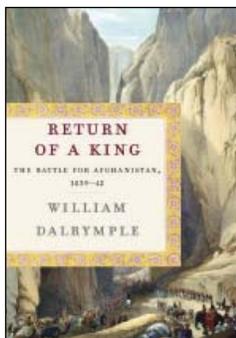
"That country drains us of a million a year or more — and we only, in truth, are certain of the allegiance of the people within range of our guns and cavalry... The whole thing will break down; we cannot afford the heavy yet increasing drain upon us in troops and money."

— Sir John Keane, British Commander in Chief, 1841, page 238

In *Return of a King*, William Dalrymple narrates the United Kingdom's ill-fated first (of four) foray into the region that was to become Afghanistan. Using an impressive array of sources, many not previously read in the west, he brings this brief period of history to life in an accessible and enjoyable style. Dalrymple spent four years in the region searching archives, libraries, and private collections preparing his interpretation of the events in this much told period. His extensive research enabled a narrative composed of a diverse cast of stakeholders with Afghan and British voices receiving equal billing. He masterfully describes the events and personalities that came together to have such a lasting impact on the country and region. The book is important for the military reader for both the history and historical lessons learned from this strategically significant region as well as the regional cultural insight and Afghan point of view that remain relevant.

The book begins with a brief, regional geopolitical overview circa 1800 and introduces the competing English and Russian national interests, which would result in the "Great Game" that gained its roots in the late 1830s. The British, having been outplayed by a savvy young Russian agent in Kabul, were determined to replace the ruling Afghan Amir with a puppet. Conveniently, her Majesty's government had been funding an exiled Afghan king, Shah Shuja, for the previous 30 years. The campaign to reseat Shah Shuja is described in great detail from the difficulties the British experienced in the southern passes of Afghanistan through their victories in Kandahar, Ghazni, and finally Kabul. Period maps and artwork as well as biographical sketches help orient the reader throughout.

In 1840, when the British fail to consolidate their initial successes, the author allows his mostly suppressed bias to emerge. "Lord Auckland, like more recent invaders, took the premature view that the conquest was already complete and so, allowed



himself to be distracted by launching another war of aggression in a different theatre." Poor leader decisions and actions across multiple lines of effort led to a rapid deterioration of the British position across the country. The varied reasons underpinning these events are instructional, and Dalrymple presents evidence of inflated personal ambition, senior leader incompetence, and institutional hubris. However, the collective results were aptly summed up by Lieutenant George Broadfoot, who upon return from a cross-country mission simply stated, "We fail from our own ignorance" (page 242).

A predicted, but poorly managed popular uprising in 1841 led to the death of two key British leaders and the disastrous retreat of the Kabul garrison to Jalalabad. An aptly named "Army of Retribution" was then formed and deployed into Afghanistan to try and recover both British prisoners and prestige. The book ends as the British return to India, with the official report of the time finding that after much loss of life and treasure, the British "had left Afghanistan much as they had found it" (page 419).

A military reader will readily recognize similarities between the challenges of the British army of 1840 and those our military forces in the region still face today. Three of these areas — language training, cultural awareness, and intelligence fusion — deserve robust professional discussion given their relevance to current and likely future involvement in the region.

First, the strategic impact of a very small number of culturally and linguistically literate officers was profound. The contributions of Claude Wade, Alexander Burnes, and Mohan Lal Kashmiri on the British side and Ivan Vitkevitch on the Russian cannot be understated. After a decade of war, the U.S. Army acknowledges the importance of cultural consideration and basic language training, but does not seem to be producing officers in any number with the linguistic depth and cultural faculty to have a strategic impact. In most cases, we tend to outsource this to our best interpreters. This brief period of history alone indicates the resources required to create a small cadre of cultural experts would have a worthwhile return on investment.

Second, the British displayed an alarming inability to see themselves as the Afghans did. This directly contributed to their strategic failure. For example, Dalrymple's ample use of Afghan sources details the crippling, strategic impact that British treatment of Afghan women had on the campaign. British interaction with Muslim women resulted in real injury to cultural pride and served as a gift to jihadists seeking a religious rationale for the eventual uprising.

Lastly and equally disturbing, for all the British miscalculations and blundering decisions made at senior levels, there existed within the headquarters the expertise and vetted intelligence reporting to have avoided the disaster that occurred. That this information was readily available to senior decision makers and yet went unheeded should force discussion among currently deployed forces.

Practitioners of our trade have much to gain from this telling

of Afghanistan's early history. There is hardly a page without a direct link to ongoing lines of effort activities in the region as we see them today. The detail provided by the numerous firsthand accounts offers insights from the political and strategic to the tactical levels — the vast majority as relevant in 2013 as in 1842. Little has changed since 1842 with respect to the fundamental challenges facing a foreign force operating in Afghanistan today. One who has experienced or is about to experience combat in this region could leverage the lessons learned by the British army in the 1840s to identify and navigate away from similar situations that challenge our military as we begin to withdraw forces and assist an independent and self-sufficient Afghan army and government.

