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'Masterly inactivity': Lord Lawrence, Britain and Afghanistan, 1864-1879

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‘Masterly inactivity’:

Lord Lawrence, Britain and Afghanistan, 1864-1879

Christopher Wallace

PhD History

June 2014

Abstract

This dissertation examines British policy in Afghanistan between 1864 and 1879, with particular emphasis on Sir John Lawrence's term as governor-general and viceroy of India (1864-69). Having achieved national renown for his exploits in the Punjab during the Indian Mutiny, as governor-general Sir John (later first Baron) Lawrence became synonymous with a particular line of foreign policy in Afghanistan, commonly referred to by contemporaries as 'masterly inactivity'. His tenure at Calcutta coincided with a critical period in Anglo-Afghan relations, on account of a protracted civil war in Afghanistan and the renewal of Russian military advances in central Asia. This dissertation explains why government ministers granted Lawrence so much latitude for formulating British policy and what motivated his 'masterly inactivity', an alluring although misleading expression. A central concern is the extent to which public criticism in Britain influenced Lawrence's decisions in India. Some of the constraints on policy-makers are also explored, including contemporary perceptions about the importance of 'prestige' to the control of India. In addition, the thesis considers some of the domestic effects of British imperialism, by reference to Lawrence's public criticism of government policy before the second Afghan war, and by analysing metropolitan reaction to the murder of the British envoy at Kabul in 1879. His utility to parliamentary Liberals and prominence in public discussion about Afghanistan in 1878 demonstrate that—after nearly a lifetime on the imperial 'periphery'—Lawrence ultimately exerted a considerable influence on politics in the imperial metropolis.

A portrait of Sir John Lawrence (by George Frederic Watts; oil on panel, 1862) is currently displayed at the National Portrait Gallery, London (NPG 1005).

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Christopher Wallace

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Introduction

John Lawrence, first Baron Lawrence, GCB, GCSI, PC, was a British administrator who worked in the Punjab, achieved national renown for his exploits during the Mutiny, and subsequently served as governor-general and viceroy of India for a perfect five-year term, from 12 January 1864 to 12 January 1869. During his tenure at Calcutta, Sir John Lawrence (he was not ennobled until his return to England in 1869) became synonymous with a particular line of British policy in Afghanistan. Contemporaries understood that policy as ‘masterly inactivity’, an alluring although misleading expression. Neglected by modern scholars, Lawrence’s approach to Afghanistan is worth studying, for as governor-general he had great latitude for determining policy at a critical juncture in Anglo-Afghan relations, when civil war in Afghanistan and Russian military expansion in central Asia threatened to disturb the status quo enjoyed since the end of the first Afghan war in 1842. Examining the formulation and motivation of his policy also illuminates characteristics of British imperialism, in India and at home, as well as some of the external influences and constraints on policy-makers. Lawrence’s return to public prominence in 1878, as perhaps the most conspicuous force in Liberal opposition to a new Afghan policy, demonstrates how a Briton from the imperial ‘periphery’ could exert a powerful influence on public discussion and politics in the imperial metropolis.

* * *

John Laird Mair Lawrence was born at Richmond, Yorkshire, on 4 March 1811. He was the sixth son of Major Alexander Lawrence, of Ulster protestant stock, and his wife

Catherine Letitia, daughter of Reverend George Knox of Lifford, co. Donegal.¹ Having attended schools at Bristol, Londonderry and Wiltshire, in 1827 Lawrence received a nomination to the East India College at Haileybury. He sailed for India in 1829, in the company of an elder brother, Henry, who later died in the defence of Lucknow (Sir Henry Montgomery Lawrence, KCB (1806-57)). After a year studying languages at Calcutta, John Lawrence requested a posting to Delhi, where he worked for four years as assistant judge, magistrate and collector. He was then given temporary charge of the Panipat district (north of Delhi), with responsibility for surveying its lands and assessing their taxation. Initially working without a British assistant, in a population of several hundred thousand, Lawrence ‘displayed the qualities that were to become a legend and a model. Riding armed through a district with a turbulent history, attired for comfort in a mixture of Western and Indian dress, he made himself accessible to its people, in patriarchal fashion, and acquired a local reputation for omniscience. He excelled in settlement work, spending the greater part of the year under canvas.’²

Lawrence came home on extended sick leave (1840-42), following a near fatal attack of jungle fever. Against medical advice, he returned to India after marrying (in 1841) Harriette Katherine Hamilton (1820-1917), daughter of Richard Hamilton, rector of Culdaff, co. Donegal. In 1844 Lawrence was appointed collector of Delhi and Panipat. Two years later he was promoted to commissioner of the Trans-Sutlej States, territory acquired after the first Anglo-Sikh war. After the second Anglo-Sikh war and the annexation (in 1849) of the Punjab, a board was established to administer the new province, with Henry Lawrence at its head, supported by John and a third member. The

¹ D. Steele, ‘Lawrence, John Laird Mair, first Baron Lawrence (1811-1879)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed. Jan. 2011).

² Steele, ‘Baron Lawrence’.

brothers disagreed regarding the treatment of the defeated Sikh aristocracy. Henry pleaded with the governor-general, Lord Dalhousie, for the Sikhs. John favoured their total subjection to direct rule, believing that lower taxation and greater security for the peasantry would provide stronger foundations for British rule than Sikh princes and noblemen. Dalhousie backed the younger Lawrence: in 1853 the board was dissolved, Henry moved to another post, and John was promoted to chief commissioner of the Punjab.³

John Lawrence was therefore able to implement his policy of reconciling the ‘hardy yeoman’ to British rule. ‘Assess low,’ he instructed a subordinate in 1853, ‘leaving fair and liberal margin to the occupiers of the soil, and they will increase their cultivation and put the revenue almost beyond the reach of bad seasons.’⁴ The achievements of Lawrence’s administration in the Punjab were considerable: a warlike population, predominantly Sikh and Muslim, was disarmed; roads and irrigation works were constructed; a police force of over twenty thousand men ‘set a standard of public order unequalled in the subcontinent’; within three years of annexation *thuggee* and *dacoity* had been eradicated; and by 1856, over three thousand schools existed, providing rudimentary education. In recognition of these achievements, in 1856 Lawrence was made KCB, on the recommendation of Lord Dalhousie.⁵

Although Lawrence had been an unusually successful administrator in India, it was the Indian Mutiny (1857-58) that transformed his reputation in Britain. His exertions during

³ Steele, ‘Baron Lawrence’.

⁴ John Lawrence to John Nicholson, 22 Jan. 1853, cited in R. Bosworth Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence* (II vols., London, 1883), vol. I, p. 394.

⁵ Steele, ‘Baron Lawrence’. The term *thuggee* refers to the practices of a sort of criminal brotherhood of *thugs*, who strangled their victims before stealing their valuables and burying their bodies. The term *dacoity* refers to acts of robbery committed by armed bandits.

the crisis made him a national hero, acclaimed as the ‘saviour of India’ and rewarded with an array of official and private honours. His actions will be considered in more detail in chapter I, but in essence his reputation was made by his resolution and vigour in the Punjab. Lawrence acted quickly and boldly by disarming Bengal army regiments and raising large, irregular Punjabi forces to replace them. He determined that recapturing Delhi was more important than the safety of his own province, and pressed British generals to move immediately on the centre of the rising. He then drained the Punjab of its new troops, sending them to Delhi together with British soldiers, stores, and moneys extracted from Punjabi bankers and princes. Finally, Lawrence arrived in the old Mughal capital, was given its charge, and argued—successfully—that the defeated rebels should receive clemency.⁶

Lawrence returned to England in February 1859, where he joined the secretary of state’s council of India. After the death of the Earl of Elgin in November 1863, Lawrence was appointed governor-general and viceroy of India. This was an exceptional honour for a commoner from within the Indian civil service. In domestic policy, he strived to increase tenant security and to reduce fiscal assessments imposed on Indians, confident that what had worked in the Punjab would succeed across the subcontinent. ‘Light taxation’, he told Viscount Cranborne in 1866, ‘is the panacea for foreign rule in India.’⁷ Characteristically, Lawrence viewed light taxation as a question of fairness *and* pragmatism. For if Indian yeomen were to safeguard British rule it was essential that they should feel palpable benefits from British administration. Lawrence therefore resisted calls for increasing the taxation of salt that would have disproportionately

⁶ Steele, ‘Baron Lawrence’

⁷ Lawrence to Viscount Cranborne, 5 Nov. 1866, British Library, papers and correspondence of Sir John Laird Mair Lawrence, 1st Baron Lawrence, Mss Eur F90 (hereafter ‘Lawrence Mss’)/31, no. 48.

affected poorer Indians. He calculated that the excise on salt increased its price as much as twelvefold in the Punjab, and perhaps by eight times in the North West Provinces. ‘The people cannot fail to see this. The general masses are wonderfully frugal, and bring up their families with great difficulty on their earnings.’⁸ In contrast, Lawrence was disgusted by the stance taken by many of his compatriots, who considered it their ‘prerogative while in India to pay no taxation at all.’ He characterised the non-official British community in India as ‘birds of passage’, rushing to amass wealth as quickly as possible with no care for what happened after their departure.⁹ Such was Lawrence’s conviction that light taxation was ‘the panacea for foreign rule in India’ that he even preferred reducing the British garrison to increasing taxation, believing that lower assessments provided more effective security than additional soldiers. There should of course be limits to such troop reductions, as he warned the secretary of state in 1867: ‘[i]nfantry should never be allowed to fall below a certain strength: they are the sinews of our power.’¹⁰

In foreign policy, Lawrence was confronted by a war of succession in Afghanistan, following the death in 1863 of Amir Dost Muhammad Khan, and by the renewal of Russian military advances in central Asia. ‘I frankly confess that I cannot’, he wrote on the eve of his departure from India, ‘see the formidable character of the danger with which we are said to be threatened by the presence of the Russians in Central Asia’. Lawrence could however perceive ‘much real danger to which we are exposed from various circumstances within our own borders in India, more particularly if we adopt a

⁸ Lawrence to Viscount Cranborne, 16 Sept. 1866, Lawrence Mss/31, no. 35.

⁹ Lawrence to Sir Stafford Northcote, 14 May 1867, Lawrence Mss/32A, no. 30.

¹⁰ Lawrence to Sir Charles Wood, 18 Sept. 1865 (2), Lawrence Mss/30, no.55. Lawrence to Cranborne, 19 Jan. 1867, Lawrence Mss/32A, no. 6.

policy in Afghanistan from which it may prove difficult hereafter to recede.’¹¹ Lawrence’s concern for internal threats to security recognised the dangers of increasing taxation (which active interference in Afghanistan would require), and the emergence of a new Indian élite who would soon ‘chafe for want of an outlet for their energies.’¹² His reluctance to interfere in the Afghan civil war was criticised in several publications in Britain, by writers apparently disturbed by the progress of Russia. In order to counter such criticism, Lawrence instructed one of his subordinates to defend his foreign policy in a British periodical. This was the genesis of an article published anonymously in the *Edinburgh Review* of January 1867, in which the author declared that Lawrence’s opinions with respect to Russia ‘tend clearly towards the conclusion which the quietists would advocate—a masterly inactivity.’¹³ This seems to have been the first usage of ‘masterly inactivity’.¹⁴

Having completed his five-year term as governor-general, Lawrence returned to England in January 1869. In April 1869 he was created Baron Lawrence of the Punjab and of Grateley.¹⁵ He returned to public prominence—briefly but significantly—as a leading critic of the Conservative government’s Afghan policy in the months preceding the second Afghan war (1878-81). Lord Lawrence died on 27 June 1879, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

¹¹ Memorandum by Sir John Lawrence, 25 Nov. 1868, *Correspondence respecting the relations between the British Government and that of Afghanistan since the accession of the Ameer Shere Ali Khan*, Parliamentary Papers 1878-79 [C.2190] (hereafter, ‘*Afghanistan Correspondence*’), no. 14, Enclosure 4, p. 61.

¹² Lawrence to Cranborne, 4 Oct. 1866, Lawrence Mss/31, no. 39.

¹³ [J.W.S. Wyllie], ‘Foreign policy of Sir John Lawrence’, *Edinburgh Review*, CXXV (Jan. 1867), 44. The motivation and argument of this article will be examined in detail in chapter VI. J.W.S. Wyllie was under-secretary in the Foreign Department of the government of India.

¹⁴ Contemporaries understood ‘masterly inactivity’ to mean calmness in the face of Russian advances in central Asia, and a reluctance to interfere outside the existing frontiers of India. The term was often used in praise of Lawrence’s Afghan policy, but also in criticism.

¹⁵ Grateley was a small estate on Salisbury Plain left to Lawrence by his favourite sister: Steele, ‘Baron Lawrence’.

Victorian biographies

In the thirteen years following his death, five full-length biographies of Lawrence were published, together with several shorter sketches.¹⁶ Three of his biographers—Robert Cust, Sir Richard Temple and Sir Charles Aitchison—had worked with Lawrence in the Punjab administration and afterwards. These men did not write critical appraisals of their former chief. Cust explicitly acknowledged Lawrence as ‘my model, my friend, and my master’ and dedicated his book to the memory of his subject.¹⁷ The official biographer chosen by Lawrence’s family was not however a fellow Punjab official. Reginald Bosworth Smith had in fact never visited India, and only met his subject around 1878. A Harrow schoolmaster and classical scholar, Bosworth Smith spent three years researching Lawrence’s papers and in meetings with his former colleagues. The biography was published in two volumes in February 1883, and enjoyed an enthusiastic reception. It was subsequently translated into Urdu and widely read in India.¹⁸ The success of Bosworth Smith’s *Life of Lord Lawrence* is understandable. It is a comprehensive account, covering over one thousand pages, and incorporates voluminous extracts from Lawrence’s correspondence. The combination of Bosworth Smith’s sympathetic, elegant prose with his subject’s more direct writing is successful, and it remains the essential account of Lawrence’s life.

¹⁶ L.J. Trotter, *Lord Lawrence: A Sketch of his Public Career* (London, 1880); R.N. Cust, ‘The great proconsul’, in R.N. Cust, *Pictures of Indian Life. Sketched with the pen from 1852 to 1881* (London, 1881), pp. 244-69; Bosworth Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence*; R. Temple, *Lord Lawrence* (London, 1889); J.J. Ellis, *Lord Lawrence* (London, 1891); C. Aitchison, *Lord Lawrence* (Oxford, 1892).

¹⁷ Robert Cust worked in the Indian civil service and first met Lawrence in 1846, in the Punjab. Cust worked with Lawrence again while the latter was governor-general, and later in the Church Missionary Society and in the ‘Afghan Committee’ chaired by Lawrence in 1878. Cust, ‘The great proconsul’, p. 246.

¹⁸ E. Graham, ‘Smith, Reginald Bosworth (1839-1908)’, rev. M.C. Curthoys, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed.).

John Lawrence as described in the Victorian biographies was a large, rugged man of great vigour and resolution, simple and straightforward in his tastes and manner, hard-working, scrupulously honest, dutiful, with a strong sense of justice, guided in India by his unostentatious Christian faith and his instinctive sympathy for the tillers of the soil. His biographers compared Lawrence to Oliver Cromwell, in physical appearance and in character. Robert Cust tells us that Lawrence was ‘dauntless in his aspect, built in the mould of a Cromwell... so strong in his simplicity and straightforwardness’.¹⁹ Bosworth Smith wrote that, like Cromwell, Lawrence ‘cared naught for appearances, spoke his mind freely, swept all cobwebs out of his path, worked like a horse himself, and insisted on hard work in others.’²⁰ Comparisons with Cromwell allowed Bosworth Smith to distinguish Lawrence from Britons who had gone to India in search of personal gain. He illustrated this distinction with an anecdote about the *Koh-i-noor* diamond, which had been committed to Lawrence’s care after the annexation of the Punjab. Rather than keeping this ‘peerless’ jewel close at hand, Lawrence simply stuffed it into his waistcoat pocket, and then forgot all about it. Only when Queen Victoria sent for the *Koh-i-noor* did Lawrence recall that he’d left it in a bundle of clothes with his Indian servant. Bosworth Smith would presumably have been conscious of the contemporary resonance of this anecdote: following the Mutiny, Sir Henry Havelock was admired as a latter-day ‘Ironside’, as educated Britons became interested in seventeenth century puritanism, and in particular Cromwell and the Ironsides.²¹ Bosworth Smith thus sought to demonstrate that Lawrence and the men he gathered around him in the Punjab were motivated not by personal gain but paternal love. This was the irreproachable explanation for Lawrence’s absent-mindedness with the *Koh-i-noor*. After all, ‘what

¹⁹ Cust, ‘The great proconsul’, pp. 249-50. See also Ellis, *Lord Lawrence*, p. 78.

²⁰ Bosworth Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence*, vol. I, p. 112.

²¹ O. Anderson, ‘The growth of Christian militarism in mid-Victorian Britain’, *English Historical Review*, LXXXVI (1971), 50-1.

was the custody of a court jewel compared with that of the happiness of the millions for which he was also responsible?’²²

Lawrence’s Victorian biographers agreed that their subject was motivated by a strong sense of public duty. Captain Trotter for example related that Lawrence, following his appointment as governor-general, with ‘manifest reluctance’ agreed to return to India; for he ‘had everything at home that could make life pleasant to a man of his moderate desires and homely tastes’. However, ‘if duty called him to India, to India he would go.’²³ The secretary of state for India had made a similar observation at the time, telling the House of Commons that Lawrence had ‘sacrificed the quiet and tranquil enjoyment of domestic life in order to perform the duty to which he was called’.²⁴ Lawrence may well have wanted to retire peacefully after the Mutiny. In 1858 he had written to Lord Stanley as follows: ‘I have served now twenty-nine years in India. I have had my share of work. My health is much shaken, and my sole desire is to return home and settle down among my children.’²⁵ However, it was almost certainly an exaggeration to suggest that Lawrence returned to India with ‘manifest reluctance’. He had been raised to the most distinguished position in British India. As governor-general, he might be able to implement Punjab reforms across India, and perhaps mitigate the post-Mutiny reaction against the official promotion of Christianity. In personal terms, the appointment conferred the certainty of a vast salary, and the likelihood of a peerage. Such attractions may not of course have proved particularly alluring to a puritan. Lawrence however had ten children. As his friend Sir Richard Temple later wrote, Lawrence ‘was himself a man of the simplest tastes and the fewest wants, but he had a

²² Bosworth Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence*, vol. I, p. 329.

²³ Trotter, *Lord Lawrence*, pp. 82-3.

²⁴ Sir Charles Wood, *Hansard*, 173 (8 Feb. 1864), col. 223.

²⁵ Lawrence to Lord Stanley, 16 June 1858, cited in Bosworth Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence*, vol. II, p. 304.

large family for whom he was affectionately solicitous.’²⁶

A striking feature of Temple’s biography is his determination to present Lawrence as a model for the middle-classes to follow. Temple seems to have had a distinct audience in mind: young British men, of modest means, for whom the Indian civil service offered a potential career. Temple thus explained how Lawrence had risen to governor-general not through social or political advantages but ‘solely from experience of India, knowledge of her people, and services rendered within her limits. The son of a poor and hardy veteran officer, he was essentially a self-made and self-taught man.’²⁷ For this reason, Temple thought that Lawrence’s life should have ‘a spirit-stirring effect on the middle class from which he sprung.’ Lawrence’s life thus had a great exemplary value, for it proved that with ‘virtue, energy and resolution like his, British youths of scanty means’ could win places by competition in Indian administration and thus carry with them ‘to the Eastern empire the possibilities of national usefulness’.²⁸

The exemplary value of Lawrence’s life may have been enhanced because his biographers presented him in several respects as quite ordinary. According to Robert Cust, Lawrence was no genius.²⁹ Temple acknowledged that as a young man, Lawrence had never been considered remarkable, and that as a man he was no orator.³⁰ This treatment seems at odds with a tendency in Victorian biography to show that the subjects had enjoyed a seamless life, and that even as boys had shown their future

²⁶ Temple, *Lord Lawrence*, p. 143.

²⁷ Temple, *Lord Lawrence*, pp. 2-3.

²⁸ Temple’s biography of Lawrence was the fourth volume in the ‘English Men of Action’ series published by Macmillan and Co. The first three volumes were accounts of General Charles Gordon, King Henry V and David Livingstone. Several subsequent volumes also chose as their subjects men who had made their names in India, such as Warren Hastings, Sir Charles Napier and Sir Henry Havelock. Temple, *Lord Lawrence*, p. 5 & end pages.

²⁹ Cust, ‘The great proconsul’, p. 252.

³⁰ Temple, *Lord Lawrence*, pp. 3, 140-1.

greatness.³¹ However, the description of Lawrence's more ordinary characteristics allowed his biographers to broaden his contemporary appeal. 'He is like you', Temple seemed to be telling his readers. For Lawrence's attributes 'were for the most part those which are commonly possessed by the British people. He evinced only two qualities in an uncommon degree, namely energy and resolution.'³²

Artistic representations of Lawrence were in important respects consistent with the man depicted in the early biographies. This is true of the oil portrait of Lawrence by George Frederick Watts, completed in 1862 and currently displayed in the National Portrait Gallery, and the bronze statue by Sir Joseph Edgar Boehm, completed around 1882 and situated in Waterloo Place, London.³³ If one contemplates the stern countenance of John Lawrence in Watts's portrait, or in Boehm's massive sculpture, one may be struck by an impression of the simplicity, or plainness, so admired by the Victorian biographers. Although these men were rarely critical of their subject and exaggerated his virtues, their representation of Lawrence is in many details—his appetite for work, his straightforward manner, his sympathy for the governed and his simple faith—consistent with the impression conveyed by Lawrence's private papers and public acts. This will become clear throughout this dissertation. To give one example here, it is striking that John Lawrence, first Baron Lawrence, GCB, GCSI, PC, followed his term as governor-general and viceroy of India with the rather drab office of chairman of the first London school board (1870-73). It is hard to imagine the first Earl of Lytton doing that.

