Preventing Strategic Defeat
A Reassessment of the First Anglo-Afghan War

Adam George Findlay

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School of Humanities and Social Sciences
University of New South Wales Canberra

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .............................................. ii

List of Maps .................................................. v

Explanatory Note: Thesis Mapping Conventions and Military Abbreviations ............................. vi

List of Figures .................................................. viii

Introduction ..................................................... 1

Chapter 1: Britain’s Afghanistan Strategy to 1838 ................................................................. 21

Chapter 2: The First Anglo-Afghan War: 1838–1842 ............................................................... 67

Chapter 3: Ellenborough’s Strategic Deliberations: February – April 1842 ....................... 122

Chapter 4: Ellenborough’s Strategic Deliberations: May – July 1842 ..................................... 159

Chapter 5: The Advance of the ‘Army of Retribution’: August – September 1842 ............ 194

Chapter 6: Kabul Operations and Withdrawal of the ‘Army of Retribution’: September – December 1842 ................................................................. 242

Conclusion ......................................................... 293

Bibliography ....................................................... 301
Acknowledgements

This thesis began in 2009 as part of my preparation for the first of my two operational deployments to Afghanistan with the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Reading the accounts of previous British and Russian Wars in Afghanistan, I was initially disconcerted with the prevailing view that any outside intervention in Afghanistan constituted a ‘graveyard of empires’. My reservation was reinforced with the brutal experiences of the ‘fighting season’ during the summer of 2009 in southern Afghanistan. ISAF’s Coalition Force operations were, at best, in a strategic stalemate against a resilient enemy in many of the locations that feature in this thesis – Kandahar, Gereshk, Qalat, Panjwa’i and the Arghandab River Valley. However to my surprise, upon reading Stocqueler’s biography of the British commander of the Kandahar Garrison in the First Anglo-Afghan War, Major-General Sir William Nott, I concluded that Britain’s Kandahar Campaign had indeed been an outstanding success. It appeared odd that such a success appeared to have been airbrushed out of the popular and prevailing historical narrative fixated on the destruction of the Kabul Garrison in January 1842. Examining Nott’s domination of southern Afghanistan, essentially a kinetic counter-insurgency campaign in modern parlance, provided much-needed succour and campaign validation in the dark days of 2009.

Returning to Afghanistan in 2013, this time to HQ ISAF in Kabul, I had completed my primary thesis research at the University of Oxford and the Royal College of Defence Studies in London. I was more aware of the strategic effects achieved by the British during their concluding phase of the First Anglo-Afghan War through the actions of the ‘Army of Retribution’. Ironically, much of my operational planning throughout 2013 for Commander ISAF, General Joseph Dunford, was focussed upon successfully ending ISAF’s war and for the transition of security primacy to the emerging sovereign nation of Afghanistan. My academic research complemented my professional endeavours that were focussed on successfully ending hostilities on terms to ensure a long-term security equilibrium. Whilst the questionable excesses of the ‘Army of Retribution’ were certainly not included in the operational design for ISAF, my research reinforced that ending a war on favourable terms is the most important of strategic military endeavours. Given the centrality of the actions of the ‘Army of Retribution’ in achieving an enduring security equilibrium on the north-
western borders of British-India for three decades, I was again perplexed by the popular perceptions of the ending of the First Anglo-Afghan War. Prevailing narratives tend to treat the concluding actions of the First Anglo-Afghan War by the ‘Army of Retribution – if they are considered at all – with distain and as an unnecessarily vindictive afterthought of little consequence.

My academic endeavours since 2009 challenging these prevailing orthodoxies on the First Anglo-Afghan War, interspersed with nearly two years of fighting in Afghanistan, are greatly indebted to a number of key supporters. Firstly my loving wife and family have remained constant and true – accepting the many trials and worry with a normality that many could not even contemplate. To my supervisor Professor Jeffery Grey who throughout the many career interruptions of a professional Army Officer has provided an unflappable reassurance and pitched his guidance perfectly with a deft and assured touch. My primary research was only possible during a truncated stay in the United Kingdom through the generous support of Professor Sir Hew Strachan and Dr Robert Johnson at the University of Oxford, Major-General ‘Mungo’ Melvin at the Royal College of Defence Studies, and Dr Tony Heathcote who came out of retirement to generously provide his considerable expertise. I also thank the innumerable and dedicated staff who so generously supported my research at the British National Archives, the British Library, the Bodleian and All Souls College Libraries at the University of Oxford, the National Army Museum in London, the Prince Consort’s Library in Aldershot, the National Library of Australia, and the Australian Defence Force Academy Library. I am grateful for the cartographic expertise of Keith Mitchell who has enabled the representation of the many significant but forgotten military actions of the First Anglo-Afghan War that this thesis has recreated from written historical sources. I am also indebted to the Chief of the Australian Army, Lieutenant-General David Morrison, for providing a brief career hiatus between demanding appointments immediately upon return from Afghanistan – effectively allowing the completion of this thesis.

Lastly, I want to thank my Afghan brother Major-General Sakhi Ahmadzai at the Presidential Palace in Kabul. In addition to the complexities of our joint prosecution of violent extremists and his onerous responsibilities supporting President Karzai, he was able to guide my (literal) battlefield research and through the dark times share a much-needed laugh over many cups of chai. I hope that our current ‘Fourth Anglo-Afghan
War’ finally provides what many societies take for granted – a secure and prosperous future, free from fear and intimidation where our children grow up to a better life – a future that all Afghans deserve. Tashakur!
List of Maps

Central Asia 1838 ix

2.1 Battle of Arghandab River: 12 January 1842 108

2.2 Nott’s clearance operations around Kandahar: 7 – 12 March 1842 114

3.1 Sale’s ‘crowning mercy’ victory at Jalalabad: 7 April 1842 134

3.2 Pollock’s seizure of the entrance to the Khyber Pass: 5 April 1842 141

5.1 Monteith’s punitive operations: 17 Jun – 3 August 1842 196

5.2 Pollock’s advance from Peshawar to Kabul 206

5.3 Attack and capture of Mama Kheyl and Kali Kheyl: 24 August 1842 208

5.4 Forcing the Jegdalek Pass: 8 September 1842 214

5.5 Encounter battle at Tezin Pass: 12 September 1842 218

5.6 Battle of Tezin Pass: 13 September 1842 222

5.7 Nott’s advance from Kandahar to Kabul: 8 August – 17 September 1842 226

5.8 Battle of Khwaja Sei Ghar (‘Gonine’): 30 August 1842 229

6.1 McCaskill’s ‘Army of Kohistan’ Campaign: 25 September – 7 October 1842 248

6.2 McCaskill’s capture of Estalef (‘Istaliff’): 29 September 1842 250
Explanatory Note:

Thesis Mapping Conventions and Military Abbreviations

There is a paucity of battlefield mapping or schematics produced to accompany the written accounts of the many military actions and activities conducted during the First Anglo-Afghan War. The mapping and schematics within this thesis have been derived exclusively from contemporary written accounts by those directly involved in the military actions undertaken by the British Army in Afghanistan.

As part of the original research for this thesis, I have synthesised these contemporary written accounts with my familiarity with the terrain over which many of the battles of the First Anglo-Afghan War were fought. Matching the contemporary eyewitness accounts is made difficult by the inexact nature of the nineteenth-century mapping, which was not subject to modern cartographic standards, with the more precise modern mapping of the same regions used in the current conflict in Afghanistan. This synthesis is further compounded, as any Afghan scholar will attest, because illiteracy is widespread in Afghanistan. Given the predominance of oral culture, Afghan place names are mainly spoken and have slight regional variations, therefore for contemporary British accounts these place names have been transliterated phonetically into English – a process that was far from standardised, hence the example of the many spellings of Kabul/ Kabool/ Cabool/ Caubul, and Kandahar/ Kundahar/ Candahar/ Qandahar, etc. For place-name naming convention within the thesis I have defaulted to the most common and recognisable use of place names, whilst restricting the contemporary spelling (when different) to direct quotations.

Mapping Conventions

I have used modern military conventions as a standardised shorthand to represent the military organisations represented on the battlefield during a particular encounter/ activity. The symbols are matched to the accompanying narrative in the thesis text. To assist in your interpretation, the following are examples of the mapping/ schematic conventions adhered to throughout the thesis:
Infantry Battalion (approximately 1000 troops). Specifically refers to Her Majesty’s (HM) 9th Regiment of Foot of the Queen’s Army.

Infantry Battalion (approximately 1000 troops). Specifically refers to the 26th Regiment of Native Infantry (NI) of the East India Company Army.

Cavalry Squadron (approximately 100-200 troops). Specifically refers to the 3rd Irregular (IRR) Horse of the East India Company Army.

Engineer Company (approximately 100-200 troops). Specifically refers to Captain Broadfoot’s Engineers (or ‘Sappers’) of the East India Company Army.

Artillery Battery (minus) (approximately 60-80 troops and four guns). Specifically refers to a Horse Artillery (HA) Battery of the Queen’s Army.

Cavalry Troop (approximately 30-40 troops). Specifically refers to the 3rd Dragoon (DRAG) Regiment of the Queen’s Army.

Artillery Section (approximately 30-40 troops and two guns). Specifically refers to Captain Backhouse’s Artillery Section of the East India Company Army.

Denotes a battle/military clash. Numbering refers to a sequence of clashes over time in proximity to each other.

Military Rank Abbreviations: For brevity, throughout this thesis the following abbreviations for military rank are used in the footnotes.

- **LTGEN** – Lieutenant-General
- **MAJGEN** – Major-General
- **BRIG** – Brigadier
- **COL** – Colonel
- **LTCOL** – Lieutenant-Colonel
- **MAJ** – Major
- **CAPT** – Captain
- **LT** – Lieutenant
# List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Dost Mahommed, King of Caubul, and His Youngest Son</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Maharajah Ranjit Singh</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>George Eden, Lord Auckland</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Sir William Hay Macnaghten</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>‘Shauh Shujah Ool Moolk’ [Shah Shuja]</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Sir William Nott</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Major-General William Elphinstone</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Sir Robert Sale</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td><em>Remnants of an Army</em></td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Sir George Pollock</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Edward Law, Lord Ellenborough</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Sketch of Ali Masjid Fort, Khyber Pass 1837</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Sir Robert Henry Sale and Florentia, Lady Sale</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Map: Central Asia 1830s
Introduction

Afghanistan’s history is defined by the interplay of its geographic positioning and complex ethnic composition. It is situated at the intersection of three distinct geographical and cultural regions – the Middle East, Central Asia and the Indian sub-continent. Geo-strategically Afghanistan has been used as a buffer state or transit route between these competing regional powers. As the famed ethnographer Louis Dupree observed, Afghanistan is an ‘an area through which armies passed on their way to somewhere else’.¹

In addition to its problematic geo-strategic location, Afghanistan possesses its own complex ethnicity formed through the proximity to these three distinct regional cultures, compounded by the isolating effects of its formidable internal geography formed around the south-western extension of the Hindu Kush. To the north are the Turkistan Plains, a semi-desert fertile flood plain bounded by the Amu Darya (classically Oxus) River where the Tajik, Uzbek and Turkmen align closely as Afghanistan’s northern neighbours. The west and south-west of Afghanistan towards the city of Herat is an extension of the arid Iranian Plateau that gradually descends westwards, where the Farsiwan align closely with their Iranian (classically Persian) neighbours. To the south of the city of Kandahar are the sands of the Registan Desert interspersed by the Helmand, Arghandab and Tarnak River systems dependant for their flow on the seasonal snow-melts. The Baloch of southern Afghanistan align to Afghanistan’s southern neighbours. To the east, the Sulaiman Mountain Range forms the eastern edge of the Iranian plateau which is delineated from the Indian sub-continent by the only clear regional boundary of the Indus River. This mountainous terrain is marked by narrow valleys created by fault lines and earthquakes. The Pashtun live in equal number across Afghanistan’s eastern and south-eastern boundaries where the movement of goods and people is via a few navigable mountain passes, the most important being the Khyber Pass to the east and the Khojak and Bolan Passes in the

¹ Dupree, Louis, *Afghanistan*, 3rd Ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. xviii. The first recorded military passage was by Alexander the Great in the fourth century BC. From northern Central Asia the Mongol invaded during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries regional empires fought over the annexation of Afghanistan, alternatively the Persian Safavids invaded from the west, and Indian Moghuls from the east.
The nation of Afghanistan became a political entity from 1747. Its foundation rested on the sovereignty formed by the Sadozai Ahmad Shah Durrani’s royal dominion over affiliated Pashtun tribes. This confederacy was unstable due to constant internal conflict, and by early in the nineteenth century tribal warfare had fractured Afghanistan to the extent it was powerless and eventually lost its rich Indian dominions. After a long period of fratricidal warfare, by 1826 Dost Mohammad and his Barakzai family finally consolidated their power in Afghanistan. It was during this period that the Afghan polity became enmeshed with European imperial ambition emanating from Britain and Russia.

This thesis examines the early nineteenth century as competing imperial ambitions erupted into a conflict between Britain and Afghanistan. This is the first modern example where the conflicting strategic imperatives from the bordering regions directly confronted the internal politics and complex geography of Afghanistan. The story of the resultant First Anglo-Afghan War is well known. It was precipitated by the spectre of Russian and Persian armies advancing through Afghanistan that threatened Britain’s strategic imperative to secure the north-western approaches to the British-Indian Empire. To mitigate these threats, the British Governor-General, Lord Auckland, chose to incorporate Afghanistan into the security orbit of British-India. The invasion of Afghanistan by Britain’s ‘Army of the Indus’ in 1839 successfully replaced the Barakzai Dost Mohammad with the exiled pro-British Sadozai Shah Shuja. Regardless of these initial successes, the war has become most popularly remembered for the inept leadership of the Kabul Garrison by Major-General William Elphinstone and his Political Advisor, Sir William Macnaghten, which led to the destruction of the 4500


\[3\] Crowned in Kandahar, Ahmad Shah was a member of the Sadozai sub-division of the Durrani confederacy. The date 1747 is often quoted as the formation of the modern Afghan state. Many Afghans consider 1919, following the Third Anglo-Afghan War, as the date when Afghanistan truly became independent. Dupree (1997), pp. xix–xx

\[4\] To protect and perpetuate British-India, Britain’s paramount strategic objective was to maintain the internal security of India. This principal strategy was supported by complementary strategies to defend British-India against external regional threats from neighbouring states and border threats. Norris, James Alfred, *The First Afghan War 1838–1842* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 6; and Yapp, Malcolm E., *Strategies of British India – Britain, Iran and Afghanistan 1798–1850*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 1

\[5\] On 1 Oct 1838 Governor General Lord Auckland outlined Britain’s strategic appraisal and response to these external threats to British-India in his ‘Simla Manifesto’. Chapter 1 of the thesis discusses the 1838 ‘Simla Manifesto’ in detail
troops and 12,000 camp-followers by Afghan tribesmen between 6 to 13 January 1842.

The focus of this thesis is how Britain responded to this devastating tactical defeat to end their first war in Afghanistan. The loss of British martial dominance fundamentally altered the regional power dynamics against British-Indian interests. Conscious of the remaining British garrisons and prisoners still in Afghanistan, the issue for British policy-makers was how to respond without risking a strategic defeat and fatally compromising the enduring strategic imperative to maintain the security along the north-western border of British-India.

Over the period of agonising strategic deliberations between March and July 1842 the incoming Governor-General, Lord Ellenborough, issued instructions for the abandonment of Afghanistan. The new military commander in Afghanistan, Major-General George Pollock, and the undefeated commander of the Kandahar Garrison, Major-General William Nott, were gravely concerned. Abandonment risked conflating the tactical destruction of the Kabul Garrison into a greater strategic defeat that compromised Britain’s strategy of securing the north-western approaches to British-India. Pollock undertook a high-risk exchange of carefully crafted correspondence, often bordering on the insubordinate, to convince Ellenborough to adopt a more assertive closure to Britain’s intervention into Afghanistan. Eventually Ellenborough was sufficiently emboldened to issue equivocal guidance for an aggressive reintervention by the ‘Army of Retribution’, and to eventually boast that his ‘one short campaign’ he had avenged ‘disasters unparalleled in their extent’.\(^6\) Despite the campaign success of the ‘Army of Retribution’, the accounts of the First Anglo-Afghan War overwhelmingly perpetuate a negative stereotype, with scholarly and popular military histories, biographies of key leaders and ethnographic studies of Afghanistan describing it as a strategic defeat for Britain.

The earliest and most detailed scholastic consideration of the events of the First Anglo-Afghan War was written by Sir John Kaye in 1851. His account, refined over the four editions of *History of the War in Afghanistan*, has resonated ever since.\(^7\) Kaye emotively attacks the foundation for the British decision to invade Afghanistan, pessimistically observes the conduct of the British intervention and concludes that the

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\(^7\) Kaye, John William, *History of the War in Afghanistan*, 2 Vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1851). The *History of the War in Afghanistan* was republished in 1857, 1874, with a fourth and final edition in 1878
First Anglo-Afghan War constituted ‘no failure so total and overwhelming as this is recorded in the page of history’. 8

With the interest generated by Britain’s next intervention into Afghanistan during the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-1880), in 1879 a second scholastic account was published by Major-General Sir Henry Durand. 9 This provided a similarly comprehensive first-hand account that complements Kaye’s detailed narrative. Unfortunately, Durand’s book was published posthumously and his comprehensive manuscript ends abruptly with his historical record only reaching March 1842. 10 His account provides no narrative or analysis describing the deliberations and actions that concluded the First Anglo-Afghan War, specifically the conduct of the ‘Army of Retribution’. 11 With the absence of this concluding campaign, Durand’s omission inadvertently began a trend that increasingly consigned Ellenborough’s deliberations and concluding actions of the ‘Army of Retribution’ to the periphery of the events of the First Anglo-Afghan War. This interpretation was reinforced in 1878 by Mowbray Morris’ short narrative centred on the destruction of the Kabul Garrison, with the successes of the ‘Army of Retribution’ portrayed as a belated conclusion to hostilities. 12

Further, in 1892 Archibald Forbes published a well-circulated study of the First Anglo-Afghan War that is very Kabul-centric and only briefly acknowledges the notable tactical successes of Nott and Pollock. 13 The emerging prominence of the disastrous Kabul Garrison against the diminution of the actions of the ‘Army of Retribution’ and Nott’s successful campaigning in southern Afghanistan is given some

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8 Kaye (1851), Vol. 2, p. 667
10 Durand’s account concludes ‘Sir Henry Durand’s manuscript ended here’, Durand (1879), p. 445
11 This is a critical absence from the historical record. Durand appeared to be challenging Kaye’s dominant opinion by offering a countervailing perspective through his very positive description of Ellenborough’s arrival in India. Durand (1879), p. 426
12 Morris concludes with the circular irony that ‘the English Army left secure on the throne of Afghanistan the dynasty they had spent so many millions of treasure and so many thousands of lives to overthrow’. Morris, Mowbray, The First Afghan War (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1878), p. 105
13 Forbes’ final chapter focuses on the recovery of the prisoners with very little analysis on the advance and actions of the ‘Army of Retribution’. Forbes, Archibald, The Afghan Wars 1839–42 and 1878–80, (London: Seeley, 1892). This account is reinforced in a synopsis by Anderson and Subedar in 1918 concluding that the First Anglo-Afghan War was ‘one of the most disastrous episodes in Anglo-Indian history’. Anderson, G. and Subedar M., The Expansion of British India (1818–1858) (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1918), p. 26
reprieve by historian Sir John Fortescue in 1927. Fortescue describes the conduct of the First Anglo-Afghan War in tactical detail and, in a return to Kaye’s and Durand’s comprehensive style, Fortescue provides a similarly opinionated critique on the entirety of the Afghanistan military campaign. Whilst acknowledging the successes of the ‘Army of Retribution’, Fortescue concludes that ‘the restoration of Dost Mohammad was a confession of defeat’ in an ‘unhappy war’ that led to Britain’s ‘loss of military reputation [and] … the wanton alienation of the Afghans’.

This stereotype of the First Anglo-Afghan War as a disaster has been perpetuated into contemporary histories. In 1966, ignoring some of the intervening and moderating scholarship, the pessimistic genre was re-energised by Patrick MacRory. In the narrative structure of Forbes and based heavily on Kaye, MacRory condemns Auckland’s strategic rationale for intervention in Afghanistan. He totally focuses on the events in northern Afghanistan with the inept British response to the uprising in Kabul, and then in excruciating and tragic detail on ‘The Catastrophe’ as the Kabul Garrison is destroyed. Nott’s campaign in southern Afghanistan is dismissed as ‘putting the naughty boys in the corner’. Similarly Britain’s agonising strategic deliberations to re-intervene following the destruction of the Kabul Garrison are described in a single sentence, ‘Ellenborough dismissed the problem by throwing the whole burden of decision upon his generals in the field’.

In 1973 the famed Afghan ethnographer and historian Louis Dupree first published his study entitled Afghanistan. Relying heavily on Kaye’s account, Dupree returns to a popular account of the First Anglo-Afghan War that concentrates on the shortfalls of Elphinstone and Macnaghten leading to the destruction of the Kabul Garrison. With no acknowledgement of Nott’s successes in southern Afghanistan, Dupree cynically observes that the collective punishment meted out by the ‘Army of Retribution’ ended with ‘the final civilized touch when he [Pollock] ordered the

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15 Fortescue (1927), pp. 277 and 280
17 The reference to ‘naughty boys’ is from Macnaghten’s comment on treating Durrani rebels as ‘perfect children … [and] should be treated as such. If we put one naughty boy in the corner, the rest will be terrified’. MacRory (1966), pp. 131 and 255
18 MacRory (1966), p. 254
destruction of the great bazaar in Kabul’. Dupree’s account concludes ‘the British left Afghanistan as they found it, in tribal chaos and with Dost Mohammad Khan returned to the throne in Kabul’ dismissing the war as an ‘abortive experiment in imperialism’. Importantly Dupree’s authoritative assessment of the strategic effect caused by the conclusion of the First Anglo-Afghan War provides two critical observations for this thesis. Importantly, when judging the success or failure of the British intervention, Dupree concludes the geo-strategic conditions in Afghanistan were no worse than before the invasion, and that the effect on the Afghan leadership following the concluding campaign of the ‘Army of Retribution’ that ‘Dost Mohammad followed two policies throughout his second reign: friendship with the British and attempts to unify his country’.

Most recently, in a market energised by the current conflict in Afghanistan, many modern authors have published accounts of the First Anglo-Afghan War that further perpetuate MacRory’s caricature. In 2006 Saul David recounted the familiar and abridged narrative of the ‘Afghan fiasco’. Beginning in 2008, Jules Stewart published the first of his two accounts of British intervention in Afghanistan. Incorporating the accounts of Kaye and Durand, the narrative follows the template established by Forbes with chapters retitled to resonate with modern audiences. Stewart acknowledges Nott’s successful campaign in southern Afghanistan only once, and fails to represent the enormity of the strategic deliberations to re-intervene in Afghanistan by the ‘Army of Retribution’. Stewart’s unsurprising conclusion is that Auckland’s ‘bizarre reasoning’ to invade Afghanistan ‘precipitated Britain into a military disaster of a magnitude not

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21 Dupree (1997), p. 399. In his 1965 political history, Arnold Fletcher goes further, asserting that the ‘effect of this war and invasion upon the Afghan internal development was tragic … Had the invasion never occurred, it is possible that Afghanistan would have adopted European ways at a rapid rate. The war blocked all this; it tinged Afghan hospitality with xenophobia and locked up the country in stultifying isolation for nearly a century’. Fletcher, Arnold, Afghanistan Highway of Conquest, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1965), p. 118
22 Dupree (1997), p. 401
24 Stewart, Jules, Crimson Snow – Britain’s First Disaster in Afghanistan, 2nd Ed. (Stroud: History Press, 2010)
25 The central chapter recounting the destruction of the Kabul Garrison is changed from Forbes’ ‘Catastrophe’ and MacRory’s ‘The Catastrophe’ to a more contemporary ‘Blood was Falling, Blood on Snow’ (hence the title of the book). The concluding chapter of the actions of the ‘Army of Retribution’ is changed from Forbes’ ‘Retribution and Rescue’ and MacRory’s ‘The Aftermath’ to ‘The Empire Strikes Back’
26 Stewart (2010), pp. 76 and 189
equalled until the fall of Singapore a hundred years later’. Again in 2011 Stewart published his more expansive account of all three Anglo-Afghan Wars. Nott’s successes are again only acknowledged once and there is no sense of the agonising strategic deliberations to re-intervene, with Stewart asserting that ‘in June [actually 4 July] Ellenborough took matters in hand and issued instructions of a morally ambiguous nature’. His summary captures the modern prevailing view of the First Anglo-Afghan War as ‘a terrible mistake as well as an injustice to Dost Mohammad and his people … the army commanders who were dispatched to Kabul to prop up this despised puppet [Shah Shuja] had brought upon the Raj its greatest ever military disaster’. In 2012 Diana Preston further reinforced this modern narrative, condemning Auckland’s decision to invade Afghanistan. In a compelling but well-trodden narrative she recounts the hubris of the British invasion by the ‘Army of the Indus’, the depressing detail of Macnaghten’s mounting errors in Kabul and Elphinstone’s inept response to the November 1841 uprising culminating in the tragic destruction of the Kabul Garrison, with only two sentences referring to Nott’s continuing successes in Kandahar. In her concluding chapter, Preston discusses the actions of the ‘Army of Retribution’ in recovering the prisoners and for the commission of final and vindictive acts.

In 2013 William Dalrymple published his comprehensive and highly readable account of the First Anglo-Afghan War. Providing a detailed review of the geo-strategic machination for Britain’s strategic deliberations to invade Afghanistan, Dalrymple questions Auckland’s rationale for launching the invasion as he concludes

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27 Stewart (2010), pp. 31–33. This conclusion is supported by the conspiratorial conclusion by Terrence Blackburn that Auckland’s 1838 Simla Manifesto was ‘hypocritical and hollow’ because Britain’s ‘real design of the expedition was, under the pretext of restoring the legitimate sovereign of Afghanistan, to take military possession of the country and to retain it’. Blackburn, Terrence, The Extermination of a British Army: The Retreat from Kabul (New Delhi: APH Publishing, 2008), pp. 194–195


29 Stewart (2011), pp. 113–114

30 The 1838 ‘Simla Manifesto’ is described as ‘the document placed the entire blame on Dost Mohammad in an interpretation of events so twisted it could have been penned by the Red Queen in the yet-to-be-written Alice in Wonderland’. Preston, Diana, The Dark Defile: Britain’s Catastrophic Invasion of Afghanistan, 1838–1842 (New York: Walker, 2012), p. 65

31 Echoing MacRory’s brief treatment of Nott, Preston observes ‘General Nott, the commander in Kandahar, was given the job of disciplining the naughty children. On 3 January his men defeated fifteen hundred Douranee horsemen who fled across the Helmand River’. Preston (2012), p. 126

32 Preston observes that spectators at Ellenborough’s elaborate reception of the ‘Army of Retribution’ at Ferozepur in December 1842 ‘might have been forgiven for believing they were witnessing the celebration of a great victory rather than an epilogue to failure’. Preston (2012), p. 245

that with the siege of Herat being lifted in 1838, ‘Auckland’s original *casus belli* were now removed’.34 Despite detailing Nott’s successes in southern Afghanistan, the delegitimised rationale for the invasion is carried through Dalrymple’s account of the First Anglo-Afghan War to the final chapter entitled ‘A War for No Wise Purpose’. In this concluding chapter Ellenborough’s seminal strategic deliberations to re-intervene in Afghanistan and his interaction with Pollock and Nott are only briefly touched on. Further, and in keeping with the chapter title, Dalrymple’s detailed account of the brutal actions by the ‘Army of Retribution’ are infused with a sense of belated pointlessness. Implying a British defeat by conferring success to the ‘Afghan victors’, Dalrymple closes with a familiar conclusion that Dost Mohammad was ‘the only man who clearly gained from the First Anglo-Afghan War … the very man whom the war was designed to dispose’.35

Finally, following in the more expansive traditions of Forbes, and latterly the historian Tony Heathcote, there have been many modern writers who have conducted more holistic analyses to present an overview of foreign interventions into Afghanistan.36 Being forced into a précis-style analysis, these accounts are useful for elucidating the defining features of the First Anglo-Afghan War. In 1993 Edgar O’Balance asserted questionably that the First Anglo-Afghan War was initiated ‘to open up trade routes westward towards Turkistan’, and more accurately that Auckland’s key strategic ‘mistake was to prefer the Sikh Maharajah Ranjit Singh to Dost Mohammad’. O’Balance then concludes that the end of the First Anglo-Afghan War ‘will always be primarily remembered for the disastrous British Retreat from Kabul, the fault of an aging incompetent General, rather than the more virile and effective actions of Nott, Pollock and Sale’.

In 2003 Jeffery Roberts concluded that the strategic effects of the First Anglo-Afghan War ‘proved but a minor setback that had a few lasting consequences on British policy’ and that in response Britain promoted a sense of Afghan exceptionalism by attributing the British defeat to ‘flaws in the Afghan

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34 Dalrymple (2013), pp. 149–150  
35 Dalrymple (2013), pp. 475–476  
36 Tony Heathcote has published a comprehensive and unemotive factual account of the events of the Britain’s three Afghan Wars. Heathcote, T.A., *The Afghan Wars 1839–1919*, 3rd Ed. (Stroud: Spellmount, 2007)  
character’ that emphasised Afghan sadism and treachery. However, given the Anglo-Afghan Treaty of 1855, Roberts questionably concludes that ‘the atrocities committed by the “Army of Retribution” left the Afghans with similar animosities towards the British that would preclude harmonious Anglo-Afghan relations’. In 2008 David Loyn concluded with the familiar observation that the First Anglo-Afghan War had been a ‘disastrous war’ whose purpose was effectively de-legitimised when ‘Dost Mohammad, the man the war had been launched to remove, was allowed to make his way back to reclaim his throne’. In 2009 Seth Jones published his modern study of the contemporary war in Afghanistan and concluded in his historical overview that the First Anglo-Afghan War ‘ended in a humiliating British defeat’ and enshrined the epithet of Afghanistan as the ‘Graveyard of Empires’.

Alongside these fatalistic histories there are a number of biographies that are crucial to understanding the events of the First Anglo-Afghan War, in particular the biographies of the British leaders and military commanders and the Afghan leader Dost Mohammad. The two key battlefield commanders are extensively analysed. The first is the two-volume biography of Major-General Sir William Nott by the journalist Joachim Stocqueler published in 1854. The bulk of Stocqueler’s biography describes Nott’s

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41 Jones, Seth G., *In the Graveyard of Empires, America’s War in Afghanistan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), p. 6; and, Bearden, Milton (2001), ‘Afghanistan, Graveyard of Empires’, in *Foreign Affairs*, Nov/Dec 2001, Vol. 80, Iss. 6, p. 17. So consistent and pervasive has this view become, it is instructive to consider the perceptions of the two most significant international leaders who initiated the current conflict in Afghanistan. The Prime Minister of Great Britain reflected on his understanding of Afghanistan on 20 September 2001 to conclude that ‘I knew little about Afghanistan, but I did know it was a country that over the centuries had been invaded, occupied and plundered yet always seemed eventually to swallow and spit out the invaders’. Similarly, the President of the United States George Bush, when contemplating launching military operations on 21 September 2001 concluded ‘the people of Afghanistan have a way of banding together against foreigners. They drove out the British in the nineteenth century … Afghanistan had earned the foreboding nickname: Graveyard of Empires’. Blair, Tony, *A Journey* (London: Hutchinson, 2010), p. 355; and, Bush, George W., *Decision Points* (United Kingdom: Random House, 2010), p. 194.

activities during the First Anglo-Anglo Afghan War and, reflecting the biography’s dedication ‘to the survivors of the Army of Candahar’, is valuable for providing a detailed account of the little recognised successes of the British Army’s occupation of southern Afghanistan. Stocqueler also provides an invaluable insight into Nott’s personal views and concerns through the publication of Nott’s private correspondence. This is particularly critical for this thesis as it provides the battlefield perspective from Kandahar during Ellenborough’s strategic deliberations for British re-intervention into Afghanistan in 1842.\(^{43}\) The second biography is Charles Low’s 1873 study of Major-General Sir George Pollock.\(^{44}\) Low is quite explicit in his purpose by dedicating his biography to ‘the record of the service of the General who brought that episode of Indian history to a glorious conclusion’.\(^{45}\) The bulk of the biography is dedicated to Pollock’s leadership of the ‘Army of Retribution’ and provides an extensive tactical account of the advance to Jalalabad and the actions around Kabul. Another great value to this thesis is that Low also provides a detailed account of Pollock’s influence upon Ellenborough’s strategic deliberations to conclude the First Anglo-Afghan War with the re-intervention of the ‘Army of Retribution’.\(^{46}\)

The perspective of the main Afghan antagonist, Dost Mohammad, is examined in Christine Nölle-Karimi’s 1997 incisive analysis of the complexities of nineteenth-century Afghan politics and the role of Dost Mohammad.\(^{47}\) Examining the First Anglo-Afghan War from an Afghan political perspective, Nölle-Karimi refutes the popular notion that the Afghan uprising against Britain was a coordinated popular national movement.\(^{48}\) She concludes that following the First Anglo-Afghan War Dost Mohammad, suitably wary of meddling with bordering regional powers that could potentially provoke another brutal British response, exploited the favourable internal

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\(^{43}\) This personal account is complemented by Stocqueler’s earlier compilation of correspondence in *Memorials of Afghanistan: State Papers, Official Documents, Dispatches, Authentic Narratives etc Ilustiative of the British Expedition to, and Occupation of, Afghanistan and Scinde, between the years 1838 and 1842* (Calcutta: Bishop’s College Press, 1843).

\(^{44}\) Low provides a brief overview of Pollock’s early career from his commission into the Bengal Artillery in 1803 until his selection by Auckland in late 1841 to replace the ailing Elphinstone in Afghanistan. Low, Charles Rathbone, *The Life and Correspondence of Field-Marshal Sir George Pollock*. (London: W.H. Allen, 1873)

\(^{45}\) Low (1873), ‘Dedication’ (immediately before Preface)

\(^{46}\) For a short synopsis of Pollock and Nott see Chapter 7 (Pollock) and Chapter 8 (Nott) in Pottinger, George and Macrory, Patrick, *The Ten-Rupee Jezail: Figures from the First Afghan War 1838–1842*, (Norwich: Michael Russell, 1993), pp. 155–213


\(^{48}\) Noelle (1997), pp. 53–55
conditions to consolidate his internal sphere of authority into an approximation of today’s form of Afghanistan. Dost Mohammad’s internal focus on consolidating Afghanistan received British support and was formalised in the 1855 Anglo-Afghan Treaty.\(^{49}\)

The strategic level of leadership during the First Anglo-Afghan War is analysed in two key biographies. The first published in 1893 by Captain Lionel Trotter is focused on Auckland’s career as the Governor-General through a narrative of the events of the First Anglo-Afghan War. Even in this very sympathetic review of events from Auckland’s perspective, Trotter effectively agrees with Kaye and bluntly concludes that Auckland’s strategic decision to invade Afghanistan ‘viewed, indeed, in whatever aspect, that policy was at once blunder and a crime’.\(^{50}\) The second, published in 1939 by historian Albert Imlah, examines the extensive public career of Lord Ellenborough and dedicates a chapter to the events of the First Anglo-Afghan War.\(^{51}\) Imlah offers a weak defence against Kaye’s accusations of Ellenborough’s ‘feebleness and indecision’ surrounding the strategic vacillations between February and July 1842, asserting that there was constancy in ‘the principles laid down’ from Ellenborough’s first directive to conclude the First Anglo-Afghan War.\(^{52}\) Imlah successfully conveys Ellenborough’s great strength of purpose and personal intervention to consolidate Pollock’s and Nott’s position in Afghanistan, but provides little credit to these battlefield commanders in influencing Ellenborough’s eventual and equivocal decision to re-intervene. Imlah concludes summarising the geo-strategic effects from the brutal end to the First Anglo-Afghan War by observing that the release of Dost Mohammad to resume his throne ‘thenceforth, the man who had been “reputedly hostile” reigned on good terms with the British, with one brief interlude, until his death in 1863’.\(^{53}\)

In addition to the individual perspectives found in the biographies, several firsthand accounts have shaped perceptions of the War. The most popular eyewitness

\(^{49}\) Noelle (1997), pp. 290–291
\(^{52}\) Imlah discredits Kaye’s views by observing that ‘Kaye, it should perhaps be added, was in India during Ellenborough’s regime and imbied much of the hostility to the Governor-General which prevailed there in some circles at the time’. Imlah (1939), pp. 94–95, and Kaye, John William, *History of the War in Afghanistan*, 4th Ed., 3 Vols (London: William H. Allen & Co, 1878), Vol. 3, p. 191
\(^{53}\) Imlah (1939), pp. 118–119
accounts were by authors closely involved with the destruction of the Kabul Garrison who had survived by virtue of being taken prisoner. Both Lieutenant Vincent Eyre, and later Lieutenant-General Sir George Lawrence, detailed the destruction of the Kabul Garrison and the subsequent captivity of the British prisoners.\textsuperscript{54} Most significantly, in 1843 Lady Florentia Sale published her journal to widespread popular acclaim. In a compelling and diarised form she describes the inept leadership of the Kabul Garrison, the utter desperation of the retreat from Kabul in January 1842, and her eight months in captivity until being emotionally reunited with her husband Brigadier Sale in September 1842.\textsuperscript{55} These earliest accounts established the most enduring and persistent feature to define the First Anglo-Afghan War – Britain’s tragedy and humiliation accompanying the destruction of the Kabul Garrison in January 1842.\textsuperscript{56}

There were also very early tactical accounts by participants in the First Anglo-Afghan War. These officers were explicit in asserting that the potential disaster following the destruction of the Kabul Garrison had been salvaged by Britain’s re-intervention by the ‘Army of Retribution’. In 1844 Lieutenant John Greenwood published his tactically focussed narrative of service under Pollock in northern Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{57} Greenwood asserts that Pollock’s aggressive re-intervention had reversed Britain’s fortunes and salvaged the First Anglo-Afghan War as ‘an unwearied career of success had marked our march on Cabul’.\textsuperscript{58} In 1845 Captain J. Martin Bladen Neill published a complementary tactical account of Nott’s unbroken military dominance in southern Afghanistan reflecting on the ‘curious and important’ achievements of the ‘Army of Retribution’ in salvaging the destruction of the Kabul


\textsuperscript{55} The disaster, tragedy, bravery and melodrama played well to the popular tastes of Victorian audiences, with even Queen Victoria receiving the Sales at Windsor Castle. Sale, Florentia (Lady Sale), \textit{Journal of the Disasters in Afghanistan} (London: John Murray, 1843), edited by Patrick MacRory (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969)

\textsuperscript{56} In 1844 a polemic book by Barrister Henry Lushington captures the contemporary examination of the very basis for Britain’s intervention in Afghanistan. Lushington argues that even if the geo-strategic threats to British-India had ‘been well founded, they do not appear sufficient to justify the course which we pursued’. Lushington, Henry, \textit{A Great Country’s Little Wars; or, England, Afghanistan, and Sinde; being a sketch with reference to their Morality and Policy of Recent Transactions on the North-Western Frontier of India} (London: John Parker, 1844), p. 47


\textsuperscript{58} Greenwood (1844), pp. 244–245
Garrison that ‘has excited universal wonder and admiration’. In 1845 a Bengal Officer concluded that the ‘Army of Retribution’ was successful in ‘closing a triumphant campaign, which will be long remembered as following one of the most disastrous chapters of our Indian history’. Increasingly pessimistic, in 1846 the Reverend Gleig provided his tactical account of service with Brigadier Sale in Jalalabad. Gleig concluded ‘so ended a war begun for no wise purpose, carried on with a strange mixture of rashness and timidity, and brought to a close, after suffering and disaster, without much glory attached either to the government which directed it, or the great body of the troops which waged it’. Finally Captain (later Major-General Sir) Henry Havelock provided his own account of the advance of the ‘Army of the Indus’ during 1838–1839, which is complemented by his brother-in-law, Dr John Clark Marshman, who provided a detailed memoir of the siege of Jalalabad and Havelock’s participation in the ‘Army of Retribution’. These accounts conclude with the observation that the First Anglo-Afghan War ‘is memorable in our Indian annals as having inflicted on us the most astounding disaster which had ever fallen our arms’ but concludes that the ‘Army of Retribution’ had ‘re-established our reputation in Afghanistan’.

The extensive literature discussed above, from the first histories to later popular accounts, to biographies, portrays the First Anglo-Afghan War as an unnecessary and disastrous war resulting in a significant strategic defeat for Britain. It is common to find descriptions of the British invasion as ill conceived, poorly executed and ultimately disastrous. There has been consistent criticism of Auckland’s strategic rationale, as described in his 1838 ‘Simla Manifesto’, as an illegitimate casus belli; with campaign analyses obsessively despairing at the calamitous tactical actions leading to the destruction of the Kabul Garrison; a poor understanding of the complexities of

60 A Bengal Officer, Recollections of the first campaign west of the Indus, and of the subsequent operation of the Candahar Force, under Major-General Sir W. Nott (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1845), p. 83
61 Gleig, G.H., Sale’s Brigade in Afghanistan with an account of the seizure and defence of Jellalabad (London: Murray, 1846), p. 181. A Cavalry Officer published his account and concluded that the British invasion was based on a flawed geo-strategic analysis, there was a lack of desire to maintain the cost of the occupation of Afghanistan, and that the return of Dost Mohammad to the Afghan throne constituted the ‘final satire on the Caubul campaign’ to poignantly invalidate the strategic rationale for Britain’s intervention in Afghanistan. A Cavalry Officer, Military Service and Adventures in the Far East, Vol. 2 (London: Charles Ollier, 1847), pp. 12–13
62 Havelock, Captain Henry, Narrative of the War in Afghanistan, (London: Henry Colburn, 1840)
Ellenborough’s strategic deliberations and rationale for re-intervention; and, an inconsistent analysis on the strategic effects from the concluding actions of the ‘Army of Retribution’, most often dismissed as a vindictive British afterthought. These persistent shortfalls have been recycled and perpetuated by generations of writers into a caricatured perception of the commencement, conduct and conclusion of the First Anglo-Afghan War as a strategic defeat composed of a melange of strategic pointlessness and military incompetence.

There are a few exceptions to this characterisation. In 1929 Lieutenant-General Sir George MacMunn, with extensive experience in British-India, published his comprehensive ethnographic study of Afghanistan and he presents a different verdict. MacMunn picks up two themes from the First Anglo-Afghan War, the essentially standardised perception centred on the disaster of the Kabul Garrison, but he emphasises the notion of the ‘brilliant military retrieval’ by the ‘Army of Retribution’. MacMunn’s analysis suggests that the events in Afghanistan were heading for strategic disaster but that they had been retrieved by the manner in which the First Anglo-Afghan War concluded. Further, instead of viewing the return of Dost Mohammad to Kabul as the popular and delegitimising ‘confession of defeat’ for Britain’s intervention, MacMunn provides the perspective that ‘the Afghans themselves had had enough of fighting, either internally or with invaders for some time to come’. MacMunn describes the effects of the conclusion of the First Anglo-Afghan War upon the return of Dost Mohammad to Kabul, after being chastened by the demonstration of the British military force.

In 1950 the former British Envoy to Afghanistan, Lieutenant-Colonel Sir William Fraser-Tytler, published his political study of Afghanistan. In his chapter the ‘First Afghan War’ Fraser-Tytler offers a measured and strategic analysis of the First Anglo-Afghan War within the broader regional context. Setting an analytical tone for a more

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64 The study spans Afghanistan from pre-history to King Amanullah’s Afghanistan following the conclusion of the 1919 Third Anglo-Afghan War. MacMunn, Lieutenant-General Sir George, *Afghanistan from Darius to Amanullah* (London: Bell, 1929)
65 Fortesque (1927), p. 277; and, MacMunn (1929), p. 156
66 Dost Mohammad was focussed on consolidating his power in Kabul, Ghazni and Jalalabad, and then on recovering Kandahar in 1853, and Herat in 1854 before signing the Anglo-Afghan Treaty with Britain in 1855. MacMunn (1929), pp. 156–157 and 160–161
sympathetic treatment of Auckland, later to be reinforced by the scholarship of Norris and Yapp, Fraser-Tytler defends the actions of Auckland for the invasion of Afghanistan by asserting that ‘it must be admitted by even the severest critic that Lord Auckland’s position in the spring of 1838 was one of extraordinary difficulty’.69

Studying Auckland’s deliberations, Fraser-Tytler concludes that ‘his final decision to use a British force to remove one Afghan ruler and replace him by another was a logical and indeed inevitable decision’.70 Finally echoing MacMunn’s observation about the ending the First Anglo-Afghan War by the ‘Army of Retribution’, Fraser-Tytler concludes ‘they restored, so far as in them lay, the status quo’.71 Both MacMunn and Fraser-Tytler conclude that the decision to re-intervene in Afghanistan with the ‘Army of Retribution’ prevented Britain’s strategic defeat in the First Anglo-Afghan War.

This thesis explores the observations raised by these few authors that the First Anglo-Afghan War did not end in disaster to challenge the persistent and popularly held notion that it was a strategic defeat. The understandable focus on the tragic events from November 1841 uprising until the subsequent destruction of the Kabul Garrison in January 1842 has conflated tactical disaster with strategic failure. By privileging a truncated period of the catastrophic events around Kabul and the attempted withdrawal to Jalalabad, the account of the First Anglo-Afghan War has been skewed. The focus on the military campaign in northern Afghanistan has been at the expense of a more balanced historical account of Britain’s unbroken military successes in southern Afghanistan and its precarious hold on eastern Afghanistan. With the comparative lack of the accounts of the Kandahar Garrison’s tactical actions and the consequent paucity of analysis, questions remain for a more holistic analysis of Britain’s military operations in Afghanistan – what other military operations were conducted in southern and eastern Afghanistan, and were these actions important in the overall conduct and conclusion of the First Anglo-Afghan War?

Another shortcoming from the historical fixation on the events in northern Afghanistan is that many accounts imply that the destruction of the Kabul Garrison

69 Fraser-Tytler (1967), p. 106
70 Fraser-Tytler (1967), p. 109. Fraser-Tytler apportions much of the blame for Auckland’s decisions on the quality of advisors, particularly the ‘unswerving rigidity’ of Macnaghten. In a further defence of Auckland, Fraser-Tytler asserts that Elphinstone’s failure to respond swiftly and decisively at the commencement of the Kabul insurrection had been the critical point of failure for Britain. Fraser-Tytler (1967), pp. 113–116
71 Fraser-Tytler (1967), p. 119
effectively ended the First Anglo-Afghan War. In reality, following the destruction of the Kabul Garrison the outcome of the First Anglo-Afghan War hung in the balance. The strategic situation for British-India inherited by Ellenborough at that time was extremely dire. With military forces and prisoners still in Afghanistan, Ellenborough’s strategic deliberations and correct decision-making were fundamental if Britain was to avoid an imminent strategic defeat. The details of Ellenborough’s deliberations leading to his profound decision to re-intervene into Afghanistan have been poorly examined. Specifically, in examining the evolution of Ellenborough’s deliberations there has been very little analysis of the key influencers and circumstances upon Ellenborough’s final decisions to end the First Anglo-Afghan War. To more fully understand this critical episode of British strategic decision-making key questions remain – what were the circumstances and key influences on Ellenborough’s strategic deliberations that resulted in his decision to end the First Anglo-Afghan War by a re-intervention into Afghanistan? Was reintervention more than a face-saving afterthought or rather the determining factor on the strategic outcome of the First-Anglo War?

Finally, having more fully examined the process whereby Ellenborough decided to re-intervene, the salvaging of an impending strategic defeat rested upon the tactical actions of the ‘Army of Retribution’, popularly dismissed as a belated and violent afterthought in the periphery of the overall campaign. The actual conduct of the ‘Army of Retribution’ commanded by Pollock and Nott was a significant military undertaking and campaign worthy of recognition in its own right. Understanding their successes in concluding the First Anglo-Afghan War requires an examination of the question – what were the actions and the strategic effects from Britain’s re-intervention into Afghanistan by the ‘Army of Retribution’?

The major questions in this thesis, surrounding the campaign beyond Kabul and Ellenborough’s deliberations on re-intervention and the actions of the ‘Army of Retribution’, are examined from a strategic perspective. As modern historian Christian Tripodi observes ‘the common notion of British strategic failure in Afghanistan is misunderstanding of what policy-makers were trying to achieve’.72 The strategic objectives that initiated Britain’s intervention into Afghanistan are defined and then evaluated against the strategic effect achieved by the conclusion of the First Anglo-

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Afghan War. Here the scholarship of James Norris and Malcolm Yapp have been instrumental in shaping the direction and tenor of the thesis.

In 1967 James Norris published his modern and authoritative book, and correctly observes that many commentators of the First Anglo-Afghan War have ‘remained content to reproduce the contemporary judgements and partisan comments of nineteenth-century writers without discrimination. To a very large extent this is the influence of Sir John William Kaye’s long reign as unchallenged historian of Victorian India’. Norris provides a fresh examination and masterful analysis of the geo-strategic machinations across Central Asia and the British strategic deliberations that culminated in Auckland’s decision to invade Afghanistan from 1838. Norris’ detailed scholarship convincingly demonstrates that the British intervention into Afghanistan was an understandable and appropriate response to the geo-strategic circumstances facing British-India in the 1830s. While the weight of historical interpretation invalidates the rationale for the British invasion of Afghanistan, a fundamental question must be revisited – was Auckland’s decision to initiate the First Anglo-Afghan War valid and appropriate? And if so, does re-focussing on Britain’s original geo-strategic context and strategic imperatives arrive at a different verdict on First Anglo-Afghan War?

The grand-strategic perspective advanced in Yapp’s 1980 analysis contextualised Britain’s involvement in Afghanistan as part of Britain’s wider strategic search ‘for a system which would safeguard British India from the dangers of attack from the north-west’. Yapp describes Britain’s frontier defence evolution from the problematic Anglo-Persian alliance of the 1830s, to the failed incorporation of Afghanistan as an extended buffer state, until finally settling on the annexation of the bordering states of Sind in 1843 and the Punjab in 1849 into British-India. Yapp acknowledges that the strategic dynamics of the 1830s had led Britain to legitimately make ‘deeper penetrations’ into Central Asia, although eventually Britain realised that ‘the cost of a

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73 Norris (1967), p. xiii
74 Norris (1967), p. xv
75 However, Norris is less comprehensive about the final year of Britain’s concluding involvement in Afghanistan summarising Ellenborough’s decision-making and actions of the ‘Army of Retribution’ into a single, inconclusive and penultimate chapter
76 Yapp (1980), p. 1
forward strategy outweighed the likely benefits’. Critically, Yapp’s detailed study also serves to examine the enormity of the strategic deliberations faced by Ellenborough in ending the First Anglo-Afghan War, ‘wanting victory, but he dared not risk a defeat’. Yapp concludes that Ellenborough’s prime motive was to preserve the perception of Britain’s military dominance for the internal security of British-India, but interestingly gives little credit to the persuasiveness of Pollock and Nott upon his decision to re-intervene with the ‘Army of Retribution’. Yapp’s analysis is a welcome addition as it provides an authoritative examination of the most critical decision-making process to extract Britain from Afghanistan that is often so lightly touched on by most commentators.

The application of a strategic framework in this thesis allows a comparison of the strategic reasons that began the War to be judged against strategic effects achieved by the British withdrawal at the end of the War. This standard strategic analytical methodology is applied focussing on the strategic ends, cognisant of the supporting strategic ways and means, to clearly establish Britain’s strategic rationale and desired intent for invading Afghanistan. Following this foundational analysis, the thesis then proceeds to answers these questions on the First Anglo-Afghan War in a broadly chronological sequence. The concluding strategic effects of the First Anglo-Afghan War are then derived from the examination of the actions of the Kandahar Garrison, Ellenborough’s strategic deliberations and the concluding actions of the ‘Army of Retribution’.

The first chapter establishes the foundation for the strategic analysis by describing the development of British-India’s enduring strategy to secure the north-western overland approaches to British India based primarily on the authoritative scholarship of Norris and Yapp. By applying a standard strategic analytical framework across the prevailing geo-strategic challenges confronting British-India during the 1830s and Britain’s enduring strategic imperatives, the chapter derives Britain’s desired strategic end-state that led to the invasion of Afghanistan. Having established and analysed the strategic context, the chapter concludes with an assessment of the validity and appropriateness of Auckland’s rationale to invade Afghanistan in 1839.

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77 Yapp asserts that the strategy to defend north-west British-India by the use of an Afghan buffer had been ‘premature’ because ‘military and financial considerations argued first for the domination of the Indus by the annexation of Sind and Panjab’. Yapp (1980), pp. 460 and 350

78 Yapp (1980), p. 443
With the well-known events in northern Afghanistan leading to the destruction of the Kabul Garrison, the second chapter focuses on the lesser known tactical events in southern and eastern Afghanistan. The unbroken successes of Nott’s military campaigning around Kandahar, and Sale’s precarious hold on Jalalabad, are described in the tactical detail that is frequently omitted from historical accounts of the First Anglo-Afghan War. Based around Stocqueler’s biography of Nott, firsthand accounts by Captains Neill and Havelock, contemporary mapping, and my own personal battlefield research, the analysis of these poorly recognised military operations provides new insights into the significance of Nott’s actions in establishing the preconditions that contributed directly to Britain’s overall conduct and conclusion of the First Anglo-Afghan War. This chapter presents original battlefield schematics and mapping.

Utilising extensive primary sources and contemporary journals and mapping collected from the British National Archives, London; the British Library, London; the Bodleian and All Souls College Libraries, University of Oxford; the National Army Museum, London; the Prince Consort’s Library, Aldershot; and Parliamentary Papers published in 1843, the next two chapters provide a detailed examination of the deliberations between Ellenborough and his two battlefield commanders in Afghanistan, Pollock and Nott. This extensive exchange of primary-sourced correspondence and mapping is synthesised with Imlah’s biography of Ellenborough, Low’s biography of Pollock and Stocqueler’s biography of Nott. The examination of this exchange of correspondence and battlefield mapping provides a greater understanding of the significance of Pollock’s and Nott’s respective tactical actions around Jalalabad and Kandahar during the period of strategic deliberations to establish the conditions that enabled the successful re-intervention with the ‘Army of Retribution’. Most significantly, the examination of the correspondence provides new insights into the extent of the persuasive advocacy by Pollock and Nott in influencing Ellenborough’s strategic deliberations.

The final two chapters, again presenting original battlefield mapping and schematics, describe the military campaign conducted during the re-intervention by the ‘Army of Retribution’ into Afghanistan. Continuing to incorporate the extensive primary and secondary sources, as well as synthesising additional firsthand accounts of a Bengal Officer, Reverend Gleig, Lieutenant Greenwood and my personal battlefield research, a detailed record of the campaign by the ‘Army of Retribution’ is developed.
The significant tactical actions undertaken by Pollock and Nott during their advance, as well as the actions conducted around Kabul, are detailed and provide a new interpretation of the strategic effects achieved by the ‘Army of Retribution’ in concluding the First Anglo-Afghan War.

Having defined Britain’s desired strategic aims and derived the concluding strategic effects, the thesis conducts a comparative strategic analysis. The strategic outcome for Britain is analysed by comparing the desired strategic end-state that initiated the British invasion of Afghanistan against the strategic effects actually achieved by Britain’s intervention. By applying this standard framework for strategic analysis, and incorporating a wide range of primary sources, this thesis provides a new understanding of the critical roles of Pollock in Jalalabad, Nott in Kandahar and the concluding actions of the ‘Army of Retribution’. From these new insights, this thesis provides a revised interpretation that challenges the widespread characterisation that the First Anglo-Afghan War ended in a strategic defeat for Britain.
Chapter 1

Britain’s Afghanistan Strategy to 1838

The prevailing perception of the First Anglo-Afghan War as a strategic defeat rests upon the alleged invalidity of the Governor-General Lord Auckland’s *casus belli* and the subsequent failure of Britain to achieve its stated strategic objectives. The most persistent criticism asserts an illegitimate strategic rationale leading to Britain’s decision to invade Afghanistan, and that the strategic objectives were not achieved by the war’s end. Most of this criticism is based upon an interpretation of Britain’s strategic rationale and objectives as detailed by Auckland in his 1838 ‘Simla Manifesto’. The weight of historical interpretation has condemned the First Anglo-Afghan War for its invalid strategic rationale and a failure to achieve the stated strategic objectives.

To examine such criticism, Britain’s strategic decision-making is analysed within the broader geo-strategic context and the competing strategic imperatives that confronted British-India throughout the 1830s. This foundational analysis establishes that the enduring British strategy was centered on the internal and external security of British-India, and Afghanistan became enmeshed into Britain’s strategic calculus due to its proximity and relationships with competing regional powers. This analysis details the evolution of Britain’s policy responses to maintain their strategic imperatives throughout the 1830s and, through the application of a standard strategic analytical framework, validates Britain’s rationale and the actual strategic objectives leading to the invasion of Afghanistan in 1839.

The first official British observation of Afghanistan came from the transit of Captain Sir John Malcolm’s (1769–1833) unsuccessful mission from British-India to Persia in 1808. The influential Malcolm had already begun to advocate a forward policy beyond the Indian frontier that sought to extend British influence through the judicious cultivation of the native aristocracy internal to India and the regional leadership of states abutting British territories. These policies had the aim of denying any potential external advance upon India through alliances with neighbouring states. These alliances were to keep an external enemy at a distance from British-India, and to remove the threat of invasion as a potential catalyst for internal insurrection. From these initial
considerations of frontier security, the enduring British strategic rationale regarding Afghanistan started to evolve.\(^1\) Britain’s primary strategic aim for engaging with Afghanistan was to ‘safeguard British India from attack from the north-west’.\(^2\) The British Government in India initially sought to achieve this strategic aim by maintaining positive and influential relations with the bordering western and north-western states of British India.

Within the context of potential threats from a French or Russian invasion of British-India, Britain’s formal relations with Afghanistan were initiated by the newly installed Governor-General in India, Gilbert Elliot the First Earl of Minto (1751–1814).\(^3\) Minto’s Commander-in-Chief, Lieutenant-General Sir George Hewett (1750–1840), considered that the defence of India should concentrate on the land frontiers.\(^4\) Hewett calculated that an invading force could enter Afghanistan via the Persian city of Mashhad and then either penetrate into British-India through Kandahar, the Bolan Pass, Quetta to Shikarpur; or more probably, from Kabul, the Khyber Pass, Peshawar to Attock.

In making his assessment Hewett cautioned against advancing to the Indus River to meet an invading force due to the many uncertainties of prosecuting an encounter battle. Instead Hewett favoured a large force of 27,000 troops concentrated at Delhi to await an overland invader to over-extend themselves and confront them on a predictable invasion route. Minto considered Hewett’s strategy too defensive and favoured British forces advancing to the Indus River and possibly further into Afghanistan. The British Resident at Gwalior, Mountstuart Elphinstone (1779–1859), went further and suggested that Britain adopt a forward defensive policy and annex the states of the Punjab Sind with a subsidiary alliance with Kabul.\(^5\)

In addition to contemplating the forward positioning of British troops to counter an invasion, Minto initiated a complementary flurry of diplomatic activity. Commencing in March 1808, he undertook precautionary diplomatic measures to deny

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1 Yapp (1980), pp. 16–17
2 Yapp (1980), p. 1
3 Minto was Governor-General from Jul 1807 to Oct 1813. Yapp (1980), p. 42
4 Hewett was briefly appointed Commander-in-Chief Oct – Dec 1807. Yapp (1980), p. 198
5 Elphinstone was appointed as the British resident at Gwalior in British-India in 1807. His forward defensive policy actually became the actual British policy from the 1890s. Yapp (1980), pp. 198–199.

any hostile Franco-Russian or Franco-Persian armies from crossing the Indus River by developing ‘the favourable opinion and cooperation not only of all states and countries to the Eastward of the Indus, but also of the Afghan government’. 6

Official contact between Britain and Afghanistan was initiated in February 1809 as part of Minto’s wider frontier diplomacy. 7 The British delegation, led by Mountstuart Elphinstone, arrived in Peshawar (the then winter capital of the Amir of Kabul) to be received by the Amir of Kabul, Shah Shuja (1786–1842). 8 The Anglo-Afghan Treaty was successfully concluded with Shah Shuja in April 1809 and ratified on 17 June 1809. 9 Britain agreed to provide financial assistance to Afghanistan in the event that it was attacked by a Franco-Persian alliance. In return, the Treaty bound Afghanistan to a mutual defence that prevented the passage of French and Persian troops through Afghanistan en route to British-India. Shah Shuja’s main concern was to obtain British subsidies to fund his fight against his brother Shah Mahmud Sadozai who had recaptured Kabul on 17 April 1809. The third clause of the Treaty, the only one of any enduring note, was the agreement of perpetual friendship so that ‘the veil of separation shall be lifted up from between them, and they shall in no manner interfere in each other’s countries’. Almost immediately the Treaty effectively became worthless as Shah Shuja lost the Afghan throne to his brother Shah Mahmud Sadozai (r. 1800–1803 and 1809–1818). 10

Importantly for later British strategic deliberations during the 1830s, Shah Shuja fled and was exiled with a British pension in Ludhiana (British-India), and retained his conviction to return to the Afghan throne. 11 At this time Minto contemplated forming a similar agreement with the victor Shah Mahmud Sadozai, who had invited a British mission to Afghanistan. Due to the prolonged and uncertain conflict for the Afghan

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6 Secret Committee to Minto, 2 Mar 1808, transcribed in Norris (1967), pp. 10–11
7 As early as 1799 an alliance between British India and Afghanistan had been suggested. The then Governor-General, Richard Wellesley (elder brother of Arthur Wellesley) favoured a policy of keeping the Sadozai dynasty in Afghanistan weak and divided whilst pursuing a treaty with Persia to exclude French regional influence. Yapp (1980), pp. 25–28
8 Shah Shuja had seized the throne from his brother Shah Mahmud Sadozai in 1803. By 1809 Afghanistan was divided between Shah Shuja in the north and east based around Kabul and Peshawar, and Shah Mahmud Sadozai in the west and south, based around Kandahar and Herat. Norris, pp. 9–10, 14 and 163–164
10 Shah Shuja’s army was routed following successive defeats in Kabul in June 1809, Kandahar in November 1809 and finally in Shah Shuja’s final stronghold of Peshawar on 12 September 1810. Yapp (1980), p. 164
11 Norris (1967), pp. 16–17
throne, Minto decided against any further initiative with the new Afghan leadership and formally dissolved the British diplomatic mission on 14 March 1810. On 6 March 1812 Minto concluded ‘we do not, under present circumstances, consider an intimate connection with the Court of Cabul as an object worthy of much anxiety or expense’.

Concurrent with the initial official British contact with Afghanistan in 1809, was the signing of the Treaty of Amritsar with Maharajah Ranjit Singh (1780 –1839) in the neighbouring Kingdom of Lahore. The Treaty of Amritsar was concluded in April 1809 between the ruler Ranjit Singh and Charles Metcalfe (1785–1846), a first assistant to Archibald Seton (1758–1818) the Resident in Delhi. This Treaty committed the British and the Ruler of the Lahore to live in perpetual friendship and not interfere with each other’s territories.

From this time Persia and Afghanistan were inversely linked in the minds of British policy-makers on the assumption that there existed a mutual hostility – so that an alliance with one would have to be very carefully balanced against an alliance with the other. A British mission to Persia was dispatched, led by Sir Harford Jones (1764–1847) suitably armed with promises, presents and more impressive credentials than Malcolm’s aborted 1808 mission and was able to negotiate the preliminary Anglo-Persian Treaty of 12 March 1809. This preliminary treaty cancelled all other Persian treaties with European states and obtained a promise from the Shah that he would not allow the passage of any European force towards India. The Anglo-Persian Treaty was formalised on 25 November 1814, which broadened the earlier preliminary Treaty from

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12 Yapp (1980), p. 164
13 Secret Committee to Minto, 6 Mar 1812, transcribed in Yapp (1980), p. 165
14 Ranjit Singh’s Sikh kingdom is most accurately referred to as the ‘Kingdom of Lahore’ as it did not cover all of the Punjab (although it became the basis of the later British province of the Punjab). There were three other Punjabi states ruled by Sikh Princes that avoided being annexed to the Kingdom of Lahore by accepting British protection. See Heathcote, T.A., The Military in British India – The Development of British Land Forces in South Asia 1600–1947, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995)
1809, reaffirming Persia’s undertaking to prevent any European army from invading India through Persian territories.\textsuperscript{17}

After the defeat of Napoleon in Europe in 1815, the earlier perceived French threats to British-India had receded. The British felt secure enough with their newly established regional treaties that they now sought to reduce military expenditure committed to protecting the north-west of India. For the two decades following the 1809 Anglo-Afghan Treaty, the prospect of any direct Afghan threat to India was considered remote because of constant internal Afghan power struggles. Shah Mahmud Sadozai had been assisted in retaking the throne from Shah Shuja in 1810 by an extremely influential Barakzai nobleman, Fath Khan, who effectively became the ruler of Afghanistan – with Mahmud as his puppet. Under Fath Khan’s patronage the Barakzai families prospered and Fath Khan’s brother, Dost Mohammad (1792–1863), began to assert his leadership. Dynastic quarrels between the Barakzais and the Sadozais culminated into a bloody feud in 1818 when Fath Khan was brutally blinded and hacked to pieces in revenge for an offence committed by Dost Mohammad against the Sadozai ruling family in Herat.\textsuperscript{18}

The uniting rule of the Sadozais over Afghanistan was gradually replaced by the Barakzai rulers. Sadozai authority became confined to Herat, whilst various Barakzai rulers were becoming ascendant in Kabul, Kandahar, Ghazni and Jalalabad. Ongoing feuding and the dynastic quarrels continued until the Barakzai nobleman Dost Mohammad eventually seized the Afghan throne in 1826. The Sadozais of Shah Shuja’s family and the Barakzais of Dost Mohammad (and his brothers) became irreconcilable enemies. This continuous leadership turmoil perturbed the British desire for security along the border of British-India but not enough to prompt action. The term ‘Afghanistan’ became a pejorative byword for anarchy.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{17} As in 1809, the Shah undertook to assist Britain in the event of an Afghan invasion of India, and Britain undertook to not interfere between Persia and Afghanistan unless asked by both countries to mediate. Norris (1967), pp. 15–16. A full transcript of the ‘Definitive Treaty with Persia’, 25 Nov 1814, is in Kaye (1878), Vol. 1, pp. 487–492
\textsuperscript{18} Shah Mahmud Sadozai fled to the Sadozai stronghold of Herat and died in 1829. Norris (1967), p. 16; and, Yapp (1980), p. 14
\textsuperscript{19} Norris (1967), pp. 16–17; and, Yapp (1980), p. 165
Following the death of Tsar Alexander I in 1825, the British Government started to become increasingly convinced of Russian expansionist ambitions in Asia under the new Tsar Nicholas, and in 1826 war between Russia and Persia broke out.\(^{20}\) As stipulated in the Anglo-Persian Treaty of 1814, the British envoy acted as the mediator and concluded that Persia was the aggressor. The subsequent Treaty of Turkmanchay between Russia and Persia was concluded on 23 February 1828, effectively humiliating Persia.\(^{21}\) The President of the Board of Control, Edward Law, First Earl of Ellenborough (1790–1871), feared that this treaty would allow Russian domination of the Persian Court to ‘practically place the resources of Persia at the disposal of the Court of St Petersburgh [sic]’.\(^{22}\) British concerns of Russian ambitions were further heightened by the Russian-Turkish Treaty of Adrianople signed 14 September 1829. The Turks had yielded to such an extent that the British Ambassador in St Petersburg,  

\(^{20}\) Persian and Russian military action centred on the Russian occupation of Gokcha in 1826 and the Russian destruction of the Persians at Tabriz in 1827. Norris (1967), pp. 22 and 29

\(^{21}\) Following the Treaty, the Shah of Persia urgently needed finance to pay reparations to the Tsar. The British envoy, LTCOL John Macdonald Kinneir, used this opportunity to free Britain from the fourth and sixth articles of the 1814 Anglo-Persian Treaty with a single payment of £150,000 in return for the cancellation of the subsidy articles. Norris (1967), pp. 22–23

\(^{22}\) Ellenborough to Governor of Bengal, 2 Dec 1828, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 22. The President of the Board of Control was effectively the Secretary of State for India with a seat in the Prime Minister’s Cabinet. Edward Law, First Earl of Ellenborough, replaced his father in the House of Lords in 1818. In 1828 he had hoped to be Foreign Secretary as part of Prime Minister Wellington’s administration, but had to be content with the appointment of the President of the Board of Control which he retained until the fall of the ministry in 1830. Ellenborough subsequently returned as President of the Board of Control in Prime Minister Robert Peel’s first (1834–1835) and briefly in the second (1841–1846) administration, before being appointed as Governor General of India in 1841. Imlah (1939). At this time he was most famous for a divorce from his second wife in 1830, Jane Digby, Lady Ellenborough, that scandalised London society. Lovell, Mary S., *A Scandalous Life: The Biography of Jane Digby*, (London: Fourth Estate, 1995), pp. 21–35
William à Court, First Baron Heytesbury (1779–1860), assessed that ‘The Turkish Sultan will probably be as submissive hereafter to the orders of the Czar as any of the Princes of India to those of the [Honourable East India] Company’.\textsuperscript{23}

From these successful Russian initiatives with Persia and Turkey, the British Government was firmly convinced that Tsar Nicholas’ ambitions had established Russia as a key British rival in Asia. Ellenborough further concluded ‘that Russia will attempt, by conquest or influence, to secure Persia as a road to the Indus [River], I have the most intimate conviction’.\textsuperscript{24} Ellenborough became obsessed with opening up Central Asia to British influence ahead of the Russians. Ellenborough assessed that any southerly Russian expansion towards Turkistan (equating to modern Central Asian states of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan), in particular the Khanate of Khiva (in modern Uzbekistan) and the southern Khanate of Bokhara (equating to regions of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan that directly border northern Afghanistan), posed three potential threats to British interests in India. The first threat was existential – a direct military invasion of British-India. The second threat increased potential for civil unrest in British-India that could be fomented with a spectre of a Russian invasion, where increasing internal security, whilst maintaining external security arrangements, would be very expensive. Lastly and more globally, the threat of invasion would constrain the exercise of British foreign policy more widely in Europe.

On 16 December 1829, Ellenborough discussed his concerns with Prime Minister Arthur Wellesley, the First Duke Wellington.\textsuperscript{25} Wellington had a more sophisticated sense of the Russian threat beyond the unlikely scenario of a direct military invasion of British-India. Wellington defaulted to the primary British focus and feared that the real danger was Russian action inciting civil unrest in British-India, which would be expensive for Britain to contain and embarrassing for Britain’s reputation in Europe. However, Britain could not readily dismiss any Russian military threat to the north-

\textsuperscript{23} Heytesbury to Aberdeen, on 30 Sep 1829, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 27. The Russians and Turks formalised their alliance with the Treaty of Unikar Skelessi on 8 Jul 1833. Norris (1967), pp. 27 and 52
\textsuperscript{24} Ellenbrough to Wellington, 11 Oct 1829, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 27. In October 1829 an influential book was published in London on the ease of a Russian march from the Caspian Sea to the Indus River. The publication worried Prime Minister Wellington as a plausible scenario. Given the coincidence with his own ideas of a direct Russian threat, Ellenborough sent copies of the book to regional diplomatic missions. Evans, Lieutenant-Colonel George De Lacy, \textit{On the Practicability of an Invasion of British India} (London: J.M. Richardson, 1829); Norris (1967), p. 29; and, Yapp (1980), p. 202
western approaches to British-India. Ellenborough considered that these potential external and internal threats could only be avoided by checking the projection of Russian influence into Turkistan, which was centred upon Russia’s trade with Bokhara. Ellenborough considered that the British response to check any Russian influence should be to make direct diplomatic representations to St Petersburg whilst simultaneously offering economic subsidies to Central Asian states. In the longer-term Ellenborough considered that increased British trade in the region could displace Russian influence. However, Ellenborough’s most pressing requirement was to gather more information.  

Wellington agreed to Ellenborough’s request to increase his information gathering across the region, but baulked at the enormous expense of any increased military presence. Wellington considered that the British Army in India was sufficiently strong to repel an invasion by a Russian Army estimated at 30,000 troops. They agreed that the newly installed Governor-General in India, Lieutenant-General Lord William Cavendish Bentinck (1774–1839), be authorised with the discretion to spend money to counter Russian influence, but not granted any authority to advance to meet the Russians without specific instructions from London. On 18 December 1829 the Court of Directors authorised a ‘mission to Scinde [Sind] and to Lahore, and the commercial venture up the Indus’. The selected method to counter Russian influence was to project British influence into Central Asia through commerce whilst concurrently gathering regional intelligence.

The enduring British strategic aim of protecting the north-western approaches to the British-Indian Empire was becoming substantially threatened by fears of Russian expansionism. Since Minto’s diplomatic initiatives around the 1809 Anglo-Afghan Treaty there had been a hiatus in British interest in the defence of north-west British-India until 1830. These intervening years had bred a generation of isolationists in British-India with the belief that there were no external threats. Ellenborough’s

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26 Yapp (1980), pp. 201–203
27 Bentinck was Governor-General from Jul 1828 to Mar 1835
28 Ellenborough Diary, 18 Dec 1829, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 37
invigorated interest from this perceived Russian threat was captured in his dispatch of 12 January 1830 which began a revolution in British policy in India.\textsuperscript{30}

If the produce of England and of India could be sent at once up the Indus to such points as might be convenient for their transport to Cabul we cannot but entertain the hope that we might succeed in underselling the Russians and in obtaining for ourselves a large portion at least of the internal Trade of Central Asia. This is a subject to which we wish you to direct your attention with a view to the Political effects which would result of success.\textsuperscript{31}

Through the Foreign Secretary, George Hamilton-Gordon, Fourth Earl of Aberdeen (1784–1860), Ellenborough tasked a comprehensive gathering of information on Russian intentions and capabilities.\textsuperscript{32} Responding to this direction from the Foreign Office the British Ambassador in St Petersburg, Lord Heytesbury, observed that Russia certainly had commercial interests between the Caspian Sea and Indus River, but ridiculed the threat of a Russian Army marching to India, as Russia was too poor and the physical feat too great. Furthermore, Heytesbury recommended placing British agents in Bokhara and Kabul to monitor the Russian frontier in Central Asia.\textsuperscript{33} Ellenborough rejected Heytesbury’s assessments and recommendations on the unlikely prospect of a Russian military advance, labelling him ‘a mere Russian’.\textsuperscript{34} Ellenborough reiterated that the method for projecting British influence into Central Asia was to be based on commerce, via the Indus River, to undersell any Russian commercial ventures. Ellenborough outlined his plan as ‘our first object being to introduce English goods and not Englishmen into Cabul and Central Asia’ with the added benefit of not raising concern about British ambitions among the other regional leaders in the Sind and the Kingdom of Lahore.\textsuperscript{35}

The British envoy in Persia, Lieutenant-Colonel John Macdonald Kinneir (1782–1830), supported Heytesbury’s view, assessing that a Russian invasion via Turkistan was unlikely due to the sheer physical obstacles along that route. Importantly, Kinneir’s analysis shifted the British focus away from contemplating an unlikely direct Russian military invasion, presciently asserting that the real danger was Russia controlling

\textsuperscript{30} Yapp (1980), p. 201
\textsuperscript{31} Secret Committee to Bentinck, 12 Jan 1830, transcribed in Yapp (1980), p. 201
\textsuperscript{32} Aberdeen was the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Foreign Secretary) in Wellington’s Cabinet between Jun 1828 and Nov 1830. He was again appointed Foreign Secretary in Peel’s administration Sept 1841 to Jul 1846. He eventually became Prime Minister Dec 1852 to Jan 1855
\textsuperscript{33} Intelligence collection was focussed on Russian commerce, naval activity and military movements around the Caspian and Aral Seas. Norris (1967), pp. 38–39; and Yapp (1980), p. 203
\textsuperscript{34} Ellenborough Diary, undated, transcribed in Yapp (1980), p. 203
\textsuperscript{35} Ellenborough to Governor of Bengal, 12 Jan 1830, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 40
Persian ambitions for expansion. Kinneir posited that the more likely scenario was Persia, as a Russian proxy, expanding eastwards to directly threaten the integrity of the north-western frontier of British-India. The Governor of Bombay, Sir John Malcolm, reinforced both assessments by Kinneir and Heytesbury, concluding that there is little threat of a direct Russian invasion and that the real threat was Russian control over Persia.

In India, Governor-General Bentinck lacked the enthusiasm for Ellenborough’s commercial initiative, as he doubted the practical navigability of the Indus River and was concerned about the opposition from the Indus states. The most adverse reaction was now from the Sir Charles Metcalfe the influential member of the all-India governing Supreme Council, who objected to Ellenborough’s plan as he considered that it risked becoming ensnared beyond the Indus River, and strongly favoured a consolidation within the existing frontiers of British-India. Weighing up these competing assessments alongside the policy direction from London, Bentinck’s views came to reflect those of the Resident at Gwalior in central India, Major Josiah Stewart. Stewart considered that there was no Russian threat and that in the unlikely event that the Russians overcame the significant obstacles of a direct overland invasion route, Britain could respond by moving forward towards the Indus River. Stewart recommended that a more practical course would be to send agents and subsidies into Central Asia. Bentinck agreed because he considered that the most realistic military threat to India, albeit remote, was if Russia advanced through Persia towards Herat.

Despite all this speculation about potential threats to the British frontier emanating from an expansionist Russia, Bentinck echoed Wellington’s concerns and maintained his conviction that the greatest threat to India was the containment of any internal civil unrest. Regardless, British strategy still had to counter the potential of a military threat, whether it be a directly from Russia or through Persia as a Russian proxy. By 1830 British strategy had shifted and was now firmly focussed on the priorities of commerce and intelligence collection via the Indus River. For the first time

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36 Yapp (1980), pp. 102 and 203
37 Malcolm was Governor of Bombay Nov 1827 – Dec 1830. Yapp (1980), pp. 203–204
38 Rather prophetically Metcalfe observed ‘the scheme for surveying the Indus … It is not impossible that it will lead to war.’ Metcalfe to Bentinck, 30 Oct 1830, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 45
39 Yapp (1980), pp. 204–205
Britain was going to venture beyond the Indus River in pursuit of the new British Government policy for projecting British influence into Central Asia.

By January 1831 Lieutenant Alexander Burnes (1805–1841) had received his instructions for an expedition. His ostensible purpose was to sail from Bombay and along the Indus River with a gift of dray horses for Maharajah Ranjit Singh of the Kingdom of Lahore. Entering the Indus River on 4 March 1831 and making detailed intelligence notes en route, the expedition finally reached Lahore on 18 July 1831. The delegation handed over the horses to Ranjit Singh which he accepted gratefully. Burnes then reported back his findings to Bentinck and his Secretary William McNaughten (1793–1841) during September 1831.

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40 Although only 25 years old, Burnes had established a strong reputation as a linguist and explorer through his assistance to the British Resident in Cutch, LTCOL Henry Pottinger. There is a succinct summary of Alexander Burnes’ character, ambition and shortcomings in Yapp (1980), pp. 206–207. For a map outlining Alexander Burnes’ travels see Waller, John H, Beyond the Khyber Pass: The Road to British Disaster in the First Afghan War, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), pp. 6–7
41 The gift of horses (initiated by the previous Governor-General, Lord Amherst) to Ranjit Singh was in return for his gift of horses to King George IV. Norris (1967), p. 40
42 The first obstacle upon entering the Indus was the introspective Sind Amirs, notoriously suspicious of Britain and their neighbours in Afghanistan and the Kingdom of Lahore. They temporarily halted the northward passage until Burnes’ expedition resumed and sailed from Hyderabad on 23 Apr 1831. Lunt, Major-General James D., Bokhara Burnes (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), pp. 32–51
These reports added to the growing pool of information beyond India’s frontier that began to more comprehensively inform the development of British strategy for the defence of British-India. Bentinck had also tasked a civil servant, Charles Trevelyan (1807–1886), and a Bengal Cavalry Officer, Captain Arthur Conolly (1807–1842), to provide assessments. In their report dated 15 March 1831 Trevelyan rejected the assessment by the Governor of Bombay, Sir John Malcolm, by calculating that Russia could attack British-India directly. Trevelyan and Conolly identified two possible invasion routes to British India: a westerly route via Persia and Herat, and a north-westerly route via the Khanate of Khiva and the Oxus River. Therefore, to counter any malign Russian intentions regarding India, Trevelyan and Conolly proposed a strong and united Afghanistan as a buffer state for the defence of British-India and, if required, a springboard for launching regional military expeditions. This assessment linked to Ellenborough’s commercial initiatives to project British political influence in Central Asia. This was the first time since Minto’s regional diplomacy between 1808 and 1810, that a united Afghanistan had been seriously considered as a buffer state for British-India. Despite Trevelyan’s and Conolly’s poor understanding of internal Afghan affairs, these reports re-introduced the notion of incorporating Afghanistan as a buffer state into Britain’s regional strategic calculus.\textsuperscript{44}

Independently to Trevelyan and Conolly, Alexander Burnes was also reaching the conclusion that a Russian army could advance through Central Asia towards the Indus River on two axes, and that an ‘Afghan Buffer’ was essential. In August 1831 Burnes called on the exiled Shah Shuja in Ludhiana during his return journey from Lahore to Simla. Despite assessing Shah Shuja as lacking ‘sufficient energy to seat himself on the throne of Cabool, and if he did, he has not the tact to discharge the duties of so difficult a situation’, Shah Shuja clearly considered that the renewed British interest in Central Asia would be useful for his ambitions of returning to the Afghan throne.\textsuperscript{45} Shah Shuja remarked to Burnes ‘had I but my kingdom, how glad I should be to see an Englishman at Cabool and to open the road between Europe and India’.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{44} They naively conclude ‘It is gratifying to reflect that while we shall consolidate the Afghan empire for our own interests we shall at the same time establish a lasting claim upon the gratitude of the people and our name will become associated with all the blessings which flow from the restoration of security and good order.’ Excerpts from the reports by Trevelyan and Conolly are transcribed in Yapp (1980), pp. 208–210
\textsuperscript{45} Burnes, undated, transcribed in Lunt (1969), p. 51
\textsuperscript{46} Burnes, undated, transcribed in Norris (1967), pp. 48–49
Burnes recommended that Britain should seek to annex Sind and the Punjab and form an alliance with Dost Mohammad in Kabul. He considered that, apart from commercial imperatives, an ‘Afghan Buffer’ was necessary to counter any overland threats from Persia. Importantly, he also recommended that Britain align with the Barakzai ruler in Kabul (and not the Sadozai rulers that Britain had previously sided with), as he considered that Dost Mohammad represented the most stable power in Afghanistan. Whilst these proposals divided opinion within the British Government, Bentinck broadly supported Burnes’ recommendations to facilitate commerce, information gathering and provide the necessary diplomatic leverage to temper the behaviour of the fractious Amirs of Sind. However, Bentinck rejected the central notion of making Afghanistan a buffer state, as he considered such an initiative would be as unreliable as Britain’s relationship with Persia had been.\textsuperscript{47}

In October 1831, Bentinck had an audience with Ranjit Singh and explained that the opening of the Indus to British commerce should not jeopardise their alliance based on the 1809 Treaty of Amritsar. Following these negotiations, Bentinck was confident in the retention of the Kingdom of Lahore as a ‘Sikh Buffer’ for overland approaches threatening British-India. Bentinck issued instructions to Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Pottinger (1789–1856) to open negotiations to obtain facilities for British commerce on the Indus.\textsuperscript{48} By August 1833 the first objective of Britain’s Central Asian policy had been completed, achieving an uninterrupted commercial passage of British goods along the 1500 kilometres of the Indus River from the Arabian Sea to Lahore. Despite Pottinger’s outstanding achievement in negotiating trading access along the Indus River, the harsh reality was that there had been a lack of commercial success as the poor navigability of the Indus hampered effective trade links.\textsuperscript{49}

In a complementary initiative, on 23 December 1831 Alexander Burnes departed Delhi for another diplomatic mission accompanied by a young Kashmiri Mohan Lal

\textsuperscript{47} Yapp (1980), pp. 210–212
\textsuperscript{48} Pottinger was appointed the British Resident in Cutch in 1825. He was the uncle of MAJ Eldred Pottinger soon to be famous for his defence of Herat in 1838. Norris (1967), pp. 17 and 238
\textsuperscript{49} In Jan 1832 Pottinger began his commercial negotiations in Hyderabad with Murad Ali, the leading Hyderabad Amir. Pottinger also negotiated similar commercial arrangements with Murad Ali’s cousin Rustum, the Khan of Khairpur. Pottinger used the division between the Sind Amirs to his advantage, eventually resulting in two commercial treaties that were concluded respectively at Khairpur on 4 Apr 1832 and Hyderabad on 20 Apr 1832. Norris (1967), pp. 53–55, and Yapp (1980), pp. 216–219
Burnes travelled through Ludhiana, was a guest of Ranjit Singh in Lahore and a guest of Sultan (his name not a title) Muhammad Khan, Dost Mohammad’s estranged brother, in Peshawar. Burnes entered Kabul on 1 May 1832 where he met, and admired, the Amir of Kabul Dost Mohammad and his brother the vizier Nawab Jubbah Khan. Burnes observed that the ‘supremacy of the Barukzye family in Cabool is acceptable to the people’ and presciently that the Sadozai dynasty was in decline ‘unless it be propped up by foreign aid’. He theorised that upon the death of the aging Ranjit Singh, the Amir of Kabul could regain his supremacy over the old Afghan Empire, and due to his favourable disposition towards the British, would allow British goods to enter Central Asia overland.