While readers with experience in Afghanistan may take offense at some of what the author sees as historical parallels to today's efforts, Dalrymple tells his story evenhandedly, saving most of his personal analysis for the brief author's note at the end of the book.

***The Lions of Carentan -
Fallschirmjäger Regiment 6,
1943-1945***

**By Volkert Griesser
(Translated by Mara Taylor)
Havertown, PA: Casemate, 2011,
272 pages**

Reviewed by Chris Timmers

From its founding in February of 1943 to its surrender and dissolution in May 1945, no other regiment in the Wehrmacht fought more fiercely and in more diverse battlefields than Fallschirmjäger Regiment (FJR) 6.

Initially deployed to Italy in July of 1943 following the collapse of Mussolini's government, FJR 6 fought to secure Rome from Italian forces who were now fighting not as Germany's allies but as their foes. Indeed, it is almost a fateful foretelling of FJR 6's destiny as to its time of being formed and committed to battle: By July 1943, Stalingrad and the 6th Army had been lost to the Soviets; in the Pacific, the Battle of Midway had been won over Japanese naval and air forces a year earlier; and, also a year previous, Allied forces had landed in North Africa and by early 1943, Rommel's forces had begun to evacuate Northern Africa for Sicily.

Nonetheless, the regiment fought in Italy, Russia, Germany, France, Holland, and Belgium. Indeed, the regiment clashed with elements of both the U.S. Army's 82nd and 101st Airborne divisions in the campaign in Normandy. And the paratroopers of FJR 6 were not just fierce fighters but honorable men as well. During the campaign in Normandy, regimental commander Major von der Heydte ordered his men not to fire on medics and chaplains from Allied forces who were tending the wounded following an extended firefight in St Mere Eglise. A three-hour cease-fire was negotiated and prisoners were exchanged.

Three months later, FJR 6 men were being deployed back inside Germany via trains. At one point the trains stopped in Aachen to re-fuel. The paratroopers got off the train to stretch



their legs and noticed another train at rest on a set of parallel tracks. As they approached this train, they noticed that its openings were blocked with reinforced steel mesh. Hands reached out from inside the railcar. It quickly became evident that this train was full of concentration camp prisoners: men, women, and children. The SS detachment guarding the train tried to keep the paras away, but the troopers surged forward. The gaunt, malnourished prisoners moved the troopers to open their bread bags and rations to outstretched arms. The SS guards threatened to open fire on the paratroopers but were soon surrounded and completely outnumbered by the paratroopers with raised and ready weapons. Ration distribution proceeded.

FJR 6 has since gone into history (May 1945), but not its legacy. Former members have been employees of the German government and worked as civil servants, engineers, and planners. They have served in large German consortiums and overseas as commercial and political ambassadors. These warriors of the last world war, for the most part, are gone now. But they were honorable men, worthy adversaries, and honored opponents.

With more than 220 photos, numerous maps, and a brisk narrative style, *The Lions of Carentan* is both informative and a pleasure to read. Look to this text to provide not just details on uniforms and weapons, but for insignia, battle credits, and awards. Griesser has done an excellent job in collecting both history and personal recollection and woven both into a compelling and moving narrative for one of Germany's most storied units.

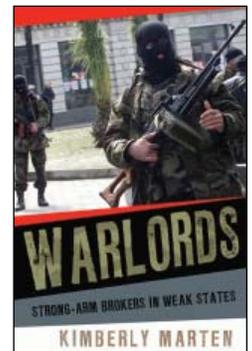
***Warlords: Strong-Arm
Brokers in Weak States***

**By Kimberly Marten
Ithaca, NY: Cornell University
Press, 2012, 262 pages**

Reviewed by LTC (Retired)
Kevin McMullen

The term "warlord" has gone out of fashion. Although warlords are not as independent as they once were, they still exist, and both a national government and an assisting power, such as the United States, must know how to cope with a warlord — especially when conducting a counterinsurgency campaign or attempting to assert the authority of the national government. Therefore, both to provide a foundation for future scholarship and to serve as reference for policy makers who will choose or will be forced to deal with a warlord, Professor Kimberly Marten has written *Warlords: Strong-Arm Brokers in Weak States*. Marten teaches political science at Barnard College of Columbia University, and she has published books both on imperialism and on the Soviet and Russian military establishments including *Engaging the Enemy: Organization Theory* and *Soviet Military Innovation*, which won the Marshall Shulman Prize. Marten opposes wars of choice, such as the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, but recognizes that circumstances may induce a state to cooperate with a warlord against the state's long-term interest.

Marten's central thesis is that the nature of a warlord has changed: a warlord is no longer an independent ruler maintained



by his own strength. Instead, a current warlord is independent only by the sufferance of a state, i.e., the national government, and this sufferance may be the result either of the state's weakness or of the warlord's existence being convenient for the state. She supports her thesis by examining the case studies of Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, Georgia, Chechnya, and Iraq, and she has organized the lessons from these case studies into observations about the origins, the stability, and the utility of warlords.