³¹ C.I. Hamilton, 'Naval Hagiography and the Victorian Hero', *Historical Journal*, 23 (1980), 383.

³² Temple, *Lord Lawrence*, p. 3.

³³ R. Ormond, *Early Victorian Portraits* (II vols., London, 1973), vol. I, pp. 264-6.

Historiographical treatment

The efflorescence of biographical interest in the thirteen years after Lawrence's death has not been matched by more recent scholarly attention. Modern historians have nonetheless examined particular aspects of Lawrence's career, such as his actions during the Mutiny.³⁴ Eric Stokes wrote about Lawrence's settlement policy, and his attitude to the Sikh aristocracy following the annexation of the Punjab.³⁵ Modern scholars have also shown some interest in Lawrence's tenure as governor-general, taking a quite different approach from the early biographers. The Indian historian Sarvepalli Gopal was particularly critical. Gopal argued that although Lawrence enjoyed a distinguished reputation as a civil servant, his appointment as governor-general raised him 'to a level to which he was unequal'. 'The Viceroy fainéant in India', Gopal alleged, appeared to secretaries of state in London 'as a senior foreman awaiting orders.'³⁶ The contention that Lawrence was indolent—for which no evidence is produced—is not one made by other historians or by contemporary critics. Some contemporaries certainly complained about Lawrence's 'coarseness', and his alleged proclivity for Punjab officials and methods. Gopal also recovers both of these criticisms. In fact, his use of the word 'foreman' seems to be based on a characterisation by a contemporary whose testimony is far from reliable, as we shall see in chapter I. Gopal described Lawrence's five-year term as 'a period of tired authority with little perspective or hint of the future.' He however acknowledged that Lawrence made 'substantial advances' in the construction of public works and the improvement of sanitation. Gopal also recognised Lawrence's determination to 'better the lot of the ordinary cultivators' and his successes in strengthening tenant rights in Oudh and the

³⁴ See e.g. E. Stokes, *The peasant armed: the Indian revolt of 1857* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 21-2, 29-30, 128; M. Naidis, 'John Lawrence, mutiny hero', *Bengal Past and Present*, 82 (1963), 1-11; Steele, 'Baron Lawrence'.

³⁵ E. Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 16-9, 117-8.

³⁶ S. Gopal, *British policy in India 1858-1905* (Cambridge, 1965), pp. 60-1.

Punjab.³⁷

Writing around the same time as Gopal, Thomas Metcalf offered a more positive assessment of Lawrence. He credited Lawrence with checking the acts of vengeance perpetrated in Delhi following its recapture from the Indian rebels.³⁸ More recent scholarship has reinforced this assessment. Kathryn Tidrick has described how initially the British authorities did nothing to restrain the ‘orgy of killing and looting’ in Delhi. ‘To his everlasting credit,’ Tidrick writes, ‘John Lawrence succeeded in using his now very great influence to stop it.’³⁹ Metcalf also identified Lawrence as an ‘outspoken reformer’ who as governor-general succeeded in maintaining something of the reforming sentiment and liberal ideology of pre-Mutiny British India, in the face of the prevailing ‘conservative reaction’ after 1858.⁴⁰ Similarly, in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* David Steele acknowledged Lawrence as ‘an authentic liberal’. This verdict is made more significant by the contexts of time and place, for ‘it was not easy to be a liberal in India, especially in the aftermath of rebellion.’⁴¹ Steele contended that Lawrence’s viceroyalty was characterised by ‘solicitude’ for the millions of Indians under British rule. Lawrence however found the powers of governor-general weaker than he had anticipated, and was frustrated in some of his initiatives. Partly for this reason, Steele recognised that Lawrence’s tenure should not be assessed by legislative progress: ‘his endeavours are not to be measured by enactments.’ Lawrence’s successes in tenant legislation support this contention. ‘Without Lawrence’ Steele concluded, ‘the tide might have run more strongly against that care for “ancient tenures” which he

³⁷ Gopal, *British policy in India*, pp. 62-3.

³⁸ T.R. Metcalf, *The Aftermath of Revolt: India, 1857-1870* (Princeton, 1965), p. 295.

³⁹ K. Tidrick, *Empire and the English Character: The Illusion of Authority* (New York, 2009), p. 28.

⁴⁰ Metcalf, *The Aftermath of Revolt*, p. 326.

⁴¹ Steele, ‘Baron Lawrence’.

considered was the most important single factor in reconciling Indians to British rule.⁴²

Modern scholars have however proved somewhat economical in their consideration of Lawrence's Afghan policy, and have presented his return to public prominence in 1878 as merely a footnote towards the end of his life.⁴³ The dissertation attempts to address this historiographical lacuna. It places Lawrence at the centre of the development of British policy in Afghanistan from 1864, and argues that he ultimately exerted a considerable influence on both parliamentary Liberals and metropolitan public discussion around the time of the second Afghan war. It will show how, during his tenure at Calcutta, successive secretaries of state for India gave Lawrence considerable discretion for formulating Afghan policy, partly in deference to his post-Mutiny reputation and partly because their decision-making capacity was constrained by political events in Britain. The motives of Lawrence's 'masterly inactivity' are therefore worth examining in detail. The dissertation explains Lawrence's policy as a pragmatic response to competing administrative priorities, and his assessment that the greatest dangers to British rule originated not from extrinsic developments (such as Russian expansion) but from political circumstances within India. In the period 1864-69, the merits of 'masterly inactivity' were much debated in the British press, for it was not only officials who perceived the border with Afghanistan as India's only vulnerable frontier. The dissertation asserts that Lawrence and many of his government colleagues were sensitive to press criticism in Britain, and it discerns press influence in specific Afghan policy decisions taken in India. Several constraints on policy-makers are also identified, including the effects of the absence of naval power on the north-west frontier, Indian fiscal considerations and Lawrence's recognition of the imperatives of

⁴² Steele, 'Baron Lawrence'.

⁴³ See e.g. Steele, 'Baron Lawrence'.

‘prestige’. It is submitted that this concentration on Lawrence, Afghan policy and Britain is rewarding, because it informs our understanding of Lawrence himself, and the formulation of Afghan policy at an important moment in the history of British India. It also offers new perspectives on the behaviour of British administrators in India, as well as the nature of British imperialism and its centripetal effects.

Sources

The dissertation makes extensive use of Lawrence’s private correspondence with the secretaries of state for India, held at the British Library in London.⁴⁴ There were five secretaries of state during Lawrence’s tenure as governor-general: Sir Charles Wood, Earl de Grey, Viscount Cranborne, Sir Stafford Northcote and the Duke of Argyll. Three of these men were Liberals (Wood, de Grey and Argyll) and two were Conservatives (Cranborne and Northcote). At this point in Lawrence’s life his political leaning was not publicly known, and he had made only oblique contact with British politics (through the council of India, from 1859 to 1863). His letters to ministers in London rarely referred to political events in Britain, though the question of franchise reform provided an exception. ‘I sincerely hope that the Reform Bill will pass’, he told Earl de Grey in May 1866, ‘for I think that the effect of such measures is to consolidate & strengthen the constitution.’⁴⁵ Lawrence’s policy of ‘masterly inactivity’, although criticised in some of the Conservative press during his viceroyalty, did not become a party political matter until 1878, in the months preceding the second Afghan war. Following his elevation to the peerage in 1869, Lawrence initially took his seat on the cross benches of the House of Lords. From there he supported William Gladstone’s

⁴⁴ British Library, papers and correspondence of Sir John Laird Mair Lawrence, 1st Baron Lawrence, Mss Eur F90 (referred to in this dissertation as ‘Lawrence Mss’).

⁴⁵ Lawrence to de Grey, 31 May 1866, Lawrence Mss/31, no. 23.

Irish church and land bills.⁴⁶ From this point Lawrence could be clearly identified as a Liberal in British politics, an affiliation consolidated by his public criticism of Conservative foreign policy in Afghanistan in 1878. His close friends may of course have always known this; Richard Temple later wrote that Lawrence had always been ‘a very moderate Liberal’.⁴⁷ Political affiliation seems however to have made little difference to the way Lawrence corresponded with the secretaries of state for India. To all of them he wrote with considerable frequency; it is not uncommon to see two letters written on the same day. Lawrence also wrote with a frankness quite distinct from the formal and restrained tone that often cloaks correspondence between officials. This frankness makes Lawrence’s letters more interesting, and more revealing. Without his frankness, it would be harder for instance to trace his sensitivity to press criticism.

Lawrence’s correspondence was of course subject to a considerable time delay. Chandrika Kaul suggests that after 1852 it took anything from thirty-three to forty-four days for mail to reach England from Bombay or Calcutta. The opening of the canal at Suez in 1869 (after Lawrence had left India), together with the introduction of steamships, significantly reduced this time.⁴⁸ Correspondence between Lawrence and his secretaries of state in the period 1864-69 was often received in as little as four weeks, though five weeks was more common. This calculation is based on the correspondents’ habit of acknowledging receipt of letters of a particular date, and assumes that they wrote immediately (or very soon) after receiving letters from India or England.⁴⁹ Although communications sent by telegraph were much faster, they conveyed only limited information and were used sparingly. The construction of

⁴⁶ Steele, ‘Baron Lawrence’.

⁴⁷ Temple, *Lord Lawrence*, p. 191.

⁴⁸ C. Kaul, *Reporting the Raj: The British press and India, c. 1880-1922* (Manchester, 2010), p. 31.

⁴⁹ The period could be longer than five weeks, though anything longer than six weeks seems to have been rare.

telegraph lines in earnest started in the eighteen fifties.⁵⁰ By 1865 the governor-general, in Calcutta, could receive the secretary of state's London telegrams in just three days.⁵¹

In 1878 the government published official correspondence relating to Anglo-Afghan affairs sent between secretaries of state and the government of India in the period from July 1863 to November 1878.⁵² The dissertation draws extensively from this voluminous series of parliamentary papers. The official despatches are more formal and elliptical than Lawrence's private correspondence, though often their intended meaning is nonetheless clear. For example, official communications rarely referred to Russia directly, preferring instead to write of 'another Power'. (In contrast, Lawrence in his private correspondence referred to Russia without hesitation.) What was meant by official communications is not always so apparent. The research has therefore set some despatches in a wider political and cultural context.⁵³ For example, the secretary of state's decision, in 1875, to instruct the government of India to send a British envoy to Afghanistan will be set in the context of increasing public anxiety about the vulnerability of India's north-west frontier.

The dissertation relies on a variety of British newspapers and periodicals in order to understand how events pertaining to Afghanistan were reported, and how British policy was discussed. By the time Lawrence arrived at Calcutta as governor-general in 1864, the influence of the political press in Britain had been strengthened by legislative and

⁵⁰ Kaul, *The British press and India*, p. 41.

⁵¹ Lawrence commented on the time taken to receive telegrams in a letter to Sir Charles Wood. Lawrence to Wood, 4 March 1865 (2), Lawrence Mss/30, no. 17.

⁵² *Afghanistan Correspondence*.

⁵³ An approach suggested by Paul Readman, following Paul Kennedy's study of Anglo-German rivalry before the Great War (*The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism* (1980)): P. Readman, 'Patriotism and the Politics of Foreign Policy, c. 1870 -c. 1914', in W. Mulligan and B. Simms (eds.), *The Primacy of Foreign Policy in British History, 1660-2000: how Strategic Concerns Shaped Modern Britain* (Basingstoke, 2010), p. 265.

technological developments. Stephen Koss has argued that three laws—abolition of the tax on advertisements (1853), repeal of the stamp duty (1855) and abolition of the tax on paper (1861)—together ‘created a new forum for national debate by according newspapers a vastly enlarged readership and, consequently, an enhanced potential for political influence.’ Technological advances in the printing and distribution of papers, the introduction of the telegraph, and the establishment of news agencies all supported the rise of the political press.⁵⁴

In her research on the British press and India, Chandrika Kaul found that *The Times* was the most influential British newspaper on Indian questions, with the greatest financial outlay and several specialist leader writers.⁵⁵ That finding also holds true for the reporting of events in Afghanistan and central Asia, and for editorial comment on Britain’s Afghan policy, which *The Times* covered in unrivalled depth. For this reason, the thesis refers to *The Times* more than any other newspaper. Contemporary newspapers also drew heavily from *The Times*. For example, during Lawrence’s tenure as governor-general the *Manchester Guardian* printed eight of *The Times*’s editorials on Afghan policy. As Stephen Koss puts it, the press was ‘a ravenous animal... [that] always fed on itself’.⁵⁶ The importance of *The Times* in terms of understanding public discussion about Afghanistan is increased because its letters pages provided a national forum for debate. Unlike parliament, this forum was open every day of the year. Writing to the editor of *The Times* in order to praise or attack Afghan policy was popular with serving and former army officers, and was a tactic also used by several former government of India officials, including Lawrence himself. Letters published in *The*

⁵⁴ Koss acknowledges that literacy was increasing, but contends that the effect of the 1870 Education Act (on the rise of the political press) has been exaggerated. S. Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain, Volume One: The Nineteenth Century* (London, 1981), pp. 1-2.

⁵⁵ Kaul, *The British press and India*, p. 61.

⁵⁶ Koss, *The Political Press in Britain*, p. 22.

Times sometimes formed the basis for discussions in other newspapers. For example, a January 1868 editorial in the *Standard* criticised Lawrence's Afghan policy and supported its attack by reference to the opinions of an army officer published a few days earlier in a letter to *The Times*.⁵⁷ The importance of *The Times* for the present research is further supported by the historiographical consensus that the governing classes placed more reliance on it than on any other newspaper.⁵⁸ The private correspondence of Lawrence with ministers in London is certainly consistent with that conclusion, for the correspondents often referred to *The Times*. *The Times* is also a vital source for understanding Britain and Afghanistan because its Calcutta correspondent was at liberty to make independent pronouncements on Afghan policy. His assessments could depart entirely from the editorial line adopted in London, demonstrating how in some instances the perspective of Anglo-Indians was utterly at variance with the perspective of their compatriots in Britain.

The research has also made extensive use of several other newspapers. They have been chosen on the basis of the extent of their coverage and commentary, but also in order to achieve a balance between different political leanings. For the Conservative perspective, the *Standard* has proved most useful, although the *Morning Post* has also been consulted. For the Liberal standpoint, the research has relied mainly on the *Daily News*, although the *Pall Mall Gazette* and *Manchester Guardian* have also been considered. Other newspapers have been used in particular circumstances. For example, the Radical *Reynolds's News* made some interesting observations about the virtues of middle class merit following Lawrence's appointment as governor-general.⁵⁹ Similarly, the Liberal

⁵⁷ *Standard*, 8 Jan. 1868, p. 4; *Times*, 4 Jan. 1868, p. 6.

⁵⁸ Koss, *The Political Press in Britain*, p. 218.

⁵⁹ This will be considered in chapter I. The politics espoused in *Reynolds's Newspaper* were arguably to

Glasgow Herald provided the most detailed reporting of Lawrence's presentation with the freedom of the city of Glasgow, and is accordingly used in order to help understand Lawrence's appeal to certain audiences in the aftermath of the Mutiny. In 1864, the political leaning of newspapers provides only an approximate guide to their attitude towards Lawrence's Afghan policy. As previously noted, that policy did not become an overtly party political question until the eve of the second Afghan war. During Lawrence's first years at Calcutta, British newspapers largely supported his circumspect policy in Afghanistan. By the end of his term, some fissures along political lines were discernible: the Liberal *Daily News* vigorously supported his policy, while the Conservative *Standard* was increasingly critical of it. Liberal newspapers could not however be relied upon to support Lawrence's 'masterly inactivity', and the *Pall Mall Gazette* came to advocate much more active steps on the north-west frontier.⁶⁰

Numerous periodicals have also been used, including the Liberal *Fortnightly Review* and *Edinburgh Review*, and the Conservative *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, *Quarterly Review* and *Saturday Review*. The dissertation necessarily concentrates on newspapers and periodicals published in Britain, because it is concerned with the way Afghan policy was discussed in Britain and how that discussion influenced policy-making. However, two British publications in India—the *Calcutta Review* and the *Times of India*—have proved useful for considering whether assumptions in Britain about the security of the Indian empire accorded with British views in India. Anglo-Indian opinion was of course disseminated in Britain by the use of 'Indian' correspondents (such as the Calcutta correspondent of *The Times*) and by the practice of

the left of Radicalism: in Koss's opinion the paper was 'marked by an unsettled Radicalism that did not stop short of republicanism'. Koss, *The Political Press in Britain*, p. 89.

⁶⁰ See e.g. *Pall Mall Gazette*, 30 May 1867, p. 1.

reprinting articles first published in India.

The research has also made use of several other published sources. The records of parliamentary debates in *Hansard* have proved particularly helpful, and can be searched online for the period covered by the research.⁶¹ These parliamentary debates shed light on some diverse matters, including public criticism of Lawrence, the emphasis policy-makers placed on ‘prestige’, and the way politicians conceived Afghanistan before the second Afghan war. A number of contemporary books—written by army officers, politicians and journalists—have also been consulted, in order to analyse their authors’ attitudes to Afghan policy and Anglo-Indian militarism.

Chapter structure

The dissertation comprises an abstract, this introduction, eight main chapters, a conclusion and bibliography. Chapter I describes Lawrence’s actions during the Mutiny and his perceived instrumentality in preserving Britain’s empire in India. It then examines his appeal to a variety of British audiences. It also considers how some of Lawrence’s most celebrated characteristics—especially his Christian faith and ‘puritan’ manner—became problematic once he became governor-general of India. The chapter argues that Lawrence nonetheless managed to retain his heroic status as the ‘saviour of India’, and was invested with a lasting reputation for vigour and for knowledge of the Punjab and India.

It is partly for this reason, Chapter II contends, that four secretaries of state in succession insisted that Lawrence should have considerable latitude for deciding what

⁶¹ <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/index.html>

British policy in Afghanistan should be. This devolution of authority to Lawrence occurred at an important moment in Anglo-Afghan relations, because civil war in Afghanistan and Russian progress in central Asia led some Britons to fear that all may not be quiet beyond the north-west frontier. The chapter also asks to what extent Lawrence's authority on Afghan policy should be understood as a consequence of domestic political events, in particular the question of franchise reform. For there is evidence that the turbulence of this and other domestic questions not only made the tenure of some ministers exceptionally short but distracted their attentions from the India Office.

Chapter III seeks to explain why Lawrence was determined that Britain should avoid all interference in Afghanistan. It first considers an argument made by some historians: that 'masterly inactivity' was essentially Lawrence's reaction to certain traumatic events during the first Afghan war (1838-42), when his brother was taken captive. The chapter posits an alternative explanation for Lawrence's policy, arguing it was a natural consequence of his administrative priorities and his assessment that the greatest threat to British rule came from within India. Resources expended against a Russian threat, which Lawrence considered remote, could not be used on Indian administrative projects that would provide more effective security for British *imperium*. The chapter contrasts Lawrence's approach with the proposals of Sir Henry Rawlinson, perhaps the most forceful advocate of intervention in Afghanistan in the period 1864-69. Finally, in order to assess whether Lawrence's stance was representative of the 'official mind' in India, the opinions of his colleagues in the government of India will be examined.

Lawrence's foreign policy critics argued that a British officer, supported by a small

military escort (or even by a small army), should be sent to Afghanistan. Such an envoy would, these critics insisted, exert a material and moral influence over one (or more) of the warring Afghan Amirs, and would check any corresponding move by Russia. Lawrence however was adamant that no British officers should cross the north-west frontier. He recognised that any such move might require ever-increasing intervention, because Britons in such remote places were liable to come to harm, and this would then have to be punished by military force. This process of escalation was driven by the imperatives of ‘prestige’, a problematic but nonetheless important concept. Chapter IV considers the influence of prestige on British policy by examining the motives for the Abyssinian expedition (1867-68). The scene thus moves from India to Africa. The expedition was however very much a British Indian affair: it was planned in India, commanded by officers from the Bombay army, and relied on Indian troops, supplies and transport animals. Moreover, although the expedition’s official objective was liberating a small number of British captives, the foreign secretary and other officials argued that it was necessary in order to maintain the prestige they thought essential for the control of India. The chapter also explores how official perceptions about prestige constrained policy decisions, setting Lawrence’s refusal to allow British officers to enter Afghanistan in this context.

Chapter V examines how British army officers in India were depicted in the British press. It identifies a recurring characterisation of these officers as restless, bellicose and ‘ambitious’ for promotion and honours. Such characteristics were thought to explain army officers’ affinity for more active policies in Afghanistan. The chapter suggests that officials in Britain and India—including Lawrence, Sir Charles Wood and the Earl of Elgin—had grave misgivings about the military authorities in India and the motivations

of some frontier officers. These officials were particularly concerned about the independent power of the commander-in-chief in India, and they shared press perceptions about the motivations of officers who bridled at policies of frontier restraint. The chapter considers what all of this says about the image of the army in the period after the Mutiny, and the vitality—in at least part of the British world—of a type of militarism before it is thought to have arrived in Britain itself.