Maintaining the regional balance of power around the Indus River required British intervention to manipulate the evolving power arrangements. During the early 1830s, the only possibility that Britain could gain direct political influence in Afghanistan came through the renewed ambition of the exiled Shah Shuja in Ludhiana. Despite repeated appeals Shah Shuja failed to gain the necessary British consent for attempting to re-take his throne in 1827, 1829, 1831 and May 1832. However, on 11 October 1832 Shah Shuja formally requested British assistance against Dost Mohammad in Kabul. Bentinck, not wanting to become involved in ‘intermeddling with the affairs of its neighbours’, declined any direct offer of British assistance although significantly did not reject Shah Shuja’s request. These events marked a change in Bentinck’s half-

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50 Mohan Lal had been educated at the English College in Delhi and was fluent in Hindi, Persian and English and was selected primarily as an interpreter. Lunt (1969), pp. 53–54. He also published the biography Life of the Amir Dost Mohammed Khan of Kabul
51 Burnes departed Ludhiana on 3 Jan 1832. After a month at Ranjit Singh’s court in Lahore, on 10 Feb 1832 he departed for Peshawar. From mid-Mar to mid-Apr 1832 in Peshawar, Burnes was the guest of Sultan Muhammad Khan the brother and enemy of Dost Mohammad. Lunt (1969), pp. 53–76, and Norris (1967), pp. 55–57
52 Burnes’ party then continued across the Hindu Kush to his most northerly destination at Bokhara on 27 Jun 1832. His observations confirmed British fears of spreading Russian influence and vindicated the opening up of the Indus River to spread British influence. Burnes then travelled to Tehran through Persia where he enjoyed an audience with the Shah of Persia, Fath Ali Shah and returned to Bombay on 18 Jan 1833. He arrived back in England at the end of 1833, and was invited by King William IV to Brighton where Burnes regaled him with the thrilling accounts of his adventures. Norris (1967), pp. 58–60 and 64–66; and Lunt (1969), pp. 91–140
53 Shah Shuja had been granted permission to remain in pensioned exile on the condition he would not undertake any attempts to recover his throne unless he first gained British consent. These appeals had been rejected by the British on the authoritative advice of Sir Charles Metcalfe. Yapp (1980), p. 214
54 Bentinck Minute transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 61. Shah Shuja asked and received an advance on his pension, was given permission to raise troops on British territory and to purchase arms from Delhi free of duty. In a preparatory diplomacy, Ranjit Singh and Shah Shuja concluded a treaty on 12 March 1833. The treaty ensured support for Shah Shuja’s attempt to retake the Afghan throne. In return Shah Shuja ceded
hearted efforts to project British regional influence by unviable commercial means, towards a scheming neutrality among regional powerbrokers along the north-western frontier of British-India. These changes were the first signs towards the practical incorporation of an ‘Afghan Buffer’ into British regional designs.\(^{56}\)

Britain needed the cooperation of both Afghanistan and the Kingdom of Lahore if any Russian advance was to be checked in Central Asia. However the Barakzai chiefs in Afghanistan, particularly Dost Mohammad, were the mortal enemies of Ranjit Singh in Lahore. Dost Mohammad, encouraged by his conversations with Burnes, requested an alliance with the British just as Shah Shuja’s Army set out from Ludhiana in early 1833. Having refused to support Shah Shuja with his newly acquired ally Ranjit Singh, Bentinck could hardly lend support to Ranjit Singh’s enemy Dost Mohammad. Bentinck politely rebuffed Dost Mohammad’s request emphasising Britain’s neutrality. If Shah Shuja was successful against Dost Mohammad, Britain would have two allies in the key centres to the north-west of British India – Lahore and Kabul. It would then be easier to win the assistance of the Sind, as the newly restored ruler in Afghanistan could renounce the old claim to Sind tributes. With Sind, Afghanistan and the Punjab settling their quarrels, the long-desired trilateral regional security on the British-Indian border would finally be completed.\(^{57}\)

Unfortunately for British self-interest, Shah Shuja’s plan unravelled. His continued haughty manner towards his fellow Afghans and Sind neighbours ensured that many local leaders were alienated (a character flaw that was to again prove to be disastrous upon his return to Afghanistan in 1839). Before even commencing their advance to Afghanistan, on the 9 January 1834 Shah Shuja’s forces had to confront and then defeat the restive Sind Amirs at the battle of Rohri. In the north, on the 6 May 1834 Ranjit Singh’s forces, under General Hari Singh Nalwa, seized Peshawar and drove Sultan Muhammad Khan back to his estranged brother, Dost Mohammad, in Kabul. In the south after Shah Shuja’s Army of 30,000 passed through the Bolan Pass, the battle of Kandahar was fought on 2 July 1834. Dost Mohammad was victorious and Shah Shuja fled to his kinsmen in Herat. This victory further strengthened Dost Mohammad’s

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\(^{56}\) Yapp speculates that the timing of Bentinck’s change indicates that he was strongly influenced by the 1831 Persian expedition into Khurasan that shook British complacency about Persia. Yapp (1980), pp. 215–216

\(^{57}\) Norris (1967), p. 62
authority in Kabul and Shah Shuja eventually returned defeated and demoralised to British-India. These events also entrenched Dost Mohammad’s implacable hatred towards Ranjit Singh for his complicity in Shah Shuja’s failed campaign. Britain was in a quandary as it needed the cooperation of both the Amir Dost Mohammad in Afghanistan and Maharajah Ranjit Singh in Lahore if any Russian and/or Persian advance towards British-India was to be checked. It was in Britain’s interest that Afghanistan and the Kingdom of Lahore settled their differences to provide the requisite level of security if the strategy of safeguarding the north-western approaches to British-India was to be achieved.58

The British assessment of these events and the effect upon British India were summarised by the outgoing Governor-General on 13 March 1835. Bentinck considered that the only external dangers to British-India ‘with which we may be threatened must come from the north west’ and did not expect any threats from the Kingdom of Lahore whilst Ranjit Singh was alive.59 He concluded that Afghanistan could prove a useful buffer state particularly under the uniting leadership of Dost Mohammad:

The present state of Afghanistan presents no cause of alarm to India. The success that attended the wretched army that Shah Shujah had under his feeble guidance affords the best proof of the weakness of the Afghan powers. The assumption of the supremacy by Dost Mahmomed Khan may possibly give greater strength and consolidation to the general confederacy. It is much to be desired that this state should acquire sufficient stability to form an intermediate barrier between India and Persia.60

Throughout the turmoil of the 1830s Bentinck had initiated a reorganisation of the Government of the North-Western Province by reposturing military bases and increasing the provision of intelligence and advice to the Government of British-India.61 Ludhiana developed into the dominant political centre for British relations on the north-west frontier system, with the Resident at Ludhiana becoming an increasingly

58 Ranjit Singh, now fearing a counter-attack, stationed a large army in Peshawar. Dost Mohammad, now reunited with his brother Sultan Muhammad Khan, rode from Kabul with his army to seek revenge. The confrontation was avoided by Ranjit Singh’s emissaries seducing Sultan Muhammad Khan and his family by the inducements of being granted estates in Peshawar. Dost Mohammed returned to Kabul angered at his brother’s treachery and vowed to return and capture Peshawar. Ranjit Singh then stationed a garrison at Peshawar and appointed a ruthless Italian from his army (one of four senior European commanders in the Army), General Paolo Avitabile, as the local Governor. Norris (1967), pp. 62–64
59 Bentinck Minute, 13 Mar 1835, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 74
60 Bentinck Minute, 13 Mar 1835, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 74
61 The Resident at Ajmer was a key political appointment reporting to the Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Province at Agra. From 1839 to 1847 the Ajmer post was held by the influential COL James Sutherland who was consulted regularly by the soon to arrive Governor-General Auckland. Interestingly, Auckland had considered (and then passed over) Sutherland for the appointment of envoy to Kabul, selecting instead William Macnaghten – a choice that Auckland later regretted. Yapp (1980), pp. 188–189
influential appointment (which included responsibility for the exiled Shah Shuja) and from 1835 Ferozepur becoming the main military centre.62

At the Board of Control in March 1835, the returned Ellenborough wrote a new dispatch about British Government policy along the Indus. Ellenborough considered if Ranjit Singh came into conflict with Dost Mohammad it would ‘involve consequences of much interest to the British Government in India’. If Ranjit Singh prevailed and took possession of Afghanistan, he could threaten the whole British north-western frontier from the Sutlej River. Such a powerful force on British-India’s border would require a substantial increase of British military force at commensurately vastly increased cost. Similarly, a united Afghanistan with the Sind would also require an expensive British military build up. Ellenborough, although predisposed to the concept of an ‘Afghan Buffer’, concluded that the optimal policy regarding British security interests was best served by a balance of power arrangement in north-west India:

It is our political interest that the Indus and its tributary streams should not belong to one state. The division of power on the Indus between the Scindians, the Afghans and the Sikhs is probably the arrangement most calculated to secure us against hostile use of that river.63

Furthermore, Ellenborough wrote of the value of Sind and the Kingdom of Lahore being in alliance with Britain with a united Afghan neighbour, as it ‘would serve our purpose by making Afghanistan an impassable obstacle to any power advancing from the West’. To fully realise this strategy of defence-in-depth, Ellenborough concluded that ‘it must, therefore, at all times, be a subject of much moment to us to have an accurate knowledge of all that passes in Afghanistan’.64 Significantly in this dispatch, Ellenborough glossed over some important regional dynamics that made this elegant and simple plan questionable. Within Afghanistan there was a lingering tension between the Barakzai family in Kabul and Kandahar, and the Sadozai rulers in Herat. Similarly, there was the irrevocable hatred between Barakzais in Kabul and Ranjit Singh over Peshawar. The twin feuds of the Barakzai over Herat to the west and Peshawar to the east were to plague any attempt at developing harmonious relations between states beyond the Indus.65

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62 In 1831 the Resident at Ludhiana was granted direct access to the Governor-General. LT Wade was re-titled Political Assistant, Ludhiana in 1832. By 1835 Wade’s experience and intelligence was recognised when he was elevated to being in charge of all political relations beyond the Indus and with Lahore. Yapp (1980), pp. 189–193
64 Secret Committee to Bentinck, 7 Mar 1835, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 71
Despite Bentinck’s restructuring of the military and political presence in British-India’s north-western frontier, he had been unsuccessful in implementing government policy to project British influence into Central Asia via commerce. In his dispatch of 13 March 1835, Bentinck speculated on the growing Russian influence over Persia. Bentinck concluded that Russian expansion into Persia and then Afghanistan potentially gave Russia ‘their best line of approach against India’. Bentinck considered that it was in Russia’s interests to extend and strengthen the Persian Empire, as it would assist in realising Russian ambitions in Central Asia. Bentinck’s most urgent concern was the threat to British-India posed by a possible Persian invasion of Herat under Russian direction, given the inadequate number of British troops available to stave off this potential threat. Bentinck’s thesis was that if Herat fell it would be possible for the Russians to establish a military base in Afghanistan. This was particularly alarming, as there was a likely willingness from Kabul’s Barakzai chiefs to join a Persian alliance to settle old scores against Ranjit Singh in Lahore. Given these particular circumstances the threats to British interests were potentially dire. Bentinck explained:

The Afghan confederacy, even if cordially united, would have no means to resist the power of Russia and Persia. They would probably make a virtue of necessity and join the common cause, receiving in reward for their cooperation the promise of all the possessions that had been wrested from them by Runjeet Singh.

In July 1835 the incoming President of the Board of Control (replacing Ellenborough), Sir John Cam Hobhouse (1786–1869), asked George Eden, First Earl of Auckland (1784–1849) to be the next Governor-General. Auckland accepted the post on 30 July; the following day he had an audience with King William IV and set off for India at the end of September 1835.

Arriving in British-India in March 1836, Auckland retained Bentinck’s Indian north-western frontier policy of maintaining a loose alliance with Dost Mohammad in Afghanistan and also favoured continuing the policy of commercial penetration into the

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66 Yapp (1980), pp. 219–220
67 Bentinck Minute, 13 Mar 1835, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 75
68 Bentinck Minute, 13 Mar 1835, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 75
69 Since the return of the Whigs to power in 1830, a very tight grouping had formed between the Prime Minister Lord Melbourne, Foreign Secretary Palmerston, President of the Board of Control Hobhouse, and Auckland. These relationships gave Auckland wide discretion, as his powers of judgement were trusted. Auckland was a serious and efficient administrator with a creditable record of public service. He had been appointed as the First Lord of the Admiralty in Jul 1834. In addition to the prestige, Governor-General was the best-paid administrative appointment in the British Empire. Trotter (1893); and Norris (1967), pp. 77–78 and 90. A good summary and description of Auckland’s character and capabilities is in Yapp (1980), pp. 220–221
region. Auckland was supported in his assessments by the recently installed Commander-in-Chief, Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Fane (1778–1840), who did not consider that the current regional threats warranted action that would jeopardise the British relationship with the Kingdom of Lahore.  

Auckland neither feared an attack by Russia nor Persian activities in Herat, as he did not support the assessments of Sir Henry Ellis (1777–1855), the new British ambassador at the Persian court. Ellis had arrived in Tehran on 3 November 1835 and found to his great consternation that the Shah of Persia and his ministers were busily

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70 Fane was a cavalry officer and veteran of the Peninsula War. He served as C-in-C from Sep 1835 to Dec 1839. He was well regarded by his subordinates. Nott wrote ‘he is a fine soldier, and I always feel pleasure in being near him’. Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, p. 88; and Yapp (1980), pp. 193–194 and 221.

The Governor-General in Council represented the supreme authority over all troops in British-India and the C-in-C was selected by the Directors of the East India Company. The vast majority of military appointees were from the British “Queen’s” Army and not from the British officers within the local Indian “Company” Army. The C-in-C directly commanded the Bengal Army and exercised a general control over the Madras and Bombay Armies. The C-in-C was separate and not subordinate to the C-in-C of the British Army or the British War Office, all his correspondence was through the Government of India. Under the Governor-General’s supreme authority, the C-in-C was the Crown’s military representative and was solely responsible for the planning, preparation and conduct of military operations. Heathcote (1974), pp. 24–25.

71 Ellis was appointed the British ambassador at the Persian court from Jul 1835 to Nov 1836.
planning military expeditions against Herat and Kandahar.\textsuperscript{72} An alarmed Ellis confirmed the worst British fears writing to both the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Henry John Temple, Third Viscount Palmerston (1784–1865) and Auckland on 13 November 1835 that ‘the Shah [of Persia] has very extended schemes of conquest in the direction of Afghanistan’.\textsuperscript{73} The Heratis, under their chief Kamran, had flouted a treaty they had concluded with the Persians in 1834, by encroaching on Persian territory in periodic slaving raids. The Russian Minister in Persia, Count Ivan Simonich (1793–1851) was also pressing the Shah to mount an expedition against Herat without delay. British intervention was constrained by the provisions of the ninth article of the 1814 Anglo-Persian Treaty which prevented Britain from interfering in the Persian and Afghan dispute without an invitation from both to mediate. Again writing to Palmerston and Auckland on 30 December 1835, Ellis summarised the British position towards the Persians as being ‘difficult to oppose an attack upon Herat … but an attempt to annex Candahar and Ghazni to the Persian dominions … has no justification, and could not be looked upon with indifference by the British Government’.\textsuperscript{74}

Palmerston in London and Auckland in Calcutta received these disconcerting dispatches between March and April 1836. Ellis wrote again reporting that he had met Dost Mohammad’s ambassador in Tehran seeking Persian assistance against Ranjit Singh, the envoys from Kandahar seeking to bind themselves to Persia, and the strong Russian influence in the Persian court enjoyed by Simonich.\textsuperscript{75} Ellis wrote to Palmerston on 10 April 1836, saying that he was becoming ‘quite convinced that the British Government can no longer, with safety to its possession in India, refrain from intimate connection with the Afghans’.

\textsuperscript{72}Having been alarmed by Bentinck’s 13 Mar 1835 Minute on Russian and Persian designs for Afghanistan, Palmerston wrote to Ellis, to ‘warn the Persian Government against being made the tool of Russian policy, by allowing themselves to be pushed on to make war against the Affghans’. Palmerston to Ellis, 25 Jul 1835, transcribed in Norris (1967), pp. 76–77

\textsuperscript{73}Ellis to Palmerston, 13 Nov 1835, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 79

\textsuperscript{74}Ellis to Palmerston, 30 Dec 1835, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 80

\textsuperscript{75}In return for help against the Ranjit Singh and a guarantee of Kandahar’s internal independence, the Kandaharis would assist in the Persian seizure of Herat. Ellis to Palmerston, 1 Apr 1836, in Norris (1967), p. 86

\textsuperscript{76}Ellis to Palmerston, 10 Apr 1836, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 87
I [Auckland] would cultivate commerce and if at any time agencies half commercial and half political could find admission I should be glad to encourage them. But further than this in the present posture of affairs, and unless new emergencies should arise, I would not go.77

In addition to contemplating the implications of the Persian advance towards Herat, Auckland had to balance his other regional challenges. Auckland’s immediate concern was Ranjit Singh’s opportunistic expansionism towards the Sind, much more than Persian threats to Afghanistan. In August 1836 Ranjit Singh was threatening Sind to the extent that Auckland considered that Ranjit Singh would be in Kabul long before the Shah of Persia. Auckland sought advice on whether to oppose Ranjit Singh to maintain Bentinck’s Indus policy.78

Following his interim appointment as Acting Governor-General, the now Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces, Sir Charles Metcalfe, had never really supported Bentinck’s Indus policy.79 Metcalfe held a contrary view to the current strategy of dividing India’s bordering territory along trilateral lines that judiciously balanced regional security between Sind, Afghanistan and the Kingdom of Lahore. Metcalfe recommended that Auckland should accommodate Ranjit Singh’s desire to seize Sind. Metcalfe’s strategic calculus was that the Indus policy had proven to be commercially unviable, and more importantly he reasoned a ‘Sikh Buffer’ was the optimal strategic posture to defend north-west British-India. The Sikhs, under Lahore’s control, would become militarily extended and therefore less of a threat if they became an enemy of Britain in the future, and Sind would serve as a more coherent buffer state for potential invaders of India. He considered it would be advantageous for a defence-in-depth strategy if any threatening Russian/ Persian military advance would have to firstly penetrate a pro-British ‘Sikh Buffer’. Additionally, a suitable buffer would not force Britain to overextend its own military capacity by advancing to confront a Russian/ Persian threat on the Indus River. Metcalfe wrote to Auckland expressing his fundamental concern that, by actively denying Ranjit Singh expansion into Sind ‘we are, I fear, about to plunge into a labyrinth of interference from which I fear we shall never be able to extricate ourselves’.80

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77 Auckland Minute, 4 May 1836, transcribed in Norris (1967), pp. 85–86
78 Norris (1967), pp. 91–92
79 During the year-long Governor-General inter regnum, from Bentinck’s retirement in Mar 1835, Metcalfe had been installed as the Acting Governor-General between 20 Mar 1835 and 4 Mar 1836. Metcalfe was Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces from Jun 1836 to Jun 1838
80 Despite his criticism of official policy, Metcalfe displayed continued loyalty by supporting Auckland’s forward policies. Metcalfe to Auckland, 15 Oct 1836, transcribed in Norris (1967), pp. 96–97
After due consideration Auckland rejected Metcalfe’s advice. Although they both wanted a secure British-India, they differed on the method to defend the frontiers. Auckland wanted to preserve Bentinck’s policy based on the loose trilateral regional balance of alliances. Furthermore Auckland wanted to assert British authority in retaining this balance by demonstrating resolve against Ranjit Singh’s regional aspirations towards Sind (and his supporting unrest against British rule in neighbouring Nepal). On 22 August 1836 Auckland sent a warning to Ranjit Singh, through the agent in Ludhiana, Lieutenant-Colonel Claude Martine Wade (1794–1861), that Britain would go to war if necessary, to oppose any Sikh expansionism southwards to capture Shikarpur, or any other parts of the Sind.\(^{81}\)

This was a turning point in the history of British-India. Unlike his predecessors, Auckland had now actively intervened to check the ambitions of a strong regional ally beyond the borders of British-India. By protecting Sind against a predatory Ranjit Singh, Auckland had inserted Britain directly into the regional dynamics – an important precursor to transitioning to a forward defensive posture within the strategy to protect the north-western approaches to British-India.\(^{82}\) Auckland explained ‘it is fair to say that I have departed from the extremely forbearing policy of my predecessor [Bentinck]. We are henceforth, I conceive, irretrievably involved in the politics of the countries of the Indus’.\(^{83}\)

Ranjit Singh’s desire for expansion also presented Auckland with a second challenge directly related to Afghanistan – the issue of the possession of Peshawar. On 31 May 1836, Dost Mohammad wrote to Auckland congratulating him on his new appointment and seeking assurances from the British about ‘the conduct of reckless and misguided Sikhs, and their breach of treaty’ following Lahore’s seizure of Peshawar in May 1834.\(^{84}\) This was an attempt to re-engage the British after very cool relations between Bentinck and Dost Mohammad that followed Shah Shuja’s failed invasion of Afghanistan. The running sore of the rivalry over Peshawar continued to pose a major threat to regional harmony along the British north-western frontier. The 1809 Treaty of

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\(^{81}\) Norris (1967), pp. 91–92; and Yapp (1980), pp. 222–223
\(^{82}\) Norris (1967), pp. 91–92 and Yapp (1980), p. 225
\(^{83}\) Auckland to Hobhouse, 7 Oct 1836, transcribed in Yapp (1980), p. 223
\(^{84}\) Dost Mohammad continues ‘whatever may suggest itself to your wisdom for the settlement of affairs of this country, that it may serve as a rule for my guidance’ concluding that ‘your Lordship will consider me and my country as your own’. Dost Mohammad to Auckland, 31 May 1836, transcribed in Trotter (1893), p. 36
Amritsar between Britain and the Kingdom Lahore was becoming an insurmountable obstacle in dealing with Dost Mohammad whilst he remained the implacable enemy of Ranjit Singh. Auckland responded, somewhat disingenuously, to Dost Mohammad on 22 August 1836 extolling the benefits of peace for Afghanistan with their neighbours:

I have learned with deep regret that dissention exists between yourself [Dost Mohammad] and Maharajah Runjeet Singh. My friend, you are aware that it is not the practice of the British Government to interfere with the affairs of other independent states.

In September 1836 the foundational elements for the British forward-defence of venturing into regional affairs beyond the boundaries of British-India were initiated. Alexander Burnes commenced another commercial and intelligence gathering voyage up the Indus River on 24 December 1836, and on Christmas Day 1836 Auckland signed a letter from Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Pottinger formalising negotiations for a permanent British resident in Sind for the benefit of British commerce along the Indus. Most critically, the agent in Ludhiana, Lieutenant-Colonel Claude Wade, had been instructed to warn Ranjit Singh against extending further south into Sind and that Britain was prepared to go to war with Lahore over the issue. By November 1836 the brinkmanship over the Sind crisis had subsided, with Ranjit Singh backing down, although the British had moved troops as a precautionary measure. Auckland considered it would be difficult to restrain Ranjit Singh again, as his decision to submit to British pressure now placed Britain in a position of obligation. This settlement between Britain and the Kingdom of Lahore over the Sind crisis would jeopardise any future accommodation between Ranjit Singh and his sworn enemy Dost Mohammad.

In mid-1836 Auckland contemplated that a unified Afghanistan was potentially desirable, however by January 1837 he concluded that a unified Afghan state was not a possibility. His view was heavily influenced by Wade in Ludhiana, who argued that the Barakzai/ Sadozai divisions were so great in Afghanistan that the nation could not be united under a single ruler. Wade recommended that Afghanistan should be subject to a similar British policy as in Sind which was restricted to British commercial imperatives only, so as not to affect the British political relationship with Lahore. Auckland

86 Auckland to Dost Mohammad, 22 Aug 1836, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 93
87 Norris (1967), pp. 93, 98 and 101
88 Wade had evolved his view of Afghanistan from 1835 where he had supported a British alliance with Afghanistan and recommended persuading Ranjit Singh to hand back Peshawar. From 1837 Wade attempted to reconcile the mutual grievances by advising Ranjit Singh to make concessions to the Afghans. He eventually considered the Sikhs were the peaceful party and that Dost Mohammad had
accepted Wade’s assessment and wrote to the President of the Board of Control on 9 April 1837 concluding that ‘it would be madness in us … to quarrel with the Sikhs [of Lahore] for him [Dost Mohammad]’.  

Almost immediately Auckland was faced with another Sikh-Afghan quarrel. There had been a westward expansion of the frontier of the Kingdom of Lahore from Peshawar towards Jamrud at the eastern entrance of the Khyber Pass. The resulting Battle of Jamrud on 30 April 1837 was a bloody Sikh-Afghan encounter where both sides suffered severe losses. The outcome was largely inconclusive but served to further inflame the continued cross-border feuding and induced the Afghans to seek assistance from the Russian-influenced Persians. These latest actions confounded Auckland’s policy of pursuing British commercial penetration into the region and desire for a balance in regional relationships to act as security for the north-western frontier of British India. 

With Ranjit Singh’s aspirations relatively constrained, Auckland re-focussed on the other substantial threat to the Indian frontier from the re-commencement of the Persian offensive towards Herat. In November 1836 the new British envoy, Sir John McNeill (1795–1883), had arrived in Tehran. He reported that despite the Persian army suffering from low morale, the Russians continued to urge the Shah to undertake a winter campaign to seize Herat. In response to this dispatch, on 21 November 1836 McNeill was instructed to dissuade the Shah from attacking Herat and to offer British mediation between Persia and Herat. The British position was to recognise that the Shah had been justified in his quarrel over Herat and cautioned a negotiated settlement over a resort to war. On 30 June 1837 McNeill wrote to Palmerston recommending a refused peace in order to seek British or Persian aid. Yapp speculates that Wade’s increasing favour for Ranjit Singh was to maintain his monopoly over British policy-making and counter the growing pro-Dost Mohammad influence of Burnes. Yapp (1980), pp. 225–229

Auckland to Hobhouse, 9 Apr 1837, transcribed in Yapp (1980), p. 226

Lahore claimed that it had initiated this movement to suppress incursions from unruly Afghan frontier tribesmen (and not, as it is often perceived, as a preliminary military movement for a Sikh invasion of Afghanistan). Norris (1967), pp. 109–110; and, Yapp (1980), pp. 226–227

MacNeill, Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Persia 1836–1844 (noting there was no British diplomatic representation in Persia between 1838–1841 due to the siege of Herat). McNeill had been granted autonomy by both Foreign Secretary Palmerston and Auckland to preserve the Anglo-Persian alliance. Norris (1967), p. 160

If these negotiations failed, McNeill was then authorised to withdraw the whole British mission to Herat. Macnaghten to McNeill, 21 Nov 1836, in Norris (1967), pp. 100–101
change to the British approach over Herat.\footnote{In Feb 1837 Palmerston had written to the new British ambassador in St Petersburg, the Earl of Durham, to clarify official Russian policy towards Persia and Afghanistan. Durham was informed that the Russian agent Simonich had been acting \textit{without} the authority of St Petersburg. The Russian Foreign Office then produced documents purporting to show that Simonich had actually made efforts to dissuade the Shah from invasion – a direct contradiction to McNeill’s assessments from Tehran. At the end of this diplomatic exchange, Simonich was not recalled and the British became increasingly suspicious of Russian duplicity over Persia. Durham to Palmerston 24 Feb 1837, in Norris (1967), pp. 103–104} It now appeared that Persia, assisted by Russia, was going to gain more influence over Herat than had previously been acceptable to British interests. McNeill wrote ‘I regarded it as the utmost importance to our security in India that Herat should not (become dependent on Persia … or) become available to any power which might obtain control over the councils of the Shah [of Persia].’\footnote{McNeill to Palmerston, 30 Jun 1837, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 117} With the imperative to maintain the harmony within the greater British and Russian alliance in Europe, both London and St Petersburg subordinated their conflicting interests over Persia as a purely Asiatic issue. Despite British and ostensible Russian remonstrations (and secret Russian blessings), on 23 July 1837 the Persians recommenced their march towards Herat.

Concurrent with the Persian expansion towards Herat and confirmed suspicions of Russian duplicity, Britain contemplated other strategic options towards Afghanistan that would maximise British interests in the defence of British-India. McNeill pondered the Afghan situation and wrote a long memorandum dated 22 January 1837 weighing up the merits of the Barakzai family against the Sadozai family. McNeill’s analysis was inconclusive, claiming that there was a good case for either family to assert their primacy, but he did calculate that a united Afghanistan was the best outcome for British interests. He noted ‘there can be no doubt of the advantage of seeking by every available means, to unite the Afghan Nation under one chief’.\footnote{McNeill to Macnaghten, 22 Jan 1837, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 105} Alexander Burnes offered a more definitive assessment of the irreconcilable Sikh-Afghan conflict that countered Wade’s pro-Ranjit Singh policy. Burnes projected longer-term views for British strategy by anticipating regional dynamics following the death of the aging Ranjit Singh and the likely unravelling of his unifying rule from Lahore. In anticipation of Sikh unity dissolving, Burnes recommended that Dost Mohammad be permitted to expand eastwards towards the Indus River and retake Peshawar. Such an Afghan
expansion would replace the effect of the ‘Sikh Buffer’ with an ‘Afghan Buffer’ for the defence of British-India.  

With conflicting advice, Auckland effectively had the choice of two policies – remain with Ranjit Singh or turn towards an Afghan solution. Auckland was unwilling to risk his stronger Anglo-Sikh alliance for the sake of what he perceived as an unreliable Afghan ally. He rejected McNeill’s recommendation of a united and consolidated monarchy in Afghanistan, and considered that an ‘Afghan Buffer’ was not realistic given that a united Afghanistan was neither possible nor strategically desirable.

Auckland decided to align British policy with Ranjit Singh and set out his views in a minute dated 9 September 1837. He realised that it was the Afghan concern with Lahore’s encroachment upon Afghanistan that had driven Kabul’s Barakzai chief to make overtures to the Persians. In turn it was this Persian encroachment that had opened the ‘indirect operation of Russian intrigue and influence on our frontiers’. To avoid forcing Afghanistan further towards Persia, Auckland chose a more middling policy that sought to mediate a peace between Dost Mohammad and Ranjit Singh. Following the Battle of Jamrud, it was extremely difficult for Auckland to deal with Dost Mohammad without grievously offending Ranjit Singh. Auckland decided to induce Ranjit Singh to cultivate peaceful relations with Afghanistan with assurances that the British alliance with Lahore held primacy. Auckland’s decision to favour Ranjit Singh was based on a flawed understanding of the relative power dynamics in the region. Auckland was convinced that Dost Mohammad was on the defensive, trying to retain his authority against Sikh domination. Dost Mohammad did not fear a Sikh invasion, and it is doubtful whether Ranjit Singh had the capacity or desire for a successful invasion. Auckland also underestimated the threat posed by Persia upon Herat. Essentially Auckland felt no sense of urgency over these regional developments and saw no reason to deviate from the balanced regional policy and pursue commercial penetration beyond the Indus.

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96 Yapp (1980), p. 230
98 Auckland Minute, 9 Sep 1837, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 120
99 Notably, Auckland was preoccupied with a famine in northern India at this time. Yapp (1980), pp. 230–231
Auckland’s 9 September 1837 minute was sent to (now) Captain Alexander Burnes as he approached Kabul on his Indus River mission. Despite Auckland’s pessimism over any favourable outcome from negotiations, Burnes was directed to inform Dost Mohammad that the British Government wanted to establish peace and security, although Britain’s first preference would be for ‘our old and firm ally Runjeet Singh’. Therefore if Dost Mohammad wanted to make peace with Ranjit Singh, Britain would assist in the reconciliation provided all Afghan ties to Persia were severed. However, if Dost Mohammad chose ‘to foment disturbances even at the hazard of his own independence, it was impossible but that the friendly feelings of the British Government be impaired’. To allay Lahore’s fears regarding these Anglo-Afghan negotiations, on 13 September 1837 Auckland’s private secretary, John Russell Colvin (1807–1857), wrote to Wade in Ludhiana, to ensure that Ranjit Singh understood that Britain ‘will do nothing in Cabool without his consent’ and to discourage Ranjit Singh from any unilateral schemes of conquest in Afghanistan.

Burnes arrived in Kabul on 20 September 1837 and was granted an audience with Dost Mohammad the next day. Initially Dost Mohammad did not expect any gain in the Peshawar dispute, but Burnes’ supplicating manner and unwillingness to say anything unpopular to Dost Mohammad appears to have raised false expectations. Dost Mohammad complained about Ranjit Singh’s conduct and expressed a hope that Britain would intervene in the long-standing Peshawar dispute, as Britain had recently done to curb Ranjit Singh’s expansion into Sind. Burnes further stipulated that all Kabul’s connections with the Persian encroachment would have to be severed before Britain would consent to assist. Dost Mohammad readily conceded, expressing regret in approaching the Persians, and adding criticism of his brothers in Kandahar who persisted with a Persian envoy at their court. Despite the Persian encroachment polarising the long-standing enmities between the Afghans and the Kingdom of Lahore, Dost Mohammad stated his willingness to sever relations with Persia to gain British

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100 Auckland’s 9 Sep 1837 Minute was sent with a covering note from Macnaghten dated 11 Sep 1837 Macnaghten to Burnes 11 Sep 1837, transcribed in Norris (1967), pp. 121-122 and Yapp (1980), p. 230


102 Colvin to Wade, 13 Sep 1837, transcribed in Norris (1967), pp. 122–123

103 Dost Mohammad wrote to his brothers in Kandahar regarding his sense that from his negotiations with Burnes ‘some hopes arise regarding Peshawar’. Dost Mohammad to the Sadars of Kandahar, 25 Oct 1837, transcribed in Yapp (1980), p. 232

104 Dost Mohammad’s brothers were the Sardars of Kandahar – the ‘Dil’ brothers. From 1830 these were Kuhandil Khan, Rahmdil Khan and Mihrdil Khan. Noelle (1997), p. 11
assistance to resolve the settlement of Peshawar – even if it remained under the suzerainty (with tributes) to Ranjit Singh in Lahore.  

Ominously for British interests, the Persian military advance continued eastwards. By December 1837 the long-feared Persian siege of Herat had begun. In Kandahar, Dost Mohammad’s brothers, the Sardars of Kandahar, had settled a treaty with the Persians that would recognise Persian authority over Herat following its capture. Kandahar became Burnes’ main effort as he sought to assert British influence to displace increasing gains by Persia and Russia. He believed that if Herat fell and the Persians seized Kandahar, the whole British position on the Indian frontier would be imperilled. Burnes then received letters from Dost Mohammad’s brothers in Kandahar stating that they were tired of waiting for British support and were about to settle with Persia. Burnes immediately wrote back offering money and assistance to protect Kandahar from the Persian encroachment. On Christmas Day 1837 Burnes dispatched Lieutenant Robert Leech (d. 1845) to Kandahar to do all he could to separate the Sardars and the Persians. Burnes knew he had exceeded his authority and committed the British Government to unspecified arrangements in Kandahar without any approval because of the Persian advance on Herat and the arrival of the Russian Agent in Kabul. 

The Russian agent Lieutenant Paul Vitkievitch reached Kabul in mid-December 1837. His arrival in Kabul, via Herat and Kandahar, further complicated the already complex regional dynamics. The Russian Government wanted to achieve regional influence through Persia, with Afghanistan to form a confederation of Herat, Kandahar and Kabul under Persian suzerainty. Vitkievitch’s instructions were to offer Dost Mohammad commercial agreements with Russia. McNeill in Tehran was gravely concerned by the overt Russian presence and concluded that ‘the establishment of a

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105 Burnes did not know that Wade had not yet approached Ranjit Singh with Dost Mohammad’s proposition over Peshawar. Macnaghten told Burnes that Ranjit Singh would not let Dost Mohammad have Peshawar but might conceivably restore it to Sultan Muhammad Khan. Macnaghten to Burnes, 2 Dec 1837, in Norris (1967), p. 127
107 The origins of Vitkievitch’s mission can be traced back to Dost Mohammad’s appeals to Russia for assistance against Shah Shuja and Ranjit Singh in 1835–1836. The appeals were received by the Russian Military Governor in Orenburg, General Perovsky who recommended Russian support. LT Vitkievitch was a 30-year-old Lithuanian officer who was General Perovsky’s aide-de-camp and later seconded to Count Simonich. He spoke French, Turkish and Persian fluently and wore the uniform of the Cossacks. Burnes found him gentlemanly, agreeable, intelligent and well informed. Vitkievitch had letters of introduction from Count Simonich, the Emperor of Russia and the Shah of Persia. Norris (1967), p. 134; and Yapp (1980), pp. 234–235
108 There is a lot of conjecture about any other surreptitious Russian offers – particularly a more active Russian involvement in Afghan affairs and finance to recover Peshawar. Yapp (1980), p. 234–235
Russian agent in Cabool must be seriously detrimental to British interests in India and in the Punjab’.  

Burnes was also very concerned about these developments in Afghanistan and wrote directly to Auckland on 23 December 1837 defending his independent actions in Kandahar and pleading for British support to Dost Mohammad. He argued that Dost Mohammad had sought a connection with Britain for a long time but his overtures had not been reciprocated by Britain’s ‘cold and distant replies’ and that demanding a reconciliation with Ranjit Singh in Lahore was demeaning and humiliating to the Afghans. Burnes specifically blamed Ranjit Singh for aggravating the fissures between Afghan leaders and explained that Lahore’s seizure of Peshawar in 1834 had acted as the catalyst for Afghans to look for assistance elsewhere, which was now manifest in a Russian agent in Kabul and Kandahar’s overtures to the Persians. Knowing Auckland’s insistence on preserving the alliance with Ranjit Singh, Burnes suggested that as a show of faith to Dost Mohammad, Britain directly intercede to resolve the running sore over the ownership over Peshawar. Burnes urged support for Dost Mohammad’s compromise position to hold Peshawar through a member of his Barakzai family (as long as it was not his estranged brother Sultan Mohammad Khan) in return for an annual tribute to Ranjit Singh:

In a settlement of the Peshawar affair we have, as it seems to me, an immediate remedy against further intrigue, and a means of showing to the Afghans that the British Government does sympathise with them, and at one and the same time satisfying the chiefs, and gaining both our political and commercial ends.

Burnes did little to alter the Governor-General’s evolving strategic appreciation. Auckland received Burnes’ dispatch in January 1838 at the same time as he heard from Wade in Ludhiana. Wade re-iterated his influential recommendation to support the exiled Shah Shuja’s claim for the Afghan throne and considered that reversing the possession of Peshawar would be unacceptable to Lahore. Wade firmly held the view that a divided and weak Afghanistan was the best strategic outcome for Britain and changing the ownership of Peshawar would swing the balance of power too far in favour of Kabul. Auckland agreed with Wade and instructed that Burnes relay to Dost

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110 Burnes to Auckland, 23 Dec 1837, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 132
111 Yapp (1980), pp. 235–236
112 Burnes to Auckland, 23 Dec 1837, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 133
113 Norris (1967), pp. 139–140; and Yapp (1980), p. 236
114 Wade observes that ‘less violence would be done to the prejudices of the people, and to the safety and well-being of our relations with other powers, by facilitating the restoration of Shah Shooja’. Wade to Macnaghten, 1 Jan 1838, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 140
Mohammad that ‘the immediate recovery of Peshawar would seem to be hopeless’.\footnote{Macnaghten to Burnes, 20 Jan 1838, transcribed in Yapp (1980), p. 236} The enmity between Lahore and Kabul had become intractable. Most critically for the First Anglo-Afghan War, when confronted with a choice between these two irreconcilable neighbours, Auckland chose to support the more stable 28 year alliance with Ranjit Singh and his powerful Western-trained army.\footnote{By 1839 Ranjit Singh’s army totalled about 75,000 men, with a core of 35,000 regulars that were well trained and organised by European officers and were equal to any sepoys in the service of the East India Company. Heathcote (1995), p 84; and Norris (1967), p. 134}

![Figure 1.4: Sir William Hay Macnaghten](Source: James Atkinson, 1841, watercolour on paper, National Portrait Gallery London)

By late January 1838 Auckland had received a strong plea for a united Afghan crown from Dost Mohammad. This irritated both Auckland and the head of his Secret and Political Department, William Hay Macnaghten (1793–1841), as they perceived Dost Mohammad as increasingly grasping. The British administration had never intended that Dost Mohammad have higher hopes than for informal protection against Ranjit Singh.

Auckland wrote to Dost Mohammad on 20 January 1838 clarifying the British position. After thanking Dost Mohammad for his friendly reception of the British mission and the rejection of Persia, Auckland stated that British policy favoured the
continued division of Afghanistan into three states – Herat, Kandahar and Kabul. Auckland asked Dost Mohammad to relinquish his designs on regaining Peshawar and reiterated that it had been Britain’s restraint upon Ranjit Singh that had saved Afghanistan from further war against the Kingdom of Lahore. Auckland concluded his letter by warning Dost Mohammad that if Kabul wanted to continue the benefits of British good offices, he must not seek alliances with great powers without British sanction. This dispatch reached Burnes on 21 February 1838 and confirmed Auckland’s complete rejection of all his recommendations, and that Auckland saw little value in an alliance with Kabul. On 22 February 1838 Burnes passed on Auckland’s decision to Dost Mohammad that Britain would offer nothing.

Dost Mohammad was devastated, realising that his offer of compromise on Peshawar had been rejected and that he had suffered a significant loss of face. Despite this Dost Mohammad was unwilling to reject Britain and argued with Burnes that if his brother Sultan Muhammad Khan was allowed back into Peshawar the British would have to offer something for Kabul’s continued friendship. Specifically, the British would have to guarantee the protection of Kabul and Kandahar against Persia, and from the inevitable plots emanating from Peshawar once Sultan Muhammad Khan was restored. Dost Mohammad prolonged his deliberation and on 5 March 1838 his brother the vizier Nawab Jubbar Khan formally raised these proposals for British protection. Burnes was in no position to accede to these requests having already been chastised for his previous unauthorised offer of British assistance to Kandahar.

However, in further negotiations with Dost Mohammad, Burnes counter-offered with stiff terms. The terms put to Dost Mohammad included: no contact or correspondence was to occur with Persia and Russia without British authorisation; Russia’s Vitkievitch mission to Kabul was to be dismissed; all claims to Peshawar should be surrendered; the Afghan leadership was to undertake to live on friendly terms with Ranjit Singh; the independence of Kandahar and Peshawar was to be respected; and, that efforts were to be taken to end the internecine strife with his brothers. To the delight of Burnes, Dost Mohammad accepted these terms and Burnes immediately

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117 Yapp (1980), pp. 237–238
118 In the same dispatch Macnaghten wrote to Burnes that his unauthorised commitment of British aid to Kandahar had been rejected and chastised him for unduly raising Dost Mohammad’s expectations. Macnaghten to Burnes, 20 Jan 1838, in Yapp (1980), p. 236; and Norris (1967), p. 142
119 Norris (1967), p. 145
reported these developments to Auckland. Auckland received Burnes’ positive developments as he approached Simla. This was reinforced with good news from Wade, who had just arrived in Simla, reporting that Herat continued to be defended successfully against the Persian siege and, Ranjit Singh had forbidden any Russian agents from entering his territory. Also, after a year-long negotiation in Sind with Nur Muhammad and Nasser Muhammad, Pottinger was close to securing the placement of a British resident in Hyderabad (which was finally agreed in April 1838). These developments in Afghanistan, Lahore and Sind appeared to be a return to Auckland’s favoured tripartite regional equilibrium on the north-western borders of British India – but it would not last for long.120

Of increasing concern to the British was that Vitkievitch had remained active in Afghanistan and was actually growing more influential in Kabul. Lieutenant Leech, sent to Kandahar the previous Christmas, reported back that the Russians were offering friendship to Kandahar in return for assistance against Ranjit Singh.121 Meanwhile in Kabul, Dost Mohammad had changed his mind regarding Peshawar.122 Burnes now realised that he was faced with delaying tactics from the Afghan leadership hedging against the outcome of events in Herat. Dost Mohammad had not yet responded to Auckland’s letter of the 20 January 1838 and he had not taken steps to dismiss the Russian agent Vitkievitch. Dost Mohammad saw his brothers in Kandahar drawing closer to the Russian-backed Persians but alternatively he had no firm promises from Persia or Russia. Dost Mohammad considered that the British conditions for reconciliation with Ranjit Singh were too humiliating for his personal honour. On 16 March 1838 the vizier Nawab Jubbar Khan confided in Burnes that Dost Mohammad had written to Kandahar saying he had lost hope of gaining anything from the British.123

120 Norris (1967), pp. 146–148 and 154  
121 Count Simonich in Tehran was preparing to formalise these arrangements by drafting a treaty between Persia and Kandahar. Norris (1967), pp. 149–150  
122 The commonly held belief, fostered by Auckland, that Peshawar proved to be the insurmountable hurdle to Anglo-Afghan negotiation is disingenuous. When Dost Mohammad did concede his demands on Peshawar, he felt that far from Britain welcoming his concession, he was confronted with an even more antagonistic attitude. In fact Auckland never even raised Dost Mohammad’s compromise option of re-establishing Sultan Mohammad in Peshawar with Ranjit Singh. The Afghans had been forced to make a choice they had never wanted. Yapp blames Burnes for falsely leading Dost Mohammad to make a position on Peshawar that he was not able to rescind with honour, whilst allowing Auckland to believe Dost Mohammad’s position was more entrenched than it really was. Yapp (1980), pp. 238–240  
123 Norris (1967), p. 150
Any friendly discourse between Dost Mohammad and Burnes now evaporated. On 23 March 1838 Dost summoned Burnes and complained that he felt bitter and abused by the British, although he still claimed that he preferred an alliance with the British over Persia or Russia.\textsuperscript{124} On 24 March 1838 Burnes lamented that the British could have created the favourable conditions for a unified Afghanistan allied to British strategic interests:

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\ldots \text{[if] we succeed in uniting the whole of the Barukzye family, which I believe quite practicable \ldots instead of weak and divided states accessible to every intrigue alike injurious to themselves and us, a barrier which will prevent future causes of vexation, and advance commercial and political ends.}\textsuperscript{125}
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In Simla, Wade reiterated his difference of opinion with Burnes’ assessment to Macnaghten on 21 March 1838. Wade assessed that Dost Mohammad was deliberately vacillating until the future of Herat was determined – seeking an alliance with the Persians if Herat fell, or seeking an alliance with Britain if Herat survived. Wade concluded that backing Dost Mohammad would be ‘full of peril’.\textsuperscript{126} Auckland’s assessment of these circumstances is summarised in a letter written to the President of the Board of Control on 3 May 1838 predicting that Herat was about to capitulate:

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\text{Candahar is waiting the event in quiet dismay, and Dost Mahomed is playing fast and loose, ready to crouch with Persia or cringe with us, whatever strength may in the end appear to be \ldots and in the meantime the Russian agents seem to have thrown aside the mask and to be acting in avowed hostility to the British Government.}\textsuperscript{127}
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After his long deliberation trying to balance Persian and British interests, on 21 April 1838 Dost Mohammad reluctantly made his decision and focussed on ingratiating himself to the Shah of Persia. On that day Dost Mohammad signalled that he had finally made a decision by sending for Vitkievitch, and on the 25 April 1838 Burnes was dismissed.\textsuperscript{128} In Kandahar the Sardars confided in Leech that they had accepted the Russian and Persian offers only because Britain had offered no assistance at all.\textsuperscript{129} As Burnes returned from Kabul, Auckland formally reported to the Board of Control that Dost Mohammad had rejected the British good offices in Kabul, noting that ‘Russia is carrying her system of interference on the very threshold of British-Indian

\textsuperscript{124} Norris (1967), p. 152  
\textsuperscript{125} Burnes to Macnaghten, 24 March 1838, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 153  
\textsuperscript{126} Wade to Macnaghten 21 Mar 1838, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 154  
\textsuperscript{127} Auckland to Hobhouse on 3 May 1838, transcribed in Norris (1967), pp. 158–159  
\textsuperscript{128} A disappointed Burnes departed Kabul on the 26 April 1838 after being presented two horses as a gift by Dost Mohammad. Norris (1967), pp. 162–163  
\textsuperscript{129} Yapp (1980), pp. 238–240
possessions’. Following the dismissal of the British mission, Dost Mohammad wasted no time in reinforcing his links with the Shah of Persia who had arrived at Herat.

During this time McNeill had been reporting regularly on events from Tehran and by late February 1838 he was increasingly concerned that Herat could not withstand the Persian siege. Arriving in Herat on 11 April 1838, McNeill advised Auckland that he considered that the British Government would be justified in taking up arms to protect British interests, as the Persian actions in Afghanistan were ‘a flagrant violation of the spirit of the [1814] Treaty, and destructive to the whole object of the alliance’. McNeill recommended that given the Persian contempt for both Afghanistan and the Kingdom of Lahore, ‘a force of British troops or of British combined with others’ should advance to Kandahar to provide significant leverage for his own negotiations with the Shah of Persia. Unable to compete with the Russian influence, on the 7 June 1838 McNeill quit Herat, leaving the Russian agent Count Simonich with unhindered influence upon the Shah.

During the return of McNeill’s Persian mission, on the 25 June 1838 whilst resident in Mashhad, McNeill composed a long and influential dispatch to Palmerston, copied to Auckland, that has become known as ‘the Meshed [Mashhad] Letter’. This letter is considered one of the key documents influencing Auckland’s strategic assessment that would lead to the First Anglo-Afghan War. In the letter McNeill provides an assessment of the implications of Persian actions and recommended the commitment of British troops:

I cannot divest myself of the conviction that if we do not seize the present opportunity to check the advance of Persia, and to close the door against her on the side of Afghanistan, we must prepare, at no distant time, to encounter both Persia and Russia in that country [Afghanistan] … If Persia should succeed in taking Herat … I conceive that it would be hopeless for us to attempt to preserve a footing in Afghanistan or in Persia: both countries, in short Central Asia, would be lost to us … I apprehend it would in every respect be more advantageous to employ British troops in the south of Persia.

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Burnes was gazetted on 6 August 1838 for a knighthood and brevet promotion to LTCOL on 7 August 1838. Auckland reported favourably on the Burnes mission: ‘I can have no doubt that the presence of Captain Burnes at Cabul has up to this time secured the neutrality of Cabul and Candahar’. Auckland to Hobhouse, 3 May 1838, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 208
131 McNeill to Auckland, 11 Apr 1838, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 165
132 Feeling that he was making little progress, on 3 June 1838 McNeill informed the Persian Foreign Secretary that he was leaving as a sign of the British Government’s displeasure, and that Britain would not receive any Persian mission until reparation had been received for insults to McNeill’s mission. Norris (1967), pp. 165–166 and p. 174
133 McNeill to Palmerston, 25 Jun 1838, transcribed in Norris (1967), pp. 175–179
It was at the end of April 1838, in these deteriorating and complex circumstances amongst regional and great power interests, that Auckland conducted his strategic reappraisal. The previous policies for implementing the British strategy seeking security along India’s north-western borders were unravelling. The positive features were that the Anglo-Sikh alliance remained strong and Britain finally had a permanent presence in Sind. However, relations with Dost Mohammad in Kabul had been severed and there was the growing spectre of the Russian-backed Persians seizing Herat. Throughout all of these fraught diplomatic negotiations, Auckland’s key reasoning had essentially remained the same as his predecessor Bentinck’s – that a weak and divided Afghanistan beyond the Indus River and Lahore as a buffer state best served British security interests along the north-western frontier. In addition, the rumours of the Persian advance were generating anti-British speculation within Nepal, and Auckland did not want to marginalise Ranjit Singh who he feared could further foment this secessionist sentiment. Auckland did not want to jeopardise his principal strategy of securing British-India against internal insurrection.134

Auckland formalised these thoughts on 12 May 1838 in a comprehensive minute entitled ‘On the crisis in Afghan affairs’. He remained critical of Dost Mohammad, concluding that the rejection of British terms had been due to the Persian invasion of Herat and the influence of the Russian mission in Kabul. Auckland observed the growing threats expressing ‘that we ought not to suffer Persian and Russian influence quietly to fix themselves along our entire western frontier’ compounded by Persian ‘schemes in Afghanistan being in universal belief combined with designs of aggression upon India’. Auckland reasoned that to maintain the British Government strategy of safeguarding the north-western approaches to British India, leaving Afghanistan to its fate was to admit ‘absolute defeat’. With this pressing combination of threats, Auckland reached the decision in principle that some type of British intervention beyond the Indus River was required.

Balancing the tripartite border alliances between Afghanistan, Lahore and Sind, even with Auckland’s increased activism, had become untenable. The two alternative methods that Auckland considered viable for preventing Persian encroachment were to provide military and financial aid directly to the ‘chiefships of Cabul and Candahar’, or

134 Norris (1967), pp. 156-158; and Yapp (1980), pp. 238–240
alternatively to ‘permit or to encourage the advance of Ranjit Singh’s armies upon Cabul, under counsel and restriction, and as a subsidiary to his advance to organise an expedition headed by Shah Shoojah’.  

Although both options furthered Britain’s nascent forward-defence posture, it is notable at this time that Auckland was reluctant to consider the use of the British Army as his strategic means. In his deliberations Auckland had rejected direct aid to Kabul and Kandahar as the arms would probably have been used against Ranjit Singh to press Afghan claims for Peshawar rather than the intended Persians, further exacerbating the insecurity of the British-Indian frontier. In rejecting the option of directly assisting biddable Afghans, by default Auckland had decided his optimal method was to actively intervene in regional affairs. Auckland’s reappraisal resulted in an option to ensure a pro-British and anti-Persian third party regime was in control in Afghanistan – whether it be Ranjit Singh or Shah Shuja.

The evolving British opinion was beginning to consolidate behind the installation of the pro-British Shah Shuja as the optimal British course. In formulating this course Auckland’s fundamental assumption was that Shah Shuja, after his long exile in British-India, could be readily returned to the Afghan throne because of sufficient local Afghan support. All of Auckland’s advisors agreed that Shah Shuja could regain his throne with ease. Critically for Auckland, his key adviser Macnaghten had concluded that there was sufficient support in Afghanistan for the return of Shah Shuja.

The strategic method derived by Auckland was to return a pliant pro-British monarch to the Afghan throne principally through the force of arms. The strategic means was to consist of Shah Shuja’s own army, comprehensively underwritten by Ranjit Singh’s formidable army and accompanied by selected British military advisors. Auckland’s response to these evolving regional dynamics was to perpetuate Britain’s enduring strategic imperative to protect the overland invasion routes towards British-India. His selected method had transitioned from being a passive but engaged defence-
in-depth using commercial methods, to a more interventionist approach to maintain a series of loose regional pro-British alliances, and finally towards a forward-defence by directly intervening in regional affairs by reinstalling a pro-British Amir. Auckland’s strategic appreciation had favoured the security benefits of establishing a pro-British buffer for British-India to confront the malign expansionist aims of the Russian-backed Persians, and that Shah Shuja would act as the circuit-breaker with Ranjit Singh to rehabilitate the destabilising Afghan-Sikh grievances for a concomitant return of security on the British-Indian frontier.

Ranjit Singh’s agreement was a critical precondition to the success of this proposed method to perpetuate the British strategy of defence of north-west British-India. In Simla Auckland prepared Macnaghten for his very delicate mission to Lahore to discuss the possibility of a joint intervention into Afghanistan and the associated sensitivities of British forces transiting across the Punjab. Auckland dispatched Macnaghten with a draft treaty, and on 3 June 1838 in an audience with Ranjit Singh, Macnaghten explained that the British sought to assist Shah Shuja recover his throne and were seeking Sikh concurrence with the plan. Macnaghten proposed that Shah Shuja’s Army would advance into southern Afghanistan via Kandahar and then northwards to Kabul, and that simultaneously Ranjit Singh could advance westwards from Peshawar towards Kabul, with both armies accompanied by British liaison officers. Ranjit Singh agreed to the Tripartite Treaty, and on 3 July 1838 Auckland was informed.

Given these momentous decisions regarding Afghanistan, Auckland’s Government was growing increasingly frustrated with the lack of official guidance from London. Auckland’s private secretary, John Colvin, complained that ‘not a word is there of public instruction or opinion upon either Persia or Afghan politics’. Despite the lack of official endorsement, Auckland was becoming more confident in his strategic decision, with Colvin proclaiming that the Afghanistan expedition would be ‘a great enterprise in which a splendid reputation may be achieved’. And Macnaghten, as the

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138 The British calculated a prolonged period was required for Shah Shuja’s Army to concentrate and advance ‘not less than three months must pass before he [Shah Shuja] could collect a force sufficient for him to move with – six months will have elapsed before he can be in Candahar, eight or nine before he can reach Cabul’. Auckland to Macnaghten, 1 Jun 1838, transcribed in Norris (1967), pp. 181–182
139 A transcript of the ‘Tripartite Treaty’, 26 Jun 1838, is in Norris (1967), pp. 188–189
141 Colvin to Macnaghten, 12 Jul 1838, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 192
key negotiator of the Tripartite Treaty, was selected to be the leading political agent for the expedition to accompany Shah Shuja into Afghanistan, despite his lack of any military experience. Auckland summarised his decision-making rationale to London on 13 August 1838:

We owe it to our own safety to assist the lawful sovereign of Afghanistan in the recovery of his throne. The welfare of our possessions in the East requires that we should, in the present crisis of affairs, have a decidedly friendly power on our frontier, and that we should have an ally who is interested in resisting aggression and establishing tranquillity in place of a Chief seeking to identify himself with those whose schemes of aggrandizement and conquest are not to be disguised.

To establish the supporting preconditions for the expedition, Auckland directed Pottinger to ensure that the route for the southern military advance into Afghanistan was not obstructed by the fractious Amirs of the Sind. In late August 1838 Auckland received McNeill’s ‘Meshed Letter’ and was firming in his decision that the planned military expedition should go ahead, even if Herat survived the siege ‘to meet aggression wherever it may be threatened and its determination to secure the frontiers which are most exposed to such attacks. I am not therefore inclined to relax in preparation’.

Following McNeill’s withdrawal of the British mission from Herat on 7 June 1838, after an ineffective six-month siege by the Persians, the Shah turned to Simonich to conclude the matter. The bombardment commenced on 24 June 1838, and once a breach had been opened, waves of Persian infantry were committed to the breach only to be repelled by the ferocious defence of the Heratis. By nightfall on, the Shah knew he was defeated and Simonich realised his influence was waning. However, the siege dragged on throughout the summer, primarily so the Shah could save face.

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142 Macnaghten also submitted Henry Pottinger’s name for consideration to accompany Shah Shuja into Afghanistan. Macnaghten’s appointment caused a great deal of disappointment with others who considered themselves strong contenders for the role, particularly Wade and Burnes. Norris (1967), pp. 192 and 204
143 Auckland to Secret Committee, 13 Aug 1838, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 201
144 Pottinger was instructed to resolve these issues ‘without seriously obstructing the primary object of success to the Candahar expedition’, Colvin to Pottinger, 11 Sep 1838, in Norris (1967), p. 232
146 Count Simonich planned the attack, alongside a Polish officer named Berowski who commanded a battalion of Russian deserters. Simonich’s plan (rather unimaginatively) was to breach the walls with artillery and storm the breach. Norris (1967), pp. 179–180
147 Inside Herat Shah Kamran had the assistance of a British officer LT Eldred Pottinger of the Bombay artillery (nephew of LTCOL Henry Pottinger the British Resident in Cutch). The story of Eldred Pottinger’s exploits during the 10-month siege became a contemporary legend in England, even outshining those of Burnes. In 1839 he received his brevet promotion to MAJ, Companionship of the Military Order of the Bath and was made the Political Agent at Herat. Norris (1967), pp. 180 and 238
On 10 July 1838 McNeill sent his Military Secretary, Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Stoddart (1806–1842), back to Herat with a strong warning to the Shah of Persia on British anger over Persian interference in Herat, and then to Bokhara to report on the progress of the Russian advance. Stoddart arrived in Herat on 11 August 1838 and placed the British ultimatum to the Shah of Persia. The Shah yielded and commenced the Persian withdrawal from Herat on 9 September 1838. In early August 1838 McNeill summarised the current situation and observed that in the event of future Russian interference that ‘Russia becomes the indisputable mistress of the destinies, political and commercial, of all Central Asia … while Persia and Afghanistan will already be at her disposal’. Despite these failures in the Russian-backed Persian siege of Herat, the retreat of the Shah of Persia did not settle the Anglo-Persian differences. It would take time to restore mutual trust in the bilateral relationship and the British still wanted to regain their influence over Afghanistan. Also the deep British mistrust of Russian intentions lingered.

In London during October 1838 Foreign Secretary Palmerston met with the Russian Ambassador to Britain, Carlo Andrea, Count Pozzo di Borgo (1764–1842). Palmerston inquired about the intentions of Russian policy towards India given the destabilising activities of Count Simonich in Tehran and Herat, and Lieutenant Vitkievitch in Kabul. In November 1838 di Borgo conveyed a message from Russian Foreign Minister Count Karl Robert von Nesselrode reiterating that the Russian Government had no hostile intentions towards Britain in Central Asia. Despite a new Russian Ambassador, General Duhamel (1801–1880), being appointed to Tehran and announcing that ‘the intention of the [Russian] Emperor has been and will continue to be not to maintain with Afghanistan any other than purely commercial relations’ – suspicions of Russian duplicity remained and doubt persisted about the real Russian intentions in Central Asia.

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148 Stoddart and his companion CAPT Arthur Conolly were captured in Bokhara and after being tortured by their captors were publically beheaded in June 1842. Norris (1967), pp. 205–206 and 214
149 Norris (1967), pp. 156–158, 206 and 217
150 McNeill to Palmerston, 1 Aug 1838, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 206
151 Norris (1967), p. 215
152 Nesselrode continued that Simonich was contradicting official Russian policy. Palmerston had won a significant diplomatic victory as Simonich and Vitkievitch were recalled to St Petersburg and their actions were condemned. On 20 May 1839 Vitkievitch committed suicide in St Petersburg. Norris (1967), pp. 216 and 229–230
153 Russian note 25 Mar 1839, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 229. Prime Minister Melbourne wrote: ‘The Russian dispatch is evasive as to the past, and gives bad reasons and makes false excuses for the
In September 1838 Auckland and Macnaghten commenced drafting the Government’s rationale for the strategic decision to restore Shah Shuja to the Afghan throne. The ‘Simla Manifesto’ dated 1 October 1838 is the most cited document by commentators attempting to establish the casus belli for the First Anglo-Afghan War. The document is useful in so far as it encapsulates most of the contemporary circumstances and considerations that culminated with Auckland’s decision to directly intervene beyond the Indus River – but it certainly is not the complete strategic summary it is commonly held to be.

The Manifesto commences by affirming the legitimacy for British involvement in the region as being commercial imperatives designed ‘to gain for the British nation in Central Asia that legitimate influence which an interchange of benefits would naturally produce’. The next reason cited is the British alliance with Ranjit Singh, in particular the Afghan attack on the Jamrud Fort in April 1837 where ‘the troops of Dost Mahomed Khan had made a sudden and unprovoked attack on those of our ancient ally, Maharajah Runjeet Singh’. Although this attack had been sudden, it was hardly unprovoked. The then Manifesto absolves further British adherence to the provisions of the 1814 Anglo-Persian Treaty as the eastwards expansion of ‘Persian influence and authority to the banks of, and even beyond, the Indus [River] … [was] wholly at variance with the principles and objects of its alliance with Great Britain’. Dost Mohammad is blamed for the diplomatic rupture between Britain and Afghanistan due to his ‘undisguised support to the Persian designs in Afghanistan’ and is disingenuously blamed for his ‘utter disregard of the views and interests of the British government’. Continuing the pro-Ranjit Singh account of regional events, Dost Mohammad’s ‘hostile policy’ is blamed for the intractable Afghan-Sikh enmity and reasoned that ‘so long as Cabul remained under his government, we could never hope that the tranquillity of our neighbourhood would be secured, or that the interests of our Indian Empire would be preserved inviolate’. The Manifesto then discusses the threats to Britain emanating from siege of Herat. Persia’s ‘most unjustifiable and cruel aggression’ towards Herat assisted damningly by the ‘chiefs of Candahar (brothers of Dost Mahomed Khan of Cabul) have avowed their adherence to the Persian policy’. Both Persian and Afghan antagonists are

course they have taken … that we would hardly venture to trust – if, indeed, we ever could have done so – either to her friendship or to her moderation’. Melbourne to Lord John Russell, 14 Nov 1838, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 216
then conflated in their malign ‘opposition to the rights and interests of the British nation in India’.

Auckland then asserts his decisiveness in ‘taking immediate measures for arresting the rapid progress of foreign intrigue and aggression towards our own territories’, as these factors directly threatened Britain’s enduring strategy of securing the north-western frontiers of British-India. Dost Mohammad and his fellow Barakzai chiefs had proven ‘ill fitted, under any circumstances, to be useful allies to the British government’. Alternatively, the option of the Sadozai Shah Shuja as the strategic way of maintaining Britain’s enduring strategy is justified as ‘an ally who is interested in resisting aggression and establishing tranquillity’. Auckland’s logical solution, ‘after serious and mature deliberation’, resulted in ‘espousing the cause of Shah Shooja-ool-Moolk [Shah Shuja]’.

Auckland then provides reassurances that he had established the appropriate arrangements to support Shah Shuja’s return to Afghanistan and for the subsequent return of regional stability. Firstly, the Tripartite Treaty was finalised with Ranjit Singh who had demonstrated ‘undeviating friendship towards the British government’ and secondly the Amirs of Sind were ‘guaranteed independence’. Auckland then reiterates the strategic imperative for his actions:

> The British government will gain their proper footing among the nations of Central Asia, that tranquillity will be established upon the most important frontier of India, and that a lasting barrier will be raised against hostile intrigue and encroachment.

The Manifesto concludes by describing the campaign plan to return Shah Shuja to power. The strategic means are detailed as Shah Shuja’s Army underwritten by the British Army, and the aspirational end-state of Afghan sovereignty is described to emphasise the concluding conditions for the direct involvement of the British Army:

> His Majesty, Shah Soolja-ool-Moolk [Shah Shuja], will enter Afghanistan surrounded by his own troops, and will be supported against foreign interference and factious opposition by a British army. The Governor General confidently hopes that the Shah will be speedily replaced on his throne by his own subjects and adherents, and when once he shall be secured in power, and the independence and integrity of Afghanistan established, the British army will be withdrawn.\(^{154}\)

However, the ‘Simla Manifesto’ is not the complete summary of Auckland’s strategic rationale that it is popularly assumed to be. Critically, given the obvious British concerns about Russian encroachment into Central Asia, and their specific

\(^{154}\) A full transcript of the Simla Manifesto is in Havelock (1840), Vol. 2, pp. 237–246
intervention in Persia – remarkably there is no mention of Russia. Remembering that Britain and Russia were European allies, Auckland strove to isolate the explanation of his strategic rationale to within the internal affairs in Central Asia. Auckland did not want to affect Britain’s much more important European relationship with Russia, so he moderated his explanation. Consequently, to provide a suitable justification censored of any reference to concerns over Russian encroachment on British-India, the Manifesto is skewed to blame Dost Mohammad’s fractious relationships with British-India and Ranjit Singh, and limited to Persian aggression against Herat. The absence of British concerns about longer-term Russian intentions is a critical but diplomatically understandable omission. The Simla Manifesto was received in London on 20 December 1838 and to the relief of Hobhouse and the Government, the ostensible reasons for intervention into Afghanistan had been constructed as a regional dispute between British-India and Persia, Kabul and Kandahar. As Auckland later confided in Hobhouse ‘I could have made it [Simla Manifesto] stronger if I had not had the fear of Downing Street before my eyes and thought it right to avoid direct allusion to Russia’.\(^{155}\) Auckland’s delicate negotiation around this matter was greatly appreciated by the Home Government.\(^{156}\)

Secondly, another common misperception derived from the ‘Simla Manifesto’ is the interpretation of Auckland’s desired strategic purpose by invading Afghanistan. An unmistakable clue is in Auckland’s private secretary, John Colvin’s hubristic reasoning for invading Afghanistan (emphasis added) ‘a golden opportunity for confirming ourselves in a position across the Indus … in six months hence we shall have a footing across the Indus and in Central Asia which will consolidate our power in India for another century’.\(^{157}\) Throughout Auckland’s deliberations, he has consistently been guided by the enduring strategic imperatives to maintain the security of the north-western approaches to British-India. In the ‘Simla Manifesto’ Auckland re-affirms his strategic end-state, ‘the welfare of our possessions in the East requires that we should have on our western frontier an ally who is interested in resisting aggression and establishing tranquillity’. With his strategic means established as the Army of Shah Shuja supported by British and Sikh forces, the strategic way selected is by installing the pliant pro-British Shah Shuja to the Afghan throne. Despite the disingenuous

\(^{155}\) Auckland to Hobhouse, 13 Oct 1838, transcribed in Norris (1967), pp. 219–220
\(^{156}\) Norris (1967), pp. 219 and 235
\(^{157}\) Colvin to Burnes, 21 Nov 1838, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 239
platitudes for ‘the welfare and happiness of the Afghans’, the installation of Shah Shuja was not an end unto itself – it served as part of the much greater strategic imperative to maintain security of the north-western approaches to British-India.\textsuperscript{158}

Following the receipt of McNeill’s dispatches, Foreign Secretary Palmerston considered the continuing viability of the 1814 Anglo-Afghan Treaty, writing to Hobhouse on 18 July 1838 that ‘the letter may remain, but the Spirit is fled … the time is come for declaring to the Schah [Shah of Persia] that we consider the [Anglo-Afghan] Treaty of 1814 at an end’.\textsuperscript{159} On 21 August 1838 Palmerston received McNeill’s ‘Meshed Letter’, and supporting McNeill’s recommendations for an aggressive British military intervention and incorporation of Afghanistan into British-India’s direct sphere of influence, wrote to President of the Board of Control:

The true Measure to take would be to make a great operation in Afghanistan; to push on Runjeet Singh, send an English corps to act with his army; to drive the Persians out of Afghanistan and to reorganise that country under one Chief; and to pay Runjeet by giving him Peshawar and Cashmeer. A good Afghan state in connection with British India would make a better barrier than Persia has been, because it would be more under our Controll [sic].\textsuperscript{160}

After receiving an update on Auckland’s deliberations for a military intervention beyond the Indus from the Governor of Bombay, Sir Robert Grant (1779–1838), Palmerston again wrote to Hobhouse. Palmerston expressed caution about pushing Persia closer to the Russians but strongly supported a British military intervention in Afghanistan:

Afghanistan is the Quarter where the real work is to be done … The advantage of operations in Afghanistan is, that there we aim directly at the object we mean to attain … I think Auckland should be encouraged in his Course; and when he has set up Soojah ool Moolk [Shah Shuja] in Cabul and Candahar … I should be glad to see that old Rouge Dost Mohammed, and those wretched Creatures of Candahar turned out as they deserve.\textsuperscript{161}

Palmerston and Hobhouse were aligned and both supported Auckland’s aggressive response to the events challenging the security of British-India’s north-western frontier. The ultimate endorsement came from Queen Victoria in her opening address to the House of Lords on 5 February 1839 summarising the British position:

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

\textsuperscript{158} Simla Manifesto, 1 Oct 1838, fully transcribed in Havelock (1840), Vol. 2, pp. 237–246
\textsuperscript{159} Palmerston to Hobhouse, 18 Jul 1838, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 207
\textsuperscript{160} Palmerston to Hobhouse, 25 Aug 1838, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 209
\textsuperscript{161} Palmerston to Hobhouse, 27 Aug 1838, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 209
such preparations have been made as may be sufficient to resist aggression from any quarter, and to maintain the integrity of my Eastern dominions.¹⁶²

In her address to Parliament Queen Victoria reaffirms the enduring imperatives that had driven Britain’s strategic calculations since the earliest encounters with Afghanistan – the security and integrity of the British-Indian Empire. These imperatives were enforced by two reinforcing strategies. Britain’s primary strategy was to maintain the internal security by suppressing any dissent within British-India. Britain’s interest in Afghanistan was rooted in the supporting strategy of providing security against external threats along the north-western overland approaches to British-India.

The earliest provision of security along the north-western approaches began with passive diplomatic engagement to cultivate a pro-British regional environment hostile to any potential invading force. In 1807, with a perceived external threat from France, Russia and Persia, the Indus River was conceived as the frontier boundary of British India. This threat initiated Britain’s continuous strategic conundrum that geographically alternated between forward-defence and defence-in-depth. Initially Minto’s administration favoured a forward-defensive posture that incorporated the Punjab and Sind along the Indus River, and an alliance with Kabul. From 1815 Britain became sufficiently confident in these regional arrangements and sought to reduce military expenditure along the north-western approaches to British-India. However by 1826 British complacency ended with an expansion of Russian influence that directly threatened British-India by potentially fomenting internal civil unrest and establishing the external preconditions for a direct military invasion. By 1830 Bentinck’s strategy to defend the north-western approaches to British-India had evolved to an active projection of British influence for the first time beyond the Indus River. But given the enmity between Ranjit Singh and Dost Mohammad, the likelihood of the necessary regional cooperation to provide a coherent western buffer for British-India was remote. Consequently, Britain adopted a balance of power arrangement between Lahore, Kabul and Sind to secure the north-western approaches to British-India.

In 1836 the newly arrived Auckland continued the balanced frontier policy that favoured a stronger alliance with Lahore alongside looser regional alliances with Afghanistan and Sind. However there were growing tensions between Persia and Herat and an increasing Russian influence over Persia. Auckland considered a range of

¹⁶² Queen Victoria, Opening of Parliament, 5 Feb 1839, *Hansard*, House of Lords, 3rd Series, Vol. 45, c. 3
strategic advice to counter the Russian-influenced Persian encroachment, including an ‘Afghan Buffer’ and a ‘Sikh Buffer’, but favoured retaining the loose tripartite border alliances between Afghanistan, Lahore and Sind to secure the north-western approaches to British-India. Auckland’s decision to intervene in the regional dynamics beyond the borders of British-India by preventing Ranjit Singh’s expansion into Sind was a dramatic turning point towards a new interventionist regional posture. By mid-1837 the Russian-backed Persians had increased their pressure on Herat and the imperative for a pro-British regional buffer state increased. Britain’s decision was to incorporate either Dost Mohammad’s Afghanistan or Ranjit Singh’s Kingdom of Lahore. Auckland favoured the more consistent and stronger Anglo-Sikh alliance over an improbably united Afghanistan. Dost Mohammad felt aggrieved that his compromises seeking British support had been rejected and decided to align with the Russian-backed Shah of Persia.

Auckland’s geo-political appreciation from May 1838 led him to pursue a directly interventionist policy to maintain the British strategy of securing India’s north-western frontier. The looming Persian encroachment could no longer be contained by a balanced tripartite border alliance with Britain between Afghanistan, Lahore and Sind. The catastrophic split between Dost Mohammad and Ranjit Singh, and Dost Mohammad’s rejection of an alliance with Britain prevented any coherent buffer being formed to protect British-India. Indeed Dost Mohammad’s alignment with Persia had further compromised the security of British-India. Despite the failure of the Persian siege of Herat, Auckland decided to press ahead as the Anglo-Persian relationship remained fractured, and Britain remained highly suspicious of Russian regional intentions.

The detailed examination of the prevailing geo-strategic context and the strategic imperatives confronting British-India reveal that Auckland responded by further extending his forward-defensive posture to become directly involved in Afghan affairs. He sought a coherent buffer against Russian-backed Persian encroachment and to rehabilitate the Afghan-Sikh relationship to ensure the maintenance of British-India’s north-western security. Auckland detailed his reasoning in his seminal but diplomatically constrained ‘Simla Manifesto’ in October 1838, purposefully omitting any reference to Russia. Despite this critical omission, Auckland’s strategic rationale and objectives for invading Afghanistan are clearly articulated and consistent with the raft of his contemporary correspondence. Britain’s desired strategic end-state had
consistently been the objective of maintaining the security of the approaches to north-western British-India.

The strategic way selected by Auckland was to positively control events in Afghanistan by installing a pliant pro-British monarch on the Afghan throne, and his strategic means was by force of arms. Given the prevailing and potential threats posed by a Russian-backed Persia and Afghanistan, and the strength of the regional relationship with Lahore, far from being illegitimate, the strategic way and means selected by Auckland to ensure the maintenance of Britain’s strategic end-state were logical, valid and appropriate.
Chapter 2

The First Anglo-Afghan War: 1838–1842

The First Anglo-Afghan War was initiated in a valid response to safeguard British-India’s strategic concerns against the prevailing geo-political threats in Central Asia. The 1838 ‘Simla Manifesto’, despite being an incomplete record of Auckland’s full strategic deliberations, articulated Britain’s reasoning to adopt a forward-defence policy against these well-founded concerns. Auckland elected to preserve Britain’s enduring strategy of securing the north-western approaches to British-India by establishing a buffer against Russian-backed Persian encroachment whilst also attempting to rehabilitate the destabilising Afghan-Sikh relationship. By utilising the military forces at his disposal from the Bengal and Bombay Armies as his strategic means, the strategic way Auckland selected was to exert a positive control over the Government of Afghanistan by the restoration of the pro-British Shah Shuja.¹

Britain’s strategic choices initiated the British invasion of Afghanistan in April 1839. The popular perception of the subsequent First Anglo-Afghan War has centred on the tragic events from November 1841 uprising until the destruction of the Kabul Garrison in January 1842. This fixation upon a truncated and catastrophic period in northern Afghanistan has come to define the historical narrative at the expense of a more balanced historical account of Britain’s unbroken military successes in southern Afghanistan and in Kabul prior to November 1841. Whilst the destruction of the Kabul Garrison precipitated British-India’s greatest strategic crisis of the 1840s, ironically it was the successes of the Kandahar Garrison that enabled Britain to salvage this imminent strategic defeat.

With the extensive historical analysis readily available, this thesis only briefly revisits the totality of the First Anglo-Afghan War and the well-trodden narrative of the destruction of the Kabul Garrison. With the ill-fated military campaign in northern Afghanistan more widely known, this chapter focuses on the British strategic responses and the lesser known but strategically critical events in southern Afghanistan. The examination focusses on the record of unbroken successes of Major-General William

¹ Durand (1879), p. 84; and Norris (1967), p. 186
Nott’s military campaign around Kandahar, establishing the preconditions to conclude the First Anglo-Afghan War on British terms.

In June 1838 Auckland wrote to his Commander-in-Chief, Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Fane, directing him to prepare the armies of the Bengal and Bombay Presidencies for an increased British military involvement in the restoration of Shah Shuja.2 This heightened the general sense of excitement in the British Army, as there had been no major military action since the capture of Bhurtpore in India 12 years previously.3 Throughout the summer of 1838 the British Army began to prepare for their potential invasion of Afghanistan.4 Fane replied to Auckland confirming that preparations in the Bombay and Bengal Armies were underway and he volunteered to lead the army to Kabul, even though he had already submitted his resignation due to ill health.5 Having finally decided for a greater involvement of the British Army for the invasion of Afghanistan, on 10 September 1838 Auckland formally directed Fane to assemble an army to ‘employ a force beyond the north-west frontier of India’.6

I have been discussing this morning with the Commander in Chief what shall be the name of this army – and we have decided that it shall be the “Army of the Indus”.7

The ‘Army of the Indus’ was a composite force consisting of both the Queen’s Army and the Honourable East India Company’s Army, whilst it was directed that ‘Shah Shuja must of course have troops of his own’.8 On 24 October 1838 Auckland detailed his command arrangements:

Sir Henry Fane will have the command of the army – and we have no better soldier – and Mr Macnaghten will represent me with Shah Shooja – and India has no abluer man. In the event of perfect success he will remain in Cabool and apply himself to the reconciliation of differences and to the consolidation of the strength of Afghanistan.9

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2 Auckland to Fane 21 Jun 1838, in Norris (1967), p. 187
3 Pottinger and Macrory (1993), p. 193
4 The enthusiasm for the campaign was so great that Fane had to draw lots to decide which Regiments would stay behind. The Regiments began recruiting an additional 10 more infantrymen to each Company in Bengal and Bombay, raising each Regiment to a complement of 800 troops. Norris (1967), pp. 203, 231 and 239
5 Auckland also wrote to the C-in-C of the Bombay Presidency, LTGEN Sir John Keane, to prepare himself to command if a smaller army was required for the invasion of Afghanistan deemed not ‘sufficient’ for LTGEN Fane’s seniority. Auckland to Keane, 15 Aug 1838, Norris (1967), pp. 191 and 203
6 Governor-General Orders, 10 Sep 1838, fully transcribed in Havelock (1840), Vol. 2, pp. 248–258; and Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 76–77. The full list of key commanders and organisation to unit level for the ‘Army of the Indus’ are listed (including COL William Nott (42nd NI) promoted to BRIG)
7 Auckland to Princep, 20 Oct 1838, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 231
8 Colvin to Macnaghten 12 Jul 1838, transcribed in Norris (1967), p. 192
On 8 November 1838 Auckland reconsidered the requirement for the second Bengal division to Afghanistan now that he was certain the Persian siege of Herat had lifted. Given the reduction in the size of the force, Auckland considered it was inappropriate for someone of Fane’s seniority to command a reduced ‘Army of the Indus’. In a compromise solution, on 13 November 1838 Auckland informed the military commander of the Bombay Presidency, Lieutenant-General Sir John Keane (1781–1844), that he was to succeed Fane as the overall commander of the expedition upon Fane’s retirement.\(^{10}\) Fane was charged with coordinating the concentration of the ‘Army of the Indus’ at Ferozepur and then would hand over command to Keane for the conduct of the invasion of Afghanistan.

On 29 November 1838 the Sikh Army of Ranjit Singh and the Bengal Army concentrated at Sobraon on the Sutlej River.\(^{11}\) Fane’s campaign plan was for the 5000 troops of Sadozai Prince Timur’s Army, supported by 6000 troops from Ranjit Singh’s Sikh Army, and accompanied by the British Agent in Ludhiana, Lieutenant-Colonel Claude Martine Wade, to advance directly on Kabul via the Khyber Pass.\(^{12}\) This action was to be supported by the main advance of the British and Shah Shuja’s Armies from the south. The Bengal Army, commanded by Major-General Sir Willoughby Cotton (1783–1860) was to march south-west from Ferozepur, via Shikarpur, to Quetta.\(^{13}\) The Bombay Army commanded by Keane, following their sea passage, was to simultaneously march northwards from Karachi, via Shikarpur, to Quetta. The two British columns would then combine at Quetta to become the ‘Army of the Indus’ under the overall command of Keane for an invasion into Afghanistan from Quetta to Kandahar.\(^{14}\)

Having marched from Ludhiana on 15 November, on 10 December 1838 the Bengal Army, accompanied by Shah Shuja’s Army, commenced their south-west march

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\(^{10}\) Keane was a notoriously ill-mannered veteran of the Peninsula Campaign and 1812 Anglo-American War. Stocqueler elaborates: ‘Keane had been bred in rough schools. By the concurrent testimony of scores of officers with whom the writer has frequently conversed, he had retained all the manners of the Peninsular camp without benefiting by the gloss of courts and the society of cities. His language too frequently reminded his staff and associates of the coarseness of the men who served under Marlborough in Flanders. Stocqueler, Vol. 1, pp. 116–117

\(^{11}\) Sobraon is 35 km north-east of Ferozepur. Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, p. 87; and Norris (1967), pp. 239–240

\(^{12}\) Norris (1967), p. 295

\(^{13}\) Cotton had served in the Peninsula Campaign and the Burmese War 1824–1825; was aide-de-camp to King George IV. Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, p. 167

\(^{14}\) Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, p. 89; and, Kaye (1878), Vol. 1, p. 396
towards Shikarpur along the Sutlej River. The Bengal Army consisted of 14,000 troops separated into two divisions made up of a total of five infantry brigades, a brigade of cavalry and a brigade of artillery supported by an estimated 38,000 camp followers and 30,000 camels. In addition there were 6000 rapidly recruited Officers and Sepoys from the Company Army that formed the poorly regarded Shah Shuja’s Army. Keane’s Bombay Army of 5000 troops had travelled by sea from Bombay to Karachi. Due to delays in procuring camels from suspicious Sind Amirs, by 28 December 1838 the Bombay Division, supported by an estimated 30,000 camp followers, had only reached Thatta.

The Bengal Army reached Rohri, and commenced crossing the Indus River on 14 February 1839. Fane issued his parting order and departed for his previously arranged retirement. On 16 February the command of the ‘Army of the Indus’ passed to Keane and by 20 February the Bengal Army had reached Shikarpur. After leaving Major-General Duncan’s 2nd Division as the Shikarpur Garrison, on 23 February Cotton’s 1st Division commenced their arduous 300-kilometre march across sandy deserts to reach Dadur at the base the Bolan Pass on 10 March. After a brief rest, on 16 March Cotton’s Division commenced another arduous advance through the Bolan Pass causing greater losses of horses and camels. On 26 March the Bengal Army reached ‘a most miserable mud town’ of Quetta. With the difficulties of bringing supplies forward, Quetta was soon exhausted of grain and to avert starvation, on 28 March the troops were placed on half-rations.

On 6 April Cotton’s Bengal Division was finally joined by Keane’s Bombay Division which further deepened Quetta’s supply crisis. Keane consolidated his force

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15 1st Division (9500 troops) commanded by Cotton consisted of: three brigades (commanded by Sale, Nott and Dennis). 2nd Division (4500 troops) commanded by MAJGEN Duncan consisted of: two brigades (commanded by Worsley and Roberts). Duncan’s 2nd Division was tasked to remain as the garrison force once they had arrived in Shikarpur. The 5 x Infantry Brigades were composed of a total of 15 regiments – 3 x European regiments (two of Royal service) and 12 x Sepoy infantry regiments. Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, p. 77; Kaye, (1878), Vol. 1, pp. 395–396 and 404; and, Forbes (1892), pp. 17–18

16 The Bengal Horse Artillery, on loan to Shah Shuja, was considered the only respectable unit. Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, p. 77; and Norris (1967), pp. 241–242

17 Thatta is 450 km south of Shikarpur. Forbes (1892), pp. 17–18; and, Norris (1967), pp. 240–243

18 Rohri is 50 km south-east of Shikarpur. Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, p. 103; and Norris (1967), pp. 242–243


21 Havelock (1840), Vol. 1, p. 254
and reorganised the command arrangements in accordance with orders issued on 4 March. Nott, now a Major-General in the Company Army, was indignant that he had been overlooked for selection as a divisional commander in the reorganised Bombay Army command structure, in preference to a temporarily promoted Major-General Sir Thomas Willshire, a Queen’s Officer. Reflecting the divisive cultural clash between Queen and Company Officers, Nott reproached this appointment with Keane. Nott objected that ‘the column about to advance is composed almost entirely of Bengal troops; that in this column there will be no less than four of Her Majesty’s General Officers, but not one Company’s’, and that holding a Queen’s commission as a Major-General, he was entitled to command a division. Nott concluded, ‘I see the whole affair; I am to be sacrificed because I happen to be senior to the Queen’s officer’. This heated exchange concluded by an incensed Keane declaring, ‘Sir! I will never forget your conduct as long as I live’. This episode began a long-running dislike of Nott by senior commanders in Afghanistan that later culminated in him being fatefully overlooked to

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22 Cotton retained command of the Bengal Infantry – renamed the 1st Division. MAJGEN Willshire was appointed as a ‘local Major General’ to command the infantry of the Bombay Presidency – called the 2nd Division (composed of two brigades). The Cavalry Division was commanded by MAJGEN Thackwell, and BRIG Stevenson commanded the Bombay Artillery Division. General Order, 4 Mar 1839, Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 115–116
23 ‘Major General William Nott, Local Rank Major General 28 June 1838 (promoted) East Indies’. War Office, A List of the Officers of the Army and the Royal Marines on full, retired, and half-pay 1842 (London: W. Clowes & Sons, 29 Jan 1842), p. 61. Nott was a European Officer in the East India Company Army who stridently defended Company Officers against the perceived superiority of Queen’s Officers. Nott had obtained a Bengal cadetship and served in India since 1800. In 1825 he was promoted to LTCOL and served three times as a Commanding Officer of 20th, 43rd and 16th Bengal Grenadiers. In testament to his strong leadership, during the period of this command he was temporarily transferred to the 71st Regiment Native Infantry ‘to restore it to a wholesome state of discipline’. Nott is described by Kaye as ‘an old Sepoy officer of good repute; a man of some talents, but blunt address – an honest, plain-spoken soldier, not always right, but always believing himself to be right – hearty, genuine, and sincere. His faults were chiefly those of temper’. Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 8, 33–34, 41–42 and 46; and Kaye (1878), Vol. 2, p. 103
24 The British Army was drawn from an uneasy combination of the two dominant military forces in British-India in 1838 – the ‘Company Army’ serving the Honourable East India Company, and the traditional British Army ‘Queen’s Army’. Although they would unite to serve together in campaigns, there was a persistent and corrosive relationship between them. The traditional Queen’s Army had an ingrained sense of superiority and entitlement over the ‘Indian Officers’ of the Company army. Conversely the Company Army resented being denied a status and recognition as equal to the Queen’s Army whilst sharing the same conditions and hazards of Indian service. Stanley, Peter, White Mutiny – British Military Culture in India, (New York: New York University Press, 1998), pp. 6–9; Strachan, Hew, Wellington’s Legacy – The Reform of the British Army 1830–54, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 183; and, Haig, LTCOL Sir Wolesley, The Cambridge History of the British Empire, Vol. 5, H.H. Dodwell (ed.), Chap. 9 ‘The Armies of the East India Company’ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), p. 153
25 Keane claimed that he had ‘received the particular orders of the Governor-General to place that officer [Willshire] in command of a division’. Nott to Charles Nott (son), 9 April 1839, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 117–121
command the Kabul Garrison in 1841. In the short term, this dispute resulted in Nott being consigned as the rearguard commander in Quetta with a denuded brigade.  

On 7 April 1839 the invasion proper of Afghanistan was launched from Quetta and by 9 April the ‘Army of the Indus’ had reached Haikalzai, the site of a later infamous defeat. Over 13 to 21 April the column struggled to navigate the baggage train through the Khojak Pass. Despite the privations from poor logistic planning and loss of baggage, by 18 April the lead 1st Division had reached Chaman. The approach of Shah Shuja supported by the ‘Army of the Indus’, supplemented by bribes from Macnaghten, caused the Barakzai Sardars of Kandahar to flee to Gereshk and Afghan resistance to crumble. Resuming their march on 24 April, fortunately for the emaciated ‘Army of the Indus’, Kandahar was taken without a fight. On 25 April Shah Shuja, accompanied by Macnaghten, entered Kandahar to an excited curiosity from the locals that soon ominously evaporated into a ‘mortifying indifference’. It took until 4 May for the exhausted 8000 troops and 30,000 camp followers of the ‘Army of the Indus’ to finally consolidate around Kandahar. The only offensive action undertaken was between 12–28 May by Brigadier Robert Sale (1782–1845) in an unsuccessful pursuit of the fugitive Sardars to Gereshk who were found to have fled to seek asylum in Persia. Otherwise the starving and disease-ridden ‘Army of the Indus’ was delayed around Kandahar until 26 June reconstituting and awaiting the harvest.  

Profoundly significant, and almost unnoticed during Britain’s preoccupation with the invasion of Afghanistan, was the death of Ranjit Singh in Lahore on 27 June 1839. The unity of the Kingdom of Lahore, a key factor in Auckland’s strategic decision-making prejudiced against Dost Mohammad, started to unravel almost immediately

26 Nott’s Rear-guard Brigade was composed: 43rd NI, a regiment of Shah Shuja’s infantry, and a troop of cavalry. Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 121–122
27 Chaman (collocated with the modern Afghan township of Spin Boldak) is 120 km south-east of Kandahar. There is a detailed account of the advance from Quetta to Kandahar in Havelock (1840), Vol. 1, 279–336; Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, p. 122; Kaye, (1878), Vol. 1, p. 433; and Forbes (1892), p. 21
28 Gereshk is 120 km west of Kandahar. The Sardars of Kandahar were Dost Mohammad’s brothers, the ‘Dil’-brothers: Kuhandil Khan, Rahmdil Khan and Mihrdil Khan.
30 A detailed staff table listing personnel strength states by unit dated 4 Jun 1839 at Kandahar (8102 troops), Quetta (1559 troops), and Sind (2326 troops) is in Havelock (1840), Vol. 2, p. 297; Durand (1879), pp. 151–157; and Waller (1993), pp. 142–145
31 Sale’s force consisted of 3000 Shah Shuja’s Horse (supplemented by a Sqn from 2nd and 3rd Bengal Light Cavalry); 1000 Shah Shuja’s Infantry (supplemented by a Coy from HM 13th and 16 NI); and, artillery. Shah Shuja’s forces established a Garrison at Gereshk, on the Helmand River. Havelock (1840), Vol. 2, pp. 23–30
32 Kaye, (1878), Vol. 1, pp 445–451
without Ranjit Singh’s unifying rule. Also, contrary to another key assumption in Auckland’s strategic rationale, the British commanders in Afghanistan started to question the suitability of Shah Shuja to be a national leader.

Regardless, the ‘Army of the Indus’ pressed ahead with implementing Auckland’s forward-defence policy. Having garrisoned Kandahar and Gereshk with Shah Shuja’s troops, on 27 June 1839 Keane commenced the 350-kilometre march towards Ghazni. Dost Mohammad had previously focussed his defence of Kabul by dispatching his son Akbar Khan (1816–1847) to the Khyber Pass to oppose the impending invasion by Prince Timur and the Sikh Army. However, on 7 July the Afghans were defeated at Ali Masjid Fort and Dost Mohammad’s eastern defences crumbled. As the ‘Army of the Indus’ advanced from Kandahar, Dost Mohammad now focussed on the defence of the Ghazni Fortress by 3000 Afghans, commanded by another son Ghulam Haidar Khan (1819–1879). Dost Mohammad’s plan was to block the British at Ghazni and counter-attack with a mobile force he was gathering to the south of Kabul to be commanded by another son Mohammad Afzal Khan (1811–1867).