The first set of observations describes the origins of warlords. The principal observation is that specialists in violence always exist in a society but that such a specialist becomes a warlord, i.e., personally rules part of the national territory, only when the national government cannot control that territory at a cost which is unacceptable to the national government. (The government might be able to control that territory at an unacceptable cost.) In fact, the seemingly strong, e.g., empires often have created warlords by subverting traditional tribal authorities. Great Britain did that by imposing primogeniture on the tribal societies of Pakistan thereby creating "a hereditary class of armed local power brokers," the maliks, in what became the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. In Iraq, by contrast, Saddam Hussein was so weakened by the losses his state suffered during its eight years of war with Iran that he solved his need for total security by outsourcing some of his policing to Sunni militias based on tribes which were real or "made in Taiwan." These local warlords became insurgents after the U.S. invasion, and the United States attempted to reintegrate them into the state as the Sons of Iraq patrolling their own areas. In Chechnya, the Russian government appointed warlords (Kadyrov father and son) as a matter of convenience to suppress the insurgency, but in Georgia, Shevardnadze tolerated the warlords of two enclaves (Abashidze of Ajara and Kvitsiani of Upper Kodori), who had emerged out of the disorganization caused by the disintegration of the Soviet Union, as a temporary *modus vivendi*.

The second set of observations describes the tenuous stability of a warlord's regime. The warlord depends on patronage from a source outside his domain, and he redistributes that patronage to his supporters. The warlord may receive this patronage from the national government (as the maliks do in Pakistan and as Ramzan Kadyrov does in Chechnya) or from a foreign government (as Abashidze and Kvitsiani in Georgia received from Russia). Concomitantly, the warlord redistributes this patronage to his supporters in various forms, e.g., jobs or preferential contracts. As a consequence, a warlord operates either with the support or at the sufferance of a national government which lacks the immediate inclination to provide security itself. However, this arrangement may work to the benefit of a foreign government or of a criminal syndicate, and the arrangement will undermine the national government.

As a further consequence, therefore, the national government may seek to eliminate the warlord. Since the warlord retains his supporters by redistributing patronage, the national government should offer those supporters a more attractive alternative (as the United States has attempted to do in Iraq despite the obstruction of the national government), and to do so, the government will need specific information about those supporters. Meanwhile, of course, the warlord will attempt to stay in power by recruiting other patrons,

as Ramzan Kadyrov has done by accommodating smugglers. The warlord also will attempt to forestall governmental action by acquiring legal control of all provisions of security in his territory, thereby depriving the national government of specific information about his networks of patronage. A democratic state can penetrate this network, but this can be done most readily by a populist leader without either strong political opposition or democratic oversight, as was done by President Saakashvili in Georgia after he succeeded Shevardnadze. Saakashvili utilized the surviving files and apparatus of the Soviet state to penetrate the networks of patronage in Ajara and upper Kodori, and then he suborned the respective warlords' supporters with offers of amnesty and official positions. In Pakistan, by contrast, the availability of lucrative jobs outside the country has produced remittances which are slowly undermining the power of the maliks.

The third set of observations evaluates the utility of a warlord to the national government, and Marten concedes that a warlord can have some utility. Thus, a warlord can temporarily serve as a buffer, e.g., by maintaining stability in a border area (as in Chechnya or Georgia) or by allowing the national government to concentrate its resources on another front (Pakistan concentrating against India). Moreover, where ethnic or sectarian tensions are high, as in Iraq, a warlord may be hard to replace in an area populated by a national minority.

However, a warlord is unlikely to become a builder of the state because he creates resentment by impeding fair outcomes, i.e., by distributing benefits and justice as patronage rather than according to merit or economic efficiency. On this point, Marten's case studies are especially informative. Thus, in Pakistan, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas are rife with smuggling, radical Islamic militancy, and economic stagnation. Even international development assistance is distributed by the local warlords, so that such assistance does not build support for the state. When Georgia tolerated the enclaves of Ajara and Upper Kodori, their warlords allowed rampant criminality and bled the state's budget through the loss of customs revenue while securing no guarantee of cooperation from Russia. The latter state subsidizes a warlord in Chechnya despite the smuggling of arms and narcotics, the loss of customs revenue, and a poor record on human rights. In Iraq, real integration of the Sunni militias may be impossible because the distrust felt by each side is too intense: the Shiite government distrusts these militias, and the members of the militias fear individual assignment to government posts.

Although not an indispensable book, Marten's book is a useful and informative one. Her analysis is persuasive for the four cases she examines, and her observations are pertinent. Although warlordism is sometimes a necessary evil, a national government should eliminate the warlord as soon as possible. A warlord is dependent upon patronage, and therefore, he is vulnerable to having his network of supporters undermined. Ethnic or sectarian tension may make this more difficult, but a popular national leader operating without effective opposition is in a strong position to act. In any case, removing a warlord requires that the national government possess specific information about the network of patronage and be willing to suborn the important members of that network. Marten has presented a great deal of information and analysis in only 262 pages. I recommend her book unreservedly.