Critics of Lawrence's foreign policy complained that Britain's passivity in Afghanistan would allow Russia to establish her influence at Kabul. It was argued in certain sections of the British press, with increasing urgency, that Lawrence should counter this threat by supporting one of the protagonists in the Afghan civil war with armaments and a subsidy. Chapter VI examines Lawrence's sensitivity to such criticism, and its effects on the formulation of British policy in Afghanistan. Lawrence remained resolute on what he considered the most important policy decision; accordingly no British envoys or troops were sent to Afghanistan. He even prohibited civilian explorers from wandering beyond the frontier. However, the chapter argues that on two matters—constructing railway lines to the north-west frontier and supporting Amir Sher Ali Khan—Lawrence offered concessions to public pressure for more active measures in Afghanistan. The chapter considers the possible reasons for Lawrence's anxiety about public opinion in Britain and its relationship with policy in India. It also asks whether Lawrence was exceptional in this regard, by contrasting his approach with that of his colleagues in the government of India. The sensitivity of these officials to press and public opinion suggests that the historiographical depiction of British policy-makers exhibiting a rational detachment from external influences may require qualification.

Chapter VII first traces the continuation of Lawrence's Afghan policy during the Liberal administration of 1868-74. It then considers why the Conservative government of 1874-1880 resolved to force a British envoy on Amir Sher Ali Khan, placing this decision in the context of prevailing anxieties about Russian expansion in central Asia. The chapter goes on to examine how parliamentary Liberals harnessed Lawrence's expertise, during public debates about the government's foreign policy around the time of the second Afghan war. These Liberals recognised that Lawrence's particular knowledge, his patriotic reputation, and his political record as a moderate gave him great utility as a public critic of Conservative policy. Lawrence was therefore encouraged to amplify his public condemnation of the abandonment of 'masterly inactivity' well in advance of other Liberals. The chapter argues that Lawrence, after so long on the imperial periphery, ultimately exerted an important influence on politics in the metropolis.

In September 1879 Afghan soldiers attacked the British residency in Kabul, killing the envoy and his entire military escort. Chapter VIII analyses how newspapers and politicians in Britain reacted to news of this attack, and in particular to the death of the envoy, Major Sir Louis Cavagnari. The prime minister, Lord Beaconsfield, feared a public outcry. However, a consensus that Cavagnari's death had to be avenged—on grounds of national honour, dignity and prestige—seems to have been the dominant contemporary response. This consensus, together with excited reports that Cavagnari and his small retinue had maintained a heroic defence of the residency before being overwhelmed, seems to have been remarkably effective in frustrating Liberal criticism of government policy. The chapter will ask what all of this says about domestic support for imperialism. The attack occurred on the cusp of the period in which historians have

identified an increase in the cultural purchase of imperialism in Britain, and it is tempting to see newspaper reporting of Cavagnari's last stand suffused with an imperial light. The chapter instead attempts to place the imperial strands in domestic newspaper coverage in the context of several other prominent strands, which had meanings quite independent of empire. It also considers the longevity of public interest in the 'gallant' Major Cavagnari, and asks whether he may have been perceived as all too representative of the type of restless, ambitious officer discussed in chapter V.

* * *

A note on terminology

The terms 'Afghan' and 'Afghanistan' will be used imprecisely throughout the dissertation. The term 'Afghan' literally refers only to the Pashtun, the largest ethnic group in 'Afghanistan' (the 'land of the Afghans'). The geographical area referred to as 'Afghanistan' did not assume its modern form until the end of the nineteenth century, when Britain and Russia delineated its political borders. Historians of Afghanistan nonetheless employ the terms 'Afghan' and 'Afghanistan' as a matter of convenience.⁶² These were also the terms used by contemporary Britons, although a different spelling was popular. When quoting from such sources, the original spelling will be preserved, so that the terms will appear with an extra letter 'f', as 'Affghan' and 'Affghanistan'.

The terms 'Anglo-India' and 'Anglo-Indian' are used in the sense they were understood in period from 1864-79, that is to say as references to respectively the British community in India and Britons in India. The word 'forward' will also be used in the

⁶² The other ethnic groups include the Hazaras, Tajiks, Uzbeks and Nuristanees. B.D. Hopkins, *The Making of Modern Afghanistan* (Basingstoke, 2008), pp. 2, 5.

same way contemporaries would have understood it. This word in one sense conveyed a desire to move the frontier of British India further ‘forward’ into Afghanistan. However, the word was also understood to mean a more general preparedness to ‘interfere’ in the internal politics of Afghanistan, in order for example to seek to control the foreign policy of particular rulers. Contemporaries would therefore have recognised various proposals as examples of ‘forward’ measures, the most ubiquitous of which were that Britain should support one of the protagonists in the Afghan civil war with armaments and money, that British envoys should be sent to Afghanistan, and that British garrisons should be established beyond the existing frontier. The expression ‘forward school’ will not be used, as it does not seem to have appeared until 1885.⁶³

⁶³ J.L. Duthie, ‘Pressure from within: the “forward” group in the India Office during Gladstone’s first ministry’, *Journal of Asian History*, 15 (1981), 47.

I

Sir John Lawrence, the ‘saviour of India’

In the summer of 1866, the Duke of Edinburgh went in state to the City of London, in order to receive the freedom of the Worshipful Company of Grocers. This ancient guild, trading in ‘all the various products of tropical climes’, had long enjoyed royal patronage. Having been ushered into the drawing-room of the Grocers’ hall at Princes Street, the Duke found himself in ‘a gorgeous apartment’ decorated with marble busts of Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, the Duke of Wellington, Viscount Nelson, and Sir John Lawrence.¹ The decision to place a civilian in such exalted company, among royalty and the greatest military and naval heroes of the century, was not the quixotic act of a fraternity of pepper merchants. Rather, it was consistent with a widespread recognition of Lawrence’s instrumentality in preserving Britain’s empire in India during the Mutiny of 1857-58. This chapter will seek to understand how contemporaries understood the significance of Lawrence’s Mutiny endeavours. In order to do so, it will consider the way in which Lawrence was rewarded with honours from the crown, parliament, the East India Company and British cities and universities. The chapter will also examine public discussion about his claims to a peerage, an honour not in fact conferred until much later (1869). This discussion illuminates Lawrence’s appeal to a variety of audiences, in particular those seeking more merit-based political appointments, the continued implementation of Christian policies in India, and reassuring proof that British rule in India was beneficent.

¹ *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 3 June 1866, p. 2. The sculptor of Lawrence’s bust is identified as ‘R. Theed’ in Steele, ‘Baron Lawrence’ and in Ormond, *Early Victorian Portraits*, vol. I, p. 265. It was however almost certainly the work of William Theed, the younger (1804-91), who later created the group ‘Africa’ (1865-71) for the Albert Memorial in Hyde Park, London. Lawrence’s bust is still on display at the Grocers’ company. Anon., ‘A Brief History of the Grocers’ Company’, [<http://www.grocershall.co.uk/>] [accessed 23 Apr. 2012].

Relatively recently, historians have concentrated less on a hero's deeds, than on the cultural context in which his life was imaginatively reconstructed. For Geoffrey Cubitt, heroes are 'endowed by others, not just with a high degree of fame and honour, but with a special allocation of imputed meaning and symbolic significance—that not only raises them above others in public esteem but makes them the object of some kind of collective emotional investment.'² That emphasis on 'collective emotional investment' will be adopted in this chapter; an approach hitherto not followed with respect to Lawrence.³ It is surprising that Lawrence has been overlooked in this way, given his reputation as the 'saviour of India' and the voluminous scholarship on other British heroes of the Mutiny, such as Sir Henry Havelock.⁴ Lawrence offers an important case study for two principal reasons. First, he suggests that heroic reputations could become problematic for men who outlived their heroic deeds. In the aftermath of the Mutiny, Lawrence's claims to greatness were contested only marginally. Had he, like Havelock, died in the hour of his triumph in India, perhaps that would have remained the case. But Lawrence lived, and some of the same traits celebrated in the aftermath of the Mutiny became problematic once Lawrence returned to India in 1864. This problem seems to have been obscured in the recent scholarship on heroism, perhaps because of the concentration on men like Havelock. Secondly, Lawrence's perceived heroism provided

² G. Cubitt, 'Introduction: heroic reputations and exemplary lives' in G. Cubitt and A. Warren (eds.), *Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives* (Manchester, 2000), p. 3. See also M. Jones, 'What Should Historians Do With Heroes? Reflections on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Britain', *History Compass*, 5 (2007), 439-454.

³ Lawrence's heroism is considered, solely on the basis of his deeds, in Naidis, 'John Lawrence, mutiny hero'. Recently, Kathryn Tidrick has considered Lawrence (alongside several Punjab officials) in order to argue that an 'illusion of authority'—namely, a myth that the personal authority of some Englishmen obviated their reliance on military force—lay at the heart of British imperialism. Tidrick, *Empire and the English Character*, ch. 1.

⁴ For scholarship on Havelock: Anderson, 'The growth of Christian militarism in mid-Victorian Britain'; J.M. MacKenzie, 'Heroic myths of empire', in J.M. MacKenzie (ed.), *Popular imperialism and the military 1850-1950* (Manchester, 1992); and G. Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British adventure, empire and the imagining of masculinities* (London, 2005), chs. 4-5.

him with an enhanced reputation in both official and public spheres, endowing him with greater authority, particularly on matters pertaining to the Punjab and its frontier with Afghanistan. It was partly for this reason that Lawrence would be granted so much latitude for determining Afghan policy during his term as governor-general, as chapter II will argue.

Lawrence and the Indian Mutiny

The events known to British audiences as the ‘Indian Mutiny’ began in Bengal in May 1857. On receiving news of the rising, the authorities in India and Britain had several grounds to fear for the safety of the Punjab. For one thing, the province had been acquired only recently, in 1849. It was also home to large Sikh and Muslim populations, regarded as ‘martial races’ who had proved their fighting qualities against Britain respectively in the Anglo-Sikh wars (1845-46, 1848-49) and the first Afghan war (1838-42). Furthermore, the geographical situation of the Punjab raised the disturbing prospect that tribes from around the Afghan frontier would join with the Indian rebels. This was the position that confronted Lawrence as chief commissioner of the Punjab. Initially Lawrence received no instructions from the superior authority of the governor-general, Earl Canning, as communications with Calcutta had been cut. Lawrence therefore acted immediately on his own initiative, assuming powers considerably beyond those of a chief commissioner. Realising that the entire Bengal army was suspect, he and his subordinates disarmed its regiments stationed in the Punjab. To replace these regular forces, Lawrence then raised over forty thousand Punjab horse and foot—trebling the existing provincial forces—all organised on the ‘irregular’ model, thus relying on very few British officers. He took advantage of all the circumstances that naturally tended to favour the British cause, by exploiting: the traditional antagonism of the Sikhs towards

the Mughal emperors (whose lineal representative, the King of Delhi, the mutineers had acknowledged as their sovereign); the ‘indifference’ of the Punjab Muslims to the residual prestige of the Delhi dynasty; and the popularity of his administration in the Punjab (assisted by good harvests and relatively moderate tax assessments).⁵

Lawrence also determined that the recapture of Delhi was more important to Britain’s position in India than the safety of his own province. The day after receiving the telegram with news of the outbreak at Meerut, Lawrence wrote to General Anson (commander-in-chief of British forces in India), urging him to act swiftly to move on Delhi:

The next step will be to recover Delhi and its magazine; the latter is the arsenal for all Upper India... By decisive measures at once we should crush the mutineers, and give support to the well-affected or timid. Time, in such matters, seems to be everything... A week or two hence it may be too late. If your Excellency will sanction these arrangements, Brigadier Sydney Cotton and I will arrange all the details. I will send him a copy of this letter and request he will have H.M.’s 27th Regiment ready to move at an hour’s notice... I make no apology for writing to your Excellency plainly and fully. I consider this to be the greatest crisis which has ever occurred in India. Our European force is so small that, unless effectively handled in the outset, and brought to bear, it will prove unequal to the emergency. But with vigour and promptitude, under the blessing of God, it will be irresistible.⁶

As chief commissioner of the Punjab, Lawrence had no formal power to set strategic objectives for the commander-in-chief. As a civilian, he might have been wary of

⁵ Steele, ‘Baron Lawrence’.

⁶ Lawrence to General Anson, 13 May 1857, cited in Bosworth Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence*, vol. II, pp. 15-6.

recommending specific troop movements to a general. Yet he wrote not only to Anson, but also to Generals Barnard and Wilson, urging them to move decisively to retake Delhi. Acting on his judgement that Delhi was the key to Britain's position, Lawrence denuded the Punjab of the irregular troops he had raised, despatching them together with his British troops to the old Mughal capital. Money was required as well as men, and so Lawrence raised forced loans from Indian bankers, traders, and princes. He sent this money along with stores and the troops to Delhi.⁷

Delhi fell to British forces in September 1857. Initially considered a particularly vulnerable province, the Punjab had not only been held but had proved decisive to the recapture of Delhi and ultimate British victory. For his prompt and vigorous actions, Lawrence was acclaimed as the 'saviour of India', meaning of course the saviour of the British position in India. This triumphant contemporary soubriquet was based on an underlying assessment of Lawrence's instrumentality shared by modern historians, writing over one hundred and fifty years later. In Lawrence's entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, David Steele asserts that Britain could not have recovered Delhi without the men and supplies sent by Lawrence. Steele concludes that '[Lawrence's] hold on the Punjab and his leadership in this crisis rescued the British in northern India.'⁸

For his exertions in suppressing the Mutiny, Lawrence received a host of honours, including three from the crown. In 1857 he was promoted to a knight grand cross of the Bath (GCB) and the following year accepted his first hereditary honour, a baronetcy. In

⁷ Steele, 'Baron Lawrence'.

⁸ Steele, 'Baron Lawrence'.

1859, having returned to Britain, he was sworn of the Privy Council.⁹ Lawrence also received two significant awards from the East India Company in recognition of his Mutiny services. In 1858 the Company granted Lawrence a two thousand pound annual annuity, and in 1859 promoted his rank, salary and status as ruler of the Punjab from chief commissioner to lieutenant-governor.¹⁰

In February 1858, Lawrence received the thanks of both Houses of parliament.¹¹ The prime minister, Lord Palmerston, concluded that the ‘services of Sir John Lawrence were really beyond all praise.’ What Palmerston found so remarkable, as he had earlier explained in a speech to the Commons, was that the very province thought to have been ‘our weak point’ in fact ‘turned out to be our strong point’.¹² According to Benjamin Disraeli, Lawrence ‘probably deserved more than any other man in India, whether soldier, sailor, or civilian.’¹³ The parliamentary acclamation of Lawrence continued long after the vote of thanks. After the Earl of Derby formed his second ministry, he lauded Lawrence’s ‘courage and dauntless resolution’ in first checking incipient mutiny, and then raising from the Punjab ‘in the hour of India’s extremity those levies and reinforcements to which in great measure the suppression of the revolt is due’.¹⁴ Ten years after the Mutiny, politicians of all parties continued to refer to Lawrence as the ‘saviour of India’.¹⁵

⁹ Steele, ‘Baron Lawrence’.

¹⁰ Lawrence’s salary was raised from £7,200 to £10,000 per annum, backdated to 1 Jan. 1858. *Hansard*, 151 (26 July 1858), cols. 2125-6. In the administrative structure of British India, the rank, salary and status accorded to the senior British official in a province depended on the perceived importance of that province. During Lawrence’s term as governor-general (1864-69), Madras and Bombay enjoyed governors; Bengal, the Punjab and the North-Western Provinces had lieutenant-governors; while other provinces variously had to make do with agents, residents and chief commissioners.

¹¹ *Hansard*, 148 (8 Feb. 1858), cols. 865-932 (Commons) & cols. 809-52 (Lords).

¹² *Hansard*, 148 (8 Dec. 1857), col. 389; *Hansard* 148 (8 Feb. 1858), col. 875.

¹³ *Hansard*, 148 (8 Feb. 1858), col. 888.

¹⁴ *Hansard*, 153 (14 Apr. 1859), col. 1696.

¹⁵ E.g. Sir Stafford Northcote, *Hansard*, 189 (2 Aug. 1867), cols. 816-7.

Some British cities, guilds and universities also recognised Lawrence's heroic deeds in India. He received the freedoms of the cities of London (1858) and Glasgow (1860), the freedom of the Worshipful Company of Grocers (1859) and honorary doctorates of civil law from the universities of Oxford and Cambridge (1859).¹⁶ However, one honour eluded Sir John Lawrence: a peerage. Public discussion about his claims to this honour illuminate both the esteem in which he was held in the wake of the Mutiny, and the different audiences to which he appealed.

Lawrence and the peerage

Before the Mutiny the East India Company exercised responsibility for the government of India, under the supervision of the British government (acting through the Board of Control). In 1858, shortly before that responsibility was transferred to the British crown, the directors of the East India Company met for the last time. In almost their final act, the directors resolved:

That in recognition of the eminent merits of Sir John Laird Mair Lawrence, G.C.B., whose prompt, vigorous, and judicious measures crushed an incipient mutiny in the Punjab, and maintained the province in tranquillity during a year of almost universal convulsion, and who, by his extraordinary exertions, was enabled to equip troops and to prepare munitions of war for distant operations, thus mainly contributing to the re-capture of Delhi, and to the subsequent successes which attended our arms, and in testimony of the high sense entertained by the East India Company of his public character and conduct throughout a long and distinguished career, an annuity of £2,000 be granted to him.¹⁷

¹⁶ Bosworth Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence*, vol. II, chs. 8 & 9.

¹⁷ Resolution of a special General Court of the East India Company, 25 Aug. 1858, reported in *Times*, 26 Aug. 1858, p. 7 (hereafter, the 'East India Company Meeting, 25 Aug. 1858'). The resolution was subsequently approved at a meeting of the proprietors of the Company, on 30 Aug. 1858, reported in *Times*, 31 Aug. 1858, p. 7.

This resolution set down an official opinion regarding the importance of Lawrence's endeavours; one later endorsed by parliament.¹⁸ There was nonetheless a quite particular 'emotional investment' at work on the part of the East India Company, as its chairman made explicit at the meeting. Sir Frederick Currie and his colleagues had already pressed the government to confer a 'higher mark of distinction' on Sir John Lawrence (that is to say, higher than a baronetcy or GCB). In order to support its case, the Company had pledged to grant Lawrence some suitable means of maintaining such a dignity. The government was at the time known to be considering whether any further honours should be conferred on Lawrence.¹⁹ Currie told the directors that the grant to Lawrence was being made 'in the hope' that a peerage would follow, but the Company must have hoped that its decision would in fact stir the government into action. The quantum of the pension awarded to Lawrence had been chosen carefully: two thousand pounds per annum was the amount usually bestowed when Anglo-Indian officers were raised to the peerage.²⁰ It is significant that the East India Company, days from its abolition, should have concentrated on such a matter. The Company had been somewhat discredited after the outbreak of the Mutiny; the prospect of elevating one of its servants to the peerage must accordingly have been extremely appealing. For Lawrence's ennoblement would have reflected well on the East India Company, through whose ranks he had risen from settlement officer to chief commissioner of a great province. Prompting the government in this way certainly *could* work: the Company had already

¹⁸ An 1833 Act of Parliament required that if the governor-general of India was in receipt of a pension, his salary would be reduced by a corresponding amount. Exceptions were however sometimes made, and on this occasion parliament resolved to pass a special Act, permitting Lawrence to receive the full amount of his governor-general's salary together with the pension awarded by the East India Company. *Hansard*, 173 (8 Feb. 1864), cols. 222-5.

¹⁹ Lord Stanley (president of the Board of Control): 'Whether any further recognition of his services should be conferred on Sir John Lawrence is a question at present under the consideration of the Government.' *Hansard*, 151 (26 July 1858), cols. 2125-6.

²⁰ East India Company Meeting, 25 Aug. 1858.

increased Lawrence's salary as chief commissioner of the Punjab so that it matched the amount received by a lieutenant-governor, and in January 1859 Lawrence duly became the Punjab's first lieutenant-governor.²¹ Long after its abolition, the East India Company's former directors continued to draw public attention to the men who had risen through its ranks.²²

The East India Company was not alone in pressing the claims of Lawrence on the government. Several publications in Britain criticised the failure to confer a peerage on the man perceived as instrumental to the survival of British rule in India. In January 1858 the *London Quarterly Review* made the case in plain language:

The difference between K.C.B. and G.C.B. must be greater in the eye of the Government than in that of the nation, since it thought it worth announcing as a reward for a man [Sir John Lawrence] who with kingly talent had ruled an excitable country, held down a mutinous army, and, at the same time, mightily supported a trembling empire. A coronet was seldom more nobly merited.²³

This line of criticism was developed over the following year in newspapers such as *The Times*, which on several occasions pressed Lawrence's claims. An editorial of July 1858 considered Lawrence's achievements alongside those of the British generals James Neill, Sir Henry Havelock, Sir Archdale Wilson, Sir Henry Lawrence (John's brother),

²¹ East India Company Meeting, 25 Aug. 1858.

²² For example, after Lawrence's appointment as governor-general of India, Colonel William Sykes (a former director and chairman of the East India Company) emphasised that the 'East India Company's service had produced some of the most distinguished men in the annals of British history, such as Clive, Malcolm, Elphinstone, Ochterlony, the two Lawrences, and many others; men who, entering the civil and military services as boys, by the force of their character and talents raised themselves to high stations unaided by interest.' *Hansard*, 173 (8 Feb. 1864), col. 224.

²³ (Lawrence had already received the KCB before the Indian Mutiny.) *London Quarterly Review*, Jan. 1858, cited in *Times*, 5 March 1858, p. 10.

Sir James Outram, Sir John Inglis, Sir Hugh Rose and Sir Colin Campbell (who was created Baron Clyde in July 1858).