The ‘Army of the Indus’ arrived on the outskirts of Ghazni on 22 July 1839 and reconnoitred the purportedly impregnable Ghazni Fortress. Advised by Shah Shuja that the Kabul Gate was a point of weakness (corroborated by a Barakzai deserter Abdul Rashid Khan), and despite their siege guns having been left in Kandahar, Keane ordered the assault. In a conventional breaching operation on the night of 22 July the engineer demolition party, led by Captain Thompson (Bengal Engineers), created a breach by collapsing part of the Kabul Gate with about 400 kilograms of gunpowder. At dawn, in a desperate military assault, the ‘forlorn hope’ led by Lieutenant-Colonel William Henry Dennie (Her Majesty’s 13th Regiment of Foot – HM 13th), clambered over the smoking rubble through the breach supported by artillery fire. This exploitation was

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33 Kaye, (1878), Vol. 1, p. 453
34 Nott did not support Shah Shuja considering that his behaviour was ‘supercilious’ and frivolous, which contrasted poorly with the expected ‘manly behaviour of the Afghans’. Nott, [Jan or Feb 1839], transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, p. 101
35 The three columns moved on successive days. Column 1: Keane’s HQ; Bombay Horse Artillery; Bengal Horse Artillery; 2 x Cavalry Bdes; 1st Bde Bengal Infantry. Column 2: Shah Shuja HQ; 4th Bde Bengal Infantry. Column 3: MAJGEN Willshire HQ; BRIG Baumgardt’s Infantry Brigade; Bombay Artillery Bty (24-pounders); Poonah Horse. A detailed description of the advance is in Havelock (1840), Vol. 2, pp. 39–66
37 Dennie’s forlorn hope was composed of four light companies from HM 2nd, HM 13th, HM 17th, and the Bengal European Regiment. Sale’s main force was composed of the remainder of HM 2nd (MAJ
rapidly reinforced by the main force led by Sale pushing through into the open square and becoming engaged in savage hand-to-hand fighting. The fighting continued throughout the day, with escaping defenders hunted down by judiciously positioned cavalry around the Fortress walls. By nightfall on 23 July the Afghan resistance had finally been overcome, Ghulam Haidar Khan had surrendered and the British troops launched into riotous plunder. The British had suffered 17 killed and 165 wounded, and Afghans killed were estimated at ‘upwards of five hundred men’ and approximately 1600 were taken prisoner.\(^{38}\)

After this devastating victory, on 31 July the ‘Army of the Indus’ recommenced their march northwards towards Kabul.\(^{39}\) Dost Mohammad determined to make a stand on the approaches to Kabul with his remaining 13,000 troops at Arghandeh.\(^{40}\) However, his authority had collapsed and his troops deserted. On 2 August Dost Mohammad fled with his two sons, Akbar Khan and Mohammad Afzal Khan, towards Bamian.\(^{41}\) With no further Afghan resistance Shah Shuja and the ‘Army of the Indus’ reached the outskirts of Kabul on 6 August.\(^{42}\) With the arrival of Prince Timur’s and the Sikh Army from the Khyber Pass, on 3 September there was a combined force of approximately 30,000 pro-Shah Shuja troops in Kabul.\(^{43}\)

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\(^{39}\) Marshman (1860), p. 61

\(^{40}\) The location referred to as Urghundeh (Kaye/ Forbes)/ Urghundee (Havelock) transposes from contemporary C19th Mapping near to the village of Urghandee Paen which approximates to the modern township of Argandeh-ye Pain (which I have shortened to Arghandeh). US NIMA Map, 2001, ‘Paghman’, Ed. 4-NIMA, Series U611, Sheet 2786, Grid Square (GS) 9519; Havelock (1840), Vol. 2, p. 100; Kaye, (1878), Vol. 1, p. 472; Quarter Master General of the Army Map, undated, ‘Continuation of the Survey from Kandahar to Kabool including the districts of Koh Damaun and Lohogurh’, Sheet No. 3 of 3, [India Office Records (IOR) Map Collection: X/3055/9/1/3]; East India Company Map, 1842, ‘Map of Afghanistan and the Adjacent Countries’, [British Museum: 43-3-10-2]; and, Quarter Master General of the Army Map, 12 May 1842 ‘Survey around Kabool including Koh-i-Damaun and part of the Loghur Districts’, [JOR Map Collection: X/3055/13]

\(^{41}\) In Aug 1839 the influential behaviour of the Kizzilbashes (foreign mercenaries, originally from Persia and now based in the Chundawal district of Kabul) was observed: ‘the desertion of these men may therefore be viewed as symptomatic of the total decay of his [Dost Mohammad’s] power’. Havelock (1840), Vol. 2, p. 99


\(^{43}\) 13,000 troops under Keane, 6000 troops in Shah Shuja’s Army, 5000 troops in Prince Timur’s Army, and 6000 Sikh troops. Norris (1967), p. 295. The impressive account of Wade’s surreptitious diplomatic efforts to destabilise Dost Mohammad’s authority in Kabul, and advance along the Khyber Pass is covered in Kaye (1878), Vol. 2, pp. 5–7
On 7 August 1839 the victorious Shah Shuja entered Kabul and was restored to the throne in the Bala Hissar after 30 years of exile.\textsuperscript{44} As experienced in Kandahar, there were few welcoming Afghan smiles for the newly enthroned Amir. The growing realisation about the unpopularity of Shah Shuja was initially offset by the great excitement and hubris at the successful conclusion of the first military campaign of Queen Victoria’s reign.\textsuperscript{45}

![Figure 2.1: ‘Shauh Shujah Ool Moolk’ [Shah Shuja](Source: James Rattray, 1848, colour lithograph, British Library London)](image)

But the British self-congratulation could not overcome the gnawing concern over a number of developments that were of increasing concern to Macnaghten. It was becoming clearer that Shah Shuja did not enjoy the support of his subjects and that his power did not extend beyond the areas controlled by the force of British arms. Shah Shuja was displaying an inability to govern and became increasingly rapacious in the collection of revenue. The newly installed Afghan administration was corrupt and introduced a punitive taxation which, along with the rampant inflation caused by the

\textsuperscript{44} Woodburn, BRIG C.W., ‘The Bala Hissar of Kabul, Revealing a fortress-palace in Afghanistan’, The Institution of Royal Engineers Professional Paper 2009, No. 1
\textsuperscript{45} Auckland was created an Earl; Keane created a Baron (‘Baron of Ghuznee’); Macnaghten received a barony; Wade, Willshire, Thackwell and Sale received knighthoods. Kaye (1878), Vol. 2, p. 31; and MacRory (1966), p. 124. Many officers were awarded the ‘Order of the Durrani Empire’ instituted by Shah Shuja on 17 Sep 1839. The comprehensive list of recipients is in Havelock (1840), Vol. 2, pp. 302–307
inflow of British money, heightened poverty amongst the local Afghans with food shortages and the increasing costs.

As directed in the ‘Simla Manifesto’, on 18 September the Bombay Division of the ‘Army of the Indus’ retired southwards from Kabul under the command of Major-General Willshire. However in response to the deteriorating security conditions, the planned withdrawal of the Bengal Division was changed. On 2 October specific units were identified to remain in Afghanistan, and Cotton was appointed commander in Afghanistan from 10 October. On 9 October additional orders were issued to establish garrisons in Jalalabad and Ghazni, and Nott was appointed the commander of the Kandahar Garrison. On 15 October the reduced contingent of the Bengal Division commanded by Keane commenced their withdrawal, via the Khyber Pass, to reach Ferozepur on 1 January 1840, whereupon the ‘Army of the Indus’ was formally disbanded.

Following their flight from Kabul, Dost Mohammad and his two sons travelled through Balkh Province in northern Afghanistan to take refuge with the Amir of Bokhara. After reconstituting, in September 1840 Dost Mohammad led a force of up to 8000 Uzbek Cavalry back into Afghanistan. The now Brigadier Dennie rode to Bamian to confront Dost Mohammad’s advance. In an encounter battle on 18 September the outnumbered Dennie prevailed and again Dost Mohammad made his escape. Dost Mohammad remained at large and generated increasing Afghan support north of Kabul in Kohistan from chieftains increasingly disaffected with Shah Shuja. In late September Sale led an expedition into Kohistan to punish these recalcitrant

46 Willshire was directed by Keane to punish a long-standing problem with Mehrab Khan the chieftain of Khelat who had been active in fomenting the Baluchi tribesmen to plunder the advancing ‘Army of the Indus’. Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, p. 140–141; and Kaye (1878), Vol. 2, p. 14
47 Identified to remain in Afghanistan: 1st (Bengal) Infantry Division, 2nd (Bengal) Cavalry, and No. 6 Light Field Bty, 30 Sappers. General Order, 2 Oct 1839, transcribed in Kaye (1878), Vol. 2, pp. 9–10
50 Heathcote (2007), pp. 42–43
51 Kaye (1878), Vol. 2, pp. 84–85
chieftains. On 29 September Sale’s force destroyed the township of Towtumdarreh and on 3 October destroyed the village of Joolgah. On 29 October intelligence was received that Dost Mohammad was moving towards Kabul, and on 2 November Sale finally sighted Dost Mohammad in the ‘Nijrow Hills’ around the village of Purwandurrah, approximately 70 kilometres north of Kabul. Positioned on opposing high ground, Dost Mohammad advanced towards the British line. In the face of the Afghan assault, the Sepoys deserted. Despite some heroic individual stands by British officers, Dost Mohammad pressed home his advantage to defeat the British column, causing it to retreat to Kabul. With his honour satisfied and apparently reconciled to his fate, the following day Dost Mohammad surrendered himself to Macnaghten in Kabul. On 12 November Dost Mohammad, under a British escort, retired to Ludhiana to live as a British prisoner in exile.

Following his confrontation with Keane, Nott continued with his rearguard duties in Quetta, supporting the southern lines of communication for the ‘Army of the Indus’ as it advanced into Afghanistan. The Quetta Garrison was gradually strengthened and Nott became well regarded for his strict justice and rapport established amongst the locals. However the maintenance of the Quetta Garrison became increasingly parlous. Supplies remained scarce, foraging parties had to increasingly contend with marauding tribesmen, there was little construction material or fuel to prepare for the approaching

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52 Yapp assesses that there was no relationship between these Kohistani chieftains and Dost Mohammad, and that ‘the Kohistan chiefs had worked themselves into a position of rebellion and now wanted a figurehead around which to rally support’. Yapp, Malcolm E., ‘Disturbances in Eastern Afghanistan, 1839-42’, Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, Vol. 25, No.1/3 (1962), pp. 516–518
53 The modern township Towtumdarreh is in the vicinity of Tootundurrah referred to in the historical record. The modern location of the village of Joolgah in the historical record cannot be located. Transposed from East India Company Map, 1842, ‘Map of Afghanistan and the Adjacent Countries’ [British Museum 43-3-10-2] onto US NGIA Map, 2005, ‘Charikar’, Ed. 6-NGA, Series U611, Sheet 2887, GS 1781; and, Kaye (1878), Vol. 2, pp. 87–89
54 The modern location of the ‘Nijrow Hills’ has been approximated using the location of the village of ‘Nijrow’ on 1842 mapping. This transposes to the vicinity of the modern area centred on the village of Aramghay. The modern locations of the nearby village of Purwandurrah (Kaye)/ Purwan Durrah (Forbes) from the historical record cannot be located. Transposed from East India Company Map, 1842, ‘Map of Afghanistan and the Adjacent Countries’ [British Museum 43-3-10-2] onto US NGIA Map, 2005, ‘Charikar’, Sheet 2887, GS 3886; and, Kaye (1878), Vol. 2, pp. 92–93
55 This unexpected surrender of Dost Mohammad has preoccupied many historians. Following his victory Dost Mohammad returned to Nijrow and rejected plans being prepared by Mir Masjidi Khan of Julgah (leader of the Kohistani revolt) to continue operations against the British. Yapp demonstrates the high degree of fracture between the various rebel factions, and Noelle proposes that Dost Mohammad considered that the tribal organisation would not be robust enough to maintain a widespread resistance to the British, as well as underestimating the British losses and sense of panic among the British in Kabul. Yapp (1962), pp. 518–521; and Noelle (1997), pp. 45–46
56 Kaye (1878), Vol. 2, pp. 94–98
57 Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 131–132
winter, with the troops becoming increasingly weakened by sickness. Concerned with these deteriorating circumstances, Nott was relieved to receive Keane’s order to assume command of the Kandahar Garrison.  

On 26 October 1839 Nott advanced from Quetta with half of his Brigade. Upon his arrival on 13 November he immediately focussed on improving the health and discipline of the Kandahar Garrison despite a simmering discontent among local chieftains. The Kandahar Garrison faced two evolving tribal threats, to the north-west there were the ‘Alizais of Zaylabad with links to Herat, and to the north-east the Ghilzais with links to Ghazni.

Figure 2.2: Sir William Nott  
(Source: John Deffett Francis, c. 1840, hand-coloured etching, National Museum Wales Cardiff)

The first threat directly affecting the British occupation in southern Afghanistan was reported on 14 April 1840 when Cotton expressed his concerns that a rebel Afghan force was planning to concentrate around Qalat to sever the lines of communication.

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58 General Order, 9 Oct 1839, transcribed in Kaye (1878), Vol. 2, p. 10. On 31 Oct 1839, the retiring Bombay Division commanded by MAJGEN Willshire reached Quetta. As directed by Keane, Willshire prepared to attack Mehrab Khan the chieftain of Khelat. Willshire’s column was composed of: HM 2nd, HM 17th, 31st Bengal NI, six guns, and two Rissalils of Local Horse. The column captured the Khelat Fort overcoming desperate resistance, killing Mehrab Khan and many of his commanders, and seized a considerable amount of booty. Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, p. 154

59 Stocqueler (1854), pp. 156–157 and 162–163

60 The modern township of Zaylabad 50 km north-west of Kandahar, equates to the ‘Zamindawar/Zemindaur’ in the historical record. The most prominent tribes of this Ghilzai threat were the Tokhi and Hotaki Tribes. US NGIA Map, 2005, ‘Kandahar’, Ed. 7-NGA, Series U611, Sheet 2180, GS 3738; Yapp (1980), p. 420; and Noelle (1997), pp. 135 and 233
between Kandahar and Kabul. Nott responded that he was aware that the prominent Ghilzai leader Gul (‘Guru’) Mohammad Khan was in the vicinity of Qalat and that he had already dispatched a small cavalry reconnaissance column. By early May it was clear that rebel Ghilzai tribesmen were concentrating. On 7 May Nott dispatched a force from Kandahar, commanded by Captain William Anderson (Bengal Artillery), to confront these rebels. On 16 May Anderson’s force approached the Afghan force at the township of Koruna (Tazee) 50 kilometres north-east of Qalat. Anderson marched his infantry, supported by artillery, directly at the estimated 3000 Afghans. The right of the assault line, commanded by Captain Woodburn, came across Afghans positioned in ravines who were dislodged by artillery fire. The left of the assault line, commanded by Lieutenant Spence, was attacked by Afghan Cavalry that was also repelled by artillery. Spence’s forces then dispersed the Afghans in a bayonet charge and hand-to-hand fighting that killed an estimated 200 Afghans. Despite local arrangements to establish a fortified cantonment in Qalat, to be commanded by Captain Macan, Cotton remained concerned with the Afghan rebels so he dispatched reinforcements from Kabul. Nott considered that Cotton’s response was an over-reaction, particularly as it precipitated the unwelcome increase in ‘plunder, the robbery, and cruel oppression’ of the Afghan population with the arrival of Prince Timur in Kandahar.

Nott grew incensed with the alienating behaviour of Prince Timur and complained that Timur’s troops had ‘done all in their power to goad the people into open rebellion’. Nott presciently observed that the British ‘are become hated by the people … [and] nothing but force will ever make them [Afghans] submit to the hated Shah

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62 Gul (‘Guru’) Mohammad Khan was the most influential Hotak leader. Nott to Cotton, 25 Apr 1840, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 169–175; and Noelle (1997), p. 211  
63 Anderson’s force was composed: HM 5th (CAPT Woodburn); two Rissalahs Shah Shuja’s Cavalry and Bengal Horse (LT Walker); a detachment of infantry (CAPT Codington); and four guns of the 2nd Troop of Horse Artillery. Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, p. 175  
64 The modern village of Koruna approximates to the location of Tazee from the historical record. Transposing from Quarter Master General of the Army Map, undated, ‘Continuation of the Survey from Kundahar to Kabool’, Sheet No. 2 of 3 [IOR Map Collection: X/3055/9/1/2]; onto US NIMA Map, 2001, ‘Qarabaghi’, Ed. 3-NIMA, Series U611, Sheet 2481, GS 3983  
65 The Qalat Garrison (commanded by CAPT Macan) comprised: Two Infantry Bns (not specified), 300 Cavalry, and four guns. The reinforcements, commanded by COL Wallace, with a detachment (unspecified) from Kabul, 16th NI (MAJ McLaren) from Ghazni, and a detachment (unspecified) from Kandahar. Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 175–177, 184, and 303; and Kaye (1878), Vol. 2, pp. 57–59  
66 Nott to Cotton, 2 Jul 1840, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 187–188  
67 Nott to Charles A. Nott (son), 22 Jun 1840, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 189–191
Despite these looming unfavourable political dynamics, Nott successfully continued his offensive military operations. On 3 January 1841 a force commanded by Captain Farrington was despatched to the north-west of Kandahar and successfully dispersed a gathering concentration of rebel tribes under the leadership of Akhtar Khan ‘Alizai. Further, following the breakdown in British relations with the ruler of Herat, Kamran Mirza Sadozai, correspondence was intercepted between his Wazir, Yar Mohammad Khan Aliyozai, and Akhtar Khan proposing to combine forces to capture the Gereshk Garrison and then move onto Kandahar. To pre-empt any advance, Nott immediately dispatched a regiment of Cavalry and an Infantry Battalion to Gereshk, and by mid-March the threat had dissipated. Despite a political agreement by Akhtar Khan to refrain from hostilities following his negotiations with the Deputy Political Agent, Lieutenant Elliot, a prudent Nott sent out a contingent to reinforce the Gereshk Garrison, commanded by Captain Woodburn.

In May 1841 to the north-east near Qalat the Political Officer, Major Lynch, initiated an assault on a nearby Afghan rebel stronghold. The successful capture and killing of the local chieftain and his rebel supporters inflamed local animosities. On 22 May intelligence was received that a force upwards of 1000 Afghan rebels were planning an attack on Qalat. Nott immediately dispatched Lieutenant-Colonel Wymer, and on 29 May his 400 troops confronted an estimated 5000 Ghilzai tribesmen led by Gul (‘Guru’) Mohammad Khan. The battle of desperate fighting raged for five hours. Eventually, through the combination of destructive artillery fire, musket fire and savage hand-to-hand fighting, the 38th Native Infantry (NI) blunted repeated Ghilzai assaults. By 2200hr the Ghilzai assaults had ceased and having resumed his march, Wymer’s relief force reached Qalat on 31 May.

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68 Nott to Daughters, 29 Sep 1840, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 255–257
69 Farrington was dispatched to the village of ‘Lurdie Nowah’ (not located) in the Zemindaur (Stocqueler)/Zamindawer (Kaye) District north-west of Kandahar. Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 281–283; Kaye (1878), Vol. 2, p. 102; and Noelle (1997), pp. 48–49
70 Rawlinson to Nott, 18 Feb 1841, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 286–289
72 Woodburn’s force was composed: 5th Regiment Shah Shuja’s Infantry (CAPT Woodburn), two guns Shah Shuja’s Artillery (LT Cooper), and Janbaz Horse (CAPT Hart and LT Golding)). Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 302–303 and 318; and Kaye (1878), Vol. 2, p. 124
73 Rawlinson to Nott, 22 May 1841, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 292–293
74 The location of the battle is provided in ‘Eelmee’ (Stocqueler)/ ‘Assiai-Ilmee’ (Kaye) – there are no modern villages of that name. Wymer’s force was composed: 38th NI (400 troops), Horse-Artillery (four guns), and Christie’s Horse. Kaye and Forbes incorrectly date this battle as 19 May 1841. Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 303–305; Kaye (1878), Vol. 2, pp. 120–121; and, Forbes (1892), pp. 56–57
To the north-west, in breach of his agreement, Akhtar Khan had continued to consolidate his forces and on 1 July reports were received that he was marching on Gereshk. As Captain Woodburn was approaching Gereshk on 3 July, he located an estimated 6000 tribesmen at the western bank of the Helmand River. During the late evening, the Afghan force commenced crossing this substantial river. Woodburn established a blocking position based around the 5th Regiment of Shah’s Shuja’s Infantry, and throughout the night his force repelled waves of Afghan assaults with artillery and musket fire. The Afghans then crossed 5 kilometres upriver and attacked Woodburn’s flank. The Afghans reached Woodburn’s rear baggage train causing confusion among his flanking Jan Baz Horse, who proceeded to also plunder British baggage train before fleeing. Woodburn fell back and consolidated his force within a low-walled enclosure, and continued to repel repeated Afghan attacks. At dawn the Afghan force then re-crossed the Helmand River, and effectively bypassing Woodburn’s position, continued via Heydarabad towards to Zaylabad.75 On 3 July Woodburn reached the Gereshk Garrison and requested additional permanent reinforcements from Kandahar.76 By 16 August the Gereshk Garrison had been reinforced when reports were received of another concentration of Afghan rebels at Shurakian.77 The new commander, Captain Griffin, immediately advanced the 16 kilometres and confronted a large Afghan force defending from a succession of walled enclosures. Griffin launched the 2nd Regiment NI and Shah Shuja’s 1st Infantry Regiment to capture the enclosures, simultaneously Shah Shuja’s 5th Infantry Regiment and Her Majesty’s (HM) 1st Regiment of Cavalry cleared the surrounding Afghan ‘skirmishers’. The assault continued routing the Afghans and the Cavalry was launched in a savage pursuit for several kilometres. With Prince Sufter Jung (a son of Shah Shuja) ‘leading the attack’ at the head of his Cavalry, the discredited Jan Baz Horse redeemed their ‘lost honour’ and Akhtar Khan fled.78

75 The village of Heydarabad is the location of ‘Hyderabad’ in the historical record. Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, p. 320; and US NGIA Map, 2005, ‘Gereshk’, Ed. 7-NGA, Series U611, Sheet 1980, GS 6630
76 Nott dispatched CAPT Griffin to command the reinforcement by 1st Regiment Shah Shuja’s Cavalry and two guns. Woodburn to Nott, 6 Jul 1841, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 320–322; and Kaye (1878), Vol. 2, pp. 124–125
77 The village of Shurakian is the location of ‘Secunderabad’ in the historical record. Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, p. 324; and US NGIA Map, 2005, ‘Gereshk’, Ed. 7-NGA, Series U611, Sheet 1980, GS 6331
Through responsive and aggressive actions on two fronts, Nott had ensured that the rebellion in southern Afghanistan ‘had been suppressed but not extinguished’. During this pause in fighting Nott was reinforced by HM 40th, and by 2 November the Kandahar Garrison totalled 5000 troops based around two cavalry regiments, a combined regiment of artillery, and eight infantry battalions.

Figure 2.3: Major-General William Elphinstone

In northern Afghanistan, having considered that the main Afghan threats had been effectively suppressed and under pressure to reduce expenditure, during September 1841 Macnaghten decided to halve the 80,000 rupees subsidy paid to Afghan chiefs. In conjunction, the newly appointed Commander in Afghanistan, Major-General William Elphinstone (1782–1842), pressed ahead to withdraw the remaining elements of the British Army from Afghanistan as stipulated in the ‘Simla Manifesto’. As late as 19 October both Elphinstone and Macnaghten appeared unaware of the scale of

79 Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, p. 286
80 The Kandahar Garrison was composed: Skinner’s Irregular Horse; Shah’s 1st Irregular Cavalry; Shah’s Horse Artillery (CAPT Anderson); Bombay Artillery Battery (CAPT Blood); Bengal Artillery Battery (CAPT Blood); HM 40th, 2nd, 16th, 38th, 42nd and 43rd Regiments of Bengal NI; 1st and 2nd Regiments Shah’s Infantry. Neill (1845), p. 143, and Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 352–353; Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 123
81 Norris (1967), p. 362
82 Upon hearing of Cotton’s impending retirement due to ill health, on 14 Nov 1840 Auckland offered the position of Commander in Afghanistan to Elphinstone, who despite his own ill health accepted the appointment on 26 Nov 1840. Elphinstone reached Afghanistan in Apr 1841 and commanded until his capture in Jan 1842 (and his death in captivity on 23 Apr 1842). Norris (1967), pp. 338–340
events about to be unleashed as ‘not a syllable was breathed by either of any expected insurrection at Cabul’.  

In southern Afghanistan Nott proceeded with the planned retirement of British troops from Afghanistan. On 7 November Colonel James Maclaren’s Brigade were dispatched for their return for India. As Maclaren commenced his march to Quetta, on the evening of 7 November, news arrived in Kandahar of the annihilation of Captain Woodburn’s detachment near Ghazni. The Ghazi Garrison commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Palmer, wrote that Woodburn’s detachment had passed through Ghazni on 2 November en route to Kabul when they were attacked and took refuge in a nearby fort in the Seyyedabad District. After holding out for a day, the Afghans assaulted the fort, killed the Sepoys, set fire to the tower and killed Woodburn and his rearguard as they attempted to escape. Worryingly, Palmer concluded ‘I think it very possible that the road between this [Ghazni] and Kelat-i-Ghilzai [Qalat] will not be long open.’ Immediately Nott dispatched riders who reached Maclaren’s Brigade on 9 November and ordered them halt and return to Kandahar.

Reinforcing Palmer’s reports on the deterioration of security, the alarming news of the insurrection in Kabul reached Kandahar on 14 November, in the form of two dispatches dated 3 November. The first, a military dispatch from Elphinstone’s Headquarters instructed Nott to ‘immediately direct the whole of the troops under orders to return to Hindostan from Candahar [Maclaren’s Brigade] to march upon Caubul instead of Shikarpore’. As this dispatch had transited south, Palmer had added his observations from Ghazni ‘the country here is getting more disturbed every day’.

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83 Marshman (1860), p. 74  
84 Maclaren’s Brigade consisting of: Bengal Artillery; and 16th, 42nd and 43rd Bengal NI. Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 123; and Neill (1845), p. 149  
87 Nott to his daughters, 1 Nov 1841, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 358–359  
88 Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, p. 359  
89 Paton to Nott, 3 Nov 1841, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 359–360; and, Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 125  
90 Palmer to Nott, (added to the letter from Paton to Nott, 3 Nov 1841), transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, p. 360
In the second dispatch, Macnaghten wrote to Nott’s Political Agent, Major Rawlinson, ‘we are in a very serious insurrection in the city just now … It would be only prudent, therefore that the 16th, 42nd and 43rd, with a troop of horse artillery and some cavalry, should come here immediately’. With such an unambiguous order from Elphinstone, and communications with Kabul now severed, Nott had to comply despite his concern for likelihood of failure. On 17 November Nott reluctantly dispatched Maclaren’s brigade towards Kabul. Unable to advance through the snow-drifts, Maclaren returned to Kandahar on 8 December.

With a crisis erupting in Kabul, there was little Auckland could do to directly influence the deteriorating events in Afghanistan. Hearing of the Kabul uprising on 24 November Auckland decided that Afghanistan must be abandoned. The factors driving his decision were the practical logistic difficulties of being unable to send supplies forward until the snow-bound passes had cleared, and the prospect of sending more troops to Afghanistan leaving the internal security of India weakened. But more fundamental for Auckland were his own doubts whether his forward-defence policy remained valid and could be afforded. On 3 December, before the calamitous conclusion to events that unfolded in Kabul, Auckland wrote to the Commander-in-Chief, Lieutenant-General Sir Jasper Nicolls (1778–1849) expressing his views on his Afghan policy. Even at this early stage Auckland favoured abandoning Afghanistan by a deliberate retirement whilst seeking to retain British political influence on the neighbouring states. Auckland advocated a withdrawal of the Kabul Garrison through Peshawar, and for the Kandahar Garrison to evacuate the Ghazni Garrison before the complete withdrawal of all British forces:

It would be vain to speculate upon the issue of the contest at Cabool; but in the extreme event of the military possession of that city, and the surrounding territory, having been entirely lost, it is not our intention to direct new and extensive operations for the reestablishment of our supremacy throughout Afghanistan.

We can scarcely contemplate in such case that there will be any circumstances or political objects of sufficient weight to induce us to desire to retain possession of the remainder of that country [Afghanistan] … we should wish our military and political officers so to shape their proceedings as will best promote the end of retiring with the least possible discredit. Of course it will be

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91 Macnaghten to Rawlinson, 3 Nov 1841, transcribed in Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, pp. 125–126
92 Nott to Stuart, 19 Nov 1841, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 363–365; and, Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 128. Yapp contends that Maclaren may have been overly influenced by Nott to return, as Nott was only concerned about the weakness of the Kandahar Garrison concluding ‘Nott was a good general, but a very selfish one’. Yapp (1980), p. 421
93 Auckland to Nicolls, 1 Dec 1841, in Yapp (1980), p. 425
desirable that this retirement shall be deliberate, and the result of arrangements that will leave some political influence in the country.\textsuperscript{94}

Auckland had now become convinced that his 1838 policy was untenable. On 6 December Auckland wrote to Macnaghten stating his belief that Afghanistan should only be held if the cost was less than the likely benefits.\textsuperscript{95} Auckland was looking to withdraw to a strong position on the Indus River and was hoping that the regime of Shah Shuja could survive without direct British support.

Figure 2.4: Sir Robert Sale

Compounding the difficulties in Kabul, previously Elphinstone had identified Sale to lead the withdrawal from Kabul and secure the route back to Peshawar. A contingent commanded by Colonel Monteith (35\textsuperscript{th} NI), composed of 35\textsuperscript{th} NI, a squadron of 5\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry, two guns and Broadfoot’s Sappers, was initially considered a sufficient force to open Kabul’s communications with Peshawar.\textsuperscript{96} However, the effect of the reduction in the annual subsidy to the Ghilzai tribesmen became immediately apparent. On 9 October Monteith departed Kabul with his small force and was ferociously attacked at

\textsuperscript{94} Auckland to Nicolls, 3 Dec 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 41, p. 35
\textsuperscript{95} Auckland to Macnaghten, 6 Dec 1841, in Yapp (1980), p. 425
\textsuperscript{96} Marshman (1860), p. 74
Butkak.\textsuperscript{97} On 10 October, Sale immediately moved out and reinforced Monteith with HM 13\textsuperscript{th} and 35\textsuperscript{th} NI and they became heavily engaged in the Khvord Kabul Pass. The fighting continued for another 18 days. Sale’s column finally reached the relative safety of Gandomak on 30 October with over 100 troops killed or wounded.\textsuperscript{98} On 10 November, Sale was informed by a dispatch from Elphinstone that the insurrection had broken out in Kabul on 2 November where Alexander Burnes had been killed, and went on to describe ‘in the most despondent language’ the parlous position of the Kabul Garrison.\textsuperscript{99}

Most importantly, Elphinstone demanded the immediate return of Sale’s Brigade to reinforce Kabul. Sale convened a council of war, incredulous that a garrison of nearly 5000 troops was not capable of aiding itself in the face of a civil insurrection. With the onset of winter reducing mobility, reserves of ammunition depleted from their fighting withdrawal, camel drivers having deserted, and the morale of Sale’s Brigade ‘a dispirited if not beaten force’ – the council of war ‘came to the conclusion, therefore, that it was not possible to march back to Cabul’.\textsuperscript{100} After rejecting Elphinstone’s request to return to Kabul, Sale decided to occupy Jalalabad to strengthen the lines of communications between Kabul and Peshawar, by establishing a well-fortified location to secure the retirement from India, or as a key staging point for more troops being sent into Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{101} On the morning of 11 November, Sale’s Brigade marched from Gandomak to Jalalabad as the rearguard was continuously harassed by armed tribesmen ‘swarming like hornets … and were only repelled by the most strenuous efforts’.\textsuperscript{102} Finally on the evening of 12 November 1841 Brigadier Sale’s column reached the deserted township of Jalalabad along the southern bank of a wide expanse of the Kabul River.\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{97} Bootkak cited in the historical record is a modern suburb of Butkak 13 km from the centre of Kabul on the eastern outskirts. Kaye (1878), Vol. 2, p. 156
\textsuperscript{98} Marshman (1860), pp. 74–79; Kaye (1878), Vol. 2, pp. 161–162
\textsuperscript{99} Marshman (1860), pp. 79–80
\textsuperscript{100} Marshman (1860), pp. 80–81
\textsuperscript{101} In Nov 1841 the additional security for the rearward lines of communication between Kabul and Peshawar consisted of: Gandamak Garrison composed of a corps of Khyber Rangers, augmented by a regiment of Janbazes (Afghan horses) and some [not specified] Afghan jezailchees (riflemen); CAPT Ferris’ was positioned in an open cantonment at Pesh-Bolak, and another 100 Afghan riflemen at Ali Masjid. Marshman (1860), pp. 78 and 81–82.
\textsuperscript{102} Marshman (1860), pp. 83–84
\textsuperscript{103} Fortescue (1927), p. 246
Almost immediately, whilst strengthening the Jalalabad Fortress, the British defenders were attacked. At dawn on 13 November an estimated 6000 Afghan tribesmen commenced sporadic attacks with harassing fire. On 14 November Monteith led a British counter-attack with a force of 1100 troops that dispersed the Afghan tribesmen, inflicting about 200 casualties. Simultaneously Captain Ferris reported that on the rearward lines to Peshawar, his garrison at Pesh Bolak had been over-run and the remaining post at Ali Masjid was besieged, effectively isolating the Jalalabad Garrison.

A large force of Afghans began concentrating around Jalalabad in late November, and on 1 December launched a concerted attack on the western side of the Fortress. Dennie led a successful counter-attack dispersing the Afghan tribesmen, killing an estimated 150 and capturing large quantities of food and fodder. As a result of this action, the garrison then enjoyed a consolidation period with little hostile action. On 31 December the Jalalabad Garrison became aware of unverified reports of the murder of Macnaghten and were again incredulous at the capitulation of the Kabul Garrison. All doubts were removed on 2 January 1842 upon receipt of a letter from Major Pottinger, who was now the Political Agent following the murders of Macnaghten and Burnes, who confirmed the state of starvation and Macnaghten’s murder on 23 December.

On 9 January 1842 an official letter dated 29 December 1841 was delivered to Sale, co-signed by Elphinstone and Pottinger. It requested the abandonment of Jalalabad and the continued withdrawal to India. Specifically Sale was to hand over all guns, stores and baggage to a new Afghan Governor of Jalalabad with the assurance ‘you will not be molested on your way; and to the safe conduct which Akbar Khan has given I trust for the passage of the troops under my immediate orders through the passes. Sale immediately convened another council of war to discuss the response to the letter. Having concluded that it had been written under duress, Sale rejected any notion of

104 Monteith’s force was composed of 700 infantry, all the Cavalry and two guns. Marshman (1860), p. 87; and, Fortescue (1927), p. 90
105 Pesh Boldak/ Bolak/ Bulak is cited in the historical record as being 40 km east of Jalalabad. It is no longer a village name in this region of Afghanistan. By transposing the 1904 data, the location of Pesh Boldak approximates to the modern village of Shirgar. US NGIA Map, 2005, ‘Gerdi’, Ed. 7-NGA, Series, U611, Sheet 3185, GS 6585; Surveyor General of India, Map, 1904, ‘North-Western Trans-Frontier’, [IOR Map Collection: X/9935/2/428/1904]; and, Marshman (1860), p. 91
106 Marshman (1860), pp. 91–92; and Fortescue (1927), p. 247
107 Marshman (1860), pp. 92–94
108 Elphinstone to Sale, 29 Dec 1841, transcribed in Marshman (1860), p. 95
abandoning the Jalalabad Fortress, a decision unanimously supported by the council to prevent any ‘further disgrace on their country’.  

On 2 November 1841, as the news of the growing Kabul insurrection reached Indian frontier, the Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West Province, Thomas Robertson, and the Political Agent on the North-Western Frontier, George Clerk, immediately urged the Commander-in-Chief, Nicolls, to reinforce Peshawar.  

Brigadier Wild, the commanding officer at Ferozepur, and Colonel Rich, the commandant at Ludhiana, hastily assembled and dispatched a reinforcement column.  

Between 18 – 26 November, Wild’s Brigade of 4500 troops crossed the Sutlej River towards Peshawar. On 4 January 1842 a second supporting brigade of 3000 troops, commanded by Brigadier McCaskill, also crossed the Sutlej River towards Peshawar.  

Given the deteriorating circumstances, by December 1841 the Political Agents, Captain Macgregor in Jalalabad and Captain Mackeson in Peshawar, were urging an immediate military advance to relieve Jalalabad. In response, Nicolls authorised Wild to advance to Jalalabad, with the caveat that Wild could only take three of his four battalions.  

By the end of December Wild also faced a near mutiny. The reinforcing Sikh troops resolutely refused to move forward into the Khyber Pass or loan any artillery to the British. The Sikh contagion spread to the Sepoys who then refused to move beyond Peshawar and advance on Jamrud. Compounding these issues the prospects of the force were reduced further by the shortage of ammunition, failing carriage equipment, and the lack of cavalry and artillery required to advance through the foreboding Khyber Pass to Jalalabad. With the relieving force in such a poor state of preparation and the uncertainty of events in Kabul, Wild decided to await reinforcements, as he considered that Sale was not in any imminent danger.  

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109 Marshman (1860), p. 96; and Fortescue (1927), p. 247  
110 LTGEN Nicolls was the Commander-in-Chief Dec 1839 – Aug 1843. Clerk was later became Governor of Bombay and Member of the Council of India. Low (1873), p. 208; and Norris (1967), p. 383  
111 Marshman (1860), p. 96  
112 Wild’s Brigade was composed of: 64th NI, 60th NI, 53rd NI, 30th NI, and a small detachment of Cavalry and Sappers. Low (1873), pp. 208–209; and Fortescue (1927), p. 248.  
113 McCaskill’s Brigade was composed of: 10th Bengal Cavalry; Artillery Battery (two 9 pounders and a howitzer); HM 9th and 26th NI. Low (1873), pp. 209–210  
114 The fourth Battalion was required to maintain the rearward lines of communication from Peshawar. Fortescue (1927), p. 248  
115 The Sikh commandant at Peshawar, General Avitabile, eventually handed over four unreliable guns that subsequently destroyed their carriage when fired. Low (1873), p. 209; and, Fortescue (1927), p. 248  
116 Low (1873), p. 210; and Fortescue (1927), p. 249
Despite these inauspicious conditions, Wild was persuaded by the urging of the Political Agents, Mackeson and Henry Lawrence, to relieve the nearer besieged British position at Ali Masjid that covered the eastern entrance to the Khyber Pass.\(^{117}\) Stressing the importance of retaining Ali Masjid for the rearward movement for the Jalalabad Garrison, Wild was persuaded to dispatch a relieving force, commanded by Colonel Moseley and supported by Political Agent Mackeson.\(^{118}\) The advance commenced on the night of 15 January 1842, and marching through the night, this small relief force reached Ali Masjid without incident. With only a small number of carriage animals reaching the destination, the Ali Masjid Garrison was placed on half rations to await reinforcement.\(^{119}\) Meanwhile in Peshawar on the evening of 18 January, the Sikh troops eventually mutinied alongside a large number of the camel drivers, who all refused to enter the Khyber Pass and departed for Peshawar. As a consequence, Wild’s advance to Ali Masjid was delayed until early on 19 January.\(^{120}\) The logistic train did not depart for another three hours, causing the column to be over-extended and advancing in daylight. Approaching the mouth of the Khyber Pass, the Afridi tribesmen commenced firing upon the column and the Sepoys were prevented from retreating after a haranguing by their officers. There was another exchange of fire, resulting in 40 British casualties, including wounds to Wild’s face that incapacitated him. The artillery broke down and Wild’s force retreated to Jamrud and then to Peshawar. Without any further reinforcement or provisions, Moseley remained isolated at Ali Masjid until 24 January when he abandoned the position and conducted a fighting withdrawal to Peshawar suffering heavy losses.\(^{121}\)

The whole conduct of the military operation by Wild, at a critical time of great strategic uncertainty, had a questionable imperative as well as poor execution. This debacle drew sharp criticism from the beleaguered Jalalabad Garrison, summarising the attempt as ‘an inadequate force, wretchedly equipped … under a commander without

\(^{117}\) The Ali Masjid Garrison was being commanded by a relative of Political Agent Captain Mackeson with a small garrison of Afghans. The relationship is described by Fortescue as a ‘brother’ and Low as a ‘cousin’ – regardless, they are related and there is a conflict of interest in Captain Mackeson’s advice. Low (1873), p. 210; and Fortescue (1927), p. 249

\(^{118}\) Mosley’s force was composed of: 53rd and 64th Native Infantry, supported by two Sikh guns and troops (reluctantly provided after payment of a bribe). Fortescue (1927), pp. 249–250

\(^{119}\) There were initially 350 carriage animals carrying supplies for the beleaguered garrison with only 60 animals reaching the destination. Fortescue ascribes wastage to the desertion and cowardice of the drivers and Sepoy escorts. Low (1873), pp. 210–211; and, Fortescue (1927), p. 250

\(^{120}\) Wild’s force was composed of: 30th and 60th NI, supported by Sikh artillery. Low (1873), p. 211

\(^{121}\) Low (1873), p. 212; and Fortescue (1927), pp. 250–251
spirit; and it broke down at the mouth of the first defile’. Nicolls instigated a formal inquiry headed by Major-General Pollock commissioned to examine ‘upon whom the blame should be laid’ and whether Wild’s decision-making was too influenced by the Political Advisor. The Supreme Government eventually censured Mackeson and Lawrence for their premature urging of a military operation upon Wild. This was a critical finding as it identified the confusing authorities that had existed in the chain of command between the military commanders and the accompanying Political Advisors. The outcome reinforced the Government’s decision to consolidate both military command and political control into the single senior military commander. This was a very important clarification that was critical in generating the level of influence wielded by Pollock and Nott in their future command of the ‘Army of Retribution’.

In Kabul until November 1841 challenges to British authority had been localised disputes in remote areas that had been readily suppressed by military force. The uprising in Kabul that erupted in November 1841 involved affiliations that had previously supported the Anglo-Sadozai regime, the Durrani nobles and bureaucrats who had served the previous Barakzai rulers and had continued to serve Shah Shuja. The struggle against the Anglo-Sadozai regime had begun to change in nature, which was misunderstood and underestimated by the British. The increasing British influence over Afghan affairs had undermined the political influence of traditionally dominant groupings and these grievances reflected a narrow set of sectional interests, as opposed to a widespread nationalistic uprising. The return of Akbar Khan in early October had formed a core around which other disaffected groups gravitated, including the tribesmen from Kohistan in the north and Ghilzai tribes controlling the passes to the east and around Ghazni. The rebel leaders were able to mobilize more support to their own narrow interests and Islam was co-opted as a unifying rallying call. With poor British awareness and inability to counter these evolving dynamics in Kabul, these uprisings grew unchecked.

The primary responsibility for the British failure in northern Afghanistan was the inability of the ailing Elphinstone to respond effectively to these growing threats. From

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122 Marshman (1860), p. 97
123 Nicolls to Governor General in Council, 10 Feb 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 178, p. 151
124 Fortescue (1927), p. 251
125 Yapp (1980), pp. 419–421
June 1841 Elphinstone had been confined to his room with sickness, and on 9 August he pleaded with Auckland to be relieved of command ‘I will no longer delay acquainting you that my health is much impaired … it therefore now becomes my painfull [sic] duty to request that I may be relieved from this command’.\textsuperscript{126} On 6 September 1841 Maddock responded to inform Elphinstone that Auckland was ‘pleased to acquiesce in your application and to authorise you to make over the commission of HM’s and the Honble [sic] Company’s forces in Afghanistan to the next Senior Officer’.\textsuperscript{127} Owing to Elphinstone’s inability to command, compounded by his fall from a horse on 2 November, British leadership of the Kabul Garrison never consolidated. The duties mostly fell on the commander of the Kabul Brigade, a Queen’s Officer, Brigadier John Shelton (HM 44\textsuperscript{th}) who was summoned back from the Bala Hissar on 9 November. A personally brave but rigid and unpopular disciplinarian, Shelton possessed a sound tactical acumen, as demonstrated during his clearance of the Siah Sung Hills on 10 November, and Bemaru Heights on 13 November. However, Shelton was incredibly divisive, displayed little capacity for higher command and possessed a corrosive contempt for Elphinstone.\textsuperscript{128}

By the end of November 1841 the ineptly commanded Kabul Garrison started to starve and morale plummeted. There was no relief column able to respond, and Shah Shuja was marginalised and isolated in the Bala Hissar. Without strong leadership the garrison never regained the military initiative and with a poorly sited cantonment, the Kabul Garrison was in a weak position to withstand any concerted siege. In the absence of an aggressive military posture by the British Army, the emboldened Afghans increased their attacks. The choice for the garrison was becoming starker – stay and starve to death, or abandon the protection of the cantonment without a guarantee of a safe passage from Afghanistan.

\textsuperscript{126} Elphinstone to Auckland, 9 Aug 1841, IOR 19777, L/P&S/5/161, folio 41. Attached is the medical assessment ‘Medical Assessment of MAJGEN Elphinstone by G.W. Barnes MD, Assist Surgeon, HM 13\textsuperscript{th} Lt Inf, Cabool, 7 Aug 1841’ that concludes ‘Major General Elphinstone C.B. has suffered for the last four months from repeated attacks of acute and Classic Gout – which has so genuinely impaired his Constitution as to render it absolutely necessary that he should proceed to Europe for the benefit of his health’. IOR 19777, L/P&S/5/161, folio 41
\textsuperscript{127} Maddock to Elphinstone, 6 Sep 1841, Letter No 1208, IOR 19777, L/P&S/5/161, folio 42. Yapp speculates that Auckland knew that Elphinstone was ill ever since his arrival in Afghanistan, but was pleased that Elphinstone’s caution and timidity aligned to his own views. Auckland’s preference was for an inactive commander, even though he was incompetent. Yapp (1980), pp. 422–423
\textsuperscript{128} Sale (1843), diary entry dated 11 and 13 Nov 1841, pp.40–44; Kaye (1878), Vol. 2, pp. 207–210; and Yapp (1980), pp. 422–423
In these deteriorating military circumstances, Macnaghten with ‘a perfidious enemy before him, a decrepit general at his side, and a paralysed army at his back’ sought a political solution. \(^{129}\) Ironically as the principal architect of the British military intervention, Macnaghten now applied himself to extricating the British from Afghanistan by diplomatic means. Disastrously, Macnaghten started to delve into the intrigues of Afghan politics as the prospect of the return of Dost Mohammad was not unanimously supported, and he seized on this apparent fissure between the rebels. Unfortunately for Macnaghten, a document he had signed supporting the pro-Shah Shuja faction was intercepted and given to Akbar Khan. At their meeting on 23 December 1841 the deception was exposed and Macnaghten was murdered only 600 metres from the cantonment. No effort was made to recover Macnaghten’s body until it was finally carried off by Afghans to be displayed in the Grand Bazaar. \(^{130}\) In a testament to the prevailing sense of despair, following Macnaghten’s murder ‘not a soldier stirred from his post, no sortie was even thought of; treachery was allowed to triumph in open day’. \(^{131}\)

The murder of Macnaghten, following closely the death of Burnes, left no effective political leadership in Afghanistan for the British. Despite Major Eldred Pottinger resuming negotiations, these tragic events paralysed the already dithering Elphinstone who refused to attack Kabul immediately in retribution, instead wanting to continue negotiations for a safe passage to Peshawar. \(^{132}\) As Pottinger negotiated an agreement for the British withdrawal in which he had little faith, Eyre complained ‘a more cheerless Christmas Day perhaps never dawned upon British soldiers in a strange land’. \(^{133}\) At the British council of war held on 27 December, given the parlous situation, it was decided that the only option was a humiliating surrender of hostages, money, artillery, small arms and ammunition to the Afghans for a treaty for safe passage. \(^{134}\)

Finally on 6 January 1842, in the absence of the promised Afghan escort or supplies, the 4500 troops (accompanied by families) and over 12,000 camp followers of

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\(^{130}\) Mackenzie to Eyre, 29 Jul 1842, transcribed in Eyre (1843), pp. 160–172 and 181

\(^{131}\) Eyre (1843), p. 181

\(^{132}\) Kaye (1878), Vol. 2, pp. 320–323; and Yapp (1980), p. 424

\(^{133}\) Eyre (1843), p. 183; and Yapp (1980), p. 424

\(^{134}\) Kaye (1878), Vol. 2, pp. 324–325
the Kabul Garrison began their disastrous withdrawal. The destruction of the Kabul Garrison is one of the most infamous episodes in the history of the British Empire and has become enshrined as the symbol of British failure in Afghanistan. Over the following eight days, the column withdrew eastwards as the bitter winter weather killed many from frostbite and exposure. Despite continued acts of incredible individual bravery, the constant harassment by the Afghan tribesmen plundering with impunity caused the collective British military discipline to disintegrate. In the horror many Sepoys and camp followers deserted, and British families were handed over as hostages to Akbar Khan, including the indomitable Lady Sale (wife of the Jalalabad Garrison commander), and Elphinstone himself. On 13 January a small group made their final stand near Gandomak. This British nightmare ended, as famously enshrined in folklore, on the afternoon of 13 January when Dr William Brydon rode alone into Jalalabad, slumped over his dying pony.

Captain Henry Havelock (1795–1857) recorded this seminal event firsthand:

About 2 P.M. on 13th January [1842], some officers were assembled on the roof of the loftiest house in Jellalabad. One of them espied a single horseman riding towards our walls … The Cabul gate was then thrown open, and several officers rushing out, received, and recognised in the traveller, who dismounted, the first, and it is to be feared the last, fugitive of the ill-fated force at

135 The Kabul Garrison was composed of: Cavalry: Bengal Light Cavalry; several Squadrons of Anderson’s and Skinner’s Irregular Horse; Artillery: six guns Bengal Horse Artillery; three guns Mountain Train. Infantry: HM 44th, 5th, 37th, 54th Bengal NI; Shah Shuja’s 6th Regiment. Engineers: Sappers and Miners. Norris (1967), pp. 378–379

136 Harrowing firsthand accounts of the disastrous withdrawal of the Kabul Garrison include Sale (Lady Sale) (1843), pp. 95–126; Eyre (1843), pp. 195–234; and Lawrence (1874), pp. 136–167. See also MacRory (1966), pp. 197–231
Cabul in Dr. Brydon … His first few hasty sentences extinguished all hope in the hearts of the listeners regarding the fortune of the Cabul force. It was evident that it was annihilated … the recital of Dr. Brydon filled all hearers with horror, grief, and indignation.\textsuperscript{137}

The Jalalabad Garrison was immediately stood-to on full alert expecting follow-up by Afghans in hot pursuit of British stragglers. In an effort to assist any other remnants of the Kabul Garrison, for three nights a light was displayed near the Kabul Gate and buglers of the HM 13\textsuperscript{th} sounded the ‘advance’ every half an hour.\textsuperscript{138} Havelock summarises the prospects faced by the Jalalabad Garrison with a bleak tactical stocktake in mid-January 1842:

> I think we can, by God’s blessing, if besieged with guns, protract our defence full forty days. We are resolved on every effort to save for Government Jellalabad and Eastern Afghanistan. If it cannot then relieve us, we sink, but we shall, I trust, die like soldiers.\textsuperscript{139}

The Jalalabad Garrison was shaken, the Kabul Garrison of which they had been a part of only three months ago, lay annihilated and unburied in the snow-covered passes. On 25 January 1842 Havelock summarises their situation in Afghanistan:

> Our only friends on this side of the Sutlej [Sutlej River] are our own and General Pollock’s bayonets. Thus while Cabul has been overwhelmed by the billows of a terrific insurrection, Candahar, Khelet-i-Ghilzie, Ghuznee, and Jellalabad stand like isolated rocks in the midst of an ocean covered with foam, while against and around them the breakers dash with wild fury.\textsuperscript{140}

Despite these desperate circumstances, Sale still retained a choice over his future course of action. His garrison possessed tenuous lines of communication with Peshawar and could either evacuate Jalalabad and fight their way back to Peshawar, or remain to defend against a renewed Afghan siege. With the news of Wild’s abortive attempt to relieve Jalalabad, the Political Agent Macgregor was now convinced that the Supreme Government would abandon the garrison. On 27 January 1842 Sale convened another military council with all his officers ‘to give sanction to the evacuation of Jellalabad, on which he [Sale] and the political agent [Macgregor] had resolved’.\textsuperscript{141} Macgregor commenced proceedings but summarised there was no prospect of reinforcement for the garrison. After 10 weeks of resolutely defending Jalalabad, the sense of abandonment by the Government led to a widespread condemnation of Auckland and Nicolls that ‘went beyond all bounds’. A vocal Captain Broadfoot vehemently rejected the notion that the garrison had been abandoned, although he was forced to concede that the

\textsuperscript{137} Havelock, quoted in Marshman (1860), pp. 98–99. Fortescue incorrectly dates the arrival of Dr Brydon in Jalalabad as 12 Jan 1842. Fortescue (1927), p. 247
\textsuperscript{138} Marshman (1860), pp. 98–99
\textsuperscript{139} Havelock to [unnamed in Serampore], Jan 1842, transcribed in Marshman (1860), pp. 99–100
\textsuperscript{140} Havelock, journal entry, 25 Jan 1842, transcribed in Marshman (1860), pp. 100–101
\textsuperscript{141} Marshman (1860), p. 103
response of the administration to the crisis had been ‘very feeble’. Broadfoot further argued that a new Governor-General was expected from England to replace the discredited Auckland, and asserted that once Ellenborough was established he ‘would never sanction so feeble and disreputable a policy’.142 Conversely, Macgregor attempted to convince the other members of the Jalalabad military council to proceed with a deal with the local Afghan tribal chiefs to provide an escort for the garrison to withdraw to Peshawar.143 These contested deliberations acted to further lower the morale of the troops. To counter these feelings of despondency, Broadfoot increased the defensive works and, alongside Havelock, actively worked with ‘incessant representations’ to persuade his fellow officers to accept the ‘noble resolution to hold out to the last’.144

By early February 1842 there was a growing confidence and assertiveness within the Jalalabad Garrison. A council of war was again convened and the majority of members now opposed any Garrison treaty and a decision was made to break off any negotiations with the Afghan authorities in Kabul. On 8 February advice was received that a British relief force was making its way to Peshawar.145 Sale decided to remain in Jalalabad, divest himself of the bulk of his transport animals and await extrication by this British relief force.146 From this precarious episode, Marshman concludes ‘thus, a negotiation which at one time threatened to compromise both national honour and the safety of the garrison, was brought to a happy termination, chiefly, if not entirely, through the firmness of Havelock and Broadfoot’.147 In reviewing these vacillations by Sale and Macgregor, Fortescue blames the corrosive defeatism on the Auckland administration, as it had come to ‘signalise [sic] the rottenness of the Indian administration and the relaxation of the moral fibre of all subjects to its rule under the sovereignty of Auckland’.148

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142 Marshman (1860), p. 104
143 Marshman (1860), pp. 104–105; and Fortescue (1927), p. 252
144 Spirits were also raised in Jalalabad by the success of two foraging parties that had secured 170 cattle and 700 sheep. Marshman (1860), p. 106
145 Marshman (1860), pp. 106–107
146 Fortescue concludes that Sale surrendered/ abandoned the transport animals to the ‘enemy’ because he did not want to risk the losses anticipated obtaining forage for the animals. Fortescue (1927), footnote 2, pp. 251 and 248
147 Marshman (1860), p. 107
148 Fortescue (1927), p. 252
Auckland was in the final phase of his incumbency and in the process of preparing to hand over to his successor when the whole crisis had erupted in Afghanistan. These unfolding events had repercussions beyond Afghanistan, as Britain’s prestige in India, and more widely in Asia, was being challenged. Marshman observes that instead of Auckland rising to the greatest crisis of his incumbency, he ‘sunk into a state of despondency’ forgetting that ‘to be ignominiously expelled from Afghanistan, without any attempt to retrieve our prestige, was to descend from the throne of India’. Marshman concludes that such was the ‘depth of depression to which the mind of Lord Auckland’ reached, that instead of responding with action and vigour to recover Britain’s reputation, prisoners and the isolated garrisons, ‘he dwelt only on the idea of withdrawing from Afghanistan with the smallest amount of danger’.

Auckland was now tired and at the end of a successful career of administration in India. When news of the Kabul crisis reached him on 30 January 1842 it broke his spirit. Auckland’s immediate response was for ‘some appearance of energy’ with a frantic acceleration of forces to protect British India. On 31 January Auckland issued a proclamation stating that he regarded these disastrous events as a ‘partial reverse, only as a new occasion for displaying the stability and vigour of the British powers’. With this, Auckland ordered immediate reinforcements for the frontier: HM 50th from Burma (although the Madras Army was preoccupied with operations in China), half of HM 22nd to move from Bombay to Karachi, every Native Infantry Regiment in each of the three Presidencies to raise an additional company, and he requested more Queen’s Army regiments from England. However, by February Auckland’s demoralisation was complete, with the news of Wild’s ignominious failure to relieve Jalalabad. The British fortunes had sunk to a new low and in this malaise he had little appetite for any offensive military action.

149 Marshman (1860), pp. 102–103
150 Auckland to Macnaghten, 6 Dec 1841, in Yapp (1980), p. 425; Low (1873), p. 208; and Fortescue (1927), p. 252
151 Marshman (1860), p. 108; and Fortescue (1927), p. 252
152 Notification by the Government of India, 31 Jan 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 139, p. 113, and quoted in Low (1873), p. 208
154 Yapp (1980), p. 425
Auckland was offered a range of strategic policy responses by his advisors. The Chief Secretary, Herbert Maddock (1792–1870), proposed a more forward-leaning position that recommended retaining Peshawar and to await the return of more favourable circumstances. Henry Prinsep (1792–1878) recommended a withdrawal and consolidation at the Sutlej River. Auckland accepted Prinsep’s advice and on 10 February ordered a British withdrawal from Jalalabad to Ferozepur. In his first directive Auckland directed Nicolls to:

… inform the Major-General [Pollock] that the main inducement for the maintenance of a post at Jellalabad, namely, that of being a point of support to any of our troops escaping Cabul, having now, it must be feared, unhappily passed away, it is the object of the Government that he [Pollock] should, unless any unforeseen contingency should give a decidedly favourable turn of affairs, confine himself to measures for withdrawing the Jellalabad garrison to safety in Peshawur.

Auckland’s second directive to Clerk in Lahore confirms the British intent to withdraw and directs the Sikh Government in Lahore provide for its own western security:

… the Government now looks to a withdrawal from Jellalabad; and as the resolution has been formed, unless events take some unexpected turn, which would obviously require or encourage a forward move, not to attempt the prosecution of operations in advance of the Khyber Pass … the Governor-General in Council would wish you to announce that resolution frankly to the Lahore Durbar, and to invite it to enter on an immediate consideration of the arrangements by which it may best provide for the security of its western territories.

Nicolls had never really supported Auckland’s expedition into Afghanistan and had always been reluctant to send reinforcements in support of a policy that he fundamentally disagreed with. Nicolls advised Auckland that in considering responses to the events in Kabul, it would be possible for the British Army to advance back into Kabul and that such an option would be a strong display of British power. But Nicolls counselled that as the British Army had proven insufficient to maintain power in northern Afghanistan, then it was questionable what the effect of a second advance would be, particularly as it would be followed soon afterwards by a withdrawal. Additionally, Nicolls was concerned that as news of the Kabul disaster became widely known, unrest could spread from Punjab, across India as far as Burma. He reasoned that military forces were needed for possible internal security tasks. Given these

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155 Note by Auckland, Governor-General in Council to Secret Consultations, 19 Feb 1842, in Yapp (1980), p. 426
156 Governor-General in Council to Nicolls, 10 Feb 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 150, pp. 120–121, and partially transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 221–222
157 Maddock to Clerk, 10 Feb 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 151, pp. 121–123
circumstances, Nicolls concluded that there was little to be gained militarily from prolonging the conflict in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{158}

Focussing on southern Afghanistan, Auckland had previously directed Nicolls on 3 December 1841 to prepare contingencies for deteriorating circumstances. Nott was instructed that ‘in the event of the loss of Cabool, to take the force at Ghuznee under his orders’ and any other forces withdrawing from Kabul. The force was then to consolidate and hold Kandahar until further orders.\textsuperscript{159} In Auckland’s third directive written on 10 February, Nott was now directed to use his own judgment to ensure the safety of his force and British honour. In the event than Nott chose to retire to Quetta, he was to also safely withdraw the garrisons of Ghazni and Qalat:

… secure the paramount object of the safety of the troops placed under your orders, and may uphold, at the same time, the honour of the British arms. Should you, with that object, resolve upon falling back from Candahar towards Quetta, you will, to the utmost, make every effort that may be in your power, in order also to relieve and bring off with you the garrison of Khelet-i-Ghilzie [Qalat], and that likewise of Ghuznee [Ghazni], if it should be within the compass of your means to give any succour to that post.\textsuperscript{160}

With the resignation of Elphinstone and the buildup of forces in Peshawar with the arrival of the Brigades of McCaskill and Wild, it became necessary to appoint a general officer in overall command. In November 1841, Nicolls started considering candidates, with the stipulation from Auckland that he preferred the appointment of a Company Officer as they best understood Sepoys. After a series of machinations with the selection process, Major-General George Pollock (1786–1872) was appointed as the Commanding General.\textsuperscript{161} Pollock was the commander of the garrison at Agra, and had previously been an artillery officer from the Bengal Army who had distinguished himself in Burma.\textsuperscript{162} A key factor that influenced his appointment by the Supreme

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\textsuperscript{158} Marshman (1860), p. 103; and Fortescue (1927), p. 253
\item\textsuperscript{159} Auckland to Nicolls, 3 Dec 1841, \textit{Parliamentary Papers} (1843), Paper No. 41, p. 35
\item\textsuperscript{160} Maddock to Nott, 10 Feb 1842, \textit{Parliamentary Papers} (1843), Paper No. 148, p. 119; and Fortescue (1927), p. 254
\item\textsuperscript{161} Nicolls had initially proposed Sir Edmund Williams for the appointment. Williams was a competent officer who had lacked military experience in India, having only served for two years there. The Adjutant-General of the Army, MAJGEN Lumley, an officer with considerable Indian experience was also considered, however his health was deteriorating. Consequently, Nicolls again recommended Williams, but was rejected by the Supreme Government. Nicolls then again proposed Lumley, which Auckland stated he would only consider following a medical assessment to avoid the mistake of the appointment of Elphinstone. The medical assessment was poor and Lumley was no longer considered. Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, pp. 20–22
\item\textsuperscript{162} Kaye provides an excellent synopsis of Pollock’s career from joining the British Army of India in 1803 to 1841. Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, pp. 20–22. Pollock was promoted to MAJGEN on 28 June 1838. War Office (1842), p. 61
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Government was Pollock’s long experience in India as a Company Officer alongside his strong military reputation. Importantly, Pollock’s experience meant that he was familiar with the management of both Sepoys and European troops, and was considered capable of building up the demoralised British force.\textsuperscript{163}

The popular reception of the decision to appoint Pollock inspired great confidence in Jalalabad, sufficient ‘to sustain the spirits of the noble garrison’.\textsuperscript{164} As Kaye summarises:

\begin{quote}
The nomination of this old and distinguished officer was believed to be free from the corruption of aristocratic influence and the taint of personal favouritism. It was felt, that in this case at least, the selection had been made solely on the ground of individual merit. And the merit that was thus rewarded was of the most modest and unostentatious character.\textsuperscript{165}
\end{quote}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure2.6.jpg}
\caption{Sir George Pollock}
\end{figure}

\begin{quote}
(Source: James John Chant (after Sir Francis Grant), Sir George Pollock, 1857, mezzotint, National Portrait Gallery London)
\end{quote}

In addition to a growing army, Pollock was armed with a newly consolidated mandate to assume both political and military responsibilities. On 6 January 1842 the Government issued a significant resolution that changed the command relationship between the military commanders and political officers. Until the issue of this edict, the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[163] Low (1873), pp. 212–214
\item[164] Marshman (1860), p. 108
\item[165] Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 22
\end{footnotes}
diarchy between military commanders and political officers had been an enduring and corrosive feature of the First Anglo-Afghan War. Now military commanders were permitted to represent all military and political issues directly with the Government:

Major-Generals Nott and Pollock, and Brigadier England will address the Government of India, in the Secret and Political Department, direct on all matters of a military and political nature, connected with their present commands.  

Following receipt of the news of the destruction of the Kabul Garrison, on 31 January 1842 Auckland wrote to Nicolls with amended guidance for Pollock. Auckland confirmed the composition of Pollock’s Division as 10,500 troops composed of the current force in Peshawar, Sale’s Jalalabad Garrison in Jalalabad and McCaskill’s Brigade still en route to Peshawar. Auckland then refined his intent regarding the advance to potentially hold Jalalabad for rettributive military actions before recovering the whole garrison:

If Major-General Pollock, arriving with only General McCaskill’s brigade, can safely maintain the position of Jellalabad with due regard to the security of communications through the Khyber Pass, he will, until otherwise ordered, continue to do so; and it will be highly desirable that he should find an opportunity of asserting our military superiority in the open country in the Jellalabad neighbourhood. But Jellalabad is not a place which the Governor-General in Council desires to be kept at all hazards; and after succor shall be given to Sir R. Sale’s brigade there, and relief shall be given to the parties arriving from Cabul, the Governor-General in Council would wish Major-General Pollock, rather than run the extreme risks in that position, to arrange for the withdrawal from it, and the assemblage of all his force at or near Peshawur.

As Pollock proceeded rapidly from Agra through Punjab, in early February 1842 he was informed of the destruction of the Kabul Garrison, and by 5 February he had reached Peshawar. He found Brigadier Wild’s garrison in an alarmingly demoralised state following their abortive relief of Ali Masjid and their fighting withdrawal that had just concluded on 25 January. There were over a thousand troops invalided in hospital which rose to 1800 by 12 February. This lack of operational effectiveness was seriously compounded by a spreading mutinous disaffection among the Sepoys, with the four battalions of Wild’s Brigade refusing to advance.  

Pollock immediately began his commander’s assessment by visiting the hospitals and concluded that despite the cold weather and constant rain, and the prevalence of dysentery and diarrhoea, the problem he faced was ‘more moral than physical’.

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167 Governor-General in Council to Nicolls, 31 Jan 1842, transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 220 – 221
168 Specifically the 30th, 53rd, 60th and 64th Regiments of NI. Pollock to Adjutant-General, undated [Feb 1842], transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 227 – 230; and, Fortescue (1927), pp. 260-261
169 Pollock to Maddock, 12 Feb 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 185, pp. 156 – 158; and, Low (1873), p. 225
Despite the arrival of McCaskill’s reinforcing brigade on 7 February, the parlous condition of Wild’s brigade meant that an advance on Jalalabad could not proceed until the Peshawar Garrison was fully battle-worthy. Within two days a mutinous delegation of Sepoys from Wild’s Brigade had already started to infiltrate McCaskill’s Brigade, and the Sikh troops were openly hostile to all British forces. The Brigade Major of McCaskill’s Brigade, Brevet-Major (later Lieutenant-General) Matthew Smith of HM 9th, describes the corrosive atmospherics prevalent in Peshawar:

The Sikh soldiery stationed at Peshawur, and Mussulman inhabitants of the city, evinced unequivocal satisfaction at the discomfiture of our arms. Vast crowds assembled to see us march through the town to our encamping ground on the 8th [February 1842]. A sneer was in the expression of many countenances around us, and not a few of the bystanders were heard to speak of us as ‘food for the Khyber’.

With Sale urging the relief of his besieged Jalalabad Garrison, Pollock had no choice but to deal with the immediate problem of consolidating his fighting force and quashing a potential mutiny before venturing out of Peshawar. Given the parlous position, any further reversal of fortunes or credibility would undermine the already fragile regional alliances and precipitate a strategic defeat for Britain. Writing to Maddock on 12 February, Pollock summarises his growing disposition and intentions to consolidate his force and to only go forward to relieve the Jalalabad Garrison prematurely in the event of an unexpected emergency. Pollock also demonstrated his intuitive understanding of the tribal Afghan thought processes as he negotiated for his advance, particularly the intimidation posed by his large force and his understanding of the longer-term Afghan imperatives to survive following the British withdrawal:

I have every reason to believe that with a force of about 10,000 men (which they would be if the expected brigade joins in time), I should be able to reach Jellalabad almost without opposition. The chiefs of Lalpoora [La’l Purah] and Ghoosta [Goshta] are willing to and desirous of aiding us, if we advance with a force sufficient to command respect, and the same may perhaps be said of the Sikhs; but unless the force is formidable, and we are able to make our way and keep open the communication, the tribes between this and Jellalabad will not only aid us, but will feel compelled to act offensively, to save themselves from the vengeance of their Cabool authorities whenever we may withdraw from the country.

Pollock wrote again to Maddock on 16 February, reinforcing his detailed planning for the advance of a large force to Jalalabad, which had been further compounded by a lack of ammunition. This letter, following so soon to reinforce his detailed 12 February letter (above), appears to be an attempt to pre-empt any criticism that Pollock

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170 Fortescue (1927), p. 261
171 Smith, Matthew, (1844), United Services Magazine, transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 219–220
172 Fortescue (1927), p. 261
173 Pollock to Maddock, 12 Feb 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 185, pp. 156–158, and partially transcribed in Low (1873), p. 226
anticipated, accusing him of being excessively cautious and unnecessarily delaying the
relief of Jalalabad. In addition to his concerns with ammunition, Pollock also faced
the mutinous tensions within Wild’s Brigade that he had inherited. Pollock visited each
of the Commanding Officers who in turn ‘seemed to consider his own regiment free
from any taint’. Despite these assurances, Pollock’s suspicion focused on 53rd and 60th
NI. To actively manage any further deterioration in morale and reduce the seditious
contagion, Pollock moved the Sikh troops out of the camp. Pollock’s suspicions and
actions were later vindicated in a letter he received in 1843 from Captain Ferris, who
commanded Jezailchees with distinction in northern Afghanistan.

As far as I am concerned, I should have no hesitation in saying before the whole world that at the
time of your [Pollock’s] arrival at Peshawur, or shortly after, the feeling which existed in the 53rd
Regiment of Native Infantry, and the 60th, amounted almost to a state of mutiny. I perfectly
remember at the mess-table hearing opinions expressed publicly, that it were far better to sacrifice
General Sale’s brigade than to risk the lives of 12,000 men; for that it was impossible to force a
pass without a loss of more than half your force.

From Pollock’s active intervention, and Ferris’ subsequent account, the key to the
corrosive morale issue was becoming apparent and had the potential to undermine the
impending advance. Pollock observed that all of the troops ‘profess their willingness to
die in action in the plains, but they dread Cabool when approached through these
passes’. The Khyber Pass held a massive psychological as well as physical obstacle.

For the remainder of February Pollock continued to prepare his force on the outskirts of
Peshawar and conducted negotiations with the Afridi tribesmen in preparation for his
advance. In addition, on 29 February, Nicolls received Auckland’s 10 February
direction for Pollock’s relief of Jalalabad and started to provide further substantial
reinforcements.

174 Pollock to Maddock, 16 Feb 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 188, pp. 159–160, and
partially transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 226–227
175 Pollock was satisfied that LTCOL Tulloch and MAJ Hoggan of 53rd NI could rectify the situation,
however, despite the efforts of CAPT Napleton there remained a lingering concern that the ‘internal
economy [of the 60th] is not as it should be’. Pollock to Adjutant-General, undated [Feb 1842],
transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 228–229
176 Ferris’ letter had been prompted by criticism of Pollock by a writer in the 2 and 5 August 1843
editions of the Dehli Gazette. Low (1873), p. 230
177 Ferris to Pollock, undated 1843, transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 230–231
178 Pollock to Adjutant-General, undated [Feb 1842], quoted in Low (1873), p. 230
179 On 18 February 1842 Pollock authorised the growth of Captain Ferris’ corps of Jezailchees to 400 in
preparation for the advance through the Khyber. By 21 February 1842 the troops reporting sick had fallen
to 1289, the ammunition resupply and augmentation by a detachment of the 33rd NI (escorting the
ammunition) finally arriving in the second week of March. Pollock to Maddock, 18 Feb 1842,
Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 190, p. 161; Pollock to Maddock, 21 Feb 1842, Parliamentary
Papers (1843), Paper No. 192, pp. 161–162; and Low (1873), p. 239
180 In his response, Nicolls detailed his orders for the dispatch of ‘Her Majesty’s 3rd Dragoons, the 3rd
troop 2nd brigade Horse Artillery, 1st Light Cavalry, 33rd Native Infantry, a rissalah of 3rd Irregular
Pollock was now also in receipt of his copy of Auckland’s 10 February directive to Nicolls that restricted Pollock to ‘confine himself to measures for withdrawing the Jellalabad garrison to safety in Peshawur’. On 23 February Pollock responded to Nicolls. It is in this correspondence that Pollock began his long-running campaign to influence British policy towards Afghanistan following the destruction of the Kabul Garrison. These are the embryonic lines of argument that continued to evolve and eventually succeeded in gaining the strategic policy necessary for the advance of the ‘Army of Retribution’. Pollock opened his argument by stating that Jellalabad afforded a better forward position for the British than Peshawar, and would permit the recovery of the British prisoners. Further, to simply withdraw after relieving Sale in Jellalabad without ‘inflicting some signal punishment’ would have created force-protection issues for his withdrawal, as well as have deleterious regional and global implications for British prestige:

My advanced position would further enable me, I hope, to effect the liberation of the prisoners now with the enemy. If I were to advance with the intention of merely withdrawing the garrison of Jellalabad, my success in advancing must depend chiefly on concealing my intentions; for although (if I succeed in any negotiation to open the Pass) every precaution will be taken by me to secure a safe retreat … I must confess, I sincerely believe that our return here, unless I first have an opportunity of inflicting some signal punishment on the enemy, would have a very bad effect both far and near.

In Auckland’s last paper of consequence, on 24 February he reiterated his intent was not for Pollock to reoccupy Afghanistan, and detailed his major concerns being the recovery of the prisoners, successfully retiring the British forces to Peshawar, and the relief of the Ghazni Garrison:

You are aware that the Governor-General in Council does not contemplate any great effort in the present season for the re-occupation of Afghanistan … You will consider it one of the first objects of your solicitude to procure the release of British officers and soldiers, and their families and private servants and followers, who are held in captivity, and their delivery to you or to other British officers, at Peshawar, or other certain place of safety … you will understand that the great present object of your proceedings in Peshawur, is, beyond the safe withdrawal of the force at Jellalabad, that of watching event, of keeping up such communications as may be admissible with the several parties who may acquire power in the northern portion of Afghanistan … and pursuing the measures which you may find in your power, for procuring the safe return of our troops and people detained beyond the Khyber Pass … The Governor-General in Council continues to regard with very great anxiety the position of the British garrison of Ghuznee. He will not relinquish the

Cavalry, six lacs [600,000 rounds] of musket ammunition’. Nicolls then details the follow-on Division’s composition to set off after 8 Mar 1842, ‘Her Majesty’s 31st Foot; 6th Native Infantry recruits; Her Majesty’s 13th Light Infantry, three field battery guns; three rissalahs 3rd Irregular Cavalry’. Nicolls to Governor General in Council, 20 Feb 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 196, p. 164

181 Governor-General in Council to Nicolls, 10 Feb 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 150, pp. 120–121, and partially transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 221–222

182 Pollock to Nicolls, 27 Feb 1842, transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 237–238
hope that on the opening of the season efforts may possibly be made from Candahar, either for the support of Lieutenant-Colonel Palmer and his troops in the maintenance of the post, or facilitate their retirement in that direction.  

Fortescue contemptuously reviewed Auckland’s final direction on Afghanistan before being replaced by Ellenborough on 28 February: ‘evidently Auckland longed to awake one morning and find that Afghanistan had been evacuated, while carefully guarding himself against the possibility of being held answerable for the evacuation’.  

In complete contrast to the destruction of the Kabul Garrison, the British had continued to acquit themselves admirably around Kandahar. Unlike the numerous failings in northern Afghanistan, against similar threats Nott had prevailed in every military encounter and had demonstrated that British control could be maintained, if that was the strategic desire. From this British position of strength, Rawlinson had even proposed a policy of disbursing tribal lands to the non-Pashtun Hazara to break the Durrani tribal structure, and to establish a new and independent Afghan Government in Kandahar, led by Prince Timur as the King. This proposal was strongly supported by the new Political Agent in nearby Sind James Outram (1803–1863) stating ‘at Kandahar we have an overwhelming force which nothing in Afghanistan can conquer, and at Quetta we have a strong brigade posted in such a manner that the position is impregnable’. Outram reasoned that an independent, strong and pro-British Kandahar, that could be readily be reinforced from Quetta, would enable Britain to exert an enduring influence over both Kabul and Herat. These proposals had very strong military merit, with a British garrison forward in Kandahar acting as a fulcrum from which any direct military advance on British-India could be repelled.

183 Maddock to Pollock, 24 Feb 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 181, p. 152
184 Fortescue (1927), p. 254
185 Outram to mother, undated [Feb 1842], transcribed in Trotter, Captain Lionel, The Bayard of India, A Life of General Sir James Outram (London: J.M. Dent, 1903), p. 73
186 For any army contemplating the overland invasion of north-west British India, the northern Bukhara-Hindu Kush-Kabul route was impractical, therefore establishing Herat as the Central Asian launch point for any invasion on British-India. If an army advanced from Herat to Kabul to transit the Khyber Pass, as well as being difficult, the advance could easily be intercepted by a strong force dispatched from Kandahar. There was also the option of directly invading from Herat via Kandahar through the Bolan Pass, where the physical defence of Kandahar became paramount. Therefore controlling Kandahar would achieve the most effective and responsive option in denying any overland invasion towards British-India. Despite the inherent military logic, Ellenborough later rejected this strategic option out of hand and directed that Kandahar was to be abandoned.
On 28 January, Nott received his copy of Auckland’s 3 December 1841 guidance to Nicolls contemplating abandoning Afghanistan. 187 Nott considered that when the Government became aware of the disastrous events in Kabul, Auckland’s direction to abandon Afghanistan would be reversed. His Political Agent, Major Rawlinson, disagreed and recommended an immediate withdrawal from Kandahar, and the commencement of negotiations of tribal leaders around Kandahar to preserve a residual British influence. Nott wrote ‘I immediately differed with him [Rawlinson] … and that the course of events had not yet been such as to warrant his entering into a treaty for our retiring from this country’. 188 Rawlinson subsequently agreed with Nott’s assessment writing:

I addressed General Nott on the subject of the Government letter of the 3rd of December [1841], stating that although the contingency contemplated by Government appeared to have arrived, yet it was attended with circumstances which could not have been contemplated, and which seemed to render it advisable that we should await further instructions. 189

Both Nott and Rawlinson were anxious for further clarification from the Government on how to proceed. Nott calculated that he had four months’ supplies, could hold Kandahar and the surrounding district over the winter, and would be able to advance and reoccupy Kabul in the spring of 1842. 190 Due to its size, Nott’s force had been divided between the Kandahar Garrison located within the city walls, and the Kandahar Cantonment ‘not capable of defence’ approximately two kilometers to the north-west. 191 There was a growing local Afghan resentment, and as British Soldiers moved between and around these two areas they were increasingly assaulted in the streets such that ‘no one could move even a few paces from the barracks, much less throughout the city, without being well armed’. 192

Adding to the complexity of the dynamics in Kandahar, and in a clear indication of the rising local insurrection, on 27 December 1841 sections of the Shah Shuja’s Jan Baz Horse mutinied. The catalyst had been a discontentment precipitated by orders to proceed to relieve the Gereshk Garrison. Agitated mutineers converged on the tent of

187 Auckland to Nicolls, 3 Dec 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 41, p. 35
188 Nott, undated, quoted in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, p. 410
189 Rawlinson to Maddock, 6 Mar 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 251, pp. 210–218
190 Stocqueler, Vol. 1, p. 410
191 The Kandahar Garrison, under the direct command of Nott, was all of the artillery; 38th, 42nd and 43rd Regiments of Bengal NI; two regiments of the Shah’s infantry; and, Skinner’s Horse. The Kandahar Cantonment, under the command of COL Maclaren, was HM 40th, 2nd and 16th Regiments of Bengal NI; and a regiment of the Shah’s Cavalry. The Kandahar Cantonment layout was on an open plain with three barrack blocks and a central hospital. Neill (1845), pp. 143–152
192 Neill (1845), p. 188
their commander, Lieutenant Golding, and bludgeoned him to death. The accompanying political officer, Lieutenant Patterson, upon hearing the nearby commotion went to Golding’s aid and after being severely beaten was left for dead. The mutineers then deserted with a large sum of money. On the following morning another horse regiment, commanded by Captain Leeson, was dispatched to pursue the mutineers. An encounter battle was fought with the deserters leaving a total of 60 to 80 killed from both sides. The instigator of Golding’s murder (not named) was decapitated and his head was returned to the Kandahar crossroads and hung prominently on display.

In an event of much more serious consequences for the defence of southern Afghanistan, on 29 December 1841, Prince Sufter Jung defected and joined the gathering rebel army of Akhtar Khan. By early January 1842 the tribal dynamics in southern Afghanistan were becoming increasingly uncertain. There was a general insurrection in the Kandahar province as many Durranı chieftains started to change their allegiances away from the British. With Sufter Jung having joined the insurgents, Akhtar Khan started receiving more reinforcements. Rawlinson again urged negotiation with these chiefs – which Nott flatly refused. Nott was unwilling to venture out to attempt to intercept the advancing Afghan forces and details his concerns to Rawlinson on 8 January 1842:

I have endeavoured to point out to you my opinion, and to show the inexpediency and perhaps ruin which would follow a division of the troops which I have, after due consideration, concentrated in Candahar, or frittering them away in small parties … I conceive the whole country to be in a state of rebellion, and that nothing but the speedy concentration of troops at this place has saved the different detachments from being destroyed in detail, and the city of Candahar from being besieged.

In the event of Sufter Jung assembling any considerable number of men, I never even contemplated waiting for the attack of that Prince under the walls of Candahar … I have

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193 Jan Baz Horse was irregular cavalry in the service of the Shah, officered by Company Officers. It later transpired that there had been simmering plans for insurrection within elements of the Jan Baz Horse for some time. The original plan was to murder LT Golding following a day’s march from Kandahar. Neill (1845), p. 155
194 Fortescue speculated that half of those killed were mutineers. Neill (1845), pp. 157–158; and, Fortescue (1927), pp. 254–255
195 At the centre of Kandahar, at the intersection of four principal streets, was a large dome with a hook suspended from its centre for hanging the bodies of executed criminals, referred to as the Charsoo. Shortly afterwards the head was taken down at the request of Prince Sufter Jung as it clearly offended local Muslim sensibilities, and in Neill’s assessment represented ‘the head of a believer exposed, whose only offence, in their [Afghan] eyes, was ridding the world of a ‘dog of an infidel’. Neill (1845), pp. 148 and 158
196 Neill (1845), p. 158
repeatedly told you, that if he approached within twelve or fifteen miles of this station, I would move out and disperse the rebels.197

With the changing tribal dynamics in southern Afghanistan, it became increasingly difficult for the Kandahar Garrison to obtain supplies from local villagers. Akhtar Khan’s growing army was becoming more active and intimidating villagers of the fatal consequences for colluding with the British. On 11 January information was received that Sutfer Jung and Akhtar Khan were advancing with an army on Kandahar. Nott acted promptly and resolved to take offensive action to confront the threat. Before commencing offensive operations, Nott hastily consolidated all of the sick and baggage into the city walls of the more defendable Kandahar Garrison.198

On the morning of 12 January Nott consolidated his force and commenced a north-westerly advance towards the Arghandab River Valley with a force of about 3500 troops.199 The force was divided into an infantry-heavy column composed of HM 40th, 2nd and 16th NI, commanded by Colonel Maclaren, tasked to advance 4 kilometres to the right over difficult terrain through the narrow Baba Vali Pass towards the Arghandab River.200 The main body of the force moved around the left of the high ground, a distance of about 7 kilometres, on terrain more suited to cavalry and artillery movement. Maclaren’s infantry column advanced up the Baba Vali Pass expecting a concerted Afghan defence to find that the Pass was ceded without a fight. As the infantrymen cleared across the saddle of the Pass, they observed their Afghan opponents had withdrawn and consolidated with the main Afghan body about 5 kilometres distant on the far (western) side of the Arghandab River. With the equally unopposed and rapid advance of the left-hand cavalry/artillery column, Nott concentrated his forces on the eastern bank of the Arghandab River.201

197 Nott to Rawlinson, 8 Jan 1842, transcribed in Stocqueler, Vol. 1, pp. 401–403
198 Neill (1845), p. 159
199 Nott’s force was composed of: CAPT Blood’s company of artillery (four 9-pounders); CAPT Anderson’s two troops of the Shah’s horse-artillery (a total of 12 6-pounders); CAPT Leeson commanding a regiment of Shah’s cavalry; CAPT Haldane commanding two rissallahs of Skinner’s Horse; HM 40th, 2nd, 16th, 38th and one wing of 43rd Regiments of Bengal NI; and, 3rd Regiment Shah’s Infantry. Neill (1845), pp. 159 and 162
200 Baba Saheb Ghar (mountain) and the nearby village of Baba Vali Saheb (I have shortened to Baba Vali) approximate to the ‘Baboowalla/ Baba Wali’ Pass in the historical record. US NGIA Map, 2005, ‘Kandahar’, Ed. 7-NGA, Series, U611, Sheet 2180, GS 5205
201 Neill (1845), pp. 159–160
At 1015hr Nott’s force commenced fording the Arghandab River towards the fortified village of Khersak. A number of Afghan skirmishers had positioned themselves forward of the village towards the river in the numerous watercourses that converged on a swamp and provided continuous harassing fire. Nott established his artillery gun line and commenced firing on the Afghan main body estimated at between 15,000 and 20,000 troops. Nott’s light infantry commenced their assault across the swamp knee-deep in mud. In the course of 20 minutes the assaulting infantry closed with the main Afghan position in the village. A concerted bayonet charge forced the Afghans into a disorderly retreat across the open plain to the rear. Nott then launched his cavalry and horse-artillery who, after carefully skirting the swamp, poured artillery fire into concentrations of hasty Afghan defensive positions. Having broken them up, the cavalry pursued the retreating Afghans. The Afghans suffered heavily, particularly from the artillery fire ‘having had such dense masses on which to play’. In contrast, Nott’s losses in this aggressive action had been slight, with only eight officers wounded and ‘a few men killed’.

202 The modern-day villages of Khersak (GS 4904), or nearby Kochnay (GS 4906), approximate to the village of ‘Killa Shuk’ referred to in the historical record as ‘about two miles below the [Baba Vali] pass’. Neill (1845), p. 160; and, US NGIA Map, 2005, ‘Kandahar’, Ed. 7-NGA, Series, U611, Sheet 2180

203 Yapp considers the estimated number of 20,000 to be ‘absurdly high’ and quotes Rawlinson that the Afghan number was actually closer to 5000. Rawlinson, 12 Jan 1842, in Yapp, Malcolm E., ‘The Revolutions of 1841-2 in Afghanistan’, Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, Vol. 27, No. 2, 1964, p. 367

204 Neill (1845), p. 162
With the Afghan threat effectively dispersed, Nott ordered the column to re-cross the Arghandab River and reached the Kandahar Cantonment late that evening. Nott’s impressive victory, ironically on the same day as the Kabul Garrison was being destroyed at the Jegdalek Pass, was the first victorious act in retrieving Britain’s martial prestige. Neill laments that this honour was incorrectly attributed to Sale and his Jalalabad Garrison (Neill’s italics):

Thus ended the “Battle of Urghundaub”, the first success after our recent disasters at Cabul, although that honour has been awarded to another distinguished force, the Governor-General having, in a notification dated Benares the 22nd of April 1842, communicating the defeat of Akbar Khan by the “illustrious garrison at Jellalabad”.

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205 Neill (1845), pp. 161–163; and, Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 404–405
206 According to Neill, a dispatch detailing these events was sent to the Government which recalls bitterly that there was no wider acknowledgement of the successful actions around Kandahar, particularly so soon after the disasters of the Kabul Garrison. This letter is not cited in Stocqueler’s biography of Nott, only noting that ‘the mass of his communications at this time were either lost or carried off by marauders’ (nor is it contained in the Parliamentary Papers (1843)). It was later confirmed that neither Ellenborough nor Nicolls ever received this dispatch. Neill (1845), p. 164; Ellenborough to Nott, 1 Oct 1842, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 136; and, Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 405–406
207 Neill (1845), p. 164
Still not aware of the destruction of the Kabul Garrison, Nott continued to prepare for the defence of Kandahar. On 30 January he was informed of the murder of Macnaghten five weeks previously, and the following day Nott provided his assessment of the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan (Nott’s italics): 208

We have just heard of Macnaghten’s death. Poor fellow! … I fear his three years’ doing cannot be retrieved, and that our blood must flow for it … [inserting a quote from his previous letter dated July 1841] “I rest convinced that they [the Afghans] never will forget or forgive what they have suffered, and that should opportunity offer they will revenge themselves.” 209

By February 1842 Nott was in possession of the Government’s 6 January 1842 resolution that empowered his undivided authority over the Political Agent in Kandahar. 210 As his own master, he resolved his future course of action. He could not withdraw to India until September 1842 due to the impracticality of withdrawing the Kandahar Garrison until the end of summer. Consequently, he would have to hold Kandahar with approximately 7000 troops and gathered five months of provisions for the task. There remained the threat that the Durrani-led insurgency around Kandahar would continue to be strengthened by the victory in Kabul, potentially forcing a withdrawal to Quetta. In anticipation of this contingency, the Government had ordered troops to re-deploy from Sind to the eastern end of the Khojak Pass. Despite Nott’s resolve, the Kandahar Garrison still lacked sufficient cavalry, pay was three months in arrears, and medical supplies and ammunition were low. The foraging tasks were becoming more hazardous, cattle continued to die, flour was running out and cooking fuel was in extremely short supply. 211

Following their dispersal by Nott’s forces at the Arghandab River on 12 January, the concentration of disaffected Afghan tribesmen started to grow again around Kandahar. The Durrani chieftain Mizra Ahmed had also defected from Kandahar to join Sufter Jung’s forces. The Durrani tribesmen started to assert themselves as the centre of the large Afghan rebellion in southern Afghanistan pitched against the Kandahar Garrison. 212 Under the leadership of Sufter Jung and Akhtar Khan based at Panjwa’i, 30

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208 On 30 January 1842 Nott was informed of the murder of William Macnaghten on 23 Dec 1841. Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, p. 406
209 Letter from Nott to his daughter, 31 Jan 1842, in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 407–408
211 Neill (1845), pp. 165–166; and Fortescue (1927), p. 256
212 Neill’s account is recommended as ‘perhaps the best account [of the ‘defence of Candahar’] is to be found in Captain Neil’s [sic] narrative’, Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 405 and 452–454; and Neill (1845), pp. 164–165
kilometres south-west of Kandahar, these Durrani tribesmen started to intercept supplies and intimidate local chiefs from supporting the British.

To counter this growing threat, Nott decided to launch an attack against the Afghan camp in Panjwa’i on 4 February. However, the severity of the weather with torrential rain and heavy snow-falls forced Nott to postpone his plans. The severe weather similarly limited the movement of the Suffer Jung’s tribesmen and in this brief reprieve from hostilities, the British foraging parties were able to replenish their meager supplies.213 Adding to Nott’s concerns, in the severe winter weather, the confined Kandahar Garrison also became increasingly affected by sickness where ‘a great many men’ were lost.214 However as the weather improved, Nott again issued orders to attack these Afghan tribesmen. On 7 March Nott launched a large pre-emptive raid with 4000 troops towards Panjwa’i, leaving approximately 2600 troops to defend Kandahar.215

The first encounter with the Afghan tribesmen occurred about 10 kilometres south-west of Kandahar. A large body of Afghan cavalry was detected on the high ground to the right of Nott’s advancing column.216 A force of 300 cavalry and two guns were dispatched, and the Afghan cavalry retired. The advance then continued to the deserted village of Salehan, about 15 kilometres from Kandahar.217 The column prepared nearby for an overnight camp formed in a hollow square, with baggage animals in the centre.218 Later that evening, a large Afghan force conducted a

213 Neill (1845), pp. 169–170
214 The sole garrison doctor, Dr MacAndrew, laboured in the absence of medical supplies as the garrison succumbed to the combined effects of respiratory illnesses, termed under the contemporary term ‘pneumonia’, and the ever-present threats of dysentery, cholera and fever. The medical supplies had been late in arriving in Quetta so they had not been brought forward in relieving column in the previous October 1841. The lack of medical supplies was to persist until the relief of Kandahar by MAJGEN England’s column in May 1842. Neill (1845), p. 172
215 Nott’s force for the attack was composed of: Skinner’s Horse; Shah’s Cavalry; two troops of Shah’s artillery (six 6-pounders); CAPT Blood’s artillery company (four 9-pounders); HM 40th Foot; 16th, 38th, 42nd and six companies of 43rd Regiments of Bengal NI; a wing of the 2nd Regiment Shah’s Infantry; and, a Persian contingent of 200 troops led by their refugee Prince Aga Khan. Neill (1845), pp. 173–174 and 179; and, Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 450–451
216 This high ground approximates to the Nowruz Ghar complex of hills on US NGIA Map, 2005, ‘Kandahar’, Ed. 7-NGA, Series U611, Sheet 2180, GS 4498
217 The modern village of Salehan is in the vicinity of the village of ‘Salianus’ in the historical record. US NGIA Map, 2005, ‘Kandahar’, Ed. 7-NGA, Series U611, Sheet 2180, GS 4094
218 A foraging party, under the command of Lieutenant A. Nelson (HM 40th), was sent to the nearby deserted village to appropriate supplies. While Nelson was in the village, a large Afghan cavalry force appeared on hills a mile distant. As the Afghans commenced an advance towards the village, Nelson retired to the safety of the main British camp
reconnaissance of the British camp and then moved off, leaving the British undisturbed for the remainder of the night.\textsuperscript{219}

On the morning of 8 March Nott’s column continued their advance to the south-west away from Kandahar. After a few kilometres an Afghan force estimated at 5000 cavalry and infantry was sighted to the south of the column amongst some villages and hills. Nott wheeled the column to the south and deployed into assault formation. The British artillery commenced their bombardment. However, when the British assault-line closed to within 1000 metres of the Afghan position, the Afghans retired. The assaulting British troops and artillery pursued the Afghans across ground intersected with deep irrigation channels. For three hours the British infantry continued their pursuit of the retiring Afghan line, never to get close enough to fire a shot. Eventually, the Afghans retired southwards across the Tarnak River, and the British ceased their assault. Nott then consolidated his force and marched northwards towards the village of Panjwa’i which was reached by late afternoon.\textsuperscript{220} Upon arrival, the village of Panjwa’i was found to have been abandoned and the British prepared for their overnight camp, which passed undisturbed by Afghan tribesmen.

The following morning, 9 March, the British column commenced their advance towards the large village of ‘Lakanee’, where it had been reported that the Afghans had established their headquarters.\textsuperscript{221} The column passed ‘an extensive range of barren, rugged, but not very high hills’ called ‘Koi Khyber’ (small Khyber).\textsuperscript{222} The Afghans had concentrated their force amongst these hills. The light companies of the HM 40\textsuperscript{th} and 16\textsuperscript{th} NI, under the command of Captain F. White (HM 40\textsuperscript{th}), ascended to clear one of the closer hills. The grenadiers of the HM 40\textsuperscript{th}, under the command of Lieutenant Wakefield, similarly cleared an adjacent hill. The Afghans then withdrew along the line of the hills. Afghan infantry was seen in the distance moving to the north, but due to the intervening complex of canals, the British could not manoeuvre to intercept this force.

\textsuperscript{219} Neill (1845), pp. 174–175
\textsuperscript{220} The modern town of Panjwa’i is the location of the village of ‘Punjwy’ referred to in the historical record. US NGIA Map, 2005, ‘Kashk-e Nokhowd’, Ed. 7-NGA, Series U611, Sheet 2080, GS 3392; and Neill (1845), pp. 176–177
\textsuperscript{221} There is no modern village of ‘Lakanee’. From the battlefield account it is likely to be south-west of Panjwa’i to draw the British further from Kandahar. It is most likely the location of the modern township of Zangabad. US NGIA Map, 2005, ‘Do Ab’, Ed. 7-NGA, Series U611, Sheet 2079, GS 2785
\textsuperscript{222} There is only one range of hills that fits the description of a range of hills running south-west from Panjwa’i based around the feature called Kheybari Ghar. The location of these features would also allow the Afghans to rapidly reinforce from across the Tarnak River from their position the previous day. Neill (1845), p. 177; and, US NGIA Map, 2005, ‘Do Ab’, Ed. 7-NGA, Series U611, Sheet 2079, GS 3587
As the clearance of the hills progressed with the Afghans continually retiring, the British then came upon the Afghans arrayed in battle order. The Afghan main force, estimated at 12,000 (including 6000 cavalry), had been located and Nott attempted to draw the Afghans into a decisive battle. Afghan cavalry had been drawn up on the high ground marking the right of the Afghan line. The Afghan line then extended from the high ground across the plain and terminated with a large infantry force occupying the ruins of a fort on the left flank.\(^{223}\)

Nott then ceased his artillery fire to encourage the Afghans to make a stand and bring about a pitched battle. However, as the British infantry advanced to close with the Afghan line, the Afghans continued to retire and increase the intervening distance, until the Afghans finally withdrew across a river (likely the Tarnak River).\(^{224}\) Reflecting the inferior quality of the horses procured for the British cavalry, Nott summarised the action of his troops’ action as ‘my want of good cavalry only saved them [the Afghans] from being totally destroyed’.\(^{225}\) The British force called off the pursuit and started to make preparations for an overnight camp close to the two large nearby villages (not named). Because these villages had been used as a stronghold by the rebellious Afghans, they were burned to the ground. There were rumours circulating that the large Afghan force would attack the encamped British during the night, so preparations for a night battle were made. However, apart from random fire into the camp around midnight, surprisingly there was no further action.\(^{226}\)

After an undisturbed night, on the following morning of 10 March, Nott’s column again advanced southwards towards the Tarnak River. The advancing British troops discovered that a large body of Afghans had re-crossed the Tarnak River heading north. The British column then retired northwards to return to Panjwa’i. Throughout the return to Panjwa’i a small party of Afghan cavalry, possibly led by Mizra Ahmed, harassed the British rearguard. This Afghan harassment was successfully repulsed by the Persian contingent who had travelled with the British column since the departure from Kandahar. After unsuccessfully attempting to draw the Afghans into a pitched battle,

\(^{223}\) The Afghan line had the many customary banners on display, including the red banner of the Jan Baz Horse. Neill (1845), pp. 177–78; and Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, p. 451
\(^{224}\) Neill (1845), pp. 178–179
\(^{225}\) Neill to Maddock, 12 Mar 1842, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 451–452. The observation on the quality of the British cavalry horses as being ‘generally vastly inferior in size, strength, and condition to those of the Affghans’ is in Neill (1845), pp. 175–176
\(^{226}\) Neill (1845), pp. 178–179; and Fortescue (1927), p. 256
Nott retired via Panjwa’i. On the following day, 11 March, Nott’s column commenced their return to reach Kandahar that evening.\textsuperscript{227}

During this return march, intelligence was received that there had been a concerted Afghan attack on the city of Kandahar the previous night of 10/11 March 1842.\textsuperscript{228} It now became clear to Nott why there had been such a lack of Afghan willingness to be drawn into a decisive engagement with his forces and why they had continually retired enticing the British into prolonged pursuits. Sufter Jung and Akhtar Khan had executed a very skillful ruse. By drawing Nott and his main force increasingly away from Kandahar with deception forces, the main Afghan force had doubled back on the evening of 9 March 1842, re-crossing the Tarnak River, and had started to lay siege to Kandahar.

\textbf{Map 2.2: Nott’s clearance operations around Kandahar: 7 – 12 March 1842}

\textsuperscript{227} Neill (1845), pp. 179–180, and Fortescue (1927), p. 256
\textsuperscript{228} Neill (1845), p. 180
Following their advance during the night of 9/10 March 1842, during the day of 10 March 1842 the Afghan forces concentrated around Kandahar. Aware of the gathering Afghan forces, the Kandahar Garrison, commanded by Major C.B.W. Lane, consolidated the British defensive posture by shutting all city gates and barring entry. After sunset a villager tried to enter the Herat Gate and dumped a load of firewood against the gate before being turned away. At 2000hr an Afghan raiding party set fire to the firewood in an attempt to burn the gate. The gate was hurriedly reinforced by flour-bags and additional troops from 2nd NI and the Shah’s 1st Infantry, and two guns were repositioned. A pitched battle for the gate ensued for four hours as heavy British rifle and artillery fire was exchanged with the assaulting Afghans waves until about midnight, when the assault on the Herat Gate was abandoned. The Afghans suffered heavy losses and the British lost a considerable quantity of grain. Another attack commenced on the Shikarpur Gate about 2100hr. The Afghans attempted to ignite the wood piled against the gate but failed. This Afghan assault was eventually driven back, to be abandoned at 0100hr. During this time another assault commenced at the Kabul Gate, but given the heightened state of alert amongst the Kandahar Garrison, this was similarly repelled after heavy fighting and abandoned also by 0100hr. Lane assessed that the Afghan losses as ‘1,000 killed and wounded’ and that because of the British fortifications ‘the guards over the gates were so completely sheltered that not a single [British] casualty occurred’. The Afghan tactical design had been to simultaneously burn down the city gates and overwhelm the British defenders. The Afghans failed to coordinate a simultaneous assault on the city gates – a feat which, if successful, would have caused the fall of Kandahar.

This very near loss of Kandahar elicited criticism of Nott’s tactical decision-making for undertaking offensive action against Sufter Jung and Akhtar Khan in Panjwa’i. It is true that with potentially 12,000 Afghans having successfully seized Kandahar, Nott’s light-scale force of 4000 troops would have difficulty recapturing the city. In this event, the most likely recourse for Nott would have been to abandon the

229 Lane to CAPT Scott (Brigade Major), 12 Mar 1842, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 456–458
230 Following these actions the Afghans retired from Kandahar although their cavalry continued to harass the lines of communication and intercept supplies. There was no more serious threat to Kandahar, but again lack of forage became pressing. On 24 March 1842 a brigade commanded by COL Wymer was dispatched to secure new grazing for the transport-camels. On the 25 March 1842 Wymer’s brigade had a small skirmish with Durrani cavalry and successfully drove them off. Neill (1845), pp. 181–183
British prisoners in Kandahar and retire ignominiously towards Quetta under the pressure of a pursuit by ascendant Afghan cavalry. Depending on the Afghan ability to mass forces against the garrison in Quetta, the British may have also been forced to abandon that outpost and conduct another hasty retreat against the fractious tribesmen of the Sind. The Sind tribesmen may have been encouraged to rise in revolt against the retreating British forces, right on the borders of British-India. As Neill correctly observes ‘the loss the city [Kandahar] would have endangered the safety of our Indian empire’. 231

Neill’s firsthand critique dismissed the notion that the British victory vindicated Nott’s tactical decision-making because the risks were too great, ‘the stake – the honour of our country, and the integrity of our eastern empire, – was too intensely important to be so lightly hazarded’. 232 In response to Neill’s damning assessment, Stocqueler mounted his defence comparing Nott’s offensive actions against the fatal defensive tactics in Kabul where inaction had allowed the Afghans to concentrate unhindered. Based on his military experience, Nott had decided to inflict a pre-emptive and decisive blow against the gathering Afghan threat. Indeed, upon Nott’s return to Kandahar he reportedly expressed little surprise that an Afghan attack had actually occurred during his absence. Nott instigated a military inquiry into the firing of the Herat Gate by the Afghans, which concluded that the build-up of firewood had been ‘a grave dereliction of duty’, but overall he was satisfied that the garrison had performed as expected in repulsing the Afghan assault. 233 In his formal account on 12 March 1842, Nott concluded in his perfunctory manner:

During my absence, a strong detachment of the enemy made an attempt upon the city, succeeded in burning one of the gates; but they were repulsed with great loss by the gallantry of the troops in the garrison. 234

In his greatest test to date, Nott had experienced a close call by any measure. At issue was whether he was reckless (Neill) or measured (Stocqueler) in his actions responding to the rising Afghan threat. Nott had weighted his force for offensive action whilst ensuring a sufficiently robust garrison remained in Kandahar. His offensive instincts were correct and followed his well-established pre-emptive methodology that had proven successful in maintaining British dominance in southern Afghanistan.

231 Neill (1845), pp. 183–184
232 Neill (1845), pp. 184–185
233 Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 455–456
234 Nott to Maddock, 12 Mar 1842, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 451–452
However, Sufter Jung had very nearly prevailed and demonstrated impressive tactical acumen. He knew that the Afghans could not mount a successful siege of Kandahar against a full British garrison, so had devised a plan to capitalise on opportunities when Nott split his force. Through spies in Kandahar Sufter Jung would likely have known about Nott’s planned offensive actions delayed from February, and had only to await his opportunity. It was only when Nott finally emerged from Kandahar to advance towards Panjwa’i that the split of the British forces could be confirmed. The repeated near-encounters that extended Nott’s forces through the continual Afghan retrograde actions provided sufficient information for Sufter Jung to confirm his selected course of action. The actions of 8 March near the Tarnak River, reinforced by the actions of 9 March on the ‘Koi Khyber’, provided enough certainty for Sufter Jung that Nott had indeed committed the majority of his forces into the field. By 9 March Sufter Jung seized the opportunity to enact his most ambitious plan and proceed with his attack on Kandahar. With a distraction force continuing to draw Nott’s considerable force away from Kandahar, Sufter Jung was able to gain additional time for a concerted assault on Kandahar.

What if Nott had reacted purely defensively? Sufter Jung would have continued his slow strangulation of supplies into Kandahar that would have eventually forced a negotiated British withdrawal, much as Nott feared from the events in Kabul with potentially the same results. The only remaining option is if Nott had reversed the ratio of his troops, reducing the force for offence actions and increased his force for the defence of Kandahar. The tactically agile Sufter Jung may have seized the opportunity to confront and destroy the smaller British force. As the opinionated Fortescue observes, Nott would have been equally criticised for not taking out a sufficiently robust force and being destroyed in the field. On balance Nott undertook the least worst of three broad options and ultimately prevailed in circumstances where his military peers in Kabul had failed. As Neill concedes:

> It is ever easy to find faults, especially after events have occurred, and when we have had time to study and reflect on what might have been the consequences. Candahar was still ours. The gallant

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and memorable defence … added another to the continued successes obtained by the Candahar army.

Nott was also responsible for the Ghazni Garrison consisting of 27th NI and commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Palmer. On 20 November 1841, as part of the general uprising in Afghanistan, the Ghazni Garrison was surrounded by Afghan tribesmen. Nott responded by sending out a relief force command by Colonel Maclaren, and the news of their dispatch caused the Afghan siege to be abandoned. However, with Maclaren being turned back due to poor weather, by 7 December the Afghan tribesmen returned in force. The inhabitants of Ghazni colluded with the Afghan besiegers and infiltrated Afghan tribesmen into the city, and by 14 December the tribesmen had dug through the walls, and entered the fort ‘by thousands’.

The Ghazni Garrison then fell back into the central citadel and came under continuous sniper fire, losing up to ‘four men per day if they showed themselves above the walls’. The winter weather was unusually severe and, with supplies running out, many of the garrison started to suffer frostbite. By Christmas day the temperature had fallen to ‘fourteen degrees below zero’ (-26° Celsius). With the arrival of the Afghan chieftain, Shams al-Din Khan, in mid-February 1842 to assume control of Ghazni, Palmer entered into negotiations to evacuate the Ghazni Garrison. The treaty dated 21 February 1842 sought the withdrawal of the British forces from Ghazni within 10 days, and to retire unmolested with the (paid for) provision of supplies and escorts to Peshawar. The Afghans then became increasingly hostile and the garrison’s supplies were exhausted (including the snow they relied upon for their water supply). With no supplies and under constant harassment of Afghan riflemen, Palmer held out under freezing conditions until 6 March. Palmer then negotiated the surrender of the Ghazni Garrison, with the provisions of being able to march out with their weapons, ammunition and baggage with a promise of safe escort to Peshawar. In the three days of fighting leading up to 18 March, Shams al-Din Khan repeatedly offered terms for a

236 Neill (1845), p. 185
237 Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 45
238 Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 46
239 Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 45–46
240 Shams al-Din Khan, referred to in the historical record as Shumsoodeen Khan/ Shamso Deen Khan, was the nephew of Dost Mohammad (and son of Dost Mohammad’s full brother Amir Muhammad Khan who consolidated Barakzai influence around Ghazni and died in 1834). Noelle (1997), p. 37.
242 Fortescue (1927), p. 258
settlement, essentially demanding the surrender of the British officers to escort them to Kabul, but handing over the Sepoys to the ‘fury of the’ Ghazni tribesmen. These terms were rejected by Palmer as unacceptable. Finally giving up on the prospect of a relief force, Palmer ordered the withdrawal:

Under the orders of Sir William [Nott], and official directions from General Elphinstone and Major Pottinger, I made over this fort of Ghuzni to Nuwab Shumsodeen Khan and Naib Rohillah Khan on the 6th day of March, 1842, having made a solemn treaty for our honourable treatment while at Ghuzni, and safe escort to Cabool, after winter. On the 8th they opened the guns on us at one hundred yards distance, leaving no chance of assistance, and being totally without water for six days. I, at the wish of all of the other officers, surrendered with about 450 men, on 18th March, 1842.

The Ghazni Garrison surrendered at 2200hr on 18 March 1842 and the Afghans could not, or would not, control the rampaging tribesmen ‘yelling for the blood of the Feringee Kaffirs’. As the garrison emerged from the citadel, they were immediately attacked by the besieging Afghan tribesmen. Many of the Sepoys were killed, while several officers were wounded and taken prisoner. The deprivations continued, with Palmer being tortured on 21 April ‘with a tent peg and ropes, in such a manner that it is wonderful he ever recovered the use of his foot’. Eventually after continued privations in Ghazni, the remaining prisoners were moved to Kabul on 19 August to be eventually reunited with the other British prisoners there. Stocqueler concludes that the story of the suffering of the Ghazni garrison is considered ‘only second in its tragical [sic] features to the melancholy tale of the Cabul treachery and massacre.’

Concurrent with the disasters a Ghazni, Brigadier England, had been ordered to concentrate a large force at Quetta to escort reinforcements, money and ammunition to Nott, and to assist any potential retrograde operations by Nott through the Khojak Pass. Arriving at Quetta on 16 March, and before receiving his full complement of reinforcements, on 26 March England commenced his advance. On 28 March, as the column approached the defile leading to the village of Haikalzai, it was fired upon by...
Afghan tribesmen from well-prepared defensive positions. Off the line of march, England ordered artillery fire and four companies of Bombay NI to attack the Afghan defensive positions, supported by HM 41st. The Afghan defenders allowed the light companies to advance into a killing ground before engaging them with such destructive fire that the advancing companies were forced to fall back upon their second echelon of advancing troops. Amid this confusion the Afghan cavalry was launched against England’s column. HM 41st formed square and repulsed the Afghan attack and the companies rallied themselves ready for a second assault. But having suffered an estimated 100 casualties, England elected to retire to a hasty defensive position 5 kilometres to the north-east near the village of Bazar. On the following morning, 29 March, fearing a large Afghan force was being concentrated, England retreated to Quetta.248

Nott was furious at a further delay to the long-awaited advance of the badly needed money, ammunition and medicine for Kandahar. There was no imperative to hasten the advance on Kandahar before the full complement of reinforcements had arrived, and England adopted a particularly questionable tactical design to move beyond Quetta and await reinforcements in a forward position. In addition, Nott rightly considered that England’s retreat from Haikalzai to Quetta gave a great psychological boost to the Afghan insurrection, further imperiling the Kandahar Garrison. Nott wrote to England on 2 April 1842:

This I deeply regret; firstly because I cannot send a force to the southern side of that Pass; secondly, I require a large supply of ammunition which I have for two years been endeavouring to get, but without success; thirdly, four lacs of rupees will be of little use here – the troops and establishments are going on for four months in arrears; fourthly, your moving into Pishteen with a convoy, known by the whole country to be intended for Candahar, and there halting or retreating to Quettah, will have the very worst effect throughout Affghanistan and will be more injurious to my present position than 20,000 of the enemy in the field.249

On 18 April Nott informed England of his intent to dispatch a brigade from Kandahar on 25 April to meet up with England’s column at Chaman, and that he demanded that England’s ‘brigade being at Kojuck [Khojak Pass] on the 1st of May, or before’ (emphasis added):

I believe there can be no difficulty whatever in accomplishing this [their rendezvous at Chaman], nor of crossing the Kojuck without loss, provided the heights are properly crowned on either side. I have crossed it three times in command of troops, and I know that what I now state is correct.

248 Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 13; and Fortescue (1927), p. 259
There can be no danger in passing through Pisheen, provided a careful and well-ordered march is preserved, and patrols and flanking parties of horse are thrown well out. The people of this country cannot withstand our troops in the open field.\footnote{Nott to England, 18 Apr 1842, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 18–20}

In addition to Nott’s understandable fury, there are profound tactical and strategic implications emanating from this failure by Brigadier England. This letter implies that the genesis of the British tactic of ‘crowning the heights’ had already been employed successfully by Nott ‘three times in command of troops’. This is an important marker when we later analyse the popular acclaim afforded to Pollock for having initiated this tactic in his (yet to be undertaken) advance through the Khyber Pass. More significant is the strategic implication of England’s failure. When news of England’s failure reached British-India, it significantly eroded the Government’s resolve towards contemplating any re-intervention into Afghanistan.

The failures of Wild’s and England’s relief columns and the loss of the Ghazni Garrison were the last of the litany of failures in the First Anglo-Afghan War that had been initiated to implement Auckland’s forward-defence strategy. The military campaign launched to maintain the security of the north-western overland approaches to British-India had begun strongly with a rapid and decisive invasion by the ‘Army of the Indus’ and a successful occupation of Afghanistan. However, the Afghan insurrection in November 1841 that culminated in the destruction of the Kabul Garrison had humiliated the martial credibility of the strategic means – the British Army. And despite the initial success in deposing Dost Mohammad, the selected strategic way of installing the pro-British Shah Shuja had failed. By early 1842 the ascendant Barakzais in Kabul and collapse of Sikh coherence in Lahore directly threatened the security of north-western British-India. With the strategic shock induced by the loss of the Kabul Garrison, compounded by the loss of the Ghazni Garrison and abortive relief efforts for Jalalabad and Kandahar, Britain’s existential concern was that their enduring strategy for the defence of British-India was teetering on the precipice of failure.

Despite Auckland’s defeatism, there still remained a bulwark against this imminent strategic failure from the isolated garrisons that survived precariously in Afghanistan. These British Army outposts provided a modicum of strategic flexibility that if used coherently could provide sufficient leverage to salvage Britain’s strategic interests in Afghanistan, and the recovery of the prisoners. It was the undefeated
Kandahar Garrison and the isolated Jalalabad Garrison that held the greatest range of strategic potential for British decision-makers. In Jalalabad Sale had established a precarious foothold in eastern Afghanistan, and a mutinous relief force in Peshawar was being transformed into a fighting force under the impressive leadership of Pollock. In Kandahar, despite his diminished status as a Company Officer and the destabilising presence of Prince Timur, Nott had presided over a distinguished military campaign around southern Afghanistan. Nott had conclusively demonstrated that with sufficient resolve the British Army could assert their military dominance over Afghans. Further, the Kandahar and Jalalabad Garrissons provided a strategic fulcrum that could be used to securely launch an aggressive re-intervention with battle-seasoned troops. It was now up to the British political leadership to develop their response and coordinate these disaggregated military outposts into a coherent strategy to salvage Britain’s imminent strategic defeat. With Auckland exhausted and discredited, any conclusion of the First Anglo-Afghan War on favourable terms lay with the incoming Governor-General of British-India.
Chapter 3

Ellenborough’s Strategic Deliberations: February – April 1842

To narrate how the Governor-General vacillated in his Afghan policy for sixteen weeks, from 15th of March to the 4th of July [1842], belongs to the province of the historian.¹

Following the destruction of the Kabul Garrison, from January 1842 the strategic outcome of the First Anglo-Afghan War wavered precariously. The newly appointed Governor-General, Lord Ellenborough, inherited extremely dire and confronting strategic circumstances. At stake were the military forces and prisoners still in Afghanistan, and perceptions of the British martial superiority that were critical in maintaining Britain’s national prestige and the security of British-India. The decisions made by Ellenborough from February 1842 were critical in avoiding Britain’s strategic defeat in Afghanistan.

In autumn 1841, the new Tory Government led by Prime Minister Robert Peel exercised little influence on the strategies for the defence of British-India and there were no firmly held views on Afghanistan. When Peel’s Government was elected, Lord Ellenborough resumed his seat at the Board of Control, as he possessed experience in Indian affairs at the Board of Control between 1828 and 1830, and had spoken as an authority on India in the House of Lords. The President of the Board of Control, Lord Fitzgerald, was unable through ill health to overcome his ignorance of Indian affairs, so the burden fell on the already overloaded Peel despite his poor knowledge of Indian matters. Peel was principally assisted in Cabinet on Indian affairs by Wellington, the Leader of the House of Lords, and the Foreign Secretary, George Hamilton-Gordon, Fourth Earl of Aberdeen. Wellington, with his personal knowledge and experience of Indian affairs was an unassailable authority in Cabinet and Parliament, while Aberdeen lacked the force and interest in India that had defined his Whig predecessor, Viscount Palmerston. With this change of government, there was a lack of real interest in India and the less heard about Indian affairs the better.²

The new Tory Cabinet was inclined to favour the policy of a permanent withdrawal from Afghanistan. Peel had originally opposed Auckland’s expedition in

¹ Marshman (1860), p. 125
² Yapp (1980), pp. 449–451
1839 and saw little reason to change his opinion.3 Peel received influential advice from the Court of Directors. Henry Tucker (1771–1851) maintained his argument on the unaffordable cost of the Afghan strategy and that there was no danger from Russia. Sir Henry Willock (1790–1858) advised that the Afghan strategy was flawed and proposed that Britain unilaterally withdraw to the Indus as continued expansion inexorably drew British-India geographically towards Russia and would eventually precipitate a collision.4

This advice was a direct repudiation of the current policy established under the previous government. Palmerston’s forward policy preference had been based on the notion that respective British and Russia Empires would continue to expand until they touched – and it was the British preference that this intersection should be as far away from British-India as possible. Further undermining Palmerston’s forward policy was that it had already become increasingly questioned as early as 1840 by Auckland, Burnes and Princep who had come to support the notion of a neutral intermediate zone. With the recent settlement with Persia and a future agreement with Russia offering a possibility promising regional stability, Britain was very keen to reduce financial expenditure and focus on the construction of important public works in India.5 Finally, Wellington formulated the Government’s advice and recommended to Peel that the first priority of a new Governor-General should be the security of India and to withdraw all British forces to the Sutlej River. Peel accepted Wellington’s recommendations on the Indian defensive posture and undertook to give the new Governor-General full discretion in implementing this policy.6

In considering the appointment of the Governor-General to replace Auckland, Peel was aware of Ellenborough’s reputation for an autocratic but efficient manner at the Board of Control. Despite Ellenborough’s headstrong manner, and due to the refusal of a preferred candidate, Peel appointed him based on his intimate knowledge of India and upon Wellington’s strong recommendation that ‘there is no doubt that Ellenborough

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3 Yapp (1980), p. 451
4 Yapp (1980), pp. 427–429
5 Yapp (1980), pp. 427–429
6 Wellington further recommended leaving the Punjab, a more aggressive policy on the lower Indus retaining control of Sind with a garrison at Shikarpur, and control of Karachi with a strong naval presence. Yapp (1980), p. 451
is better qualified than any man in England’.⁷ On 20 October 1841, the Court of Directors formally elected the 51-year-old Ellenborough unopposed to the post of Governor-General.⁸ Although Ellenborough’s intellect and energy would remain strong throughout his tenure as Governor-General, he famously refused to delegate or accept contested advice. Ellenborough’s autocratic personal and professional manner thus introduced a new and critical factor into Britain’s strategic calculus regarding Afghanistan.⁹

Figure 3.1: Edward Law, Lord Ellenborough
(Source: Frederick Say, c. 1845, oil on canvas, 142 x 112 cm, National Portrait Gallery London)

Previously, during the 1830s, Ellenborough had initiated the British policy of commercial engagement along the Indus to counter Russian influence. In 1839, like his then opposition colleagues, Ellenborough initially opposed the adoption of Palmerston’s forward strategy towards Afghanistan. However, by 1840 he had come to support the basis of Auckland’s earlier 1838 ‘Simla Manifesto’ of installing a pro-British monarch in Afghanistan. Intuitively, and reflecting the majority of military analysts,

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⁷ Wellington, undated, transcribed in Imlah (1939), p. 76. Peel’s actual preferences had been for the former Ambassador to Russia, Lord Heytesbury who had declined. Yapp (1980), pp. 426–427
⁸ Imlah (1939), p. 78
⁹ In India without the tempering of English politics, Yapp considers that Ellenborough grew into a vain and inefficient despot. Yapp (1980), pp. 426–427
Ellenborough preferred the Sutlej River as the British frontier.\textsuperscript{10} Although there was a high degree of coincidence with the Wellington-Peel plan, Ellenborough would increasingly evolve his own strategic posture towards Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{11}

In September 1841 Ellenborough stressed the difficulties of retaining Afghanistan due to the extended lines of communication, and by late 1841 he had come to favour the evacuation of Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{12} Despite a widespread agreement on the British policy of eventually abandoning Afghanistan, Ministers were very unhappy with the immediacy that was being contemplated. Cabinet considered that such a passive response would damage British prestige, as the destruction of the Kabul Garrison would not be properly avenged, and British prisoners would not be recovered. Whilst there was widespread acknowledgement that the abandonment of Afghanistan to be sensible policy eventually, such was the concern with the loss of British prestige that this alone constituted the primary rationale to retain a semblance of British authority over Afghanistan in the shorter term.

By October 1841 Ellenborough had not committed to any strategic decision. He proposed to Wellington a phased British withdrawal from Afghanistan that would be completed at sometime between 1843 and 1844 subject to two geo-strategic preconditions – a settlement with Persia and that Shah Shuja should be able to support himself. The first had been achieved, but the second was becoming increasingly unlikely. In effect Ellenborough’s proposed plan before he departed England was not substantially different to that of Auckland’s 1838 strategy.\textsuperscript{13}

Arriving in Calcutta on 28 February 1842, Ellenborough’s preconceived ideas for British policy options towards Afghanistan were utterly dislocated as he came to realise the extent of the destruction to British regional authority from Afghanistan to India. Ellenborough now faced the same competing imperatives as Auckland – having to balance the restoration of a coherent Afghan policy whilst maintaining stability within India. Ellenborough had to weigh the recovery of regional and international British prestige by committing more troops into Afghanistan against the potential loss of internal control and the dire implications for Indian stability, particularly if another

\textsuperscript{10} Yapp (1980), p. 427
\textsuperscript{11} Yapp (1980), p. 451
\textsuperscript{12} Ellenborough to Murray, 11 Sep 1841, Yapp (1980), p. 429
\textsuperscript{13} Yapp (1980), pp. 429–430
military defeat was inflicted upon the British in Afghanistan. However, given the identical conditions facing both Governors-General in India, the new British response was to emanate from the fundamental character differences between the two men.  

Between 3 and 12 March 1842, Auckland and his sisters remained as Ellenborough’s guests at Government House in Calcutta. Ellenborough’s appointment was initially supported by Auckland who considered Ellenborough energetic and liberal – although he had cautioned that he could also be in danger of too many fixed ideas. During that period there were detailed discussions between the outgoing and incoming Governors-General. This discourse left Auckland with the impression that Ellenborough was a ‘wild and boastful talker, puffed up with vanity and pride. The new Governor-General spoke as if he were the Great Mogul of modern times’. Auckland’s sensible and perceptive demeanour racked with self-doubt had been replaced by Ellenborough’s autocratic egotism.

Ellenborough’s reputation was already widely known in India and Afghanistan for his ‘energy of character’ from his previous tenure as the President of the Board of Control. Unlike Auckland, the military leadership within Afghanistan anxiously awaited Ellenborough’s reputation for egotism to manifest itself in a more assertive strategic response for ‘the re-establishment of the British power in Afghanistan, the vindication of our military renown, and the infliction of retributive vengeance upon the destroyers of our army, and the captors of our countrymen and countrywomen’. However, Ellenborough’s strategic assessment for Afghanistan was conducted within the greater context of Empire. He viewed the British Government in India as essentially an imposed and alien construct that engendered little loyalty from the vast population that only acquiesced as long as Britain remained powerful. Ellenborough’s strategic assessments overwhelmingly favoured the primary British strategy of retaining authority over the internal security of British-India. He recognised that the capability of the army was the foundation of British prestige and the principal agent for internal

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14 Yapp (1980), p. 430
15 Yapp (1980), pp. 426–427
16 Trotter (1893), p. 181
17 Yapp (1980), p. 430
18 Stocqueler, Vol. 2, p. 20
19 Yapp (1980), p. 442
stability.\textsuperscript{20} Within Ellenborough’s strategic calculus, considerations of Afghanistan would only ever be elevated to the status of a secondary strategic concern:

It seems to be forgotten that I found in India a defeated Army, and an Empire in danger. It was in danger because acquired only by Arms, by arms alone could it be preserved, for in the heart of the People it has no foundation.\textsuperscript{21}

As previously discussed, the last authoritative directive on Afghanistan had been the outgoing Auckland’s letter of 24 February 1842, instructing Pollock to limit his military actions to rescuing the British prisoners, to relieve the Ghazni garrison and then retire to Peshawar.\textsuperscript{22} The newly arrived and assertive Ellenborough was increasingly convinced that the defeat in Afghanistan also threatened to destabilise the security of north-west British-India, and became determined to restore the martial prestige of the British Army.\textsuperscript{23} He was also mindful of restoring Britain’s reputation internationally. Wellington’s direction to Ellenborough captures the powerful sentiment in Britain on Indian affairs, which Cabinet feared that untreated could destroy their electoral survival:

It is impossible to impress upon you too strongly the notion of the Importance of the Restoration of our Reputation in the East. Our Enemies in France, the United States and wherever found are now rejoicing in Triumph upon our Disasters and Degradation. You will teach them that their triumph is premature.\textsuperscript{24}

With these pressing demands, Ellenborough needed a short-term policy to salvage the British position in Afghanistan and a longer-term policy to establish Britain’s future posture in Central Asia. These two policy imperatives became conflated in his first action as Governor-General. Ellenborough had decided that the ‘Afghan Buffer’ policy was to be abandoned and that British intervention was to be limited to the relief of beleaguered garrisons, the release of British hostages and prisoners held in Afghanistan, and the restoration of British military reputation. Despite the strength of his conviction, he continued to vacillate in his own strategic views. In making his earliest determination Ellenborough was mindful of a spectrum of advice from influential regional appointees. The strategic contention was essentially whether to return to the old British policy pre-1838 where Auckland had favoured a strong Kingdom of Lahore, or to persist with the

\textsuperscript{21} Secret Consultations to Governor General in Council, 28 Mar 1843, transcribed in Yapp (1980), pp. 442–443
\textsuperscript{22} Maddock to Pollock, 24 Feb 1842, \textit{Parliametary Papers} (1843), Paper No. 181, p. 152, and Low (1873), p. 284
\textsuperscript{23} Strachan (2004), p. 85
\textsuperscript{24} Wellington to Ellenborough, 30 Mar 1842, transcribed in Yapp (1980), p. 452
current policy adopted between 1839 and 1841 that favoured a stronger Afghanistan. In January 1842 the Agent to the Governor-General for the Affairs of the Punjab and North-West Frontier, George Clerk (1800–1889), proposed a return to the older British geo-strategic policy favouring a ‘Sikh Buffer’ with a strong Government in Lahore over a weak and disunited Afghanistan ‘to break the chain of Mahommedanism between Central Asia and Hindoostan [India]’, and proposed that Jalalabad be transferred to the Lahore Government as a critical inducement.25 More urgently, James Outram, the Political Agent of Sind and Baluchistan, argued that withdrawal from Afghanistan without attempting any form of revenge would be ‘fatal to the future peace on prosperity of India’.26 Likewise, McNeill in Persia reinforced the view that the disastrous events in Afghanistan had been a great blow to British prestige across Asia and had to be recovered.27

By 15 March 1842, Ellenborough had consolidated his response to these strategic imperatives. He dispatched his direction to his Commander-in-Chief, Lieutenant-General Sir Jasper Nicolls, detailing the factors that had driven his strategic assessment. Following the explanation of the limiting geo-strategic, economic and logistic factors that combined to invalidate Afghanistan as a stable security buffer for British-India, Ellenborough leaves the reader in no doubt to his resolution. Asserting that ‘in war, reputation is strength’, he directs his Army to ‘re-establish our military character beyond the Indus’, and hinting at a possible re-occupation of Kabul, authorises ‘the infliction of some signal and decisive blow upon the Afghans’.28 Reflecting his concern and wishing to be closer to the affairs in Afghanistan, on 6 April 1842 Ellenborough departed Calcutta for Allahabad. Ellenborough was clearly fearful of further defeats in Afghanistan. However the fate of the British prisoners and garrisons still in Afghanistan, and the repercussions for Indian internal stability and Britain’s

25 Clerk to Maddock, 15 Jan 1842, transcribed in Yapp (1980), pp. 436–437. Gaining consent from Lahore had always proved problematic. George Clerk, alongside Mackeson (Pollock’s chief political officer), Henry Lawrence in Peshawar, and Nicolls and Robertson in the North-Western Provinces, all considered that a significant inducement was required to ensure Sikh compliance. Yapp (1980), pp. 435–436, and pp. 516–517
27 Yapp (1980), p. 452
international prestige, drove him to pursue his aggressive response. In short Ellenborough desired victory but could not risk defeat.

Kaye considers the 15 March 1842 Proclamation to be the first public document of any importance by the newly installed Ellenborough and correctly observes that the document reflects ‘a calm and able review of all the circumstances attending our position beyond the Indus’. With copies passed directly to Major-General Pollock in Jalalabad and Major-General Nott in Kandahar, Pollock’s biographer observes that within Afghanistan Ellenborough’s ‘dignified sentiments struck a responsive chord … desirous that the honour of the country should be maintained at its ancient pitch’: 30

… the ultimate destruction of a numerous division of the British army, a calamity wholly without parallel in our history in India … compel us to adopt the conclusion, that the possession of Afghanistan, could we recover it, would be a source of weakness, rather than of strength, in resisting the invasion of any army from the West, and, therefore, that the ground upon which the policy of the advance of our troops to that country mainly rested, has altogether ceased to exist …

in the first instance, regard to the safety of the detached bodies of our troops at Jellalabad, at Ghuznee, at Kelat-i-Ghilzye, and Candahar, to the security of our troops now in the field from all unnecessary risk, and, finally, to the re-establishment of our military reputation by the infliction of some signal and decisive blow upon the Affghans … — a blow which might re-establish our military character beyond the Indus, and leave a deep impression of our power, and of the vigor with which it would be applied to punish an atrocious enemy …

The Commanders of the forces in Upper and Lower Affghanistan will, in all the operations they may design, bear in mind these general views and opinions of the Government of India. They will, in the first instance, endeavour to relieve all the garrisons in Affghanistan, which are now surrounded by the enemy … To effect the release of the prisoners taken at Cabool … [and with] the relief of Ghuznee, it may possibly become a question, in the event of Major-General Pollock’s effecting a junction with Sir Robert Sale, whether the united force shall return to the country below the Khyber Pass, or take a forward position near Jellalabad, or even advance to Cabool.

We are fully sensible of the advantages which would be derived from the re-occupation of Cabool, the scene of our great disaster and of so much crime, even for a week, of the means which it might afford of recovering the prisoners, of the gratification which it would give to the army, and of the effect which it would have upon our enemies. Our withdrawal might then be made to rest upon an official declaration of the grounds upon which we retired as solemn as that which accompanied our advance; and we should retire as a conquering, not as a defeated, Power. 31

The welcome news of Pollock’s arrival in Peshawar was received in Jalalabad on 13 February 1842, but diminished immediately by the first appearance of Akbar Khan’s reconnaissance forces. In the intervening month while Akbar Khan was distracted with leadership issues in Kabul, the physical defences of the Jalalabad Fortress had been

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29 Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 191
30 Low (1873), p. 287
repaired, provisions had been secured to withstand a siege and Pollock’s strong relief force under resolute leadership was now postured in Peshawar. Sale had consolidated his defensive position in Jalalabad and was now postured to withstand the anticipated Afghan siege. On 15 February, Akbar Khan’s camp, emboldened by his successes in Kabul and armed with weaponry captured from the annihilated Kabul Garrison, was observed being established 11 kilometres distant in the vicinity of Nazrabad. On 19 February Sale received another letter from Pollock conveying his intent that the relief column in Peshawar would only move forward immediately if the Jalalabad Garrison was facing an imminent existential threat. In the absence of such a crisis, Pollock’s intent was to consolidate and prepare his force in Peshawar. A worried Sale immediately prepared his response to Pollock outlining his resource limitations, and that his cavalry had about a month of supplies remaining after which he would be unable to withdraw. Literally as Sale’s response letter was being written, an extremely violent earthquake struck and destroyed much of the Jalalabad Fortress. When it became apparent Akbar Khan did not immediately exploit this defensive vulnerability, the Garrison began a frenetic reconstruction so rapid that the locals attributed it to ‘English witchcraft’.

By 25 February Akbar Khan, supported by his cousin Sardar Sultan Ahmad Khan, had consolidated their position 5 kilometres to the west of Jalalabad, and by 2 March had completed their investment of the Jalalabad Garrison and cut off supplies. On 7 March a letter was received from the authorities in Kabul demanding that the British immediately evacuate Jalalabad. The Afghan messenger informed Sale that if

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32 Marshman (1860), p. 108
33 Havelock’s Journal describes ‘Umur Khail’ ‘seven miles’ from Jalalabad. This transposes onto the 1904 mapping as ‘Amar Khel’ and is now an unnamed village in the vicinity of the modern village of Nazrabad. US NGIA Map, 2005, ‘Jalalabad’, Ed. 7-NGA, Series U611, Sheet 3085, GS 2415; Surveyor General of India Map, 1904, ‘North-Western Trans-Frontier’, [IOR Map Collection: X/9935/2/428/1904]; and, Havelock, transcribed in Marshman (1860), p. 111
34 Marshman (1860), p. 109
35 ‘The earthquake shook down all out parapets which had been built with so much labour, injured several of our bastions, cast to the ground all our guard-houses, demolished a third of the town, made a considerable break in the rampart of a curtain in the Peshawur face, and reduced the Cabul gate to a shapeless mass of ruins’. Havelock, transcribed in Marshman (1860), pp.110–111
36 It later transpired that in the region around Akbar Khan’s many houses and forts had been comprehensively destroyed. Akbar Khan, far from being able to exploit the temporary exposure in British defences, had expended his energy attempting to hold his force together, as the Afghan tribesmen wanted to return to repair their own homes. Notably in Peshawar, the earthquake caused several houses to collapse, with Pollock narrowly escaping being crushed. Havelock, transcribed in Marshman (1860), p. 112; Low (1873), p. 241; and, Fortescue (1927), p. 261
37 Fortescue (1927), p. 262
not complied with, a large Afghan army would be dispatched from Kabul to supplement Akbar Khan’s encircling army. In Peshawar on 8 March Pollock received an urgent letter from Sale and his Political Agent, Captain George Macgregor (1810–1883), urging his advance towards Jalalabad. In Pollock’s response on 12 March, he discussed the significant capability shortfalls and morale problems in his own force ‘1,800 sick, and … the Hindoos of four out of five native corps, refused to advance’. Pollock also provided an update on his next reinforcement brigade not reaching Peshawar until the end of March, which was the earliest date he considered prudent to commence his advance to Jalalabad. Against the growing imperative to relieve the besieged Jalalabad Garrison, Pollock cautioned ‘if I attempted now, it might risk you altogether; but if you can hold out, the reinforcements would make your relief as certain as any earthly thing can be’, adding that the only object of the advance was to recover the garrison and return to India. Throughout March 1842 the Jalalabad Fortress skirmishes continued between the garrison’s foraging parties and the besieging Afghans. On 10 March the Afghans launched a wholesale assault that tested the resolute British defence, resulting in Akbar Khan being forced to withdraw, losing over 100 dead.

There was an increasingly tense exchange of correspondence as Pollock attempted to balance the preparation of his forces for the daunting task of forcing the Khyber Pass, against the time imperatives of relieving Sale in Jalalabad before he was forced to capitulate. On 17 March Sale received an earlier letter (dated 8 March) from an anxious Pollock, enquiring about the endurance of the Jalalabad Garrison. Sale immediately replied to Pollock on 17 March, encoded in French for security, that the Jalalabad Garrison could last until ‘dernier de Mars [the end of March]’ as the supply situation in the Jalalabad garrison was becoming increasingly parlous. Additionally, because Pollock had calculated that, as he would have to man the posts along his rearward lines

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39 The reinforcing brigade was composed of: 3rd Dragoons, troop Horse Artillery, 1st Light Cavalry, 33rd Native Infantry and two companies of the 6th Native Infantry. Pollock to Macgregor, 12 Mar 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 227, pp. 192–193, and transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 242–243, and Marshman (1860), p. 113
40 Pollock to Macgregor, 12 Mar 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 227, pp. 192–193, and transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 242–243, and Marshman (1860), p. 113
41 Marshman (1860), p. 113
42 Sale to Pollock, 17 Mar 1842, transcribed [in French], in Marshman (1860), p. 114 The European troops had been placed on a reduced ration of salt meat (and no vegetables) which was estimated to last until mid-April. The native troops were increasingly ill from their reduced ration. To draw out the supplies Sale ordered the destruction of all the camels. Marshman (1860), pp. 114–115 and 118
of communication as he advanced, he now required the additional reinforcement of the HM 31st which was not due in Peshawar until mid-April 1842. Pollock inquired whether Sale could extend his endurance even longer in Jalalabad until 26 April. 43 A gravely concerned Sale responded by again outlining again his dwindling supplies and that his greatest fear was being isolated with no relief force getting through to Jalalabad, ‘we dread failure on your part of forcing the passes’. 44 However to Sale’s relief, on 3 April a letter (dated 27 March) was received informing him that Pollock had decided to wait no longer for the reinforcements and commence his advance. 45 This letter also relayed Pollock’s concerns at the fear of his native troops confronting the prospect of having to advance through the Khyber Pass, and confiding in Sale that he still considered the relief of Jalalabad to be high risk: 46

God knows I am most anxious to move on … However desirable it is that I should be joined by the 31st Regiment, your late letters compel me to move, and I hope therefore to be with you by about the 7th [April]. 47

On the evening of 5 April a Kashmiri spy (not named), who had been previously employed by the British, had purportedly managed to escape from Akbar Khan’s camp. The spy informed Havelock of a report just received by Akbar Khan that local Afridi tribesmen had treacherously reversed their assurances for Pollock’s safe passage through the Khyber Pass. The spy reported that after a day of fighting Pollock had been forced into a retreat. In the pre-dawn of 6 April Havelock took this devastating report to Sale. 48 On the morning of 6 April, Sale’s worst fears were confirmed by an artillery salute fired from Akbar Khan’s nearby camp, reportedly to celebrate the successful blockade of Pollock’s relief column by the Afridi tribesmen. 49 With their isolation seemingly assured, the garrison’s morale plummeted. Havelock records the sentiment within the garrison regarding their fate:

Coupled with the news of the preceding night, the event at first did create feelings of doom. It seemed as if the tide of events had been set uniformly against us, and that our hopes of succor,

43 Pollock to Sale, not referenced, in Marshman (1860), p. 115
44 Sale to Pollock, not referenced, in Marshman (1860), p. 115
45 Marshman (1860), pp. 116–117. The reinforcing column commanded by Colonel White and headed by the 3rd Dragoons had still not arrived in Peshawar as expected by 27 March 1842 (it finally reached Peshawar on the morning of 29 March 1842). Low (1873), pp. 243–245
46 Marshman (1860), pp. 116–117
47 Pollock to Sale, 27 Mar 1842, transcribed in Low (1873), p. 244
48 Marshman politely sums up the dynamic of Sale’s leadership in Jalalabad, ‘Sir Robert [Sale], though the bravest of the brave, sometimes shrunk from the responsibility of taking the initiative in a daring enterprise’. Marshman, (1860), p. 117, and Fortescue (1927), p. 262
49 Marshman (1860), p. 117
which had been some days sanguine, had once again vanished, and that we were consigned to a new succession of privations and labours, terminating in the inevitable and utterly ruinous disaster.\textsuperscript{50}

Although the reports of Pollock’s defeat were an Afghan ruse and completely false, ironically this provided the impetus for Sale’s officers to press their commander for more aggressive action. Despite being routinely urged by his officers to lift the siege through their own endeavours, Sale preferred to await Pollock’s relief column. But now it appeared that Sale’s worst fears had been realised, and the Jalalabad Garrison had little choice but to take matters into their own hands. During the course of 6 April the apparently hopelessness of the situation and the pressure from his officers forced Sale into action. That evening the senior officers of the garrison met with Sale and urged him to attack Akbar Khan. Formal orders were issued for an attack on the following morning, 7 April.\textsuperscript{51} During the night of 6/7 April Akbar Khan arrayed an estimated 6000 tribesmen in a defensive posture to the west of Jalalabad, with his left flank extending to the Kabul River.\textsuperscript{52}

Before dawn on 7 April 1842, the three columns of infantry assembled in silence at the west gate of the Jalalabad Fortress, and at the same time the supporting artillery and cavalry positioned themselves at the southern gate. The advance commenced with Captain Havelock rapidly advancing along the right flank towards Akbar Khan’s camp and driving back Afghan skirmishers. After advancing 1200 metres Colonel Dennie’s centre column came within range of a small Afghan strongpoint based around one of the intermediate forts held by 200–300 Afghans. Instead of bypassing the strongpoint (as had been the original plan), Sale halted both Dennie’s centre column and Colonel Monteith’s left columns, and then ordered the centre column into a direct assault on the Afghan fort. The assault by HM 13\textsuperscript{th} successfully stormed through the outer wall of the fort to be exposed to withering fire from the inner keep. Dennie was mortally wounded and the assault failed.\textsuperscript{53}

Havelock continued to press ahead successfully with his advance on the right flank and worried about the delay in the centre. Sale ordered Havelock to halt. Akbar Khan, seeing Havelock’s column was exposed and unsupported, launched an estimated

\textsuperscript{50} Havelock, notebook entry, undated [6 Apr 1842?], transcribed in Marshman (1860), pp. 117–118
\textsuperscript{51} The concept for battle is in Marshman (1860), pp. 118–119
\textsuperscript{52} Marshman (1860), p. 119
\textsuperscript{53} Sale to CAPT Ponsonby, 7 Apr 1842, National Army Museum (NAM) 6405-62-17-3; Marshman (1860), p. 119; and Fortescue (1927), pp. 262–263
1500 Afghan cavalry. The Afghan cavalry attacked to take advantage of Havelock’s 360 troops exposed and static on the right flank. Having hastily formed the British troops into square, the Afghan cavalry was driven off by heavy musket fire as they closed to within 30 metres. Havelock recommenced his advance and after gaining another 100 metres the Afghan cavalry charged again. Havelock formed his whole force again into square and repulsed this second Afghan cavalry assault. Sale had dispatched Backhouse’s artillery to support the right column and, with this support, Havelock commenced his final assault on Akbar Khan’s camp to capture two Afghan guns and drive the defending Afghans towards the Kabul River. By now Sale had resumed the main advance, by choosing to bypass the strongpoint that was now only providing harassing fire. As the left and centre columns recommenced their advance, Akbar Khan’s camp was attacked by the consolidated British force at three points. By 0700hr the battle was over, with Akbar Khan’s force in full retreat, and by nightfall the Afghan tribesmen had dispersed.\footnote{The ‘field was strewed with the bodies of Affghans’ and the British casualties were 11 killed and 71 wounded. Casualty figures taken from Sale to CAPT Ponsonby, 7 Apr 1842, NAM 6405-62-17-3. Marshman puts the British casualties at 10 dead and 50 wounded, in Marshman (1860), p. 121, and Fortescue puts the British casualties as 14 killed and 64 wounded, in Fortescue (1927), pp. 262–264}

**Schematic 3.1: Sale’s ‘crowning mercy’ victory at Jalalabad: 7 April 1842**

Sale made his formal report of this victory to Ellenborough, Nicolls and Pollock that evening, describing his ‘general attack on the Affghan camp, in the hope of relieving this place from blockade, and facilitating General Pollock’s advance to our
When Ellenborough was informed of the victory he immediately issued a proclamation on 21 April congratulating the ‘illustrious garrison’:

under the command of its gallant leader, Major-General Sir Robert Sale, thoroughly beaten in open field an enemy more than three times its numbers … the Governor-General cordially congratulates the Army upon the return of victory to its ranks.\(^56\)

In summarising this defence of Jalalabad, Marshman concludes ‘in our previous history in India, there had been no example of such a siege, or such a deliverance’.\(^57\) In the tradition of the many accounts of the First Anglo-Afghan War, Marshman’s hyperbole continues to ignore the successful defence of Kandahar by Nott in March 1842, or the valiant defeat of the Ghilzai siege of Qalat by Captain Craigie in May 1842 (discussed later). Marshman’s objective was to contrast Sale’s defence of Jalalabad with that of Elphinstone’s in Kabul, with the difference being attributed to the quality of their respective key advisors. Promoting the virtues of Havelock, the subject of his biography, Marshman damns Sale’s leadership with faint praise, and essentially attributes the successes in Jalalabad to Sale’s advisers – the ‘genius of Broadfoot’ and the ‘bold counsels of Havelock’.\(^58\) More transparently, Fortescue damned Sale’s timidity and poor tactical acumen throughout the whole period of siege of Jalalabad, particularly Sale’s conservative defensive posture, and the failed assault on the Afghan strongpoint during the ‘crowning mercy’ victory.\(^59\) In contrast to Ellenborough’s effusive praise of the ‘illustrious garrison’, Fortescue considered that Sale’s tactical failure to bypass the Afghan strongpoint and maintain the British offensive momentum was because ‘Fighting Bob’ had gained his name by persistently butting his head at stone walls, and was not to be turned from pursuing his one and only tactical idea’.\(^60\)

For this thesis, more fundamental than assessing Sale’s questionable higher-command qualities, is that given his unassisted victory in Jalalabad, was whether the Afghan threat was ever as dire as Sale had portrayed to Pollock. Sale’s pessimistic correspondence alarmed Pollock to the extent that he felt compelled to initiate his daunting advance on Jalalabad early, before his force was fully prepared, and therefore exposing his forces to

\(^{55}\) Sale to CAPT Ponsonby, 7 Apr 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 249, pp. 207–209
\(^{56}\) Notification by the Governor-General of India, 21 Apr 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 248, pp. 206–207, and transcribed in Marshman 1860), p. 124
\(^{57}\) Marshman (1860), p. 121
\(^{58}\) Marshman (1860), p. 122
\(^{59}\) The ‘crowning mercy’ is Havelock’s term for the victory at Jalalabad on 7 April 1842, in Marshman (1860), p. 123
\(^{60}\) Fortescue (1927), p. 263
even greater risk. This is important in appreciating the complicating pressures on Pollock’s impending tactical success.

In Peshawar, during the period of consolidation since arriving on 5 February 1842, Pollock’s chief political officer, Captain Frederick Mackeson (1807–1853), had been negotiating with the Afridi tribesmen to guarantee safe passage for the advancing British column through the Khyber Pass, but these negotiations were compromised by Akbar Khan who had reinforced the eastern entrance to the Khyber Pass with Afghan troops and two guns around Ali Masjid on 2 April. In response, Pollock ceased further negotiations and decided his only option was to advance through the Khyber Pass secured by his own force of arms.

In addition to accelerating his force’s preparation, compounding Pollock’s problems was gaining the support from the considerable co-located garrison of 24,500 Sikh troops. Following the disaster of the Sikh battalions in Brigadier Wild’s unsuccessful attempt to relieve Jalalabad in January and their corrosive effect on British morale during the previous two months, through careful negotiation Captain Henry Lawrence (1806–1857) finally secured Sikh support for the impending advance. Assisting in gaining Sikh support was the arrival of Colonel White’s substantial and morale-boosting reinforcements on 29 March. Regardless, with the prospect of traversing through the Khyber Pass holding an almost supernatural foreboding, many of the promised Sikh troops arrived late, camel drivers deserted and there were delays caused by the heavy rain. Despite these setbacks, with the sufficient reinforcements that had arrived (less HM 31st), Pollock was ready to commence his advance to relieve

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61 Pollock had appointed Captain Ponsonby as his Assistant Adjutant General and Sir Richard Shakespeare as his Military Secretary. Low (1873), p. 241
62 The deal was negotiated for 50,000 rupees to guarantee the safe conduct of the British column through the Khyber Pass between Jamrud at the eastern entrance, to Loya Daka at the western entrance. A deposit was to be paid initially and the balance paid upon the safe British arrival in Loya Daka. Low (1873), pp. 245–246
63 The Sikh forces in Peshawar (on 2 Mar 1842) comprised: four Battalions commanded by General Mehtab Singh – 2700 troops; four Battalions of Mahomedans and Nugees – 3000 troops; Souars (cavalry) – 3100 troops; 2 x Brigades of Ramgoles (militia) commanded by General Avitabile (an Italian officer) – 1800 troops; Rajah Gholoub Singh’s troops – 3,000 troops; General Court (a French officer) – 5000 troops; miscellaneous – 5900 troops; and 20 guns. Low (1873), p. 247
64 This Sikh compliance was greatly assisted by the arrival of Gholaub Singh, the Rajah of Jummoo, who had been dispatched directly by Shere Singh (successor to Ranjit Singh) with the explicit order to act in support of the British troops in the terms of the Anglo-Sikh treaty. Low (1873), pp. 246–247
65 Colonel White’s column included a troop of Horse Artillery, the 3rd Dragoons and 1st Light Cavalry. Low (1873), p. 245
Jalalabad. Pollock’s column of 8000 troops commenced their march from Peshawar on 31 March 1842, with the intention of commencing the advance through the Khyber Pass the following day.\footnote{Pollock’s column numbering 8000 troops is quoted in Low (1873), p. 267}

As he had promised Sale, on 31 March 1842 Pollock’s force marched towards the township of Jamrud. Given the relatively open nature of the terrain, the force advanced in three parallel columns – the central advance and rear-guards with the concentration of the baggage train, and flanking protection to the right and left.\footnote{Pollock’s force consisted of (noting identified commanders and forces assigned to the LTCOL Moseley and MAJ Huish flanking clearance forces: \textbf{Left Column} (LTCOL Moseley, 64\textsuperscript{th} NI): 2 x Coys HM 9\textsuperscript{th} (MAJ Huish adv force); 1½ x Coys HM 9\textsuperscript{th} (LTCOL Moseley rear security); 7 x Coys 53\textsuperscript{rd} NI (MAJ Hoggan); 3 x Coys 60\textsuperscript{th} NI (CAPT Napleton); 4½ x Coys 64\textsuperscript{th} NI (LTCOL Moseley rear security); 400 \textit{Jezailchees} (CAPT Ferris - MAJ Huish adv force). \textbf{Right Column} (LTCOL Taylor, HM 9\textsuperscript{th}): CAPT Broadfoot Sappers; 2 x Coys HM 9\textsuperscript{th} (LTCOL Taylor adv force); 1½ x Coys HM 9\textsuperscript{th} (MAJ Anderson security guard); 4 x Coys, 26\textsuperscript{th} NI; 7 x Coys 30\textsuperscript{th} NI (MAJ Payne); 3 x Coys 60\textsuperscript{th} NI (CAPT Riddell); 4 x Coys 64\textsuperscript{th} NI (MAJ Anderson security guard); 400 \textit{Jezailchees} (LTCOL Taylor adv force); Toorbas Khan’s troops (Afghans). \textbf{Centre (Main) Column:} Cavalry: 2 x Sqn 3\textsuperscript{rd} Light Dragoons (advance guard); 2 x Sqn 3\textsuperscript{rd} Light Dragoons (rearguard); 2 x Sqn 1\textsuperscript{st} Light Cavalry (advance guard); 1 x Sqn 1\textsuperscript{st} Light Cavalry (rearguard); 10\textsuperscript{th} Regiment Light Cavalry (rearguard); \textbf{Artillery} (CAPT Alexander) - 4 x guns Horse Artillery (advance guard); 4 x guns Horse Artillery (rearguard); 2 x guns Mountain Train (advance guard); 3 x guns Foot Artillery (advance guard); 3 x guns Foot Artillery (rearguard); \textbf{Engineers} - Sappers, Miners, Pioneers (advance guard); \textbf{Infantry} - Grenadier x Coy HM 9\textsuperscript{th} (advance guard); 1 x Coy HM 9\textsuperscript{th} (MAJ Davies, HM 9\textsuperscript{th} rear guard); 1 x Coy 6\textsuperscript{th} NI (rear guard); 1 x Coy, 26\textsuperscript{th} NI (advance guard); 3 x Coys, 30\textsuperscript{th} NI (advance guard); 2 x Coys 33\textsuperscript{rd} NI (MAJ Barwell, HM 9\textsuperscript{th} advance guard); 2 x Coys 53\textsuperscript{rd} NI (advance guard); 3 x Coys 60\textsuperscript{th} NI (rearguard); \textbf{Irregulars} - 1 x Risallah Cavalry (advance guard); 2 x Risallahs Cavalry (rearguard). Low (1873), pp. 248–251; and Fortescue (1927), p. 265.} Understanding the extreme terrain to be encountered, and in contrast to the invasion of the ‘Army of the Indus’ three years prior, Pollock ordered a reduction in the logistic train ‘as from the nature of the country between Peshawur and Jella labad, the line most consistent with safety must be as little encumbered as possible’.\footnote{Pollock set an example of reducing his personal baggage train to one camel and two mules! Pollock memorandum, undated [Mar 1842], transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 251–252}

The column reached Jamrud without incident on 31 March and established camp near the entrance to the Khyber Pass.\footnote{The British forces observed that the Afghans had built up a substantial barrier across the entrance to the Pass made of huge stones, trees and mud. Low (1873), p. 253}

Pollock was delayed in Jamrud again due to the heavy rain, the desertion of more camel drivers and the delay in moving forward of Rajah Golab Singh’s Sikh troops.\footnote{Pollock to Maddock, 2 Apr 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 239, pp. 200–201, and transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 253–254}

On 3 April 1842 Pollock wrote of his concerns with the psychological state of the native troops balanced against the pressing imperative of advancing to Jalalabad:
The pluck of the Sepoys is doubtful; but I hope, when we carry the mouth of the pass, they will feel confidence … I still much regret that I have not the [HM] 31st; but after Sir Robert Sale’s letter [most probably the 23 Mar 1842 letter] received some time back, I consider that he has put it out of my power to wait longer.\textsuperscript{72}

In Jamrud Pollock issued his final orders for the conduct of breaching the Khyber Pass. On the evening of 4 April immediately prior to the advance, Pollock visited all of his commanding officers to reconfirm their understanding of these orders and gauge the morale of his troops. Pollock was comforted by the reports that morale was strong, including that of the Sepoys.\textsuperscript{73}

Pollock’s plan for the conduct of his advance was for the main column, composed of the advance, main and rear guards, to be supported by the simultaneous clearance of the flanking heights of the Khyber Pass. Pollock retained overall command of the entire column and the main guard of the central column. Brigadier Wild had command of the advance guard and Brigadier McCaskill had command of the cavalry-heavy rear guard. The main flanking security and clearance of the heights were to be composed of a combination of HM 9th, 26th NI, 64th NI and two groups of 400 Jezailchees.\textsuperscript{74}

The right clearing column was commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Taylor (HM 9th) alongside Major Anderson (64th NI), who were to initially assault the flanking high ground as a combined force. Lieutenant-Colonel Taylor was then to continue the clearance ‘to crown the heights, and advance in successive detachments of 2 companies at intervals of 500 yards’ with his force of two companies of HM 9th, four companies of 26th NI and 400 Jezailchees. Major Anderson’s security force comprising one and a half companies HM 9th and four companies 64th NI was to remain static and secure the high ground at the entrance of the pass. Similarly, the left clearing column which was commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Moseley (64th NI) alongside Major George Huish (26th NI) were to initially conduct a combined assault. Using the same tactical methodology as the right column, once the high ground had been successfully reached, Major Huish’s force of two companies HM 9th, four companies of 26th NI and 400 Jezailchees, would continue the clearance of the high ground. Lieutenant-Colonel

\textsuperscript{72} Pollock to Macgregor, 3 Apr 1842, transcribed in Low (1873), p. 254
\textsuperscript{73} Low (1873), p. 256
\textsuperscript{74} Low (1873), p. 248
Moseley’s force of one and a half companies HM 9th and four and a half companies 64th NI would remain static to secure the high ground.75

Once the high ground had been successfully cleared, Lieutenant-Colonel Taylor’s right clearing force was to descend and join with Major Huish’s left clearing force. The two columns would then reconstitute as a single force of four companies of HM 9th, eight companies of 26th NI and Captain Ferris’ Jezailchees, all under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Taylor for an advance through the pass. Later, when the rear guard of the main column had successfully advanced into the pass, the security forces from Major Anderson’s force on the right and Lieutenant-Colonel Moseley on the left were to descend and reconstitute as a single force composed of three companies of HM 9th, eight and a half companies of 64th NI, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Moseley and form the rear of the advancing column.76 Pollock’s tactical scheme of manoeuvre is detailed in his orders issued on 4 April 1842:

The force to be under arms to-morrow morning at half-past three o’clock, ready to move forward … No fires are to be lighted on any account; no drum to beat or bugles to be sounded. The six companies of the 60th Regiment, and six companies of the 33rd Regiment, will remain with the baggage in the vicinity of the treasure and ammunition. The parties for crowning the heights, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Taylor and Major Anderson, will move forward to the hill on the right of the pass. The parties for the same duty under the command of Major Huish and Lieutenant-Colonel Moseley, will in like manner move forward to the hill on the left. Lieutenant-Colonel Taylor’s party will be accompanied by the irregulars who lately garrisoned Ali Musjid. Captain Ferris’s Jezailchees will accompany the left advancing party.

When the heights have been crowned on both hills, four companies of the 9th Foot, the eight companies of 26th, under Lieutenant-Colonel Taylor and Major Huish, also the Jezailchees under Captain Ferris, will descend the hills in readiness to enter the pass. Six horse artillery guns, four from the Foot artillery, with the mountain guns, will be drawn up in battery opposite the pass. The advance guard, seven companies of the 30th, and seven companies of the 53rd, will accompany the guns. The whole cavalry will be placed by Brigadier White, that any attempt to attack from the low hills on the right must be frustrated … When the rear of the column is entering the pass, the two rear companies of Lieutenant-Colonel Moseley’s and Major Anderson’s parties should descend the hills.77

Pollock’s plan to advance through the Khyber Pass demonstrates remarkable tactical acumen well adapted to the enormous undertaking upon which his force was about to commence. These are sophisticated manoeuvrist tactics detailing the formation and re-formation of fighting organisations in complex terrain whilst engaging the enemy, synchronised by the appropriate alignment and realignment of the command arrangements. Pollock’s concept was developed to ensure the conduct of a large-scale

75 Low (1873), pp. 249–250, and Fortescue (1927) p. 265
76 Low (1873), pp. 249–250, and Fortescue (1927) p. 265
77 Pollock’s Orders, 4 Apr 1842, transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 255–256
advance along highly channelised and predictable routes, against a resilient enemy in previously unconquered mountainous terrain.

As ordered, at 0330hr on 5 April 1842 Pollock’s advance commenced towards the entrance of the Khyber Pass against the barricades constructed by the Afridi tribesmen who confidently considered their position impregnable. The steep and precipitous heights were scaled and opposed by surprised Afghan tribesmen presenting a determined resistance throughout the British ascent. However, once the respective crests had been reached, the key positions commanding the entrance to the pass were abandoned by the Afghan tribesmen. On the right-flanking high ground, Major Anderson remained on the right-hand crest with one company of HM 9th and two companies of 26th NI commanded by Captain Gahan, with a smaller force than had been originally anticipated for the task. Lieutenant-Colonel Taylor took the remainder of the right assault force, descended from the heights to clear Afghans from positions on the north of the Ali Masjid road. Taylor successfully completed his task by overcoming a series of determined Afghan stands, particularly his final significant action clearing an Afghan defensive position. This clearance required a deliberate flanking uphill assault by Lieutenant Watson (HM 9th), with a company from HM 9th and a newly reinforcing company from 33rd NI, against the rear of the Afghan concentration. Taylor led a downhill assault simultaneously with Watson’s uphill assault. This synchronised assault routed the Afghans who retreated towards Ali Masjid.

The clearance to the left was equally successful and more rapid due to less opposition. Led by Captain Ferris’ Jezailchees the hill at the entrance to the pass was seized. The commanding position was then secured by Lieutenant-Colonel Moseley, who held the position with two companies of 26th NI. The remainder of the force descended to continue the clearance of the heights to the left of the Ali Masjid road. The only concerted Afghan defence was at a large concentration overlooking a bridge which was overcome by an assault by Major Huish’s force, resulting in an Afghan retreat at their great loss.

78 Low (1873), p. 257, and Marshman (1860), p. 122
79 Low (1873), pp. 258–259 and 261, and Fortescue (1927), p. 265
80 Huish to Ponsonby, 6 Apr 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 244, pp. 204–205; Low (1873), pp. 258–259 and 261; and Fortescue (1927), p. 265
As the flanks were being cleared, Pollock ordered the artillery, commanded by Captain Alexander, to move the guns forward and provide harassing fire into the withdrawing Afghans. Pollock became concerned about the delay in Lieutenant-Colonel Taylor’s clearance of the right flank, so a force of four companies of HM 9th, four companies of 26th NI and four companies of the 64th NI, commanded by Brigadier Wild, were tasked to assault the right-hand high ground on another route. This route was extremely steep near the summit and, despite the Afghans effectively throwing large boulders against the assaulting British, eventually the summit was seized.\(^{81}\) The fighting along the flanking high ground against a determined enemy was exhausting. Having seized both positions commanding the entrance and the clearance proceeding on both flanks, the main column now entered the Pass.

Following Pollock’s successful seizure of the entrance to the Khyber Pass, the Afghans effectively abandoned the Ali Masjid Fort. As Pollock’s advance guard

\(^{81}\) Low (1873), pp. 259–260
reached the Fort it was seized with little opposition at approximately 1400hr. With flanks secured, the main body covered the 8 kilometres to Ali Masjid without further opposition. Pollock’s advance was been supported by a column of 12,000 Sikh troops.

Commencing their advance on 5 April, the Sikh troops moved forward to Ali Masjid using the longer route via the Jubogee Pass. Rajah Gholoub Singh’s simultaneous advance had the important effect of diverting Afridi tribesmen away from Pollock’s main advance. By 6 April, Rajah Gholoub Singh’s force had arrived at Ali Masjid, and pitched their camp alongside the British at Lalla Chund. The rearguard, commanded by Major General McCaskill, entered the pass with the massive and unwieldy baggage train that contained the logistic support for both Pollock’s column as well as provisions for the relief of Sale’s Jalalabad garrison. The rearguard camped overnight 3 kilometres into the Pass, and was secure in the Ali Masjid Fort by 1400hr on 6 April with the large baggage train completely intact.

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82 By nightfall on 5 April 1842 the forward British elements were camped at Lala China (referred to in the historical record as Lalla Chund, 2 kilometres east of the fort). Throughout the bitterly cold night of 5 April 1842 the Afghans sustained harassing fire and the British maintained their guard to counter any potential Afghan chupao (night attack). In the morning Captain Ferris’ Jezailchees were assigned as the garrison for the Ali Masjid Fort. Low (1873), pp. 262 and 264

83 The Sikh forces comprised: Rajah Gholoub Singh’s five Muslim Battalions and 10 Sikh Battalions; General Avitabile’s (an Italian officer) Brigade; and General Mehtab Singh’s Brigade. Low (1873), p. 266

84 Leech, Lieutenant R. (Bombay Engineers), Map: ‘Reconnoitering Survey of the Khyber Pass from Jumrood to Dhaka’, 1837

85 The Sikh advance did not experience the same level of resistance from the Afghan tribesmen as experienced by Pollock’s column. In a series of actions the Sikh force lost approximately 100 killed or wounded. Low (1873), pp. 266–267, and Fortescue (1927), pp. 265–266

86 McCaskill’s report on 6 April 1842 emphasises that ‘the complete success of the attacks made by the force in advance, rendered unnecessary any active operations on my part’ and most significantly ‘no part
force had overcome an Afghan opposition of approximately 10,000, of which as many as 300 were killed and 800 wounded, for the loss of which 14 killed and 104 wounded. Pollock reflected that he had ‘feelings of much satisfaction’ with the results of his deliberate planning and methodical execution.

On 6 April Pollock confirmed the final rear security arrangements with Singh based on their previous agreement that the Sikh troops would garrison Ali Masjid to maintain the rearward lines of communication to Peshawar until 5 June. Pollock intended to leave the Jezailchees in Ali Masjid and when the 6th NI and HM 31st arrived on their delayed advance to Jalalabad, the 6th NI was to remain to provide garrison reinforcements alongside the Sikh troops. On 7 April Pollock recommenced his advance towards and by nightfall had reached Lala Beg. Given the narrowness of the defile the column became overly extended, with the extensive baggage train not departing Ali Masjid Fort until 1300hr on 8 April. Given the paucity of Afghan resistance, Pollock’s main concern was the progress of McCaskill’s large baggage train. By 8 April Pollock had reached Landi Khana and then pushed on to Loya Daka. In the vicinity of Loya Daka, at the township of La’l Purah, the leading elements of Pollock’s column were lightly opposed by local tribesmen. Pollock arrived in at his camp near La’l Purah on 10 April, with McCaskill’s logistic train a day to the rear. The British camp continued to be harassed by Afghan tribesmen operating of the baggage having been plundered, nor any loss sustained’. McCaskill to Ponsonby, 6 Apr 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 245, p. 205
97 A total 14 killed, 104 wounded and 17 missing. HM 9th bore the brunt of these casualties leading the clearance of the flanking high ground accounting for a third of the total losses, 8 killed and 33 wounded. Pollock to Maddock, 16 Apr 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 242, pp. 201–203; and, Low (1873), pp. 264–265
98 Pollock to Maddock, 16 Apr 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 242, pp. 201–203
99 Following the departure of Pollock to Jalalabad, Singh entered an agreement with the Afridi tribesmen to maintain the rearward communications through the Khyber Pass and quit Ali Majid in early-May 1842. Low (1873), pp. 267–268
100 Pollock to Maddock, 8 and 9 Apr 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 250, p. 210
101 The modern village of Lala Beg and Landi Khana are located respectively in the villages from the historical record described as ‘Ghuree Lala Beg’ and ‘Lundikhana’. Fortescue (1927), p. 266
102 Fortescue (1927), p. 266
103 The modern village of Loya Daka is located in the vicinity of the village of ‘Dhaka’ described in the historical record. Pollock to Maddock, 8 and 9 Apr 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 250, p. 210
104 The modern village of La’l Purah is located in the vicinity of in the village of ‘Lalpoora’ from the historical record. The hostile tribesmen were loyal to Saadut Khan, the brother and opponent of Toorabaz Khan of La’l Purah who had remained loyal to the British.
from the La’l Purah, so a force commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Taylor was launched to suppress any further hostility.  

It was in La’l Purah that Pollock received advice from Captain Macgregor that Shah Shuja had been murdered on 5 April, that Futteh Jung had been crowned, and of Sale’s victory over Akbar Khan on 7 April. Confident (and probably a little perplexed) that the dire existential threat posed by the siege of Jalalabad had been lifted by the garrison’s own efforts, Pollock proceeded at a less urgent pace more suited to his large convoy of relief stores and provisions for the Jalalabad garrison. On 13 April the advance resumed in earnest across the more open terrain to the west of the Khyber Pass. Experiencing no opposition, by 15 April the column reached Ali Boghan where some of Sale’s officers rode out to greet the advancing column.

Famously, on 16 April 1842 Pollock reached Sale’s garrison in Jalalabad. Many of the accounts of Pollock’s arrival at Jalalabad tell of the Band of HM 13th welcoming Pollock’s column, rather cheekily, with an old Jacobite tune *Oh! but ye’ve been long o’coming*. There was excitement as Pollock’s column marched into Jalalabad with his large supply of relief provisions. Writing formally to Maddock on 16 April, Pollock reported ‘I have the honour to report my arrival here this day, and I have been gratified at finding the garrison in so very healthy a state’, and commended the performance of his troops ‘for their zeal, devotion, and unflinching valour, in performance of the very arduous duty which they have so nobly executed’. However, writing more candidly to a friend, Pollock’s immediate assessment raised further questions of how dire Sale’s

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95 LTCOL Taylor’s force was composed of two squadrons of 3rd Light Dragoons, two companies of HM 9th, 10 companies of [regiment not stated] NI, and two guns. On 11 Apr 1842 his diversionary rouse was made to secure a river-crossing site approximately 10 kilometres from the British camp as an alternate route into La’l Purah. These diversionary actions and strength of the force at the fording site forced Saadut Khan and his supporting tribesmen to withdraw and allowed the sympathetic Toorabaz Khan, who had accompanied Pollock’s advance, to be restored as the principal authority in La’l Purah. MAJ Smith (McCaskill’s Acting Deputy Assistant Adjutant) account transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 268–277
96 Shah Shuja was murdered on 5 April 1842 on the orders of his godson, Shuja ool Dowla (son of Newab Zemaun Khan) at Seeah-Sung. Futteh Jung, the second son of the Shah was then proclaimed King. Low (1873), pp. 305–306
97 Marshman (1860), p. 123
98 Ali Boghan is described as 11 kilometres east of Jalalabad. There is no longer a village of this name in this region of Afghanistan. By transposing the 1904 data, the location of Ali Boghan approximates to the modern village of Samar Khel [GS 4403]. Surveyor General of India Map, 1904, ‘North-Western Trans-Frontier’, [IOR Map Collection: X/9935/2/428/1904]; and MAJ Smith account transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 270–277
99 Marshman (1860), p. 123
100 Pollock to Maddock, 16 Apr 1842, *Parliamentary Papers* (1843), Paper No. 242, pp. 201–203, and partially quoted in Low (1873), p. 262
position had really been given that Sale’s troops were actually in a better condition than his own: 101

We found the fort strong, the garrison healthy, and, except for wine and beer, better off than we were. They were, of course, delighted to see us. We gave three cheers as we passed the colours, and the band of each regiment played as it came up. It was a sight worth seeing. All appeared happy. 102

As previously discussed, given the state of the Jalalabad Garrison described by Pollock, there remains the issue of whether Sale was actually ever really besieged in Jalalabad necessitating the rushed advance of Pollock’s relief column. Sale’s eventual aggressive offensive action on 7 April 1842 (albeit prompted by false Afghan reporting) readily dispersed Akbar Khan’s forces within a single day. Low is quite aggressive in defending Pollock, lest it diminished Pollock’s remarkable achievements in reaching Jalalabad. Low quotes from Captain (later Major-General) Augustus Abbot of the Bengal Artillery who commanded the artillery battery at Jalalabad ‘Pollock did relieve Jellalabad. We could not even have retired without suffering great loss’. 103 Quoting from Sale’s official report to Government dated 16 April, Low argues that Sale’s own description demonstrates that he was relieved by Pollock, ‘the relief of this place [Jalalabad] having been effected by the victorious advance through the passes of the Khyber of the army under Major-General Pollock’. 104 However Low’s logic, that by Sale simply stating he was ‘relieved’ proved that Jalalabad was in state of siege, is flawed. Indeed, given Sale’s history of protestations back to India, Sale could hardly have said otherwise. The conclusive evidence is provided by Sale’s success in defeating Akbar Khan so comprehensively on 7 April 1842 without any external support. It is this action that answers the fundamental question as to the threat faced by Sale and his own capacity to deal with it. A critical Fortescue concludes, ‘the whole action is plain proof that if Sale had really deserved his name of a fighting soldier he need never have been beleaguered in Jalalabad at all’. 105

Regardless of these retrospective examinations of the actual necessity to relieve Jalalabad, it is important to acknowledge that Pollock had successfully accomplished a monumental military undertaking despite being forced to launch his advance

101 Fortescue (1927), p. 266
102 Pollock to friend [not detailed], undated, transcribed in Low (1873), p. 277
103 Captain Abbott’s letter (his emphasis), undated, transcribed in Low (1873), p. 279
104 Sale to Maddock, 16 Apr 1842, partially transcribed in Low (1873), p. 279
105 Fortescue (1927), p. 264
prematurely. The acclaimed Afghan ethnographer and historian Dupree declares that ‘the army of Major General George Pollock forced the Khyber Pass for the first time in history’. Pollock’s manoeuvrist tactics in successfully forcing a transit through the dreaded Khyber Pass in April 1842 by force of arms alone have now entered popular military folklore as the only redeeming action by the British Army during the First Anglo-Afghan War. The reason these actions by Pollock have gained such prominence is because the juxtaposition of Pollock’s successful advance of the ‘Army of Retribution’ against the lamentable generalship of Elphinstone’s disastrous retreat only three months earlier. Pollock had quickly asserted the notion that British military discipline and superior tactics could prevail against Afghan resistance. This comforting reaffirmation of British military superiority, so soon after Elphinstone’s tactical ineptitude, began the process of salvaging some sense of British martial authority.

However, this much eulogised tactic by Pollock as the instigator of the successful ‘crowning the heights’ is not the revolutionary tactical adaptation that it has come to be held up as. Pollock’s tactics bear a remarkable similarity to Nott’s (previously quoted) unsolicited advice for successfully advancing to Kandahar from Quetta. Nott advised England that the Khojak Pass could be negotiated ‘provided the heights are properly crowned on either side. I [Nott] have crossed it three times’. With Nott’s earliest crossing of the Khojak Pass in October 1839, Pollock clearly was not the originator of these tactics as popularly acclaimed, he simply enhanced and codified the innovative tactic developed by Nott’s forces in southern Afghanistan – another casualty of the historical record’s fixation on northern Afghanistan. Regardless of the provenance of the revolutionary tactic of ‘crowning the heights’, it originated and was refined by the commanders of the ‘Army of Retribution’ during the First Anglo-Afghan War.

Most importantly, Pollock’s tactical mastery resulted in a significant strategic implication for Britain. The successful penetration of the Khyber Pass had positioned a potent military force in Jalalabad that, alongside Nott in Kandahar, now provided Ellenborough with a wider range of options to formulate Britain’s strategic response in salvaging the First Anglo-Afghan War.

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106 Dupree adds ‘earlier armies had paid tribute or skirted the pass through the Kabul River Valley’. Dupree (1997), p. 395
107 Nott to England, 18 April 1842, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 18
In contrast, one of the main constraints on Ellenborough’s strategic latitude in ending the First Anglo-Afghan War was the British prisoners still in captivity in Afghanistan. Upon his arrival in Jalalabad, Pollock had assumed both the military and political command in northern Afghanistan. On 22 April, Pollock was informed of the surrender of Lieutenant-Colonel Palmer’s garrison at Ghazni on 18 March and the treachery of the Afghan victors in the subsequent massacre and taking of British prisoners. The British prisoners from Ghazni had been moved to join the prisoners from the ill-fated Kabul Garrison. The Afghans moved these prisoners constantly and with Pollock’s arrival Akbar Khan dispatched Captain Colin Mackenzie (1806–1881) to Jalalabad to negotiate the terms of the prisoners’ release. Mackenzie arrived in Jalalabad on 25 April and confirmed that Major-General Elphinstone had died on 23 April at Tezin ‘worn out with sickness, fatigue, and anxiety’. It was with Mackenzie’s arrival in Jalalabad that the full litany of events endured by the Kabul Garrison, particularly the murder of William Macnaghten and the events of the November – December 1841 insurrection, first became widely known. Mackenzie also passed on a message from Akbar Khan, translated and signed by fellow prisoner Major Eldred Pottinger on 20 April 1842.

Akbar Khan’s letter made a number of demands that sought the withdrawal of the majority of British troops, with only a small residual garrison to work with an Afghan elected leader, as well as the release of his father Dost Mohammad. Secondly, Akbar Khan proposed that if there was to be a continuation of the war, the prisoners should still be exchanged. Thirdly, if neither option was agreed, Akbar Khan inquired about the scale of the British demands to ensure clemency towards himself and other Ghilzai chiefs to surrender, in terms of imprisonment and/or reparations. Pottinger’s letter concluded with a valuable insight into events in Kabul with his commentary on the instability and uncertainty seizing the Afghan leadership. Pottinger observed that the Afghan ‘leaders appear panic struck’ and that events were causing Akbar Khan ‘to

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109 Sale was assigned a brigade command and Maegregor was appointed as an aide-de-camp on Pollock’s staff. Low (1873), p. 282
110 Low (1873), pp. 306–307
111 Akbar Khan returned Elphinstone’s remains, and on 1 May 1842, Elphinstone was buried alongside Colonel Dennie in the Fort of Jalalabad. MAJ Smith, undated, quoted in Low (1873), p. 307. In addition Mackenzie delivered a great quality of information and correspondence including Lieutenant Vincent Eyre’s journal, later published as The Military Operations at Cabul which ended in the Retreat and Destruction of the British Army, January 1842
112 Pottinger to Pollock, 20 Apr 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 305, pp. 254–255
change his resolution’ daily. Pollock relayed an update of these critical events in Kabul, and outlined his proposed negotiating strategy for the release of the British prisoners to Maddock on 26 April. On the same day Pollock penned his response to Akbar Khan:

Kindness and good treatment of our prisoners will meet with due consideration at the hands of Government, and the release of them much more so; their release would also greatly facilitate further communication between the Governments. If money be a consideration, I am prepared to pay into the hands of any one deputed by the Sirdar Mahomed Akbar Khan the sum of two lacs [200,000] of rupees whenever the prisoners shall be delivered to me in this Camp.

Mackenzie departed Jalalabad on 28 April with Pollock’s response for the negotiated release of British prisoners. Akbar Khan, displeased with Pollock’s offer, commissioned Pottinger to write a second letter for his counter-offer. It is clear from demands, and given the uncertainty in Kabul posed by the British threat, that Akbar Khan has a singular focus on self-preservation and personal aggrandisement:

Sirdar Mahomed Akbar Khan was disappointed with the offer made to him, and particularly the not receiving any reply to his own overture … Mahomed Akbar Khan has written a letter as a memorandum, which Captain Mackenzie will lay before you; the Sirdar has not signed it, as he fears it may be used against him in case of your not closing with his terms … His requests are: 1stly, that a written promise of amnesty be given to himself, Mahomed Shah Khan, and the latter’s family for all past acts up to the date of delivery. 2ndly, that neither he or any of the above-mentioned family shall be sent out of Cabool and Jellalabad districts, against their wishes. 3rdly, that they may not be obliged to pay their respects to you in our camp, till they be assured against any danger. 4thly, if we intend to revenge ourselves on the enemy, and then leave the country, he trusts the Government will be conferred upon him. 5thly, he wants a Jaghire [?] to support his family, and names two lacs as adequate. 6thly, he wants eight lacs [800,000] of rupees as a present to start him with. His great fear (as it is of all Afghans) is of being removed from this country. He also asks for his own women who are in his father’s haram serai.

In this response Pottinger took the opportunity of updating Pollock on the latest political machinations in Kabul, and enclosed an untranslated letter from Akbar Khan to Pollock. Mackenzie again returned to Jalalabad on 8 May with Pottinger’s letter and passed on the hand-written note from Akbar Khan (without any identifying seal in case of compromise to his fellow Afghans). Reflecting the fractious events in Kabul, Akbar

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113 Pottinger to Pollock, 20 Apr 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 305, pp. 254–255
114 Pollock to Maddock, 26 Apr 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 304, p. 254
115 Pollock to Pottinger (for Akbar Khan), 26 Apr 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 306, p. 255
116 Pottinger (from Akbar Khan) to Pollock, 3 May 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 320, pp. 281–282
117 The Barakzai powerbrokers, led by Nawab Zeman Khan, had succeeded in overthrowing their Popalzai rivals, led by Nayb Amanollah. Akbar Khan had claimed the crown, and Nawab Zeman Khan had been appointed as his Vizier. Pottinger (from Akbar Khan) to Pollock, 3 May 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 320, pp. 281–282; and Akbar Khan to Pollock, received 8 May 1842, NAM 6405-62-17-2; and partially transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 309–310
Khan’s plea is again pure self-interest. Akbar Khan’s claims of friendship with the British are breathtaking, and his claim of refusing Kingship betray the turmoil and uncertainty in Kabul generated by the Pollock’s re-intervention into Jalalabad:

At present, my friends and allies have possessed themselves of the government of Cabool, and all of them send daily to me three or four men with oaths and protestations, requesting me to come and be their king … and I, from the friendship I bear you, do not consent to be the king of Cabool, since to do so must involve the necessity of being your enemy. I prefer your friendship to the throne (of Cabool), because if I was to go to Cabool now, the men of Cabool would push me forward, and then it would be difficult to release my guests [prisoners], and to be on friendly terms with you. On this account I have written to show my friendship for your Government. Please God, my services shall exceed the injuries I have done you, on condition that we are friends.118

On 10 May Pollock updated Maddock with a copy of both letters and a copy of his reply to Pottinger. Pollock confided in Maddock, ‘I naturally feel some difficulty in replying to such documents, placed as I am in a novel situation, and without instructions to guide me. I have endeavoured to be guided in my reply, and to concede nothing that might hereafter embarrass the Government. I shall feel anxious to know if my reply meets the approval of the Governor-General’.119

On the same day Pollock responded to Akbar Khan (via Major Pottinger). Despite a dedicated response to each of Akbar Khan’s specific issues, there was little change to his first letter with a singular focus on the release of the British prisoners:

I regret that Sirdar Mahomed Akbar Khan should have been disappointed at my last reply, because I fully understood that I replied to his overture when I made the offer for the prisoners, and which I intended should be the basis of any negotiations that might afterwards be entered into … The circumstances of receiving a Persian memorandum without seal or signature does not evince that confidence and good faith which ought to be shown where a good understanding between parties is desired …

With regard to the first [demand], it follows as a matter of course, that whenever we agree to any terms, amnesty for the past will result. The second request about residing at Cabool and Jellalabad is out of place now … with reference to the third request, the Sirdar Mahomed Akbar may be assured that I will guarantee his personal safety whenever he may visit my camp … the fourth request refers to matters entirely depending on future results … With regard to the fifth and sixth

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118 Akbar Khan to Pollock, received 8 May 1842, NAM 6405-62-17-2; and partially transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 309–310
119 Pollock to Maddock, 10 May 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 321, pp. 282–283. Later Maddock confirmed Pollock’s latitude to negotiate “under the 13th paragraph of the instructions issued to you on 24th of February (of which you were in possession on 26th of April), you were authorised to speak of “the release of Dost Mahomed Khan” … the instructions contained in my letter of the 25th ultimo [April] will have placed you at liberty to negotiate for a general exchange of prisoners … you remain authorised, by the instructions of the 24th of February to give money, on the public account, for the release of individual prisoners’. Maddock to Pollock, 21 May 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 327, pp. 286–287
requests, I have already told you that I suppose the Sirdar rests his claim to any present on his delivering up the prisoners.  

Mackenzie again travelled from Jalalabad, with Pollock’s second unchanged response of 10 May. This letter effectively ended any negotiated settlement for the release of the British prisoners between Pollock and Akbar Khan.  

Halting at Benares on 21 April 1842, Ellenborough received the reports of Sale’s ‘crowning mercy’ victory at Jalalabad on 7 April and relayed the information to London. However, after learning of Brigadier England’s failure at Haikalzai on 28 March, he appeared to lose confidence. With a perceptible change in tone from the assertiveness of his 15 March 1842 letter, Ellenborough’s formal notification to abandon Afghanistan to the Secret Committee on 22 April is more measured:  

These several events, although they improve our prospects to some extent, have in no respect altered my deliberate opinion, that it is expedient to withdraw the troops under Major-General Pollock, and those under Major-General Nott, at the earliest practicable period … That opinion is found upon a general view of our military, political, and financial situation, and is not liable to be lightly changed.  