But even among these illustrious men the name of John Lawrence, the Ruler of the Punjab, stands supreme. We know of no standard by which we can discriminate between the respective merits of these Indian Paladins save by the results of their exertions. Let this, then, be the test. Had the mutineers in the earlier stage of the troubles been able to maintain themselves in Delhi, and had the Punjab risen in our rear, British India would have been lost... We say, then, that he who saved the Punjab and the North-Western Provinces was the man who preserved India to the British Crown. That man was John Lawrence!²⁴

It is striking that a civilian could ‘stand supreme’ over all of these victorious military leaders, given the praise heaped on the generals by the press.²⁵ The editorial had urged that a peerage should be conferred on Lawrence. This was an argument *The Times* pursued in earnest: Lawrence deserved a peerage on merit, and more merit-based appointments were needed in order to confer legitimacy on the peerage as a whole. The following year, with this accolade apparently denied Lawrence, *The Times* published another editorial, excoriating the basis on which titles were conferred. Three ‘gentlemen of ample landed estate, but no very remarkable ability’ (Sir Charles Morgan, Tatton Egerton, and Colonel Wyndham) had just been ennobled. The editorial speculated on the propriety of these appointments; large ‘contributions’ to party election funds possibly having been made by the men in question. Surely Lawrence’s existing awards

²⁴ *Times*, 29 July 1858, p. 8.

²⁵ No aspect of the campaign was more praised than the generalship of Havelock, Neill, Lawrence, Nicholson, and latterly Campbell. During the Crimean war, the victories had been described as ‘soldiers’ victories’, with the bravery of the troops acclaimed; the generals, with a few notable exceptions, were largely condemned. During the Mutiny however, the vast Indian terrain, isolated garrisons and scattered enemy offered scope for a multitude of independent initiatives by the various generals: E.M. Spiers, *The Army and Society 1815-1914* (London, 1980), pp. 132-4.

(baronetcy, KCB, and East India Company pension) were insufficient ‘for saving our Indian Empire’?

And this is all that England can do for the bravest, the best, and the wisest of her sons, who, by the resources of his unaided genius, has preserved to us the acquisitions of Clive and of Hastings, and saved us from losing in one disastrous hour the conquests of Lake, of Wellington, and of Napier! To the honours of the Peerage Sir John Lawrence must not, it seems, aspire. He must not penetrate into that sublime region inhabited by the Morgans, the Egertons, and the Wyndhams, nor overshadow their aristocratic mediocrity by the massive proportions of his glory.²⁶

The editorial line taken by *The Times* can be seen in the context of mid-century criticism of aristocratic patronage, and the opportunity presented by the Mutiny—in which several middle-class men were pre-eminent—to press for further reform. Many of the victorious generals had proved that military prowess and qualities of leadership were not confined to the aristocracy: none of Havelock, Campbell, Neill and Nicholson had advanced his career by wealth or patronage.²⁷

The crown was not of course the sole source of honours that a Mutiny hero might receive. In March 1858, the Corporation of the City of London voted the freedom of the city to Lawrence. Its resolution, like the East India Company’s pension award, emphasised Lawrence’s heroic deeds.²⁸ However, the addresses made in support of the

²⁶ *Times*, 26 Apr. 1859, p. 6.

²⁷ Spiers, *The Army and Society*, p. 133.

²⁸ The resolution read as follows: ‘That the freedom of this city be voted to Sir John Lawrence, the Chief Commissioner of the Punjab, for the energy manifested by him in crushing the mutinous spirit of the Bengal regiments in the Punjab, and for his prompt exertions in maturing the preparations which led to the capture of Delhi and the safety of our positions in the north-west of India.’ Meeting of the Corporation of the City of London, 4 March 1858, reported in *Times*, 5 March 1858, p. 10 (hereafter,

resolution set great store by Lawrence's humble social origins. For here was proof that 'a middle-class man' had 'conferred the greatest benefits upon his country. (Hear, hear.)' The Corporation argued that men of proven merit should have even greater administrative responsibilities in India; that the government of India should 'not be intrusted to hands merely because of their connexions and their aristocratic influence'.²⁹

Lawrence and Christianity

The Corporation of London had also been impressed by Lawrence's Christian faith. It observed that although most British officials had 'systematically ignored the existence of our own religion', and discouraged its profession among the natives of India, Sir John Lawrence had taken the opposite view.³⁰ The Grocers' Company had made similar remarks when presenting the freedom of their guild to Lawrence, partly attributing his Mutiny successes to his 'reliance on the Giver of all Wisdom'.³¹ There was also a belief among some Britons that Lawrence's role in suppressing the revolt had a providential explanation, as was made explicit when he received the freedom of the city of Glasgow. For precisely at the moment 'when we almost feared that our Indian possessions were to be torn from us—then did Sir John Lawrence, under Providence, prove himself the "saviour of India." (Great applause).'³² This providential narrative had been a striking feature of a meeting in London in June 1859, the purpose of which was the presentation of an address to Lawrence. The address bore over seven thousand signatures, including those of three archbishops, twenty bishops, twenty-eight peers, seventy-one members of the House of Commons, a large number of military and naval officers, civil servants,

'Meeting of the Corporation of London, 4 March 1858').

²⁹ Speech by Deputy Dakin, Meeting of the Corporation of London, 4 March 1858.

³⁰ Speech by Deputy Dakin, Meeting of the Corporation of London, 4 March 1858.

³¹ *Times*, 14 July 1859, p. 12.

³² Presentation of the freedom of the city of Glasgow to Sir John Lawrence, 21 Sept. 1860, reported in *Glasgow Herald*, 22 Sept. 1860, p. 3.

and three hundred mayors and provosts, from all parts of the country. The meeting had been convened by the Evangelical Alliance, and was chaired by the Bishop of London.³³

The address declared that:

In you, Sir John, we, in common with the great body of your fellow-countrymen, gratefully recognize the instrument raised up by an all-wise Providence, to bear a part equal, if not superior, to that of any living man in this never-to-be-forgotten service to the British nation.³⁴

The address elevated and yet subordinated Lawrence's actions in suppressing the Mutiny: thanks were naturally due to the 'Supreme Ruler of all events', who first placed Lawrence in the Punjab and who then used him 'as the instrument by which the ascendancy of a Christian Power was maintained in a large portion of the continent of Asia.'³⁵ This interpretation of events was subsequently adopted by Reverend James Ellis, in his biography of Lawrence. Ellis presented his subject as a 'vessel' chosen by God in order to preserve an empire.³⁶ Lawrence for his part was quick to acknowledge God's intervention on the British side. Responding to the address presented to him at the Evangelical Alliance meeting, he stated his opinion that Britain's ultimate victory 'against the fearful odds which beset us was alone the work of the great God who so mercifully vouchsafed His protection. Nothing but a series of miracles saved us. To Him, therefore, alone is the glory due.'³⁷

³³ Meeting convened by the Evangelical Alliance, London, 24 June 1859, reported in *Times*, 25 June 1859, p. 11 (hereafter, the 'Evangelical Alliance Meeting, 24 June 1859'). Sir Richard Temple provides some further details: the Bishop of London was Archibald Campbell Tait, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury. Temple, *Lord Lawrence*, p. 138.

³⁴ Extract of address read by the Bishop of London, Evangelical Alliance Meeting, 24 June 1859.

³⁵ Speech of the Bishop of London, Evangelical Alliance Meeting, 24 June 1859.

³⁶ The term 'chosen vessel' was used in the bible to describe St. Paul (Acts IX.) The word 'vessel' in this context denotes that which is made for some use, and is absolutely helpless and dead except so far as it is applied to such use. Ellis, *Lord Lawrence*, p. 9.

³⁷ Speech of Sir John Lawrence, Evangelical Alliance Meeting, 24 June 1859.

The determination among Christians to praise a fellow-believer who had played such a prominent part in the Mutiny may be understood as a defensive response to a perception that the religious fervour of some officials and missionaries was a principal cause of the revolt. Christians were aware that the post-Mutiny official preference for ‘conciliation’ in place of reforming zeal risked derailing many of their projects in India. The Queen’s Proclamation, assuming the government of India for the crown, had repudiated any ‘desire to impose our convictions on any of our subjects,’ and enjoined the authorities to abstain from interference with the religious beliefs of the people of India.³⁸ As well as this official reaction, Christians were confronted by declining popular enthusiasm for missionary work.³⁹ Nevertheless, the missionaries still formed a powerful body of opinion with a popular appeal, as is evident from their campaign for a ‘Christian policy’ in post-Mutiny India. The missionaries denied that an open profession of Christianity by the government involved any political danger; indeed they insisted that a Christian policy was the best way of avoiding future outbursts of rebellion. One of the specific measures they advocated was the introduction of the bible in Indian government schools. Successive secretaries of state firmly opposed all such schemes, as did many British officials in India, and even some churchmen. Only in the Punjab did officials support the missionary programme.⁴⁰

Lawrence himself was one such supporter. In April 1858 he sent a despatch on ‘Christianity in India’ to the government of India, in which he argued that the bible ought to be taught in government schools to all those ‘willing to receive it’, but should

³⁸ Metcalf, *The Aftermath of Revolt*, p. 108.

³⁹ During the 1860s, popular enthusiasm for missionary work was declining steadily: the C.M.S. (Church Missionary Society), the largest Anglican body in India, obtained almost no new recruits for the Indian mission field. While the number of missionaries on the rolls in India rose from 54 to 107 during the 1850s, it stood at only 109 in 1871. The total membership and average annual income of the C.M.S. were equally stagnant: Metcalf, *The Aftermath of Revolt*, p. 97.

⁴⁰ Metcalf, *The Aftermath of Revolt*, pp. 98-102, 106.

not be obligatory. Lawrence sought to distance himself from the more extreme views of some of his subordinates in the Punjab administration, and argued that the power of government should not be used as an engine of proselytism, and that Christianity should not be propagated by secular rewards, force, or persecution. However, Lawrence insisted that ‘Christian things done in a Christian way’ would never alienate the people of India. On the contrary, he stated that it was only ‘when unchristian things are done in the name of Christianity, or when Christian things are done in an unchristian way, that mischief and danger are occasioned’.⁴¹

Lawrence’s despatch was subsequently made public and was received favourably in the columns of *The Times*.⁴² The reception of his public statements was perhaps understandably warmest among evangelicals. Gratefully repeating Lawrence’s statement about ‘Christian things done in a Christian way’, the Bishop of London eulogised these ‘memorable words’. Well might evangelicals have offered their ‘fervent prayer... that God may long preserve your life, and still continue to employ you as a great instrument of the public good.’⁴³ Lieutenant-Colonel Herbert Edwardes was well placed to understand the sense of marginalisation felt by some Christians in the wake of the Mutiny. Edwardes was a friend of Lawrence, one of his subordinates in the Punjab administration, and known to the public in Britain for his daring military exploits in India.⁴⁴ Edwardes was an evangelical with robust views on the merits of implementing

⁴¹ Despatch of Sir John Lawrence to the government of India on Christianity in India, 21 Apr. 1858, no. 720, reproduced in *Occasional Papers on India*, V (1858), *Knowsley Pamphlet Collection*, (hereafter, the ‘Lawrence Despatch on Christianity in India’), pp. 2, 5, 10.

⁴² ‘By an open profession of Christianity and an open performance of Christian things in a Christian way we should have offended no one; by a mistaken reserve we have suggested delusions and created alarms.’ *Times*, 25 June 1859, p. 9.

⁴³ Evangelical Alliance Meeting, 24 June 1859.

⁴⁴ Edwardes, Sir Herbert Benjamin (1819-68), army and political officer in India. Edwardes achieved public renown for defeating a military insurrection at Multan (1848), after which he was made CB, thanked by both Houses of parliament and awarded an Oxford DCL. He took ‘prompt and decisive action to maintain British authority’ in the Punjab during the Mutiny, was made KCB (1860), and

Christian policies in India. Many of his proposals had been rejected by the British authorities, and proved too extreme even for many Christians (including Lawrence himself in some cases). But Edwardes was able to grasp the essence of Lawrence's appeal to Christian audiences. In 1860 he published a biographical sketch in the *Leisure Hour*, in which he explained why Lawrence was such an alluring figure for British Christians. For when men recommended to officials that Christian measures should be adopted in India:

they were told that they were fanatics—well-intentioned, no doubt, but still fanatics, who were utterly ignorant about India, and recklessly wanted to carry their miserable rushlight into the heart of an imperial magazine. To such arguments the religious community at home had been hitherto obliged to submit in silence. But now there had come an end of all that. The one governor in India who, in the fiery trial of 1857, had been found master of the occasion, celebrated justly for many high and noble qualities, was celebrated above all for this, that he was *no enthusiast*, but rather a hard practical man, the sober genius of common sense—this oracle of official life had spoken from out of the very pigeon-holes of tradition, and declared it *safe* to do our duty.⁴⁵

Christians acclaiming Lawrence were seeking to acclaim the power of their own religion. For anything that raised Lawrence, a prominent Christian, in public esteem would naturally reflect well on Christianity. It seems reasonable to speculate that this was at least part of the motivation for the Evangelical Alliance presentation to

received a Cambridge LLD. He was commissioner of Ambala and agent for the Cis-Sutlej states (1862-64). An evangelical, he pressed the government of India to promote Christianity in India and was later vice-president of the Church Missionary Society. Edwardes was made KCSI in 1866, and promoted major-general in 1868: T.R. Moreman, 'Edwardes, Sir Herbert Benjamin (1819-1868)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed. May 2007).

⁴⁵ Lieutenant-Colonel H.B. Edwardes, 'Sir John Lawrence, G.C.B.', *Leisure Hour*, 419 (5 Jan. 1860), 12 (emphasis in original).

Lawrence, and also for the acts of certain individuals and their efforts to bring even greater public attention to Lawrence's exploits. Arthur Kinnaird provides one such example. Kinnaird was at this time the Liberal MP for Perth, and spoke frequently on Indian questions. He was also a devout evangelical.⁴⁶ Kinnaird, doubtless mindful that Lawrence was not only faithful to the evangelical cause but a great asset to it, on several occasions sought to promote Lawrence's Mutiny exploits. In April 1859, *The Times* published a letter from Kinnaird urging the government to confer a peerage on Lawrence. In his letter, Kinnaird explained that Lord Dalhousie (governor-general of India, 1848-56) had offered Lawrence a baronetcy a year before the Mutiny broke out. As Lawrence's previous services had therefore already merited that honour, the baronetcy accepted by Lawrence in 1859 could not be said to be in recognition of his Mutiny services.⁴⁷ Kinnaird also used his position in the House of Commons to press the government to confer a peerage on Lawrence.⁴⁸ The relationship between Kinnaird and Lawrence is not clear. It seems unlikely that they were acquainted while Lawrence was serving in India, but they certainly met on Lawrence's return after the Mutiny, and Kinnaird appeared with Lawrence at the presentation of the freedom of the city of Glasgow.⁴⁹ It seems however that Kinnaird pressed for Lawrence's claims to a peerage not on the grounds of personal friendship, but on the basis of his merits as a Christian hero of the Mutiny.

⁴⁶ Kinnaird, Arthur Fitzgerald, 10th Lord Kinnaird of Inchture and 2nd Baron Kinnaird of Rossie (1814-87): philanthropist, evangelical, banker, politician. Kinnaird was Liberal MP for Perth (1837-39 & 1852-78). Succeeded his brother Lord Kinnaird (1878). He was 'a familiar figure' at the May meetings of the evangelical societies at Exeter Hall. F. Prochaska, 'Kinnaird, Arthur Fitzgerald, tenth Lord Kinnaird of Inchture and second Baron Kinnaird of Rossie (1814-1887)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed.).

⁴⁷ Kinnaird to editor, *Times*, 12 Apr. 1859, p. 11. Kinnaird was correct in making this assertion about the previous offer of a baronetcy to Lawrence: see Bosworth Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence*, vol. II, p. 363.

⁴⁸ *Hansard*, 151 (26 July 1858), col. 2125.

⁴⁹ *Glasgow Herald*, 22 Sept. 1860, p. 3.

Character, manliness and duty

In his biographical portrait of Lawrence in the *Leisure Hour*, Edwardes sought to emphasise his friend's virtues of manliness and simplicity. Edwardes started by setting out Lawrence's full name and title, as the Herald's College would have written it: 'Sir John Laird Mair Lawrence, Baronet, Knight Grand Cross of the Bath, and Member of Her Majesty's Privy Council'. Edwardes then explained that to every Englishman in India, the subject of his article was 'plain John Lawrence'. This plainness was, for Edwardes, a characteristic Lawrence shared with other great men. 'So it ever is with really great men. We, in our gratitude, bind wreaths around their brows, heap titles on their heads, and fling heavy robes of office around their limbs; but they just shake themselves, and are *men* again.' Edwardes depicted Lawrence as an extremely rugged administrator, comfortable in the wild and among Indians; 'emphatically a *man*'.⁵⁰ In one passage, Edwardes described the end of a typical day during the period when Lawrence worked as a settlement officer:

Work over, out into the fields with horse or gun, for his strong frame and hardy spirit loved wild sports. But ever an eye to business: some jungle lair of cut-throats to be explored... And so home at sunset, with fine appetite for the simple meal... After that, more air (for the nights are hot,) an easy chair outside in the bright moonlight, with our large John in it, without coat or waistcoat, and shirt sleeves up over his elbows... altogether much at home; a giant in the act of refreshment. One by one the grey-beards of the district drop in too... and squat Eastern fashion on their heels and ankles, in a respectfully feudal ring, about their Saxon khan...⁵¹

A number of important themes are evident from this short passage: the simplicity and

⁵⁰ Edwardes, 'Sir John Lawrence, G.C.B.', 8 (emphasis in the original, in each case).

⁵¹ Edwardes, 'Sir John Lawrence, G.C.B.', 10.

plainness of John's meal and attire; his personal courage (exploring the 'jungle lair of cut-throats', alone); his sense of duty ('ever an eye to business'); his isolation (the only white man in the sketch); and his personal authority (the native elders or 'grey-beards' squat around him, 'in a respectfully feudal ring'). The description presented by Edwardes is likely to have resonated with contemporary interest in manliness, duty and character. The qualities invoked by 'character' were self-restraint, perseverance, strenuous effort, courage in the face of adversity, and duty.⁵² Courage in adversity was easier for domestic audiences to imagine if the individual was isolated in some way.⁵³ British officers in the Punjab were certainly isolated, as the above passage from Edwardes made clear. For the Georgian gentleman, the most prized human qualities could only be developed in the enjoyment of 'society', whereas for the respectable Victorian, work was the chief sphere in which moral worth was developed and displayed.⁵⁴ Edwardes described Lawrence as a 'colossal workman', who as chief commissioner of the Punjab undertook years of 'Herculean labour'.⁵⁵ Later biographers would amplify these themes. Sir Richard Temple for example wrote that the Punjab was the hardest place for officers to work: its Muslim and Sikh inhabitants were 'quite the strongest, manliest and sturdiest that the British had ever had to deal with in India'. Moreover, Temple characterised the eight hundred mile border with Afghanistan as 'the most arduous frontier in the Eastern empire.'⁵⁶

Lawrence and 'good government'

The providential narrative, emphasising the role of God, was not the only explanation

⁵² S. Collini, 'The Idea of "Character" in Victorian Political Thought', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 35 (1985), 36.

⁵³ Collini, 'The Idea of "Character" in Victorian Political Thought', 45-7.

⁵⁴ Collini, 'The Idea of "Character" in Victorian Political Thought', 39.

⁵⁵ Edwardes, 'Sir John Lawrence, G.C.B.', 12-3.

⁵⁶ Temple, *Lord Lawrence*, p. 50.

offered to contemporaries for Lawrence's resilience during the Mutiny. Another explanation, complementary to the providential version of events, was that the Sikhs and Muslims of the Punjab had come to Lawrence's standard in 1857 because his administration had been so *good*. This account helped explain what was otherwise a conundrum: how the Punjab, which in the spring of 1857 had appeared to be the most vulnerable province, had in fact proved the foundation of British victory. Public attention was accordingly directed to the administration of the Punjab from its annexation in 1849 to the outbreak of Mutiny in 1857. Britons were presented with reverential descriptions of how a 'nation of soldiers' (the Sikhs before annexation) had 'literally, in the expressive language of Scripture, beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks... (Cheers.)'⁵⁷ The contrast between the 'two Punjabs' (before and after annexation) was deemed remarkable: where before there had been a desert, Sikh yeomen now 'stood waist-deep in the exuberant harvest'.⁵⁸ It was this that explained 'the extraordinary and unique spectacle of a recently conquered people drawing the sword in the defence of those by whom they had been subdued.'⁵⁹ Contemporaries were thus repeatedly presented with the idea that the Punjab's resilience during the Mutiny was in part a natural result of Lawrence's beneficent administration. This argument seems to have been accepted by some Britons, including men in the Corporation of London: 'the government of Sir John Lawrence was so popular that where rebels escaped they were hunted up by the natives and were brought back to receive condign punishment. (Hear, hear.)'⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Speech of B. Scott (chamberlain of the Corporation of the City of London), at the presentation of the freedom of the City of London to Sir John Lawrence, 3 June 1859, reported in *Times*, 4 June 1859, p. 9 (hereafter, the 'Presentation of the freedom of the City of London to Sir John Lawrence, 3 June 1859').

⁵⁸ Cust, 'The great proconsul', pp. 247-8.

⁵⁹ Speech of B. Scott at the Presentation of the freedom of the City of London to Sir John Lawrence, 3 June 1859.

⁶⁰ Meeting of the Corporation of London, 4 March 1858.

Lawrence himself placed great emphasis on the idea that the ‘good government’ of his province, with its paternalistic concern for ‘improving the condition of the people’, to a great extent explained the Punjab’s resilience during the crisis of 1857-58. As he explained in a speech to the Corporation of London in June 1859, on the occasion of his presentation with the freedom of the city:

If I was placed in a position of extreme danger and difficulty, I was also fortunate in having around me some of the ablest civil and military officers in India. In times of peace we had worked so as to be prepared for times of commotion and danger. We had laboured to introduce into a new country order, law, and system. Our object had been to improve the condition of the people, and obtain their goodwill and sympathies, and hence it happened that, by God’s help, we were able to meet the storm which must have otherwise overwhelmed us all. (Loud cheering.)⁶¹

On this occasion, Lawrence placed less emphasis on the role of divine providence than in his address to the Evangelical Alliance. Although he changed the emphasis of his arguments to suit the particular audience, he nonetheless continued to include ‘God’s help’ as part of his account. There is no suggestion that his religious faith was anything other than sincere. But the principal message in the above passage is that a beneficent administration, carried out by a small number of British officers in the Punjab, had saved India. This was doubtless an attractive narrative for many contemporary Britons. It was certainly more flattering to the way they imagined the empire in India than less palatable truths about the suppression of the Mutiny. The resilience of the Punjab had in fact depended to a great extent on sheer military force, the threat of that force,

⁶¹ Presentation of the freedom of the City of London to Sir John Lawrence, 3 June 1859.

intimidation through severe measures of retribution and the exploitation of racial divisions between Hindus and Sikhs.⁶² In avoiding mention of these topics, Lawrence was following an approach taken in almost all contemporary British accounts of the Mutiny. In the same way, technical advantages enjoyed by the victors—such as the electric telegraph and Enfield rifle—were barely mentioned in many accounts of the conflict. The vital role played by Indian troops fighting on the British side was also often overlooked.⁶³ Lawrence's account of victory also fitted a prevailing notion that natives could be ruled through the power of personality, and without evident resort to force.⁶⁴ Again, this was a more palatable idea than relating how Indians had been 'blown away' from guns (a common practice), or discussing details of *divide et impera*, such as the decision to send Hindu troops to parts of the Punjab where the Sikh population was naturally hostile to them.

Kathryn Tidrick has argued that John was 'never admired as extravagantly' as his brother Sir Henry Lawrence, because 'he did not possess, as Henry was thought to do, the supreme quality of effortless dominion over native races. His achievements had no mystery. They were too evidently the result of intelligence, endurance, strong nerves, and hard work.'⁶⁵ Certainly, Lawrence's 'Herculean labour' in the Punjab was well publicised after the Mutiny, and is likely to have resonated with Victorian attitudes to work. However, recognition of Lawrence's hard work seems to have been accompanied by admiration for his personal influence. R.D. Mangles, a director and later chairman of the East India Company, observed that if Lawrence's Punjab administration 'had not been equally just and firm; if he had not won for himself the affections of the people, he

⁶² Bosworth Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence*, vol. II, pp. 42-3.

⁶³ Indians supplied two-thirds of the army which stormed Delhi. Spiers, *The Army and Society*, pp. 132, 134.

⁶⁴ Tidrick, *Empire and the English Character*, p. xii.

⁶⁵ Tidrick, *Empire and the English Character*, p. 24.

never could have denuded so great a province, which had been so lately conquered, of those troops which he sent to Delhi. Great indeed must have been the influence which he gained over the Sikhs.’⁶⁶ Robert Cust subsequently took this point even further, describing a man with the touch of a conjurer: for John Lawrence had ‘found the Panjab a den of wild beasts, and left it an orderly garden’.⁶⁷ The perceived instrumentality of Lawrence’s personal influence had a long afterlife. In 1904 an Indian professor defined what was meant by the term ‘saviour of India’, and here there was no mention of God, military superiority, or Lawrence’s subordinates in the Punjab:

It is the opinion of many men that it was only the strong mind of Lord Lawrence that so influenced the Sikhs of the Punjab that, while other provinces had broken out in rebellion, that province remained faithful and loyal to the British Government. If the Sikhs, too, had risen in rebellion, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for the British Government to preserve a footing on the soil of India. Hence Lord Lawrence was the saviour of India.⁶⁸

Lawrence and clemency

In suppressing revolt in the Punjab, Lawrence carried out severe measures of retribution. Yet an important part of his appeal to British audiences in the wake of the Mutiny was his perceived clemency. This is not necessarily a contradiction, for Lawrence’s actions must be understood in the context of the behaviour of his

⁶⁶ Mangles’s comments were cited by Alderman Salomons during the Meeting of the Corporation of London, 4 March 1858. Mangles worked in India from 1820-28 and 1831-39, undertaking a variety of administrative posts for the East India Company. An evangelical Anglican, Mangles was a member of the Church Missionary Society. A life-long Whig, he was MP for Guildford, 1841-1858. In 1847 Mangles became a director of the East India Company and in 1857 was elected chairman. In 1858 he retired from parliament on his appointment to the new council of India, a position he held until his retirement in 1866. K. Prior, ‘Mangles, Ross Donnelly (1801-1877)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed.).

⁶⁷ Cust, ‘The great proconsul’, p. 249.

⁶⁸ S.C. Bhattacharya, *Notes on Sir Richard Temple’s Lord Lawrence* (Lahore, 1904), p. 1. Bhattacharya was professor of English at D.A.-V. College, Lahore. This book, published by The Students’ Own Agency, was part of a series for students at Punjab University; other titles included notes on Charles Dickens’s *Tale of Two Cities* and Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*.

compatriots in India and in the context of the specific period, that is to say the crisis of 1857-58. A febrile atmosphere developed in many sections of the British community in India (and at home) following reports of atrocities, including rape, committed by Indian rebels against British women and children. It should be remembered that the governor-general's nickname 'Clemency Canning' was initially used not in reverence but reproach. A letter Lawrence received from Herbert Edwardes on 1 June 1857 sheds light on the prevailing atmosphere in Anglo-India. Edwardes's letter revealed plans for the execution of all one hundred and twenty men from a Bengal army regiment. Lawrence replied to Edwardes by the next post, urging him to reconsider: 'I would not put them all to death. I do not think that we shall be justified in the eyes of the Almighty in doing so.' Lawrence suggested that executing one-fourth to one-third of the men would suffice, as this would demonstrate to the Indian sepoy 'that we punish to deter, and not for revenge... Otherwise, men will fight desperately to the last, as certain they must die.'⁶⁹ In the event forty men, rather than one hundred and twenty, were 'blown away' in the presence of the Peshawar garrison and spectators from the surrounding country.⁷⁰ Following the recapture of Delhi, the British perpetrated acts of vengeance including summary executions for over four months, before Lawrence took the city under his charge (in February 1858) and 'effectively checked' them.⁷¹ Moreover, Lawrence's reputation for clemency was based on the fact that he had advocated an amnesty for the rebels from an early stage. He wrote to Lord Canning in February 1858, setting out his views:

My Lord, — I do not know whether you may feel disposed or not to grant anything like an amnesty in favour of the least guilty of the mutineers and insurgents in Oude and elsewhere. But

⁶⁹ Lawrence to Edwardes, 1 June 1857, cited in Bosworth Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence*, vol. II, p. 72.

⁷⁰ Bosworth Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence*, vol. II, p. 73.

⁷¹ Metcalf, *The Aftermath of Revolt*, p. 295.

I feel persuaded that such a measure would be very politic. It is much easier for people to advocate the destruction of all offenders, than to show how this can be effected. Now that we have taken Delhi, beaten every large body of mutineers in the field, and are prepared to enter Oude again in force, we should simplify matters much if we issued a proclamation declaring that those mutineers who have not murdered their officers, or women or children, and who gave up their arms shall be allowed to go to their homes and live unmolested... We could then deal more easily with the desperate characters. At present, all are held together from the very desperation of their condition... we should not also forget that, as a ruling power, we have also our shortcomings and want of foresight to answer for. We placed temptation and opportunity before the mutineers, which it was difficult to resist. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, committed themselves simply from the force of circumstances; on the one hand threatened with fire and sword if they refused; on the other, plunder and social advantages were pressed on them. Many hesitated long, but seeing no vitality in our power, no prospect of succour, they concluded that the game was up, and began to act for themselves.⁷²

His letter to Canning shows that Lawrence favoured an amnesty partly on grounds of pragmatism: without one, the Mutiny would become a protracted affair, only undermining British authority in the eyes of Indian observers. (The amnesty was eventually conceded late in 1858.⁷³) Lawrence's perceived clemency certainly impressed his Christian admirers, who emphasised its religious motivation rather than its pragmatism. Kinnaird hailed Lawrence as a man: 'who knew how to be severe when severity was necessary to render English life secure and British authority supreme, but when our enemy was vanquished knew how to show mercy and to stop the shedding of blood'.⁷⁴ Lawrence's biographers were also eager to emphasise this clemency. As well

⁷² Lawrence to Earl Canning, 1 Feb. 1858, cited in Bosworth Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence*, vol. II, pp. 277-8.

⁷³ Steele, 'Baron Lawrence'.

⁷⁴ *Times*, 12 Apr. 1859, p. 11.

as allowing these men to acclaim Lawrence's sense of 'justice' and 'humanity', it allowed broader conclusions to be drawn about British imperialism, especially when contrasted with older colonial powers. This comparison proved irresistible to the classical scholar Reginald Bosworth Smith:

That the mosques of Delhi were not desecrated; that the inhabitants were not left to shift for themselves as homeless outcasts; that the whole city, with its glorious buildings and its historic memories, was not levelled with the ground, and the plough driven over its site; in one word, that the lasting shame emblazoned in letters of blood and fire in the annals of Imperial Rome, by her ruthless destruction of Carthage and of Corinth, is not written in equally indelible characters in the annals of English rule in India, was due, in great part at least, to the justice and the humanity, the statesmanship and the Christian spirit of John Lawrence.⁷⁵

Bosworth Smith was of course Lawrence's official biographer and presented his subject in a flattering light. However, a number of modern scholars have made the same point about Lawrence's instrumentality in arresting the indiscriminate killing perpetrated by many of his compatriots.⁷⁶ In this sense, Lawrence was not merely the 'saviour of India' but the saviour of Britain's reputation and its ability to claim a moral legitimacy to govern Indians.

How these depictions of Lawrence were actually received is of course difficult to measure. Kathryn Tidrick has suggested that although Lawrence became a popular hero in Britain, his contribution to the preservation of British India was not in fact fully appreciated by the public. This, Tidrick asserts, was because Lawrence's own

⁷⁵ Bosworth Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence*, vol. II, p. 260. Bosworth Smith had in 1878 published *Carthage and the Carthaginians*.

⁷⁶ See e.g. Metcalf, *The Aftermath of Revolt*, p. 295; Tidrick, *Empire and the English Character*, p. 28.

statements about ‘good government’ and his faithful subordinates in the Punjab shifted attention towards the band of brothers working under him.⁷⁷ It is difficult however to be this exact. The evidence from contemporary newspaper reports certainly suggests that Lawrence was very popular in the years after the Mutiny: on public occasions he was usually received with loud cheering and jubilation (for example at meetings of the Evangelical Alliance, Corporation of London, and Grocers’ Company). Moreover, numerous publishers perceived that a variety of material about Lawrence would be popular. This material included images of the ‘saviour of India’, thus offering Britons the opportunity to glimpse a man about whom so much was being written. In 1858, the *Illustrated London News* reproduced some woodcuts of Lawrence.⁷⁸ The article by Edwardes in the *Leisure Hour* included a full-page portrait, in which Lawrence appears as a physically imposing man, with a somewhat serious, stern face.⁷⁹ From October 1859, a wax model of Lawrence was displayed at Madame Tussaud’s in London. The Radical *Reynolds’s Newspaper* was certainly impressed by this model: it had ‘very appropriately’ been placed as a companion to the figures of Generals Havelock and Campbell, and apparently no expense had been spared by the proprietor and no labour by the artist in order to procure an accurate portrait. The happy result was ‘one of the best modelled figures in the collection’.⁸⁰

Dissenting voices

At the East India Company meeting of August 1858, two men had opposed the resolution granting a pension to Lawrence. The first man, one ‘Mr. Crawshay’, alleged that the directors were acting ‘in collusion’ with *The Times* in seeking to secure a

⁷⁷ Tidrick, *Empire and the English Character*, pp. 28-9.

⁷⁸ Ormond, *Early Victorian Portraits*, vol. I, pp. 264-6.

⁷⁹ Edwardes, ‘Sir John Lawrence, G.C.B.’, 9.

⁸⁰ *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 30 Oct. 1859, p. 9.

peerage for Lawrence. The speaker was almost certainly George Crawshay, variously an ironmaster, Radical political activist, and stockholder in the East India Company.⁸¹ Crawshay accused Lawrence of disobeying the orders of the Company by seeking to convert Indians to Christianity.⁸² He further accused Lawrence of committing ‘atrocious acts of cruelty’ in suppressing revolt in the Punjab, citing as evidence certain statements published in an account by Frederick Cooper.⁸³ Crawshay’s attempt to amend the proposed resolution received the support of only one other proprietor. The original resolution was thus agreed to, amidst cheering.⁸⁴ Crawshay’s voice was clearly a marginal one, but it nonetheless demonstrates that not all contemporaries accepted Lawrence’s account of how the Mutiny was suppressed in the Punjab by good government, good men and God’s grace.

Lawrence’s reputation as an evangelical also led to criticism from some publications in Britain. The following month an article appeared in the *Saturday Review*, responding to certain proposals on which Lawrence and Herbert Edwardes were agreed: that Bible classes could safely be established in Indian government schools, and that religious processions should be prohibited throughout India. The *Saturday Review* argued that on these points the great majority of Anglo-Indians took contrary views to Lawrence and Edwardes. Lawrence’s ‘error’, according to the article, was that he thought what could be achieved by force in the Punjab was possible in all other parts of India. Although the

⁸¹ Crawshay was committed to the principle of religious toleration, a member of the Anti-State Church Association, and had denounced the ‘greased cartridge’ affair after the start of the Mutiny. J. Allen, ‘Crawshay, George (1821-1896)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed. May 2009).

⁸² Crawshay in fact said that one of Lawrence’s subordinate officers, Robert Montgomery, had issued orders for the preferment of native Christians in official positions but that Lawrence had to bear responsibility for the actions of his subordinates. East India Company Meeting, 25 Aug. 1858.

⁸³ Cooper’s account, *The crisis in the Punjab, from the 10th of May until the fall of Delhi*, was published in 1858.

⁸⁴ East India Company Meeting, 25 Aug. 1858.

country owed a ‘vast debt’ to Lawrence, ‘his peculiar situation’ (the number of troops he wielded in the Punjab) apparently prevented his judgement being conclusive.⁸⁵ In a later piece, the *Saturday Review* regretted the likelihood that the ‘Exeter Hall people’ would seek to raise Lawrence as an instrument in their enthusiasm for ‘the cause of Blood and Bibles’ (that is to say, measures of ‘severity’ and a ‘proselytising’ policy).⁸⁶

Government ministers in Britain may also have been wary of Lawrence’s reputation for religious zeal. The peerage that many prominent East India Company officials, evangelicals and newspaper columnists had agitated for was not granted to Lawrence. Several considerations may have played a part in this decision. For example, the directors of the East India Company understood from conversations with government ministers such as Lord Stanley that it was more difficult for the Queen to confer peerages on the civilian heroes of the Mutiny. When Delhi was captured honours were bestowed on military officers, as they were after the relief of Lucknow; but no honours were conferred on civilians (except awards in the order of the Bath).⁸⁷ An official explanation was not provided, but when Arthur Kinnaid pressed Lord Stanley in parliament on the matter, Stanley enumerated the various honours Lawrence had already received.⁸⁸ It is possible therefore that the government simply determined that no further honours were required in Lawrence’s case. Lawrence certainly received considerable official recognition for his Mutiny exploits: promotion to GCB, the thanks of both Houses of parliament, Privy Counsellorship, an East India Company pension (allowing him to accept a previously offered baronetcy), and promotion to lieutenant-governor. However, it is hard to avoid the sense—especially given the government’s

⁸⁵ Anon., ‘Sir John Lawrence and Colonel Edwardes’, *Saturday Review*, 6 (30 Oct. 1858), 414-5.

⁸⁶ Anon., ‘Sir John Lawrence’s Return’, *Saturday Review*, 7 (16 Apr. 1859), 456.

⁸⁷ East India Company Meeting, 25 Aug. 1858.

⁸⁸ Lord Stanley, *Hansard*, 151 (26 July 1858), cols. 2125-6.

post-Mutiny emphasis on religious toleration in British India—that Lawrence’s reputation as an evangelical possibly denied him a peerage.

The government also chose not to appoint Lawrence as governor-general in succession to Earl Canning in 1862. Instead the Earl of Elgin was preferred. Elgin came from an old aristocratic family and had experience of imperial administration in Canada and China, but knew nothing of India.⁸⁹ Elgin’s tenure was to prove short: he died in November 1863, en route to Peshawar. David Steele has suggested that Lawrence’s ‘evangelical bent’, together with the ‘offence’ given by his views on the deficiencies of the British military and on army reform in India, counted against him when the government was considering who should succeed Elgin.⁹⁰ (Lawrence had argued forcefully for the irregular system, which allowed Indians more responsibility for commanding their own men and was unpopular with many in the British military establishment.) However, Lawrence *was* appointed to succeed Lord Elgin.

It is worth emphasising just how remarkable this decision was. There was something of a convention that no servant of the East India Company could serve as governor-general of India. There was also an expectation that the governor-general must be a peer, and must have gained political experience in Britain or the empire. Lawrence’s candidature may have been strengthened by the coincidence of Elgin’s death with an expedition on the north-west frontier of India (the Ambela, or Sitana, war; this will be examined in the next chapter). Nonetheless, that Lawrence was appointed without satisfying any of the normal criteria indicates his standing after the Mutiny. The secretary of state for India,

⁸⁹ Bruce, James: (1811-63): succeeded as 8th Earl of Elgin & 12th Earl of Kincardine, 1847; governor Jamaica, 1842-46; governor-in-chief British North America, 1846-54; high commissioner China, 1857-60; governor-general India, 1862-63.

⁹⁰ Steele, ‘Baron Lawrence’.

Sir Charles Wood, later told the House of Commons that he knew ‘no one better fitted to undertake the Government of India’.⁹¹ The government had also been quick to seek a little political credit from this merit-based appointment. Wood had therefore reminded parliament that Lawrence ‘had raised himself to his present high position unaided and unassisted by any extraneous influence, and entirely by the force of his own character and abilities.’⁹² This emphasis on ‘character’ was consistent with opposition to the politics of patronage and the idea that ‘true worth’ was unrelated to social position.⁹³ As Colonel William Sykes acknowledged, it was ‘creditable to the Government’ that they had selected Lawrence, ‘considering that the Viceroyalty of India was such an object of ambition to the great families of this country.’⁹⁴

Reynolds’s Newspaper marvelled at this ‘unexpected plunge from the lofty aristocratic cliffs on which the former chief rulers of India were wont to be taken, into the depths of middle-class life’. The newspaper explained to its working-class audience that this was an excellent appointment for British India, because it provided ‘her with so able and experienced a man’. However, *Reynolds’s Newspaper* was not prepared to give the government any credit for a merit-based selection, arguing that it was a middle-class appointment by default, because British aristocrats were simply ‘too precious to have their lives risked in such a place.’ The paper explained that the Indian climate and a governor-general’s duties were not conducive to longevity, and had proved fatal to the previous three incumbents: Dalhousie, Canning, and Elgin.⁹⁵

⁹¹ *Hansard*, 176 (21 July 1864), col. 1823.

⁹² *Hansard*, 173 (8 Feb. 1864), col. 223.

⁹³ Collini, ‘The Idea of “Character” in Victorian Political Thought’, 40.

⁹⁴ *Hansard*, 173 (8 Feb. 1864), col. 224.

⁹⁵ Although ‘governing families’ loved honour and riches, they loved life more. *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 6 Dec. 1863, p. 4.

Lawrence as governor-general of India

On 12 January 1864, Sir John Lawrence returned to India, this time as governor-general. From this moment he was subjected to more frequent and more intensive criticism, especially from within the British community in India. His reputation as an evangelical was problematic almost immediately, when he prohibited the Hindu practice of throwing their dead into the river Hooghly. For Lawrence, this was a pragmatic decision based on the requirements of sanitation (he had just established a sanitary commission), but the order was criticised by some of his compatriots as the consequence of his religious zeal.⁹⁶

From 1864, a new criticism of Lawrence emerged. Some Anglo-Indians found Lawrence's manner too austere for the splendid office of governor-general, and newspaper correspondents complained about the 'plainness' of his rule. As one of his biographers later wrote, with considerable understatement, British India was 'a country where external style is much considered'.⁹⁷ Yet only rarely did Lawrence indulge in the sort of pomp that was expected of the governor-general. After the 1866 *darbar* at Agra, the Calcutta correspondent of *The Times* was relieved that at last 'Sir John Lawrence has, in outward pomp and glittering display of our power, shown himself equal to the high office of Her Majesty's Viceroy'.⁹⁸ However, even on that occasion, sections of the British press regretted that Lawrence's address to the native chiefs had been 'unduly austere', and he felt the need to justify his remarks to the secretary of state.⁹⁹ The following month Lawrence was attacked in the Anglo-Indian press for his allegedly 'shabby treatment' of the visiting Duc D'Alençon. Lawrence wrote to the secretary of

⁹⁶ Bosworth Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence*, vol. II, p. 418.

⁹⁷ Temple, *Lord Lawrence*, p. 175.

⁹⁸ *Times*, 22 Dec. 1866, p. 7.