Kaye considered that England’s ‘miscarriage’ at Haikalzai ‘had not only driven all the forward feeling out of Lord Ellenborough, but had blunted his logical acumen and deadened all his feelings of compassion [towards the British prisoners]’. These observations are reinforced by Low who concluded that in addition to Sale’s 7 April victory and Pollock’s successful relief of Jalalabad on 16 April, it was the capitulation of Lieutenant-Colonel Palmer’s garrison at Ghazni on 18 March as well as Brigadier England’s failure at Haikalzai that had eroded Ellenborough’s earlier confidence and resolve. Stocqueler writes of Ellenborough at this time, ‘the evacuation of Afghanistan was with him a fixed idea; neither entreaty nor remonstrance seemed to

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120 Pollock to Akbar Khan (via Pottinger), 10 May 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 323, pp. 284–285  
121 Low (1873), p. 310; and Yap (1980), p. 433  
122 Pollock retained a correspondence with Fath Jang who led the Saddozai group in Kabul following the murder of his father in March 1842. Pollock adopted a practical approach to maintain communications with all powerbrokers in Afghanistan. Ellenborough rejected these arguments that Britain had moral and legal obligations towards the surviving members of the Saddozai family and mandated a policy ‘to withhold the recognition of the British Government from any competitor to the throne of Afghanistan’. Maddock to Pollock, 28 Apr 1842 (1), Public Records Office (PRO) 30-12-95; and Yapp (1980), p. 433  
123 Notification by the Governor-General, 21 April 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 248, pp. 206-207; Governor-General to the Secret Committee, 22 April 1842, No.4, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 258, p. 223; and Fortescue (1927), pp. 267–268  
124 Ellenborough to the Secret Committee, 22 April 1842, No.4, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 258, p. 223; and partially transcribed in Low (1873), p. 290  
125 Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 196  
126 Low (1873), pp. 287–288
exercise the least influence upon his determination’. 127 Less elaborately, it was at this point according to Fortescue that Ellenborough decided to ‘cut his losses’ and recall the army back to the Indus River. 128

Also by April George Clerk had expanded his persuasive ‘Sikh Buffer’ thesis from January 1842 into a comprehensive plan that allowed Britain to retain influence for the security equilibrium along the north-western approaches to British-India without being directly committed. Clerk proposed to enhance British frontier security through strengthening Lahore by placing Jalalabad under Sikh control. Conversely he proposed weakening Afghanistan by dividing Kabul and Ghazni – to be retained by the Barakzai Dost Mohammad – from Kandahar, to ruled by Shah Shuja’s eldest son the Saddozai Prince Timur. Ellenborough was strongly attracted to Clerk’s proposal for a ‘Sikh Buffer’ on two counts: it would contain an antagonistic Barakzai state, and gaining Jalalabad would over-extend Lahore militarily which, in turn, would increase the Sikh vulnerability to British coercion. 129

From within Afghanistan, it was also in April that Pollock started to inform Ellenborough of his difficulties in Afghanistan, being unable to retire because of the lack of transportation, and that his withdrawal would jeopardise the security of Nott’s Kandahar Garrison. In Kandahar, Nott was still impatiently awaiting reinforcement by England who was reassembling his forces at Quetta following his aborted advance in March. Privately, Nott vented his exasperation to Pollock at the loss of momentum for an advance on Kabul. Still working off Ellenborough’s 15 March 1842 guidance, Nott was frustrated that the continued delays meant that a withdrawal from Afghanistan was the only viable option remaining. Pollock was left in no doubt about Nott’s strategic preference to advance on Kabul:

I believe I shall go mad … I ought to have been on my way to Ghuzni to extend my hand to you [Pollock], instead of which I am obliged to make a [rearward] movement on the Kojuck … As far as cattle are concerned we are nearly helpless. God knows why such a delay has occurred in sending me money and stores. This is dreadful. 130

With his growing concerns at the continuing deterioration of the battlefield fortunes and an attractive strategic alternative of the ‘Sikh Buffer’ in securing north-

127 Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 55
128 Fortescue (1927), p. 267
129 Yapp (1980), p. 437
130 Nott to Pollock (his emphasis), undated [Apr] 1842, quoted in Stocqueler (1843), Vol. 2, p. 33
west British-India, Ellenborough increasingly doubted his earlier preference for a possible re-intervention into Afghanistan. In his most significant strategic change, he now vacillated from the assertiveness of his 15 March edict hinting at re-intervention. In a return to Auckland’s conservative 28 February 1842 directive, Ellenborough ordered the abandonment of Afghanistan. On 19 April 1842, in the first of many instructions of that day, he issued new and definitive guidance to Nott for the evacuation of the Qalat Garrison, to hand over the authority in Kandahar to the discredited Prince Timur, and to withdraw his forces from Kandahar to Quetta:

I [Maddock] am directed by the Governor-General to instruct you to take immediate measures for drawing off the garrison of Kelat-i-Ghilzye [Qalat] … You will evacuate the city of Candahar, giving that too into the charge of Prince Timour … You will then proceed to take up a position at Quetta, until the season may enable you to retire upon Sukkur. The object of the above-directed measures is, to withdraw all our forces to Sukkur at the earliest period at which the season and other circumstances may permit you to take up a now position there. The manner of effecting this, now necessary, object is however left to your discretion.\(^{131}\)

In addition to his instruction to Nott, on that same day Ellenborough issued another three new instructions to the Commander-in-Chief Nicolls of his decision to abandon Afghanistan. The first letter to Nicolls on 19 April (copied to Nott) detailed Ellenborough’s direction for Southern Afghanistan. This letter betrays the deep and destabilising impression that Palmer’s surrender at Ghazni and England’s defeat at Haikalzai had made on Ellenborough’s strategic reasoning:

The fall of the citadel of Ghuznee had removed the principal object for which it was expedient to retain the force under Major-General Nott, in its advanced position at Candahar … The severe check experienced by Brigadier England's small corps on the 28th ultimo [March], — an event disastrous as it was unexpected … to cripple the before limited means of movement and of action which were possessed by Major-General Nott, as to render it expedient to take immediate measures for the ultimate safety of that officer's corps, by withdrawing it, at the earliest practicable period, from its advanced position, into nearer communication with India.\(^{132}\)

Ellenborough then wrote his second letter to Nicolls (copied to Pollock) assessing the situation in northern Afghanistan and directing Pollock to withdraw from Jalalabad, with the only discretion being the timing of the withdrawal due to the oncoming summer:

The retention of the combined force in the vicinity of Jellalabad, during the hot months, may be more conducive to the health of the troops than a retrograde march through the Khyber Pass, and might have some material influence upon any negotiation which might be instituted for an exchange of prisoners. On the other hand, it is obvious that the position of Major-General

\(^{131}\) Maddock to Nott, 19 Apr 1842, PRO 30-12-95

\(^{132}\) Ellenborough to Nicolls (1), 19 Apr 1842, (copied to Nott) Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 260, p. 224
Pollock's force at one end of a long and difficult pass, with an enemy in its front, and an ally [Sikhs], not to be entirely depended upon, in its rear, is not one in which, having regard to military considerations alone, a general would readily place himself … The only question, therefore, will be, in which position will Major-General Pollock's force remain during the hot months with most security to itself, and with the least pressure upon the health of the troops, its ultimate retirement within the Indus being a point determined upon, because the reasons for our first crossing the Indus have ceased to exist.\textsuperscript{133}

Despite Ellenborough's two previous letters to Nicolls (copied directly to his subordinate commanders) directing the British withdrawal from Afghanistan, it is the third letter that hinted at the possibility of future military action against Afghanistan. Addressed only to Nicolls, Ellenborough seeks his counsel on the considerations, ‘if new aggressive movements upon Affghanistan should be deemed necessary’ once the withdrawn garrisons in Afghanistan had ‘been redeemed from the state of peril’. Unbeknownst to Pollock and Nott, Ellenborough still harboured the possibility that once all the garrisons had been safely withdrawn, a punitive advance back into Afghanistan could be ‘justifiable again to push them [Afghans] for no other object than that of revenging our losses, and of re-establishing, in all its brilliancy, our military character’.\textsuperscript{134}

With the delays in the physical transmission of correspondence, before the receipt of Ellenborough’s latest 19 April instructions, Pollock wrote to Maddock on 20 April. Still working to the earlier 15 March 1842 guidance, it is clear that Pollock was actively examining options for ‘the re-occupation of Cabool’.\textsuperscript{135}

To establish depots or strong posts at intervals on the road between this [Jalalabad] and Cabool, would so reduce the numerical strength of this force, that by the time it reached the capital it would be too weak to effect the desired object … I have maturely considered the question of our advance by this road to Cabool, and I confess that I see too many difficulties to warrant our risking such a course. The force I have the honor to command, if well supplied, is ready to march anywhere, and if I could have advanced by the route of Candahar, our success would be certain. But to withdraw from this place at the present moment, would enable the enemy to concentrate all their strength in the vicinity of Candahar, which, until the junction of Brigadier England, would embarrass Major-General Nott.\textsuperscript{136}

The immediate tactical dilemma for any potential British military action was centered upon the provisioning of supplies to support the chosen course from Jalalabad, either advance or withdrawal, and the consequential effect of these actions upon Nott’s

\textsuperscript{133} Ellenborough to Nicolls (2), 19 Apr 1842 (copied to Pollock), \textit{Parliamentary Papers} (1843), Paper No. 261, pp. 224–225, and partially transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 289–290
\textsuperscript{134} Ellenborough to Nicolls (3), 19 Apr 1842, \textit{Parliamentary Papers} (1843), Paper No. 262, pp. 225–226; and partially transcribed in Low (1873), p. 290
\textsuperscript{136} Pollock to Maddock, 20 Apr 1842, NAM 6405-62-17-3
security in Kandahar. To simply guarantee the rearward lines of communication from Kabul, Pollock estimated that it would require all of his force to be staged in depots, leaving little military force for the actual re-seizure of Kabul – so he could not readily advance. Alternatively, if Pollock were to withdraw from Jalalabad, the currently divided Afghan forces would be able to concentrate and overwhelm an unreinforced Nott in Kandahar – so Pollock could not retire. Pollock then hinted at the potential effectiveness of a combined force with Nott with his seemingly belated point that if he had initially advanced via Kandahar, and therefore joined forces with Nott, then British success would have been guaranteed.

In this increasingly fluid strategic situation the new Governor-General, as anticipated by Auckland, had now fully interjected himself into the military command chain with his autocratic manner. Ellenborough was dispatching his directives directly to the battlefield commanders in Afghanistan, effectively bypassing the authority of the Commander-in-Chief Nicolls. Ellenborough’s manner of cutting across the military chain of command was further complicated due to the geographical dislocation between commanders – all reliant on the physical transmission of written instructions. Ellenborough in Benares/Allahabad (north-east India) was over a 1000 kilometres distant from Nicolls in Simla (north-western India). And Nicolls forward in Simla, was still over 700 kilometers from Pollock in Jalalabad, and over 1000 kilometres to Nott in Kandahar.

With this evolving strategic direction, Nicolls wrote to Ellenborough on 27 April in an attempt to align the British response to Afghanistan. Nicolls confirmed to Ellenborough that he considered the previous 15 March 1842 directive that was copied directly to Pollock to be the extant strategic intent. Nicolls added that he had not further amplified Ellenborough’s direction to Pollock:

I have not ventured to give any instructions to Major-General Pollock. The 5th, 9th, 10th, and 11th paragraphs of your orders of the 15th March must now guide him. It is for him alone to decide between the practicability of a forward movement, either upon Cabool or Gundamuck (or its vicinity), and the withdrawal of the whole force to Peshawur.137

Having reluctantly decided that the 15 March 1842 edict was the authoritative Government guidance on Afghanistan, Nicolls then reversed his posture when he

137 Nicolls to Ellenborough, 27 April 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 284, p. 240, and partially transcribed in Low (1873), p. 291
received Ellenborough’s letter of 19 April. Nicolls reconciled these changes in strategic direction and consolidated his response to Ellenborough on 29 April. In it Nicolls betrays his long-held strategic preference for the abandonment of Afghanistan, and eagerly agrees with the withdrawal of British forces from Jalalabad. He also informs Ellenborough that (unlike his subdued response to the 15 March 1842 guidance) he had amplified the Governor-General’s directions to his subordinate commanders and that he encloses a copy of these orders:

I have to report to your Lordship that I have this day directed Major-General Pollock to withdraw the troops from Jellalabad … Inclosed [sic] I have the honor to transmit a copy of this letter to the Major-General [Pollock], as it may be of importance to assist your Lordship in conveying your further orders, regarding the return of the troops to the provinces. I trust that the early return of the Jellalabad brigade, which I have directed, may be approved; and that I may not be considered to have erred in giving some latitude, in certain specified cases, to the Major-General. My opinion is, that the whole force should be withdrawn to our own frontier, if the season will admit. 138

Nicolls then wrote to Pollock, also on 29 April, to expand on Ellenborough’s direction to withdraw from Jalalabad. This dispatch was subsequently leaked and became widely known in India (the negative impact of public opinion is discussed later). 139 However at this time for the intended audience, Nicolls reviewed the current situation and acted to strengthen Ellenborough’s direction to Pollock. Nicolls specifies that the only conditions that he would accept any further delay of the withdrawal were issues related to prisoner release or if Pollock was attacked:

Shah Shooja being dead, Ghuznee lost, and Major-General Nott directed by his Lordship’s command (also of the 19th instant [April]), to withdraw the garrison of Kelat-i-Ghilzye, to evacuate Candahar, and to retire, first upon Quetta, and when the season admits, upon Sukkur; you are required to make a similar movement in Upper Affghanistan, and to withdraw every British soldier from Jellalabad to Peshawur … The only circumstances which can authorize delay in obeying this order are,—

1st. That you may have brought a negotiation for the release of the prisoners – to such a point that you might risk its happy accomplishment by withdrawing.
2nd. That you may have detached a lightly equipped force to endeavour to rescue them.
3rd. That the enemy at Cabool may be moving a force to attack you. In this improbable case, should any respectable number of troops have descended into the plain below Jugdulluck with that intent, it would be most advisable to inflict such a blow upon them. 140

On 28 April Maddock wrote directly to Major Outram, the Political Agent of Sind and Baluchistan based in Sukkur. This correspondence provides telling insights as it reaffirmed Ellenborough’s strategic decision to withdraw from southern Afghanistan,

138 Nicolls to Ellenborough, 29 April 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 286, p. 242
139 Low (1873), p. 301
140 Nicolls to Pollock, 29 April 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 287, pp. 242-243, and transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 295–296
and it exemplified Ellenborough’s autocratic style of directly issuing military orders to subordinate functionaries, effectively bypassing any coordination with the Commander-in-Chief. As Fortescue noted, ‘yet more strange was the presumption of Ellenborough in thus scattering military orders broadcast without first consulting his military adviser, the Commander-in-Chief’.\textsuperscript{141} Outram is ordered to support Nott’s withdrawal from Kandahar Garrison:

The Governor-General adheres to the intention of withdrawing, at the earliest practicable period, the British forces now in Lower Afghanistan … you will, at the first convenient period … proceed to Quetta … to give the greatest aid in facilitating the movements of Brigadier England and the Major-General [Nott].\textsuperscript{142}

Despite the clear instructions to Pollock on 19 April for the withdrawal of British forces from Jalalabad, which had been reinforced by the Commander-in-Chief on 29 April, Ellenborough remained concerned about the possibility of Pollock still attempting an advance on Kabul (as per his previous 15 March direction).\textsuperscript{143} To be sure, and to reconfirm the revised strategic intent to withdraw, again on 28 April Maddock wrote directly to Pollock stating, ‘the Governor-General will adhere to the opinion, that the only safe course is, that of withdrawing the army under your command, at the earliest practicable period’ with the caveat to ‘have especial regard to the preservation of the health of the troops’.\textsuperscript{144} This is an interesting letter, as it hinted for the first time at Ellenborough being suspicious of Pollock’s motives, and his concerns about any unilateral decision by Pollock to re-invade Afghanistan.

Given the obfuscation and continual delays generated by Pollock and Nott over the coming months, this was a well-founded suspicion on Ellenborough’s part. Somewhat disingenuously Low writes, ‘we can offer no explanation of the reason that induced his Lordship to entertain the idea that Pollock might have advanced upon the capital of Afghanistan’.\textsuperscript{145} Even Kaye claims to be at a loss to explain why Ellenborough ‘should have entertained a belief even of the possibility of Pollock advancing upon Cabul’, speculating that Ellenborough had an ‘erroneous estimate of the military aspirations of General Pollock’.\textsuperscript{146} However, there is an explanation. Ellenborough’s suspicions of Pollock’s motives were well founded. Even at this early

\textsuperscript{141} Fortescue (1927), p. 269
\textsuperscript{142} Maddock to Outram, 28 April 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 273, p. 235
\textsuperscript{143} Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 198
\textsuperscript{144} Maddock to Pollock, 28 April 1842 (2), PRO 30-12-98
\textsuperscript{145} Low (1873), p. 292
\textsuperscript{146} Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 198
stage, Ellenborough’s political instincts led him to know his Generals better than the biographers have given him credit for – and so it proved.

During the period February to April 1842 the enormity of the strategic challenges confronting Ellenborough became fully realised. Whilst earlier in London, prior to the assumption of his duties as Governor-General, Ellenborough rejected the previous Whig Government’s forward policy and embraced the policy of eventually withdrawing from Afghanistan and restoring the British-Indian boundary on the Sutlej River. It was only upon his arrival in British-India that Ellenborough came to properly comprehend the extent of the damage to British prestige by the destruction of the Kabul Garrison. Of specific concern was that the loss of martial prestige directly affected the ability of the British Army to underwrite the internal stability of British-India. In response, Ellenborough issued an assertive order to counter Auckland’s earlier defeatist directive of 24 February 1842 for the withdrawal from Afghanistan. Persuaded to re-establish the geo-strategic ‘Sikh Buffer’ and with his desire to recover Britain’s prestige, on 15 March 1842 Ellenborough issued orders for the re-intervention into Afghanistan. He ordered the recovery of the garrisons and prisoners, and to inflict sufficient destruction on the Afghans to retire from Afghanistan on wholly British terms. With the notable exception of the Commander-in-Chief Nicolls, this direction resonated very strongly with the professional assessments of both Pollock and Nott, and they busied themselves to implement these orders.

Within Afghanistan, Britain’s battlefield fortunes continued to vary. Most notably Pollock, despite being pressured by Sale into launching prematurely, had advanced to successfully relieve Jalalabad over the period 31 March and 16 April. Taking command of a demoralised Division in Peshawar, Pollock prepared for and then conducted the first successful forcing of the Khyber Pass by enhancing Nott’s innovative tactic of ‘crowning the heights’. In addition, after their long siege Sale’s ‘illustrious garrison’ in Jalalabad eventually prevailed in their ‘crowning mercy’ victory on 7 April. However, despite Nott’s unbroken military dominance in Southern Afghanistan, England’s relief force from Quetta was defeated on 28 March at Haikalzai, and Palmer’s Ghazni Garrison capitulated on 18 March.

These two British battlefield reversals shook Ellenborough’s earlier confidence. In addition, both Pollock and Nott reported significant transportation issues and the ‘Sikh
Buffer’ was an increasingly attractive strategy to maintain the defence of north-west British-India without requiring troops in Afghanistan. Ellenborough’s increasing uncertainty caused his earlier resolve for an aggressive re-intervention to dissipate. In a return to Auckland’s defeatism, on 19 April Ellenborough ordered the abandonment of Afghanistan. This was reinforced by Nicolls, who had consistently supported abandonment, and he issued an amplifying order to Pollock and Nott on 29 April with additional conditions for their immediate withdrawal.

Having inherited an enormous crisis in February 1842, by the end of April a number of significant trends were emerging that would come to have a great bearing on Ellenborough’s final strategic decision. Ellenborough’s autocratic manner continued to frustrate and marginalise Nicolls. The tendency to directly task commanders added confusion to the exercise of military authority, and acted to neutralise the Commander-in-Chief’s policy preference for the abandonment of Afghanistan. More importantly, Ellenborough’s keen political instincts led him to suspect the willingness of Pollock and Nott to comply with his orders to abandon Afghanistan. Although not yet in receipt of the latest 19 April directive, it was becoming increasingly clear that Pollock and Nott privately rejected any notion of passively abandoning Afghanistan. The ambiguity of the military command authority and the delays in the physical transmission of instructions created a small margin of latitude for the battlefield commanders in Afghanistan. Pollock and Nott would need to fully exploit this latitude to manipulate the circumstances if they were to ensure their desire for an aggressive re-intervention into Afghanistan to salvage Britain’s impending strategic defeat in the First Anglo-Afghan War.
Chapter 4

Ellenborough’s Strategic Deliberations: May – July 1842

It would be tedious to detail the vacillations, the obscurities, and the tortuosities of Lord Ellenborough’s successive communications to his two Generals in Afghanistan.¹ During the period from February to April 1842, Britain’s dire military vulnerability in Afghanistan had begun to slowly improve despite a number of setbacks. The recovery of the martial reputation of the British Army and the prestige of the British Empire were paramount for the shorter-term response to Afghanistan and Britain’s longer-term positioning in Central Asia, and the strategic imperatives of securing the north-western frontier and the internal security of British-India remained. The strategic options available to Ellenborough in Afghanistan had increased with Pollock’s potent military force now in Jalalabad and Nott’s undefeated Kandahar Garrison. With the slow accretion of Britain’s battlefield successes in Afghanistan, ironically Ellenborough’s earlier confidence for an aggressive re-intervention had dissolved. By April 1842 Ellenborough had issued orders for the abandonment of Afghanistan. The detailed examination of Ellenborough’s deliberations through his exchange of correspondence during the critical decision-making period between May and July 1842 provides new insights into the extent of Pollock’s and Nott’s persuasive advocacy. Through a tortured period of vacillation, Pollock and Nott were eventually able to reassure and persuade Ellenborough to authorise the launch of the ‘Army of Retribution’ back into Afghanistan and begin the process of reversing an impending strategic defeat.

Now positioned forward in Jalalabad, our key correspondent, Pollock, was constrained into inaction. His forces could not readily advance or retire as they lacked the transportation and his staff was busy procuring the necessary camels and bullocks. Over 5 and 6 May, the second reinforcing brigade arrived in Jalalabad and consolidated the garrison strength to approximately 15,000 troops, supported by an estimated 50,000 camp followers.² With the arrival of the 4th Brigade commanded by Colonel Monteith,

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¹ Forbes (1892), p. 144
² Pollock’s force in the Jalalabad Garrison:

**Cavalry Brigade:** H.M. 3rd Dragoons; 1st, 5th (Fortescue - not cited by Greenwood) and 10th Bengal Light Cavalry (Low only cites two regiments of native Cavalry); 3rd [Tait’s?] Irregular Horse (Low cites irregular horse numbers as ‘about four hundred’); and, 2nd Regiment Shah Shuja’s Horse.
the force in Jalalabad was assessed as now ‘fully sufficient for the conquest of eastern Afghanistan’. The latest arrivals began settling into the deteriorating accommodation conditions awaiting the strategic decision to advance to Kabul or withdraw to Peshawar. With the approaching summer, the Jalalabad Garrison began suffering increases in disease and dysentery:

As the season advanced, the heat became intense; so much so that it was impossible to live in our tents on the surface. We were obliged to dig caves under ground to shelter ourselves … The camels and baggage animals were dying in numbers daily, and the stench of their dead bodies and of the filth of the immense camp was insupportable [sic]. Millions of flies were bred in the masses of corruption that lay on every side … Sickness began to rage among the men, who bitterly complained that they were brought there to die like cowards in that pest house, instead of being at once led against the enemy. Why this delay took place I could never make out: but, as we were subordinates, we had only to obey orders, and that without asking questions.

By early May 1842, Pollock had received Maddock’s letter dated 28 April reiterating the revised Afghan policy ordering the ‘withdrawing [of] the army under your command, at the earliest practicable period’. Pollock had also received the reinforcing orders from his Commander-in-Chief, dated 29 April ‘to withdraw every British soldier from Jellalabad to Peshawur’, with the only proviso permitting any delay being any compromise in the negotiations for the rescue of the prisoners. Despite Pollock not yet having received his copy of Ellenborough’s second 19 April letter to Nicolls, the Governor-General’s intention to abandon Afghanistan had been well and truly understood.
Pollock responded to these letters from Nicolls and Maddock on 13 May in a remarkable piece of correspondence that vindicated Ellenborough’s earlier concerns regarding Pollock’s motives. The letter was omitted from the published volume of official correspondence in the *Papers relating to Military Operations in Afghanistan*, presented to both Houses of Parliament in 1843 suggesting it had generated much consternation. More importantly for our purposes, by selectively using the guidance received, Pollock arrayed a number of arguments in order to delay in Jalalabad and press for further consideration of an advance on Kabul. Pollock used the Governor-General’s supreme authority and cited Ellenborough’s concern as expressed in his 28 April letter about the welfare of Pollock’s troops. Pollock then used this caveat from the Governor-General to supersede his Commander-in-Chief’s direction of 29 April to withdraw without delay. By manufacturing these as apparent contradictions, Pollock chose to interpret the difference between the two directives as permission to remain in Jalalabad, as he claimed the health of his soldiers in order to delay his withdrawal.

Pollock then conflated a series of broadly related issues that together supported his claim to further delay the withdrawal of his Jalalabad Garrison. His reasoning covered tactical to the strategic considerations: the difficulties of acquiring transportation; Britain’s reputational standing as a global power; compromising the negotiations for the release of the British prisoners; Peshawar being no more favourable to the health of his troops than Jalalabad; and that no Afghan force posed a credible threat to his position in Jalalabad. Given the prevailing strategic direction from both the Governor-General and the Commander-in-Chief, the presumption taken in Pollock’s response to his higher chain of command is as admirable as it is astonishing:

I have now the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter, dated 28th ultimo [April], which adverts to the present aspect of affairs in Afghanistan, and the probability of my having advanced towards Cabul; stating also, that in such an event, the views of the Governor-General as to the withdrawal of the troops will not be altered; and further, that whatever measures I may adopt I must have especial regard to the health of the troops. *I trust that I am not wrong in considering this*


The existence of this letter is only gleaned from an inference from a later letter (Pollock, 20 May 1842 see below) and the subsequent enquiry in Parliament initiated by Lords Lansdowne and Palmerston. The Parliamentary enquiry finally elicited a copy of Pollock’s 13 May 1842 letter from Indian records which was acknowledged as received by the office of the Governor General on 11 July 1842. Palmerston and Peel, 17 Feb 1843, *Hansard*, House of Commons Debates, 3rd series, Vol. 66, cc. 768–769; and Wellington, 17 Feb 1843, *Hansard*, House of Lords Debates, 3rd series, Vol. 66, cc. 763–765. It is unclear whether the original letter was read by Ellenborough before this duplicate arrived or not. Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, pp. 200–201, and Low (1873), pp. 303–304

Maddock to Pollock, 28 April 1842, *Parliamentary Papers* (1843), Paper No. 272, p. 235
letter as leaving to me discretionary powers, and, coming as it does from the supreme power in India, I venture to delay, for some days, acting up to the instructions communicated in his Excellency the Commander-in-Chief’s letter, dated 29th ult [April].

I regret much that a want of carriage-cattle has detained me here; if it had not been so, I should now be several marches in advance, and I am quite certain that such a move would have been highly beneficial. Affairs at Caubul are, at the present moment, in a very unsettled state … With regards to our withdrawal at the present moment, I fear that it would have the very worst effect – it would be construed into a defeat, and our character as a powerful nation would be entirely lost in this part of the world.

It is true that the garrison of Jellalabad has been saved, which it would not have been, had a force not been sent to its relief. But the relief of that garrison is only one object; there still remain others which we cannot disregard – I allude to the release of the prisoners … If, while these communications were in progress, I were to retire, it would be supposed that a panic had seized us. I therefore think that our remaining in this vicinity (or perhaps a few marches in advance) is essential to uphold the character of the British nation; and in like manner General Nott might hold his post; at all events till a more favourable season.

I have no reason, yet, to complain that the troops are more unhealthy than they were at Agra. If I am to march to Peshawur, the climate is certainly not preferable; and here I can in one or two marches find a better climate, and I should be able to dictate better terms than I could at Peshawur.

I cannot imagine any force being sent from Caubul which I could not successfully oppose. 10

Pollock then continued to reinforce a theme from his earlier correspondence to Maddock from 20 April where he had stated that he had ‘maturely considered the question of our advance by this road to Cabool’. 11 Pollock had calculated that any actions required for an advance on Kabul would require Nott in Kandahar to act in support and concluded with a disingenuous acceptance to ‘move either forward or backward, as I may be directed’. Significantly Pollock then sets an end-date for any deliberations for future options, based on the ability to withdraw to India before the Khyber and Bolan Passes became impassable by winter snow – November 1842. The closing sentence subtly introduced a final aspect that Pollock knew would entail further reasons to delay, the political negotiations for handing over Jalalabad to Sikh control as part of Clerk’s wider ‘Sikh Buffer’ proposal. This response provides a powerful insight into Pollock’s thinking in mid-May 1842 – being eager to advance, build up his forces and exercise to the full the marginal discretionary power that he had been granted. 12 In complete contravention to the intent of his orders from both the Governor-General and his Commander-in-Chief, Pollock then continued by detailing his deliberations for an advance on Kabul!

11 Pollock to Maddock, 20 Apr 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 302, p. 253
12 Low (1873), pp. 304–305
But the advance on Caubul would require that General Nott should act in concert and advance also … I shall endeavour to procure carriage-cattle as fast as I can, to move either forward or backward, as I may be directed; or, if left to my discretion, as I may think judicious. Under any circumstance, I should not advocate the delay of the troops at either Candahar or on this side beyond the month of November; and in this arrangement advertence must be had to the safety of the Khybur, which I consider the Sikhs would gladly hold if they were allowed to take possession of Jellalabad.\textsuperscript{13}

Pollock’s continued delay in withdrawing was frustrating the Governor-General. Whilst Pollock’s 13 May letter was being relayed to Ellenborough, a letter from Maddock was sent to Pollock dated 4 May. Maddock’s letter updated the latest 19 April instructions, to press Pollock again to withdraw from Jalalabad with no more delay. The letter acknowledged the difficulties in obtaining transportation and maintaining the health of the troops, but asserted that these factors ‘should not have induced you to defer that movement’. Maddock concludes by restating that ‘the first object of the Governor-General's anxiety has ever been to withdraw, with honor, into positions of security’.\textsuperscript{14} Further, on 5 May Ellenborough received a copy of Nicolls’ 29 April direction to Pollock. To reinforce that Ellenborough’s intent was completely aligned with the Commander-in-Chief’s direction, Maddock wrote to Pollock again on 6 May. Maddock affirms that Nicolls’ orders are ‘instructions the Governor-General entirely approves. They are in accordance with the general principles laid down by his Lordship for your guidance, and you will execute them to the best of your ability’.\textsuperscript{15} After Maddock dispatched these letters to Pollock, also on 6 May Ellenborough wrote to Nicolls. By affirming full support for Nicolls’ guidance to Pollock, this dispatch completed the alignment between Ellenborough’s political direction and Nicolls’ military direction to Pollock:

I have to thank your Excellency [Nicolls] for having had the goodness to give those instructions, of which I [Ellenborough] entirely approve. They are in accordance with the general principles

\textsuperscript{13} A significant aspect of this letter, given its importance in the ongoing strategic deliberations, was that it was never formally included in the official volume of correspondence in the *Papers Relating to Military Operations in Affghanistan*, presented to both Houses of Parliament in 1843. The existence of this letter is only gleaned from an inference from a later letter (by Pollock on 20 May 1842 discussed later) and the subsequent enquiry in Parliament initiated by Lords Lansdowne and Palmerston. The Parliamentary enquiry finally elicited a copy of Pollock’s 13 May 1842 letter from Indian records which was had been acknowledged as received by the office of the Governor-General on 11 July 1842. Pollock to Maddock, 13 May 1842, fully transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 301–304; and Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, pp. 198–201. Extracts are also contained in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 57, and NAM 6405-62-17-2

\textsuperscript{14} Maddock to Pollock, 4 May 1842 (1), IOR European Manuscripts (Mss Eur) F439/ 8; and, PRO 30-12-98

\textsuperscript{15} Maddock to Pollock, 6 May 1842, PRO 30-12-98
which, in my letter of 19th ultimo [April], were laid down for the Major-General’s [Pollock] guidance.\(^{16}\)

On 14 May Ellenborough wrote a highly confidential document to Nicolls that conveyed his lack of strategic certainty. Developing the more aggressive intent hinted at in his third letter of 19 April addressed only to Nicolls, Ellenborough had been convinced to quietly accept the practical necessity of delaying the withdrawal of Pollock and Nott before the end of 1842.\(^{17}\) He also harboured desires that Pollock ‘vindicate the army by some signal blow against the Afghans’ and recover the prisoners. Ellenborough detailed his proposed mechanism for the withdrawal from Afghanistan and stressed secrecy with his intent not to embolden any Afghan pursuit of withdrawing British forces. He concludes by outlining his deception plan of raising an ‘Army of Reserve’ with a dual purpose of convincing an Afghan audience of being readied for an invasion, and for a domestic message of British military power aimed at potential dissenting factions within British-India:

> I have hitherto succeeded in preserving absolute secrecy with respect to the intention I entertain as to withdrawing from Afghanistan. I have done so by unusual means, but I deem it to be essential the public interests that entire secrecy upon that point should be observed. I feel that the difficulties with which the two armies would have to contend in making their retreat, would be greatly increased were the Afghans now acquainted with their intention to retire; and, in order to mislead them on this point, even were there no other object, I should be disposed to form an army of reserve in a position from which it might advance to the support of either Major-General Pollock, or Major-General Nott, and, at the same time, overawe the states of India; and to make public at once the intention of collecting such an army.\(^{18}\)

Also during May 1842, Ellenborough continued to vacillate on his longer-term regional strategy. In pursuit of the ‘Sikh Buffer’ option he instructed Clerk to negotiate the transfer of Jalalabad to the Sikh authority in Lahore.\(^{19}\) However, these negotiations stalled, so the ownership of Jalalabad was not pressed. Lahore wanted assurances about future British intentions in Afghanistan, as they were concerned about over-extending themselves if the British intended to withdraw permanently from Afghanistan (which

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18 Ellenborough to Nicolls, 14 May 1842, *Parliamentary Papers* (1843), Paper No. 300, p. 252; and transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 319–320. Low incorrectly attributes the date of this letter to 4 May 1842 – this is incorrect because in this dispatch Ellenborough’s also encloses correspondence dated 13 May 1842. Maddock to Nott, 13 May 1842, PRO 30-12-95
19 The new Treaty was to replace the 1838 Tripartite Treaty (following its invalidation by the murder of Shah Shuja). Clerk’s instructions were to reaffirm the provisions of the Tripartite Treaty as they related to Sind and the Punjab, whilst ensuring that Lahore did not recognise any anti-British Afghan ruler or was granted too much control over Afghanistan and Sind. Yapp (1980), pp. 437–438
had actually been part of the British design). Consequently, Ellenborough had increasing doubts about the divided Afghan strategy, and started to entertain the possibilities of a united Afghanistan under Fath Jang’s pro-British leadership.\textsuperscript{20}

Whilst Pollock had been able to delay and obfuscate with his political masters, it was another matter entirely to disobey an explicit order from his military commander. Making Pollock’s strategic manoeuvring increasingly difficult was Maddock’s letter of 6 May which explicitly reinforced Nicolls’ letter with the imprimatur of the Governor-General. Despite still not being in receipt of Ellenborough’s 19 April letter, on 20 May Pollock responded to Maddock’s letters of 4 and 6 May.\textsuperscript{21} Reducing the earlier boldness of his 13 May letter, Pollock still sought official sanction to delay his withdrawal to October or November 1842 based around the lack of water and transportation for the withdrawing force, with Nott likewise requested to delay. Pollock again made reference to the importance of handing over Jalalabad to Sikh forces to cover his withdrawal to Peshawar:

\begin{quote}
I have already in my letter, dated the 13th instant [May], entered on the subject, and must receive a reply before I shall be able to move … In order to meet the wishes of Government by retiring, the first object would be to secure the Khyber Pass with our own troops … [and] send several hundred camels laden to Peshawur … I shall therefore be glad if any letter from Government may authorise my remaining till October or November, in which case General Nott should also be directed to remain.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

By late May any implication of a delay in the withdrawal from Afghanistan was generating great consternation and frustration with the British-Indian leadership in Allahabad. In exasperated tones Maddock wrote to Pollock on 29 May after monitoring routine correspondence between Pollock and Clerk dated 18 May. In this letter Clerk raised the issue of a potential delay to Pollock’s withdrawal due to the ongoing negotiations for prisoner release. Clerk innocently observed that, ‘I do not believe that, with the negotiations [for prisoners] pending in your front, you will withdraw’.\textsuperscript{23} Indicative of Maddock’s hypersensitivity, when reading the correspondence he became alarmed that Pollock was attempting to widen his latitude to conduct prisoner negotiations in an effort to delay his withdrawal. To reinforce that no such latitude had

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{20} Yapp (1980), p. 438
\item\textsuperscript{21} Pollock also refers to two other important dispatches ‘the dispatch of the 19th ultimo [April] I have not yet received … [and] my letter, dated the 13th instant [May]’. Pollock to Maddock, 20 May 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), pp. 322–323
\item\textsuperscript{22} Pollock to Maddock, 20 May 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 347, p. 296, and partially quoted in Low (1873), p. 312 and pp. 322–323
\item\textsuperscript{23} Clerk to Pollock, 18 May 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 343, p. 294
\end{footnotes}
been granted, Maddock wrote to Pollock ‘nothing has come to His Lordship’s [Ellenborough’s] knowledge which could lead to the conclusion that any negotiations with Mahomed Akbar Khan ever had been in the state which alone could have justified delay in withdrawing’. Maddock’s shrill pedantry made sure that, in addition to conveying the atmospherics in Allahbad, Pollock fully understood that his actions were being watched suspiciously and very closely.

Whilst Maddock’s rebuke was in transit, Pollock then pressed home his argument to both Nicolls and Ellenborough. On 24 May Pollock outlined his plan and concerns about the impending withdrawal of the Jalalabad Garrison in response to Nicolls’ direction of 29 April. Apart from again detailing the difficulties of procuring transport animals, Pollock introduced a new line of argument against withdrawal by discussing at length the detrimental impact of widespread knowledge of the British intent to withdraw from Afghanistan. Specifically Pollock lodged a complaint against one of Nicolls’ own staff who had written privately to one of Pollock’s officers in Jalalabad informing him of the sensitive and high-level strategic considerations for the British withdrawal (referring to the confidential correspondence from Ellenborough to Nicolls dated 14 May 1842). Low recounted that on 23 May when Pollock was on parade, an (unnamed) officer rode up and congratulated Pollock, asking him ‘whether he had heard of the withdrawal being decided upon’. Pollock was stunned that such sensitive information was now widely known in the Jalalabad Garrison. Pollock’s greatest concern was that once the British intent to withdraw became known by the local Afghan population, the locals would no longer continue with their supply arrangements with the British, and the physical security of the Khyber Pass to facilitate a safe withdrawal would become even more problematic.

24 Ensuring Pollock is aware that Ellenborough is closely reading his correspondence, Maddock writes “the Governor General has observed that in a letter addressed to you by Mr Clerk on the 18th Instant [May], that gentleman remarks that “he does not believe that, with negotiations pending in your front, you will withdraw”. Maddock reconfirms for Pollock that the only permitted prisoner negotiations are ones ‘almost brought to accomplishment at the time of your receiving the Commander in Chief’s (29 April 1842) letter, not to negotiations which might then be pending’. Maddock to Pollock, 29 May 1842 (1), IOR Mss Eur F439/8; and, PRO 30-12-98
25 Low (1873), p. 320
26 I [Pollock] heard yesterday evening that an officer on your [Nicolls] staff had written to an officer here [in Jalalabad] that we were ordered back. Sir Robert Sale has endeavoured to counteract the bad effect such a report might create. A few days ago I was on the point of ordering a brigade to occupy the Pass, and then requested of Sir Robert Sale, and others, to whom I was obliged to communicate the true state of the case, to give out that we required treasure from Peshawur, and were sending in superfluous baggage. But the letter which has been received, and coming from the quarter it does, has evidently made an
On 25 May Pollock then wrote to Maddock and reiterated the key themes from his previous correspondence of 13 and 20 May. He provided great detail reflecting his tactical appraisal of withdrawing through the Kyber Pass during summer, and for the security of his lines of communication to Peshawar ostensibly to cover the withdrawal (but equally to assist any advance). In the event that these conditions were perceived by Ellenborough as too dire and necessitating an immediate withdrawal, Pollock reassured that he has plentiful supplies and enjoyed relative security around Jalalabad. To ensure that withdrawal was not further contemplated, Pollock reminded Maddock of the unrecovered British prisoners and concluded with a flourish that any contemplation of a withdrawal as ‘pregnant with great distress’.  

The necessity of crowning the heights the whole way cannot be questioned, for plunder will at all times attract numbers; and, from my own experience, I know how trying it was to the troops (even in the beginning of April) on the heights although every precaution was taken to supply them with water. Now the difficulty would be much greater, and I could not expect to supply water during the whole time we should be making each march, and without it the men could not ascend steep and precipitous mountains. I therefore strongly urge the necessity of remaining in this vicinity till the season becomes more favourable. With regard to our situation here, or a march or two in advance, we need have no fear of want in provisions … The whole country around is perfectly quiet, and as long as we remain in advance, in force, the passage of the Khyber may be considered quite safe … With regard to the climate, it is hot, but I do not think it more so than in the provinces, and I consider it far superior to Peshawur, and I can at any time improve it by moving forward; but I must confess, I cannot but look upon a retrograde movement, at present, as pregnant with great distress to the whole force, and very probably loss of life. 

Low is scathing of Ellenborough’s timidity in abandoning Afghanistan, accusing him of abandoning the ‘cardinal military axiom’ of Ellenborough’s own 15 March words that ‘in war, reputation is strength’. Incredibly, when recounting the receipt of Maddock’s explicit instructions combining the authority of both the Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief, Low reveals that Pollock’s immediate reaction was to write directly to Nott ‘requesting him on no account to retire, as directed by his superiors, until he should hear again from him, Pollock’. Remembering that both Pollock and Nott were directly under command of the Commander-in-Chief, and that there was no impression; and I only hope it may not extend to the native population, which would, indeed, be ruinous … The moment such a thing is known, it is probable supplies will cease to come in; we should be in difficulty about forage; all who are now friendly would be ready to oppose us; and, if I had not time to secure the Pass, the consequences might be serious indeed’. Pollock to Nicolls, 24 May 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 361, pp. 303–304; and fully transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 320–321

Pollock to Maddock, 25 May 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 362, p. 304

Pollock to Maddock, 25 May 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 362, p. 304

Low (1873), p. 294

Pollock states ‘I am sorry that I have no copy of my letter or his [Nott’s] reply’. This is most probably Pollock’s letter dated 15 May 1842 received by Nott on 29 May 1842 (discussed later). Pollock to Low (Low’s emphasis), undated, quoted in Low (1873), p. 297; and Nott to Pollock, 30 May 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 377, pp. 313–314
direct command relationship between Pollock and Nott (at this stage), Pollock’s instructions to Nott had no formal military authority. Given the significance of Pollock’s direct (and technically unlawful) actions countermanding Nicolls’ orders, Low engaged in correspondence with the then Field-Marshal Pollock seeking an elaboration on these profoundly insubordinate actions.\(^{31}\) In response to Low’s direct enquiry, the following is a fascinating admission from Pollock and insight into his thinking during May 1842 (Pollock’s emphasis):

I think you are quite right when you assert my letter to Nott was perhaps one of the most important documents of all my Afghan correspondence. I am sorry to say I have not even a memo of the letter.

I felt at the time that to retire would be our ruin – the whole country would have risen to endeavour to destroy us. I therefore determined on remaining at Jellalabad until an opportunity offered for our advance, if practicable. I knew Nott had been ordered to retire, and I knew that if he did go, his opponent would pay me a visit, accompanied by the army which eventually did oppose me. We had some tough work with that army, but if the army opposed to Nott had joined them, the odds against us would have been very great. I had quite enough to do with those who did oppose me at Jugdulluck and Tezeen. Stopping Nott for a few days, after his receipt of orders to retire, was perhaps a very bold step, but I looked upon it as the only safe course to pursue, and it succeeded. If it had not succeeded, I knew that I might lose my commission, but I felt pretty certain that if we worked together in earnest, the game would be ours … I feel certain, that if I had not stopped him [Nott], our campaign would have ended much in the same way that occurred to the first party that returned from Cabul – one individual reached Jellalabad.\(^{32}\)

Regardless, by late May 1842 any remaining hope on Pollock’s part that he could conceivably delay his withdrawal further to conduct an eventual advance on Kabul was extinguished by his Commander-in-Chief. In a letter dated 28 May, via his Military Secretary Lieutenant-Colonel Luard, Nicolls conveyed his absolute resolve to implement the Governor-General’s intent. To make it perfectly clear to Pollock, Luard recounted Nicolls’ chain of orders and directions to date, specifically referring to Ellenborough’s direction of 19 April and Nicolls’ own order of 29 April. If Pollock entertained any lingering doubt about the intent of his superiors to abandon Afghanistan, the letter closes with details of the administrative and ceremonial arrangements for their return to India:

In answer to your remark that you hope the view you have taken of your situation will meet the approbation of the Commander-in-Chief, I am desired by his Excellency [Nicolls] to state that his order to you, dated 29th April, to withdraw the force under your command from Afghanistan, was sent under authority of the Governor-General of India (as therein stated, dated 19th April, 1842), and his Lordship [Ellenborough] has since approved of the spirit and wording of that order. His Excellency [Nicolls] cannot observe, from Mr. Secretary Maddock’s letter of 28th April, that any discretionary power was conveyed to you; on the contrary, you are therein told that, even had you

\(^{31}\) Field Marshal Sir George Pollock, Constable of the Tower, died on 6 October 1872.

\(^{32}\) Pollock to Low, undated, quoted in Low (1873), p. 297
advanced upon Cabool, his Lordship's [Ellenborough’s] view, previously taken, of the policy to be pursued, that is, "withdrawing at the earliest practicable period within the Khyber Pass," remained unaltered. Mr. Maddock's letter of the 4th and 6th instant [May] repeat this opinion.\(^{33}\)

By late April 1842 in southern Afghanistan, the garrison at Quetta had been reinforced and Brigadier England was now ready to reattempt his relief of Kandahar. England advanced from Quetta on 26 April with his full brigade.\(^{34}\) On 28 April, reversing his previously disastrous encounter, England secured Haikalzai with little difficulty and on 30 April the column entered the Khojak Pass.\(^{35}\) As promised in his letter of 18 April, Nott had dispatched a brigade from Kandahar, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel (later General Sir George) Wymer, to escort Brigadier England through the Kojak Pass.\(^{36}\) The two brigades joined and then as a combined force proceeded without any Afghan opposition to reach Kandahar on 10 May.\(^{37}\) Nott’s position in Kandahar had now improved markedly, in addition to 2500 troops from England’s brigade, the Kandahar Garrison now possessed the long-awaited medicines and the finances to purchase transport and supplies.\(^{38}\)

However Nott’s optimism was short lived. Ellenborough’s 19 April instruction to abandon Afghanistan eventually reached Nott on 16 May. Ellenborough’s orders ‘astonished and mortified’ Nott and his Political Agent, Major Rawlinson.\(^{39}\) Ellenborough’s orders to ‘evacuate the city of Candahar’ burst upon Nott ‘like a thunderclap’.\(^{40}\) Compounding the unexpected nature of the order from Ellenborough, Rawlinson detailed the principal concern that would now arise from a British withdrawal from southern Afghanistan with the potential reemergence of Persian (and possibly Russian) influence via Herat. Rendering the strategic environment similar to

\(33\) LTCOL Luard to Pollock, 28 May 1842, *Parliamentary Papers* (1843), Paper No. 333, pp. 288–289; and transcribed in Low (1873), p. 322

\(34\) England’s Brigade of 2500 troops was composed of two infantry battalions, two horse (cavalry) regiments, and a battery of horse-artillery. Fortescue (1927), p. 269

\(35\) Possibly unnerved (according to Fortescue), England ‘halted the column, dismounted, called for a chair and sat down’ to await the arrival of Nott’s force. Fortescue (1927), p. 269

\(36\) Wymer’s Brigade was composed of 2nd, 16th and 38th Bengal NI. Low details 38th NI (Fortescue incorrectly details 28th NI). Low (1873), p. 298 and Fortescue (1927), p. 269

\(37\) Fortescue (1927), p. 269

\(38\) Stocqueler, Vol. 2, p. 54, and Neill (1845), p. 172

\(39\) Low (1873), p. 298, and Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, pp. 203

\(40\) The best account of the reception of Ellenborough’s orders upon Nott come from Rawlinson in his account to the Political Agent in Quetta, Major Outram. Rawlinson to Outram, 18 May 1842, letter transcribed in Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, pp. 203–204, and Fortescue (1927), p. 269; and, Maddock to Nott, 19 Apr 1842, *Parliamentary Papers* (1843), Paper No. 259, p. 223–224; and partially transcribed in Low (1873), p. 288
that faced in 1838, ironically the British withdrawal could precipitate the same strategic
preconditions that had originally led to the British intervention:

I have hardly yet had time to reflect fully upon the effects, immediate and prospective, of our
abrupt departure. There is no man at present on whom I can cast my eyes in all Candahar as likely
to succeed to power ... Should the Barukzyes triumph at Caubul, and should we no longer oppose
the return of Kohundil, he will be the most likely chief to succeed; but the natural consequence of
his return ... will be of course to render Persian influence paramount at Herat and Candahar; and,
with the prospect of a Russian fleet at Astrabad and a Persian army at Merve, it is by no means
impossible that the designs which threatened us in 1838 may at last be directly accomplished.41

At this point, it is clear that Nott was not only surprised but also profoundly
disagreed with the Governor-General’s unequivocal direction of 19 April. Nott had even
less discretionary latitude than Pollock, as Rawlinson noted, ‘there is no discretionary
power, however, vested in General Nott by this late letter, he has only to consider the
best way of carrying this order into effect.42 Nott was now in the same professional bind
as Pollock in a potentially insubordinate juncture between his own belief in aggressive
military action and Ellenborough’s latest direction. Interestingly, Nott’s biographer
Stocqueler assiduously avoided directly confronting the issue. Stocqueler dissipates
Nott’s views as one of many dissenting views, particularly the (recently
disenfranchised) political officers for any seditious talk. Stocqueler quotes liberally
from the ‘masses of private correspondence’ sent to Nott at the time of which ‘fifty
similar extracts might be given’ where ‘the uniformity in tone, in regards to [opposing]
the intended retreat, was striking’.43 Effectively conveying contemporary perspectives,
Stocqueler quotes from correspondence between Sir Richard Shakespeare, Pollock’s
Military Secretary in Jalalabad, to Maddock, ‘I agree with you in thinking that a retreat
now would be ruinous. We may try to disguise the matter, but there is no concealing
from Asia that our leaving our hostages and our guns is disgraceful’.44 Again Stocqueler
quotes from Colonel Sutherland, British Resident at Ajmer, to Major Outram, the
Political Agent of Sind and Baluchistan:

If we do anything less than make a triumphant march through Afghanistan, in at one end and out
at the other, I shall be bitterly disappointed. I care not whether it is done by General Pollock’s or
General Nott’s forces, or by both. Nothing less than this will satisfy the people of Central Asia and
of India that we have the power and means of re-establishing our tarnished honour.45

41 Rawlinson to Outram, 18 May 1842, letter transcribed in Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, pp. 203–204
42 Rawlinson’s Journal quoted in Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, pp. 204
43 Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 55 and 57
44 Shakespeare to Maddock, undated, Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 56
45 Sutherland to Outram, undated, Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 56
In all these peripheral discussions about the correspondence received by Nott, there is no acknowledgement by Stocqueleur of the receipt of Pollock’s undated correspondence from May 1842 that instructed Nott to ‘on no account retire’.\(^{46}\)

On 17 May Nott provided his formal response to the 19 April edict from Ellenborough. Nott acknowledged Ellenborough’s directions, but described a number of difficulties arising from the compliance with the order for a general withdrawal. As with Pollock, the key limitations raised by Nott were the large amount of transportation that would be required to withdraw the Kandahar Garrison and the difficulties of withdrawing via Quetta in the coming summer months. Compounding these factors was Nott’s concern that once the British intention to withdraw became widely known, effectively upon the withdrawal of the Qalat Garrison, there would be a deterioration in the relations with the local Afghans. Specifically, Afghan logistic support would likely be withheld as the locals became increasingly hostile and impeded a safe and efficient British withdrawal.

In addition to these purely military considerations, the dilemma for Nott in contemplating a withdrawal from Kandahar was what to do with the problematic Saddozai Prince Timur, son of the murdered Shah Shuja. In his duties around Kandahar Prince Timur had proved an impediment to Nott’s firm and principled governance. Timur’s tenuous attachment to Britain arose ‘more from the absence of energy and decision of character than from any particular attachment to the Christian invaders of Afghanistan’.\(^{47}\) The Political Agent, Rawlinson, writing to the Governor-General from Kandahar on 22 April, provides a damning assessment of Prince Timur’s future potential, ‘I consider him, from his natural indolence, altogether unfitted to wield the Afghan sceptre, without our strong and sustained assistance’.\(^{48}\) In a challenge to

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\(^{46}\) Stocqueleur understood the adverse ramifications of insubordination upon Pollock’s reputation, even following Nott’s death (in Carmarthen, Wales on 1 January 1845) when publishing in 1854, and chose not to include this potentially insubordinate correspondence in his biography of Nott. Conversely, Low does reference the receipt of the letter by Nott stating that, ‘upon receiving General Pollock’s letter, Nott gladly agreed to remain where he was until he should again hear from him’. Clearly Low, albeit writing in 1873 after Pollock had been promoted to Field Marshal, had fewer qualms regarding the inclusion of Nott in Pollock’s web of insubordination. Low (1873), pp. 297–299

\(^{47}\) Stocqueleur (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 93–94

\(^{48}\) Rawlinson to Ellenborough, 22 Apr 1842, in Stocqueleur (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 99–102. Indeed so weak was Timur’s authority in the absence of British support, that during the earlier consideration of retiring the whole Kandahar garrison via Quetta, Timur had requested to withdraw with the British to Ludhiana and be retained in asylum under similar provisions as his late father, with a potential to be returned to the throne, appealing to Ellenborough, ‘if the British Government did not contemplate and permanency of occupation, I should trust that, after participating in the execution of retribution, and being thus
Ellenborough, Nott sought further guidance given his low expectations for the successful transition of authority in Kandahar to Prince Timur. And finally, following Nott’s successful campaign in southern Afghanistan, rather cynically and with bitterness, this letter pointedly concludes that given Ellenborough’s decision to withdraw, it would be ‘almost useless for me to acquaint you’ with the unbroken military successes in pacifying the Kandahar region:

These measures shall he carried into effect, and the directions of his Lordship accomplished in the best manner circumstances will admit of. I shall experience a great want of carriage; the force, at present, is large; the camp-followers numerous; stores, guns, &c, very considerable; and, when it is known that the British troops are about to retire from Afghanistan, which the evacuation of Kelat-i-Ghilzie [Qalat] - will render obvious, many difficulties will arise: from that moment we must not expect the least aid from the natives in the country, in providing supplies or carriage, or rendering assistance in any way whatever; on the contrary, we must expect to encounter every impediment ...

The climate of Quetta is so very unhealthy in July, August, and September, that I could have wished to have avoided exposing the troops to its dreadful effects during these months; but, on the withdrawal of the garrison from the fort of Kelat-i-Ghilzie, the period of my continuance at Candahar must depend upon the feelings perceptible in the country towards the British force.

I am of opinion that Prince Timoor is sincerely attached to the British Government, but I believe he has no influence in this country, and that he will be desirous of accompanying the English troops. I shall be most anxious to receive the orders of the Governor-General of India regarding him …

Under the circumstances noted in your letter, it is almost useless for me to acquaint you that I have in a great measure put down rebellion, and tranquillised the districts of Candahar; the people are cultivating their lands, and living in peace, with the exception of 500 or 600 men under Prince Suffer Jung.  

The only latitude Nott had been provided by Ellenborough was the stipulation ‘to withdraw all our forces to Sukkur at the earliest period at which the season and other circumstances may permit you to take up a new position there. The manner of effecting this, now necessary, object is however left to your discretion’. Judging by Nott’s response, any withdrawal of the Kandahar Garrison was not going to occur before September 1842 at the end of summer.

irretrievably committed with the Afghans, your Lordship would not propose to leave me in possession of the throne on the withdrawal of the British troops. Under such circumstances I should desire an asylum at Loodiana, and in that situation, after the Afghans had exhausted themselves by internal conflict, and had learnt the value of a consolidated monarchy, strengthened by the political support of British India, I should, as the heir to the Dooranee crown, and with the concurrence of the British Government, be available at any time to the national invitation’. Prince Timur to Ellenborough (translated by Rawlinson), 29 Apr 1842, in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 95–99

49 Nott to Maddock, 17 May 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 371, p. 309

50 Maddock to Nott, 19 Apr 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 259, p. 223–224
The first action Nott undertook in complying with his 19 April orders from Ellenborough was to ‘take immediate measures for drawing off the garrison of Kelat-i-Ghilzye [Qalat]’. Bolstered by England’s reinforcements, Nott prepared for the relief of Qalat, 130 kilometres north-east of Kandahar, being threatened by 5000 – 6000 hostile Ghilzai tribesmen. On 19 May Nott dispatched Lieutenant-Colonel Wymer with a force composed of four infantry regiments, cavalry and two batteries of artillery. Despite the dispatch of the relief force from Kandahar, the Qalat garrison, under the command of Captain John Craigie, was able to prevail without assistance.

Craigie had previously been dispatched from Kandahar in November 1841 with a force to secure a key transit node towards Kabul. Following the occupation of the Qalat Fort by 600 troops, from 9 December 1841 an estimated 1500 hostile Ghilzai tribesmen had gathered. The Ghilzais started harassing the Fort and garrison’s foraging parties, and turned the local tribesmen against the British. Through a severe winter the garrison had been provisioned for six months, however following Colonel Maclaren’s aborted relief of Ghazni in November 1841, his 300 troops had to be hurriedly accommodated and this placed additional stress on the provisions. With the arrival of the milder spring weather the Ghilzai tribesmen recommenced their campaign of harassment, and by 26 April 1842 the Qalat Fort was completely surrounded with Afghan trenches closing to within 250 metres. During the early morning darkness of 21 May, the fort was assaulted by masses of Afghan tribesmen. In a desperate exchange of rifle and artillery fire at close range with hand-to-hand combat, three concerted Afghan assaults on the parapets of the Fort were repulsed. Each assault consisted of a column of an estimated 2000 tribesmen with scaling ladders. The ferocity and boldness of the Afghan attacks completely surprised the garrison, leading Captain Craigie to conclude that the Afghan actions must have been ‘emboldened no doubt by their previous successes at Kabul and Ghuznie [Ghazni]’. At daybreak the assaults ceased, with the Afghans focussed on carrying away their dead and wounded. Craigie dispatched two

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51 Maddock to Nott, 19 Apr 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 259, p. 223–224
52 Nott in a Letter to his daughters dated 22 May 1842, quoted in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 42
53 LTCOL Wymer’s Force was composed of: 1st troop Bombay Horse Artillery; Captain Blood’s battery (four 9-pds); Detail 3rd Bombay Light Cavalry; Half Shah's 1st Cavalry; Detachment Captain Haldane's 1st Irregular Horse; HM40th Regiment; 2nd Regiment NI; 16th Regiment NI; 38th Regiment NI; Detail of Madras Sappers; Detail of Bengal Foot Artillery. Nott to Maddock, 21 May 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 373, p. 310–311; Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, pp. 205; and Fortescue (1927), p. 272
54 CAPT John Halkett Craigie’s Force at Qalat comprised Shah’s 3rd Infantry Regiment, 250 Sepoys of 43rd NI, 40 European artillery and Sappers. Low (1873), p. 298
companies from the Shah’s 3\textsuperscript{rd} Infantry Regiment from the Fort in pursuit of the withdrawing Afghans. By 1430hr the last tactical action had ceased and by nightfall the Afghans had withdrawn.\textsuperscript{55} In the post-battle assessment, Craigie estimated that his garrison of 900 had faced an attack numbering between 5500 and 7000 tribesmen, with an estimated 400 Afghans killed, for the loss of six wounded Sepoys.\textsuperscript{56} On 23 May the Qalat Garrison was notified that Wymer had been dispatched, and on 26 May Wymer’s column reached Qalat. The Qalat fortifications were destroyed and by 7 June 1842 all British forces had withdrawn successfully to Kandahar without incident.\textsuperscript{57}

As previously discussed, a concerted attempt to seize Kandahar by Afghan tribesmen had been successfully repulsed by Nott’s forces on the night of 10-11 March. Following the dispatch of Wymer on 19 May to relieve the Qalat Garrison, again Akhtar Khan seized the opportunity to take advantage of the split in British forces. From their position to the west of the Arghandab River, 8000 tribesmen advanced to seize the steep high ground 5 kilometres to the north-west of Kandahar, with an additional 2000 tribesmen guarding the Baba Vali Saheb Pass.\textsuperscript{58} On 29 May 1842 Nott moved against the ominously poised Afghan force with about 2000 troops and 12 guns, leaving the now Major-General England to provide the rearguard in Kandahar.\textsuperscript{59} The Afghan blocking position of about 2000 tribesmen was positioned astride the Baba Vali Saheb Pass. Nott’s force attacked this position and drove the Afghans off the high ground and pursued them ‘in gallant style, and drove them in confusion, and with great loss’ along the Arghandab River Valley.\textsuperscript{60} Nott wrote his account of this battle to Maddock that evening:

\begin{itemize}
\item[55] In recognition of the bravery, the Shah’s 3\textsuperscript{rd} Infantry was formally incorporated into the Indian Army by the title of the Regiment of Khelat-i-Ghilzie. Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2., pp. 43–45
\item[56] The six wounded Sepoys: two were from 43\textsuperscript{rd} NI, and four from 3\textsuperscript{rd} Infantry. Craigie, CAPT, quoted in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2., p. 44; and Craigie, CAPT, ‘The Defence of Khelat-i-Ghilzie’, in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2., p. 323
\item[57] Craigie, CAPT, ‘The Defence of Khelat-i-Ghilzie’, in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2., pp. 318–324; and Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2., pp. 43–45
\item[58] The modern Baba Vali Saheb Pass [GS 5205, Sheet 2180] is in the vicinity of the ‘Baba Wullee pass’ referred to by Nott. Nott to Maddock, 29 May 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 376, p. 312
\item[59] Nott’s force was composed of Horse Artillery (12 guns), HM 41\textsuperscript{st}, 42\textsuperscript{nd} Bengal NI, Detachment Light Battalion Bombay, Detachment 25\textsuperscript{th} Bombay NI, Detachment Poona Horse, Detachment Shah’s 1\textsuperscript{st} Cavalry. ‘Field Return of the Troops present in the Action of the 29th of May, 1842’, in Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 376, pp. 312–313
\item[60] Nott to Maddock, 29 May 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 376, p. 312; Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2., pp. 60–61; and Fortescue (1927), pp. 272–273. Nott’s action was on the same battlefield as MAJGEN Sir Fredrick Sleigh Roberts’ later success in the Battle of Kandahar on 1 September 1880 commanding the ‘Kabul-Kandahar Force’. A comprehensive account of Roberts’ battle is in Army
Aktar Khan, Chief of Zamindawur, having assembled three thousand men crossed the Helmund, and joined the rebel force under Prince Sutfur Jung and Atta Mahomed, on the right bank of the Urghundab, taking advantage of the absence of Brigadier Wymer, who had been detached into the Ghilzie province with a large portion of my force, and nearly the whole of my cavalry. The enemy, under an impression that we had not a sufficient number of men to hold the city, and at the same time to attack them in the field, took possession of some steep rocky hills within a mile of the city walls. I instantly moved out with the troops noted in the accompanying field return, leaving Major-General England, K. H., in command of the city. The Ghazees had about 8,000 in position, and 2,000 men guarding the Baba Wullee pass, and roads leading to their camp.

The following day Nott wrote the concluding account of the battle to Pollock:

I moved out with Anderson's guns, 1,000 infantry, and about 250 horse. Our troops carried the enemy's positions in gallant style; it was the finest thing I ever saw. These 8,000 Affghans, led on by Prince Sutfur Jung, and many chiefs, could not stand our 1,200 men for one hour; and yet the cry of the press is, that our Sepoys cannot cope with the Affghans. I would at any time lead 1,000 Bengal Sepoys against 5,000 Afghans.

Again, through aggressive and resolute tactical actions against significant odds, Nott maintained his undisputed dominance of the Kandahar region. Regardless, he was still adhering to the 19 April instructions to abandon southern Afghanistan. Having successfully withdrawn the Qalat Garrison and successfully fought an aggressive defensive action around Kandahar, an irritated Nott reluctantly prepared to withdraw the Kandahar Garrison. In response to Pollock’s letter of 15 May (received on 29 May), on 30 May Nott recounted recent events around Kandahar and hints that his preparations could still cover either an advance or a retirement from Kandahar:

I was, last evening, favoured with your note of the 15th instant [May – possibly Pollock’s ‘insubordinate’ letter]. Agreeably to the orders of the Supreme Government, under date the 19th April, I have withdrawn the garrison of Kelat-i-Ghilzie [Qalat]; the order left me no discretion; the same order applies, in the same positive manner, to Candahar; however, it will take some time to arrange, and, before I can possibly carry it into effect, there will be ample time for the Government, should they deem it advisable, to send me other orders. I shall be prepared to advance, or retire, agreeably to the pleasure of Government.

Nott was frustrated at the loss of valuable time in reasserting British reputation due to the strategic indecision, and in a recurring theme, his personal resentment caused by a lack of recognition for his efforts in Kandahar. Both these frustrations are captured in Nott’s letter to his daughters later in July:

Had not the Governor-General bound me hand and foot, I should now have been in Caubul, without asking for the aid of Pollock. The game was in our hands, and we would not take it. Pollock ought to have marched sharply on Caubul; had he done so, not a shot would have been
fired. Mark me, my children, had I been in his place, with that beautiful army, I would have struck such a blow that the whole world should have rung with it. I am ordered not to do anything. Well our nation is disgraced. How strange that Englishmen should be so paralyzed! … They have behaved most shamefully to me, in not publishing any of my dispatches, especially that of 12th of January [1842, ‘The Battle of Arghandab’], wherein I told them my noble regiments had defeated 20,000 men. Mark me, the army at Candahar has defeated the enemy in some sixteen actions, tranquillized the whole country, made every Atfghan bend the knee, never met with reverse, however outnumbered by the enemy – and no notice has been taken of it.65

There is a persistent resentment in Nott’s writings at the perceived lack of recognition for his continuing successes in southern Afghanistan. This perception is not borne out by closer analysis and points more to flaws in Nott’s character. Given Ellenborough’s propensity for self-promotion and the dire events in Afghanistan, the Political Agent in Sind and Baluchistan, Major Outram, rightly asserts that at that time, ‘I have little doubt that Lord Ellenborough would be too glad to grace his Gazettes by every military triumph he could lay his hands on’.66 Stocqueler agrees that ‘Outram was quite right in his conjecture’ that Nott’s dispatches were never published as they had never been delivered to Ellenborough, having been intercepted en route by Afghan ‘marauders’.67 Additionally, the Governor-General was not stinting in his praise on the occasions he did receive correspondence from Kandahar. On 25 June Maddock wrote to Nott ‘acknowledging the receipt of your several despatches of the 21st [Recovery of the Qalat Garrison] and 29th [Nott’s defence of Kandahar] of May [1842], and I am directed to express to you the Governor-General’s entire approval’.68 The conclusive evidence that not all of Nott’s dispatches were being received by Ellenborough or Nicolls (and hence a perceived lack of recognition) comes from Ellenborough’s letter to Nott dated 1 October 1842. Having acknowledged receipt of Nott’s account of the capture of Ghazni (in September 1842; discussed later), in the letter’s postscript Ellenborough informs Nott that ‘neither the Commander-in-Chief nor I have ever received your account of your victory of the 12th of January [1842, ‘The Battle of Arghandab’]. You should, as soon as you can, send duplicates of all your letters written after the [November 1841] insurrection’.69

65 Nott to Daughters (Nott’s emphasis), undated July 1842, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 65–66
67 Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 66. Stocqueler also notes that ‘the mass of his [Nott’s] communications at this time were either lost or carried off by marauders’, in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 1, pp. 405–406
68 Maddock to Nott, 25 Jun 1842, PRO 30-12-95; Nott to Maddock, 21 May 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 373, pp. 310–311; and Nott to Maddock, 29 May 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 376, pp. 312–313
69 Ellenborough to Nott, 1 Oct 1842, PRO 30-12-95
The stand-off continued between the Governor-General and the Garrisons of Jalalabad and Kandahar. Despite Nicolls’ unequivocal direction to Pollock on 28 May confirming the Governor-General’s strategic intent to withdraw, and Ellenborough’s 19 April direction to Nott to withdraw, both Pollock and Nott were careful to avoid any direct insubordination in prolonging their delay. In the hiatus caused by their obfuscation, both consolidated their forces and achieved a number of reassuring military successes in Afghanistan.

Concurrently, there was also a growing disapproval of Ellenborough’s withdrawal strategy among Anglo-Indian society and the domestic British public, who began to regard such an exit from Afghanistan as ‘inglorious’. This was matched by the widespread opprobrium that greeted Nicolls’ 29 April directive to Pollock, which had been leaked (by unknown sources) to the public. The widespread sentiment towards Nicolls ‘created a storm of indignation throughout India, both in the official and non-official public, as well as in the press, who were unanimous in their reprobation of the policy it enunciated’. Typical of the public condemnation is an observation captured in the *United Service Magazine*:

> We have every reason to suppose that the Order, which appeared as having emanated from the Adjutant-General’s Office, is genuine: it speaks of the army retiring beyond the Indus … it will add to the multiplied embarrassments … The Afghans must then come to one of the two conclusions, that we are either morally frightened or stark mad.

Towards the end of May 1842, there was a change in atmospherics for the Governor-General in Allahabad. Low assessed Ellenborough at this time, generously suggesting that his conservative strategy had been at odds with his naturally assertive demeanour, as ‘it went against his [Ellenborough’s] high spirit to order General Pollock in unmistakable terms to withdraw, and yet his judgment counseled the course’. With the mounting tactical successes and a greater sense of security for the Jalalabad and Kandahar Garrisons, there was a growing anticipation within Afghanistan that Ellenborough would reverse his 19 April decision for an immediate withdrawal. Reflecting the sensitivity by the forces in Afghanistan for any indication of a more aggressive posture, the earlier move by Ellenborough to Allahabad was perceived

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70 Low (1873), p. 326  
71 Low (1873), p. 301  
73 Low (1873), p. 322
hopefully as ‘an augury of a more active policy’. Stocqueler wrote of the prevailing mood in Afghanistan at this time, claiming that ‘new and ardent hopes were excited that Lord Ellenborough would direct an advance on Caubul or Ghuzni [Ghazni]. The Generals panted for the signal; every man in the camps was eager for the fray’. 74 There were others who believed that Ellenborough had always intended to make a ‘grand demonstration in Central Asia, to which his present measures were merely preparatory’. 75

Whilst these observations offer insights into the prevailing mood at the time, it was Pollock’s and Nott’s correspondence during May and their respective tactical successes that were decisive in reversing Ellenborough’s earlier edicts to withdraw ‘at the earliest practicable period’. 76 As intimated in his previous confidential correspondence to Nicolls in his third letter of 19 April and again on 14 May, Ellenborough had now been convinced by Pollock and Nott that it was inadvisable to withdraw before October, and was reassured that offensive action could be taken against the Afghans. Kaye attributed this change to the fact that the Governor-General had ‘somewhat shaken off the uneasy sensation which the disaster at Hykulzye seems to have engendered in his mind’. 77 Additionally, Ellenborough now felt less tactically exposed in Afghanistan, as both the Kandahar and Jalalabad Garrisons were fully reinforced and proved capable of withstanding any Afghan onslaught. Kaye directly praised Pollock for generating the requisite confidence that had emboldened Ellenborough, effectively crediting him for initiating the reversal in British policy:

Unwilling to return to the provinces without striking a signal blow at the Afghans, and doing something great to re-establish the military reputation of Great Britain in the countries beyond the Indus, Pollock grasped eagerly at the faintest indication of willingness on the part of the Governor-General to place discretionary power in his hands; and expressed his eagerness to traverse, with a victorious army, the scene of our recent humiliation. 78

74 Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 58
75 Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 59. MAJ Outram opines to his colleague LT Hammersley, the Political Agent in Quetta, on 26 May 1842 the prevailing mood among field-grade officers was the anticipation of a temporary withdrawal to be reinforced before an aggressive re-intervention into Afghanistan ‘it is evident to me that Lord Ellenborough’s object in withdrawing to Peshawur and Quetta was merely that of our armies might be safe and easily communicated with during the period that would elapse ere reinforcements from England should enable us to enter on the campaign in overpowering force’. Outram to Hammersley, 26 May 1842, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 60
76 Maddock to Pollock, 28 April 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 272, p. 235, and Fortescue (1927), p. 272
77 Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 197
78 Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 201
The formal permission to remain until October was a significant strategic concession by Ellenborough. In a flurry of correspondence Ellenborough confirmed that he had finally acceded to Pollock’s and Nott’s requests and formally authorised a delay to their withdrawal from Afghanistan. Earlier on 13 May, Nott was provided authorisation to delay his withdrawal in a letter from Maddock that confirmed ‘the Governor-General understands that … you cannot retire below the passes till October [1842]’. Furthermore, Ellenborough reverted towards his original strategic bias conveyed from 15 March demanding recovery of the prisoners and punitive actions against the Afghans before retiring from Afghanistan. However, Ellenborough’s original desire to restore British military reputation by inflicting ‘some signal and decisive blow on the Afghans’ had been moderated to offensive actions at opportunity targets. On 1 June Maddock informed Pollock of this revised intent:

It would be desirable, undoubtedly, that before finally quitting Afghanistan, you should have an opportunity of striking a blow at the enemy; and since circumstances seem to compel you to remain there till October [1842], the Governor-General earnestly hopes that you may be enabled to draw the enemy into a position in which you may strike such a blow effectually.

In a letter from Pollock to Nott on 14 June, Pollock enclosed his copy of Maddock’s letter dated 1 June. Despite Maddock having assured Pollock that Nott would be informed separately, Pollock was eager to share the letter with Nott as it indicated a return to Ellenborough’s more aggressive original posture. Pollock reinforces these changes in strategic direction in his covering letter to Nott, and his eagerness to resume the offensive is almost palpable:

I had yesterday the pleasure to receive the original, of which the above is a copy. It is most satisfactory, and will, I trust, enable us to retrieve all our disasters. I cannot of course tell what are your orders from Government, but I trust they will be such as to enable you to co-operate with me. My plans are not quite decided yet, but all difficulties may be said to be conquered, now that Government authorize my acting with energy … this morning I had the gratification to receive yours of the 30th ult [May]. Most cordially do I congratulate you on the success of your brilliant little affair, and trust, ere many months have elapsed, we shall have given these Affghans several similar lessons, for their late successes have made them very bold.

On the same day Maddock also separately informed Nott of Pollock’s authorised delay until October and directed Nott to ‘take care that the garrisons of Kelat-i-Ghilzie [Qalat] and Ghiriskh [Gereshk] shall be drawn away in such time as to enable you to

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79 Maddock to Nott, 13 May 1842, PRO 30-12-95
81 Maddock to Pollock, 1 Jun 1842, (No. 277 of 1842) IOR Mss Eur F439/8; and, PRO 30-12-98
82 Pollock to Nott, 14 Jun 1842, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 89, and transcribed in Low (1873), p. 353
move your army towards Sukkur as soon as the season will permit’. In these critical instructions Ellenborough’s autocratic manner was again becoming manifest. This latest strategic decision had been taken and communicated directly to the military commanders in Afghanistan and by-passed the Commander-in-Chief Nicolls. As already discussed, only three days previously on 28 May, Nicolls had written demanding that Pollock withdraw ‘at the earliest practicable period’. In addition, the Governor-General’s staff had become increasingly involved in the process for the tactical provisioning of the required transportation animals for both Pollock and for Nott. Writing his final letter on 1 June to Nicolls, Ellenborough provided copies of his direct correspondence to Pollock and Nott, and then delving into the tactical minutiae of logistic provisioning, demanded that Nicolls submit to him a weekly logistic return.

Despite the significance of Ellenborough’s authorisation to delay the British withdrawal, there was nothing that indicated any sanction for Pollock and Nott’s most ardent goal for a British advance on Kabul. Importantly, to this point Ellenborough’s only formal concession had been to delay the British withdrawal from Afghanistan until October 1842:

How effectual a counterpoise [of] steady national feeling, on the part of subordinates, can supply to vacillating Authority.

By July the earlier sense of doom that pervaded Ellenborough’s appreciation regarding Afghanistan between April and June had started to be replaced with a possibility that an advance towards Kabul could now be feasible. Given that the Jalalabad and Kandahar Garrisons had consolidated into robust positions of security, and the approaching winter was narrowing the remaining withdrawal period, the time for strategic vacillation on the frontier policy was ending. Either Ellenborough had to unequivocally demand a withdrawal of British forces, or seize the opportunity to recover the British prisoners still languishing in Afghanistan and attempt to restore

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83 Maddock to Nott, 1 Jun 1842, PRO 30-12-95
84 LTCOL Luard to Pollock, 28 May 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 333, pp. 288–289; and transcribed in Low (1873), p. 322
85 That details ‘the number of each description of [transport] animals with Major-General Pollock, and on the route to join him; the probable period of arrival; the probable position at the date of the return; the number and description of persons accompanying the several convoys of animals, and under what terms engaged; and the cost of the animals, if purchased’ to the Governor-General. Ellenborough to Nicolls, 1 Jun 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 353, p. 299
86 Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 59
87 Bengal Civilian, Lord Auckland and Lord Ellenborough, (London: Smith and Elder, 1845), p. 26
Britain’s tattered military reputation. Kaye’s analysis greatly credits Ellenborough with balancing the competing imperatives of withdrawal from Afghanistan, whilst simultaneously placating public (and military) criticism for the ramifications of such an action to British prestige. With a touch of hyperbole, Kaye summarises Ellenborough’s decision-making process as ‘an effort of genius beyond the reach of ordinary statesmen’:

In this juncture, he [Ellenborough] betook himself to an expedient unparalleled, perhaps, in the political history of the world. He instigated Pollock and Nott to advance, but insisted that they should regard the forward movement solely in the light of retirement from Afghanistan. No change had come over the views of Lord Ellenborough, but a change had come over the meaning of certain words in the English language. The Governor-General had resolutely maintained that the true policy of the English Government was to bring back our armies to the provinces of India, and that nothing would justify him in pushing them forward merely for the re-establishment of our military reputation. But he found it necessary to yield to the pressure from without, and to push the armies of Pollock and Nott further into the heart of the Afghan dominions. To preserve his own consistency, and at the same time to protect himself against the measureless indignation of the communities both of India and of England, was an effort of genius beyond the reach of ordinary statesmen.

Despite the political gymnastics credited to Ellenborough, Kaye’s analysis was too generous. Ellenborough’s strategic decision was balanced upon some very difficult strategic choices and the great uncertainty surrounding their outcome. Ellenborough’s dilemma was essentially whether his long-standing desire for vengeance and the redemption of British reputation could be justified against the losses that could be potentially incurred by pushing forward again into Afghanistan. It had been only five months since the destruction of the Kabul Garrison, and he was fully aware of the near universal opprobrium for the perceived failure of his predecessor Auckland.

In London at a Cabinet meeting on 5 July, all members had agreed to support the policy of abandoning Afghanistan. Wellington agreed with Ellenborough’s decision, captured in his 19 April directive, to immediately withdraw. The other Cabinet members, supported by the Queen, wanted the prisoners recovered and Muhammad Akbar Khan punished before any British withdrawal. However, it was Prime Minister Peel who urged Ellenborough on 6 July to return to Kabul so that the British withdrawal would be perceived as a negotiated political settlement removing British control over Afghanistan, and not as a result of the military defeat.

88 Fortescue (1927), p. 268
90 Peel to Ellenborough, 6 July 1842, transcribed in Yapp (1980), p. 453
The key unknown variable in Ellenborough’s strategic calculation was the chance of success for a military re-intervention in Afghanistan. By July Pollock and Nott had delayed sufficiently within Afghanistan and engaged in a number of tactical successes that had started to reverse the battlefield fortunes in favour of the British. Mindful of former Governor-General Wellesley’s advice that ‘the peace of India is maintained by the military strength of the British Power’, Ellenborough felt sufficiently emboldened to order an advance, albeit within constrained objectives. With impressively convoluted language Ellenborough’s ‘genius’ was to issue directions to his military commanders so that any credit for strategic success would be his, and that any military failure could be squarely blamed on Generals Pollock and Nott.

Ellenborough’s seminal guidance, again written directly to his military commanders, began with a very long letter to Nott in Kandahar dated 4 July 1842. The letter is written in such a fashion as to appear to give Nott a choice ‘in forming your decision’ of how he elected to withdraw from Kandahar. Ellenborough stated his intention to withdraw from Afghanistan but effectively gave Nott the choice of his withdrawal route from Kandahar – the expeditious 250-kilometre southerly route through Quetta, or the longer 800-kilometre circuitous northerly route via Ghazni and Kabul to Peshawar! Ellenborough’s guidance is clearly loaded towards his preference for a retirement via Kabul. As Fortescue observed, ‘the generals took the hint’ of Ellenborough’s intent to advance on Kabul in the absence of a direct order. It is a remarkable piece of correspondence:

… Nothing has occurred to induce me to change my first opinion, that the measure commended by consideration of political and military prudence, is to bring back the armies now in Afgha

...
your army, and upon your own ability in directing it, I should have no doubt as to the success of the operation … and you must feel, as I do, that the loss of another army, from whatever cause it might arise, might be fatal to our Government of India.

I do not undervalue the aid which our Government in India would receive from the successful execution of a march by your army through Ghuzni and Caubul, over the scenes of our late disasters. I know all the effect it would have upon the minds of our soldiers, of our allies, of our enemies in Asia, and of or countrymen, and of all foreign nations in Europe. It is an object of just ambition, which no one more than myself would rejoice to see effected; but I see that failure in the attempt is certain and irretrievable ruin, and I would endeavour to inspire you with the necessary caution, and make you feel that, great as are the objects to be attained by success, the risk is great also …

You will recollect that what you have to make is a successful march, that that march must not be delayed by any hazardous operation against Ghuzni or Caubul, that you should carefully calculate the time required to enable you to reach Jellalabad in the first week of October, so as to form the rear-guard of Major-General Pollock’s army. If you should be enabled by a coup-de-main to get possession of Ghuzni and Caubul, you will act as you see fit, and leave decisive proof of the power of the British Army without impeaching humanity. You will bring away from the tomb of Mahmood of Ghuzni, his club, which hangs over it, and you will bring away the gates of his tomb, which are the gates of the Temple of Somnath.93 These will be the just trophies of your successful march.

You will not fail to disguise your intention of moving, and to acquaint Major-General Pollock with your plans as soon as you have formed them. A copy of this letter will be forwarded to Major-General Pollock to-day, and he will be instructed by a forward movement to facilitate your advance; but he will probably not deem it necessary to move any troops actually to Caubul, where your force will be amply sufficient to beat anything the Afghans can oppose to it. The operation, however, of the two armies must be combined upon their approach so as to effect with the least possible loss of occupation of Caubul, and to keep open the communications between Caubul and Peshawar … 94

Notably, at this stage Ellenborough did not expect Pollock to advance on Kabul to join Nott, and his bias for the upcoming campaign is evident in the one paragraph that discusses the Quetta withdrawal option against the five paragraphs that detail the Kabul withdrawal option. This bias is again apparent in the covering note sent by Ellenborough to Pollock on 4 July, with an attached copy of the 4 July letter to Nott. Ellenborough’s direction on the command and control status between Pollock and Nott

93 This seemingly incongruous task requires explanation. The Somnath Gates were originally on a Hindu temple and had been allegedly stolen by the great Muslim conqueror, Mahmud of Ghazni (998–1030). Ellenborough believed, wrongly as it turned out, that these gates were placed on the tomb of Mahmud at Ghazni. By returning them to India, Ellenborough hoped to enhance British rule by assuaging a growing anti-British sentiment among Hindus by cynically dividing Hindus and Muslims. Ellenborough intended to parade and display the gates around India before finally restoring them to the temple at Somnath. Yapp (1980), p. 443. Ellenborough further elaborated on his intent after hearing of Nott’s removal of the gates (in September 1842), ‘I intend to address to the Princes and Chiefs, and all the people of India, on the occasion of the restitution of this great trophy of war; and it will be transmitted immediately to the Princes and Chiefs whose territories are situated on the route between the Sutlej and Somnath. I intend that the gates of the temple should be carried in triumphant procession to the ancient site, on which a temple has recently been erected.’ Ellenborough to Nott, 19 Oct 1842, transcribed in Stocqueler, Vol. 2, pp. 133–134 and pp. 110–112
94 Ellenborough to Nott, 4 Jul 1842, IOR Mss Eur F439/8
northwards from Ghazni strongly presupposed that Nott’s decision would be to advance towards Kabul:

I have the honour to communicate with you a Copy of a Letter I have this day addressed to Maj. Gen. Nott. You will endeavour to combine your movements, as far as you can with those of the Major General should he decide upon adopting the line of Retirement by Ghuznee and Cabool; and as soon as he shall have advanced beyond Ghuznee, you will as senior Officer issue such orders to Maj. General Nott as you may deem fit; but until the Major General shall have passed Ghuznee his movements must rest with himself as he alone can know all the circumstances by which they must be determined.  

If there is any remaining doubt about the outcome Ellenborough sought from Nott’s decision to withdraw from Afghanistan via Kabul, Ellenborough wrote again to Nott the next day reinforcing his intent. In this letter it was clear that Ellenborough had examined the command structure and authority in Sind if Nott advanced north to Ghazni and Kabul, and not southwards through Quetta:

In the event of your availing yourself of the option given to you in my letter of yesterday's date [4 July 1842], and of your deciding upon the route of Ghuznee and Cabool, I have to express my wish that you should send Major-General England to command at Sukkur. In the event of your moving upon Ghuznee … I shall write confidentially to Sir George Arthur [Governor of Bombay], and desire him, in such an event, to send, as soon as the season will permit, Major-General Sir Charles Napier to command all the forces between the Kojuck and the Indus.

Yapp concluded that Ellenbrough’s evasive prose was constructed to strongly convey his preference but leave the actual decision, and hence any blame, for this uncertain military venture with Nott. Surprisingly, having previously praised Ellenborough’s strategic decision-making as ‘an effort of genius beyond the reach of ordinary statesmen’, Kaye was scathing in his criticism of Ellenborough’s evasive order to Nott and condemned his 4 July letter:

Lord Ellenborough’s instructions to the Generals were so worded – whether by accident or by design I do not presume to determine – as to cast upon them all the onus of failure, and to confer upon the Governor-General, or at least divide with him, all the honour of success. One thing is certain – the letter of 4th of July, addressed to General Nott and signed by the Chief Secretary [Maddock], ought not to have been written. It is either from the first to last a masterpiece of Jesuitical cunning, or it indicates a feebleness of will – an infirmity of purpose – discreditable to the character of a statesman entrusted with the welfare and honour of one of the greatest empires in the world.

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95 Ellenborough to Pollock, 4 Jul 1842, IOR Mss Eur F439/8; and, PRO 30-12-98
96 Ellenborough to Nott, 5 Jul 1842, NAM 30-12-95
97 Yapp (1980), p. 432
99 Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, pp. 288–289, and partially transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 327–328
Low summarised Ellenborough’s order to Nott, saying it ‘neither peremptorily required his withdrawal nor his advance, but casts the entire onus of responsibility of whatever steps he might take, in conjunction with George Pollock, on the shoulders of the two generals’. 100 Low then agreed with Kaye’s caustic comments suggesting that Ellenborough’s order is ‘not a whit too harshly characterized by Kaye’. 101 Conversely, Stocqueler was more charitable in his observation that it was appropriate to leave the final decision to Nott, as ‘Lord Ellenborough did not wish to commit himself to an open declaration of what was evidently his desire … at the distance at which he was placed from the scene of the operation … it therefore became necessary, after expounding his own views, to give that officer a large discretion’. 102 Finally, on 6 July Ellenborough wrote to Wellington explaining his reasoning, ‘the case is one in which, at this distance, I could hardly direct an advance, but, at the same time, I should hardly be justified in continuing to prohibit it. It was entirely a question of the commissariat’. 103

Was this really a case of true mission command? The intent explained to Wellington is certainly consistent with Ellenborough’s previous direction to his military commanders, and Wellington’s authoritative response is held as an affirming endorsement of support to Ellenborough:

I quite concur in the course of operations which you have suggested. You have in my opinion acted most handsomely by your generals in communicating with them so freely your opinions upon points on which after all they must form their own after considering all the reasoning on both sides of the question which you have so ably detailed for their consideration … it is impossible for anybody at a distance, even informed as you must be, to dictate the exact course of a military operation. 104

In his pivotal sequence of letters written to Nicolls on 19 April, Ellenborough had previously deferred to the commanders’ better situational awareness to make informed decisions, ‘Your Excellency [Nicolls] is so much nearer the scene of action in Upper Afghanistan than I am … so much more qualified to form a correct opinion upon this subject than I am, that I feel I do best by leaving it in your Excellency's hands’. 105 Despite such evidence, the much more prevalent command style of Ellenborough was

100 Low (1873), p. 327
101 Low (1873), p. 327
102 Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 85
104 Wellington to Ellenborough, undated, transcribed in Imlah (1939), p. 106
105 Ellenborough to Nicolls, 19 Apr 1842 (2) (copied to Pollock), Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 261, pp. 224–225
that of an autocrat and renowned micro-manager who habitually bypassed the military chain of command.

The seminal letter of 4 July providing Nott with the option of advancing on Kabul was a strategic decision that Ellenborough could have lawfully ordered without permitting any discretion for the battlefield commander. Despite Imlah’s defence that Ellenborough could have avoided the ‘odium of a failure’ by delegating this decision to Nicolls, the astute Ellenborough had properly calculated the strong desire of both Nott and Pollock to pursue an aggressive re-intervention.\(^\text{106}\) With a view to hedging his own reputation to avoid the complete opprobrium of Auckland’s fate, Ellenborough availed himself of the opportunity to directly implicate his battlefield commanders in the strategic decision-making to strengthen his defence if the military operation had failed.