⁹⁹ Lawrence to Cranborne, 21 Feb. 1867, Lawrence Mss/32A, no. 14.

state, explaining there was ‘not an iota of truth’ in such reports.¹⁰⁰ In defending his actions, the ‘autocrat of the Punjab’ displayed a sensitivity to press criticism that will be examined in chapter VI. British ‘society’ in Calcutta seems to have compared Lawrence unfavourably with his aristocratic predecessors, and Reginald Bosworth Smith sought to counter allegations of ‘bad manners and parsimony’ in his subject’s viceregal hospitality.¹⁰¹

An example of how Lawrence may have been perceived by some Anglo-Indians, especially those from outside the Punjab, is provided in the memoirs of John Beames. Beames worked in the Indian civil service, almost exclusively in Bengal (1861-93). The evidence presented by Beames is problematic: although he made some notes while serving in India, his account was written from memory in 1896, once he had returned to England. He also claimed that Lawrence had checked his career, and seems to have borne a grudge.¹⁰² Nonetheless, it is interesting that he depicted Lawrence as ‘a rough, coarse man; in appearance more like a “navvy” than a gentleman’. Beames recounts that a colleague of his ‘imprudently’ brought a piano with him to the Punjab; Lawrence apparently found this an ‘unpardonable refinement’ for an officer, and said he would smash it.¹⁰³ Beames offered this description of Lawrence’s puritanical tastes:

His ideal of a district officer was a hard, active man in boots and breeches, who almost lived in the saddle, worked all day and nearly all night, ate and drank when and where he could, had no family ties, no wife or children to hamper him, and whose whole establishment consisted of a

¹⁰⁰ Lawrence was at pains to explain the Duc D’Alençon’s sudden arrival and the hospitality provided to him. ‘Had he been the Prince of Wales I could not have done more under the circumstances. I merely mention this in case the matter should excite comments in England.’ Lawrence to Cranborne, 21 Jan. 1867, Lawrence Mss/32A, no. 7.

¹⁰¹ Steele, ‘Baron Lawrence’.

¹⁰² J. Beames, *Memoirs of a Bengal Civilian* (London, 2003), pp. 11, 186.

¹⁰³ Beames, *Memoirs of a Bengal Civilian*, pp. 102-3.

camp bed, an odd table and chair or so and a small box of clothes such as could be slung on a camel.¹⁰⁴

It seems likely that Beames's anecdotes about Lawrence were somewhat exaggerated, and it is clear he resented a man who had attended the same school (the East India Company college at Haileybury) but gone on to such high office. Nonetheless, it also seems likely that this characterisation, although exaggerated, to some extent reflected a perception among some contemporaries that Lawrence was too austere. The sensitivities of the reader are of course relevant to how these messages would have been received: to his biographers his simplicity and plainness remained virtues.¹⁰⁵ Herbert Edwardes, in his reverential article in the *Leisure Hour*, might happily have used a description not too dissimilar from that provided by Beames; but in praise not criticism of his subject. However, there was clearly a difference between the qualities British audiences could celebrate in a settlement officer or provincial administrator and the qualities those same audiences expected of the governor-general. After the Mutiny, the governor-general was styled 'viceroy and governor-general of India'. As viceroy—the Queen's representative in India—he was required to entertain splendidly. Criticism of Lawrence's 'plainness' was very likely exaggerated: for example the 'puritan' of the Punjab seemed happy enough to wear the star and riband of his GCB.¹⁰⁶ But after the end of his term in India, the social background of viceroys seemed to be more important than ever, and the four men who followed Lawrence were all aristocrats.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Beames, *Memoirs of a Bengal Civilian*, p. 102.

¹⁰⁵ Reverend Ellis for instance seemed to relish the fact that Lawrence's 'simple manners and Cromwellian bearing offended some of the empty nobodies of Calcutta.' Ellis described with obvious approval how Lawrence dispensed with most of the escort required by previous governors-general, in order to save his men from the heat of the sun. Ellis, *Lord Lawrence*, p. 78.

¹⁰⁶ When the occasion merited it, as at the presentation of the freedom of the City of London to him, on 3 June 1859.

¹⁰⁷ After Lawrence, the next four viceroys were: Richard Southwell Bourke, 6th Earl of Mayo; Thomas George Baring, 1st Earl of Northbrook (eldest son of Sir Francis Thornhill Baring, 3rd baronet and later

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During the Indian Mutiny, Lawrence appears to have been ahead of events: urging the recapture of Delhi on ponderous generals; raising vast irregular forces while many thought no Indians could be trusted; and pressing for clemency amidst orgies of vengeance. However, after his return to India in 1864, some of the characteristics celebrated in the hero of the Mutiny became difficult to reconcile with the demands of viceregal office. Lawrence the evangelical now had official responsibility for *not* enforcing a Christian policy in India; Lawrence the puritan now found that his manner was too austere for some Anglo-Indian tastes; and Lawrence the autocrat of the Punjab became shackled by Calcutta politics. Lawrence nonetheless remained a national hero, because his achievements continued to be perceived as instrumental to the survival of British India in the crisis of 1857-58. His heroic status was subsequently of great significance to the determination of British policy in Afghanistan, because it endowed him with an enduring reputation for vigour and for knowledge of the frontier province that had ‘held firm’.

Critics of his foreign policy later complained bitterly about the authority Lawrence exerted on account of his Mutiny exploits. ‘Lawrence’s services to the country were so conspicuous,’ one journalist later protested, ‘and his position was altogether so exceptional among Anglo-Indian administrators, that there is little wonder in his decisions on matters connected with Afghan policy having been accepted by many

1st Baron Northbrook); Edward Robert Bulwer-Lytton, 1st Earl of Lytton (son of Edward George Earle Lytton Bulwer Lytton, 1st Baron Lytton); and George Frederick Samuel Robinson, 1st Marquess of Ripon (son of Frederick John Robinson, Viscount Goderich and later Earl of Ripon).

people as conclusive, equally above criticism and dissent.’¹⁰⁸ Although this assessment considerably understated the opposition to Lawrence’s policy, his heroic reputation did, as the following chapter will argue, have a significant influence on British policy-making beyond the north-west frontier. Successive secretaries of state for India, writing to the governor-general between 12 January 1864 and 12 January 1869, were not corresponding with a mere aristocrat, but with the ‘saviour of India’.

¹⁰⁸ D.C. Boulger, ‘Lord Lawrence and Masterly Inactivity’, *National Review*, 1 (Apr. 1883), 286.

II

British policy in Afghanistan:

Sir John Lawrence and official decision-making, 1864-1869

Sir John Lawrence's tenure as governor-general of India coincided with two developments that threatened the relative tranquillity enjoyed in Anglo-Afghan relations since the end of the first Afghan war in 1842. Dost Muhammad Khan, Amir of Afghanistan since 1842, died in June 1863. Although the Dost had nominated his son Sher Ali Khan as successor, this choice was contested by some of his relatives, leading to a prolonged civil war. Such were the vicissitudes of this fratricidal war that it was impossible to predict which contender would emerge victorious, or if Afghanistan would split into separate kingdoms. The second development was the renewal of Russian military advances in central Asia. The combination of the Afghan civil war and Russian expansion allowed an old British nightmare to resurface: that a foreign power would establish its influence in Afghanistan. All of this mattered to Britain on strategic grounds, because India's north-west frontier (contiguous with Afghanistan) was considered its most vulnerable border. Government ministers therefore had ample grounds for asserting their authority for the determination of India's foreign policy in this region. However, four secretaries of state in succession each insisted that Lawrence should have considerable latitude for deciding what British policy in Afghanistan should be.

The discretion given to Lawrence is not simply a story of responsible ministers allowing the 'man-on-the-spot' to decide mere details of a general policy with which they agreed. The reasons for Lawrence's authority are therefore worth examining in detail. This

chapter will argue that ‘policy-makers’ in Whitehall considered that *knowledge* of India and Afghanistan, and the *strength* of Britain’s administrators, were so important that they readily deferred to a man with a great reputation for both. However, the authority exercised by Lawrence on Afghan policy should also be understood in the context of political events in Britain. This chapter will examine the extent to which the political turbulence of franchise reform and certain other domestic questions, which made the tenure of some ministers precarious and short, also served to distract their attentions from the India Office.

Responsibility for British policy in Afghanistan

In 1858, responsibility for the government of India was transferred from the East India Company to the crown. The fourteenth Earl of Derby explained the legislative intention in the House of Lords: ‘India must be put on the same footing as the other possessions of the Crown, and be administered by a Minister responsible to Parliament.’¹ That minister (the secretary of state for India) had to have regard to other departments, especially the Foreign Office, but he was nonetheless expected to wield significant powers. The secretary of state would be advised by a new body, the ‘council of India’ (sitting in London), but he was not bound by the decisions of his councillors, nor obliged to consult them on urgent or diplomatic matters.² Sir Charles Wood, having initially experienced some interference from his councillors, later recorded that he won for the secretary of state ‘abundant power in one way or another of enforcing his views’.³ Wood was also determined that the British government should exert its

¹ *Hansard*, 151 (15 July 1858), col. 1453. Lord Derby was then prime minister, and the legislation in question was the 1858 Government of India Act.

² Although where expenditure was required, the minister had to obtain a majority vote of his council: R.J. Moore, ‘Imperial India, 1858-1914’, in A. Porter (ed.) *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume III The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 424-5.

³ Wood, Charles, 1st Viscount Halifax (1800-85): succeeded to baronetcy, 1846; president of the Board

authority over the governor-general, and the government in India, on all matters of ‘principle’. He explained his approach to Lawrence’s predecessor, the Earl of Elgin:

The Home Govt is the absolute power—& strong as its disposition may be to support the Govt in India (as it ought) there are limits to that. In details & urgent matters the Govt of India ought to do everything but in matters of principle, it ought to be sure of the support of the Home Govt.⁴

Wood’s relaxation of control over mere ‘details’ was consistent with the government’s intention for the 1858 Act.⁵ However, Wood’s other exception—for ‘urgent matters’—was being annihilated by improvements in communications technology. By 1865 Lawrence, in Calcutta, could receive Wood’s London telegrams in just three days.⁶ This technological progress offered government ministers a potential control over imperial governors that was not available to their predecessors in the early nineteenth century, when communications from London were sent on the six-month voyage via the Cape. In that period, governors-general had assumed vast powers, not infrequently confronting the home authorities with the *fait accompli* of territorial expansion.⁷ Technological innovation could not of course make metropolitan control complete: a governor-general

of Control, 1852-55; secretary of state for India, 18 June 1859 – 16 Feb. 1866; created Viscount Halifax, 1866. Wood’s memorandum on Procedure, n.d. [1869], R.J. Moore, *Sir Charles Wood’s Indian Policy, 1853–66* (Manchester, 1966), p. 39, cited in Moore, ‘Imperial India’, p. 426.

⁴ Wood to Elgin, 9 Apr. 1862, British Library, papers of James Bruce, 8th Earl of Elgin as viceroy of India, Mss Eur F83 (hereafter ‘Elgin Mss’)/7, f118 (emphasis in original).

⁵ The Earl of Derby: ‘with regard to the details of the government of India, the less interference there is on the part of Parliament the better prospect will there be of securing the happiness and contentment of the people of India.’ *Hansard*, 151 (15 July 1858), col. 1448.

⁶ Lawrence marvelled: ‘Is it not a wonderful thing more like magic than any thing of human invention, being able to receive news in less than 4 days?’ Lawrence to Wood, 4 March 1865 (2), Lawrence Mss/30, no. 17.

⁷ There was a much shorter ‘overland’ (via the Mediterranean and Suez) alternative to the Cape route, but this could be cut when Turkey was at odds with Britain. J.S. Galbraith, ‘The “Turbulent Frontier” as a factor in British expansion’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 2 (Jan. 1960), 151-3.

might still exceed his instructions, or ignore them entirely.⁸

Responsibility for determining policy in Afghanistan was certainly one of those matters of ‘principle’ on which the British government should have been the ‘absolute power’. This was because of Afghanistan’s geographical location, adjacent to British India’s north-west frontier. Policy-makers perceived the north-west frontier as the most vulnerable part of British India, on the basis that the Royal Navy and the Himalayas guarded all other points of entry.⁹ If Russia were to invade India directly, then across the north-west frontier she would have to advance. Russia also posed a more oblique threat. Some British officials and military strategists thought that her expansion in central Asia would foment unrest in India. This threat, rendered more acute by the experience of the Mutiny, meant that in any future conflict with Russia Britain might have to maintain large reserve forces in India in order to prevent native insurrection.¹⁰ Ira Klein has argued that British fears of Russian advances towards India were responsible, primarily, for the first and second Afghan wars (respectively 1838-42 and 1878-81).¹¹ Anxieties about the security of this frontier resurfaced with the renewal of Russian military advances in the eighteen-sixties. This was by no means an exclusively official preoccupation: Afghanistan was, as editorials in *The Times* acknowledged, ‘a subject of imperishable interest’ to its readers.¹²

⁸ Lord Lytton may have considerably exceeded his instructions, in pursuing an aggressive frontier policy before the second Afghan war. See e.g. M. Cowling, ‘Lytton, the Cabinet, and the Russians, August to November 1878’, *English Historical Review*, 76 (1961), 59-79. Lytton’s instrumentality has however been questioned by other historians, and a powerful contrary view is offered by I. Klein, ‘Who made the second Afghan war?’, *Journal of Asian History*, 8 (1974), 97-121.

⁹ J.L. Duthie, ‘Some further insights into the working of mid-Victorian imperialism: Lord Salisbury, the “Forward” Group and Anglo-Afghan relations: 1874-1878’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 8 (1980), 199.

¹⁰ A.P. Thornton, ‘The reopening of the “Central Asian question”, 1864-9’, *History*, 41 (1956), 125-6.

¹¹ ‘The British were an insular people,’ Klein adds, ‘but not in India, and Russian proximity troubled them more than it would have bothered a continental power, used to contiguity with serious rivals.’ Klein, ‘Who made the second Afghan war?’, pp. 120-1.

¹² *Times*, 9 Dec. 1868, p. 9.

However, metropolitan control was not as systematic as anticipated either by the legislation of 1858, or Wood's interpretation of it. In practice, four secretaries of state in succession each insisted that Lawrence should have considerable latitude for deciding what British policy in Afghanistan should be. This devolution of power illustrates how individuals could exercise authority outside constitutional frameworks, not because they were headstrong or exploited slow communications, but because such authority was voluntarily surrendered to them.

Knowledge and strength

At the time of his appointment as governor-general, Lawrence's reputation rested not only on his administrative success and vigour in suppressing the Mutiny, but also on his knowledge of the country and people around the north-west frontier. His knowledge was derived from his long experience in India and the Punjab, as well as from his negotiation of the Anglo-Afghan treaties of 1855 and 1857. The 1855 treaty exchanged guarantees of territorial integrity and promised 'perpetual peace and friendship' between the East India Company and Amir Dost Muhammad Khan (and his heirs). The 1857 treaty conferred money and arms on Dost Muhammad, in order to assist the defence of his Afghan possessions from Persia.¹³ The treaties were tested during the Mutiny, when it was feared that the tribes from around the Afghan border would join with the Indian rebels. That they did not was seen as a success for Lawrence's negotiation of the treaties. Lawrence was fortunate in being credited with this success, because he had been sceptical about the wisdom of negotiating with the Afghans. The idea had come from Herbert Edwardes, and was endorsed by governors-general

¹³ At the time of the 1857 treaty, Britain was at war with Persia. *Afghanistan Correspondence*, nos. 1 & 2, pp. 1-2.

Dalhousie and Canning.¹⁴

In the years after 1858, knowledge of India and its inhabitants was especially prized, because the outbreak of the Mutiny had surprised officials in Britain and India. This post-Mutiny emphasis on expertise was given legislative force by the 1858 Government of India Act, in its creation of the ‘council of India’. The purpose of the council was to provide the secretary of state for India with that ‘knowledge which it is utterly impossible that any public man, trained in the ordinary school of English administration, can possess upon purely Indian questions’.¹⁵ A majority of councillors was therefore required to have served or resided for at least ten years in India.¹⁶ Lawrence was appointed to the council of India on his return to England in 1859. His expertise in council, especially on Afghan and frontier affairs, impressed the secretary of state. Sir Charles Wood was at this time urged by Sir Bartle Frere to adopt a more forward policy in Afghanistan.¹⁷ However, it is Lawrence’s advice to avoid any such ‘meddling’ that stands out in Wood’s correspondence with Elgin.¹⁸ Even when his own views were quite contrary, Wood recognised that Lawrence ‘knows the country & the people so well that his opinions are worth attending to.’¹⁹

The respect for his knowledge of India, and its vulnerable frontier, also explained Lawrence’s appointment as Lord Elgin’s successor. In his announcement to parliament

¹⁴ Bosworth Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence*, vol. I, pp. 449-54.

¹⁵ Lord Stanley, *Hansard*, 150 (7 June 1858), cols. 1674-6.

¹⁶ In addition, a prospective councillor must not have left India more than ten years before his appointment. Moore, ‘Imperial India’, p. 425.

¹⁷ Frere, (Henry) Bartle Edward (1815-84): commissioner Sind, 1851-59; KCB, 1859; governor-general’s council, 1859-62; governor Bombay, 1862-67; council of India, 1867-77; president Royal Geographical Society, 1873-74; baronetcy & GCB, 1876; governor Cape Colony, 1877-80.

¹⁸ See e.g. Wood to Elgin, 18 Apr. 1863, Elgin Mss/8, f97.

¹⁹ The reference to ‘country’ in this letter meant the area around Lahore: Wood to Elgin, 16 Nov. 1863, Elgin Mss/8, f263.

Wood emphasised Lawrence's knowledge of India: 'Sir John Lawrence will, I feel confident, justify all the expectations that have been formed from his former career, and from his intimate knowledge of the country.'²⁰ At the time the appointment was made, British troops were engaged in operations on the north-west frontier (the Ambela, or Sitana, war). The Calcutta correspondent of *The Times* reported that the British commander, General Sir Neville Chamberlain, had met with 'determined opposition' in the Ambela pass. In the month to 20 November 1863, sixteen British officers and one hundred and seventy-five men had been killed (of a force of six thousand troops). For the Calcutta correspondent, this was sufficient evidence that the border war was assuming threatening proportions:

The bazaars of Delhi and Umritsir look to see if we are to be beaten, just as all India looked to Delhi in 1857; and thus what was at first a trifling frontier war, such as we have fought 20 times since the annexation of the Punjab, has become a matter of Imperial interest.²¹

In an editorial on the same subject two days later, *The Times* noted that between the north-western frontier of the Punjab and Kabul there lived 'a number of tribes distinguished alike by martial instincts and religious fanaticism.' It was thought that large numbers of Indian mutineers had found refuge among these tribes in 1857. The editorial concluded that it was therefore 'fortunate, under such circumstances, that a ruler like Sir John Lawrence should be on his way to India.'²² In fact it seems likely that when Wood and his colleagues were considering the appointment of Elgin's successor, Lawrence's Mutiny record and knowledge of the Punjab weighed even more heavily in his favour on account of the coincidence of the Ambela war with Elgin's death.

²⁰ Sir Charles Wood, *Hansard*, 176 (21 July 1864), col. 1823.

²¹ *Times*, 9 Jan. 1864, p. 9.

²² *Times*, 11 Jan. 1864, p. 6.

Bosworth Smith had little doubt that this ‘clenched the appointment beyond the possibility of doubt’.²³

In the event, by the time Lawrence reached India the Ambela war was over.²⁴ Once Lawrence had taken up his post at Calcutta, Wood was able to invoke his name in parliament, in order to add weight to particular policy decisions. For example, in June 1864 Wood had to defend controversial military reforms in the House of Commons. He sought to explain and justify the measures on the basis that they had been done with the ‘sanction and advice’ of Sir John Lawrence, who was ‘the highest authority we could have on Indian matters’.²⁵ This was doubtless a useful political shield for the secretary of state. However, Wood’s trust in Lawrence’s judgement was sincere. An example of this trust is Wood’s decision to defer to Lawrence regarding Britain’s native envoy at Kabul. This was scarcely a question of mere details: the absence of British envoys in Kabul was one of the main complaints of those who argued that Britain should adopt a more active policy in Afghanistan.²⁶ Yet Wood deferred entirely to Lawrence’s judgement on this question. ‘Do whatever you like,’ he told Lawrence, ‘we shall approve.’²⁷

Lawrence also enjoyed a reputation for ‘adamantine strength’, encapsulated in the

²³ ‘Who so fit to deal with this particular danger, who so certain to preserve the peace, as the man who had tamed and conciliated the warlike races of the Punjab, and whose name was a household word, regarded, sometimes with love, sometimes with fear, but always with awe and veneration, by each wild chief of each wild tribe along the dangerous frontier of six hundred miles?’ Bosworth Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence*, vol. II, p. 385.

²⁴ The expedition was directed against the Wahabi ‘fanatics’ at Sitana. Chamberlain’s forces reached the top of the Ambela pass on 20 Oct. 1863. The fighting was fierce and Chamberlain was seriously wounded. Reinforcements were sent under General Garvock and ‘the Yusufzai field force completed its task’: E.M. Lloyd, ‘Chamberlain, Sir Neville Bowles (1820-1902)’, rev. J. Lunt, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed. Sept. 2011).

²⁵ Wood also noted that a majority of the council of India had approved the measures: *Hansard*, 175 (6 June 1864), col. 1274.

²⁶ See e.g. the report of the Calcutta correspondent, *Times*, 1 March 1865, p. 10.