The response from the military commanders in Afghanistan to his guidance was as Ellenborough had rightly predicted. Nott, who could be such an obstinate, vocal and adversarial subordinate, proved this by not immediately complaining or challenging such evasive guidance. As described by a contemporary Bengal Civilian, Nott had ‘stood his ground in the heart of the enemy’s country, pleading to the Government now one, now another excuse for his delay, until the memorable choice was offered him’.\(^\text{107}\) Nott had never wavered in his desire to salvage some British prestige because he knew ultimately Afghans respected military strength, and wanted sufficient latitude to conduct military operations as he saw fit. Unlike his previous feelings of being bound ‘hand and foot’, Nott did not dispute Ellenborough’s latest guidance as it provided the latitude and suggested a course of action that Nott wanted to pursue.\(^\text{108}\)

In the morning of 22 July a Cossid (native letter carrier) arrived in Kandahar to deliver Ellenborough’s 4 July letter. Nott’s decision was evident in his immediate reaction upon receipt of Ellenborough’s letter. After prevaricating and delaying his responses to previous guidance, it is revealing that on the same day as receiving the letter, Nott had eagerly prepared and dispatched a holding letter to Ellenborough by midday (possibly to ensure the advance could not be reversed if Ellenborough vacillated again). In this response Nott acknowledged the receipt of Ellenborough’s 4 July letter.

\(^\text{106}\) Imlah (1939), p. 105
\(^\text{107}\) Bengal Civilian (1845), p. 29
\(^\text{108}\) Nott to Daughters, undated July 1842, transcribed in Stocqueler, Vol. 2, pp. 65–66
and promised a more comprehensive reply later. Fortunately Ellenborough’s letter arrived in Kandahar just in time to halt Nott complying with the 19 April order to withdraw. Captain Peter Nicols confirms the advanced state of preparations in Kandahar, ‘Nott had made all preparations to retire – nay, the day was named and the force told off – when he received the counter order [from Ellenborough]’.

Pollock received Ellenborough’s 4 July letter on 16 July, and on the following day he responded:

I have already written to the General [Nott], to ascertain what his plans will be, after the receipt of your Lordship’s letter, apprising him that, if he returns by Ghuznee and Cabool, he should give me the earliest information of the strength of his force, in order that I may lay in supplies accordingly. When I receive his reply, I shall be able to determine on my own movements, which, from your Lordship's exertions in my behalf, will not, I hope, much longer be crippled.

Less politely, Pollock privately expressed his final sense of vindication and anticipation for the responsibility of commanding the British advance back into Afghanistan, ‘I have not lived long enough to judge the propriety of an act for which I alone am responsible … I assure you that I feel the full benefit of being unshackled and allowed to judge for myself.

Most pressing for Pollock was to ascertain the progress of Nott’s withdrawal. Pollock correctly assessed that Nott ‘will find some difficulty in resisting the glorious temptation [of advancing on Kabul]’ provided Ellenborough’s latest guidance had been received in time. He was critically concerned that Nott had already withdrawn from Kandahar in compliance with Ellenborough’s 19 April and Nicolls’ 29 April orders, and was eager that it was stopped. Consequently Pollock rapidly dispatched a succession of five messengers to Kandahar. However, due to the tenuous lines of communication between Jalalabad and Kandahar, by 10 August Pollock had not heard from Nott and his growing concern is reflected in a private letter:

109 Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 79 and 85
110 CAPT Nicolson to Pollock, undated, transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 331–332. Nott had been progressively building up his carriage camels from Quetta, thanks to Major Outram’s efforts, and preparations were advanced for the withdrawal.
111 Pollock to Ellenborough, 17 Jul 1842, PRO 30-12-65
112 Pollock to (unnamed) friend, undated, transcribed in Low (1873), p. 331, and Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 289
113 Pollock to (unnamed) friend, undated, transcribed in Low (1873), p. 332, and Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 297
114 As correspondence could be readily intercepted by Afghans, messages were sometimes written on rice-paper, with some cryptic comments written overtly in ink, and concealed messages requiring the application of iodine. One apocryphal story has Pollock writing the cryptic instruction of ‘Advance, Nott’ – unfortunately this is not true. Low (1873), p. 333
My movement will, of course, depend on General Nott’s ability to meet me. Our late accounts from that quarter are not favourable. They say that Nott is bent on retiring, and I very much fear that he will have made several marches to the rear before the Government despatch [sic] can reach him.\footnote{Pollock to Robertson, 10 Aug 1842, transcribed in Low (1873), p. 333}

Having promulgated his revised strategy prompting a re-intervention into Afghanistan prior to an eventual withdrawal, truer to his micro-managing form Ellenborough then dispatched a highly detailed letter of guidance directly to Pollock on 23 July. This letter detailed Ellenborough’s tactical military assessment and logistic preparations to support the combined advance of Nott and Pollock, including precise timelines and the anticipated response of the Afghans. It is also evident that Ellenborough was critically concerned with the recovery of the prisoners, dedicating half the document to the matter.\footnote{To the extent that Ellenborough draws on historical examples concerning the restoration of slaves in Algiers and Khiva to highlight that power is necessary to assure the appropriate coercion. Ellenborough to Pollock, 23 Jul 1842, IOR Mss Eur F439/8; and, PRO 30-12-98} Importantly, his campaign concept had been adjusted to add Pollock’s simultaneous advance on Kabul. Finally, and most importantly for the conduct of the ‘Army of Retribution’, this letter provides Ellenborough’s objectives that are often only quoted in part:

My expectation is that Major General Nott will feel himself sufficiently strong and be sufficiently provided with carriage to march upon Ghuznee and Cabool … the importance of terminating the whole combined operation and bringing the two Armies onto the Plains before the commencement of severe weather will hasten his preparations for leaving Candahar, and I anticipate his being able to do so by the 15\textsuperscript{th} of August.

I do not apprehend that between Candahar and Ghuznee any obstacles will be offered to his march by an Enemy disheartened by repeated discomfiture and completely taken by surprise; and I look forward to the Army from Candahar being to the north of Ghuznee on the 10\textsuperscript{th} of September …

I am hardly fanciful enough to think that all I have directed to be done will be done by that earlier day, but I certainly entertain the expectation that leaving as you probably will 2 Regiments of H.M. and 200 Irregular Cavalry hold in the Khyber Pass to occupy that Position, and leaving likewise a Garrison in Jellalabad you will possess sufficient carriage to move the remainder of your Army in advance and in time to support the march of Major General Nott upon Cabul.

Mahomed Akbar Khan will probably retire from Cabool on the approach of the Combined Army. The expectation of its advance will revive and invigorate the factions oppose to that Chief and it is not altogether improbable that the result may be his overthrow and the nominal establishment of a Royal Govt in the Person of some other Chief or of the Prince Fatteh Jung.

You are already authorised to treat with a de facto Govt for the exchange of prisoners, but you will avoid doing any act from which it might be inferred that the British Government recognises any authority which may be established in Cabool. You will distinctly declare that you are not authorized to make any such recognition, and you will refer the matter to us.

\textit{The objects of the combined march of your Army and Major General Nott’s upon Cabool will be to exhibit our strength where we suffered defeat, to inflict harsh, but not vindictive retribution}
upon the Affghans and to recover the General and the Colonel, as well as the Prisoners, lost by our Army.

… There is one other event too rather to be desired than expected perhaps, but which must be deemed of not impossible recurrence – the surrender of Mahomed Akbar Khan into Govt hands by the factions hostile to him. To the possession of that Chief Person I attach very great importance. You are already authorized to give an appearance that his Life shall be spared; but you will not make any other condition, nor make that lightly. I earnestly desire that that Chief, the avowed murderer of Sir W. Macnaghten, and the betrayer of a British Army, should come into our Power without any conditions whatsoever …

You will therefore not delay any operation whatsoever which Military considerations would suggest to you in consequence of any pending negotiations. You will as long as the season permits you to remain with perfect security, rely upon your own Force, and upon that above, for the effecting of your objects, and exert that Force vigorously – giving every proof of British Power which is not inconsistent with the usages of Man and the dictates of British Humanity; but you will never forget that, after so exhibiting that Power, you are without allowing yourself to be diverted therefrom by any object, to obey the positive orders of your Government to withdraw your Army from Afghanistan.

It will be your highest praise, after having re-established the opinion of the invincibility of the British Army upon the source of their late misfortunes, to restore its Armies to India in a perfectly efficient state at a period where I assure you that their presence in India is most desirable.

I trust that the last man of the two Armies will have repassed the Sutlej [River] by the first of January [1843] and that I may then have the satisfaction of offering to you my Personal congratulations upon your having successfully accomplished every object you have been directed to effect and realized every reasonable wish of your Country.\(^{117}\)

In his 4 July letter to Nott and 23 July letter to Pollock, Ellenborough had provided both commanders with his intent. His guidance to Nott in ‘forming your decision’ on withdrawing from Afghanistan via Kabul was quite specific. Ellenborough directed Nott that his withdrawal ‘must not be delayed by any hazardous operation against Ghuzni or Caubul, that you should carefully calculate the time required to enable you to reach Jellalabad in the first week of October’. Nott was directed to ‘leave decisive proof of the power of the British Army’, to secure the ‘gates of the Temple of Somnath’, and in the most telling insight into Ellenborough’s fears, Nott was cautioned ‘the loss of another army … might be fatal to our Government of India’.\(^{118}\) From this guidance Nott understood his task as a purely military endeavour to reassert the martial reputation of the British Army, secure a symbolic trophy and comply with a condensed timeline to withdraw from Afghanistan by winter.

Ellenborough’s direction to Pollock on 23 July was more geo-strategic than the guidance issued to Nott. He is quite explicit that Pollock’s primary purpose is to ‘exhibit our strength … to inflict harsh, but not vindictive retribution upon the Affghans and to

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\(^{117}\) Ellenborough to Pollock (emphasis added), 23 Jul 1842, IOR Mss Eur F439/8; and, PRO 30-12-98

\(^{118}\) Ellenborough to Nott, 4 Jul 1842, IOR Mss Eur F 439/8
recover the … Prisoners, lost by our Army’. Unlike his correspondence with Nott, he detailed Pollock’s permitted relationships with key Afghan leaders. Although Ellenborough increasingly favoured the abandonment of an ‘Afghan Buffer’, in practice Britain needed to retain political relations with some constituted authority in Afghanistan because of the need for ongoing negotiations to secure the release of the remaining British captives and for the provision of supplies to the British Army soon to be in Kabul.¹¹⁹ Ellenborough authorised Pollock to ‘treat with a de facto Govt for the exchange of prisoners, but you will avoid doing any act from which it might be inferred that the British Government recognises any authority which may be established in Cabool’.¹²⁰ By granting Pollock the latitude to negotiate with the Afghan leadership, Ellenborough provided Pollock with the opportunity to manipulate longer-term arrangements consistent with Pollock’s own perception of British-India’s strategic objectives.

Throughout these deliberations Ellenborough had been bypassing the Commander-in-Chief Nicolls, in his direct correspondence to the two field commanders. It was not until 27 August that Nicolls was informed, by a letter from Pollock, of the instructions sent to General Nott on 4 July. Ellenborough’s direct command of his two field commanders in Afghanistan clearly frustrated and disenfranchised Nicolls. Consistently Nicolls had lagged behind on the latest developments in this dynamic period of policy-making on Afghanistan. Nicolls’ strong preference for withdrawal was neutralised by Ellenborough’s predilection to over-ride the Commander-in-Chief’s authority. Nicolls writes in exasperated tones in his journal at the undermining of his authority by being isolated from these dramatic strategic events directly affecting his military forces in Afghanistan:

August 27 – To-day I find, by a despatch [sic] from General Pollock, that General Nott has decided on retiring to the provinces, via Ghuznee and Cabul. Lord E——, by letter dated 4th of July, gave him a choice as to the line by which to withdraw, and he has chosen this – certainly the noblest and worthiest; but whether it will release our prisoners and add to our fame I cannot venture to predict. Lord E’s want of decent attention to my position is inexcusable.¹²¹

This close examination of Ellenborough’s strategic deliberations between May and July 1842 began with a return to the earlier defeatist policies as Ellenborough

¹¹⁹ Yapp (1980), pp. 432–433
¹²⁰ Ellenborough to Pollock, 23 Jul 1842, IOR Mss Eur F439/8; and, PRO 30-12-98
ordered the abandonment of Afghanistan. With a Commander-in-Chief supporting this retrograde policy and a ‘Sikh Buffer’ offering attractive strategic possibilities, any possibility of reversing Ellenborough’s decision fell heavily on the two dissenting battlefield commanders. From their positions forward, and their familiarity with Afghanistan, both Pollock and Nott clearly understood the geo-strategic implications of such an ignominious withdrawal of the British Army following the recent destruction of the Kabul Garrison. Pollock and Nott intuitively understood that abandoning Afghanistan would catastrophically erode the martial reputation of the British Army upon which the internal and regional security of British-India rested. Apart from the immediately dire threat to themselves once Britain’s abandonment decision became known to the Afghans, they had assessed that the strategic vacuum created by Britain’s withdrawal would embolden antagonistic regional powers towards British-India. They were concerned that such a change in the regional power dynamics would encourage an instability that directly threatened Britain’s strategy of maintaining the security of the north-western frontier of British-India. They feared that a precipitous British withdrawal from Afghanistan would effectively constitute a strategic defeat for Britain.

The dilemma for Pollock and Nott was how to convince their superiors that the decision to abandon Afghanistan without first reasserting British primacy was inimical to Britain’s strategic interests. For senior generals any notion that they directly disobey their superiors would not be countenanced, therefore Pollock and Nott chose to pursue a more nuanced and defendable course of intransigence. Against the increasing suspicions and frustrations of Ellenborough, Pollock and Nott consistently sought to delay Britain’s withdrawal. Remaining in Afghanistan was necessary to generate the assurances and conditions for British success so that Ellenborough could be convinced to reconsider a military re-intervention into Afghanistan.

In addition to Pollock’s persuasive reasoning in his letters of 20, 24 and 25 May 1842, he also sought to delay the withdrawal by manufacturing a sense of confusion over his authoritative higher guidance. Pollock deliberately conflated Ellenborough’s tendency to directly control military affairs against Nicolls’ increasingly marginalised authority as the Commander-in-Chief. As evidenced by Pollock’s letter of 13 May 1842 this bifurcated command relationship, in conjunction with the delay in transmission of correspondence, was purposefully used to confuse the guidance for the withdrawal from
Afghanistan. This obfuscation created the delays that allowed Pollock and Nott to pursue and consolidate more favourable tactical conditions conducive to a military re-intervention. Finally, when this bifurcation in command authorities was eventually unified with an unequivocal order to withdraw from Afghanistan, Pollock privately disobeyed and wrote to instruct Nott to not withdraw.

However, further disobedience was not required as the delays in withdrawing until May 1842 had achieved their tactical purpose. There was a consolidation of potent military forces in both Jalalabad and Kandahar, with Nott successfully recovering the Qalat Garrison and defending against another Afghan onslaught. The reversal of British battlefield fortunes combined with public criticism of the abandonment policy and difficulties with implementing the ‘Sikh Buffer’. Unknown but of assistance to Pollock and Nott, Ellenborough’s confidential assessments consistently desired a re-intervention but he feared the opprobrium of another defeat. Pollock’s and Nott’s reassurances started to turn the tide back towards Ellenborough’s earlier and more assertive policy settings from March 1842. In June Ellenborough was convinced to formally authorise a delay in the withdrawal until October 1842. And finally, by July Ellenborough was sufficiently emboldened to permit an advance back into Afghanistan, albeit with constrained objectives. To defray the blame from any potential military defeat and confident in Nott’s and Pollock’s response, Ellenborough conveyed his intent for re-intervention as a choice for his battlefield commanders. Both Nott and Pollock embraced Ellenborough’s latitude to implement their consistent and long-held desire to aggressively re-intervene into Afghanistan. Pollock’s and Nott’s persistent advocacy and battlefield mastery was critical in Ellenborough’s decision-making. A reassured Ellenborough finally sanctioned a more assertive exit policy from Afghanistan, seeking to salvage the British Army’s martial reputation and preserve Britain’s enduring strategy of maintaining the security of north-west British-India. Ironically, it was the battlefield commanders in Afghanistan who reassured and convinced their superiors of the viability for military action to prevent Britain’s strategic defeat in Afghanistan.

With Pollock’s and Nott’s plan fully embraced by Ellenborough, recovering Britain’s prestige now depended wholly on a successful campaign by the ‘Army of Retribution’. However, Ellenborough’s separate guidance to his commanders would create problems in defining the objectives and coherence of purpose for the re-
intervention, with Nott issued purely military objectives and Pollock granted the latitude to develop longer-term strategic options. British-India still remained on the precipice of strategic defeat in Afghanistan. Having successfully achieved their aims in convincing Ellenborough to aggressively re-intervene in Afghanistan, only the successful reoccupation of Kabul and eventual withdrawal from Afghanistan on British terms would salvage the enduring strategic imperative for the security of north-west British-India.
Chapter 5

The Advance of the ‘Army of Retribution’: August – September 1842

With Pollock and Nott having substantially influenced Ellenborough’s deliberations to re-intervene into Afghanistan, the salvaging of Britain’s impending strategic defeat now rested upon the actions of these two battlefield commanders. The military campaign of the ‘Army of Retribution’ concluding the First Anglo-Afghan War was critical to ending Britain’s intervention in Afghanistan on terms that maintained the strategic imperative to secure the north-west of British-India. The actual conduct of the ‘Army of Retribution’ commanded by Pollock and Nott, popularly dismissed as a belated and peripheral afterthought, is a military campaign in its own right and worthy of recognition. The significant battlefield victories won by Pollock and Nott during their advance on Kabul established the conditions to avert Britain’s imminent strategic defeat. The impressive military actions of the ‘Army of Retribution’ challenge the widespread characterisation that the First Anglo-Afghan War ended in a defeat for Britain.

Over the course of the summer of 1842, the health of the Jalalabad Garrison continued to deteriorate, with sickness levels increasing through outbreaks of dysentery and fever. The carriage animals died in great numbers, leaving a nauseating stench of their putrefying remains with attendant swarms of flies.1 Whilst Ellenborough’s 4 July and 23 July letters were in transit there also remained great uncertainty about the future course of military action. The issue of withdrawal or advance had been a constant source of intense conjecture amongst Jalalabad Garrison for months.2

Various rumours and reports were at this time constantly floating about the camp. One day it was said that we were immediately to proceed to Cabul; on the next, perhaps, some story would gain credit that we were to return without striking a blow, and that the prisoners were to be obtained by negotiation. Supplies of every kind had become very scarce … while the water of the Cabul river which ran near was of the most deleterious quality. It was no wonder that the hospitals became overcrowded and numbers died of dysentery, brought on by drinking this polluted water, combined with the effects of bad food and tainted air. The stench of the camp was, indeed, enough to breed a pestilence.3

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1 Gleig (1846), p. 166
2 Low (1873), p. 336
3 Greenwood (1844), pp. 176–177
By June 1842 Pollock was sufficiently reinforced to commence a series of aggressive punitive local operations. On 17 June Pollock dispatched Colonel Monteith’s 4th Brigade east from Jalalabad towards Pesh Boldak to inflict ‘punishment’ on the local tribes considered as having attacked Elphinstone’s retreating column in the previous January. On 18 or 19 June Monteith’s force of 2300 troops commenced their destruction of the village of Ali Boghan where the excesses of the troops in setting fire to the houses had to be restrained by Monteith and the Political Agent Macgregor. On 20 June the force reached the village of Gula’i, where plundered British ‘treasure was known to be in the hands of two chiefs’. When confronted with demands to return the money, the evasive responses by the village elders elicited a violent British response. The houses, forts and villages were destroyed, including the explosive demolition of the Afghan irrigation systems and the destruction of valuable orchards. As Lieutenant Greenwood notes:

We became quite adept in the work of destruction, and a greater scene of devastation was perhaps never beheld. The Goulai [Gula’i] people had, however, richly deserved it all. They had behaved most treacherously and infamously to Captain Ferris and also to General Sale.

The British display of strength and intimidation immediately produced a local effect. Fearing a similar fate, the village of Zur Sarak Kalay, volunteered a return of their stolen British guns, property and 10,000 rupees. Basing themselves at Gula’i, the

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4 Pesh Boldak/ Bolak/ Bulak is cited in the historical record as being 40 kilometres east of Jalalabad and was garrisoned by Captain Ferris in November 1841. It is no longer a village name in this region of Afghanistan. By transposing the 1904 data, the location of Pesh Boldak approximates to the modern village of Shirgar. US NGIA Map, 2005, ‘Gerdi’, Ed. 7-NGA, Series U611, Sheet 3185, GS 6585; Surveyor General of India Map, 1904, ‘North-Western Trans-Frontier’, [IOR Map Collection: X/9935/2/428/1904]. Additionally, there is discrepancy on date of the dispatch of the 4th Brigade from Jalalabad. Greenwood, a participant in the expedition cites 17 Jun 1842; Fortescue cites 27 Jun 1842 [which must be incorrect]; and Low cites ‘middle of June’. See Greenwood (1844), pp. 178–187, Low (1873), p. 312, and Fortescue (1927), p. 273

5 The attack at Ali Boghan most likely occurred on 18 or 19 June 1842 (noting that the force was in the village of Gula’i on 20 June 1842). The attack was composed of Captain Abbott’s Light Field Artillery Battery; a Squadron of 1st Light Cavalry; HM 31st; 33rd and 53rd NI; and, Captain Ferris’ Jezailchees. Greenwood (1844), pp. 178–187, Low (1873), pp. 312–313, Fortescue (1927), p. 273, and Marshman (1860), p. 91

6 Goulai/ Golai cited in the historical record is located in the vicinity of the modern village of Gula’i. US NGIA Map, 2005, ‘Gerdi’, Ed. 7-NGA, Series U611, Sheet 3185, GS 6386; Surveyor General of India, Map: ‘The Two Routes to Kabul via Jalalabad, & via The Kuram Valley’, Scale 1 inch = 4 miles (Surveyor General’s Office: Calcutta, Oct 1879), [IOR Map Collection: X/9973/1]; and, Low (1873), p. 313

7 Low (1873), p. 313

8 Greenwood (1844), p. 179

9 Deh Surruk/ Deh Sarak cited in the historical record is no longer a village name in this region of Afghanistan. By transposing the 1879 data, the location of Deh Surruk/ Deh Sarak approximates to the modern village of Zur Sarak Kalay. US NGIA Map, 2005, ‘Gerdi’, Ed. 7-NGA, Series U611, Sheet 3185,
British force made short forays to other outlying villages ‘levying contributions and destroying the strongholds of tribes that were refractory’.  

Map 5.1: Monteith’s punitive operations: 17 Jun – 3 August 1842

By 24 July, Monteith’s Brigade had moved to the village of Mazina as a base for operations in the narrow Shinwari Valley lined with steep heights, along which was positioned a line of defensive forts. On 25 July a party of 500 troops, commanded by Captain Willes (HM 31st), proceeded to reconnoiter the Shinwari tribal stronghold 13 kilometres to the west, and after a brief skirmish returned to Mazina. Monteith ordered a brigade attack on the Shinwari stronghold with a rear guard remaining to defend the camp. The Shinwari tribesmen made their stand at a stronghold in

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10 Mazeena cited in the historical record equates to the modern village of Mazina. US NGIA Map, 2005, ‘Jalalabad’, Ed. 7-NGA, Series U611, Sheet 3085, GS 3686. From the 1904 data the Shinwari tribe was designated along the Chapriar River (South of Jalalabad). This equates to the modern Chapliar River Valley. Surveyor General of India Map, 1904, ‘North-Western Trans-Frontier’, [IOR Map Collection: X/9935/2/428/1904]; Fortescue (1927), p. 273; and Greenwood (1844), p. 182
11 By transposing the significant location identified in 1904 as ‘Mizra Azim Khan’s Fort’ along the Chapliar River, it is most likely that ‘Secunder Khan’s Fort’ is now the ruined fort in the vicinity of the township of Manu. US NGIA Map, 2005, ‘Jalalabad’, Ed. 7-NGA, Series U611, Sheet 3085, GS 2190; Surveyor General of India Map, 1904, ‘North-Western Trans-Frontier’, [IOR Map Collection: X/9935/2/428/1904]
12 The attacking brigade comprised of an infantry force of two companies from the 31st Foot and the 33rd and 53rd NI regiments, part of the 1st Cavalry, supported by Captain Abbot’s troop of artillery and
anticipated the assault launched on 26 July. The Afghans were overwhelmed and routed from the valley. The Afghans suffered very heavy losses and ‘the interiors of forty-five forts were in a blaze along the valley’, while the British force lost three killed and 23 wounded.\textsuperscript{14} Having shattered the Afghan resistance, Monteith’s Brigade was recalled by Pollock and returned to Jalalabad on 3 August, having ‘smelt the camp for some miles before we arrived at it’.\textsuperscript{15}

Concurrently in Jalalabad, there was a renewed attempt for prisoner negotiations between Pollock and Akbar Khan, following their stalled negotiations from May. On 13 July Captain Colin Troup, a British prisoner, rode into Jalalabad from Kabul accompanied by an Afghan emissary Hadje Buktear Khan.\textsuperscript{16} Troup relayed Akbar Khan’s message that he wanted to return the female prisoners but had been countered by the influential Mohammad Shah Khan who was bitterly opposed to any form of reconciliation. A letter from fellow prisoner Pottinger was also delivered to Pollock. This letter provided Akbar Khan’s hostile response to Pollock’s previously discussed 10 May letter, which had effectively ended the earlier negotiated settlement for the release of British prisoners. In addition, this letter also provides a summary of the political dynamics in Kabul and the growing primacy of Akbar Khan:

\begin{quote}
I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter, dated 10\textsuperscript{th} May, 1842, and have to inform you that it as regarded as most offensive by Akbar Khan … I have sounded Mahomed Akbar [Khan], as far as possible, on the subject of his feelings towards us; they appear hostile, and I much doubt if he will consent to treat on any terms but those of retaining the country … He then offered to exchange the whole of the prisoners for those in India … His father [Dost Mohammad] having given himself up voluntarily, he argues, we have no right to detain. Cabool is now completely in the hands of this Chief [Akbar Khan]. Many are inimical to him, but his own energy and that of his supporters is so much the greatest, that no one is likely to oppose him, unless the British troops advance … He, however, is our bitterest as well as ablest enemy, and will be the last to submit to our sway.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

Previously on 6 May, Akbar Khan had entered Kabul and by 17 May he had persuaded the influential Aminullah Khan Logari to abandon his alliance with Fatteh

\textit{Jezailchees}. (Fortescue incorrectly cites the 52\textsuperscript{nd} NI in this action instead of 33\textsuperscript{rd} NI). The remainder of the force comprised two companies from each infantry regiment (31\textsuperscript{st} Foot and the 33\textsuperscript{rd} and 53\textsuperscript{rd} NI regiments) and some cavalry. Monteith, 27 Jul 1842, transcribed in Low (1873), p. 314; Greenwood (1844), pp. 182–183, and Fortescue (1927), p. 273
\textsuperscript{14} Monteith, 27 July 1842, transcribed in Low (1873), p. 314; and, Greenwood (1844), pp. 182–183
\textsuperscript{15} Greenwood (1844), pp. 186–187; Low (1873), p. 314; and Fortescue (1927), p. 273
\textsuperscript{16} CAPT Troup (48\textsuperscript{th} NI, formerly Brigade Major to Shah Shuja’s forces) had been dispatched by Akbar Khan as the previous intermediary Captain Colin Mackenzie was seriously ill. The Afghan emissary, Hadje Buktear Khan, was from Kandahar and apparently selected because of his intelligence, neutrality and having been to Bombay was familiar with the British. Low (1873), p. 316
\textsuperscript{17} Pottinger to Pollock, 10 July 1842, \textit{Parliamentary Papers} (1843), Paper No. 434, pp. 349–351
Jung. With their combined authority, on 7 June Akbar Khan was admitted into the Bala Hissar, and on 29 June Akbar Khan was formally appointed as Fatteh Jung’s Wazir.\textsuperscript{18} Pollock summarises his negotiations for the exchange of prisoners in his dispatch to Maddock on 14 July and conveys the Afghan concerns regarding Britain’s longer-term intentions in Afghanistan caused by the proximity and potency of Pollock’s forces in Kabul:

I have told him [Hadje Buktear Khan] that on the release of the whole of our prisoners, including those at Ghuznee, the British Government will release those now in Hindoostan, including Dost Mahomed Khan; and that we shall expect to have our guns restored. The terms proposed by me appeared to be well received … The Chief stated that His Majesty Futteh Jung, the nobles and people of Cabool, were most anxious that some treaty of friendship should be entered into between the British Government and Dost Mahomed, previously to him leaving Hindoostan … I was asked whether it as our intention to interfere in the Government of the country; my reply was, that from the first we never intended remaining in the country, and that we should not interfere in their choice of a king.\textsuperscript{19}

Troup and Hadje Buktear Khan then returned to Kabul with only a verbal message. Both were summoned by Akbar Khan, along with Pottinger, to provide an account of the British position. Pottinger advised Akbar Khan to immediately dispatch all the prisoners to Jalalabad as proof of Afghan sincerity in the negotiations, because he calculated that Pollock was poised to break off negotiations and advance upon Kabul. Akbar Khan responded that without a written promise from Pollock to withdraw from Afghanistan he would not deliver the prisoners. These discussions continued late into the night, with Akbar Khan stating that if the British advanced he would send the prisoners further away into Turkestan. Clearly the situation deeply troubled Akbar Khan, because at daybreak he resumed his discussions with Troup and ordered him back to Jalalabad immediately. Troup and companion, Captain George Lawrence, arrived back in Jalalabad on 2 August.\textsuperscript{20} Relaying these events in Kabul, Pollock remained unmoved, with his only concession being that he would delay the advance of his army for a number of days. Pollock’s negotiating stance was then endorsed by the Governor-General.\textsuperscript{21} After receiving Pollock’s 14 July letter, an increasingly confident Ellenborough responded on 29 July and began by chastising Pollock for over-reaching on attaching conditions to Dost Mohammad’s release and being preemptive on longer-term Anglo-Afghan relations, but importantly provided Pollock the authority to proceed

\textsuperscript{18} Aminullah Khan Logari was Wazir to Dost Mohammad’s nephew Nawwab Muhammad Zaman Khan. Noelle (1997), pp. 51–53
\textsuperscript{19} Pollock to Maddock, 14 July 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 433, pp. 348–349
\textsuperscript{20} Prisoner CAPT George Lawrence was the brother of Henry Lawrence, political agent in Peshawar. Low (1873), p. 317
\textsuperscript{21} Low (1873), pp. 317–319
with his advance. Ellenborough’s instructions dramatically altered the negotiating dynamic for the release of British prisoners. Further negotiations were now a moot exercise, as Akbar Khan had demanded the withdrawal of British troops from Afghanistan before releasing the prisoners, and Ellenborough had ordered the opposite – that the British withdrawal was predicated on the release of the prisoners:

These circumstances afford better hopes of ultimate recovery of all prisoners, that it has yet been allowable to entertain; but I must impress upon you, that no trust whatever is to be placed in any Afghan; and that *all military operations must proceed as if no negotiation was in progress* … You may inform the Afghan chiefs … that immediately upon receiving from you the report of the surrender to you of the trophies of war, and of the prisoners, I will direct Dost Mohammad Khan … to be honorably conveyed to the frontier of Cabool … and consent that there shall be peace between the British Government and the Afghan people.  

In a continuation of punitive actions around Jalalabad, following the return of Colonel Monteith’s expedition, on 6 August Brigadier Sale was ordered to advance 20 kilometres south-west towards Fatehabad. Due to the weakened state of the troops, it took Sale’s column three days to reach the deserted Fatehabad. The British troops then launched local offensive operations destroying the infrastructure and orchards of villages implicated in the destruction of Elphinstone’s column. Indicative of these actions was, upon receipt of intelligence that Akbar Khan intended to occupy a fort 10 kilometres distant, known to be a favourite residence, Sale dispatched a force to destroy the fort. Upon their approach there was such limited Afghan resistance to indicate that Akbar Khan had not yet arrived and the Afghan garrison promptly surrendered. The fort was immediately occupied and its bastions demolished with explosives. The occupying force then commenced its destruction of the adjoining village where ‘every house was destroyed, every [orchard] tree [ring] barked or cut down’. Sale’s Brigade remained in Fatehabad for three weeks conducting similar punitive actions and, being absent from the disease and fetid conditions of Jalalabad, the troops began to regain their health. The force collected livestock and provisions to consolidate themselves in preparation for the keenly hoped for decision to advance on to Kabul.

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22 Ellenborough to Pollock (emphasis added), 29 Jul 1842 (2), PRO 30-12-98
23 Sale’s Brigade force was composed of: HM 13th and 35th NI, a troop of Horse Artillery, Broadfoot’s Sappers and Tait’s Irregular Horse. Gleig (1846), pp. 168–169; and, Pollock to Ellenborough, 13 Aug 1842 (2), PRO 30-12-65
24 The force comprised 300 troops from 35th NI, two guns, 200 troops from Tait’s Irregular Horse, and Broadfoot’s Sappers. Gleig (1846), p. 168
25 Gleig (1846), p. 169
26 Gleig (1846), pp. 168–169
As previously discussed, in southern Afghanistan on 22 July Nott had received Ellenborough’s 4 July letter and finally the strategic direction he had long been hoping for. After uncharacteristically responding immediately with a holding letter to Ellenborough, Nott then issued orders to prepare for the advance. He ordered the concentration of guns, artillery ammunition and camels in Kandahar, and an additional 350 camels to be brought forward from Quetta.  

As Stocqueler summarises, Nott felt that his ‘hour was come, and he was resolved that nothing should stand in the way of his long cherished and noble design’. After four days’ consideration Nott outlined his campaign design in a more fulsome response to Ellenborough on 26 July. He had decided to split his force into a smaller and potent force to advance northwards towards Kabul, and retire the remainder under the command of Major-General England southeast towards Quetta. Consistent with his empathetic approach to the local population, Nott reassures Ellenborough with the high standards he demanded from his troops:

Having well considered the subject of your Lordship’s letter of the 4th instant [July], having looked at the difficulties in every point of view, and reflected on the advantages which would attend a successful accomplishment of such a move, and the moral influence it would have throughout Asia, I have come to the determination to retire a portion of the army under my command via Ghuzni and Caubul. I shall take with me not a large, but compact and well-tried force on which I can rely. Your Lordship may rest assured that all prudence and every military precaution shall be observed; there shall be no unnecessary risk, and if expedient I will mask Ghuzni and even Caubul; but should an opportunity offer, I will endeavour to strike a decisive blow for the honour of our arms … I have commenced arrangements for the remainder of the force retiring upon Sukkur, under the command of Major-General England, K.H., who will receive the necessary instructions for his guidance in withdrawing the troops from Candahar and the different posts between this and Shikarpore. I am most anxious, notwithstanding the conduct of the Afghan Chiefs, that our army should leave a deep impression on the people of this country of our character for forbearance and humanity.

The next day Nott responded directly to Pollock to inform him of his course of action. As Pollock had correctly anticipated, Nott had chosen to retire from Kandahar, via the more circuitous route, through Kabul. This response allayed Pollock’s previous concerns that Nott may have already acted under Ellenborough’s superseded orders and had already begun a wholesale withdrawal to Quetta. Nott’s ‘most welcome’ response was received by Pollock in Jalalabad in mid-August 1842:

You will have received a copy of a letter from the Governor-General, under the date the 4th instant [July], to my address, giving me the option of retiring a part of my force to India, via Cabul and

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27 Nott to Quetta Garrison, 22 Jul 1842, in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 85
28 Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 86
29 Nott to Ellenborough, 26 Jul 1842, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 86–87
30 Low (1873), p. 334, and Fortescue (1927), p. 274
Jellalabad. I have determined to take that route, and will write to you fully on the subject as soon as I have arranged for carriage and supplies.  

Ellenborough wrote again to Nott on 6 July, reinforcing his previous two letters written on 4 July and his addendum on 5 July. Ellenborough, consistent with his micro-managing style, had studied a variety of tactical options available to Nott. Not yet aware of Nott’s campaign design and still suspicious of his battlefield commanders intent, Ellenborough provided additional tactical direction. Highlighting his continued unease with potential risks of re-intervention, Ellenborough authorised Nott to synchronise his withdrawal sequence from Kandahar, but stipulates that once the withdrawal has been completed there were to be no British troops remaining in Afghanistan:

Although I consider that in point of fact if you move towards Ghuzni and Caubul, with the intention of forming a junction with Major-General Pollock, and retiring with him through the Khyber Pass, your only practicable line of retirement will be that which you must open for yourself, through the enemy’s ranks … It is absolutely necessary, in the event of your moving upon Ghuzni, that you should make previous arrangements of the most certain and secure nature for the withdrawal below the Kojuck Pass of the troops you may not take with you. It is impossible for me to sanction the leaving of any force at Candahar, in a position in which might be surrounded, and require relief by an army from below the passes.

I cannot run the risk of a calamity like that which befell the garrison at Ghuzni; but at the same time it may not be necessary that the troops you may leave behind you should have passed the Kojuck, or should even have quitted Candahar before your movement may have commenced. Your decision upon this point must rest upon circumstances at the time; and I can only caution you, while you take into consideration the advantage which the holding of Candahar for some time after your movement has commenced … you must likewise consider that no risk whatever must be incurred as regards the secure retirement of the troops to be left behind you.

Ellenborough also responded to Nott’s previous request for guidance on the future of the inept Prince Timur. He authorised Timur to withdraw directly to India from Kandahar, and specified that Timur was not to accompany Nott to Kabul, lest it be misconstrued that Britain supported his claim to the throne and alienated the current incumbent Fatteh Jung. Ellenborough instructed that, ‘Prince Timour will, therefore, retire to Quettah and Sukkur, under the safeguard of whatever force you may send back to Scinde’.

Aware that Ellenborough would not yet have received his outline campaign design from his 26 July dispatch, Nott responded to Ellenborough’s additional direction to allay any concerns about the withdrawal plans for Kandahar. On 31 July Nott reiterated his campaign design:

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31 Nott to Pollock, 27 Jul 1842, NAM 6210-168-10
32 Ellenborough to Nott, 6 Jul 1842, fully transcribed in Stocqueler, Vol. 2, pp. 104–105
I am well aware of the advantages which would attend a portion of my force holding Candahar for fifteen or twenty days after the movement of troops towards Ghuzni, and I had accordingly arranged to leave her Majesty’s 41st Foot, five regiments N.I., twelve guns, cavalry, &c., for that purpose; but … I soon found that I could not do so without considerable risk, in the event of ever so small a body of the enemy assembling to impede the march of the Quettah column from Candahar. I will venture to make one remark to your Lordship: – unless the commander places full confidence in the troops under his command, no good result can be expected – this applies to all troops, but in particular to our native soldiers. I have now determined on seeing the Quettah column in march before I quit the vicinity of Candahar; and as I have thus given up the idea of holding the city, I shall take Her Majesty’s 41st Regiment with the Ghuzni column.

At present the districts round Candahar are perfectly tranquil, and I really believe that a very large majority of the people deeply regret our departure; yet I think that the moment we march, a scene of the greatest anarchy and cruelty will take place.

It is apparent that Nott’s original withdrawal sequence was for the Kabul column to initially march north, with his rear security provided by the remainder of his force in Kandahar. Then following the secure commencement of the northerly column, after a period of 15 to 20 days the remaining Kandahar Garrison was then to withdraw to Quetta. However, in the cryptic and unsolicited remark about ‘full confidence in the troops’, Nott clearly had doubts about the capacity of the remaining soldiers in either being able to act in a rearguard capacity, particularly with the odious Prince Timur unchecked in Kandahar, or being able to penetrate any Afghan force blocking their passage towards Quetta. Further it confirms Nott’s lack of confidence in England’s capabilities, particularly after the debacle at Haikalzai the previous March. Given these circumstances, reinforced by Ellenborough’s stipulation that no garrison was to remain in Kandahar, Nott reversed his planned withdrawal sequence. As he confirmed in his letter, the withdrawal sequence from Kandahar was to be the initial march of the Quetta column to the south-east, followed by the Kabul column marching to the north. No longer concerned about Kandahar having to be secured in his absence, this switch in sequence allowed Nott to take HM 41st as part of his Kabul column.

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33 Nott to Ellenborough, 31 Jul 1842, PRO 30-12-64
34 Nott’s disparaging opinion of England is revealed in a later exchange of correspondence regarding the eligibility of England’s Quetta column being awarded the ‘Candahar Medal’. In response to England’s 24 Oct 1842 petition to the Governor-General to be awarded the medal, Nott responds damningly to Maddock ‘medals were only granted for gallant conduct in the field … [England’s] “action of the 28th of March” when his force was completely defeated … for being in Candahar from the 10th of May to 10th of August, where they never fired a shot … the “passage of the Kojuck, in August, 1842”, where there was no enemy that could possibly have resisted … I deeply regret that any such claim should have been advanced’. Nott to Maddock, 15 Nov 1842, fully transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 177–179; General Orders by His Excellency the Commander in Chief, 4 Oct 1842, fully transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 164–168, and Low (1873), pp. 442–443, and Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 175; England to Maddock, 24 Oct 1842, fully transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 175–177
Nott now finalised his arrangements in preparation for the withdrawal from Kandahar. He transferred responsibility for the affairs of Sind to the commander of the Quetta column Major-General England. Nott instructed England to withdraw all the troops, guns and stores from Quetta as part of his planning.\textsuperscript{35} Nott, true to his empathetic approach with the local population, impressed upon England the high conduct he expected of England’s withdrawing troops that, ‘no soldier or camp-follower ought to be allowed to enter any village. It is desirable in every point of view that an army should leave a deep impression on the minds of the people of this country of our high character for forbearance and humanity’.\textsuperscript{36}

The remaining 8000 troops of the Kandahar Garrison composed Nott’s Division for the advance to Ghazni and Kabul.\textsuperscript{37} As Nott finalised his preparation to withdraw, on 7 August he provided his final thoughts in a dispatch from Kandahar to update Ellenborough. This letter revealed Nott’s key concerns that spanned the tactical, local reputational issues and regional strategic implications. Having split his force and with both columns facing arduous tactical movements, Nott expressed his concerns with the successful withdrawal of the Quetta column and the logistic sustainment of his own force when it arrived in Kabul. Nott also clearly considered his upcoming actions as a key component in the restoration of a battered British prestige throughout the region. Significantly for a commander who also viewed that a favourable local legacy was important, Nott reflected on the professional conduct of the troops in quitting Kandahar, and the respect shown to the British by the local Afghans implying an affirmation of his success as the garrison commander:

\textsuperscript{35} Nott arranged that the Political Agent in Sind, MAJ Outram, correspond directly with England and sent LT Jackson as the Political Agent to accompany Prince Timur to India. MAJGEN England’s Quetta column was composed of: Troop of Horse Artillery, Bullock battery (six guns), Detachment of Poonah Horse, two Rissalahs (100 men each) of Irregular Cavalry, 25th Regiment of Bombay NI, several companies of a Light Battalion, and three regiments of Bengal Irregular Infantry. Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 113–114

\textsuperscript{36} Nott to England, undated (late-Jul/early-Aug 1842), transcribed in Stocqueler, Vol. 2, p. 115

\textsuperscript{37} Nott’s Division for the advance to Kabul was composed as follows. **Artillery:** LT Leslie’s Troop of Bombay European Horse Artillery; CAPT Anderson’s Troop of Artillery (late the Shah’s Artillery); CAPT Blood’s 9-pounder Battery; Company of Bengal Foot Artillery (4 x 18-pounders). **Cavalry:** 3rd Regiment of Bombay Light Cavalry; Haldane’s and Christie’s Horse (Irregular Cavalry). **Engineers:** Bengal Engineers (MAJ Saunders); Bombay Engineers (LTs North and Stoddart). **Infantry:** HM 40th (Major Hibbard); HM 41st; 2nd Bengal NI; 16th Bengal NI (COL McLaren); 38th Bengal NI (CAPT Burney); 42nd Bengal Bengal NI; 43rd Bengal NI; 3rd (CAPT Craigie) Regiment of Irregular Infantry. **1st Infantry Bde:** Colonel Wymer (acting Brigadier) Brigade Commander and Brigade Major CAPT J.H. Scott (38th Bengal Native Cavalry). **Nott’s Staff:** CAPTs Polwhele, Waterfield and LT Tytler; Political Agents MAJ Leech and Rawlinson. Composite list compiled from: Stocqueler, Vol. 2, p. 114; Nott to Maddock, 30 Aug 1842, transcribed in Stocqueler, Vol. 2, pp. 123 – 124; Wymer to Nott, 1 Sep 1842, in *Parliamentary Papers* (1843), Paper No. 492, p. 389; and, Imlah (1939), p. 107
I dare say I shall meet with difficulties, but our march through the centre of Affghanistan, via Ghuznee, and Cabool, will have a great moral influence throughout Asia even if I should not have an opportunity of striking a blow for the reputation of our arms, and I think I shall accomplish it to your Lordship’s satisfaction. The only fear I have is the want of forage in the valley of Cabool, and thence Jellallabad …

The surrounding country is apparently in a tranquil state, and, with the exception of the turbulent Chiefs, I really believe the people deeply regret our departure. They were in alarm a few days back under an impression that our army would plunder and destroy the city, but I succeeded in assuring them that no man should be molested or a particle of property touched, and on the troops quitting the city I knew not which most to admire, the fine discipline and forbearance of our troops, or the quiet and respectful behavior of the inhabitants.38

As Nott finalised his preparations for departure, Stocqueler summarised Nott’s legacy in Kandahar:

He [Nott] was turning his back upon a city and a province where he had caused his own and the British name to be respected and feared. He had converted a lawless and disconnected people into good citizens and respectful friends. None of the wrongs which had been inflicted on the people of Caubul, exciting them to hatred and vengeance, were visited on the people of Candahar; on the contrary, sure and condign punishment fell upon any one eating the British salt who injured an Affghan. Strict justice, firmness, and humanity had been the leading principles of the good General, and his presence had come to be regarded as the guarantee of tranquility and order.39

By August 1842 Cabinet’s view from London had strengthened towards returning to Kabul, recovering the prisoners and punishing Akbar Khan.40 In Afghanistan, Pollock maintained a tight control on the confidential negotiations between Ellenborough, Nott and himself. Within the Jalalabad Garrison Pollock’s senior commanders, including Sale, were unaware of the maturity of the arrangements for the advance on Kabul. By mid-August, coinciding with the arrival of Ellenborough’s confirmatory 23 July correspondence and the acknowledgement by Nott of his receipt of Ellenborough’s 4 July directive, Pollock was confident that the strategic preconditions for the advance on Kabul had solidified. Pollock summarised these conditions to Ellenborough, particularly the central issue of confirming Nott’s decision to advance upon Kabul, in a series of three letters dated 13 and 15 August. On 13 August he wrote two letters to Ellenborough. In both, he acknowledged receipt of Ellenborough’s 29 July authority to proceed with the advance. In his first Pollock highlights his lack of transportation animals, but makes his intentions clear, ‘if I could collect a sufficient number of bullocks or mules … I would proceed immediately on hearing that General

38 Nott to Ellenborough, 7 Aug 1842, in Stocqueler, Vol. 2, pp. 117–118
40 Interestingly the sole dissenter was Wellington, retaining his initial conviction of an immediate withdrawal. Yapp (1980), p. 453
Nott is now on his way’. In his second, to reinforce his considerations for advancing once Nott’s intentions were confirmed, ‘I will look anxious for accounts from General Nott … I most seriously trust he will at once determine to advance. If he does I shall make every exertion to move on Cabool without delay’. Finally, on 15 August, a relieved Pollock wrote to Ellenborough, ‘I have had the pleasure to receive a letter from Gen. Nott announcing his intention to advance on Cabool’. Pollock was now confident that he possessed all the conditions and authorities to launch his advance on Kabul, and immediately announced the order for Britain’s military re-intervention into Afghanistan to his commanders.

The proclamation issued by Pollock was circulated widely, including to the Afghan leadership, that the British were going to reoccupy Kabul and warned of retribution against any harm to the British prisoners. When the direction for a re-intervention was released there was great excitement and enthusiasm. Pollock’s direction ‘was welcomed both by the Brigadier [Sale] and his followers with hearty goodwill’. Sale who was still deployed in Fatehabad wrote to Pollock on 16 August upon being informed of the advance on Kabul, ‘Hurrah! this is good news … I am so excited that I can scarce write’. As a precursor to the general advance, Pollock immediately dispatched the HM 3rd Dragoons with an additional troop of Horse Artillery to Fatehabad, under the command of the Cavalry Brigade Commander, Colonel White.

After the dispatch of his advance elements towards Fatehabad, on 20 August 1842 Pollock commenced his main-body advance towards Gandomak which he had selected as the assembly point for his invasion force. Pollock formed a rear-party to remain in Jalalabad with the sick and wounded along with any excess stores that would impede a rapid advance towards Kabul. The column that commenced the advance numbered approximately 8000 troops.

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41 Pollock to Ellenborough, 13 Aug 1842 (1), PRO 30-12-65
42 Pollock to Ellenborough, 13 Aug 1842 (2), PRO 30-12-65
43 Pollock to Ellenborough, 15 Aug 1842, PRO 30-12-65; and, NAM 6210-168-10
44 Gleig (1846), p. 169
45 Sale to Pollock, 16 Aug 1842, transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 336–337
46 Low (1873), p. 337; and Pollock to Ellenborough, 13 Aug 1842 (2), PRO 30-12-65
47 Marshman (1860), p. 128
48 Low (1873), p. 338
49 Pollock’s column was composed of Pollock’s HQ, Artillery: 3rd Troop, 1st Brigade Horse Artillery (four guns); 3rd Troop 2nd Brigade Horse Artillery (four guns); CAPT Abbott’s Battery (six guns); CAPT
On the evening of 20 August, Pollock’s column reached Soltanpur. His advancing column then moved through Sale’s position at Fatehabad to arrive at Memlah by the night of 22 August.\textsuperscript{50} Pollock’s column reached Gandomak on the morning of 23 August.\textsuperscript{51} As planned, Pollock consolidated the assembly point for his invasion force at Gandomak and commenced the process of building up his force by a succession of arriving brigades. Despite assurances before commencing the advance, where Pollock had ‘perceived a favourable change’, the problematic Sikhs did not now want to advance any further.\textsuperscript{52} He accommodated their request and planned to leave them at Gandomak to maintain the rearward lines of communication. Also upon the occupation of Gandomak, Pollock was informed that the Afghan Chiefs Hadji Ali and Khryroollah Khan were in the nearby village of Mama Kheyæl, 5 kilometres distant. In a sign of the British mood, a retributive raid was immediately planned ‘to punish the inhabitants of the village for having harboured them’ against tribesmen widely considered as ‘the most
ferocious butchers of our countrymen, in their retreat from Cabul’.\footnote{Pollock to Maddock, 31 Aug 1842, NAM 6210-168-10; and, Marshman (1860), p. 128} Given their proximity to Gandomak, Pollock decided to attack the village and ordered forward HM 3rd Dragoons and Broadfoot’s Sappers from Sale’s camp at Fatehabad who then marched 20 kilometres through the night to arrive at daybreak.\footnote{Pollock to Major-General Lumley, 25 Aug 1842, \textit{Parliamentary Papers} (1843), Paper No. 470, pp. 374–376; Low (1873), pp. 339–341; and Fortescue (1927), p. 274}

Having prepared his camp to counter any Afghan attack on his rear, at 0400hr on 24 August Pollock launched his assault on the villages of Mama Kheyl and nearby Kali Kheyl.\footnote{Mamoo Khail cited in the historical record equates to the modern village of Mama Khyel [GS 9089]. The nearby village cited in the historical record as Koochle Khail has been transposed from 1879 data from the only other village in the local area denoted as Kudi Khel. This location most likely equates to the vicinity of the modern village of Kali Kheyl [GS 9088]. US NGIA Map, 2005, ‘Azrow’, Ed. 8-NGA, Series U611, Sheet 2985; Surveyor General of India Map, 1879, ‘The Two Routes to Kabul via Jelalabad, & via The Kuram Valley’, [IOR Map Collection: X/9973/1]} The fields at the front of Mama Kheyl had been deliberately flooded by the Afghans to prevent a direct advance upon the village. Pollock divided his force into two columns, with four companies of the HM 9th and skirmishers leading both columns. Pollock accompanied the right column, under the command of Major-General John McCaskill, which was postured for the advance against the village of Kali Kheyl. The left column, under the command of Brigadier Tulloch, advanced directly towards the fort in the village of Mama Kheyl.\footnote{In preparation for the assault Pollock composed his rearguard under the command of Major Davis of HM 9th Foot. The rearguard composition was: three companies of 26th NI, three companies of 60th NI, 50 Sowars of the 3rd (Tait’s) Irregular Cavalry, and the recently arrived squadron of 3rd Dragoons. Pollock to Major-General Lumley, 25 Aug 1842, \textit{Parliamentary Papers} (1843), Paper No. 470, pp. 374–376, Low (1873), p. 341; and Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, pp. 298–299;} Nearby, Captain Broadfoot’s cavalry and engineer force were positioned to Taylor’s right as a flanking security force. As Broadfoot’s force advanced in a nearby orchard they encountered a concentration of Afghans who then initiated an attack. This Afghan

\footnote{Taylor’s infantry force consisted of four companies of HM 9th Foot and six companies of 26th NI. McCaskill to Captain Ponsonby, 25 Aug 1842, \textit{Parliamentary Papers} (1843), Paper No. 471, pp. 376–377; and Low (1873), pp. 342–343}
assault was successfully repulsed by Broadfoot’s flanking guard, and soon these Afghan tribesmen retreated to Mama Kheyl.58

Schematic 5.3: Attack and capture of Mama Kheyl and Kali Kheyl: 24 August 1842

Brigadier Tulloch’s left column then directly assaulted the village of Mama Kheyl supported by the artillery fire from Captain Abbott’s Battery for their advance over the intermediate cultivated fields. After skirmishing the British exploited a small breach in a half-repaired bastion, and the Afghans abandoned the fort. Pollock moved his headquarters to a position between the two advancing columns to coordinate the advance. He ordered Tulloch to reinforce the right column with two companies of HM 9th and for the remainder of Tulloch’s force to commence the destruction of Mama

58 Broadfoot’s force was composed of 250 Sowars of the 3rd (Tait’s) Irregular Cavalry alongside his own Sappers (approx. 220 troops). Captain Broadfoot to Captain Ponsonby, 25 Aug 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 472, pp. 377–378; and Low (1873), pp. 343–344
Kheyl. In the face of Taylor’s advance on the right towards Kali Kheyl, the Afghans also abandoned their village. These withdrawing Afghans converged with the other withdrawing Afghans from the neighbouring village of Mama Kheyl that had been dislodged by Tulloch’s advance. The retreating Afghans from Mama Kheyl were intercepted by the Tait’s 3rd Irregular Cavalry in open ground ‘where the cavalry cut them up handsomely’. The retreating Afghans from both villages fell back on the surrounding high ground to occupy defensive positions closer to the village of Kali Kheyl. These defensive positions were within the range of the jezzails allowing the Afghans to keep up harassing fire onto Taylor’s force now consolidating in the village of Kali Kheyl. The indefatigable Broadfoot, now gathering a party of HM 9th and 26th NI, continued the pursuit of the retreating Afghans. Broadfoot’s ad hoc force, now supporting Taylor’s village clearance of Kali Kheyl, undertook bayonet attacks to clear a remaining Afghan village (no name given). Broadfoot’s continued assault into the surrounding foothills surprised the Afghans who then abandoned their positions and allowed Broadfoot’s troops to capture a large quantity of cattle, ammunition and stores.

Following his clearance of Kali Kheyl, Taylor’s infantry force continued an assault uphill, ascending to clear the remaining Afghan defensive positions ‘from crag to crag’. It was subsequently discovered that the Afghan chiefs Hadji Ali and Khyroolah Khan had fled with 60 followers to Kabul.

The British casualties for this action were seven killed and 49 wounded, with estimates of similar Afghan losses. With the clearance of the surrounding heights completed and the ongoing burning of the forts and dwellings, and cutting down the orchards within Mama Kheyl and Kali Kheyl, Pollock ordered the whole column to

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59 Major Smith’s personal account of the battle for ‘Koorcllee Khail’, transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 346–347
60 Low (1873), p. 344
63 Pollock to Lumley, 25 Aug 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 470, pp. 374–376
64 Ponsonby, 24 Aug 1842, ‘Return of Killed, Wounded, and Missing of Troops under the personal command of Major-General Pollock, 24 August 1842’, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 473, p. 378. Low incorrectly states 45 wounded, Low (1873), p. 346. Major Smith’s personal account of the battle for Koooollee Khail, states ‘our loss in this action was a total of fifty-six killed and wounded’ and gives the Afghan losses as ‘about equal’, transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 346–347
concentrate upon the destruction of Mama Kheyl, concerned that the Afghans would simply reoccupy these villages if he had withdrawn immediately. The British force continued their localised destruction and gathering supplies for their advance, and on 30 August Pollock ordered the return of the column to Gandomak to continue the preparations for the advance on Kabul.

Pollock halted at Gandomak for the arrival of the remainder of his troops from Jalalabad and built up his supplies whilst he awaited further information on Nott’s movements, so as to best sequence their combined movements to arrive in Kabul simultaneously. Pollock also reinforced his rearwards lines of communication by arraying a force of 200 Jezailchees between Gandomak, Fatehabad and Jalalabad to enhance the security for the passage of supplies, primarily against Afghan thieves from the village of Memlah.

Previously on 21 July, the Afghan ruler Shah Futteh Jung (son of murdered Shah Shuja) had written to Pollock confirming the power arrangements in Kabul. It was clear that Akbar Khan, the self-appointed Vizier now exerted full control over Futteh Jung and the affairs of state. Furthermore Akbar Khan had legitimised his exercise of power through the authority of this titular king:

I have given to Sirdar Mahomed Akbar [Khan] the full and entire management of all my property and affairs of every description, and have resigned to him in perpetuity full power to judge and settle all questions on all points. Whatever arrangements he may make with the English Government I agree to confirm, and no alteration shall be made.

On 1 September the forlorn figure of the deposed ruler Futteh Jung ‘the nominal King of Cabool’ appeared in Pollock’s camp ‘this morning’. He had escaped from imprisonment by Akbar Khan in the Bala Hissar and now sought refuge with Pollock. Despite his dishevelled appearance, he was formally received by Pollock and provided

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66 Marshman (1860), pp. 128–129; and Low (1873), p. 348
69 Futteh Jung to Pollock, 21 Jul 1842, transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 349–350, and transcribed in Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 301
70 Pollock to Maddock, 1 Sep 1842, NAM 6210-168-10. Futteh Jung was accurately, but rather uncharitably, described by Low as being ‘slender and rather good-looking young man, but neither gifted with brains nor entitled to much respect on the score of morality’, or more bluntly by Kaye as an ‘imbecile Prince’. Low (1873), p. 348, and Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 301
with accommodation befitting royalty. Pollock immediately informed the Governor-General of the unexpected arrival of Futteh Jung. In response, on 13 September Ellenborough reiterated his instructions to Pollock ‘to abstain, under the present circumstances of Afghanistan, from recognizing as Sovereign any pretender to the throne of Cabool’. Furthermore, Pollock was instructed to pass on to ‘Prince’ (pointedly not referred to as ‘Shah’) Futteh Jung Ellenborough’s desire ‘to recognize, at the earliest period, a Government in Cabool, supported by the Affghans themselves, and capable of maintaining relations of friendship with neighbouring states’. This assiduously apolitical stance by the British was to have very practical ramifications for Pollock during his later occupation of Kabul.

The hedging strategies of the local Afghans matched those of their deposed Shah. Local Afghan chieftains, aware of Monteith’s actions in the Shinwari Valley (map 5.1), Sale’s actions around Fatehabad (see map 5.2), and the recent actions at Mama Kheyl and Kali Kheyl (schematic 5.3), came in to tender their submission to Pollock. There was a growing Afghan fear that the British re-intervention was going to be as uncompromising in exacting revenge as these recent punitive raids. As a direct consequence of the changes to local allegiances (however brief), the provisions in Gandomak were readily built up. However, Pollock’s most pressing need was to coordinate his own advance with Nott to ensure that both columns converged upon Kabul together. As previously discussed, Pollock had written to Nott on 14 June and enclosed the letter he had received from Maddock dated 1 June which had provided the first indication of a change in Ellenborough’s intent towards a more assertive posture in Afghanistan. However, Pollock had heard nothing from Nott since the previously discussed receipt of Nott’s letter dated 27 July received in mid-August 1842. In that letter Nott had confirmed his choice ‘of retiring a part of my force to India, via Cabul

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71 Since the murder of Shah Shuja on 5 April 1842 and death of Ranjit Singh 20 June 1839, the British considered the Tripartite Treaty with the British to be ‘abrogated’ and the British position was to remain neutral in the selection of the Afghan sovereign, stipulating only that the choice be made by ‘the Affghan chiefs and people’. Maddock to Pollock, 13 Sep 1842 (2), PRO 30-12-98
72 Pollock also used this hiatus to visit the nearby site of the last stand of HM 44th at Gandomak before their annihilation during the retreat in Jan 1842. The exposed remnants of the Kabul garrison were readily located on a conical knoll with European fair hair still attached to their skulls. Low (1873), p. 352
74 The exchange of correspondence between the two Generals required physical transmission by cossids (letter-carriers) travelling long distances through hostile tribes and entailed delays in transmission (and potential interception)
and Jellalabad’ in response to Ellenborough’s famous 4 July letter.\(^75\) In the interval Pollock had dispatched 10 messages seeking confirmation and detail of Nott’s movements and timings. At midnight 6 September Pollock finally received responses that confirmed Nott had commenced his northward movement from Kandahar. \(^76\)

Now confident that Nott was on the march, on 7 September Pollock resumed his advance on Kabul with a force organised into two Divisions supported by a rear party remaining in Gandomak.\(^77\) The first Division, to which Pollock attached himself, was commanded by Major-General Sir Robert Sale.\(^78\) The Division passed the infamous conical hill of HM 44\(^{th}\) last stand at Gandomak where the skeletons and remains from the massacre of the Kabul Garrison were still scattered. The Division marched 14 kilometres over extremely rough roads for five hours to reach the village of Sorkh Pol.\(^79\)

At Sale’s overnight camp at Sorkh Pol was the bridge which had been the scene of great British loss of life when access had been denied to Elphinstone’s retreating troops by the Afghan guard.\(^80\) The following day, 8 September, the second Division, commanded by Major-General McCaskill, with the bulk of transportation animals, commenced their move from Gandomak. They were accompanied by elements of a Sikh contingent that had arrived in Gandomak on 6 September 1842 and had agreed to proceed with the

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\(^75\) Nott to Pollock, 27 Jul 1842, transcribed in Low (1873), p. 334, and Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 297

\(^76\) The letters received from Nott are not listed but they must range from 27 Jul (Nott’s last letter received) to 5 Sep 1842 at the latest. From the checklist of correspondence provided by Stocqueler to strenuously refute the claim that Nott did not communicate with Pollock, it is most likely that the letter(s) referred to by Low was one/all of the following letters written as Nott advanced northward: Kelat-i-Gilzie [transcription error ‘16 miles from Kandahar Camp Killa-i-Argezran(?)’ see Nott to Pollock, 10 Aug 1842, IOR Mss Eur F439/7 - 10 Aug 1842, Camp Chusham Neushaka - 26 Aug, and/or Camp Ghoine - 31 Aug. Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 139; and Low (1873), p. 354

\(^77\) Low (1873), p. 354

\(^78\) Sale’s Division was composed: Artillery: 3\(^{rd}\) Troop, 1\(^{st}\) Battalion, Horse Artillery (two guns); No. 6 (Captain Abbott’s) Light Field Battery (six guns); Captain Backhouse’s Mountain Train (three guns). Cavalry: HM 3\(^{rd}\) Light Dragoons; One Squadron 1\(^{st}\) Light Cavalry; Three Rissallahs (half-Squadrons) 3\(^{rd}\) (Tait’s) Irregular Horse. Engineers: 5\(^{th}\) Company Sappers and Miners; Broadfoot’s Sappers; Mackeson’s Bildars (Pioneers). Infantry: HM 9\(^{th}\); HM 13\(^{th}\) Light Infantry; 26\(^{th}\) NI and 35\(^{th}\) NI (both Fortescue and Low reference 26\(^{th}\) NI not 16 NI detailed by Pollock – which is a transcription error of Pollock’s letter, because in a later battle description of the assault on Jegdalek Pass (discussed later) and battle casualty summary, the 26\(^{th}\) NI is repeatedly referred to. Pollock to Lumley, 7 Sep 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 485, pp. 383–384; Pollock to Lumley, 9 Sep 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 488, pp. 385–387 (and attached summary Ponsonby, 8 Sep 1842, ‘Return of Killed, Wounded and Missing … the Storming of the Heights of Jugdulluck’); Low (1873), pp. 354–355 and 359; and Fortescue (1927), p. 274

\(^79\) The modern village of Sorkh Pol has the bridge crossing over the Hesarak River which is referred to in the historical record as Soorkab, or Red, River (Sor is Pashto for red). Low (1873), p. 355

\(^80\) Beneath the bridge were skeletons, still covered in leathery skin, from where they had been shot from the bridge as they had attempted to ford the river below. Low (1873), p. 355
The rear-party was established at Gandomak as a supply depot as the 500 bullocks hired from Peshawar and the 600 camels hired from Attock had not yet arrived to support the advance. Pollock was forced to advance without these carriage animals so he ordered a commissariat officer from Jalalabad to move forward to Gandomak to coordinate the collection of supplies and prepare for the future requirement to support the return of the ‘Army of Retribution’ to India. Pollock was equally concerned about the defence of the Gandomak position, which he then strengthened by the redeployment of a cavalry squadron and wing of NI from Jalalabad, and to be further reinforced with the impending arrival of 1000 Sikh troops.

On 8 September, Sale’s Division commenced their march from Sorkh Pol towards the Jegdalek Pass. The reconnaissance party, commanded by the Deputy Quartermaster-General, Captain Codrington, reported a great concentration of Ghilzai tribesmen covering the Jegdalek Pass from the surrounding heights that formed an ‘amphitheatre’. The Afghans had selected a formidable defensive site to block the British progress towards Kabul. As Pollock approached the Jegdalek Pass with Sale’s column, the initial encounter with the Afghan defence on the circling high ground was daunting, as reflected in Pollock’s initial impressions:

I perceived their summits were occupied by a considerable number of men; and a nearer view enabled me to ascertain the nature of their position, which was one of singular strength and difficulty of approach. The enemy were assembled in bodies apparently under different chieftains, each having a distinguishing standard.

In response to the long-range rifle fire of the Afghan jezzails that inflicted British casualties, the column halted and Sale’s artillery commenced firing onto the high ground. Despite the accuracy of the British artillery fire, it failed to dislodge the

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81 McCaskill’s Division was composed: Artillery: 3rd Troop, 1st Brigade Horse Artillery (two guns); 3rd Troop, 2nd Brigade Horse Artillery (two guns). Cavalry: 2 Squadrons and HQ, 1st Light Cavalry; Three Rissallahs (half-Squadrons) 3rd (Tait’s) Irregular Horse. Infantry: HM 31st; Wing 33rd NI; Wing 60th NI. Sikh contingent: 200 cavalry, 300 infantry, 5 camel guns, and 10 long jezails commanded by Captain Henry Lawrence. Pollock to Lumley, 7 Sep 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 485, pp. 383–384. Low (1873), pp. 355–356
82 Pollock to Lumley, 7 Sep 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 485, pp. 383–384; and Low (1873), p. 356. Low refers to 50 bullocks, Pollock’s letter describes 500. I have taken Pollock’s original letter as the authoritative source
83 The Gandomak garrison consisted of: 3rd Troop of 2nd Brigade Horse Artillery (two guns), 1 Squadron 5th Light Cavalry, 1 Squadron and HQ of 10th Light Cavalry, Left wing 33rd NI and Left wing 60th NI. Pollock to Lumley, 7 Sep 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 485, pp. 383–384; Pollock to Lumley, 22 Oct 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 533, p. 423; Low (1873), pp. 356–357; and, Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 303
84 Pollock to Major-General Lumley, 9 Sep 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 488, pp. 385–387
tribesmen from their prepared defensive positions. Consequently, Pollock ordered an assault to dislodge the Afghan defenders, whom he estimated to number between ‘four to five thousand men’.

Schematic 5.4: Forcing the Jegdalek Pass: 8 September 1842

The assault was structured on three simultaneous attacking columns ascending the heights focussed against three prepared Afghan defensive positions. To the left Captain Broadfoot’s Sappers were tasked to assault a steep hill and capture an entrenched Afghan defensive position on the high ground. In the centre, a force based around the HM 13th commanded by Captain Wilkinson, accompanied by a company of 26th NI commanded by Captain Gahan, were tasked to assault the key hill at the centre of the Afghan defensive position. To the right, Lieutenant-Colonel Taylor’s force based on
HM 9th (personally commanded by Sale!) with two companies of 35th NI (commanded respectively by Lieutenants Boileau and Trench) were tasked to assault across an intervening ravine and then onto the high ground to capture an abandoned Afghan fort that housed a large concentration of Afghan chiefs and cavalry. The three columns were launched simultaneously and ‘with great difficulty and fatigue’ the assault engaged in close fighting to successfully disperse the tribesmen from the Jegdalek heights.\textsuperscript{85}

A large body of dislodged Afghans withdrew to the ‘summit of a high mountain’ at the rear of their Jegdalek position to make a final stand. Pollock was determined to destroy the Afghan resistance so he pressed home the assault on this rear Afghan defensive position. Under the covering artillery fire provided by Captain Abbott, a composite force advanced toward the Afghan defensive position. This composite force reformed into two columns led respectively by Captains Wilkinson and Broadfoot.\textsuperscript{86} Clambering over the precipitous heights against heavy jezzail fire with rocks thrown down from the heights, ‘the discomfited Ghilzyes not relishing an encounter, betook themselves to flight … and leaving our troops in quiet possession of their last and least assailable stronghold’. The Afghans again withdrew in the face of this determined and unrelenting British assault. Pollock was delighted at the success of this difficult feat by his force, writing, ‘seldom have soldiers had a more arduous task to perform’ and reporting that ‘we have thus signally defeated, with one division of troops, the most powerful tribes and the most inveterate of our enemies’. The routing of the Afghan stronghold at Jegdalek came at a cost to the British of six killed and 58 wounded (including a slightly wounded Sale).\textsuperscript{87}

Pollock wanted to pursue the retreating Afghans in order to maintain the momentum and deny the reconstitution of any Afghan opposition. However, his troops were exhausted after the arduous clearance of the Jegdalek Pass, artillery ammunition was low and the carriage animals were weak from continued lack of forage. Sale made a representation to rest for a day at Jegdalek, but Pollock did not want to cede any of the hard-gained momentum. Sale’s lead Division then pushed through the Pass, man-

\textsuperscript{86} This composite force comprised HM 13th Light Infantry, one company 26th NI, one company 35th NI, 5th Company Sappers and Miners and Broadfoot’s Sappers. Pollock to Lumley, 9 Sep 1842, \textit{Parliamentary Papers} (1843), Paper No. 488, pp. 385–387
\textsuperscript{87} Pollock to Lumley, 9 Sep 1842, \textit{Parliamentary Papers} (1843), Paper No. 488, pp. 385–387; partially transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 362–363; and Fortescue (1927), p. 274
handling the guns over the steep ascents, to finally rest at Katasang where Elphinstone and Brigadier Shelton had been previously held prisoner during attempted negotiations with Akbar Khan.  

Major-General McCaskill’s 2nd Division maintained a day’s separation to the rear of the advance to reach Sorkh Pol on the evening of 8 September. McCaskill positioned security parties along the escarpments to cover the ponderous movement of the baggage train and rearguard. The following day his column commenced its slow move through the Jegdalek Pass. As the rearguard of the column entered the Pass, the security picquets descended to rejoin the main body, and had their commanding positions instantly occupied by the trailing Afghans. The Afghans retained a distance but maintained a constant harassing fire into the rear of the column, resulting in the rearguard being in almost continuous engagement.

Following the departure from Jegdalek, Sale’s lead column continued to pass many remnants of the destruction of the Kabul Garrison with the road strewn with ‘the mangled bodies of their fellow-soldiers’ from the previous January’s retreat. These constant reminders of Afghan atrocities accumulated to engender a grim resolution among the advancing troops, ‘inflaming their minds almost to frenzy’ to avenge their slaughtered comrades. By 10 September Sale’s lead Division had reached a desolate and exposed position at Khvajeh-se Baba Ziarat where there was some much-needed fodder. The advance of the lead Division continued to Tezin, where reports were sent back that an Afghan blocking force was gathering in strength.

On 11 September the force reached Tezin where Sale’s 1st Division reconsolidated with McCaskill’s 2nd Division for the first time since departing Gandomak on 7 September. McCaskill’s Division had advanced through the Jegdalek

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88 Kutta Sung cited in the historical record is the modern village of Katasang. Subsequently Pollock was informed by CAPT Troup, a prisoner who was at that time in Kabul with Akbar Khan, that had the British not pressed on with their the advance (as requested by Sale), Akbar Khan had been ready to launch 20,000 tribesmen again at the British column in Jegdalek. Low (1873), pp. 363–364
89 Low (1873), pp. 365–366; and Fortescue (1927), pp. 274–275
90 En route a ruined building was discovered with over 100 skeletons huddled where they had sought refuge from Afghans before being slaughtered or dying of exposure. Marshman (1860), p. 130
91 Marshman (1860), p. 130; and Low (1873), pp. 366–367
92 The township of Sei Baba cited in the historical record is in the vicinity of the modern township of Khvajeh-se Baba Ziarat. Low (1873), p. 366
93 The township of Tezeen cited in the historical record is in the vicinity of the modern township of Tezin-e Khais (which I have shortened to Tezin). Fortescue (1927), p. 274
Pass with the loss of over 100 transport animals and arrived at Tezin exhausted. Given
the state of his own forces after an arduous advance in contact with the Afghans,
Pollock ordered a temporary halt at Tezin on 12 September to provide some respite and
reconsolidation of his force.\textsuperscript{94} The Tezin River Valley was completely encircled
by heights and the passage to Kabul was through the mouth of the narrow defile of the
Tezin Pass which continued westward for 6 kilometres between sheer mountain
complexes to the north and south.\textsuperscript{95} Taking advantage of Pollock’s temporary halt,
Akbar Khan collected his force for his decisive defensive battle for Kabul. Pollock had
(wrongly) anticipated that Akbar Khan’s defensive position would be further along the
formidable defiles of the Khvord Kabul Pass nearer Kabul. With Pollock’s column
stationary, Akbar Khan decided to move forward and confront him with the Afghan
forces supplemented by tribesmen ‘swarming’ to his aid from Kabul and the
surrounding region.\textsuperscript{96}

For the halt, Pollock ordered security positions to be established forward on the
surrounding high ground to support the main British position within the valley of Tezin.
During the afternoon of 12 September, Major Thomas Skinner (HM 31\textsuperscript{st}) was tasked to
secure a ridgeline overlooking the Tezin Valley with a small composite force of six
infantry companies, engineers and \textit{Jezailchees}.\textsuperscript{97} Elsewhere that afternoon the
advancing Afghans had commenced concerted attacks against other forward security
positions. The left forward security picquet, charged with protecting feeding cattle, was
attacked with such ferocity that at 1730hr a counter-attack force of 240 men from HM
9\textsuperscript{th} was dispatched, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Taylor. These reinforcements
drove back the Afghan assault after heavy close-quarter fighting. Taylor was then
reinforced by Major Huish and a small force from 26\textsuperscript{th} NI, and this combined force
continued to press the withdrawing Afghans. After being pursued across a plain by
Taylor’s skirmishers, an Afghan defensive position was identified along a range of steep

\textsuperscript{94} Pollock to Lumley, 14 Sep 1842, \textit{Parliamentary Papers} (1843), Paper No. 500, pp. 395–398; Low
(1873), p. 367 and 374; and Fortescue (1927), pp. 274–275
\textsuperscript{95} The Baluk and Garay Ghar Mountain complexes are part of the northern foothills of the Selseleh-ye
Spin Ghar Mountain Range. These are referred to collectively in the historical record as the Huft Kotal (in
Dari \textit{Haft Kuh} or ‘seven hills’). There is a nearby spot height 4 km south of the Tezin Pass rising
precipitously to 2808 m
\textsuperscript{96} Marshman (1860), pp. 129–130; and, MAJ Smith’s account transcribed in Low (1873), p. 381–383
\textsuperscript{97} MAJ Skinner’s security force consisted of a company from each of HM 9\textsuperscript{th}, HM 13\textsuperscript{rd}, HM 31\textsuperscript{st}, 26\textsuperscript{th} NI,
35\textsuperscript{th} NI, 33\textsuperscript{rd} NI, 50 Broadfoot’s Sappers, and 50 Jezailchees. Skinner to Ponsonby, 16 Sep 1842,
\textit{Parliamentary Papers} (1843), Paper No. 502, pp. 399–400
hills 2 kilometres north of the Tezin Valley with an Afghan force estimated at 500–600 tribesmen.

Schematic 5.5: Encounter battle at Tezin Pass: 12 September 1842

Taylor launched into an immediate assault against the front of the Afghan position, ordering Captain Lushington (HM 9th) to support the assault on the left of the position and secure that flank with skirmishers. The Afghan left flank was turned and Taylor’s force ascended the summit, and concealed by ridgelines, crept up undetected to within 20 metres of the remaining 300 Afghans. The final clearance of the position was achieved by launching a bayonet charge led by Lieutenants Elmhirst, Lister and Vigors. The surprise and aggression of this assault drove the Afghans ‘headlong down the hill’ to outside small arms range with losses that ‘must have been very severe’. As it was last light, Taylor elected to cease any further pursuit and returned to the comparative

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98 Taylor to Ponsonby, 13 Sep 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 501, pp. 398–399
safety of the main position. This action had cost Taylor four killed and 12 wounded.

The right forward security picquet also became heavily engaged. In savage hand-to-hand fighting, the position held by 80 troops from the 60th NI commanded by Lieutenant Montgomery eventually repulsed the concerted Afghan assault. From 2000hr sporadic harassing fire and small isolated Afghan assaults continued throughout the night against the security positions. These were accompanied with cries of ‘Huk! Huk! Huk!’ reverberating from countless Afghan ‘war dances’ in the surrounding hills – an ominous indication for the following day.

After this interrupted night, on the morning of 13 September 1842 Pollock prepared to recommence his advance on Kabul by forcing the narrow 6-kilometre Tezin Pass. Throughout the night an estimated 16,000 Afghans, including Akbar Khan and his loyal chieftains, had established positions on the surrounding high ground, having ‘neglected nothing to render its natural difficulties as formidable as numbers could make it.’ To support the advance towards the mouth of the Tezin Pass, Pollock had formed a main force commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel A.F. Richmond (33rd NI) composed of 750 cavalry, two guns and 1300 infantry. The first encounter of Pollock’s came as an estimated 600 Afghan cavalry were preparing to charge from the south-east. After repositioning his artillery and cavalry, Richmond launched a pre-emptive charge supported by artillery. The cavalry comprising the HM 3rd Dragoons (Captain Unett), 1st Light Cavalry (Brevet Major Scott) and 3rd Irregular Cavalry...

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100 MAJ Smith’s account transcribed in Low (1873), p. 381–383
101 Pollock to Major-General Lumley, 14 Sep 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 500, pp. 395–398; and Low (1873), p. 371
102 MAJ Smith’s account transcribed in Low (1873), p. 381–383
103 Pollock to Major-General Lumley, 14 Sep 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 500, pp. 395–398; and Low (1873), pp. 371–372
104 The rearguard was composed of: Cavalry 750 cavalry troops based on: two squadrons of HM 3rd Dragoons (160 troops), 1st Regiment Light Cavalry (295 troops), Detachment 3rd Irregular Cavalry (60 troops), Sikh Cavalry (200 troops). Artillery: Two 9-pounder artillery guns from No. 6 Light Field Battery. Infantry 1300 troops based on: picquets HM 9th and HM 31st (143 troops), four companies 26th NI (310 troops), Wing 33rd NI (129 troops), 35th NI (294 troops), picquets 60th NI (124 troops), and Sikh Infantry (300 troops). Richmond to Ponsonby, 14 Sep 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 503, pp. 400–401; and, Low (1873), pp. 372–373
(Captain Tait) charged and ‘with great slaughter’ killed an estimated 50 Afghans and captured an Afghan standard.\textsuperscript{105}

With Major-General McCaskill remaining in command of the main body, Pollock went forward into the Tezin Pass with Sale’s advance guard. Pollock had selected the European regiments as the key to his battle plan, with HM \textsuperscript{9}th (three companies) and HM \textsuperscript{31}st (three companies) arrayed on the left flank and HM \textsuperscript{13}th (three companies) on the right flank. Sale’s assaulting forces were supported by a troop of Horse Artillery, Captain Backhouse’s mountain guns and a detachment of the HM \textsuperscript{3}rd Dragoons.\textsuperscript{106} As the European troops commenced their assault, unlike the previous encounters, the Afghans did not retreat as the British troops ascended the heights and closed with their defended positions – the defending Afghans advanced to meet the British forces head on.\textsuperscript{107} The British artillery commenced well-aimed fire in support of the advancing British infantry on the Afghan tribesmen positioned on the overlooking heights. The two columns of infantry clambered up their respective heights under heavy \textit{jezzail} fire, and steadily drove back the Afghan tribesmen from their commanding positions. A feature of the clearance of the heights was the violent and uncompromising close-quarter fighting with frequent bayonet assaults. Slowly, through grinding close-quarter combat, the British forces gained possession of the heights surrounding the Tezin Pass.\textsuperscript{108} Lieutenant Greenwood recorded the savagery of this fighting, retelling an (oft-cited) account from an unnamed officer in HM \textsuperscript{9}th:

\begin{quote}
There is a ferocity about Affghans which they seem to imbibe with their mother’s milk. In storming one of the heights, a colour sergeant was killed … A soldier of the same corps happening to pass the spot some time after, saw a Kyberee boy apparently about six years of age with a large knife, which his puny arm had scarcely sufficient strength to wield, engaged in an attempt to hack off the head of the dead sergeant. The young urchin was so completely absorbed in his savage task, that he heeded not the approach of a soldier, who coolly took him up on his bayonet, and threw him over the cliff.\textsuperscript{109}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[105] Richmond to Ponsonby, 14 Sep 1842, \textit{Parliamentary Papers} (1843), Paper No. 503, pp. 400–401; Marshman (1860), p. 130; and Low (1873), p. 377
\item[106] Low (1873), p. 373; and Fortescue (1927), p. 275
\item[107] Low speculates that the Afghan resolve was possibly due to the presence of Akbar Khan, or the Afghan belief that ‘the faithful who die thus, are destined to pass an eternity of sensual delights’. Low (1873), pp. 373–374
\item[108] Marshman (1860) p. 130; and Low (1873), p. 374
\item[109] Greenwood (1844), p. 176
\end{footnotes}
Yielding under this intense close-quarter fighting, Afghans withdrew to consolidate their defence on the heights of the ‘Huft Kotal’. Major Skinner, who had been posted with a composite infantry-engineer force to secure a ridge overlooking the Tezin Valley the previous afternoon, observed the Afghans withdrawing towards the ‘Huft Kotal’ feature. Sale then instructed Skinner to pursue the withdrawing Afghans and secure the heights to the right of ‘Huft Kotal’ as a flank guard in support of the main assault of Sale’s advance guard. Skinner’s force ascended the hills at the base of the mountain and then began the clearance of Afghans along the narrow ridgeline in a succession of company-level assaults to support the main assault on ‘Huft Kotal’.

The battle continued throughout the day as the main assault force doggedly ascended ‘Huft Kotal’ and in a series of independent actions overcame the obstinate resistance of the Afghans, with the British troops cheering as they finally seized the summit. A squadron of HM 3rd Dragoons (Captain Tritton) and two Horse Artillery guns (Major Delafosse) were detached to pursue the fleeing Afghans, which succeeded in ‘cutting up many of them’ as well as capturing an Afghan 12-pound howitzer. Lieutenant Cunningham and his detachment of Sappers succeeded in capturing another Afghan 24-pound howitzer. Pollock’s forces had finally secured the summit of ‘Huft Kotal’ at a cost of 32 killed and 130 wounded. The Afghans had suffered very heavily and had been routed abandoning two of their guns and three standards on the battlefield.

Meanwhile, the last of the baggage column had entered Tezin Pass under the protection of Richmond’s main force, who held the dominating high ground to allow the baggage to pass safely. There was one final successful action by the Sikh cavalry, commanded by Political Agent Captain Lawrence, that dispersed two Afghan artillery

110 The Huft Kotal referred to in the historical record is an indistinct geographic descriptor alternatively of specific high points or more generally to the surrounding mountain range. In this context I have approximated that the records are referring to the Balutak Ghar feature. US NGIA Map, 2005, ‘Azrow’, Ed. 8-NGA, Series U611, Sheet 2985, GS 5007
111 MAJ Skinner divided his force (based on an odd brigading of forces – a company from each Battalion) as follows: CAPT Borton (HM 9th) – company HM 9th/ company 26th NI; LT Sayers (HM 31st) – company HM 31st / company 33rd NI; LT Sinclair – company HM 13th Light Infantry/ company 35th NI; LT Orr – Sappers and Jezailchees. Skinner to Ponsonby, 16 Sep 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 502, pp. 399–400; and Low (1873), pp. 376–377
112 Pollock to Lumley, 14 Sep 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 500, pp. 395–398; and Low (1873), pp. 376–377
guns that had been brought up to fire on the rear of the column as it entered Tezin Pass.\textsuperscript{113}

\textbf{Schematic 5.6: Battle of Tezin Pass: 13 September 1842}

Despite continued pressure by the Afghans against Richmond’s retiring rearguard security, the positions on the heights were effectively maintained so that the baggage train eventually reached the Khvord Kabul Pass at 2000hr that evening with the loss of very few stores.\textsuperscript{114} Kaye summarises the enormity of Pollock’s victory:

\begin{quote}
The Afghan chiefs had brought out their best fighting men against us … Their people were at home in these tremendous defiles; whilst few of our troops had ever seen them – few were accustomed to the kind of warfare which now alone could avail … They were fighting in defence of their hearths and altars; the very existence of their nation was at stake. It was the last hope of saving their capital from the grasp of an avenging enemy. But with everything to stimulate and
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{113} Pollock to Lumley, 14 Sep 1842, \textit{Parliamentary Papers} (1843), Paper No. 500, pp. 395–398; and Low (1873), pp. 376–377
\textsuperscript{114} Khurd/Khoord Kabul/Cabool cited in the historical record is the modern township of Khvord Kabul. Richmond to Ponsonby, 14 Sep 1842, \textit{Parliamentary Papers} (1843), Paper No. 503, pp. 400–401; and Low (1873), pp. 378–380
everything to aid him, Akbar Khan could offer no effectual resistance to the advance of Pollock’s retaliatory force.\textsuperscript{115}

This battle had been decisive. Akbar Khan’s determined defence against the British advance on Kabul had failed, and the Afghan forces had been routed and were now in disarray. Pollock summarises his momentous achievement with understatement, ‘the enemy being completely dispersed, we pursued our march, and encamped at Khoord Cabool without further opposition’.\textsuperscript{116}

Immediately upon routing the Afghan defence of Tezin, advance parties were dispatched to clear the heights of the Khvord Kabul Pass. On 14 September the main advance resumed and traversed the secured Khvord Kabul Pass without any Afghan opposition to reach Butkak where Kabul could finally be seen 13 kilometres distant.\textsuperscript{117} Pollock describes the carnage from the destruction of the Kabul Garrison still evident ‘in going through the Khoord Cabul Pass, the day after the battle of Tezeen, the skeletons were so thick on the ground, that our men were obliged to drag them to one side to allow the gun-carriages to pass.’\textsuperscript{118} Finally on 15 September 1842 Pollock’s Army marched, again without opposition, from Butkak to enter a near-deserted Kabul. Akbar Khan had fled northwards with his supporters and the remaining chiefs tendered their allegiance to Pollock. By the afternoon the army had established their camp on the plain that had formerly been the racecourse of the Kabul Garrison.\textsuperscript{119}

Pollock’s impressive feat of arms had successfully reversed the ignominy of Elphinstone’s retreat by driving back all Afghan opposition and had put the putative Afghan leader to flight. Importantly, Pollock’s successes had his forces powerfully postured to undertake Ellenborough’s 23 July edict ‘to exhibit our strength where we suffered defeat, to inflict harsh, but not vindictive retribution upon the Afghans and to recover … the Prisoners, lost by our Army’.\textsuperscript{120}

Concurrently Nott had commenced his departure from Kandahar. His first task was to backload to Quetta the personnel and equipment that had been deemed excess for

\textsuperscript{115} Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, pp. 310–311
\textsuperscript{116} Pollock to Lumley, 14 Sep 1842, \textit{Parliamentary Papers} (1843), Paper No. 500, pp. 395–398
\textsuperscript{117} Boodhak/ Butkhak/ Bootkak cited in the historical record is a modern suburb of Butkak on the eastern outskirts of Kabul. Low (1873), pp. 384–386
\textsuperscript{118} Pollock to Sir Frederick Pollock (brother), undated, transcribed in Low (1873), p. 385
\textsuperscript{119} Low (1873), pp. 385-386, and Fortescue (1927), p. 275
\textsuperscript{120} Ellenborough to Pollock, 23 Jul 1842, European Manuscripts (Mss Eur) F439 folio 8, India Office Records (British Library), and \textit{Parliamentary Papers} (1843), Paper No. 415, pp. 334–336
his advance to Kabul. The Quetta column, commanded by Major-General England, had
been allocated five battalions, cavalry and 12 guns to secure the massive logistic
column with an estimated 10,000 animals and Prince Timur’s retinue. England retired
from Kandahar over 7 and 8 August, and through successfully employing the tactics of
‘crowning the heights’, minimised the opportunistic raids by Afghan tribesmen and
successfully navigated the baggage train through the Khojak Pass between 16 and 18
August. On 26 August England reached Quetta with few casualties and assumed his
political and military responsibilities that had been mandated earlier by the Government
on 19 March. England’s ‘less brilliant’ achievements in conducting his portion of the
withdrawal were formally recognised with accompanying faint praise by Ellenborough
in his General Order dated 20 October 1842:

The Governor General has much satisfaction in announcing the successful termination of the
arduous and difficult operation confided to Major-General England, of withdrawing, through the
Kojuck and Bolan Passes, into the valley of the Indus, a portion of the force lately stationed at
Candahar … This operation, less brilliant in its circumstances than that entrusted to Major-General
Pollock and Major-General Nott, was yet one which demanded the greatest prudence in making of
every previous arrangement for securing the safe descent of the several columns, and which called
into exercise many of the higher qualities which must contribute to form the character of an
accomplished General.