²⁷ Wood to Lawrence, 17 June 1865, Lawrence Mss/26, no. 38.

sobriquet ‘Iron John’.²⁸ Wood certainly seems to have been impressed. Writing to Elgin in 1862, he described Lawrence as ‘an iron man’ who was ‘one of a thousand.’²⁹ Lawrence’s reputation for strength enhanced his authority on frontier questions, for when he told ministers the border was tranquil this was the judgement of the ‘iron man’ who had pacified the Punjab. The following report must have seemed more authoritative to ministers in London than correspondence from less experienced governors: ‘Don’t be alarmed at the rumours of war & commotion on the Punjab Frontier. So far as I can hear and judge, there is no truth in these reports.’³⁰

The deference with which Wood, a minister with considerable experience of Indian administration, treated Lawrence was more pronounced in the three succeeding secretaries of state. Wood’s immediate successor was Earl de Grey.³¹ The disparity in the respective knowledge of Lawrence and his nominal chief was considerable. De Grey acknowledged this explicitly in his correspondence. Writing to Lawrence in June 1866, de Grey acknowledged he stood ‘so much in need of the assistance of your experience & judgment.’³² In that letter de Grey had considered himself ‘new’ to his post. Yet only one month later he had left the India Office, following a change of government. The new minister was the Conservative Viscount Cranborne.³³ Cranborne’s tenure also proved short; and like de Grey, Cranborne acknowledged his inexperience in Indian affairs, later writing that he had been ‘so ignorant of the subject matter of my duties’ on

²⁸ Extract from J.W. Kaye, *A History of the Sepoy War in India 1857-1858* (vol. I, London, 1864), printed in *Times*, 13 Apr. 1865, p. 6.

²⁹ Wood to Elgin, 26 June 1862 (1), Elgin Mss/7, f227.

³⁰ Lawrence to Wood, 6 Dec. 1865, Lawrence Mss/30, no. 72.

³¹ Robinson, George Frederick Samuel (1827-1909): styled Viscount Goderich, 1853-59; succeeded to father’s earldom (Ripon) and to a more senior one (that of his uncle, de Grey), 1859; known as de Grey until created Marquess of Ripon, 1871; under-secretary of state for India, 1861; secretary of state for India, 16 Feb. 1866 – 6 July 1866; governor-general India, 1880-84.

³² De Grey to Lawrence, 3 June 1866, Lawrence Mss/27, no. 22.

³³ Cecil, Robert Arthur Talbot Gascoyne (1830–1903): styled Lord Robert Cecil, 1830-65; styled Viscount Cranborne, 1865-68; secretary of state for India, 6 July 1866 – 8 March 1867; succeeded as 3rd Marquess of Salisbury, 1868.

taking office.³⁴ The difference in experience certainly struck Lady Gwendolen Cecil, Cranborne's daughter and biographer: 'Sir John Lawrence was Viceroy; and his young chief accepted whole-heartedly his policy of frontier self-restraint and internal economic development.'³⁵ The diffidence suggested by Lady Gwendolen Cecil is borne out by her father's correspondence with the governor-general on Afghan policy in this period. For example, in August 1866, Sir Henry Green sought to persuade Cranborne that British troops should occupy Quetta. Located beyond the existing British frontier, Quetta (in Baluchistan) commanded one of the principal routes into India (the Bolan pass), and its occupation was frequently on the lips of those who advocated a forward policy in Afghanistan. Cranborne reported to Lawrence: 'I have informed [Sir Henry Green] in reply that an expression of opinion from you must necessarily precede any expression of opinion on my part.'³⁶ Lawrence's opinion had 'necessarily' to precede Cranborne's opinion simply because Lawrence was so much more knowledgeable on the subject. Lawrence duly obliged with a voluminous correspondence on the folly of occupying Quetta, and Cranborne accepted Lawrence's arguments entirely. In October 1866 the young secretary of state wrote: 'I quite concur in your views as to the impolicy of meddling in Affghan or Russian quarrels.'³⁷ On the specific question of the proposal to occupy Quetta with British forces, Cranborne echoed the views of the governor-general, though with a little more humour: 'I would as soon sit down upon a beehive.'³⁸

Cranborne resigned in October 1867, and was succeeded at the India Office by Sir

³⁴ Cranborne to Lawrence, 4 March 1867, Lawrence Mss/28, no. 9.

³⁵ G. Cecil, *Life of Robert, Marquis of Salisbury* (II vols., London, 1921), vol. I, p. 206.

³⁶ Cranborne to Lawrence, 27 Aug. 1866, Lawrence Mss/27, no. 32.

³⁷ Cranborne to Lawrence, 2 Oct. 1866, Lawrence Mss/27, no. 35.

³⁸ Cranborne to Lawrence, 10 Dec. 1866, Lawrence Mss/27, no. 46. Cranborne, in his second stint at the India Office (1874-78), would not feel the same confidence, as we shall see in chapter VII.

Stafford Northcote.³⁹ The new secretary of state had little time to find his feet on Afghan affairs: Lawrence's first letter conveyed news of the almost certain defeat of Sher Ali Khan, whom Britain had recognised as successor to Dost Muhammad. Lawrence's letter explained that Sher Ali would probably now ask for aid, 'with an intimation that if we decline he will be compelled to seek for assistance from the Persians or even the Russians'.⁴⁰ The significance of this intelligence was the connection it made between the civil war in Afghanistan and the advance of Russia. In reply, Northcote informed Lawrence that he had 'read with great interest' this news, and had shown the letter to Lord Stanley, the foreign secretary. 'We are very reluctant to intermeddle in any way with these complicated civil wars—and hope you will adhere to your policy of entire neutrality.'⁴¹ There seemed little doubt about exactly *whose* Afghan policy this was. Similarly, the press perception was that Afghan policy was Lawrence's policy.⁴²

One year later, Northcote was still struggling to see 'very clearly in the matter of Caubul politics.'⁴³ In contrast, official confidence in Lawrence's judgement remained considerable, as a despatch in December 1867 confirmed:

Her Majesty's Government... place the most implicit confidence in your prudence, and in your intimate acquaintance with the political condition of Afghanistan, and feel assured that they may safely leave it to your discretion to act as you may think right upon any emergency that

³⁹ Northcote, Stafford Henry (1818-87): succeeded to baronetcy, 1851; secretary of state for India, 8 March 1867 – 4 Dec. 1868; created Earl of Iddesleigh, 1885.

⁴⁰ Lawrence to Northcote, 9 March 1867, Lawrence Mss/32A, no. 16. Lawrence soon confirmed his instinct was correct: Lawrence to Northcote, 28 March 1867, Lawrence Mss/32A, no. 21.

⁴¹ Northcote to Lawrence, 10 Apr. 1867, Lawrence Mss/28, no. 17.

⁴² Editorials in *The Times* used this formula, e.g. *Times*, 23 Aug. 1867, p. 6.

⁴³ Northcote to Lawrence, 2 July 1868, Lawrence Mss/29, no. 32.

may arise.⁴⁴

This passage captures the devolution of authority to Lawrence. Northcote's use of the word 'prudence' was presumably a reference to Lawrence's circumspection, that is to say his preference for avoiding interference beyond the frontiers of India. This no doubt was reassuring to ministers in London. But it is explicit that those ministers accepted that Lawrence possessed an 'intimate acquaintance with the political condition of Afghanistan'—knowledge they themselves certainly did not have—and that this made him an excellent judge of foreign policy from India.

Political circumstances in Britain

The authority exercised by Lawrence on Afghan policy should also be understood as a consequence of certain domestic political events, particularly the question of franchise reform. Wood told Lawrence in April 1866 that the House of Commons was 'so much occupied with Reform' that it was unlikely to scrutinise Indian questions; not even the war in Bhutan.⁴⁵ The reform question also made the tenure of ministers precarious, and in some cases exceedingly short. Earl de Grey, having suspected that he would be forced from office after three months, in the event survived for just five.⁴⁶ Such transience made it difficult for ministers to form their views on complex questions of Indian foreign policy, as de Grey acknowledged. Shortly before he left office, de Grey admitted to Lawrence that his tenure had been 'so short that I have only had time to begin to form my views on some of the many important & difficult functions connected

⁴⁴ Secretary of state for India (Northcote) to governor-general of India (Lawrence), 26 Dec. 1867, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 12, pp. 24-6.

⁴⁵ Wood to Lawrence, 2 Apr. 1866, Lawrence Mss/27, no. 17.

⁴⁶ De Grey to Lawrence, 3 May 1866, Lawrence Mss/27, no. 20.

with Indian Administration'.⁴⁷ Cranborne lasted a little longer, for eight months, before resigning on the reform question. After Cranborne's resignation, Lawrence expressed his frustration at the lack of continuity at the India Office: he thought it was 'a great evil' that the secretary of state was 'liable to so constant a change as we have experienced during the last few months.'⁴⁸ Lawrence in this instance was referring to Indian domestic policy, but the frequent changes of India Office personnel naturally contributed to the devolution of responsibility for Afghan policy on Lawrence. During his five-year term as governor-general, Lawrence corresponded with no less than five different secretaries of state for India.

The next secretary of state survived for almost two years. Sir Stafford Northcote, however, found domestic political circumstances 'so absorbing that it is difficult to keep up with one's proper work... We are throwing over all our measures in order to complete the Reform bills and hasten the dissolution.'⁴⁹ The general election that followed the dissolution was also to prove a significant distraction. Northcote was explicit about this in his correspondence with Lawrence, admitting in October 1868 that his 'electioneering distracts me sadly from Indian work.'⁵⁰ Northcote also found that parliamentary debates on the disestablishment of the Irish Church distracted him and constrained his capacity for policy-making. This was the case with the question of the (British) Indian Navy, a frequent subject of discussion in Lawrence's correspondence with Northcote. The difficulty was that the Indian Navy had been broken up, and the Royal Navy could not be placed under the orders of the government of India. This clearly left the governor-general in a weak position on questions requiring naval

⁴⁷ De Grey to Lawrence, 27 June 1866 (2), Lawrence Mss/27, no. 26.

⁴⁸ Lawrence to Cranborne, 9 March 1867, Lawrence Mss/32A, no. 17.

⁴⁹ Northcote to Lawrence, 8 May 1868, Lawrence Mss/29, no. 23.

⁵⁰ Northcote to Lawrence, 14 Oct. 1868, Lawrence Mss/29, no. 49. See also Northcote to Lawrence, 17 Sept. 1868, Lawrence Mss/29, no. 45.

intervention.⁵¹ Lawrence wanted to explore the possibilities of reviving the Indian Navy, but he would receive no assistance from a distracted secretary of state. Northcote wrote to Lawrence in August 1868 and described his ‘dependence’ on what he termed ‘extrinsic political questions’:

I am very glad you have taken up the question of a partial revival of the Indian Navy. It seems to me the right thing; but there will be many difficulties to be overcome, and I feel doubtful of being able to carry such a measure in my present political position. It is certainly a disadvantage to India that the Secretary of State should be so dependent upon extrinsic political questions. We shall deal meagrely and tentatively, instead of boldly, with such questions as an Indian Navy, or a Persian policy, or the Govt. of Bengal, because a great battle is being fought over the Irish Church.⁵²

This seems like persuasive evidence that domestic political events in Britain, in this instance the Irish church question, could interact powerfully with ostensibly unrelated matters of British external policy, such as the revival of an Indian Navy. This conclusion is consistent with historiographical arguments that there was continuous interaction between British external and domestic politics. In a 2006 *English Historical Review* article concentrating on a later period (1898), Thomas Otte declined to assert the ‘primacy’ of either foreign or domestic spheres of British politics. Instead, Otte argued that although foreign policy remained to some extent shielded from public or party-political interference, ‘there was a constant interaction between the external and

⁵¹ The Royal Navy was not under the orders of the government of India, and ‘cannot be placed under them.’ Northcote to Lawrence, 12 June 1868, Lawrence Mss/29, no. 28. Lawrence thought it had been ‘a great mistake breaking up the Indian Navy.’ Lawrence to Northcote, 7 July 1868, Lawrence Mss/33, no. 47.

⁵² Northcote to Lawrence, 13 Aug. 1868, Lawrence Mss/29, no. 42.

domestic spheres of politics'.⁵³ Still more recently, Paul Readman has argued that British foreign policy was not insulated from domestic politics and that neither had normative 'primacy' over the other. Readman instead refers to a 'dynamic interaction' between the two.⁵⁴

Contrasts with Elgin and Mayo

Neither Lawrence's predecessor nor his successor as governor-general was given so much discretion for formulating British policy in Afghanistan. Initially, Sir Charles Wood had been keen to exert his authority over Lord Elgin. Elgin had considerable experience of imperial administration, though not in India, and one month after arriving at Calcutta asked Wood for guidance on the Afghan policy he should 'follow'.⁵⁵ This was during the period that Lawrence served on the secretary of state's council of India in London, and impressed Wood with his knowledge of Afghanistan. 'As to Cabul,' Wood wrote in response to Elgin's question, 'my policy is to keep clear of all those intrigues'.⁵⁶ Wood became less assertive in stipulating what policy Elgin should follow, presumably because the latter seemed deferential and prudent, and expressed himself to be 'very averse to any interference' in Afghanistan.⁵⁷ It is striking nonetheless that Wood had emphasised that this was *his* policy. In contrast, the official (and public)

⁵³ Specifically, Otte argues that concerns about the state of public opinion (measured in parliamentary by-elections) influenced debates within the government about Britain's foreign relations, especially the merits of the country's presumed 'isolation'. T.G. Otte, "'Avenge England's Dishonour": By-elections, Parliament and the Politics of Foreign Policy in 1898', *English Historical Review*, CXXI (2006), 385-6.

⁵⁴ Readman suggests that historians may have failed to recognise this because they have searched for the wrong thing (politicians being forced into certain courses of action). Policy could be (negatively) *constrained* as well as (positively) forced. In particular, Readman argues that in foreign affairs patriotism played a significant role in constraining what politicians could do. Readman, 'Patriotism and the Politics of Foreign Policy', 260, 269-70.

⁵⁵ 'I should like to have some idea of the policy which you would consider it advisable for me to follow here'. Elgin to Wood, 15 Apr. 1862, Elgin Mss/2, f61v. Elgin found different circumstances in Afghanistan from those which greeted Lawrence in Jan. 1864: the question for British policy-makers in 1862 was the extent of their interference with the attempt of Amir Dost Muhammad to wrestle the city of Herat from Persian control.

⁵⁶ Wood to Elgin, 19 May 1862 (2), Elgin Mss/7, f184 (emphasis in original).

⁵⁷ Elgin to Wood, 16 July 1862, Elgin Mss/3, f47.

understanding in the period 1864-69 was that Afghan policy was emphatically Lawrence's policy.

The Earl of Mayo succeeded Lawrence as governor-general in January 1869.⁵⁸ The appointment of Mayo differed from that of Elgin and Lawrence in that it caused some political controversy. Mayo had been Conservative chief secretary for Ireland, and was appointed by Disraeli shortly before the end of his first ministry. Gladstone contemplated recalling Mayo (even though he had already sailed for India) and replacing him with the Duke of Argyll, on the basis that a governor-general should not be appointed by a government in its 'last agony'.⁵⁹ In the event, Mayo continued to India and Argyll became secretary of state instead.⁶⁰ It is possible that the manner of Mayo's appointment coloured their official relations; Argyll initially suspected that Mayo had assumed too much authority for determining Afghan policy. Following the reception of Sher Ali Khan at Ambala, Argyll regretted Mayo's pledge that the British government would 'view with severe displeasure any attempts on the part of your rivals to disturb your position as Ruler of Cabul'.⁶¹ Argyll, referring to the government's agreement with Lawrence's policy, was concerned that Mayo's pledge might be construed as committing Britain to a particular course of action. In May 1869, Argyll explained in an official despatch to Mayo that there were clearly circumstances in which 'it would not be for the credit of the British Government to support the Ameer either by money or by arms.'⁶² Argyll accordingly instructed Mayo to explain to Sher Ali that

⁵⁸ Bourke, Richard Southwell (1822-72): styled Lord Naas, 1849-67; succeeded as 6th Earl of Mayo, 1867; assassinated by an Afghan convict in the Andaman Islands, 8 Feb. 1872.

⁵⁹ Gopal, *British policy in India*, p. 64.

⁶⁰ Campbell, George Douglas (1823-1900): styled Marquess of Lorne, 1839-47; succeeded as 8th Duke of Argyll, 1847; secretary of state for India, 9 Dec. 1868 – 17 Feb. 1874.

⁶¹ Secretary of state to governor-general, 14 May 1869, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 18, pp. 91-2.

⁶² Argyll suggested one example of such a circumstance: 'If [Sher Ali Khan] succeeds in establishing a government, which is strong but notoriously cruel and oppressive, Her Majesty's Government ought

there should be ‘no expectation on his part of armed intervention’ and that the continuance of British support ‘must always depend upon the pleasure of the Government of India’.⁶³ Mayo, however, managed to persuade Argyll that his ‘new’ policy in Afghanistan was no more than that begun by Lawrence.⁶⁴ Lawrence had after all suggested the meeting with Sher Ali at Ambala, and had given the Amir armaments and money before leaving India. Argyll was ultimately satisfied that Mayo was indeed continuing Lawrence’s policy. It is striking that ‘Lawrence’s policy’ was utilised in this manner, as the reference-point for the correct British policy in Afghanistan.

* * *

The council of India had been established in order to furnish the secretary of state with the requisite knowledge to discharge his policy-making functions. However, the same intellectual premise that brought the council into being—that ministers who had no knowledge of India needed advice from ‘Indian experts’—also explains why the constitutional framework for policy-making was, in the period 1864-69, bypassed in favour of Lawrence’s judgement. Nominally under orders from a secretary of state responsible to parliament, Lawrence in fact found that responsibility for Afghan policy was devolved on him because he enjoyed a reputation for knowledge and strength, because the relative inexperience and precarious, short tenures of successive ministers made it difficult for them to grapple with complex Indian foreign policy questions, and because those ministers were also distracted and constrained by domestic British political questions such as franchise reform and Irish church disestablishment.

to be free to withhold all assistance from him.’ Secretary of state to governor-general, 14 May 1869, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 18, p. 92.

⁶³ Secretary of state to governor-general, 14 May 1869, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 18, p. 92.

⁶⁴ Government of India to secretary of state, 1 July 1869, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 19, pp. 92-100.

This devolution of power from the imperial metropolis to its periphery illustrates that individuals could exercise authority outside constitutional frameworks. In Lawrence's case, this was not because he was headstrong or disobeyed instructions, or because he exploited slow communications between India and London; authority for determining and developing British policy in Afghanistan was voluntarily surrendered to him. This demonstrates that the rules regarding the exercise of decision-making authority for Indian foreign policy were subject to both circumstances and personalities (and assessments of personality). The circumstances in which this devolution of authority occurred were in some respects exceptional, for it was unusual for a governor-general to have so much knowledge of India and its north-west frontier, because of the convention that the appointment should be made from outside India. It was unusual to acquire such knowledge without having served in India, though there were some exceptions to this.⁶⁵ The next chapter will examine how Lawrence tried to utilise the authority he had been given on Afghan policy.

⁶⁵ George Nathaniel Curzon (governor-general of India, 1899-1905) had prepared himself for that office by extensive travel in, and writing on the subject of, central Asia. J. Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830-1970* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 202-3.

III

The pragmatism of ‘masterly inactivity’

After the publication in January 1867 of J.W.S. Wyllie’s *Edinburgh Review* article, supporters and critics of Lawrence’s Afghan policy commonly referred to it as one of ‘masterly inactivity’.¹ This popular expression may have encouraged the misunderstanding that Lawrence favoured non-interference in Afghanistan in all circumstances.² In fact, it would be more accurate to describe his policy as one of ‘reluctant interference’ or ‘limited interference’, though these terms of course lack the elegance of Wyllie’s formula. This chapter will seek to explain why Lawrence was so reluctant to intervene beyond India’s north-west frontier. A number of historians have argued that his policy was primarily a reaction to the disasters of the first Afghan war. The evidential basis for that hypothesis will be considered, before a more prosaic argument is advanced: that ‘masterly inactivity’ was a natural consequence of Lawrence’s administrative priorities, and his assessment that the greatest threat to the security of British India came from *within* its existing borders. His stated ambitions as governor-general were to consolidate British power and to improve the ‘condition of the people’; objectives he believed were interdependent. Lawrence thought that such an administrative project was so important, and so demanding of manpower and money, that he viewed with extreme scepticism any proposal to spend his limited resources beyond India’s frontiers. The chapter will then contrast this administrative approach with the more ambitious proposals of Sir Henry Rawlinson, perhaps the most forceful advocate of forward measures in the period 1864-69. Finally, in order to assess whether

¹ Contemporaries also used several other terms, the most common of which were ‘watchful’, ‘observant’, ‘circumspect’, ‘cautious’, and ‘passive’.

² [G.B. Malleson], ‘Sir John Lawrence—Part III’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 105 (June 1869), 717-9.

Lawrence's stance was representative of the 'official mind' in India, the opinions of his colleagues in the government of India will also be examined.

The first Afghan war: British captives

During the first Afghan war, an uncertain number of British men and women became captives in Afghanistan. As many of these Britons published accounts of their captivity, their experience was, in a sense, shared with their compatriots at home.³ Linda Colley has argued that captivity was central to the British experience (actually or vicariously, that is to say through literary consumption) of imperial conflict in this period, and to how Britons at home understood the empire.⁴ Colley's assertion that the reading public at home would have had a traumatic identification with the vulnerability of Britons abroad has received some criticism from historians of empire. Richard Drayton for example, in reviewing Colley's *Captives*, questioned how many contemporary readers actually had experience of captivity, without which these accounts may simply have been received as 'amusing fictions', or 'a light kind of exotic pornography'.⁵

One of those taken captive during the first Afghan war was George Lawrence, one of John's elder brothers. By the time the news reached John, who was on honeymoon in Naples, it was thought likely that George would already have been killed. With this

³ Linda Colley has provided the following figures for the numbers of Britons who were taken captive and survived their captivity (and were released in Sept. 1842): 32 officers, over 50 soldiers, 21 children, and 12 women. Many Britons published narratives of their experiences: there are references to accounts by at least 12 British army officers held captive in Afghanistan in 1841-42, although some of these texts seem not to have survived. The most famous account is that by Florentia, Lady Sale (*A Journal of the Disasters in Afghanistan* (1843)), which became a best-seller: L. Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600-1850* (London, 2002), pp. 350-2.