On 8 August Nott commenced his planned advance. For Nott’s northerly advance
to Kabul, his column advanced in a series of short marches intended to distract the local
Afghan tribesmen away from harassing the withdrawal of England’s Quetta column. Nott
had selected his force for the advance to Kabul with Colonel (acting Brigadier)
Wymer commanding the 1st Infantry Brigade, and Brigadier Stacey commanding the 2nd
Infantry Brigade. The force totaled 14 artillery pieces, three cavalry regiments, eight
infantry battalions and attendant engineers. By 16 August Nott’s column had covered

Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 120; and Fortescue (1927), p. 275
122 General Orders by the Governor-General of India, 20 Oct 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper
No. 527, p. 420
123 ‘Nott quitted Candahar … on the 8th of August’. Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 119, and Fortescue
(1927), p. 275. Kaye incorrectly assigns the commencement of Nott’s advance as 9 August 1842. Kaye
(1878), Vol. 3, p. 325
124 Nott’s column was composed of: Nott’s HQ: CAPTs Polwhele and Waterfield, and LT Tytler.
Cavalry: 3rd Regiment Bombay Light Cavalry Regiment; 1st Regiment Bengal Irregular Cavalry (CAPT
Haldane); Bengal Irregular (Christie’s) Horse (CAPT Christie). Artillery: 1st Troop Bombay Irregular
Horse Artillery; 2nd Troop Bengal Irregular Horse Artillery (two guns); Troop Shah Shuja’s Horse
Artillery (two guns); 3rd Company, 1st Battalion Bombay Foot Artillery (six 9-pounder guns) (CAPT
Blood); Shah Shuja’s 18-pounder siege guns (four guns). Engineers: Bengal Engineers (MAJ Edward
Sanders); Bombay Engineers (LTS North and Stoddart). 1st Infantry Brigade COL (acting BRIG)
Wymer; Brigade Major: CAPT J.H. Scott (38th NI); HM 40th (MAJ Hibbert); 16th Bengal NI (LTCOL
McLaren); 38th Bengal NI (CAPT Burney); 3rd Regiment Shah’s Irregular Infantry (CAPT Craigie). 2nd
Infantry Brigade BRIG Stacey; HM 41st; 2nd Bengal NI; 42nd Bengal NI (MAJ Clarkson); 43rd Bengal
130 kilometres to reach Qalat. Increasingly, Nott and Pollock were corresponding directly to coordinate their movements, and although Pollock had requested confirmation on Nott’s arrival in Kabul, it was difficult for Nott to judge at this early stage. Nott wrote to Ellenborough on 19 August to provide an update on his progress, list his exchange of correspondence with Pollock and advise that his principal concern was the provision of supplies. Nott also reports on the good morale of his troops and his initial reconnaissance sent forward to Ghazni:

As yet we have not met with any difficulties, and in consequence of the proclamation which I sent forward before I left Candahar, and subsequently assuring the population of protection, and of payment for every article and supplies brought in, the people have remained in their villages, and freely send supplies into our camp. I have prohibited our troops entering any town or village, and hitherto there has not been a case of violence or plunder … I continue to receive various reports on the state of affairs at Ghuznee and Cabool, but none that I can rely on … I have sent a man or two into the former city [Ghazni], and expect them back in my camp in a day or two. My troops are in high spirits, and I have every confidence in them.

By 27 August Nott’s column had arrived at the deserted village of Moqor without any Afghan opposition. However, Shams al-Din Khan the Governor of Ghazni had become aware of Nott’s northward movements and began consolidating the local chieftains to oppose the British advance.


125 Neill (1845), p. 213
127 Nott to Ellenborough, 19 Aug 1842, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 120–121
By 28 August Nott’s column had reached Kareez Oosman Khan where they first encountered the hostile Afghan tribesmen.\(^{129}\) As the force commenced their advance, an estimated 300 Afghans appeared at the rear of the column.\(^{130}\) Nott dispatched two
rissallahs of Captain Christie’s Bengal Irregular Horse, supported by three rissallahs the 1st Bengal Irregular Cavalry. Stocqueler recorded that Christie drove the Afghan’s off with ‘accustomed gallantry’.

Shams al-Din Khan and his Afghan forces commenced their advance from Ghazni and sent out reconnaissance parties to confront Nott as he approached Ghat Kala. Following Christie’s first encounter with Afghans at Kareez Oosman Khan, also on 28 August a cavalry screening force from the 3rd Bombay Cavalry commanded by Captain Delamain was dispatched. About 5 kilometres distant, Delamain’s force came across a small Afghan force and immediately attacked and killed 20 Afghans. Pursuing the Afghan survivors, Delamain’s force came across an estimated 150 Afghan cavalry on a ridgeline and impetuously ordered a charge with a squadron of the 3rd Bombay Cavalry. Surprised by numerous Jezailchees appearing on their flanks, the Bombay Cavalry were cut down and routed with the loss of 61 killed and injured by an Afghan force more correctly estimated at 7000.

The date is later accurately recorded by Nott in a subsequent letter to Maddock on 31 August 1842, where Nott encloses a list of killed and wounded on ‘28th and 30th instant [August]’. Nott to Maddock, 29 Aug 1842, Parliamentary Papers, Paper No. 489, p. 387, and Nott to Maddock, 31 Aug 1842, in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 122–123, and Parliamentary Papers, Paper No. 491, pp. 388–389


132 Stocqueler provides a brief summary of this action (albeit incorrectly assigning the 3rd Bombay Light Cavalry to the action instead of the 1st Bengal Irregular Cavalry and Christies Irregular Horse), but fails to describe the defeat of Delamain’s defeat later that same day. Captain Christie’s own account is ‘we cut up about fifty of them; Lieutenant Chamberlain's party from the other flank destroyed twelve more.’ Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 121–122, and Christie to Delamain, 28 Aug 1842, Parliamentary Papers, Paper No. 490, pp. 387–388.

133 There is no modern village in this region of Afghanistan named in the historical record as Gonine (Nott), Goine (Stocqueler), Ghoaine (Low and Kaye). Importantly, the day after the battle Nott’s letter to Maddock provides a geographic location of his ‘Camp, Gonine, 38 miles S.W. of Ghuznee [Ghazni]’. Calculating the distance from Ghazni along Nott’s approach route and transposing from an 1880 map which identifies the location of the village of Ghar. The 1880 village of Ghar best transposes to the modern village of Ghat Kala [9568] and the prominent nearby feature the Khwaja Sei Ghar where the battle took place. US NIMA Map, 2001, ‘Luman’, Ed. 3-NIMA, Series U611, Sheet 2583, GS 9568; Nott to Maddock, 31 Aug 1842, Parliamentary Papers, Paper No. 491, pp. 388–389; transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 122–123; Low (1873), p. 388; Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 331; East India Company Map, 1842, ‘Map of Afghanistan and the Adjacent Countries’, [British Museum Ref 43-3-10-2]; Quarter Master General of the Army Map, undated, ‘Continuation of the Survey from Kundahar to Kabool’, Sheet No. 2 of 3, [JOR Map Collection: X/3055/9/1/2]; and Surveyor General of India Map, ‘Map of Country between Kalat-i-Ghilzai and Ghazni’, Scale 1 inch = 4 miles, (Calcutta: Surveyor General’s Office, April 1880)

134 Fortescue is scathing describing one of Nott’s cavalry officers with ‘foolish precipitation brought on a small engagement’ in which the Afghans tribesmen prevailed by inflicting over 50 killed and wounded
Boosted by this early victory, and having passed around the severed heads of the two British officers killed (saying that one was Nott’s), by 30 August Shams al-Din Khan was ready for battle.\textsuperscript{135} He had assembled his force, estimated at 10,000 tribesmen, arrayed across Nott’s advance route. The Afghan position on the Khwaja Sei Ghar feature spanned from a fort to Nott’s left, then rising along a low ridgeline to a high feature to Nott’s right.

After resting and consolidating his force, at 1500hr Nott’s force continued their advance composed of four infantry battalions supported by cavalry and artillery.\textsuperscript{136} Nott’s initial intention was to focus on a breach of the Afghan fort on the left with his artillery, and then to seize it with his infantry. After delays getting the artillery into position, the British fire proved ineffective. This emboldened Shams al-Din Khan to launch his Afghan force towards Nott’s centre, with his cavalry postured to envelop both British flanks and supporting artillery firing from the high ground. In response, Nott redirected his advancing columns from the fort on the left towards the centre of the advancing Afghan force, with cavalry and Anderson’s Horse Artillery supporting the British flanks. The Afghan fire then increased from Nott’s left flank, so Nott widened his assault frontage, and placing skirmishers to his front, advanced with his main force in assault formation. Against effective Afghan small arms fire, but the ineffective elevated Afghan artillery fire, Nott’s force closed and when the British bayonet-charged ‘with a loud and cheerful hurrah, the Afghans turned and fled before us’.\textsuperscript{137} Nott’s right-flanking cavalry seized the Afghan guns and Captain Christie’s Bengal Horse pursued the retreating Afghan force. Shams al-Din Khan’s forces were routed abandoning their camp along with their baggage and guns. Nott’s force had successfully conducted an

\textsuperscript{135} The two officers killed were CAPT H. Bury and Brevet CAPT G.O. Reeves both of 3\textsuperscript{rd} Regiment Bombay Light Cavalry. MAJ Rawlinson to MAJ Outram, 7 Sep 1842, in Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 330; Neill (1845), pp. 220–223; and BRIG Wymer to Nott, 1 Sep 1842, ‘Return of Killed, Wounded, and Missing of the Field Force under the command of Major-General William Nott, in the Engagements with the Enemy on the 28th and 30th of August, 1842.’, Parliamentary Papers, Paper No. 491, pp. 389–390

\textsuperscript{136} Nott’s force was based around Colonel Wymer’s 1\textsuperscript{st} Brigade (with the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Brigade defending the Camp): HM 40\textsuperscript{th}, HM 41\textsuperscript{st}, 16\textsuperscript{th} NI, 38\textsuperscript{th} NI; and included all of his Nott’s cavalry: 3\textsuperscript{rd} Regiment Bombay Light Cavalry, and 1\textsuperscript{st} Regiment Bengal Irregular Cavalry (CAPT Christie); and an artillery force composed of Anderson’s Bombay Irregular Horse Artillery, two 9-pounder guns from CAPT Blood’s Bombay Foot Artillery Company and two of Shah Shuja’s 18-pounder siege guns. MAJ Rawlinson to MAJ Outram, 7 Sep 1842, in Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 331; and Neill (1845), pp. 224–225 and 228–229

\textsuperscript{137} Neill (1845), pp. 226–227; and Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 332
encounter battle against this large Afghan force, resulting in an overwhelming victory.\textsuperscript{138}

![Schematic 5.8: Battle of Khwaja Sei Ghar ('Gonine'): 30 August 1842]

The delaying actions of Shams al-Din Khan’s Afghan tribesmen, against Christie and Delamain on 28 August and Nott on 30 August, had resulted in Nott’s force incurring a total of 38 killed and 66 wounded.\textsuperscript{139} Nott described the action in his dispatch to Maddock the following day:

\begin{quote}
I moved out with one half of my force; the enemy advanced in the most bold and gallant manner, each division cheering as they came into position; their left being upon a hill of some elevation, their centre and right along a low ridge, until their flank rested on a fort filled with men. They
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{139} ‘Return of Killed, Wounded, and Missing of the Field Force under the command of Major-General William Nott, in the Engagements with the Enemy on the 28th and 30th of August, 1842.’ Enclosure to Nott to Maddock, 31 Aug 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 492, pp. 389–390
opened a fire of small arms, supported by two six-pounder horse Artillery guns, which were admirably served; our columns advanced upon the different points with great regularity and steadiness, and after a shot spirited contest, completely defeated the enemy, capturing their guns, tents, ammunition, &c. &c., and dispersing them in every direction; one hour more of daylight would have enabled me to destroy the whole of their infantry. Shumshudeen [Shams al-Din] fled in the direction of Ghuznee [Ghazni], accompanied by thirty horsemen.140

Recommencing his advance on 1 September, and passing through Mushaki on 2 September and Nani on 3 September, by 4 September Nott was within 3 kilometres of Ghazni.141 His first action on 5 September was to conduct a detailed reconnaissance of the Ghazni Citadel and clear an Afghan protection force located on the high ground to the north-east around the village of Buhlal, approximately 600 metres from the Citadel walls.142 The great Ghazni artillery piece the Zubbur-Jung began firing and forced the relocation of Nott’s main camp to the north-east at the township of Rowzeh.143 The engineer reconnaissance force, led by Major Sanders (Bengal Engineers), commenced their reconnaissance tasks protected by an escort from 16th NI. On reaching the high ground, Sander’s force became involved in a series of skirmishes with the Afghans. Reinforcements were dispatched led by Captain Ferdinand White (HM 40th), composed of a number of light companies and a troop of Anderson’s Horse Artillery, and completed a clearance of the high ground including the capture of the village of Buhlal.144 These actions are described in a dispatch to Nott by Wymer on 6 September ‘I carried the Bulool [Buhlal] Heights yesterday morning … dispersing the enemy in all directions … and retained possession of the heights’.145

The heights were now secured by the 16th and 42nd NI and two 9-pounder guns. On the night of 5 September, the British force was preparing to lay siege to the Ghazni
Citadel and had commenced setting up a heavy artillery position (for the four 18-pounders siege guns) on a spur forward of the village of Buhlal about 350 metres north-east from the Citadel. The assault plan was to breach the western wall with the heavy artillery, and under the covering fire of the light artillery, conduct a simultaneous assault on multiple axes. The main assault to the capture of the Citadel was focused on the western breach, to be supported by assaults on the Kabul and Water Gates. The plan was developed by Sanders and approved by Nott.\(^{146}\) However, upon initiating the assault on the night of 5–6 September, the Afghan garrison was observed abandoning the Citadel.\(^ {147}\) With this capitulation, on 6 September Nott seized the Ghazni Citadel unopposed and directed that ‘the city of Ghuzech, with its citadel, and the whole of its works, to be destroyed’.\(^ {148}\) This was the first action of real note in the recovery of British prestige, and Nott provided his firsthand account of this achievement, for the relatively light loss of three killed and 43 wounded, in a dispatch to Maddock on 8 September:

On the morning of the 5\(^{th} \) instant [September], I moved on to Ghuzech, I found the city full of men, and a range of mountains running north-east of the fortress, covered by heavy bodies of cavalry and infantry; the gardens and ravines near the town were also occupied. The enemy had received a considerable reinforcement from Cabool, under Sultan Jan … I at once determined on carrying the enemy’s mountain positions before encamping my force. The troops ascended the heights in gallant style, driving the enemy before them until every point was gained … The engineer officers, sappers and miners, and infantry working parties were employed under the directions of Major Sanders, during the night of the 5\(^{th} \) … but, before they had reached the position assigned them, it was ascertained that the enemy had evacuated the fortress …

P. S.—I have recovered about 327 of the sepoys of the 27th Regiment Bengal Native Infantry, who had been sold into slavery, and dispersed in villages 40 miles round Ghuzech.\(^ {149}\)


\(^{147}\) ‘Early on the evening of the 5\(^{th} \) a brisk matchlock fire was kept up from the citadel on the hill, but this gradually slackened, and at ten P.M. had entirely ceased. The enemy’s infantry had been observed at dusk crossing the river near the water-gate, with the intention, it was supposed of attacking the working party during the night, but towards the morning of the 6\(^{th} \) there was ground for believing that the fort was evacuated. At daylight this was ascertained to be the case by Lieutenant North, of the Engineers, who took possession at that hour of the water-gate without opposition.’ Memorandum by MAJ Edward Sanders to Nott dated 9 Sep 1842, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 127–129, and Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 497, pp. 392–393; and partially transcribed in Neill (1845), pp. 237–238


\(^{149}\) Nott to Maddock, 8 Sep 1842, in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 125–126, and Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 496, pp. 391–392; and Enclosure ‘Return of Killed, Wounded, and Missing of the Field Force under the command of Major-General William Nott, in the Engagements with the Enemy before Ghuzech, on the 5\(^{th} \) September 1842’ Sanders to Nott, 9 Sep 1842, in Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 498, p. 394
Significantly in the post script to his dispatch, Nott reports that his force had been able to recover Sepoy prisoners from the 27th Bengal NI captured following the previously discussed ignominious British surrender of the Ghazni Garrison by Lieutenant-Colonel Palmer on 18 March. However, the European Officers of the Ghazni Garrison who had also surrendered had been taken away to be co-located with the other European prisoners captured during the retreat from Kabul. These Sepoys recounted their mistreatment in captivity and ‘the cruelties to which they had been subjected during their prolonged incarceration’. As the British forces reoccupied the Ghazni Citadel, they visited the rooms where the European prisoners had been held and found messages written on the walls. In the first significant act of retribution, over the next two days Nott’s troops demolished the Ghazni Citadel to render it useless as a future Afghan defensive position. The comprehensive destruction of the Ghazni Citadel is captured in Major Sanders’ message to Nott on 9 September on the activities undertaken by his engineers over the period 7 and 8 September. The practical effect of the demolition was self-evident, the psychological effect was to reverberate with those Afghans awaiting the final British advance on Kabul:

Fourteen mines have been sprung in the walls of the citadel, all with good effect. The upper fort has been completely destroyed, the second line of works extensively breached in two places, and the outer and lower walls have their revetments blown down and greatly injured in three places … In several spots remote from the mines, the walls, though they have not fallen, are so seriously shaken by the explosions, that have unless immediate and energetic measures are adopted, on the departure of your force, for their repair and security, they must crumble down during the ensuing winter … The gateways of the town and citadel, and the roofs of the principle buildings, have been fired and are still burning.

The final task, in accordance with Ellenborough’s instructions from his 4 July missive, the ‘Gates of the Temple of Somnath’ had to be removed from Sultan Mahmoud’s tomb and prepared for transportation. This dubious task in the township of Rowzeh delayed Nott for a further two days. The gates were described as 12-foot-high

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150 Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 130
151 ‘Col. Palmer, Capt. Alston, Lieut. Poett, Lieut. Harris, Ensigns Williams, Nicholson and Davis, DR. Thompson, 27th Regiment Native Infantry, Capt. Lee Burnet, 54th Regiment, and Lieut. Crawford, Shah Shoojah’s Force, prisoners in Ghuznee through the treachery of Sirdar Shooms ood Deen Khan, his brother, Ghool Mahomed, Naib Roohoolah Khan, and Mirzah Mullich Mahomed, in having broken every article of two treaties solemnly sworn to. If, on the arrival of any British force, the prisoners are not forthcoming, avenge them on the above-mentioned, and on Khan Mahomed Khan, of Killa Maroof, a cousin of the Sirdars, his brother, Faz Mahomed Khan, and Nuzzer Mahomed. They had charge of the prisoners, and treated them most infamously, having once tortured the Colonel, and taken every opportunity of being insolent and oppressive. PS: Khan Mahomed Khan is said to have a wife and two children in Captain Mackeson’s power at Peshawur.’ Message on Prisoner’s Cell wall at Ghazni signed by Lt C. Harris, dated 26 May 1842, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 131
152 Sanders to Nott, 9 Sep 1842, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 129–130; and Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 498, pp. 393–394
carved and inlaid sandalwood with three metal bosses said to be from the shield of Sultan Mahmoud and venerated by the local Afghans. \(^{153}\) Interestingly, the gates had a questionable provenance and at the time of their removal, Major Rawlinson, who supervised proceedings and questioned the local priests, concluded that the Gates ‘are certainly not those of Somnauth’ and could not be restored in any event as the original temple of Somnath already lay in ruins. Rawlinson reassured the readers of his journal that in implementing this wanton act of cultural vandalism, ‘all possible delicacy was observed in not desecrating the shire further than absolutely necessary’. \(^{154}\)

Nott’s achievements in the capture of Ghazni is viewed as signaling the first blow of the ‘Army of Retribution’ in restoring Britain’s battered military prestige. After being informed of this success Ellenborough was delighted. Ellenborough responded to Nott on 1 October, ‘I sincerely congratulate you on your having achieved a conquest, of all others most gratifying, even had it not been attended by the recovery of so many sepoys’, concluding effusively ‘Believe me General, with the greatest respect. Your very faithful friend and servant’. \(^{155}\)

On 10 September Nott recommenced his advance northward beyond Ghazni to Kabul. This movement initiated an important change in the command relationship within Afghanistan in accordance with Ellenborough’s 4 July edict to Pollock (copied to Nott). Nott was now placed subordinate to Pollock, in accordance with Ellenborough’s explicit direction that ‘as soon as he [Nott] shall have advanced beyond Ghuznee, you [Pollock] will as senior Officer issue such orders to Maj. General Nott as you may deem fit’. \(^{156}\)

Reaching the Seyyedabad District on 12 September, Nott’s column had advanced 50 kilometres from Ghazni to reach the township of Patankhel, near where Captain


\(^{154}\) Stocqueler further reassures the reader by justifying this desecration. The reader is reminded that the gates had originally been stolen from a Hindu temple and that the current actions, by implication, were effectively righting a previous wrong originally perpetrated on the Hindus, ‘these fellows had no tears of repentance for the odious crimes committed by their lay countrymen; it was not, therefore, to be expected that their wailing and weeping over the loss of some rotten pieces of wood, which had been obtained by the desecration of a temple of the Hindoos’. Rawlinson, undated, extract from his journal, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 132

\(^{155}\) Ellenborough to Nott, 1 Oct 1842, PRO 30-12-95

\(^{156}\) Ellenborough to Pollock, 4 Jul 1842, IOR Mss Eur F439/8
Woodburn’s detachment had been killed in November 1841. On 13 September, Nott’s column advanced another 23 kilometres to reach the township of Shekhabab where Afghan tribesmen maintained harassing fire into the British camps throughout the night. The next day’s advance encountered the combined Afghan forces of Shams al-Din Khan, Sultan Jan and other chieftains in their last concerted attempt to defend Kabul, with an estimated Afghan force of 12,000 tribesmen. The Afghans had occupied a series of positions along the mountain ranges that paralleled Nott’s final advance towards Kabul. In a sequence of encounter actions on 14 September, Nott ordered his light companies, commanded by Captain White (HM 40th) to clear the ridgelines, and HM 9th to clear a concentration of Afghan tribesmen from a hill near Badam Kalay. Having successfully cleared the surrounding high ground the British force was withdrawn, and the Afghan tribesmen again reoccupied the heights and were suppressed with British artillery fire. Overnight, the sporadic firing into the British camps notably reduced as the Afghan defenders withdrew, in likely response to Pollock’s victory at Tezin Pass on 13 September. Following the action at Badam Kalay, there was no further serious resistance to Nott’s advance. On 15 September the British column advanced through the Maydan Valley, finding abandoned Afghan defensive positions, and established their camp at Arghandeh approximately 25 kilometres west of Kabul.

157 From Stocqueler, Nott writes a letter to Pollock on 13 Sep 1842 [letter not seen] from ‘Camp Pultamek’. This most likely transposes to the village of Pultanee from a contemporary C19th map, and approximates to the modern village of Patankheyl. US NGIA Map, 2005, ‘Ramak’, Ed. 6-NGS, Series U/611, Sheet 2784, GS 6751; Quarter Master General of the Army Map, undated, ‘Continuation of the Survey from Kandahar to Kabool including the districts of Koh Damaun and Lohogurh’, Sheet No. 3 of 3, [JOR Map Collection: X/3055/9/1/3]; and, Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 138

158 Neill provides very detailed progress of the advance of Nott’s column from Ghazni to Shekhabab. 11 Sep – 21 km to Puttonah; 12 Sep – 18 km to Seyedabad [no distance]; 13 Sep – 13 km to Shirkabad. Neill (1845), pp. 245–250. From Stocqueler, Nott again writes to Pollock on 13 Sep 1842 from Shakabad. Shekhabab (Neill) or Shakabad (Nott) transposes to the village of Shehabad from a contemporary C19th map, and approximates to the modern township of Shekhabad. US NIMA Map, 2001, ‘Towp’, Ed. 4-NIMA, Series U611, Sheet 2785, GS 7771; Quarter Master General of the Army Map, undated, ‘Continuation of the Survey from Kandahar to Kabool including the districts of Koh Damaun and Lohogurh’, Sheet No. 3 of 3, [IOR Map Collection: X/3055/9/1/3]; and, Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 138


160 The location referred as Mydan (Nott) or Maiden (Neill) transposes onto a contemporary C19th map as ‘Maidan’ and is the modern District of Maydan. The location referred to as Urghundee (Nott and Neill)/Urgundie (Stocqueler)/Urgundeh (Kaye and Fortescue) transposes from contemporary C19th mapping to
Nott wrote to Pollock on 16 September informing him of his successes summarising, ‘our troops beat them and dislodged them in gallant style, and their conduct afforded me the greatest satisfaction’, and the loss of four killed and 59 wounded.\(^{161}\) By 17 September Nott’s column had reached 8 kilometres from Kabul at Camp Kelat-i-Sultan, and on 21 September 1842 moved into Kabul nearer to Pollock’s Camp.\(^{162}\)

Previously on the morning of the 16 September, Pollock had escorted Prince Futteh Jung and his attendants to the Kabul Palace. Having entered the Palace, Futteh Jung took his seat on the throne, positioned overlooking a large open square where Afghans had assembled. Pollock was offered a chair of state to the right and Major-General McCaskill to the left, whilst Futteh Jung was reinstalling and his officers of state were appointed.\(^{163}\) Pollock then proceeded to the Bala Hissar, accompanied by Futteh Jung, to conduct a military ceremony that accompanied the raising of ‘the British colours’ atop the most conspicuous site in Kabul. A British guard was then positioned at the Bala Hissar under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Taylor.\(^{164}\)

The first direct communication between Pollock and Nott came on the morning of 16 September shortly after Pollock had secured the Bala Hissar. The Political Agent Major Rawlinson, disguised in Afghan clothing, rode from Nott’s camp at Arghandeh across Kabul to Pollock’s camp on the racecourse. Pollock received Nott’s letter

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\(^{162}\) Kelat-i-Sultan, or Khelat Sultan-Jan in contemporary C19th mapping, is now in the western suburbs of Kabul. Quarter Master General of the Army Map, 1842, ‘Survey around Kabool including Koh-i-Damaun and part of the Loghur Districts’; Nott to Pollock, 16 Sep 1842, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 137–138, and in Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 504, pp. 401–402; and, Return of Killed, Wounded, and Missing of the Field Force under the command of Major-General William Nott, in the Engagements with the Enemy on the 14th and 15th of September, 1842. Enclosure to Nott to Pollock, 16 Sep 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 504, pp. 401–402

\(^{163}\) The raising of the colours was accompanied by the Band of HM 9th playing ‘God Save the Queen’. A royal salute was fired by the Horse Artillery and all troops give three cheers. Pollock to Lumley, 16 Sep 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 506, pp. 402–403; and, Low (1873), pp. 390–392
informing him of the imminent arrival of the Kandahar column and his battlefield successes at Ghazni and Maydan.\textsuperscript{165}

The first object of Pollock in Kabul was to secure the release of the British prisoners, so he tasked his military secretary Sir Richmond Shakespear to lead 700 Kuzzilbash cavalry to secure the prisoners.\textsuperscript{166} After his defeat at Tezin on 13 September, Akbar Khan abandoned his powerful position in Kabul and fled to Kohistan leaving his ally Aminullah Khan Logari and followers in Estalef.\textsuperscript{167} Akbar Khan had intended to take the British prisoners over the Hindu Kush, and an Afghan chief, Saleh Mohammad, was entrusted with handing over the prisoners to an Uzbek chief. Indicative of the effect of Pollock’s advance on the Afghan leadership, the inexorable British advance on Kabul had alarmed Saleh Mohammad to the extent that he negotiated with the prisoners for a reward. An agreement was signed and Saleh Mohammad openly declared his defection from Akbar Khan. The Afghan commander of the fort was replaced by the British prisoner Major Eldred Pottinger, who then issued proclamations for the surrounding Afghan chiefs to submit to British authority.\textsuperscript{168} Still fearful of recapture by Akbar Khan, on 14 September Pottinger passed a letter to inform both Pollock and Nott of their situation (using Greek letters for security), urging to them ‘let us hear from you quickly’.\textsuperscript{169} Pottinger’s plea reached Pollock whilst Nott was in the final stages of his approach to Kabul. There was a justifiable concern that Akbar Khan would still attempt to attack or recapture the loosely restrained prisoners. Specifically Sultan Jan, who had been defeated by Nott at Maydan on 15 September was reportedly intent on intercepting the British parties being dispatched to recover the prisoners. In the first direct exercise of their new command relationship, on 17 September Pollock instructed Nott to dispatch a brigade to Bamian to assist Shakespear:

\begin{quote}
We have sent 700 Kuzzilbashes to Bamian, and Sir R. Shakespear accompanies them. It is known that Mahomed Akbar [Khan] has gone towards Kohistan; he cannot have any very great forces, one or two thousand horse, and may possibly attempt to get the prisoners; will you, therefore, send, in the direction of Bamian, a brigade … I therefore wish that the party you send should get into no difficulty, and risk nothing. I feel pretty certain that after what has happened Mahomed
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{165} Low (1873), pp. 392–393, and Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 343  
\textsuperscript{166} On 24 September 1842 Prime Minister Peel had written to Ellenborough urging the recovery of the prisoners. Peel to Ellenborough, 24 Sep 1842, in Yapp (1980), p. 453; Pollock to Nott, 17 Sep 1842, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 142; Marshman (1860), p. 131; Low (1873), pp. 394–395; and Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 345 (Marshman, Low and Kaye state 600 Kuzzilbash)  
\textsuperscript{167} Noelle (1997), p. 53  
\textsuperscript{168} Marshman (1860), pp. 131–132; and Fortescue (1927), p. 276  
\textsuperscript{169} Pottinger to Pollock and Nott, 14 Sep 1842, transcribed and translated in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 139–141
Akbar [Khan] will be very unwilling to advance if he hears that a force is on its way to rescue prisoners.\textsuperscript{170}

Pollock’s letter was carried across Kabul from Pollock’s Camp on 17 September by a returning Rawlinson and Lieutenant W. Mayne, escorted by a troop of irregular cavalry. In a poor start to the new command relationship, Nott received the party whilst marching at the head of his troops approaching their camp at Kelat-i-Sultan, whereupon Nott ‘poured upon Mayne and his escort all the vials of his wrath’.\textsuperscript{171} In examining Nott’s vitriolic outburst, Low concluded that Nott ‘at no time the most amiable of men’ considered the primacy of his orders from Ellenborough to march without deviation to Kabul and then to India.\textsuperscript{172} Kaye asserted that Nott’s reaction to Pollock’s order was borne out of resentment of ‘being recommended by his superior to do what his own better judgment ought to have done unprompted’.\textsuperscript{173} Kaye based his unfavourable assessment upon an entry from Rawlinson’s journal that claimed Nott was inflexible, having previously been urged twice by his own officers to recover the prisoners.\textsuperscript{174} Rawlinson observes on 14 September that Nott ‘would not, however listen to the proposal, declaring that he had only one object in view, that of marching his force to India via Caubul, without turning to the left or right; and that he considered, from the tenor of all Lord Ellenborough’s despatches [sic], the recovery of the prisoners to be a matter for indifference to government’.\textsuperscript{175}

Despite this observation from someone as close as Rawlinson, Stocqueler provided a spirited defence of Nott claiming it to be ‘monstrous that the faintest suspicion should ever have been harboured of his supineness when the lives of his own countrymen were at stake’.\textsuperscript{176} The defence of Nott is more successful when examining the military merits of Pollock’s request. Nott’s exhausted troops had just arrived in Kabul on the day Pollock’s request had been received, and to send out a relatively small force against an unknown strength of Afghans was fraught with risk. Despite some impressive tactical victories by Pollock and Nott during their respective advances, there

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{170} Pollock to Nott, 17 Sep 1842, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 142
\item \textsuperscript{171} Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 347
\item \textsuperscript{172} Low (1873), p. 395
\item \textsuperscript{173} Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 347
\item \textsuperscript{174} Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, pp. 346–349
\item \textsuperscript{175} Rawlinson’s observations are undermined by his belief that Nott did not appreciate the importance of the recovery of British prisoners. In a number of dispatches transmitted to Nott, it was very clear that the recovery of British prisoners was central to Ellenborough’s contemplation of re-intervention in Afghanistan. Rawlinson, 14 Sep 1842, extract from his journal, transcribed in Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 346, also transcribed in Low (1873), p. 396
\item \textsuperscript{176} Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 145
\end{footnotes}
had also been some equally disastrous military failures – Brigadier Wild at Masjid on 19 January and Brigadier England at Haikalzai on 28 March.\footnote{Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 146–147} Nott responded to Pollock on the same day explaining that Pollock’s request was essentially unreasonable given the state of his recently arrived column and tactically foolhardy:

I have been favoured with your note of this date, in which you express a wish that I should detach a brigade towards Bamian. Before you decide on sending it I would beg to state as follows. The troops under my command have just made a long and very difficult march upwards of 300 miles, and they have been continually marching about for the last six months, and most certainly require rest for a day or two … I sincerely think that sending a small detachment will and must be followed by deep disaster. No doubt Mahomed Akbar [Khan], Shumshoodeen [Shams al-Din] and the other Chiefs are uniting their forces, and I hourly expect to hear that Sir R. Shakespear is added to the number of British prisoners … After much experience in this country my opinion is that if the system of sending out detachments should be adopted, disaster and ruin will follow … I could have wished to have stated this in person to you, but I have been so unwell for the last two months that I am sure you will kindly excuse me.\footnote{Nott to Pollock, 17 Sep 1842, IOR Mss Eur F439/6}

In Nott’s conclusion he alludes to his poor health which Kaye dismissed as simply an excuse by Nott to not wanting to visit Pollock’s Camp.\footnote{Writing later the former LT Mayne, the unfortunate bearer of Pollock’s instructions to Nott on 17 Sep 1842, observed that Nott ‘appeared in perfect health at the time’. Mayne, 27 Feb 1847, transcribed in Low (1873), p. 397; and Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 348} Regardless of Nott’s motivations, Pollock responded in a measured manner ‘without any acerbity’. This episode is illustrative of the temperaments of the two key Generals. Low described both as ‘equally honourable and high-minded’ and ‘resolute and determined when the time for action came’. However the similarity ends there, Pollock is further described as ‘suaviter in modo’ [gently in manner] in contrast to Nott who was ‘remarkable for his irritability and moroseness of temper’.\footnote{Low (1873), pp. 399–400} In a measure of Pollock’s forbearance dealing with Nott, Lieutenant Mayne’s recollection of meeting Nott on 17 September offered a damning critique, ‘I was often astonished that General Pollock did not put General Nott under arrest for his disobedience to orders, and rude and insubordinate replies to his letters. I expressed myself frequently to this effect to General Pollock, on whose staff I then was’.\footnote{Mayne, 27 Feb 1847, transcribed in Low (1873), p. 397} With Nott having declined the task, Pollock tasked Sale to form a brigade to support Shakespear. This second protection force based on HM 13\textsuperscript{th} was dispatched, with Sale eager to recover his wife and daughter from Afghan captivity.\footnote{Marshman (1860), p. 131; Low (1873), pp. 401–402; and Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, pp. 348–349}
However, by this time the prisoners had freed themselves. On 15 September an Afghan horseman from Kabul informed Pottinger of Akbar Khan’s defeat at Tezin, and on the morning the freed British prisoners commenced their independent move towards Pollock’s camp in Kabul. On 17 September around 1500hrs, the British prisoners saw a body of horsemen riding towards them. They met up with Shakespear’s cavalry column and on the same day, under the cavalry escort, were brought back into British security in Kabul. On 19 September the second column of HM 13th commanded by Sale returned to Kabul, and Sale was emotionally reunited with his wife and daughter. On 22 September a royal salute was fired in celebration of the safe arrival of the prisoners, nine ladies and their children, 33 officers and 38 soldiers, in Pollock’s Camp.\(^{183}\)

On 21 September 1842, Pollock wrote on the successful recovery of the prisoners, ‘it gives me the greatest satisfaction to be enabled to state, that the whole of the European prisoners are now quite free from the hands of Mahomed Akbar [Khan]’ which was gratefully received by Ellenborough on 5 October 1842.\(^{184}\) The advance of

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\(^{183}\) Sale (1843), pp. 156–157; Marshman (1860), p. 132; CAPT Smith, undated, transcribed in Low (1873), p. 403; and Fortescue (1927), p. 276

\(^{184}\) Pollock to Ellenborough, 21 Sep 1842, PRO 30-12-65; and, Low (1873), pp. 404-405. Pollock also informed Nicolls on 21 Sep 1842, NAM 6210-168-10. By 27 Sep 1842 CAPT Bygrave, the last prisoner of Akbar Khan had been released without ransom and had arrived in Pollock’s camp. Ellenborough wrote
the ‘Army of Retribution’ had ensured the release of a total of 122 prisoners from the Kabul and Ghazni Garrisons, some of whom went on to have distinguished careers.\(^\text{185}\)

On 30 September 1842 in response to Pollock’s and Nott’s successes in their respective advances towards Kabul, Ellenborough released a General Order. The order praised Nott’s capture and destruction of Ghazni and Pollock’s defeat of Akbar Khan at Tezin. Ellenborough’s order gloats over the recent successes during the simultaneous advance on Kabul, and portrays these achievements as having regained authority for the British and erased the memories of the recent Kabul disaster:

> The British flag now waves in triumph from the highest point of the Bala Hissar. Thus have all the past disasters been retrieved and avenged in every sense in which they were sustained, and repeated victories in the field, and the capture of the cities and citadels of Ghuznee and Cabool, have advanced the glory and established the accustomed superiority of British arms.\(^\text{186}\)

With Pollock and Nott having successfully advanced their respective armies to Kabul and secured the British prisoners, the first phase of the campaign of the ‘Army of Retribution’ had broken any Afghan hubris over their destruction of the Kabul Garrison. Further, the relentless British advance on two simultaneous axes, punctuated by significant battlefield victories and brutal acts of retribution, prolonged the shaky Sadozai ascendancy and prevented any consolidation within the Barakzai leadership. Pollock had maintained both strategic and tactical pressure on Akbar Khan with the launch of successful punitive operations around Jalalabad, whilst maintaining diplomatic negotiations for the release of British prisoners. Upon receipt of Ellenborough’s sanction to advance on Kabul, Pollock’s advance was marked with impressive actions at Mama Kheyl and the Jegdalek Pass, to finally rout Akbar Khan’s forces in his significant victory at the Battle of Tezin Pass. The spectre created by Pollock’s relentless advance pressured another change in Afghan loyalties, forcing Akbar Khan to abandon Kabul and leading directly to the release of the British prisoners. Similarly Nott had maintained an unbroken military dominance around

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\(^{185}\) Among the notable recovered prisoners were: Ladies Sale and Macnaghten; MAJGEN Shelton, MAJ Eldred Pottinger, CAPT (later LTGEN Sir) George Lawrence, LT (later MAJGEN Sir) Vincent Eyre. In total 35 officers (Ranks: MAJGEN – Surgeon), 12 ladies and their 22 children, 2 clerks, HM 44th - 38 soldiers (Ranks: SGT – Boy), HM 13th 7 PTEs, and Bengal Horse Artillery 6 soldiers (Ranks: SGT – GNR). Eyre (1843), Appendix H ‘List of Prisoners released on the arrival of Generals Pollock and Nott at Cabul in September 1842’, pp. 424–426; and Low (1873), p. 391; and partially transcribed in Low (1873), p. 387

\(^{186}\) General Order by the Governor-General of India, 30 Sep 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 495, p. 391; and partially transcribed in Low (1873), p. 387
Kandahar and consolidated the isolated British garrisons. Nott’s advance on Kabul was likewise marked by a succession of significant battlefield victories. Nott broke Shams al-Din Khan’s authority in impressive actions at the Battle of Khwaja Sei Ghar and Badam Kalay, and struck the first significant blow of the ‘Army of Retribution’ with his capture and destruction of the Ghazni Citadel. With both Pollock and Nott having successfully synchronized their convergence on Kabul, they had wrested the strategic momentum back in favour of British-India to avert the imminent strategic defeat. With Britain having reestablished the strategic initiative, it was now the actions of the ‘Army of Retribution’ in Kabul and the conduct of their withdrawal that would ensure the conclusion of the First Anglo-Afghan War on British terms.
Chapter 6

Kabul Operations and Withdrawal of the ‘Army of Retribution’
September – December 1842

The concluding phase of the First Anglo-Afghan War had now commenced. The uninterrupted series of victories during the bloody advances by both Pollock and Nott had shattered all Afghan resistance and reasserted British martial dominance over Afghanistan. Following the strategic shock and policy vacillations that followed the destruction of the Kabul Garrison, the strategic momentum had been wrested back in favour of Britain. The Afghan leadership was in disarray, British prisoners had been recovered and Britain’s imminent strategic defeat had been averted. However, Britain’s long-term strategy was still at stake. Britain had to consolidate the conditions in Afghanistan to ensure longer-term strategic objectives for the security of north-west British-India were maintained. The success of the concluding actions of the ‘Army of Retribution’ rested on their ability to ensure that post-war Afghanistan did not threaten Britain’s enduring strategic end-state as prescribed in Auckland’s ‘Simla Manifesto’ of 1838 – ‘that tranquillity [sic] will be established upon the most important frontier of India, and that a lasting barrier will be raised against hostile intrigue and encroachment’.

With both British columns having concentrated in Kabul, there was a growing tension between the two commanders, with Nott formally the subordinate authority. Pollock complained to Nicolls, ‘from several of MGeneral Nott’s communications, he appears to consider himself in Command of a distinct and separate Army. And I am unwilling to do any thing which may occasion an unpleasant feeling between us.’ The key issues of contention were interrelated; Pollock’s relationship with the Afghan administration under Shah Futteh Jung and the anticipated duration of the British occupation of Kabul. Both issues led to a simmering dispute between Britain’s two principal commanders in Kabul. The frictions in Kabul reflected the differing interpretations of Ellenborough’s intent for the purpose of the ‘Army of Retribution’ now that it had arrived in Kabul. For Nott the reoccupation of Kabul was a

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1 A full transcript of the 1838 ‘Simla Manifesto’ is in Havelock (1840), Vol. 2, pp. 237–246
2 Pollock to Nicolls, 10 Oct 1842, NAM 6210-168-10
straightforward task of conforming to Ellenborough’s 4 July 1842 edict, to ‘leave decisive proof of the power of the British Army’ whilst remaining mindful of the high risk that ‘the loss of another army … might be fatal to our Government of India’. However for Pollock, there were strategic-level nuances to be accommodated. Despite being cautioned by Ellenborough to act with neutrality towards the Afghan authorities, Pollock wanted to pursue longer-term security arrangements favourable to British interests, and again planned to maximise the little strategic latitude he had been granted.

Ellenborough’s political policy for the British dealings with Afghan authorities was provided in Maddock’s letter from 13 September 1842 after the unexpected arrival of Futteh Jung in Gandomak on 1 September. Ellenborough had demanded that Pollock recognise no Afghan authority, instructing him to ‘abstain, under the present circumstances of Afghanistan, from recognizing as Sovereign any pretender to the throne of Cabool’ and that he would not ‘delegate the power of recognizing a new Sovereign or Government’. These instructions from the Governor-General were fine in principle, but difficult to implement. The practical demands for the occupation in Kabul required an interaction with some semblance of Afghan authority. The immediate issue was Pollock’s conspicuous attendance at the inauguration of Futteh Jung that had taken place at the Kabul Palace on 16 September 1842 – in direct contravention of Ellenborough’s instructions of not ‘recognizing a new Sovereign or Government’. Ignoring the obvious impression upon the Afghans, Low explains that British engagement with Futteh Jung had been subordinated to Pollock’s Political Agent Captain Macgregor. Specifically, Macgregor had been quite firm in his dealings with Futteh Jung, stressing that the British were unable ‘to support him with men, money, or arms, and the necessity, in consequence, of relying entirely on his own resources’. Whilst technically conforming to Ellenborough’s intent in their indirect dealings with Futteh Jung, the overt manner of the victorious British Armies returning a fleeing Futteh Jung to Kabul, and then being immediately present at his inauguration, unambiguously

3 Ellenborough to Nott, 4 Jul 1842, IOR Mss Eur F439/8
4 Ellenborough continued that he also wanted Pollock to provide his recommendations of Afghan leadership writing that ‘you will report to his Lordship every circumstance tending, in your opinion, to guide his judgment in deciding on this most important point’. Maddock to Pollock, 13 Sep 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 479, pp. 380–381
5 Maddock to Pollock, 13 Sep 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 479, pp. 380–381
6 Rawlinson, undated, extract from his journal, transcribed Low (1873), pp. 392–393, and Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, pp. 343–344
conveyed the impression to the Afghan population of the British bestowing of favour upon Futteh Jung.

Pollock hedged against Ellenborough’s guidance by arguing that his greater imperative was to deal with a singular authority to ensure the provision of supplies for his army. Pollock had insufficient supplies and means of carriage and was therefore compelled to stay in Kabul and arrange for their provision. Pollock argued that his logistic dealings reinforced Futteh Jung’s authority, which prevented looting and further destruction by granting an amnesty with any former rebels willing to support the government of Futteh Jung. Conversely, Nott broadly considered every Afghan to be an enemy. In dogged adherence to Ellenborough’s edict banning favoured interaction with any Afghan government, Nott did not recognise Futteh Jung as the ruler and even refused to receive Futteh Jung’s ministers. Furthermore, in a letter to his daughters dated 7 October 1842, Nott summarises his frustrations with what he considered to be an unnecessary and inexplicable delay in Kabul that added daily to the significant risk of having to withdraw from Kabul in the upcoming winter:

What we are staying for I am utterly at a loss to know, unless it be, to be laughed at by the Afghans, and the whole world. I cannot bear to witness such scenes, but recollect from the moment I arrived at Cabool, I had nothing to do with public affairs. Had I commanded, I would have blown up the famed Bala Hissar, and at this moment should have had my little veteran army at Peshawur. This horrid delay is truly annoying. Fortunately the season as yet, has been unusually mild, or our own men would have suffered greatly; but what man of sense would have run the risk, for the sake of following at the heels, and dancing attendance on a set of Afghans, whose hands are still red with the blood of our murdered countrymen! Shame, shame!

Pollock’s recognition of Futteh Jung had a much more profound rationale beyond the shorter-term practicalities of coordinating logistic provisioning. Having successfully convinced the Governor-General to re-intervene in Afghanistan, Pollock was concerned about the longer-term implications for the future of British-Afghan relations. The core reason for Pollock’s continued dealing with Futteh Jung is conveyed in Rawlinson’s observation that, ‘it appears to me out of the question that Futteh Jung should be able to hold his own after our departure’. Pollock rightly predicted that if the Sadozai Government was not assisted to establish themselves, that the growing Barakzai presence would reassert itself and return to dominate the government in Kabul.  

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7 Yapp (1980), p. 433  
8 Low (1873), pp. 405–406  
9 Nott in a letter to his daughters, 7 Oct 1842, transcribed in Stoqueler, Vol. 2, pp. 163–164  
10 Rawlinson, undated, extract from his journal, transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 392–393, and Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, pp. 343–344
Understandably, Pollock calculated that any return of Barakzai leadership would be inimical to Britain’s strategic policy of a compliant Afghan regime to maintain the long-standing security equilibrium on the north-western borders of the Indian Empire.  

Nott considered his role in fulfilling the withdrawal from Afghanistan via Kabul, to quite simply be the successful conduct of punitive expeditions in order to restore the British martial reputation, whilst maintaining the momentum for the overall British withdrawal from Afghanistan. Nott’s second growing concern at the extended delay in Kabul was exacerbated by a number of complaints being raised against the conduct of his troops obtaining supplies from the Afghans. Stocqueler solely blamed Pollock for ordering a protracted halt in Kabul, reasoning that it was this decision by Pollock from which all subsequent problems emanated. Nott was angry that Pollock had only brought one week’s supplies, particularly with his relatively short lines of supply back to India. Having marched nearly 500 kilometres from Kandahar, Nott had anticipated greater levels of stock to be available to replenish his force upon arrival in Kabul.

Adding to this initial shortfall, Stocqueler reasoned that it was Pollock’s prolonged delay in Kabul that had caused Nott’s men to consume their residual supplies and therefore seek additional forage that had in turn led to Afghan complaints about the ‘marauding habits of Nott’s men’. These complaints were conveyed to Pollock in a joint letter from the Afghan leadership. The essence of the Afghan complaints were validated by Rawlinson’s private observations of Nott’s troops:

September 19th – Our Sepoys and camp followers, taking their cue, I fancy from their officers, are very unruly, and commit extensive depredations on the lands and villages near our camp ...

September 20th – Our men have been plundering to-day as usual about the camp, and some scuffle which took place at Deh Afsur, four Kuzzilbashes, with Khassim Khan, a chief were slain by the Sepoys.

September 21st – The fort of Mahomed Murza, one of our worst enemies, was given up to plunder ...

September 22nd – The depredations of the Sepoys and followers from this camp continue, notwithstanding all the efforts that are made to repress them.

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11 Yapp (1980), p. 434
12 Nott explains, ‘I left Candahar with sufficient supplies to take my force to Jellalabad on full rations, but in consequence of the great delay which has occurred in this place, I am now reduced to provisions for seven days’. Nott to Pollock, 22 Sep 1842, IOR Mss Eur F439/6
13 Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 148
14 Rawlinson, 19 to 22 Sep 1842, extract from his journal, transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 407–408
Pollock forwarded a translation of the Afghan letter of complaint to Nott who, despite the evidence from Rawlinson’s private observations, denied the complaints and concludes, ‘that the writer should be instantly seized, and punished for sending such a grossly false and insolent statement’. With the destruction of Elphinstone’s column the previous winter foremost in his mind, Nott was also increasingly concerned of being starved into a weak negotiating position by the reduction in supplies to the British Army. Nott then formally responded to Pollock on 22 September to dismiss the Afghan complaints and outlined his concern that by being denied supplies, the same conditions that precipitated Elphinstone’s fate were being engineered again by the Afghan leadership in Kabul:

I conceive that General Pollock must have received some erroneous information – no army ever moved with fewer instances of plunder than that under my command, and not an instance of irregularity has occurred without punishment being inflicted … I believe the enemy (I mean Futteh Jung’s party and the rest of his people) are organizing a system to bring our men to the same state of starvation to which General Elphinstone’s army was reduced, in hopes of the same results.

In his second response of 22 September to Pollock, Nott again pressed home his earlier defence of his troops’ actions and his conviction of Afghan duplicity, describing their inability to purchase supplies which therefore necessitated their seizure. Importantly for examining the differing perspectives of the British leaders, Nott considered all Afghan leadership to be hostile to British interests and bluntly linked Futteh Jung to Akbar Khan to delay the British in Kabul. Nott expresses his grave concern that any British delay in Kabul would also afford the Afghans the time to organise a more coordinated counter-attack against the eventual British withdrawal through the Khyber Pass:

The people are not inclined to sell even at the high price offered. I cannot see my troops, who have overcome so many difficulties during the last four years, starve as long as supplies are in the country, and I must therefore send parties out to seize what will be sufficient to take my army to Jellalabad, paying for the same … I know that Futteh Jung and his party will do all in their power to keep us here as long as possible; but what is called his party is really the party of Mahomed Akbar [Khan], and while delaying here, I have no doubt they are organizing a regular system of opposition in the passes, and unless we act with decision and energy, throwing aside pretended friends, we shall meet with considerable difficulty, and, perhaps suffer some new disasters from the want of provisions or the severity of the weather.

At this time Pollock had received intelligence that one of the hostile Afghan chiefs, Aminullah Khan Logari, was gathering the scattered Barakzai tribesmen of

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15 Nott to Pollock, undated, transcribed in Low (1873), p. 408
17 Nott to Pollock, 22 Sep 1842, IOR Mss Eur F439/6
Akbar Khan’s forces. These reports indicated that Afghan forces, with the tempting prospect of Akbar Khan also being present, were reconstituting to attack the British from north of Kabul in the region referred to as Kohistan. These hostile Afghan chiefs had withdrawn to Estalef, along with their wives, children, treasure and the evacuated female population of Kabul because the fortress was considered impregnable. In addition to their destruction of the Kabul Garrison, these Afghan tribesmen had also annihilated the British Garrison at Charikar during the recent insurrection – an action that Pollock considered to warrant retribution.

Pollock was determined to break up this Barakzai force and continue to mete out retributive punishment. Pollock ordered a detachment, under the command of Major-General Sir John McCaskill, to be constituted from his own and Nott’s Divisions. This ‘Army of Kohistan’ was ordered to advance to Estalef to destroy any Afghan resistance, and on 25 September 1842 McCaskill was assigned his forces by Pollock. On 26 September the force concentrated to the north-east of Kabul near Khvajeh Rawash, and used the eastern-most axis to travel northwards from the capital. The force reached the village of Bazari by 27 September.

18 Aminullah Khan Logari is referred to in the historical record variously as Ameenoollah (Marshman and Low) and Ameen-oollah Khan (Kaye). Marshman (1860), p. 132; Low (1873), p. 409; and, Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 362
19 The modern township of Estalef, 40 km north of Kabul is referred to in the historical record as Istaliff, and is known colloquially as the ‘Maiden City’, or ‘virgin fortress’, as it was considered impregnable, see CAPT MacKenzie, Note to ‘Zeila’, quoted in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 158–159; Marshman (1860), p. 133; Fortescue (1927), p. 276; and Low (1873), p. 409
20 MAJ Pottinger was the British Political Agent for Turkistan was located at a Residency in a castle at Laghmani (Lughmanee (Kaye)) and was protected by a Gurkha Regiment commanded by CAPT Coddrington in the nearby town of Charikar. After evacuating the Residency, over the period 5–13 November 1842, the Charikar Garrison was eventually destroyed attempting to withdraw to Kabul, MAJ Pottinger survived. Marshman (1860), p. 133, and Kaye (1878), Vol. 2, pp. 225–234
21 McCaskill’s ‘Army of Kohistan’ was composed: Artillery: Bombay Battery (9 pounders) (CAPT Blood); Mountain Train (CAPT Backhouse); two 18-pounders. Cavalry: HQ and two Squadrons HM 3rd Dragoons; Regiment Bengal Irregular Horse (CAPT Christie); 1st Sqn 1st Regiment Light Cavalry. Engineers: Field Engineers (Major Sanders). Infantry Brigade (BRIG Tulloch – from McCaskill’s Division): HM 9th; 26th NI; CAPT Broadfoot’s Sappers. Infantry Brigade (BRIG Stacey – from Nott’s Division): HM 41st; 42nd Bengal NI; 43rd Bengal NI. The composition is an amalgamation of Pollock to Lumley, 28 Sep 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 517, p. 412; and, Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 154
22 Khvajeh Rawash is a northern suburb of Kabul (near the eastern threshold of Kabul International Airport) and equates to the village of ‘Khowja Rawash’ referred to by McCaskill. The modern village of Bazari is in the vicinity of the village of ‘Zimuree’ referred to by McCaskill. ‘Khowja Rawash’ and ‘Zimuree’ transpose onto a contemporary 1842 map to the locations of the villages of ‘Khoja Rorvaish’ and ‘Bazaree’, which is in the vicinity of the modern village of ‘Bazari’. US NGIA Map, 2005, ‘Kabol’, Ed. 8-NGA, Series U611, Sheet 2886, GS 1650; Quarter Master General of the Army Map, 1840, ‘Survey around Kabool including Koh-i-Damaun and part of the Loghur Districts’, [IOR Map Collection: X/3055/13]; McCaskill to CAPT Ponsonby, 30 Sep 1842, transcribed in Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 519, pp. 412–414, and Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 154–158
evening and was concerned that his force faced a strongly fortified township set on a mountain side, with defenders confident of repelling any attack.\textsuperscript{23}

Map 6.1: McCaskill’s ‘Army of Kohistan’ Campaign: 25 September – 7 October 1842

McCaskill issued orders on 28 September arraying the ‘Army of Kohistan’ with Brigadier Tulloch’s Brigade as the right attack column, Brigadier Stacey’s Brigade as the left attack column, a composite rearguard and a combined cavalry/infantry reserve.\textsuperscript{24}

During a bitterly cold night with high winds, the assaulting troops moved into position

\textsuperscript{23} The town of Istaliff, consisting of masses of houses and forts, is built on the slope of a mountain … and in no way can this place of abode of fifteen thousand people be approached, but by surmounting ranges of hills, separated by deep ravines … the enemy, after this disposition, considered the place unassailable, by having retained within the town the wives and children, not only of the inhabitants, but of thousands of refugees from Cabool’. McCaskill to CAPT Ponsonby, 30 Sep 1842, transcribed in Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 519, pp. 412–414, and Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 154–158

\textsuperscript{24} The detailed disposition: **Right Attack Column** (BRIG Tulloch) – CAPT Backhouse’s Mountain Train, Captain Broadfoot’s Sappers, HM 9\textsuperscript{th}, and 26\textsuperscript{th} NI; **Left Attack Column** (BRIG Stacey) – Bombay Battery (Captain Blood), two 18-pounders, wing HM 41\textsuperscript{st}, wing 42\textsuperscript{nd} NI, and 43\textsuperscript{rd} NI; **Rearguard** (MAJ Clarkson), wing 42\textsuperscript{nd} NI, and two rissallah (Squadron) CAPT Christie’s Cavalry; **Reserve** composed of HM 3\textsuperscript{rd} Dragoons and 1\textsuperscript{st} Light Cavalry commanded by MAJ Lockwood, and wing HM 41\textsuperscript{st} Foot. McCaskill to CAPT Ponsonby, 30 Sep 1842, transcribed in Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 519, pp. 412–414, and Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 154–158; and, McCaskill, 28 Sep 1842, ‘Memorandum for the operations of to-morrow’, transcribed in Marshman (1860), pp. 133–134
and commenced their assault towards Estalef in a heavy frost on the morning of 29 September. McCaskill’s plan was for Tulloch’s column to be the main effort:

The attack will be made from our right by Brigadier Tulloch’s brigade, in columns at quarter distance with deploying intervals, covered by skirmishers, endeavouring to seize the ridges of the hills on the enemy’s left, and thus turning by that flank his whole position. Brigadier Stacy’s brigade will adopt a similar formation in the plain, but will not attack, until it sees the Afghans’ left turned, when it will move on and co-operate with the right column in mastering the hills. The cavalry and reserve will be ready to support this movement and protect the guns.

As the force reached the intermediate village of Esmullah, the weight of Afghan fire caused McCaskill to alter his original weighted assault plan. He launched both his left and right columns into a broad-fronted simultaneous assault. The brigades commenced their combined uphill assault on the outskirts of Estalef against a resolute and layered Afghan defence:

The enemy position in gardens and behind enclosures and walls, backed by a town the flat roofs of which were occupied by riflemen, and behind which rose tremendous ridges of mountains, was strong, and the levies congregated for its defence were numerous and full of audacity and excitement.

Against accurate and sustained jezzail fire, the British skirmishing tactics ‘rushed upon the gardens’ to create a ‘rapid and unhesitating advance [that] soon left the enemy no resources but flight’. The assault continued with a relentless momentum. McCaskill had ‘the gratification of seeing enclosures, forts, heights, suburbs, and town successively won by the two columns’. The withdrawing Afghans accompanied by their women and children clambered up the surrounding mountain-side. Captain MacKenzie (HM 41st) recalled the scene:

Hundreds of women and children, enveloped in their white boorkas, studded the side of the mountain, as they plied their rapid and dangerous way towards the summit. Every moment their numbers became more dense, until, at length, the face of the hill appeared almost as if a wide and snow-like sheet had overspread it … it was subsequently reported that upwards of 4,000 men, women, and children, had perished, from cold and hunger, among the mountains.

25 Marshman (1860), p. 133
26 McCaskill, 28 Sep 1842, ‘Memorandum for the operations to-morrow’, transcribed in Marshman (1860), pp. 133–134
27 The modern village of Esmullah approximates to the village referred to by McCaskil as ‘Ismillah’. McCaskill to CAPT Ponsonby, 30 Sep 1842, in Stocqueler, Vol. 2, p. 155, and in Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 519, p. 413
28 Havelock, transcribed in Marshman (1860), p. 134
29 McCaskill to CAPT Ponsonby, 30 Sep 1842, in Stocqueler, Vol. 2, p. 156, and in Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 519, p. 413
30 McCaskill to CAPT Ponsonby, 30 Sep 1842, in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 156, and in Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 519, p. 413
McCaskill’s troops, still receiving fire from the Afghans positioned on the mountain-side, continued to fire artillery into the fleeing masses, ‘dispersing the fugitives by its effective fire’. By 1000hr Aminullah Khan Logari had fled, Estalef had been seized and property was found that had been plundered during the destruction of the Kabul Garrison. McCaskill then ordered the engineers to demolish the key fortifications, and instructed his troops to secure supplies and then to burn the township of Estalef.33

Schematic 6.2: McCaskill’s capture of Estalef (‘Istaliff’): 29 September 1842

Following their destruction of Estalef, McCaskill’s force then advanced unopposed northwards towards Charikar and Laghmani for their final task to avenge the

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32 McCaskill to CAPT Ponsonby, 30 Sep 1842, in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 156, and in Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 519, p. 413
33 McCaskill concludes in his report that the rapid victory was achieved with ‘trifling’ casualties, of six killed and 45 wounded, and achieved the defeat of the following Afghan chieftains ‘Ameenoollah Khan Loguree, Khaojie Ameer Kotwal, Hazin Khan (an assassin of Sir Alexander Burnes), Hazir Alec Khan, Khuleefa Ibrahim’. McCaskill also speculates that the Afghans had been deceived on the direction of the attack, due to the direction of his reconnaissance on the previous evening, leading the Afghans to position their guns and forces in anticipation of an assault from their left. McCaskill to CAPT Ponsonby, 30 Sep 1842, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 156–157, and Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 519, pp. 412–415
destruction of the Gurkha Regiment in November 1841. McCaskill issued an order on 3 October 1842 from Charikar that betrays the excessive actions of his soldiers in carrying out these acts of retribution that had begun to spiral out of control, requiring flogging to punish errant behaviour:

That in the destruction of Istaliff [Estalef] and Charakkar [Charikar], the objects of retribution in the Kohistan contemplated by superior authority have been accomplished; no farther example needs be made, unless punishment is provoked by any attacks on our columns as they march towards Cabool. Soldiers and followers must therefore understand, that from sunset this evening they are expected to return within the strictest limits of discipline. License and plunder must cease, and property and person be strictly respected; and the provost-marshall's assistants will be instructed to flog severely on the spot any soldier, sepoy, or native attached to the camp, who may be detected in any act of devastation or violence.

By 6 October McCaskill’s ‘Army of Kohistan’ had returned to Khvajeh Rawash, and on 7 October rejoined the British Camp in Kabul. On 1 October Pollock forwarded McCaskill’s 30 September account of the battle of Estalef and his clearance operations in Kohistan region to the Adjutant-General of the Army, Major-General Lumley, which was then received by Ellenborough on 10 October. Far from praising Pollock’s initiative in launching this operation into Kohistan, Ellenborough’s response on 12 October provides an insight into Ellenborough’s suspicions, never quite fully allayed, that Pollock was again delaying his withdrawal from Afghanistan. It seems that Nott was not the only one concerned about Pollock’s intent to delay in Kabul:

Neither the Commander-in-Chief, nor myself have received any dispatch from you, intimating this intention of dispatching two brigades to Kohistan, or mentioning the day on which your movements towards the Indus would commence ... I trust that you will not have engaged in any enterprise of which the effect can be to delay your return one day.

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34 Marshman also describes from Havelock’s memoirs the destruction of the village of ‘Oppian, the ancient Oppiana’ during this period, but it cannot be located on contemporary C19th or modern mapping. Marshman (1860), p. 135; Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, pp. 363–364; and Fortescue (1927), p. 276
36 There is a typographical error in Low, assigning the return of the ‘Army of Kohistan’ to Kabul on ‘7th September’, Low (1873), p. 410; Marshman (1860), p. 135; and Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 366
37 Pollock to Lumley, 1 Oct 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 518, p. 412. There were two Major-General James Rutherford Lumleys, a father and son. The elder rose to become Major-General Adjutant General of the East India Company's army in 1833 following service in the 2nd Mahratta War (1803–1805) and the 3rd Mahratta War (1817–1818). The younger was also employed in the service of the East India Company, serving under his father as Assistant Adjutant General and taking part in the First Sikh War (1845–1846). Both are ancestors of British actress Joanna Lumley
38 Ellenborough to Pollock (emphasis added), 12 Oct 1842 (2), PRO 30-12-98. Pollock later defended his departure date from Kabul explaining he considered the earliest practical date for withdrawal as 15 Oct 1842. The delayed arrival of the baggage animals until 11 Oct was a key factor. He also defends his actions in dispatching McCaskill to Kohistan to remove threats that may have jeopardised his subsequent withdrawal. Pollock to Ellenborough, 23 Oct 1842 (2), PRO 30-12-65
Low vehemently defended Pollock against Ellenborough’s thinly veiled suspicions of remaining in Kabul longer than was tactically prudent and concludes that, ‘it must have been galling in the extreme to General Pollock … to have to write exculpatory letters’.\textsuperscript{39} Feigned indignation aside, Ellenborough was rightfully suspicious of Pollock’s motives, having previously been the recipient of Pollock’s obfuscating behaviour in Jalalabad. Ellenborough increased his doubts regarding Pollock’s strategic ambitions, as did Nott, given Pollock’s previous success in influencing British strategy for a re-intervention into Afghanistan. Ellenborough was increasingly concerned that the occupation of Kabul appeared to be lengthening, significant operations were being undertaken around the capital, and with the approaching winter the opportunity for the British withdrawal in favourable weather was narrowing.

The ‘Afghan Buffer’ policy that had been rejected by Ellenborough still retained influential proponents within Afghanistan. Accompanying Pollock was George Macgregor, the Political Agent who had served Macnaghten loyally from Jalalabad and survived the siege with Sale. He was joined by Captains George Broadfoot and Henry Havelock who had also distinguished themselves in the siege. Accompanying Nott’s advance from Kandahar was the Political Advisor Major Henry Rawlinson. Despite being stripped of their independent political power by Ellenborough, all of these men remained an influential force upon Pollock, and they all retained their strong conviction that the optimal British strategy was the full annexation of an ‘Afghan Buffer’ under direct British influence. Pollock’s contemplation of these persuasive strategic possibilities had been a key factor in his desire to advance to Kabul. An annexation strategy continued to play into Pollock’s strategic calculus once he was in Kabul, and drove his attempts to consolidate Futteh Jung’s Government. By directly supporting the Sadozai cause with his dispatch of McCaskill’s ‘Army of Kohistan’ against Barakzai tribesmen, Pollock manifestly ended any notion of British neutrality in internal Afghan affairs. Pollock now sought to promote Afghanistan as a neutral buffer state. Ellenborough correctly perceived Pollock’s aggressive actions in Kohistan as the beginning of an attempt to reinstall a pliant authority in Afghanistan and was

\textsuperscript{39} Low (1873), p. 426
increasingly concerned that Pollock was being unduly influenced by the detested Political Agents.  

Conversely, Nott was having none of it. He had been contemptuous of Political Agents when their influence was in the ascendancy, and was not going to embrace their strategic recommendations now they had formally been disenfranchised by Ellenborough’s 6 January edict consolidating political and military affairs under Pollock and Nott. He was in no mood for meddling in the strategic affairs of Afghanistan, as he was ‘a soldier’s soldier: surly, savage, and selfish, he was contemptuously indifferent to anything but the welfare and safety of his troops’. Further emboldened by Ellenborough’s 13 September directive to ignore Afghan politics and resolutely sure of his selected course of action, Nott was keen to leave Afghanistan with his military force intact and to fulfill Ellenborough’s direction without being distracted by strategic considerations.

Pollock, influenced most heavily by Macgregor, still believed that a strong united Afghanistan under a Sadozai ruler was the most advantageous strategic outcome for British interests. Regardless of Pollock’s grander ambitions, any possibility of British residual influence in Kabul evaporated when Futteh Jung learned that the British were planning to withdraw from mid-October 1842. Fearing the same fate as his father, Futteh Jung arranged to leave Afghanistan with the retiring British column. The remaining pro-Sadozai tribes, concerned about a power vacuum in Kabul and accepting their inability to reconcile with their Barakzai opponents, rapidly produced an alternate ruler. They selected Shahpur Mizra Sadozai, the younger brother of Futteh Jung, described by Kaye as a ‘high-spirited boy’ and, unlike his older brother, he willingly accepted his appointment. In a final throw of the dice, Pollock requested that Britain be allowed to support Shahpur with money, soldiers and weapons – Ellenborough refused. Following Ellenborough’s unequivocal rejection, all that Pollock was able to

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40 Yapp (1980), pp. 434–435
42 Yapp (1980), p. 434
43 Maddock to Pollock, 13 Sep 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 479, pp. 380–381; and Yapp (1980), p. 434. Yapp interestingly contemplates what could have happened if Nott had been of the same mind as Pollock, given that in July and August 1842, Ellenborough’s resolve to abandon Afghanistan appeared to be weakening to favour a British policy supporting Futteh Jung. Yapp (1980), pp. 434–435
achieve was to provide some guns in the hope that Shahpur would be able to survive. Pollock also requested that Ellenborough delay the release of Dost Mohammad from captivity to allow Shahpur time to consolidate and establish himself. By now Ellenborough was content that Kabul should sort out its own destiny and, ignoring Pollock’s request, promptly released Dost Mohammad.\footnote{Yapp (1980), p. 435; Noelle (1997), p. 53}

The scale of the final retributive actions in Kabul being contemplated by Pollock centered on the succession of Afghan power. Low speculated that if Akbar Khan had been killed or captured during McCaskill’s ‘Army of Kohistan’ expedition, Futeh Jung could have been persuaded to retain the Afghan throne. With a guaranteed transition of power sympathetic to British concerns, there would have been no retributive actions. However, having now established the more tenuous option of Afghan leadership succession to Shahpur, Pollock wanted a retributive mark to be left on Kabul. His choice settled on two high-profile options – destroy the Bala Hissar as the embodiment of Afghan martial prowess, or destroy Kabul’s famous ‘Grand Bazaar’, where the head of the former British Envoy, Sir William Macnaghten murdered on 23 December 1841, had been displayed. The extent and scale of the premeditated retributive actions undertaken within Kabul have become the subject of historical controversy from the moment of they were commissioned. These actions have become the most symbolic and defining action of the ‘Army of Retribution’.

Low asserts that Pollock was ‘undecided whether the Bala Hissar, the citadel of Cabul, should be selected as the memorial of England’s vengeance for her outraged honour’.\footnote{Low is evasive on these events dedicating only seven pages of his 560-page tome to this highly controversial period of Pollock’s generalship. Low (1873), pp. 411–417} Pollock’s callous deliberation has led to conjecture as to the choice Nott would have made. Both Kaye and Low assert that if Nott had been in charge ‘he would have destroyed the Bala Hissar and the city, and would have marched with the least possible delay to Jellalabad’.\footnote{Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 361, and Low (1873), p. 411} Stocqueler partially agrees that Nott would have destroyed the Bala Hissar and moved from Kabul expeditiously, however importantly he asserts that ‘Nott would have spared the city’. Furthermore in a damning swipe at Pollock, Stocqueler contends that Nott, consistent with his consideration of local populations, would have spared the Bazaar as the destruction of the markets for the
working population was ‘cruel, unnecessary, and unworthy of the British character’. Alternatively, Nott considers the Bala Hissar to be within the purview of the Afghan leadership and ‘proper objects of warlike retribution’.49 Under Nott’s leadership, only the Bala Hissar would have been destroyed, an assertion supported by Captain Neill who observed ‘to this work of destruction [Grand Bazaar] General Nott was decidedly averse, and he most strenuously urged the propriety of razing the Bala Hissar’.50

Pollock’s final choice was heavily influenced by the pleading of the Afghan leadership to spare the Bala Hissar. Pollock was petitioned that the newly crowned Shahpur should retain the appearance of royalty in the palace of his Sadozai father, that all those that had been faithful to Futteh Jung were currently located in the Bala Hissar. So Pollock agreed to save the Bala Hissar. For a lasting demonstration of British retribution, Pollock ordered the Grand Bazaar for destruction, ostensibly because it was the location where the mutilated remains of Macnaghten had been displayed:51

The deeds which were perpetrated during those few days of license disfigured the closing page of this glorious campaign.52

On 9 October 1842, Pollock instructed his Chief Engineer, Captain Frederick Abbott (1805–1892), to demolish the Grand Bazaar.53 Of concern in these calculations was the returning population, estimated up to 5000, who had fled Kabul and were now returning ‘confident by the comparative immunity they had enjoyed during the early part of our [the British] sojourn’.54 As part of the damage mitigation, and in recognition of the returning population, Pollock instructed Abbott to refrain from using fire or gunpowder to assist in the destruction, as he feared the spread of fire into surrounding areas of Kabul. Abbott’s engineers were assisted by four companies of HM 31st and detachments of NI commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Richmond. However, given the massive structure of the Grand Bazaar and the short period of time permitted for the

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49 Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 161
50 Neill (1845), p. 268
51 Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 161; Low (1873), p. 413; and, Fortescue (1927), p. 276
52 Low (1873), p. 415
53 Abbott had joined Pollock in Jalalabad and later became Major-General Sir Frederick Abbott. Low (1873), p. 413
54 Rawlinson, undated, extract from his journal, transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 414–415, and Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 369
task of destruction, Abbott unilaterally decided to resort to the use of gunpowder. This explosive demolition of the Grand Bazaar initiated ‘a scene of pillage and rapine’. 55

Despite Richmond’s belated attempts to reassert control at the Grand Bazaar, the soldiers and camp followers from both Pollock’s and Nott’s camps descended on Kabul to indulge in an uncontrolled orgy of destruction and theft. Rawlinson records, ‘the cry arose that Cabul was given up to plunder. Both camps rushed into the city, and the consequence has been the almost total destruction of all parts of the town’. 56 A mosque at the far end of the Grand Bazaar and another nearer the cantonment, the Feringhee (Foreigners’) Mosque built to commemorate the Afghan successes over Elphinstone’s Army, were destroyed. Fire took hold across a city built primarily from wood and proved impossible to extinguish. The plunder continued in a sustained manner for three days, with inhabitants indiscriminately attacked. 57 Lieutenant Greenwood, part of HM 31st destruction party, recalls these events firsthand:

We proceeded the next morning [9 October 1842], and blew up all the principal chokes and bazaars where Sir W. McNaghten’s head and others had been exposed, and set fire to the city in many places. The houses were of course gutted in a very short time … We continued the work of destruction until night closed upon us, then returned to camp tired enough. Many of our men looked just like chimney-sweepers from the fire and smoke. On succeeding days other parties were sent, and the city of Cabul, with the exception of the Bala Hissar, and the Kuzzilbash quarter, was utterly destroyed and burned to the ground … The conflagration lasted during the whole time we remained encamped in the vicinity; and still saw it when entering the Koord Cabul pass, on our return. 58

In the Kaye’s and Low’s authoritative accounts of this destruction of Kabul there is an attempt to moderate the description of these wanton acts of vandalism and theft. Low assures the reader that ‘no one deplored more than the kind-hearted, though strict disciplinarian’ Pollock, but concludes that ‘there are times in which the bonds of discipline are loosed in the best conducted army’. 59 Similarly, Kaye asserts that ‘such excesses as were committed during the last three days of our occupation of Caubul must ever be deplored’. 60 Despite these acknowledgements for the atrocity perpetrated by the occupying ‘Army of Retribution’, Low ascribes the mood for vengeance on the Army’s advance towards Kabul along an ‘entire road lined with the ghastly skeletons and

55 Low (1873), p. 414
56 Rawlinson, undated, extract from his journal, quoted in Low (1873), pp. 414–415, and Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 369
58 Greenwood (1844), pp. 242–243
59 Low (1873), p. 414
60 Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 370
decaying remains of their countrymen'. This may partially explain the desire for retribution for Pollock’s Army advancing along the withdrawal route of Elphinstone’s ill-fated column, but fails to explain any sense of vengeance for Nott’s Army that had advanced from a separate direction. Kaye goes further, adding to the provocation of Elphinstone’s destroyed column to ascribe that, ‘everywhere tokens of our humiliation, and of treachery and cruelty of the enemy, rose up before our people, stinging them past all endurance, and exasperating them beyond all control’. A more balanced observation came from Captain McKinnon’s criticism of the selection of the Great Bazaar:

As a last memento [sic] of the British invasion, the arched bazaars of the city of Caubul were destroyed and buried in a confused mass of blackened ruin … the insurrection and its concomitant disasters arose not amongst the mercantile community of Caubul, but amongst the warlike mountain tribes. To punish the unfortunate house owners of the bazaars was not dignified retaliation for our losses.

Pollock formally reported on his activities and methodology for selection of the Grand Bazaar to Major-General Lumley on 13 October 1842 once his withdrawal was underway. Notably, the widespread destruction of Kabul by fire and the three days of plunder were not detailed:

Previous to my departure from Cabool, I destroyed with gunpowder the grand bazaar of that city … which may be considered to have been the most frequented part of Cabool, and known as the grand emporium of this part of Central Asia. The remains of the late Envoy and Minister had been exposed to public insult in this bazaar, and my motive in effecting its destruction, has been to impress upon the Affghans, that their atrocious conduct towards a British functionary has not been suffered to pass impunity. A mosque also at one end of the bazaar, and another near the cantonment, filled with venetians, otherwise ornamented with European material, and designated as the Feringhee Mosque, to commemorate the events last year, has likewise been destroyed.

Before leaving Kabul, General Orders from the Governor-General dated 4 October were received. Ellenborough is effusive in his praise and liberal in the allocation of honours, ‘the Governor General, earnestly desirous of evincing the gratitude of the Government of India towards the general officers, officers, and non-commissioned officers and privates, engaged in the operations of the present campaign in Afghanistan’. Reflecting Ellenborough’s hubris, there was also a great sense of

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61 Low (1873), p. 415
62 Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 370
63 Captain McKinnon’s Narrative, quoted in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 162
64 Pollock to Lumley, 13 Oct 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 529, p. 421
65 The 13 resolutions commenced with the payment of six months’ batta to all participants in the ‘Army of Retribution’. There was recognition of the many battles fought by renaming of regiments to reflect to increase their status, with battalions of the Bengal NI being renamed as the Regiment of Grenadiers and Regiments of Light Infantry, and the Bengal Irregular Infantry (in the service of Shah Shuja) brought on
vindication within Pollock’s Army. Lieutenant Greenwood, until recently occupied in
the wanton plunder of Kabul, summarises the sense of success within the ‘Army of
Retribution’ in reversing the ignominy of Elphinstone’s annihilation by reasserting the
superiority of British military prowess:

An unwearied career of success had marked our march on Cabul. One blow of the British lion’s
paw had, as it were, changed the whole aspect of affairs over which our enemies had so lately
rejoiced. The prisoners in their hands had been all been rescued to safety; every city they
possessed had been taken and destroyed; and Akbar Khan himself, the master-spirit of the whole
nation, was a fugitive, with a price upon his head, and with scarcely a single follower. But a few
months before, and how different was the state of our affairs! An army beaten at all points, and
utterly annihilated [less Kandahar – of course!].

The successes of Pollock and Nott and the recovery of the prisoners delighted
Ellenborough as ‘a source of unbounded gratification’, and with their continued military
dominance his anxiety regarding Afghanistan started to abate. Confident that Pollock
and Nott had achieved the objectives he had directed, Ellenborough felt sufficiently
assured to formally initiate the termination of the ‘Army of Retribution’ campaign.
Ellenborough was in Simla when the news of the successful reoccupation of Kabul
reached him and he finally rejected the policies of an annexure of an ‘Afghan Buffer’ or
a ‘Sikh Buffer’. Resident in the same room that Auckland’s ‘Simla Manifesto’ of 1
October 1838 had been composed, in a symbolic act of completion Ellenborough
decided to issue his own ‘Simla Manifesto’ four years to the day after his predecessor’s
fateful edict. Ellenborough enclosed a copy to Prime Minister Peel acknowledging
that his blatant and party political rejection of Auckland’s policies ‘will make the
members of the late [Whig] Government very angry’, however he justified his actions as
‘the people of England will approve of it, and all the military men will say I am right’.

Reflecting his persistent disagreement with the intervention in Afghanistan,
Commander-in-Chief Nicolls recorded the signing of this new ‘Simla Manifesto’ on 1
October 1842 and recalled that following their consultation, ‘Lord Ellenborough signed
his notification of altered intentions, in a clear, short, decided paper, which I much

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strength to the Bengal Army as the Regiment of Kelat-i-Ghilzie. The victories were to be reflected in the
authorised adornment of respective regimental colours, and the issuing of medals to reflect victories for
veterans of ‘Candahar’, ‘Ghuznee’, ‘Cabool’ and ‘Kelat-i-Ghilzie’ all with the suffix ‘1842’. General
Orders by the Governor General of India, 4 Oct 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 514, pp.
66 Greenwood (1844), pp. 244–245.
67 Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 374
69 Ellenborough to Peel, 5 Oct 1842, transcribed in Imlah (1939), p. 110
Ellenborough wrote to Queen Victoria that his ‘Simla Manifesto’ was ‘the first instant but not yet made in public, declaring the future policy of the Government in India’. Ellenborough had finally decided to abandon Afghanistan and affirmed his determination to withdraw the ‘Army of Retribution’ and reset British-India’s frontier on the Sutlej River. His proclamation of 1 October, written primarily for a British-Indian audience, exposes the failure of Auckland’s policies juxtaposed against his own successful actions to finally withdraw from Afghanistan on Britain’s terms, having maintained Britain’s strategic imperatives and restored Britain’s prestige:

Disasters unparalleled in their extent, unless by the errors in which they originated, and by the treachery by which they were completed, have, in one short campaign, been avenged upon every scene of past misfortune; and repeated victories in the field, and the capture of cities and citadels of Ghuznee and Cabool, have again attached the opinion of invincibility to the British arms.

The British army in possession of Afghanistan will now be withdrawn to the Sutlej [River].

The Governor General will leave it to the Affghans themselves to create a Government amidst the anarchy which is the consequence of their crimes …

The Governor General will willingly recognize any Government approved by the Affghans themselves, which shall appear desirous and capable of maintaining friendly relations with neighbouring states …

The rivers of the Punjab and Indus, and the mountainous Passes and barbarous tribes of Afghanistan will be placed between the British army and an enemy approaching from the West, if indeed such enemy there can be, and no longer between an army and its supplies.

The enormous expenditure required for the support of a large force, in a false military position, at a distance from its own frontier and its resources, will no longer arrest every measure for the improvement of the country and of the people.

The combined army of India and of England, superior in equipment, in discipline, in valour, and in the Officers by whom it is commanded, to any force which can oppose to it in Asia, will stand in unassailable strength upon its own soil, and for ever, under the blessing of Providence, preserve the glorious empire it has won, in security and honour.72

Having conducted a successful campaign, replete with a smoldering capital city, on 11 October 1842 Pollock issued orders to commence the withdrawal of the ‘Army of Retribution’ to India.73 That evening Futteh Jung and Shah Zaman, the blind brother of

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70 Nicolls Papers, dated 1 Oct 1842, transcribed in Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, pp. 375–376. Ellenborough’s ‘Simla Manifesto’ was not published immediately as Ellenborough explains to Pollock that his original decision to delay the ‘immediate publication’ of the Manifesto was to get a translation to the Native Courts, and he did not want to publish his intention to withdraw the Army of Retribution ‘until I knew that you had actually the prisoners in your hands, and had made arrangements for leaving Caubul’. Ellenborough to Pollock, 12 Oct 1842 (1), PRO 30-12-98
71 Ellenborough, undated, transcribed in Imlah (1939), p. 110
73 Low (1873), p. 416
Shah Shuja, came to the British camp. The two Afghan noblemen and Shah Shuja’s family were placed in the care of recently released prisoner Captain George Lawrence for the journey back to India. The British Colours were lowered and the regiment guarding the Bala Hissar was withdrawn to join the whole Army making preparations for the withdrawal from Kabul.

Our national honour having now been vindicated, our military prestige restored, and having the captives recovered, the troops were to bid adieu to Afghanistan, in the fervent hope that they might never see it again.

The size of this returning Army had increased exponentially since its advance on Kabul. In addition to the 128 European prisoners recovered, there were an additional estimated 2000 Sepoys and camp followers from Elphinstone’s garrison who had been found as beggars in Kabul, with many having lost their hands or feet to frostbite. Additional to these remnants of Elphinstone’s garrison, there was a ‘large number’ of native Indians from Ghazni and Kabul who had become destitute from the destruction of the respective cities and sought a safe passage back to India. Pollock’s accommodating policy of assisting the return of these destitute Indians was rejected by Nott, whose intransigence again drew the ire of Low who condemned ‘the inhumanity displayed by the Candahar General!’ Rawlinson describes the scene at the respective camps:

General Pollock’s camp is crowded with hangers-on, imperfectly provided with carriage or supplies, and he necessarily experiences much inconvenience in consequence. General Nott has positively refused to permit his force to be encumbered in the same way, and yesterday evening a general clearance of our camp took place preparatory to the march.

On 12 October Pollock commenced the withdrawal of British forces by a return march to Jalalabad. Pollock had formed his withdrawing ‘Army of Retribution’ into three columns with Major-General Sale leading the 1st Division, Major-General McCaskill leading the 2nd Division and with Major-General Nott’s Force forming the...

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74 Lawrence (1874), p. 225
75 Low (1873), pp. 416–417; and Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 371
76 Marshman (1860), p. 135
77 Pollock arranged for two officers to supervise the movement of these ‘unfortunate wretches’ back to India on any available animal, where they were to be pensioned by a large subscription raised by the European residents in addition to the East India Company pension owed separately to the Sepoys. Greenwood (1844), pp. 255–256; and Low (1873), pp. 404 and 419–420
78 Low (1873), p. 420
79 Rawlinson, undated, extract from his journal, transcribed in Low (1873), p. 419
80 Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 171; and Fortescue (1927), p. 276
The ‘crowning the heights’ tactic successfully evolved by Pollock’s and Nott’s advances though narrow defiles, was again to be employed for the return march. The advance guard establishing flanking picquets along the commanding heights of the withdrawal route to be held until the rearguard had passed, whereupon the picquets would descend and join the rearguard of the column. Sale’s force was dispatched in advance, unencumbered by a baggage train, to secure the heights of the first key defile of the Khvord Kabul Pass. Pollock marched with the main body of the column. Nott’s rearguard troops also departed Kabul on the same day. With a lingering distrust, Pollock was concerned that if Nott’s troops delayed their departure, to provide a separation from the main body, ‘the old Candahar division might commit excesses’ if left unsupervised in Kabul. Finally, the large main body of troops and camp followers, further encumbered with an enormous baggage train (including war trophies such as 44 captured artillery pieces), then proceeded through the Khvord Kabul Pass without any Ghilzai tribesmen making an appearance. By the evening of 13 October, Nott’s rearguard, exhausted from escorting such an enormous baggage train of ‘numerous camels and other baggage animals being jammed in the narrow road’, reached the overnight camp at Khvord Kabul. The only hostilities the rearguard encountered were sporadic firing at their sentries during the night.

The advance guard and main columns marched through the recent battle site of Tezin Pass on 14 October. The rearguard did not arrive at their overnight camp at Tezin

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81 Pollock’s force was composed: **1st Division** (MAJGEN Sale); 3rd Troop 1st Brigade HA (four guns); No. 6 Light Field Battery (two 18-pounders); Detail E artillery mountain train; HM 3rd Light Dragoons; four Rissalas 3rd Irregular Cavalry; one squadron 1st Light Cavalry; HM 9th; HM 13th Light Infantry; 26th NI; 35th Light NI; 5th Company Sappers; CAPT Broadfoot’s Sappers; Jezzailchees; Sikh contingent. **2nd Division** (MAJGEN McCaskill); 3rd Troop 2nd Brigade HA (four guns); CAPT Blood’s Battery (9-pounders); two squadrons 1st Light Cavalry; HM 31st; 2nd NI; 16th NI; Wing 33rd NI; wing 60th NI. **Rear Guard** (MAJGEN Nott); 1st Troop Bombay Irregular Horse Artillery; troop (late) Shah Shuja’s Horse Artillery (two guns); Detachment 1st Battalion Bombay Foot Artillery; 3rd Regiment Bombay Light Cavalry Regiment; 1st Regiment Bengal Irregular Cavalry (CAPT Haldane); 1st Regiment Bengal Irregular Horse (CAPT Christie); Detachment Sappers and Miners; Detachment Madras Sappers and Miners; HM 40th; HM 41st; 2nd Bengal NI; 16th Bengal NI, 38th Bengal NI, 42nd Bengal NI and 43rd Bengal NI; 3rd Regiment (late) Shah Shuja’s Irregular Infantry. Compiled from: Pollock to Lumley, 13 Oct 1842, *Parliamentary Papers* (1843), Paper No. 529, p. 421; and Nott to Ponsonby, 15 Oct 1842 [transcription error of date. This letter reports on the 15 Oct battle as ‘yesterday’ – therefore 16 Oct 1842], *Parliamentary Papers* (1843), Paper No. 535, pp. 423–424

82 Fortescue (1927), p. 276


84 Low (1873), p. 418, and Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 371

85 Low (1873), pp. 418–419. The 44 captured artillery pieces had to be destroyed after the first day’s march because of their impediment to the effective progress of the column.

86 Greenwood (1844), pp. 254–256, and Low (1873), p. 418
until after midnight, as they were involved in a ‘severe engagement’ that was ‘completely defeated’ after a concerted attempt to plunder the baggage train.\textsuperscript{87} Pollock maintained his offensive mind-set and pursued opportunities for retributive actions. Using the delay in concentrating his force at Tezin, Pollock dispatched a composite force of HM 9\textsuperscript{th} and 26\textsuperscript{th} NI a distance of 5 kilometres to attack the fort of a Ghilzai chieftain, Khoda Bux Khan, who had harassed Pollock’s rearward lines of communication. The small force found the Ghilzai Fort evacuated, so it was destroyed by fire and they returned to the Tezin Camp that night.\textsuperscript{88}

By 16 October the advance guard and main body had proceeded and ‘met with no opposition since we left Cabool’ except for ‘small parties of thieves occasionally firing on the rear guards’.\textsuperscript{89} Despite McCaskill’s dispersal of organised Afghan resistance during his destruction of Estalef, opposition from Afghan tribesmen was increasingly encountered by the rear elements of the British column along the withdrawal route.\textsuperscript{90} The Afghan tribesmen were shadowing the withdrawing column and ‘occasionally shewed [sic] themselves far out of our reach on the heights, apparently watching our motions with great interest’.\textsuperscript{91} The Afghans were getting bolder and were timing their attacks to re-dominate the overlooking heights as the rearguard over-watch security picquets descended to rejoin the main body.\textsuperscript{92} On the night of 15–16 October, the rearguard’s 42\textsuperscript{nd} NI, commanded by Captain Leeson, was heavily engaged as it traversed the Tezin Pass. Nott dispatched a counter-attack force to the rear, commanded by Major Hibbert, comprising 200 Sepoys, a Wing of HM 40\textsuperscript{th} and two companies of HM 41\textsuperscript{st}. Hibbert’s composite force successfully reinforced Captain Leeson’s beleaguered battalion to repel the Afghan attack and scatter the Afghan tribesmen at a cost to the British of 12 killed and 49 wounded.\textsuperscript{93}

On 18 October, McCaskill’s 2\textsuperscript{nd} Division in the main body had to negotiate the Jegdakek Pass. As reported by Lieutenant Greenwood, McCaskill’s own advance guard passed along the defile ‘without a great deal of opposition’. The main body of

\textsuperscript{87} Greenwood (1844), p. 260
\textsuperscript{88} Low (1873), p. 418
\textsuperscript{89} Pollock to Ellenborough, 16 Oct 1842 (2), PRO 30-12-65
\textsuperscript{90} Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 171
\textsuperscript{91} Greenwood (1844), p. 261
\textsuperscript{92} Greenwood (1844), p. 266
\textsuperscript{93} Nott to Ponsonby, 15 Oct 1842 [transcription error. 15 Oct is the day before the battle, and Nott writes the attack was ‘yesterday’ – it should read 16 Oct 1842], Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 535, pp. 423–424, and Low (1873), pp. 420–421
McCaskill’s Division, without the numbers to completely dominate the high ground, occasionally halted to fire artillery shrapnel at any concentration of Afghans on the heights. However, the rearguard was most vulnerable and there were numerous attacks by the Afghan tribesmen, ‘most furiously, in the expectation, no doubt, of getting a good haul at the baggage’ that were successfully repulsed. To support these rearguard actions, Brigadier Monteith directed his artillery to fire into the Afghan positions dominating the high ground on the passes. This action continued until the entire baggage train had successfully emerged from the gorge without loss, although desultory follow-up Jezzail fire continued from the shadowing Afghan tribesmen until the column finally arrived at Sorkh Pol at last light. Further along the withdrawal route, by 18 October the advance guard and main body had reached the post established at Gandomak by the Sikh forces to maintain the lines of communication. The column halted at Gandomak for a day for rest and to feed the cattle, and with McCaskill’s Division arriving on 19 October, the column then proceeded to Fatehabad on 20 October.

On 20 October, Sale’s leading 1st Division reached their former camp at Fatehabad. Although Sale’s main column proceeded unmolested, his rearguard was attacked by a force of local tribesmen. The rearguard infantry withdrew into a defensive position and the Afghan tribesmen proceeded to pursue them across open ground. Having exposed themselves advancing towards the defensive infantry position, the rearguard cavalry was launched and ‘rode among them in every direction, hacking and hewing right and left with their long sabres, while the infantry kept up a most destructive fire’. The Afghans suffered great losses and the fleeing Afghans were cut down by the pursuing cavalry, ‘until from fatigue they could scarcely raise their arms’. Further to the rear, Nott’s column traversed the Jegdalek Pass from 19 October, and after a concerted attack upon his own rearguard which was successfully repulsed, to reach Gandomak by 22 October. Nott’s column then proceeded to Jalalabad with no

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94 Greenwood (1844), p. 268
95 Greenwood (1844), pp. 268–269
96 Low (1873), p. 423 and Greenwood (1844), pp. 271–272
97 Greenwood (1844), p. 273
98 There is little available in the historical record on Nott’s withdrawal through the Jegdalek Pass to Gandomak. His transit through the Jegdalek Pass must have commenced no earlier than 18 Oct 1842
further orchestrated Afghan attacks, only having to repel small-scale opportunistic raids against their baggage train.\textsuperscript{99} Importantly, as the column consolidated at Gandomak, Nott received an unexpected letter from Ellenborough expressing his delight upon receiving the news of Nott’s 30 August victory at Khwaja Sei Ghar. In recognition of Nott’s achievements, Ellenborough conferred upon Nott the prestigious and lucrative appointment as the ‘Resident at the Court of Lucknow’.\textsuperscript{100} Nott appeared to have been genuinely moved by Ellenborough’s gesture, replying ‘it is a reward far beyond what I could have expected had my services been of a much more arduous nature in carrying the Order of Government into effect’.\textsuperscript{101} This was a subtle finishing flourish by Nott now that the ‘Army of Retribution’ had successfully achieved their re-intervention into Afghanistan in a manner urged by Nott and Pollock that had been initially resisted by Ellenborough. In his closing remarks, Nott attributes the success of these actions as ‘carrying out the Order of Government’ and cleverly ties the success of the re-intervention back to Ellenborough.

On 22 October Pollock and Sale’s 1\textsuperscript{st} Division arrived at Jalalabad.\textsuperscript{102} The remaining columns then streamed in Jalalabad, with McCaskill’s 2\textsuperscript{nd} Division arriving on 23 October, and finally Nott’s rearguard arriving on 24 October.\textsuperscript{103} The brief pause in Jalalabad was also used to rearrange the cumbersome baggage train for the return to Peshawar. The baggage train had to incorporate all the stores from Jalalabad including a large gun called the \textit{cazee} of Jalalabad, as a trophy to celebrate Sale’s defence of Jalalabad.\textsuperscript{104} Concurrent with the withdrawal, as part of Britain’s longer-term regional

\footnotesize{(when McCaskill’s 2\textsuperscript{nd} Division was fighting through the Pass), and given the day’s separation of columns, was most likely traversed by Nott on 19 or 20 Oct 1842. Likewise there is no other information about Nott’s arrival and action at Gandomak. Nott could not have arrived in Gandomak before 20 Oct 1842 as McCaskill arrived in Gandomak on 19 Oct and did not leave until 20 Oct 1842. Given the day’s separation of columns and that Nott arrived in Jalalabad on 24 Oct 1842, Gandomak was most likely traversed by Nott on 21 or 22 Oct 1842. Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 171; and Low (1873), p. 423

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{99} Bengal Officer (1845), p. 81

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{100} Ellenborough continues ‘… marking the high sense I entertain of the value of your Military Services, and of making known to the army and the People of India that the situation of greatest dignity and emolument under the Government is deemed by me to be due reward of a successful General’.

\footnotesize{Ellenborough to Nott, 21 Sep 1842, PRO 30-12-95

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{101} Nott to Ellenborough, 21 Oct 1842, PRO 30-12-64

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{102} Pollock to Lumley, 22 Oct 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 533, p. 423

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{103} Low (1873), p. 423

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{104} Nott was unable to transport the \textit{cazee} as he was already encumbered with the gates of Somnauth, so McCaskill’s column was assigned responsibility of dragging this ungainly trophy to India. The gun was placed on a hastily converted carriage and a team of about 40 bullocks were assembled to drag the trophy towards India at a speed of 1 km an hour. This carriage was noted by Greenwood as he passed by, ‘I expected every moment to see the whole concern break down … the wheels, which from the immense
positioning, the long-running diplomatic negotiations continued for the transfer of authority of Jalalabad to the Kingdom of Lahore. After lengthy prevarications, at the last moment Lahore had decided to accept suzerainty over Jalalabad, but it was too late. With the British abandonment of Afghanistan, the rulers in Lahore were left to make their own arrangements in eastern Afghanistan, but were too consumed with their own disintegrating internal affairs. In the absence of political guidance to the contrary, Pollock issued instructions for his engineers to commence the destruction of the Jalalabad Fortress.\(^{105}\) Greenwood described that during the ‘four days’ halt at Jellalabad, the Fort and town were, according to orders, set fire to, and totally destroyed’.\(^{106}\) In a final indignity, a bastion fell over Elphinstone’s grave.\(^{107}\)

On 27 October Pollock’s army with a vast baggage train commenced their withdrawal from the ruins of the Jalalabad Fortress. With McCaskill’s Division leading, Nott’s departure was delayed until 28 October to provide a day’s separation and to again form the rearguard of the army.\(^{108}\) By the evening of 27 October, McCaskill’s column had travelled 11 kilometres to reach Ali Boghan as the force became increasingly weakened by dysentery causing some deaths. On 28 October McCaskill’s column progressed slowly and with great delays, as the large baggage train had to negotiate a number of narrow defiles. Indicative of the precarious progress, the baggage train was forced to halt for six hours due to the congestion caused by an overturned cart.\(^{109}\) Despite these delays, between 28 and 30 October Pollock’s lead Division had reached La’l Purah and the nearby township of Loya Daka.\(^{110}\) At Loya Daka Pollock reconfigured the command arrangements in anticipation of the opposition from the Afridi tribesmen for the return journey through the Khyber Pass. Pollock assumed direct command of the leading column, composed of the 1\(^{st}\) and 4\(^{th}\) Brigades, McCaskill was

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weight of the carriage pressing down, always seemed oval rather than of a circular form’. Greenwood (1844), p. 280; and Low (1873), pp. 431–433

\(^{105}\) Low (1873), pp. 429–430

\(^{106}\) Greenwood (1844), p. 277

\(^{107}\) Low (1873), p. 430

\(^{108}\) Low (1873), p. 430

\(^{109}\) Greenwood (1844), pp. 279–282

\(^{110}\) There is conjecture when Pollock reached La’l Purah / Loya Daka. Greenwood’s narrative implies 28 or possibly 29 Oct 1842, whilst Low’s account states 30 Oct 1842. Greenwood (1844), pp. 281–282; and Low (1873), p. 433
assigned the main column composed of the remaining 2nd and 3rd Brigades, whilst Nott remained as the column’s rearguard. 111

Anticipating a strong Afghan resistance in the Khyber Pass, Pollock continued with the cautious tactics that had proven successful during his advance through the same defiles seven months previously, even though his force had doubled in size. Setting out from Loya Daka over 29–30 October, Pollock’s two brigade advance guard traversed the Khyber Pass in three days. 112 The first day the column retired 13 kilometres from Loya Daka to Landi Khana; the following day was a very long march of 18 kilometres to Ali Masjid; and with the third day’s march of 14 kilometres, the column finally emerged from the Khyber Pass and reached Jamrud. 113 Remarkably, and contrary to everyone’s expectation, there was very little Afghan opposition encountered by Pollock’s lead brigades (despite the regimental band ensuring that the tribesmen could hear the progress of the column):

We entered the [Khyber] pass, expecting every moment a volley from the frowning hills on either side; but, to our astonishment, not a shot was heard, nor a Kyberee to be seen. For some time we proceeded, supposing the enemy had thought it prudent to get us well into the pass before they commenced the attack … Why they allowed our division to pass unmolested I never could imagine, as those behind were most furiously attacked, and experienced heavy losses … We marched up the ascent with the band playing in front ‘Away, away to the mountain’s brow’, and a variety of other tunes. 114

As noted by Greenwood, both McCaskill’s and Nott’s columns were not so fortunate. McCaskill’s two brigades departed Loya Daka on 2 November with the 2nd Brigade leading to pass through Landi Khana at 1000hr. During the remainder of the day and that night, the force and baggage train experienced no Afghan opposition. In the rear throughout the night of 2–3 November, Captain Lane had struggled moving the large cazee through the steep and narrow defiles and at the Landi Khana Pass the rickety carriage carrying the large cazee gave way. 115

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111 Low (1873), p. 433
112 The commencement date of the return of Pollock’s is unclear. Low does not provide a date only stating ‘Pollock reached Dakha on the 30th [Oct 1842]’ and Greenwood’s narrative implies 29 Oct. However, Pollock is known to be in Ali Masjid on 1 Nov 1842. Given Greenwood describes the two days required to traverse from Loya Daka to Ali Masjid, the earliest Pollock could have left Loya Daka is 29 Oct and the latest is 30 Oct to be in Ali Masjid by 1 Nov 1842. Greenwood (1844), pp. 282–285; and Low (1873), pp. 434–436
114 Greenwood (1844), p. 283
115 McCaskill to Ponsonby, 4 Nov 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 541, p. 427; Greenwood (1844), pp. 281 – 286; and, Low (1873), pp. 432 – 433
McCaskill’s rear brigade, the 3rd Brigade commanded by Brigadier Wild, had departed Loya Daka on the morning of 3 November. The column reached the abandoned Jalalabad cuzee and by 1000hr had struggled to move it only a further 800 metres. With the imperative to get to Ali Masjid by nightfall, Wild ordered Lane to blow up the cuzee in place and to move forward with the remainder of his artillery train.\(^{116}\) As the 3rd Brigade baggage train reached Landi Khana on 3 November, Wild rejoined his advance guard on the approach to Lala Beg as it came under fire from Afridi tribesmen in the surrounding hills.\(^{117}\) In a critical admission, Wild recounts, ‘I immediately sent up crowning parties’ and fired artillery onto the heights whereupon ‘the enemy quickly fled’.\(^{118}\) Wild’s account is significant in that by stating that he sent up ‘crowning parties’ to disperse the Afridi tribesmen, he implied that he did not already have ‘crowning parties’ in place to clear the heights for the column below. This was in direct contravention of Pollock’s tactical directions and own tactical practice.

Wild’s column then continued the advance, halting briefly three times to allow the baggage train to close up. Additional artillery was assigned to the rearguard with two mountain guns commanded by Lieutenant Christie. Wild excuses his poor progress to the delays incurred by attempts to move the Jalalabad cuzee and the exhausted state of his brigade, ‘I cannot attribute the misfortune of to-day to any other cause than having been benighted in the pass, owing to the delay the big gun occasioned, and also the extreme weakness of my brigade’. With the approach of nightfall on 3 November Wild’s column was still progressing through narrow defiles towards Ali Masjid. At the rear of Wild’s column, Lane came under a heavy night attack near Lala Beg, forcing him to hastily occupy a local fort to defend against an Afridi onslaught, but in the action lost a howitzer, artillery gun, two baggage carriages and a number of killed and wounded.\(^{119}\) Further forward, Afridi tribesmen made another concerted night attack,

\(^{117}\) Wild’s advance guard was composed of: two troops 5th Cavalry, artillery (commanded by Lieutenants Smith and Christie), 64th NI (Colonel Moseley). Wild to Havelock, 3 Nov 42, *Parliamentary Papers* (1843), Paper No. 542, pp. 427 - 428  
\(^{118}\) Wild to Havelock, 3 Nov 42, *Parliamentary Papers* (1843), Paper No. 542, pp. 427 - 428  
\(^{119}\) In the morning of 4 Nov Lieutenant Corsar was dispatched and successfully recovered the stolen howitzer and both carriages. McCaskill to Ponsonby, 4 Nov 1842, *Parliamentary Papers* (1843), Paper No. 541, p. 427
killing Lieutenant Christie and Ensign Nicholson, and capturing two mountain guns.\textsuperscript{120}

The confusion of the night attack is apparent in this eyewitness description:

Night overtook our unfortunate 3\textsuperscript{rd} Brigade. The enemy, emboldened by the darkness, came down upon them in strength. Some of our men were cut off in the column. Numbers of them were hit by stones, which were flying in all directions. The confusion must have been great. The Irregular Cavalry rode right over the infantry, knocking down several of the officers.\textsuperscript{121}

Nott’s Division had commenced their march from Jalalabad on 28 October.\textsuperscript{122} Nott’s column progressed in a more deliberate and coordinated tactical manner that ensured that each night the column was in a consolidated defensive position. Nott’s methodical approach is typified by his movement along the long and treacherous passage between Landi Khana to Ali Masjid, where Wild’s Brigade had been attacked at night. Nott purposely halted overnight at the halfway point in Lala Beg and did ‘not attempt the forced march, which had been the sole cause of the losses which the other [lead] division experienced; but, wisely halting … enabled to get his baggage every day into camp, and his guards and picquets posted before nightfall.\textsuperscript{123}

With these prudent tactics employed for the withdrawal, Nott’s only major action was when his rearguard encountered a concerted Afridi assault around Ali Masjid. Both of these actions occurred against Nott’s rearguard, under the command of Major Brown assisted by Major Simmonds (both HM 41\textsuperscript{st}).\textsuperscript{124} The first encounter was on the approach of the rearguard to Ali Masjid on 4 November. The second attack occurred during the rearguard’s withdrawal from Ali Masjid on 6 November. During these actions Nott’s rearguard was able to recover one of the mountain guns that had been captured by the Afridis from Wild’s column on the night of 3 November.\textsuperscript{125} As part of his rearguard’s actions Nott’s Chief Engineer, Major Sanders, supervised the demolition

\textsuperscript{120} Wild to Havelock, 3 Nov 1842, \textit{Parliamentary Papers} (1843), Paper No. 542, pp. 427–428

\textsuperscript{121} Unreferred correspondence (author’s emphasis), transcribed in Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 391

\textsuperscript{122} Nott’s column was composed of: Bengal 3-2 Foot Artillery; Bombay 3-1 Foot Artillery; Christie’s Horse; HM 40\textsuperscript{th}; HM 41\textsuperscript{st},2\textsuperscript{nd} and 16\textsuperscript{th} NI Bengal Grenadiers; 38\textsuperscript{th}, 42\textsuperscript{nd} and 43\textsuperscript{rd} Native Light Infantry. This list is not comprehensive. Compiled from the ‘Return of killed and wounded during the attack on the rear-guard of General Nott’s force, on the 4\textsuperscript{th} and 6\textsuperscript{th} November, 1842’, in Nott to Ponsonby, 8 Nov 42, \textit{Parliamentary Papers} (1843), Paper No. 544, pp. 428–429

\textsuperscript{123} Greenwood (1844), p. 286

\textsuperscript{124} There is little battlefield description of these encounters other than Nott’s terse statement that his rearguard ‘was attacked by the enemy, on marching to and from Ali Masjid’ and the provision of a comprehensive battle casualty list detailing the four killed and 19 wounded in these actions. Nott to Ponsonby, 8 Nov 42, \textit{Parliamentary Papers} (1843), Paper No. 544, pp. 428–429

\textsuperscript{125} It is unclear whether Nott’s rearguard captured one or both of the mountain guns lost by Wild’s rearguard on the night of 3–4 Nov 1842. Stocqueler’s account states, ‘Nott’s column re-captured a gun which had been taken by the Khyberiies from McCaskill’. Fortescue states, ‘the pieces were recovered a few days later by Nott’. Neither Kaye or Low refer to Nott’s recovery of the artillery pieces lost on the night 3–4 Nov 1842. Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 172; and Fortescue (1927), p. 277
of the Ali Masjid Fort on 5 November. ¹²⁶ Nott’s rearguard column had traversed the Khyber Pass with 84 casualties.¹²⁷ Nott’s column arrived in Jamrud on 6 November, and by 8 November had rejoined the remainder of Pollock’s Division camped about 6 kilometres east of Peshawar.¹²⁸

The Provincial Governor of Peshawar, the Italian General Avitabile, having warned Pollock of the impossibility of his task as the ‘Army of Retribution’ passed through the previous February, now feasted Pollock and his victorious generals.¹²⁹ With the consolidation of the ‘Army of Retribution’ in Peshawar, Pollock’s and Nott’s operational actions in Afghanistan were effectively concluded.

On 12 November 1842, four days after Nott’s Division had rejoined the main column, the whole force departed their camp on the outskirts of Peshawar and commenced their uneventful return march across Punjab towards Ferozepur on the Sutlej River. The news of the return of the ‘Army of Retribution’ had reached India. Critically, one of the desired effects of Pollock’s and Nott’s actions had been to restore British military prestige within India. This effect, essential for the maintenance of stability across the wider subcontinent, is apparent in a contemporary observation from Colonel Sutherland, the respected soldier-statesman British Resident at Ajmer:

> It is, indeed, a comfort to be able to be able to look a native in the face again with confidence … one could not help feeling that we had fallen from our high position; and they would have felt this too … had not the noble resolution been taken of moving forward to retrieve our tarnished reputation.¹³⁰

The returning Army continued to be affected by sickness and disease. Throughout the remainder of the march the column suffered continued losses from smallpox and dysentery, as well as from wounds sustained during the hostile phase of the

¹²⁶ The destruction of the Ali Masjid Fort most likely occurred on 5 Nov 1842 for two reasons. First, Nott reached Ali Masjid on 4 Nov and departed on 6 Nov, therefore they purposefully stayed for an extra full day in a dangerously exposed position for the sole purpose of demolition. Secondly, MAJ Sanders writes to Nott confirming his completion of the mission upon reaching Jamrud on 6 Nov 1842. As a keen regimental officer, he would wish to inform his commanding general as soon as practicable after successfully completing his significant assigned task. Sanders to Nott, 6 Nov 42, *Parliamentary Papers* (1843), Paper No. 545, p. 429.

¹²⁷ Forresque (1927), p. 277

¹²⁸ The ‘Army of Retribution’ traversed around Peshawar to avoid going through the city. Pollock to Lumley, 9 Nov 42, *Parliamentary Papers* (1843), Paper No. 543, p. 428; Low (1873), pp. 436–437; and, Nott to Ponsonby, 8 Nov 42, *Parliamentary Papers* (1843), Paper No. 544, pp. 428–429

¹²⁹ Low (1873), p. 437

¹³⁰ Sutherland, undated, Private Papers, transcribed in Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 374
withdrawal. Nott had become increasingly weakened by ‘a disease of the heart’ dating from 1841 and it was during this withdrawal phase that he formally tendered his resignation. Although Stocqueler proffers the reasons for Nott’s resignation as being ‘continually deprived of the part of his carriage cattle’ and weariness dealing with ‘vexatious’ complaints, these are highly innocuous reasons for ending a distinguished military career. Stocqueler more accurately reflects than an ailing Nott was motivated by a real sense that he had concluded his mission by bringing his army ‘out of Afghanistan, and all actual field service having come to a close, he was earnestly desirous of being relieved of command’. Unstated in Ellenborough’s immediate holding response to Nott on 8 November asserting ‘I cannot but feel that your going away weakens the Government’, is that the Governor-General would not let anything detract from the perception of victory he sought to generate from the strategic successes of the triumphant return of the ‘Army of Retribution’. The resignation of a key commander before the end of this campaign would also raise legitimate questions concerning the command relationships within the ‘Army of Retribution’, particularly the fractious relationship between Nott and Pollock in Kabul. Later on 19 November, Ellenborough more formally delayed accepting Nott’s letter of resignation, appealing to Nott’s desire for recognition, as well as highlighting Ellenborough’s interminable fixation of the ‘Gates of the Temple of Somnath’.

I do not deem it consistent with the public service to accept your resignation until you have safely conducted to the British frontier the troops you have led with so much honour through Afghanistan. I deeply regret that any circumstances should have occurred to induce you to wish to resign your command … I was in hopes [sic] that you would have accompanied my Camp, on your way to Lucknow. I shall have a considerable force at Delhi, where I shall probably deliver the gates of the Temple of Somnauth to the Princes of Rajpootnà.

Ellenborough wanted a fitting ceremony to mark the significance of the final return of the British Army from Afghanistan and onto Indian soil and moved from

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131 In the absence of sufficient ambulance carriages, the transportation of the sick in chair-like panniers suspended over the backs of camels caused even more deaths. Low (1873), pp. 443–444
132 Nott to Ellenborough, 2 Nov 1842, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 260 and 290
133 Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 172
134 Ellenborough to Nott, 19 Nov 1842, in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 260–261
135 In anticipation of the arrival of the Army of Retribution, Ellenborough had ordered an escort, under the command of his own aide-de-camp Captain Herries, to take the Somnath Gates to Guzerat. Ellenborough also issued a proclamation to the whole of India announcing the presence of the gates. Ellenborough’s gesture of returning the gates of the temple of Somnath achieved little more than ridicule both in India and Britain. Regardless, Ellenborough insisted on their return to India and conducted solemn processions where the gates were escorted and displayed with great ceremony throughout northern India to the bewildement of the locals. The gates were finally, and quietly, laid up in the Judgment Hall of the Palace at Agra. Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 180; Low (1873), p. 390; and, Yapp (1980), pp. 443–444
Simla to personally greet the returning ‘Army of Retribution’. At Ferozepur, Ellenborough was accompanied by a large army composed of the ‘Army of Reserve’ that had been formed under the personal command of the Commander-in-Chief Nicolls. Indian press cynically speculated that the ‘Army of Reserve’ had been retained in Ferozepur for the sole purpose of this welcome home ceremony. This cynicism ignores that the military purpose of the reserve had been to reinforce an increasingly worn out and sickly ‘Army of Retribution’ at any stage of its return, which had fortunately proceeded uneventfully after reaching Peshawar. However, it is worthy of note that this level of criticism is indicative of the tenor that began to infuse the public discourse and academic commentary that has served to undermine the considerable military successes of Pollock and Nott ever since.

On 9 December Ellenborough arrived in Ferozepur and threw himself into organising the reception proceedings. The Maharajah of the Punjab, the Princes of Sirhind, alongside their ministers of state and military chiefs, were invited to attend. Ellenborough also intended that Dost Mohammad attend. High on symbolism (and showmanship), Ellenborough intended to make a proclamation and grand gesture of releasing Dost Mohammad and other Afghan nobles upon the return of the ‘Army of Retribution’ to India. This gesture was popularly felt as ‘un-British’ and Ellenborough had relented, to release Dost Mohammad earlier in October 1842 after a private interview. Indicative of Ellenborough’s hubristic mindset at this time, he wrote privately to his sister, ‘it is impossible to imagine an army in finer state than the Army of India is in now … It is strong and perfectly equipped, and the Spoilt Child of Victory. I long to in the midst of them like a boy who has just got his first commission’.

The ceremonial route for the ‘Army of Retribution’ was to be over a bridge made of boats spanning the Sutlej River. Ellenborough had ordered a triumphal arch to span the bridge and to be covered in yellow, blue and red cloths representing an eastern dawn. The construction of this arch is referred to widely in sources and has become incorporated into the cynical narrative against Ellenborough, further undermining the achievements of the ‘Army of Retribution’. It does appear from descriptions that ‘in

137 Low (1873), pp. 450–451
138 The Maharajah of the Punjab actually declined the invitation and sent his heir and other officials to represent him. Low (1873), p. 452
139 Low (1873), p. 452; and Noelle (1997), p. 53
140 Ellenborough to Lady Colville, 20 Nov 1842, transcribed in Imlah (1939), p. 118
place of a handsome or imposing structure, they erected a most unsightly and grotesque object, which, instead of exciting admiration, was the fertile source of ridicule’.

But who shall attempt to describe the erection denominated the triumphal arch? It was a scaffolding of bamboos, resembling a gigantic gallows … Under this arch, as they called it, the whole army marched, and peals of merriment as they did so burst from the soldiers, – it was such an absolute caricature of anything triumphal.

As Pollock’s column approached Ferozepur, on 14 December Ellenborough dispatched his aide-de-camp and military secretary, respectively Captains Colville and Somerset, to deliver the medals that Ellenborough had granted the Jalalabad Garrison. Ellenborough wanted to enhance the sense of occasion with the Garrison being welcomed wearing their decorations. Ellenborough had a fixation to single out the Jalalabad Garrison for special acknowledgement, quite separately from the ‘Army of Retribution’. This was against the advice of Nicolls, who was bypassed again and privately reflects that ‘[Ellenborough] did not desire that the honours paid to the garrison should be extended to any other part of the army. This I regret, for they have all seen hard work, great exposure, and some arduous days of service’.

On 17 December 1842 the ‘illustrious garrison’ of Jalalabad, now adorned with their medals, reached the Sutlej River. Sale at the head of his Jalalabad Garrison crossed the pontoon bridge to be greeted in person by Ellenborough. With a great desire to heighten the sense of success and theatre, Ellenborough had arranged for 250 elephants in two ranks to line the initial part of the ceremonial welcome route. Ellenborough had also arranged for the 25,000 troops of the ‘Army of Reserve’ to line up as the welcome guard on the Indian bank of the Sutlej River. To receive the ‘Amy of Retribution’, the single line of the ‘Army of Reserve’ extended 4 kilometres. Each

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141 Low (1873), p. 454; and Yapp (1980), p. 444
142 Greenwood (1844), p. 293
143 Ellenborough issued a specific notification that formally listed those officers authorised to wear the medal granted to the garrison of Jalalabad. Notification by the Governor-General of India, 17 Dec 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 546, pp. 429–430
144 Nicolls, undated, transcribed in Low (1873), p. 456
145 Marshman (1860), p. 136, and Low (1873), p. 456
146 With trunks painted, the elephants were to trumpet a welcome in unison and then bend at the knee on a prearranged signal. Upon Sale’s arrival, the pachyderm greeting party resolutely refused to move as the Jalalabad Garrison simply marched through their ranks, adding to the sense of farce. Low (1873), pp. 454–455
On 18 December Pollock passed over the Sutlej River leading the second brigade of infantry, with artillery and cavalry. As with Sale, Pollock was received by Ellenborough at the foot of the pontoon bridge, however there was no further ceremonial reception. Low lamented that ‘there was no presenting of arms by the army of reserve … to greet him [Pollock] and the gallant soldiers he had led to so many victories’. Compounding the lack of overt recognition of Pollock by Ellenborough, on 23 December Nott had arrived at the Sutlej River leading the remaining columns of the ‘Army of Retribution’. The greeting party consisted of many ‘hundreds’ of visitors to receive the remainder of the ‘Army of Retribution’ at the foot of the pontoon bridge. In recognition of the appointment of Nott as the Resident at Lucknow, Ellenborough insisted that Nott now be referred to as ‘Excellency’. A gun salute was fired as Nott formally set foot back in India. Nott was affectionately welcomed by Ellenborough and Nicolls. Nott writes warmly of his reception by Ellenborough in Ferozepur in a private letter:

Some people may laugh at his [Ellenborough’s] acts, but he is the keenest Englishman I have ever seen in this country, and just the man to deal with Asiatics. He is indeed truly kind, and he last night made a long and eloquent speech in praise of my whole conduct, and declared before this large party, and therefore to the world, that “the safety of all was due to my firmness”, and as much more would fill several sheets of paper.

Presciently, Nott concluded his account of Ellenborough, ‘all this fuss I do not like, although I like and admire the man; it will only bring down envy and abuse from little minds’. The ceremonial activities surrounding the reception of the ‘Army of Retribution’ lasted about a week in and around Ferozepur. There was much feasting and dancing, with banquets held in huge tents festooned with silk flags upon which the place

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147 To add to the occasion, as Sale reached the centre of the welcome guard, the Horse Artillery gave a 19-gun salute and the band of the Lancers played ‘See the Conquering Hero Comes’. Low (1873), p. 456
148 Low cites 19 Dec 1842 as the day Pollock crosses the Sutlej River. However, Maddock’s formal notification dated 18 Dec 1842 proclaims ‘this day Major-General Pollock, C.B., passed the Sutlej’, see Notification by the Governor-General of India, 18 Dec 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 547, p. 431; and, Low (1873), p. 457.
149 Low (1873), p. 457. The only other separate acknowledgement was for the 26th NI who formed a hollow square at the request of Ellenborough to be commended for their exemplary conduct, and to receive the honour of being elevated to a regiment of Light Infantry. Notification by the Governor-General of India, 18 Dec 1842, Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 547, p. 431
150 Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 180–181 and 398; and, Low (1873), p. 457
151 Nott to his Daughters (Nott’s emphasis), 24 Dec 1842, in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 181
152 Nott to his Daughters, 24 Dec 1842, in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 181
names of battles were listed. Low disapprovingly noted that ‘the rejoicings were marred by the prejudiced exclusiveness of the Governor-General’, in reference to Ellenborough’s elevation of Nott and Sale above the achievements of Pollock. In a conclusion to the festivities, on 26 December a ‘grand field day’ of military exercising was held. Up to 40,000 troops with 100 guns, comprising the ‘Army of Retribution’ and the ‘Army of Reserve’ manoeuvred across the great plain of Ferozepur. This martial display of British military might was conducted in the presence of the many notable guests, including officers from European states and Sikh princes. The Sikh Rajah Shere Singh presented Major-Generals Pollock, Nott and Sale with magnificent swords. Thus with the great martial display, the actions of the ‘Army of Retribution’ were concluded:

Thus dramatically closed the incidents of the war in Afghanistan … Pollock’s triumphal march over the scenes of our disasters formed a fitting and glorious finale to the drama in which thousands of lives were sacrificed, millions of treasure buried, honour tarnished and regilt, and a kingdom lost and won.

The post-mortem on the relative successes of the commanders during the campaign of the ‘Army of Retribution’ began immediately and has permeated into modern military folklore. Pollock’s legacy was widely acclaimed as setting ‘a milestone in military history’ as the first commander to successfully force the Khyber Pass utilising the tactic of ‘crowning the heights’. Indeed, the promotion of this legacy appears to have been assisted by Pollock himself from as early as October 1842. Pollock’s claim on history in advancing successfully on Kabul was reinforced by the success of his withdrawal of the ‘Army of Retribution’: in particular, achieving the withdrawal of his lead brigades to reach Peshawar for the loss of only three men and none of his baggage train – although it had been Nott’s rearguard that had undertaken the heaviest fighting. On 23 October Pollock had written to Ellenborough summarising the success of his withdrawal to Jalalabad. This letter was prompted to address an apparent contradiction between Pollock’s report of 16 October where he

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153 Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 182; and, Low (1873), p. 458
154 Low (1873), p. 458
155 Nott cites 30,000 and Low cites 40,000. Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 182; and, Low (1873), p. 459
157 Low (1873), p. 459
158 Stewart (2011), p. 103
159 Low (1873), p. 434
states that he had ‘met with no opposition since we left Cabool’ against reports by Nott who had reported heavy fighting traversing the Tezin Pass.¹⁶⁰

I am still of opinion (and my opinion is formed from information I have received from good sources) that the only enemy we have had to contend with have been brigands of the country, who, even in times of peace, are always to be found where there is prospect of plunder. I have crowned the heights the whole distance, and have had a strong rearguard. I have not only my with no opposition, but have scarcely seen an inhabitant; most certainly there has been no organized resistance.¹⁶¹

In this letter it appears that Pollock did not fully comprehend the tactics of the Afghan tribesmen attacking the totality of the column of which Pollock had overall command. The Afghans had purposefully targeted the more vulnerable rearguard of the column and not the advance elements in which Pollock had travelled. At worst, the implication of Pollock’s letter is that his tactics of ‘crowning the heights’ were explained as the difference in the damage inflicted by the Afghan tribesmen on the column, inferring that the tactics of his subordinates were inferior – therefore suffering from more severe Afghan attacks. This letter infers that the ferocity of Afghan attacks were due to the tactical failures of his subordinates. This subtle inference is perpetuated by Pollock’s biographer Low, who denigrates the other commanders in a clear attempt to perpetuate the notion of Pollock’s superior generalship:

So complete were General Pollock’s arrangements that his column arrived at Jelalabad without a single casualty, though Nott and McCaskill, who did not take the precaution of crowning the heights the whole way during their progress, were not equally fortunate.¹⁶²

Interestingly, the authoritative account by Kaye is uncontroversial in describing the conduct of the withdrawal. Kaye states that ‘Pollock wrote that he had not seen an enemy; but McCaskill and Nott, who followed with the centre and rear divisions, were not quite so fortunate’. Asserting correctly that there was ‘no organised resistance’, Kaye offered no further analysis of the levels of tactical competence other than his observation that Nott’s ‘skirmish’ at the Tezin Pass constitutes an exception to the otherwise ‘desultory’ Afghan attacks.¹⁶³ Unfortunately Low’s unprompted slur infuses later writers, particularly Fortescue’s authoritative account on the competence of Sale and McCaskill.

¹⁶⁰ Pollock to Ellenborough, 16 Oct 1842, PRO 30-12-65; and, Nott to Ponsonby, 15 Oct 1842 [transcription error. 15 Oct is the day before the battle, and Nott writes the attack was ‘yesterday’ – it should read 16 Oct 1842], Parliamentary Papers (1843), Paper No. 535, pp. 423–424
¹⁶¹ Pollock to Ellenborough, 23 Oct 1842 (2), PRO 30-12-65, and partially quoted in Low (1873), p. 424
¹⁶² Low (1873), pp. 423–424
¹⁶³ Kaye refers to other accounts of actions of the rear of the column – Colonel Stacy’s Narrative, Neill and Greenwood. Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, pp. 388–389
Fortescue is unusually scathing on the tactical failures during this final phase of the withdrawal of the ‘Army of Retribution’, where he considered such errors to be ‘most discreditable and very wrong’ and identified two key setbacks that blighted the otherwise orderly proceedings due to the failure of respective commanders to scrupulously employ the tactics of ‘crowning the heights’. He criticised Sale’s actions between Landi Khana and Ali Masjid on 1 November for failing to deploy any flanking cover and, having ‘left things to chance’, was attacked by Afridi tribesmen.\footnote{Fortescue (1927), pp. 276–277} Fortescue’s second criticism is leveled at McCaskill, or more correctly ‘the unlucky’ Brigadier Wild who commanded the 3rd Brigade of McCaskill’s rear column, as being ‘equally negligent’ in also failing to post flanking cover.\footnote{Low (1873), pp. 433 and 435–436; and, Fortescue (1927), pp. 276–277} Fortescue’s valid criticism is borne out by Wild’s own account of his actions approaching Lala Beg on 3 November where he ‘immediately sent up crowning parties’ – therefore implying that, in contravention of Pollock’s orders, Wild did not have flanking cover already in place.\footnote{Wild to Havelock, 3 Nov 42, \textit{Parliamentary Papers} (1843), Paper No. 542, pp. 427–428} That even to the end the tribesmen should have been able to wrest advantage from the British was most discreditable and very wrong. From stupid, unteachable old Sale nothing better, perhaps, was to be expected; but MacCaskill was supposed to be a good officer and should not have been guilty of such a lapse. Nor is it easy to acquit Pollock of blame, for his force was not a large one, and he should have insisted upon proper conduct of the march by his subordinates.\footnote{Fortescue (1927), p. 277}

Fortescue’s contempt for Sale is a recurring theme and he seethed at Sale’s ‘hero’ status considering that, ‘after making a false movement [to Jalalabad], and shrieking for the forces of the Empire to deliver them from the consequences of their own incompetence. This is the one great evil which the Army inherited from this unhappy war’.\footnote{Fortescue (1927), pp. 279–280} Having summarily dismissed the tactical competence of Sale and of McCaskill, Fortescue does provide a more balance critique of Pollock and Nott.

Fortescue properly acknowledged Pollock for his restoration of courage into a demoralised force and his deliberate logistic build up in Peshawar before venturing into Afghanistan, despite the considerable pressure to proceed prematurely from Sale in Jalalabad. Pollock is also commended for the widespread adaptation of the tactics for successfully advancing through Afghanistan’s narrow defiles. However, Fortescue denied Pollock consideration amongst the pantheon of British military commanders due to his lack of ‘inspiring personality’; failure to mould ‘his force into a really efficient
military instrument’; failure to make ‘his spirit dominant among all ranks’; and, finally his losses during the withdrawal along the Khyber Pass.\textsuperscript{169} More sympathetically, Pollock’s biographer concluded that the successes of the ‘Army of Retribution’ were due primarily to the ‘thoroughness of his [Pollock’s] arrangements, which were as masterly and complete in their minutest details in every action’.\textsuperscript{170} As proof, Low cited that ‘in forcing the Khyber, the casualties were only 135!’, to conclude that Pollock’s fastidious planning resulted in relatively few casualties given that ‘the sacrifice of a thousand lives would have been thought no extravagant outlay’. Low correctly singled out Pollock’s actions at Tezin, against Akbar Khan during the advance to Kabul on 13 September, as being ‘worthy to be ranked among the greatest triumphs of Indian warfare’. The employment of conventional British combined arms tactics were prevented by the unique geography of the narrow mountain passes that presented ‘difficulties to be overcome of a novel and well-nigh insurmountable nature’. The British artillery was ineffective against Afghans entrenched along the dominating heights. Consequently the infantry had to assault, unsupported by artillery, along steep and broken heights to clear Afghan resistance over ground known to the defenders. In addition to the extremely arduous nature of clearing the precipitous high ground against an entrenched defender, the technical range overmatch of the Afghan \textit{jezail} over the standard British infantry weapon placed the British assaulters at another disadvantage as the Afghan weapon ‘carried death into the ranks of the [British] assailants at a range at which the “Brown Bess” was practically useless’.\textsuperscript{171} Low concluded that Pollock’s tactical ‘success and brilliancy’ provided an enduring and ‘practical illustration of the value of certain rules in mountain warfare, which, indeed, Pollock may be said to have been the first to define’.\textsuperscript{172}

There is no doubt that Pollock’s tactical innovation of ‘crowning the heights’ is rightly lauded as enabling the successful forcing of the Khyber Pass by force of arms to thereby establish the achievement as ‘a milestone in military history’.\textsuperscript{173} Pollock’s notoriety prevails despite evidence of Nott successfully using the same tactic between Kandahar and Quetta in southern Afghanistan from as early as 1839. However, having established Pollock’s military credentials, Low over-reached in his conclusions to

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\textsuperscript{169} Fortescue (1927), p. 278
\textsuperscript{170} Low (1873), p. 437
\textsuperscript{171} Low (1873), p. 438
\textsuperscript{172} Low (1873), pp. 438–439
\textsuperscript{173} Stewart (2011), p. 103
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undermine the validity of his assessment. Low continued to assert the superiority of Pollock’s tactics against those of his subordinate commanders. Low selectively compared Pollock’s successes against Nott (presumably at the Battle of Khwaja Sei Ghar) and Sale at Jalalabad concluding that:

The victories achieved by Nott and Sale cannot be compared to these successes [by Pollock]; they were gained on open ground, where both cavalry and guns could act with effect, whereas in the Khyber and at Tezeen the British gunner could scarcely be employed at all, while the infantry had to assail heights.  

Low ignored that the tactical disadvantages Pollock successfully overcame at Tezin were equally faced by his subordinate commanders. Despite his selective tactical comparison, Low’s final summary provides an excellent summary of the difficulties impressively overcome by Pollock:

Pollock contested every step with the fiercest and most warlike races of Central Asia. His foes were flushed with success, while the morale of his native troops was more than questionable … [Pollock] had to contend against a Commander-in-Chief and Governor General whose orders were at variance with his own views of what was expedient … advancing on Cabul with only a week’s supplies … General Pollock achieved grand and striking results.  

Fortescue’s only unreserved praise is for Nott, and he is one of the few writers of the First Anglo-Afghan War to acknowledge that ‘Nott alone of the senior officers came out of this enterprise with credit’. As the commander of the rearguard column for the withdrawal, Fortescue acknowledges that Nott had been continually harassed by Afghan tribesmen and had responded by ‘handling his troops like a soldier’ applying sound tactics that successfully delivered his troops and baggage through the treacherous passes. Fortescue judged Nott to be a ‘sound man’ who succeeded because he consistently maintained two military principles of maintaining discipline and never deploying small detachments in isolation. Despite Nott having plenty of commonsense, Fortescue considered that Nott’s inflexibility and cantankerous demeanour easily translated to obstinacy, particularly in dealing with civil superiors, and infers that Nott’s outlook was narrow and his ‘limitations were many and close’. Fortescue assesses Nott as a commander ‘ever on the watch for slights, quick to take offence and slow to accept conciliation’, but credits Nott for his constancy, patience, determination and as ‘an upright man and a good soldier’. Most significantly in his assessment Fortescue

174 Low (1873), p. 438
175 Low (1873), pp. 440–441
176 Fortescue (1927), pp. 278–279
177 Fortescue (1927), p. 277
concludes that Nott should have been the hero of the First Anglo-Afghan War ‘but for his [Nott’s] unfortunate temper it is probable the he [Nott] and not Sale would have come down to posterity as the hero of this war.’  

Honours were bestowed at the conclusion of the First Anglo-Afghan War, with Ellenborough being raised in the peerage to an Earl. Low observes the supreme irony of such high recognition, given that if Ellenborough’s own strategy had prevailed he ‘would have contented himself with bringing off the Jalalabad garrison, thus leaving the unredeemed honour of his country’ and therefore receiving no official recognition. Indeed this irony is compounded, as it was the persistence and persuasiveness of Pollock and Nott that convinced Ellenborough to launch the ‘Army of Retribution’ into Afghanistan. Without the efforts of these two field commanders there would have been ‘no advance on Cabul, with its attendant triumphs, no release of British captives’.  

Ellenborough’s subdued enmity towards Pollock is evident in the disparity of honours and financial arrangements bestowed on his subordinate Major-General Sale, inferring that it ‘appeared as if intended to denote that General Pollock had fallen under the displeasure of the supreme authorities’. Low linked this lack of generosity with previously discussed non-publication of Pollock’s controversial 13 May 1842 letter that had strongly advocated the advance on Kabul, leading to an ‘ungenerous feeling in the mind of the Governor-General towards him [Pollock]’. However, most interesting is Pollock’s own perception for his lack of official recognition. Pollock cited that the differences between Ellenborough and himself arose during the strategic deliberations that eventually led to the re-intervention strategy. Tellingly Pollock refers to his advance into Afghanistan as ‘unauthorized’:

> There can be little doubt but that it was owing to the difference regarding my unauthorized advance on Cabul, that the Government [in Britain] did so very little by way of acknowledgement of my services, as the Government did not wish to act contrary to the opinion of the Governor-General.  

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178 Fortescue (1927), p. 279
179 Low (1873), p. 460
180 Pollock was nominated for the highest class of The Knight Grand Cross of The Most Honourable Military Order of the Bath (GCB). With Sale already having received the highest award (GCB), in further recognition of his service he was granted by the Government in Britain a colonelcy of a regiment with a salary of £500 to £600 per year, and an additional pension of £500 per year. Low (1873), pp. 460–461
181 Pollock, undated, transcribed in Low (1873), p. 461
Although Pollock was appointed to command the Dinapore Division in the Bengal Presidency upon return to British-India, his lack of specific recognition commanding the ‘Army of Retribution’ was entirely consistent with Ellenborough’s calculus applied to his strategic deliberations throughout 1842. Ellenborough’s primary motive had been to rapidly establish his premiership by leveraging off the disastrous end of Auckland’s intervention in Afghanistan. As evidenced in his 4 July 1842 letter, the strategic deliberations concerning re-intervention had principally centered on Ellenborough’s concerns relating to the risk to his own reputation by becoming mired again in Afghanistan as Auckland had. By implicating his battlefield commanders in the decision-making process, Ellenborough distanced himself sufficiently from the decision for re-intervention if it had gone badly. Conversely, Ellenborough remained sufficiently close to events to claim credit if the intervention was successful – and so it proved.

There were very damaging contemporary political sentiments circulating that contested Ellenborough’s personal claim for success. The former Ambassador to Russia, Ulick de Burgh (1802 –1874), Marquess of Clanricarde pointed out the obvious logic flaw from Ellenborough’s 4 July 1842 letter. In the House of Lords, Claricarde declared that he ‘defied any man, if General Nott had failed in his advance, to attribute any blame to Lord Ellenborough’, therefore ‘if no blame could attach to him [Ellenborough] in case of failure, surely no merit should accrue to him from success’.\textsuperscript{182} To negate such perceptive and corrosive logic, Ellenborough seized the successes of the ‘Army of Retribution’ and acted rapidly to reinforce the perception of his own personal success with the ostentatious welcome at Ferozepur and his grand proclamations relayed throughout India. Having uncomfortably exposed himself politically over the whole notion of re-intervention, even with his own risk mitigation in place, Ellenborough was not going to let anybody interfere with his reflected glory. In this sense Pollock was now Ellenborough’s main threat. If Pollock was to become the acclaimed hero for his success as a military commander, it would consign perceptions of Ellenborough to a secondary and supporting capacity. Worse still, Pollock could reveal that Britain’s success was a result of his and Nott’s single-minded championing for re-intervention and having to convince a reluctant and vacillating Governor-General for its implementation – a damning truth that would have devastated Ellenborough’s

\textsuperscript{182} Clanricarde, ‘Affghan War – Vote of Thanks’, 20 Feb 1843, \textit{Hansard}, House of Lords, 3\textsuperscript{rd} Series, Vol. 66, c. 920
credibility. Ellenborough understood these political and reputational dynamics implicitly. To promote himself, Ellenborough acted by marginalising Pollock’s central role and achievements, and artificially promoted the questionable tactical reputation of Sale.

As a less influential subordinate commander close to retirement, Ellenborough could also afford to be more generous with Nott. The formal recognition of Nott’s service began when he was informed that he was also to be invested with The Knight Grand Cross of The Most Honourable Military Order of the Bath. Nott’s self-effacing reaction towards being bestowed this honour, and his proclaimed dislike of recognition, are as interesting as they are disingenuous. Nott’s career had been punctuated by him taking offence at the slightest provocation of perceived inequality between the Queen’s and Company Armies, or upon any aspect of his own military capabilities. At the point of ultimate vindication by Queen Victoria on his military prowess and that of his beloved Sepoys, for Nott to privately write the following record reeks of false modesty:

How little are the home people aware, that I would not give a straw for these honours – or what they call honours. Every man I meet comes up to congratulate me on that which I would rather not have. You have long known my dislike of these foolish things, and there is no change in me. I cannot well decline what our Queen has given me, but could I do so with honour and propriety, I would not hesitate.

This proclaimed view contrasted with Nott’s more predictable speech following the actual investiture ceremony. The ceremony was held at sunrise at the Fort of Agra in March 1843. Nott was invested with his award by the Governor-General alongside his fellow recipient Sir George Pollock. Following the investiture a grand public breakfast was attended by ‘assembled hundreds’. When Nott was invited for his formal speech, he was truer to form, ‘I stand before you, as evidence that in England the road to the highest honours is not closed to any individual, however humble their original positions, provided they have some merit and talent, and opportunity for their display’. In a gesture of farewell, Ellenborough presented Nott a gift of a sword and conferred upon Nott an elevation to the ‘Envoy to the King of Oude’. The praiseworthy letter of

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183 In a letter from Queen Victoria dated 12 Dec 1842 received in Kurnal on 28 Jan 1843. Augustus, Acting Grand Master, 12 Dec 1842, Document Conferring the Grand Cross of the Bath, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 399–400 and 192–193
185 Nott’s investiture speech, Mar 1843, quoted in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 215
186 Ellenborough had previously appointed Nott to the prestigious position as the Resident at the Court of the King of Oude in Lucknow, to commence from 30 Nov 1842. Nott was well recompensed with an envoy’s salary of 5000 rupees per month. Following Nott’s return to England, on 21 Aug 1843 he was
introduction to the King of Oude summarises Ellenborough’s high opinion of Nott, ‘He [Nott] has commanded armies, always victorious, in the neighbourhood of Candahar for four years, and has now, after taking and destroying Ghuzni, brought back his forces in triumph to Hindostan’.\(^{187}\) The lavish praise of Nott also assisted in diminishing the achievements of Pollock.

One of Nott’s last acts as a military commander was to prepare a report on logistic provisioning, specifically on ‘the defects of the present want of system’ in response to a request from Ellenborough on 28 December 1842.\(^{188}\) Nott examined his own logistic shortfalls in Afghanistan and concluded that the addition of a dedicated Commissariat officer to each brigade, particularly for expeditionary operations, would provide ‘great increased efficiency at a reduced expense to the state’.\(^{189}\) Following the submission of this report, Nott resigned his military command to his successor Colonel Wymer and, with an escort of 30 Sepoys, commenced his journey to Lucknow.\(^{190}\) On 2 January 1843 he issued his final message to the soon to be demobilized ‘Army of Candahar’:

> Major-General Nott, having received permission to join the appointment assigned to him at the Court of the King of Oude, cannot leave the Candahar force without returning his best thanks to the officers and men composing it, for the assistance he had constantly received from them, which has enabled him, upon all occasions, to uphold the honour of our country and the reputation of British arms. It is with feelings of deep regret and admiration that the Major-General now bids farewell to his brave and gallant comrades of the Candahar army.\(^{191}\)

Ellenborough was criticised privately by Peel’s Cabinet for the manner of his deliberations over re-intervention, the hasty orders issued on 15 March and his delegation of decision-making onto Pollock and Nott regarding their actions for withdrawal on 4 July 1842. Cabinet criticism of Ellenborough also extended to the conduct of the ‘Army of Retribution’, particularly for permitting the destruction at

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\(^{187}\) Ellenborough to King of Oude, undated [Jan 1843], transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 192

\(^{188}\) Nott was to consider the merits of ‘whether the Carriage Department should not be distinct from the Commissariat’. Ellenborough to Nott, 28 Dec 1842, PRO 30-12-95

\(^{189}\) Nott concluded ‘one department of supply for all the wants of an army, would seem the preferable system’ – a Department of Supply. Nott to Ellenborough, 10 Jan 1843, PRO 30-12-64. These recommendations were adopted by MAJGEN Sir Charles Napier with his development of a dedicated Transport Corps to support his successful military annexation of Sind in 1843. Holmes, Richard, *Sahib: The British Soldier in India 1750–1914* (Harper and Collins: London, 2005), pp. 60–61

\(^{190}\) Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, p. 191

\(^{191}\) Nott to ‘Candahar Army’, 2 Jan 1843, transcribed in Neill (1845), pp. 318–319
Estalef and the Grand Bazaar in Kabul which were considered cruel and unnecessary.\textsuperscript{192} It was the repercussions of these acts of destruction on English politics that principally concerned Cabinet, whereas the strategic implications of abandoning Afghanistan held little interest.\textsuperscript{193}

In the Parliamentary debates on the First Anglo-Afghan War, occurring variously in May and June 1842 with a major clash in March 1843, centred on the origins of the War by contesting the decision to intervene and the validity of the Russian threat. There was no real discussion on the policy basis for intervention in Afghanistan or the decision to withdraw. Despite the partisan nature of these debates, the consensus of Parliamentary opinion supported the withdrawal from Afghanistan primarily based on the financial cost and the perception that there was no threat from Russia. Peel’s Tories, through a sympathetic press, had continued to question Auckland’s actions in Afghanistan and had given full credit for the reversal in British fortunes to their appointee Ellenborough. As a consequence, the Whig opposition began increasingly to focus on the punitive actions of Pollock and Nott during the campaign of the ‘Army of Retribution’.\textsuperscript{194} The sympathetic Whig press then ‘put forth innumerable libels’ regarding the conduct of the ‘Army of Retribution’ during their occupation of Kabul. Ellenborough had already requested Pollock’s account of the most infamous act of the ‘Army of Retribution’, the ‘destruction of the bazaar and mosque at Cabool’ in a letter dated 23 March 1843.\textsuperscript{195} After ‘these vile slanders’ in the British press reached India, on 29 March Ellenborough formally requested that both Nott and McCaskill also respond.\textsuperscript{196}

On 2 April Pollock responded and defended the actions of his troops and interestingly, unlike his two fellow commanders, did not answer these most potent accusations directly. He began by attacking the veracity of his accusers in the media, ‘it is difficult to grapple with vague and anonymous accusations against the conduct of the troops. Many detailed statements in the newspapers were entirely unfounded, and were got up with the sole object of creating a sensation’. Pollock continues by defending the actions of his troops in the broad by arguing his ‘regret that the instances alluded to

\textsuperscript{192} Fitzgerald to Ellenborough, 31 Jan 1843, Yapp (1980), p. 453
\textsuperscript{193} Yapp (1980), p. 453
\textsuperscript{194} Yapp (1980), pp. 454–456
\textsuperscript{195} Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 226 - 228
\textsuperscript{196} Yapp (1980), p. 456
have not been specified’. He then juxtaposes the actions of his troops against their extreme provocation for revenge as they advanced past the remnants of Elphinstone’s army with ‘the sight of skeletons of their late brethren in arms, which still lie covering the road from Gundamuck to Cabool’:

Some excesses may, unknown to me, have been committed; but I will venture to assert no troops ever conducted themselves with more forbearance under such unprecedented aggravations; perhaps no army was ever placed in a more trying situation. During the whole course of their progress towards the capital they had ocular proofs of the treachery and brutality of a merciless enemy; but still I am unable to call to mind any wanton, deliberate act of inhumanity on the part of the troops.197

Pollock admitted to one act of revenge, the destruction of the village of Ali Boghan on 18 or 19 June 1842 by troops of the 4th Brigade commanded by Colonel Monteith, explaining this action as an unauthorised unilateral action by troops seeking revenge following the discovery of ‘parts of a dress of some of our soldiers who had been massacred on the march from Cabool’. He further explains that the burning of the village ‘whether accidentally or intentionally is doubtful’ and that Monteith was unaware of this act of retribution ‘till the place was in flames’. He concludes with the findings of an inquiry he ordered into this action that, ‘not a man, woman, or child was injured; and I know the greater part of the property was returned to the head man in the village’. The other military actions ‘in subsequent engagements with the enemy were then summarised in Mumoo Khail [Mama Kheyl], Jugdulluk [Jegdalek], and Tenzeen [Tezin], I neither saw nor heard of any excesses’. Of the greatest significance, only once in his lengthy response did he answer the damning accusations of his force whilst in Kabul and the destruction of the Grand Bazaar or the neighbouring Mosques. Clearly at odds with eyewitness accounts, Pollock states that he was ‘not aware of any instance of violence having occurred. It was not possible entirely to prevent plundering, but during the time the Engineer officer was employed in the destruction of the bazaar and mosque attached, both cavalry and infantry were on duty in the city to prevent any outrage’.198

Nott had only been the Resident in Lucknow for a short period when, on 4 April 1843, he provided his indignant repudiation to claims of ‘certain excesses committed by the British troops on retiring from Afghanistan’.199 Nott was required to address two specific accusations ‘upon what private property and upon what private buildings,

197 Pollock to Ellenborough, 2 Apr 1843, fully transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 480-483
198 Pollock to Ellenborough, 2 Apr 1843, fully transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 480-483
199 Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 216 - 217
injury was inflicted by my orders, or under my toleration, at Ghuznee [Ghazni], and ‘whether unresisting individuals were destroyed in cold blood, for mere vengeance, or whether women were either violated or murdered for their ornaments’. To the first accusation, Nott simply replied, ‘I answer, upon none’. To the second accusation, Nott was more fulsome and continues with his long-running frustration about the lack of recognition for the Kandahar Garrison:

I will endeavour to suppress my scorn and indignation while I shortly reply to this charge … the gallant Candahar army – that army which was for so long a time neglected, but which, nevertheless, nobly upheld our national honour, and during a period of four years acted with the greatest forbearance and humanity to the people of Afghanistan.

Nott then went on to offer a vindication of events in Ghazni, and passed on any claims of excess in Kabul onto his commander:

Ghuznee – Colonel Palmer, at the head of a brave garrison, surrendered Ghuznee to various tribes of Afghans. The city was occupied by these people for months; it was vacated by the enemy on arrival of the army under my command. On its being entered by the British troops, it was found that not a single person was in the city, neither man, nor woman, nor child. There was no property, and I do not believe there was a house left completely standing in the town; the whole had been unroofed and destroyed by the contending Afghans for the sake of the timber, &c. I have said there were no inhabitants in Ghuznee, and therefore “unresisting individuals” could not have been “destroyed in cold blood”, women could not have been “murdered and violated for their ornaments” … I ordered the fortifications and citadel of Ghuznee to be destroyed. It had been the scene of treachery, mutilation, torture, starvation, and cruel murder to our unresisting and imprisoned countrymen …

I did not command at Caubul. … My division was encamped at a distance, with the exception of one regiment, against which corps I never received a complaint. My division was not in Caubul after Sir George Pollock’s troops left it. General Pollock’s army and my troops marched the same day. No man under my command was ever detected in plundering without being immediately punished … I will only further say, that never did an army march through a country with less marauding and less violence than which I commanded in Lower Afghanistan.

In the conclusion to his indignant response Nott used the opportunity to assert his superior generalship and reaffirmed his perception of his own legacy. However, the evident frustration generated by the accusations he is required to answer, caused Nott to over-reach and provide a rare and damning criticism of Auckland’s leadership:

I put down rebellion, and quelled all resistance to the British power, in spite of the fears and weaknesses of my superiors. By mild, persuasive measures I induced the whole population to return to the cultivation of their lands, and to live in peace. I left them as friends, and on friendly terms. On my leaving Candahar no man was injured or molested, no man was deprived of his property, and my soldiers and the citizens were seen embracing. It is on record that I informed the Indian Government that I could hold the country for any time – it is on record that I informed Lord Auckland, as far back as December 1841 that I would, with permission, re-occupy Cabul with the
force under my command. There was nothing to prevent it but the unaccountable panic which prevailed at the seat of government.203

Similarly, Major-General McCaskill was requested to respond to accusations surrounding the conduct of his forces during the campaign of the ‘Army of Kohistan’ at Estalef and Charikar. In a letter dated 29 March 1843, the Commander-in-Chief requested McCaskill explain the actions of his force in burning of Estalef, the treatment of women, the potential murder of any Afghans ‘after resistance had ceased’ and the destruction of Charikar. McCaskill responded on 2 April justifying the actions of his force, and effectively blaming the burning of Estalef on Pollock’s orders, defending his force’s conduct towards treatment of women, and offering a reassurance that no murder occurred following the assault, although some unintended civilian casualties are acknowledged:

About one-third of the town [Estalef] was destroyed by fire, in obedience of the orders of Major-General Pollock. My instructions were to burn the whole … A single instance only of the maltreatment of a woman has come to my knowledge. When the troops were finally withdrawn from the place, an officer discovered accidentally that such an act had been perpetrated, but it was not possible to trace the culprit. The conduct of the soldiers and sepoys towards the women was almost universally good.

When the troops first attained the highest points of the town, vast numbers of women and children were making their way up the mountain; several men were interspersed among them and fired upon our soldiers, who abstained from returning the shots, lest they should injure the women …

I am firmly persuaded that no such case occurred [of Afghans killed in cold blood]. Our more advanced troops, in rushing through the streets, were fired upon from some of the houses; they returned fire, and in this way an irregular discharge of musketry was kept up, by which two or three old men, one woman, and perhaps two or three children were killed; but this only occurred at the onset … it is probable that ten or twelve unarmed Afghans may have fallen a sacrifice.204

McCaskill’s concluding defence of the action of his forces with ‘a disposition to plunder and violence’ is less convincing. He appeared in fact to have temporarily lost control of his forces as they plundered Charikar, requiring the issue of orders where ‘its effect was such as I desired, by repressing disorder and restoring the proper discipline of the force’.205

In London, Parliament did not wait until these letters of explanation had been received. The decision to withdraw from Afghanistan had been announced in the Queen’s opening speech to Parliament in February 1843. There was no policy discussion at this time, although former Governor-General Auckland again defended his

203 Nott to Lumley (emphasis added), 4 Apr 1843, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 217–220
204 McCaskill to Lumley, 2 Apr 1843, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 221–225
205 McCaskill to Lumley, 2 Apr 1843, transcribed in Stocqueler (1854), Vol. 2, pp. 221–225
original decision for intervention. The Whig attack, now concentrated on Ellenborough’s contradictory military orders between March and July 1842, was successfully defended by Wellington – although the odour of brutality lingered sufficiently to detract from the overall military achievements of the ‘Army of Retribution’. As a result of the release of _Parliamentary Papers_ in mid-February 1843, exposing Auckland’s nervous handling of the Afghanistan crisis, the Whigs did not oppose a vote of thanks to the ‘Army of Retribution’. On 20 February 1843, both Houses of Parliament voted to give thanks to Pollock and Nott. The motion for the vote of thanks in the House of Commons was introduced by Prime Minister Peel. After likening Pollock’s military achievements to those of Alexander the Great, Peel concludes ‘I think the House will unanimously award to General Pollock the highest distinction which a military man can receive, and record their public acknowledgment to him for his gallantry and perseverance in the face of such serious difficulties’. Peel’s praise for Nott was similarly effusive, acknowledging his ‘gallant spirit never quailed … he thought of nothing but of retrieving the honour of the British name; and I do not confine my admiration of General Nott merely to his military prowess and skill … but to the moral character of General Nott’. In the House of Lords, before formally thanking Pollock and Nott, Wellington read from Queen Victoria’s speech:

> Her Majesty is happy to inform you that complete success has attended the recent military operations in Afghanistan. Her Majesty has the greatest satisfaction in recording her high sense of the ability with which these operations have been directed, and of the constancy and valour which have been manifested by the European and native forces. The superiority of her Majesty's arms has been established by decisive victories on the scenes of former disasters, and the complete liberation of her Majesty's subjects who were held in captivity, and for whom her Majesty felt the deepest interest, has been effected.

Pollock departed a brutalised Afghanistan having been unable to persuade Ellenborough to implement a pro-British Sadozai ‘Afghan Buffer’ for the frontier security of British-India. Instead, a fragile regime based around the tenuous authority of Shahpur Mizra Sadozai was now in place in Kabul. Without British military or financial assistance, Shahpur’s authority quickly crumbled. Following the British withdrawal from Kabul, Akbar Khan was summonsed back to Kabul by the Afghan ministers, and

206 Yapp (1980), p. 454
207 Peel, ‘Afghan War – Vote of Thanks’, 20 Feb 1843, _Hansard_, House of Commons, 3rd series, Vol. 66, c. 962
Shahpur was forced to flee to Peshawar.\footnote{Noelle (1997), pp. 52–53} Whilst crossing Punjab to Ferozepur, Pollock received an update on these latest political machinations and the promotion of his recent enemies to positions of authority:

The Sudderze prince, Shahpoor [Shahpur], had been expelled from the Bala Hissa, and had fled for safety to Peshawur. The poor boy had narrowly escaped with his life. Akbar Khan had made a descent upon Cabul, and carried everything before him. The Newab Zamaun Khan [Nawwab Muhammad Zaman Khan – Dost Mohammad’s nephew], it was said, had been made Governor of Jellalabad, Shumshooden [Shams al-Din Khan] of Ghuznee, Sultan Jan of Candahar: and in the meanwhile, Dost Mohammad was making his way through the Punjab to his old principality … Everything is reverting to the old state of things, as it was before we entered the country.\footnote{Letter to Pollock, undated, transcribed in Low (1873), pp. 453}

Having ceded positive control over the leadership of Afghanistan, the desired strategic effect created by the ‘Army of Retribution’ for the security of British-India now rested on the policies adopted by the newly reinstalled Afghan leadership. Following his release from exile by Ellenborough in October 1842, Dost Mohammad entered Afghanistan via the Khyber Pass in January 1843 and had resumed his Afghan throne by June 1843.\footnote{Noelle (1997), p. 53} As part of the shaping of Dost Mohammad’s longer-term outlook, during his exile in Ludhiana, he had requested a visit to Calcutta and had been hosted by Auckland. During his visit to Calcutta, Dost Mohammad had been highly impressed at the scale and extent of British military and naval power, and was heard to remark that, ‘if he had known of all these warlike means, and of the extraordinary power of the English before, he would have never have thought to oppose our views’.\footnote{Lal (1846), Vol. 2, pp. 494–495} Despite Dost Mohammad appearing to celebrate excessively upon his return to power in Kabul, having ‘given himself up again to drinking and to dancing parties’, he was actually in a weaker political position than he had been on the eve of the British invasion in 1839.\footnote{Lal (1846), Vol. 2, p. 497} Ironically, the British occupation during the First Anglo-Afghan War had created the conditions that greatly assisted Dost Mohammad to reconsolidate then expand his authority. The ‘Army of Retribution’ had inflicted such widespread and lasting damage on the tribal power structures that the remaining rival chieftains were more easily brought under Dost Mohammad’s control. The Anglo-Sadozai Government of Shah Shuja had also acted to centralise power to a much greater extent in Kabul, and by establishing a strong and disciplined Afghan Army, had ensured a much more powerful system of central government and means of enforcement. Finally, the
economic stimulation and growth from the British spending left a greatly expanded Afghan economy that in turn provided greater sources of revenue. Exploiting these favourable conditions, Dost Mohammad rapidly asserted his authority in Kabul, Jalalabad and Ghazni. However, north of the Hindu Kush and Herat remained largely independent, and only in Kandahar had the control passed to the former Sardars, Dost Mohammad’s three half-brothers, the ‘Dil’ brothers. In consolidating his return to power and extending his influence over these outlying domains, Dost Mohammad did not conduct reprisals against those who had cooperated with the British, instead he acted to marginalise the successful leaders of the insurrection. Aminullah Khan Logari who had loyally supported Akbar Khan in Kabul and barely survived Major-General McCaskill’s destruction of Estalef was imprisoned for life. Sardar Sultan Ahmad Khan, who loyally supported his cousin Akbar Khan around Jalalabad, was exiled to Kandahar. Dost Mohammad relied heavily on his sons for the administration of Afghanistan, with primacy bestowed upon Akbar Khan who was elevated to Wazir and has become immortalised in Afghan oral tradition. Despite being the heir apparent, Akbar Khan continued to challenge his father’s timid policies towards the Sikhs and the Sardars of Kandahar, and Dost Mohammad was implicated in Akbar Khan’s untimely death in February 1847.

Dost Mohammad quickly re-established himself, and by the time of his death in 1863 had consolidated the Barakzai ascendancy to extend his reign over a kingdom that approximates to modern Afghanistan. As he consolidated his authority, Dost Mohammad was guided by his two strategic principles – ‘friendship with the British and attempts to unify his country’. He remained mindful of the superior military capability and proximity of the British Army, and the proven willingness of the British-Indian Government to intervene when their strategic imperatives were threatened. Consequently, he limited his regional ambitions and maintained his focus on matters internal to Afghanistan. Despite his temporary alignment with the Sikhs during the

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215 Yapp (1964), p. 381
216 Dost Mohammad’s brothers were the Sardars of Kandahar – the ‘Dil’ brothers: Kuhandil Khan, Rahmdil Khan and Mihrdil Khan. Noelle (1997), pp. 11 and 57
217 Akbar Khan is considered as a great national hero who had defeated the British and spared only one man to tell the tale. Also in recognition there is suburb in Kabul called ‘Wazir Akbar Khan’ around where the Kabul Cantonment had stood. Personal discussions in Afghanistan during 2013 with key leadership in the current Afghan National Army
218 Noelle (1997), p. 57
219 Dupree (1997), p. 401
Second Anglo-Sikh War of 1848–1849, between 1843 and 1855 Dost Mohammad assiduously refrained from antagonising British-India.\textsuperscript{220} Relations between Afghanistan and British-India became repaired and were formalised in the signing of the Anglo-Afghan Treaty on 30 March 1855 proclaiming mutual obligations of respect and amity, which were further strengthened in a new treaty signed on 26 January 1857.\textsuperscript{221} However, the greatest proof of Dost Mohammad’s unwillingness to provoke another brutal British intervention was through his actions in response to the nadir of the British-Indian Empire – the Indian Mutiny of 1857. Despite the greatest temptation to exploit Britain-India’s weakness and expand his kingdom eastwards to seize his long-held ambitions for Peshawar, Dost Mohammad refrained from intervening. In the face of such strategic serendipity he declared, ‘I have now made an alliance with the British Government and come what may I will keep it till death’.\textsuperscript{222} Having proven to be ‘our faithful ally during the crisis of 1857’, the British introduced a subsidy system in 1857 which thereafter became the main British instrument of influence in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{223} With improved diplomatic relations with British-India, underwritten by the close proximity of the potent British Army, Dost Mohammad and the ruling Barakzais had been suitably chastened by the brutality and swiftness of the campaign of the ‘Army of Retribution’ in concluding the First Anglo-Afghan War. The strategic effect created by concluding the First Anglo-Afghan War with such devastation and brutality was evident in Dost Mohammad never again meddling in regional affairs that could potentially threaten Britain’s enduring strategy of securing the north-western British-Indian frontier.

In complete contrast to the popular conception of the campaign of the ‘Army of Retribution’ as a belated and cynical afterthought, these concluding military actions had proven critical in averting Britain’s strategic defeat in the First Anglo-Afghan War. Following the impressive advocacy by Pollock and Nott, the launch of the ‘Army of Retribution’ in the wake of the destruction of the Kabul Garrison salvaged an imminent strategic defeat that had threatened the security of British-India. The combined leadership of Pollock and Nott, whilst never harmonious, was sufficiently robust to enable their simultaneous advance on Kabul. With an unbroken series of crushing

\textsuperscript{220} Dupree (1997), p. 401
\textsuperscript{221} MacMunn (1929), pp. 160–161; and Fletcher (1965), pp. 122–123
\textsuperscript{222} Dost Mohammad, undated, transcribed in Fraser-Tytler (1967), p. 125
\textsuperscript{223} Low (1873), p. 452. The subsidy system instigated in 1857 broadly continued as Britain’s foreign policy tool until 1919. Yapp (1980), pp. 438-439
battlefield victories on both axes of advance, the arrival of the ‘Army of Retribution’ in Kabul seized the strategic initiative back in favour of Britain.

Having recovered the British prisoners, Pollock’s focus became supporting the fragile pro-British Sadozai Government as he launched McCaskill’s ‘Army of Kohistan’ on a destructive campaign to break a Barakzai stronghold. With the salvaging of Britain’s short-term fortunes, the strategic contention became the longer-term arrangements that would ensure that Afghanistan did not pose a threat to British-India’s strategic imperatives. Emboldened by his persuasive advocacy to re-intervene in Afghanistan, Pollock again attempted to persuade Ellenborough to adopt a pro-British Sadozai ‘Afghan Buffer’. Nott was vehemently opposed to such strategic meddling and demanded an immediate withdrawal from Afghanistan. Likewise Ellenborough, far from being persuaded and increasingly concerned at Pollock’s strategic ambitions, unequivocally demanded the ‘Army of Retribution’ abandon Afghanistan. In his own ‘Simla Manifesto’ of 1842 Ellenborough reset the boundary of British-India upon the Sutlej River. Unable to remain in Kabul, Pollock controversially selected Kabul’s Grand Bazaar for destruction to leave a lasting mark of British retribution. In the most infamous legacy of the ‘Army of Retribution’, over the final three days the Grand Bazaar, two Mosques and large areas of Kabul were destroyed and subjected to an orgy of looting by British troops. Having avenged the desecration of Macnaghten’s body, the combined ‘Army of Retribution’ finally withdrew from Kabul, and in a series of desperate rearguard actions successfully retired via the Khyber Pass to eventually reach Ferozepur.

The reception of the ‘Army of Retribution’ at Ferozepur by a delighted Ellenborough was an ostentatious affair. Honours were bestowed to mark the successful conclusion of the First Anglo-Afghan War on British terms. To elevate the perception of his own success in salvaging the imminent defeat in Afghanistan, a vainglorious Ellenborough deliberately marginalised Pollock’s outstanding achievements, fearful of exposing his own strategic vacillations and temporising. Instead Ellenborough purposefully lavished praise on Pollock’s direct subordinates Sale and Nott. With unfavourable perceptions of the First Anglo-Afghan War following the destruction of the Kabul Garrison, there was another round of criticism directed at the ceremonial excesses of the reception of the ‘Army of Retribution’. This cynical perception of the returning ‘Army of Retribution’ has prevailed ever since and acted to undermine the
impressive military achievements of Pollock and Nott. This cynicism was then propelled into a wider popular consciousness by the politics of Westminster. The Whig opposition, stung by Ellenborough’s criticism of Auckland’s policies, openly questioned the allegations of excess committed by the ‘Army of Retribution’ to attack Peel’s Tories politically. The evasive defence in the respective responses by Pollock, Nott and McCaskill to these damning allegations was eventually overtaken by political events. However, these allegations and indignant responses have acted to further cloud the perception of success in the military campaign of the ‘Army of Retribution’.

Finally, following the withdrawal of the British Army, the Sadozai Government in Kabul crumbled and Dost Mohammad again became ascendant. Following the destruction of the Kabul Garrison, in this final phase of the First Anglo-Afghan War the ‘Army of Retribution’ had reasserted Britain’s martial dominance and bludgeoned any Afghan sense of hubris. Having re-established Britain’s credentials as the strongest regional military force capable of malicious intent, a suitably chastened Dost Mohammad did not want to provoke a repeat of this brutal British re-intervention into Afghanistan. The strategic effect of the ‘Army of Retribution’ had been to moderate Dost Mohammad’s strategic calculus. This constrained relationship steadily improved, with Afghanistan eventually formalising its friendship with Britain in 1855. Until his death in 1863 Dost Mohammad focussed on the internal consolidation of Afghanistan and avoided regional intrigues that could threaten British-India’s strategic interests and provoke another brutal British military intervention.
**Conclusion**

A reinterpretation and re-emphasis on the strategic causes and the concluding effects of the First Anglo-Afghan War challenges the widely held notion that it resulted in a strategic defeat for Britain. The prevailing historical narrative has consistently misidentified Britain’s strategic rationale for launching the invasion of Afghanistan in 1839, has selectively analysed the British occupation of Afghanistan and incompletely evaluated the conditions at the end of hostilities.

The flawed attribution of British strategic rationale has been based on an incomplete interpretation of the geo-strategic context faced by British-India in the 1830s. This misinterpretation has led to the widespread assertion that the British strategy in the First Anglo-Afghan War was to return the pro-British Shah Shuja to the Afghan throne as an end unto itself. This misidentification of Britain’s strategic rationale is then compounded by most commentators through focussing exclusively on the tactical destruction of the Kabul Garrison as the defining event of the conflict that constituted the effective end of the First Anglo-Afghan War. This prevailing historical view began with Kaye’s authoritative 1851 narrative of the First Anglo-Afghan War and, with the notable exceptions of scholarship by Yapp and Norris, has been perpetuated by both scholarly and popular military historians ever since.

My close analysis of the development of the fatalistic narrative of the First Anglo-Afghan War reveals that Kaye’s 1851 work was pivotal in setting the tone of the First Anglo-Afghan War, with his conclusion that ‘no failure so total and overwhelming as this is recorded in the page of history’. As the first and most authoritative historian, Kaye has cemented the view that the rationale for the British invasion was an illegitimate ‘unrighteous usurpation’. By his fourth edition in 1878, Kaye’s authoritative opinions had further hardened to conclude that the subsequent occupation of Afghanistan was ‘signally disastrous’, which had culminated in Britain’s ‘humiliating expulsion from Afghanistan’. As the leading historical authority, until Norris in 1967 and Yapp in 1980, subsequent commentators have overwhelmingly perpetuated a stereotype of Kaye’s negative views of the First Anglo-Afghan War. This subsequent scholarship has generally failed to effectively convey the geo-strategic nuances that

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1 Kaye (1851), Vol. 2, p. 667 (also in Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 398)
2 Kaye (1851), Vol 2, p. 670 (also in Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 402)
3 Kaye (1878), Vol. 3, p. 402
resulted in Britain’s invasion of Afghanistan, has only selectively examined the British occupation of Afghanistan, and has incompletely analysed the conduct of the withdrawal from Afghanistan that concluded the First Anglo-Afghan War. The continued comparison of a misidentified strategic casus belli against an incomplete conclusion has falsely perpetuated the view that the First Anglo-Afghan War was a strategic disaster for British-India.

By examining the strategic interests of British-India and emphasising the British strategy to ensure the defence of the north-western frontiers, this thesis shifts the understanding of the First Anglo-Afghan War. A deeper examination of the geo-strategic challenges facing British-India in the 1830s has established that the desired strategic end-state that precipitated Britain’s invasion of Afghanistan was to ensure the security of the approaches to north-western British-India. With this end-state established, the strategic success or failure of the First Anglo-Afghan War is judged against the achievement of this strategic imperative at the conclusion of hostilities.

Britain had preferred a defence-in-depth posture by maintaining a balance of power among British-India’s three bordering north-western states of Afghanistan, the Sind and with a bias favouring the Kingdom of Lahore. With Russian-backed Persian expansion into Afghanistan evident from 1835, the Governor-General, Lord Auckland, feared that Afghanistan could become a hostile intermediary causing instability on the British frontier, or worse, function as a potential transit route for an invasion of British-India. To counter Persian and Russian expansionism, by 1838 Auckland elected to maintain a positive control over Afghanistan after a carefully considered assessment of British equities among the other regional states. By adopting a more assertive forward-defensive posture, the strategic way Auckland selected was to positively control events in Afghanistan in favour of British-Indian interests by installing a pliant pro-British monarch on the Afghan throne, and his strategic means was by force of British arms. This thesis concludes that, given the Russian-backed Persian threats to Afghanistan and the strength of the regional relationship with Lahore, the strategic way and means selected by Auckland to ensure the maintenance of Britain’s strategic end-state of securing the north-western British-India were logical, valid and appropriate.

The First Anglo-Afghan War was initiated to maintain the security of the north-western overland approaches to British-India. Using the British Army as principal
strategic means of British authority in India, the invasion by the ‘Army of the Indus’ in 1839 was rapid and decisive. The strategic way of installing the pro-British monarch Shah Shuja to his former throne was initially successful as the deposed ruler Dost Mohammad was exiled to British-India. However, disaffected Afghans increasingly disrupted the British military occupation in both northern and southern Afghanistan. In November 1841 the Afghan insurrection erupted in Kabul, culminating in the destruction of the Kabul Garrison in January 1842. The scale of the tragedy and the humiliation of the martial credibility of the British Army induced a profound strategic shock that resonated throughout the British Empire. Britain’s existential concerns for the collapse of its frontier security strategy were further compounded by continued Sikh instability in neighbouring Lahore, and in Afghanistan the military failures continued with the abortive relief efforts for Jalalabad and Kandahar, and the loss of the Ghazni Garrison.

Critically important to the conclusion of the First Anglo-Afghan War and countering this imminent strategic defeat, there remained isolated British garrisons in eastern and southern Afghanistan, and a relief force being prepared in Peshawar. In contrast to the Kabul Garrison, the Kandahar Garrison, commanded by Major-General William Nott, had defeated greater threats and had successfully retained British dominance in southern Afghanistan. Further, Nott had conclusively demonstrated that with sufficient resolve the British Army could assert its military dominance over Afghans. By April 1842, Brigadier Robert Sale’s Jalalabad Garrison in eastern Afghanistan had been reinforced from Peshawar by Major-General George Pollock’s relief force employing innovative tactics that had successfully forced an opposed passage through the Khyber Pass. Through their resolute and indefatigable tactical military actions, the Kandahar and Jalalabad Garrisons offered a secure strategic fulcrum and battle-seasoned troops in southern and eastern Afghanistan that could be used to securely launch an aggressive re-intervention into Afghanistan. The dilemma for British-Indian leadership was to develop a coherent response to salvage this precarious situation that incorporated these disaggregated military outposts and to recover the British prisoners. This response had to prevent conflating the localised tactical defeat in Kabul into a much greater strategic defeat that would compromise the enduring imperative to secure the north-western approaches to British India.
With the strategic shock of the destruction of the Kabul Garrison still reverberating and Auckland exhausted and discredited, in February 1842 the incoming Governor-General, Lord Ellenborough, became British-India’s primary strategic decision-maker. Ellenborough inherited a situation from the outgoing Auckland where Britain’s strategic defeat in Afghanistan was imminent and the instinctive reaction of British-Indian leadership was to abandon Afghanistan. Both Pollock and Nott as the battlefield commanders in Afghanistan believed that such an ignominious withdrawal risked compounding a significant tactical defeat into a strategic defeat, directly compromising the security of north-west British-India. With the strategic outcome in the balance, this thesis argues that there were three critical and interconnected events that prevented the First Anglo-Afghan War degenerating into a strategic defeat for British-India.

By closely examining the vacillations in the strategic deliberations between March and July 1842, this thesis demonstrates that Ellenborough’s final decision to re-intervene in Afghanistan was heavily influenced by his two battlefield commanders in Jalalabad and Kandahar. The first critical series of events was Pollock’s successful strategic advocacy for British re-intervention into Afghanistan and his mastery as a commander to establish the tactical conditions essential to mount a successful re-intervention. Ellenborough’s temporising throughout his period of strategic deliberation alternated from demanding an immediate withdrawal from Afghanistan to supporting an aggressive re-intervention. Pollock’s advocacy was also inadvertently strengthened by Ellenborough’s autocratic manner which acted to marginalise the influence of the British Army’s Commander-in-Chief, Lieutenant-General Sir Jasper Nicolls, who had consistently sought an abandonment of Afghanistan. Ellenborough’s direct correspondence with the battlefield commanders, bypassing Nicolls, sufficiently confused the military command authorities so as to create an ambiguity that Pollock was able to manipulate. It is clear from private correspondence that both Pollock and Nott rejected any notion of passively abandoning their positions. Pollock, supported by Nott, intuitively understood that abandoning Afghanistan would erode the martial reputation of the principal strategic means of British-Indian internal and regional authority – the British Army. It was feared that this loss of martial prestige, coupled with the strategic vacuum created by Britain’s withdrawal, could encourage further encroachment by emboldened antagonistic regional powers towards British-India, or encourage further
instability along British-India’s north-western frontier with Afghanistan. Such unintended consequences caused by a precipitous British withdrawal would have constituted a strategic defeat for British-India.

Ellenborough’s strategic decision-making was predicated on the chances of British success, which were initially dire and complicated by his desire to recover British prisoners still in Afghanistan. Pollock, supported by Nott, understood their superior’s strategic calculus and, in actions often bordering on the insubordinate, undertook to delay their respective withdrawals. Both Pollock and Nott employed a nuanced course of delaying intransigence and obfuscation for the development of conditions they considered more conducive for a British military re-intervention. From their respective strongholds in Jalalabad and Kandahar, both commanders also calculated that by building up a series of tactical successes they would reassure Ellenborough sufficiently to grant his authorisation to re-intervene into Afghanistan. In his persuasive exchange of correspondence, Pollock was able to convince Ellenborough to follow his more aggressive instincts and sanction the British re-intervention into Afghanistan. Pollock’s advocacy was reinforced by his unbroken tactical successes that reassured the shaken British leadership to even contemplate re-intervention as a viable course. Pollock successfully argued that an aggressive re-intervention was an essential precursor to the eventual British withdrawal in order to preserve Britain’s enduring strategy of maintaining the security of north-west British-India. After months of prevarication, the continued advocacy and tactical successes of both Pollock and Nott had sufficiently encouraged Ellenborough to sanction an aggressive re-intervention by an ‘Army of Retribution’ into Afghanistan. Ironically, this thesis demonstrates it was the battlefield commanders who were critical in reassuring their own commander of the actions required to prevent Britain’s strategic defeat in Afghanistan.

The second critical series of events was Major-General Nott’s undefeated battlefield command of the Kandahar Garrison and his vehement reinforcement of Pollock for a British re-intervention into Afghanistan. Nott’s troops had remained the dominant military force in southern Afghanistan throughout the British occupation; and he has been routinely denied a prominence in popular narratives that he merits. His responsive and aggressive military dominance on two fronts suppressed the insurrection in southern Afghanistan and defeated two large-scale attacks directly on Kandahar. In addition to providing this battlefield reassurance to Ellenborough, Nott’s own exchange
of correspondence was critical in reinforcing Pollock’s strategic advocacy for a British re-intervention into Afghanistan. With the plan for re-intervention fully embraced by Ellenborough, recovering Britain’s prestige and maintaining frontier security depended wholly on the third critical series of events surrounding the military campaign of the ‘Army of Retribution’.

The ‘Army of Retribution’ has been popularly and incorrectly consigned as a cynical afterthought that concluded Britain’s involvement in the First Anglo-Afghan War. Following their successful strategic advocacy, Pollock and Nott were eventually granted the authority from Ellenborough to launch their synchronised re-intervention into Afghanistan, and it was the campaign during the re-intervention by the ‘Army of Retribution’ between August and October 1842 that salvaged the strategic outcome of the First Anglo-Afghan War for the British.

The successful advance on two simultaneous and converging axes from Jalalabad and Kandahar onto Kabul wrestled the strategic initiative back in favour of Britain and extinguished any Afghan hubris over the destruction of the Kabul Garrison. Pollock’s relentless advance from Jalalabad, punctuated by impressive victories at the Jegdalek Pass and Tezin Pass, maintained the political uncertainty in Kabul and provided the leverage to secure the release of the British prisoners. These effects were complemented by Nott’s continued battlefield successes with impressive victories at Khwaja Sei Ghar and the capture and destruction of the Ghazni Citadel. The advance of the ‘Army of Retribution’ maintained the fragile pro-British Sadozai leadership in Kabul and prevented the full assertion of Akbar Khan’s Barakzai authority.

Having salvaged success from an imminent strategic defeat, Pollock attempted to convince Ellenborough to support the longer-term retention of a pro-British Sadozai regime in Kabul. Satisfied that British authority had been sufficiently reasserted, Ellenborough rejected Pollock’s advice and directed the abandonment of Afghanistan. The brief reoccupation of Kabul by the ‘Army of Retribution’, and the short campaign by Major-General Sir John McCaskill’s ‘Army of Kohistan’, meted out a questionable but effective form of retributive justice culminating in the destruction of the Grand Bazaar. Having reasserted British martial dominance in this final and brutal conclusion to the First Anglo-Afghan War, the British Army demonstrated that it remained a strong regional military force possessing both superior capacity and malicious intent when
provoked. The Afghans were exhausted by the First Anglo-Afghan War, and the ascendant Barakzai leadership did not want to provoke another brutal British intervention into Afghanistan. Upon his return to the throne Dost Mohammad felt sufficiently chastened to moderate his ambitions and constrained himself to the internal consolidation of Afghanistan, and avoided regional intrigues that could threaten the British strategic imperatives of frontier security.

Although Ellenborough claimed victory due to the manner he concluded the First Anglo-Afghan War, it was a hollow boast. Despite Ellenborough’s subsequent efforts to marginalise Pollock’s impressive achievements, it was his two battlefield commanders who had never wavered in their conviction that a re-intervention into Afghanistan was the only appropriate response that could avoid Britain’s strategic defeat. It was Pollock and Nott who had dominated respectively in Jalalabad and Kandahar, who had prevented a continuation of the Afghan rout of British forces following the destruction of the Kabul Garrison, and provided the essential platforms from which to launch the British re-intervention. By successfully advocating their strategic assessment and demonstrating their tactical dominance around Jalalabad and Kandahar, both tactical commanders reassured their strategic leadership that the battlefield calculus in Afghanistan had turned for British success. Ellenborough’s equivocal decision to authorise the launch of the assertive actions of the ‘Army of Retribution’ concluded the First Anglo-Afghan War on British terms and salvaged the near-strategic defeat for British-India.

The unbroken campaign successes of the British re-intervention into Afghanistan by the ‘Army of Retribution’ have been favourably reinterpreted in this thesis. Through the consistent application of the strategic baseline, the strategic effect of the concluding actions of the ‘Army of Retribution’ in 1842 have been analysed against the enduring British-Indian strategic rationale that launched the initial invasion of Afghanistan in 1842. The actions of Pollock and Nott, in convincing Ellenborough for an aggressive re-intervention into Afghanistan and through their leadership of the ‘Army of Retribution’, salvaged a near-strategic defeat for Britain. By establishing the favourable conditions for the British withdrawal from Afghanistan, this thesis concludes that the re-intervention by the ‘Army of Retribution’ salvaged the First Anglo-Afghan War for Britain by preserving Britain’s enduring strategic imperative to maintain the security of north-west British-India. The brutalising effect of this re-intervention on the Afghan
leadership, coupled with the close proximity of the potent British Army of India, constrained Dost Mohammad from engaging in regional affairs that could again threaten British-India’s frontier security. The concluding actions of the ‘Army of Retribution’ brutally reinforced regional perceptions of British martial capability and averted further compromise to the British strategic end-state. The ‘Army of Retribution’ withdrew from Afghanistan not the victors, as promoted by Ellenborough, but as an Army that had salvaged British fortunes sufficiently to prevent the First Anglo-Afghan War becoming a strategic defeat for British-India.

Through the application of a strategic analytical framework a new interpretation of the First Anglo-Afghan War has emerged. The British invasion of Afghanistan constituted a legitimate and calculated strategic reaction by Auckland to counter threats affecting the security of British-India in the late 1830s. After suffering a devastating tactical defeat of the Kabul Garrison, it was the actions of the two battlefield commanders remaining in Afghanistan which reversed this tactical defeat and averted the potential strategic defeat for Britain. Pollock’s and Nott’s tactical mastery and persuasive advocacy to Ellenborough for British military re-intervention launched the ‘Army of Retribution’ back into Afghanistan. Finally, it was the decisive and undefeated campaign by the ‘Army of Retribution’ that sufficiently salvaged Britain’s strategic interests to prevent the strategic defeat of Britain in the First Anglo-Afghan War.
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