⁴ Colley's expressed intention was not to deny the devastating power and impact Britons had at particular times and places, but to show that Britons were not only warriors but also captives. Colley, *Captives*, p. 376.

⁵ R. Drayton, 'Putting the British into the Empire', *Journal of British Studies*, 44 (Jan. 2005), 189. For other criticisms of Colley's 'macro-narrative', see P.J. Marshall, 'Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600-1850', *English Historical Review*, 118 (June 2003), 719-21.

probability in mind, John wrote a hurried letter to his sister-in-law, noting a ‘general feeling’ in India—from even before this ‘disaster’—that ‘the sooner we get out of Afghanistan the better’.⁶ In the event, George Lawrence was held captive for eight months, but lived to tell the tale.⁷ Some historians have argued that his brother’s captivity in Afghanistan caused John Lawrence forever to fear treading in the footsteps of 1842. John Lowe Duthie is particularly critical in this regard, asserting that Lawrence ‘allowed harrowing personal memories to over-influence his judgement of Anglo-Afghan relations.’⁸ Duthie supports this hypothesis in three ways. First, he cites the ‘incoherence’ of the letter Lawrence wrote to his sister-in-law in the immediate aftermath of hearing that his brother had been taken captive.⁹ Although Duthie does not say so explicitly, his readers are by implication invited to connect Lawrence’s ‘incoherence’ in 1842 with his subsequent policy of ‘masterly inactivity’ over two decades later. Secondly, Duthie states that Lawrence’s correspondence contained ‘frequent, malicious stereotypes of the Afghans as perverse, untrustworthy and irredeemably given to duplicity.’¹⁰ The notion of ‘Afghan treachery’ is certainly a strand in Lawrence’s correspondence, although it is often juxtaposed with the recognition of Afghan bravery.¹¹ This somewhat schizophrenic assessment of Afghan

⁶ John Lawrence to Honoria Lawrence (wife of Sir Henry Lawrence), 23 March 1842, Bosworth Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence*, vol. I, pp. 145-6.

⁷ G. Lawrence, *Reminiscences of Forty-Three Years in India*, ed. W. Edwards (London, 1874), p. v.

⁸ J.L. Duthie, ‘Sir Henry Creswicke Rawlinson and the Art of Great Gamesmanship’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, XI (1983), 258.

⁹ The letter seems to have been written in haste, and contains some grammatical errors. Bosworth Smith reproduces the letter in full (and without correcting the mistakes) in his *Life of Lord Lawrence*. The first two sentences provide a sufficient impression of the ‘incoherence’ that Duthie seems to consider so telling: ‘My dear Honoria, I hardly know how to write to you the last mail has brought us such dreadful accounts the death of Sir Wm. [Macnaghten] poor George’s imprisonment and probable death and the reported destruction of the whole Cabul army. Is certainly an amount of dreadful which has seldom come from India certainly never in my mind...’ John Lawrence to Honoria Lawrence, 23 March 1842, Bosworth Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence*, vol. I, pp. 145-6.

¹⁰ Duthie, ‘Rawlinson and the Art of Great Gamesmanship’, 258.

¹¹ Lawrence offered this assessment of Afghan character to the secretary of state for India: ‘the Afghan’s greed is insatiable. He is faithless, treacherous, and fickle. He will sell his wife, his friends, his children, his country, for his personal profit... On the other hand, they are a brave & sturdy people & quite capable of making a sturdy resistance to their enemies when so disposed. So long as it is in their

character is entirely consistent with British perceptions in this period, and it is noteworthy principally because Lawrence, unlike most British commentators, actually had personal experience of Afghans.¹² Thirdly, Duthie calls a formidable witness—the ‘astute’ Lord Salisbury—who ‘later suspected the existence of this strong personal element in Lawrence’s Afghan policy’.¹³ Duthie is not alone in relying on Salisbury for evidence of what Lawrence and his fellow policy-makers thought about Afghanistan. Rose Greaves, surveying British policy in Afghanistan, concluded that for many years after 1842, ‘policy makers saw the Afghan ghost and had no enthusiasm for adventures in Afghanistan. Many years later Lord Salisbury lamented that the disasters of 1842 had entered like iron into their souls.’¹⁴

It is not obvious why Salisbury’s suspicions and lamentations should be considered so persuasive. He seems to have had a quite unusual relationship with anxiety. In 1845, he was removed from Eton College because he had been ‘so enthusiastically bullied’. At Christ Church, Oxford, the sickly Cecil secured an honorary fourth-class degree in mathematics only by dint of nobleman’s privilege. Until a late age, he would be liable to crises he called ‘nerve storms’, bringing depression, lassitude, and hypersensitiveness of

interest to be on one side, they will fight valiantly.’ Lawrence to Northcote, 18 Aug. 1867, Lawrence Mss/32B, no. 49.

¹² Official attitudes to Afghan ‘character’ are recorded in a memorandum prepared by T.H. Thornton (secretary to the Punjab government) and forwarded by the government of India to the secretary of state for India in Feb. 1868. Thornton quoted large extracts from an earlier report, by Richard Temple, describing the independent tribes of the north-west frontier as ‘savages, noble savages perhaps, and not without some tincture of virtue and generosity, but still absolutely barbarians nevertheless.’ Temple also noted that the tribes were ‘superstitious and priest-ridden’, ‘avaricious’, ‘thievish and predatory... The Patan mother often prays that her son may be a successful robber.’ Nevertheless, these tribes ‘possess gallantry and courage themselves, and admire such qualities in others.’ Memorandum by T.H. Thornton, 18 Nov. 1867, forwarded by the government of India to the secretary of state for India on 14 Feb. 1868. *Afghanistan Correspondence*, No. 12A, Enclosure, pp. 26-31. Lawrence met Afghans during his years in the Punjab, including while negotiating the Anglo-Afghan treaties of 1855 and 1857.

¹³ Duthie, ‘Rawlinson and the Art of Great Gamesmanship’, fn. 26, 271.

¹⁴ R.L. Greaves, ‘Themes in British policy towards Afghanistan in its relation to Indian frontier defence, 1798-1947’, *Journal of the Royal Society for Asian Affairs*, XXIV (Feb. 1993), 34.

touch and hearing.¹⁵

The hypothesis that Lawrence's circumspect policy in Afghanistan was borne out of his brother's captivity there was in fact argued by near contemporaries as well as historians. Nearly four years after Lawrence's death, Demetrius Charles Boulger offered this opinion on the origins of 'masterly inactivity' in the *National Review*:

Lord Lawrence's attention was first attracted to the Afghan question by the tidings, which reached him while in Europe, of the destruction of Elphinstone's brigade in the passes. The question came home to him in a very personal manner, as one of his brothers was captive to Akbar Khan... on no one had the valour and treachery of the Afghans, and the natural difficulties of their country, produced a greater impression than on him. So powerful was the spell thus cast over him, by events due solely to the folly and incapacity of a military commander, that it became a cardinal point of his policy to have nothing whatever to do with a fresh advance into Afghanistan, under any pretext whatsoever.¹⁶

Neither Salisbury nor Boulger was an impartial witness. It was Salisbury who, in 1875, started the Conservative government's move away from Lawrence's cautious Afghan policy. By the end of 1878 (the second Afghan war began in November of that year), debates about Afghan policy had become polarised, and Lawrence proved an extremely awkward opponent for Conservative ministers like Salisbury, and their press supporters, like Boulger.¹⁷ The evidence offered by Salisbury and Boulger must be treated with some scepticism therefore. In fact, it seems highly unlikely that 'harrowing personal

¹⁵ P. Smith, 'Cecil, Robert Arthur Talbot Gascoyne-, third marquess of Salisbury (1830-1903)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed. Jan. 2011).

¹⁶ The reference to 'the valour and treachery of the Afghans' is another example of the schizophrenic characterisation common in British accounts. Boulger, 'Lord Lawrence and Masterly Inactivity', 288-9.

¹⁷ This will be considered in chapter VII.

memories', or the 'Afghan ghost', explained Lawrence's aversion to interference in Afghanistan. The policy of reluctant or limited interference was of course embraced by a succession of policy-makers from 1842 until 1875, and presumably very few (quite possibly none) of those officials had direct or family experience of captivity in Afghanistan.

The primacy of Indian considerations

Lawrence's approach to Afghan policy was in fact derived entirely from Indian considerations. He thought that his priorities as governor-general—consolidating British power and improving the 'condition of the people' of India—were interdependent. In his speeches in Britain after the Mutiny, Lawrence had connected the attempts of his Punjab administrators to 'improve the condition of the people' and the support of those people in the crisis of 1857-58.¹⁸ This argument is not in itself sufficient to explain Indian participation on the British side during the Mutiny: as discussed in chapter I, it omitted the powerful stimulation of military force, measures of retribution and the exploitation of racial divisions between Indians. Nonetheless, Lawrence and many of his colleagues set great store by the idea that improving the conditions of Indians would reconcile them to British rule. Lawrence's confidence in the benefits provided by British administration is demonstrated by his views on the princely state of Mysore. Lawrence favoured Mysore's 'lapse' (to British control) on the anticipated failure of the hereditary succession. In June 1867 Lawrence explained the reasons for his views on this subject, which were at odds with official post-mutiny policy, to the secretary of state:

¹⁸ This quotation was cited in chapter I, but is reproduced here for ease of reference: 'Our object had been to improve the condition of the people, and obtain their goodwill and sympathies, and hence it happened that, by God's help, we were able to meet the storm which must have otherwise overwhelmed us all. (Loud cheering.)' Speech made by Lawrence, Presentation of the freedom of the City of London to Sir John Lawrence, 3 June 1859.

I do not say that there are no points of our administration where the shoe does not pinch; I fully admit that the reverse is the case; but what I do affirm, and what I believe enquiry would prove is, that the benefits of our system are great and palpable; & moreover are appreciable by all the industrious classes... If our Govt of India was not very much better than that of the native Chiefs, it would be indeed impossible for us to hold the country with the body of British troops allotted for the purpose. If we left India tomorrow I believe that war and rapine would again prevail, and that in a few short years it would become very much in the state we rescued it from.¹⁹

This letter reveals Lawrence's confidence not only in the 'great and palpable' benefits of British rule but his belief that Indians recognised this. This confidence helps explain Lawrence's scepticism regarding any proposals to spend scarce resources outside India, where no such benefits would accrue to Indians. Those who advocated more active measures in Afghanistan pointed to Russian progress in central Asia and the uncertainties of the Afghan civil war as circumstances that justified departing from a policy of vigilance. Lawrence, however, did not see the advances of Russia in that light. In April 1866 he wrote to Earl de Grey, setting out his views on these developments:

In Cabul a fierce civil war is being prosecuted... and doubtless will go on, until one man of great vigour arises, or, which is more probable, a large number of leading men are cut off. The result no doubt will be to weaken the power of the Affghans, and to some extent to expose them to foreign attack. But Affghanistan is strong for defence. The country is very strong & rugged, and the people hardy and resolute. I am for letting them alone to adjust to their own affairs. As regards Central Asia and the Russian progress in that vast area, I am for securing all the

¹⁹ Lawrence to Northcote, 25 June 1867, Lawrence Mss/32B, no. 38.

information procurable through intelligent native agency; but not for sending English officers into these countries. I am also for not interfering with the Russians, for I am not at all certain that their progress will prove injurious to our interests, and at any rate the further they advance the greater will be their difficulties & complications. Our interference would not retard their advance, while we should waste on the endeavour means & money which can be used to a much better effect in India.²⁰

Lawrence's wish to 'let alone' the Afghans was certainly not unqualified. If one of the contending parties in the civil war were to receive assistance from Persia or Russia, he thought this would change the position entirely. Similarly, Lawrence considered that if 'a Chief of real mark or character' emerged who seemed likely to triumph in the civil war, then there would be strong grounds for helping such a man with money and armaments.²¹ However, until such a time Britain should not intervene in the civil war. As for Lawrence's attitude to Russian expansion, there appear to be different reasons why Lawrence thought this would not 'prove injurious' to British interests. In part, Lawrence was confident that the 'vast area' of central Asia would provide ample outlets for Russian endeavours without threatening the frontiers of India. Lawrence argued that in some respects Russian progress would actually benefit British interests, because her progress through the Muslim khanates of central Asia would spread Christianity and suppress 'barbarous' practices. An insight into Lawrence's attitude is provided by the arrival in India, in January 1867, of an ambassador sent by the Amir of Bukhara. Lawrence received the ambassador, who asked for assistance to prevent the subjugation of Bukhara to Russian forces, an event shortly anticipated. Lawrence offered the ambassador no such assistance. As he later confided to Cranborne, Lawrence would in

²⁰ Lawrence to de Grey, 20 Apr. 1866 (1), Lawrence Mss/31, no. 16.

²¹ Memorandum by Sir John Lawrence, 25 Nov. 1868, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 14, Enclosure 4, p. 60.

fact ‘much sooner help the Russians to destroy [the Amir of Bukhara] than aid him against them. Such a rule as that of Bokhara can have no sympathy from an Englishman.’²² Bukhara could have ‘no sympathy from an Englishman’ because the Amir had imprisoned and then executed (by public beheading, probably in 1842) the British officers Conolly and Stoddart, an episode that had been well publicised in Britain.²³ As for Lawrence’s conviction that the further the Russians advanced ‘the greater will be their difficulties & complications’, this was a product of his belief that the khanates and tribal areas would not support an advancing army.²⁴ His equanimity regarding the approach of Russia is evident throughout his correspondence: he was consistently ‘doubtful’ that she intended to advance on India, and consistent in his view that arrangements with rulers beyond the frontier would give Britain ‘no real strength, but on the contrary only tend to waste our resources.’²⁵ His preoccupation with resources was a corollary of his difficulties in increasing the revenue available to the government of India, a constraint that will be considered later in this chapter.

Lawrence’s determination to protect his scarce resources, and his calmness regarding Russian expansion, must also be seen in the context of his assessment of the threats to the security of British India. Instead of an existential threat from Tsarist forces or Afghan tribes beyond the north-west frontier, Lawrence perceived dangers from within India. His concerns are evident in a long letter he wrote to Cranborne in October 1866,

²² Lawrence to Cranborne, 3 Jan. 1867, Lawrence Mss/32A, no. 1.

²³ A.P. Thornton, *For the File on Empire: Essays and Reviews* (London, 1968), p. 136.

²⁴ Lawrence had earlier given his opinion to Sir Charles Wood that ‘it would be for our advantage that Russia should busy herself in Kokan, Yarkund, and Bokhara; in fact in Central Asia. It will absorb her energies and waste her resources. The more she acts in this way, the greater will be her difficulties & complications. These countries can never support any considerable armies. She must support them from her own Provinces. If she attempts to quarter them on the people of Central Asia, she will turn the people against her.’ Lawrence to Wood, 27 May 1865, Lawrence Mss/30, no. 35.

²⁵ ‘If the Russians are ambitious and acquisitive there is enough in Central Asia to satisfy these feelings, to occupy their whole mind, to employ all their means.’ Lawrence to Cranborne, 20 Dec. 1866, Lawrence Mss/31, no. 59.

the ostensible purpose of which was to counter a recent proposal to occupy Quetta. Lawrence explained that while there was ‘no possible advantage’ to be gained from the occupation of Quetta he could ‘anticipate it as the beginning of many complications & difficulties & much expense...’ He described the inhabitants of Baluchistan as ‘wild & fanatical’, and the power of the Khan over them as ‘almost nominal’. Moreover, Lawrence was adamant that the greatest risks to British rule originated from within India:

Dear Lord Cranborne, believe me, our dangers & perils lie in India and not from beyond the border. All our money all our resources are wanted in India. We are educating the people in wholesale fashion, and the difficulty will be how to employ the leading spirits, the men who will have knowledge, spirit, & aspiration and who will chafe for want of an outlet for their energies. We have to consolidate our hold on the country; improve its institutions; pay the employees, and in particular the native part of them, better than we now do, and all this without adding materially to taxation. How is this to be done, if we go extending our occupation beyond the Frontier? We have already in my mind gone too far.²⁶

His experience of the Mutiny presumably made it easier for Lawrence to perceive security threats originating from within India. In his subsequent letters to Cranborne, Lawrence continued to emphasise the insidious security risks that clearly concerned him far more than the progress of Russia. He identified the lack of employment opportunities for Indians and ‘the way in which natives are treated by Englishmen’ as together constituting ‘the great danger to which our rule in India is exposed.’²⁷

Lawrence recognised that there was a ‘gulf’ between Britons and Indians, and that this

²⁶ Lawrence to Cranborne, 4 Oct. 1866, Lawrence Mss/31, no. 39 (emphasis in original). Note that the extract quoted above did not come from the start of the letter; Lawrence was using the words ‘Dear Lord Cranborne...’ not by way of customary salutation but for additional emphasis.

²⁷ Lawrence to Cranborne, 19 Dec. 1866 (2), Lawrence Mss/31, no. 58.

was ‘more or less strong every where but perhaps stronger in Calcutta than in most places.’²⁸ He attributed this tension to the Mutiny, which he thought had ‘excited a distrust indeed I may say a hatred between the two races which perhaps may never subside; and which has certainly not of late years decreased.’²⁹

Sir Henry Rawlinson and the government of India

Sir Henry Rawlinson was perhaps the most forceful advocate of forward measures in Afghanistan during Lawrence’s term as governor-general, even though for most of this period he had no official role in the formulation of policy.³⁰ In July 1868 Rawlinson wrote a memorandum ‘on the Central Asian Question’ and sent it to the secretary of state for India, Sir Stafford Northcote. Northcote then forwarded it to the government of India, in order to obtain the views of Lawrence and his colleagues. In his memorandum, Rawlinson attributed recent Russian military advances to either a ‘natural law’ or the resumption at St Petersburg (or amongst Russian commanders on the spot) of ‘an old traditional scheme of territorial conquest’. He thought there was an inexorable momentum to these advances: ‘when civilization and barbarism come into contact, the latter must inevitably give way’. Rawlinson predicted the extinction of the three independent governments of Kokand, Bukhara and Khiva, and the extension of the Russian frontier to the river Oxus.³¹ Initially, Rawlinson stated that the notion Russia

²⁸ ‘The educated Bengallees are sensitive & irritable and dislike the bearing of the English towards them, many of whom are inferior to them in wealth & position & also in intellect & knowledge.’ Lawrence to Cranborne, 19 Dec. 1866 (2), Lawrence Mss/31, no. 58.

²⁹ Lawrence to Cranborne, 4 Jan. 1867, Lawrence Mss/32A, no. 2.

³⁰ Rawlinson, Sir Henry Creswicke, 1st baronet (1810-95): assistant to Sir William Macnaghten in Afghanistan, and ‘fought with distinction in 1842 at Kandahar, where he had become political agent for lower Afghanistan’. President Royal Asiatic Society (1878-81) and long-time member & president of the Royal Geographical Society. Consul-general in Baghdad (1851) and involved with Sir Henry Layard in Assyrian excavations. Conservative MP for Frome (1865-68). Made KCB (1856), GCB (1889), and created baronet (1891) on Lord Salisbury’s recognition of ‘his distinguished service to the state’. R.W. Ferrier and S. Dalley, ‘Rawlinson, Sir Henry Creswicke, first baronet (1810-1895)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed. Jan. 2008).

³¹ H.C. Rawlinson, ‘Memorandum on the Central Asian Question’, 20 July 1868, originally sent to the

would invade India ‘may be dismissed as almost chimerical’. The threat posed by Russia instead consisted in the ‘disquieting effect’ her progress in central Asia would have on India: ‘every Chief throughout Northern India’ with a real or imagined grievance against British rule ‘will at once commence intriguing in the hopes of relieving himself from our oppressive shadow’. Rawlinson could not however resist indulging in the threat he himself had dismissed as ‘almost chimerical’. If Russia were to establish herself in strength at Herat, which he considered the most important military position in central Asia, then Rawlinson imagined a nightmare:

It is thus quite within the bounds of possibility that, some years hence, if Russia found herself engaged in another war with us, she might launch upon India, from her Herat base, a force of 50,000 Persian “Sirbaz”, disciplined and commanded by Russian officers, and thus fully competent to cope with our best Native troops; supporting such a force with 20,000 Turcoman and Afghan horse, than whom there is no better irregular cavalry in the world; and, if she were really in earnest, detaching also a small auxiliary body of her own picked troops, to give strength and consistency to the invading army.³²

Referring to reports of Muslim unrest in India, Rawlinson also envisaged Russia being able ‘to set in motion’ the Afghan tribes along the north-west frontier. In order to counter such threats Rawlinson proposed that Britain should, without delay, support Sher Ali Khan by granting to him a subsidy, armaments, British officers, and possibly an auxiliary military contingent. On the question of a British mission at Kabul, charged with the distribution of the subsidy and the direction of what Rawlinson termed ‘our quasi-protectorate of the country’, he thought the matter could only be decided on the

secretary of state for India but forwarded by the instructions of that minister (Northcote) to the government of India, 21 Aug. 1868. *Afghanistan Correspondence*, No. 12B, pp. 31-3.

³² Rawlinson, ‘Memorandum on the Central Asian Question’, pp. 36-7, 40.

spot. However, although writing from Britain, Rawlinson had no doubt that Kabul was ‘a position that we must inevitably occupy sooner or later, unless we are prepared to jeopardize our Indian Empire’.³³

The government of India did not respond to the proposals made in Rawlinson’s memorandum for several months. Their written reply to the secretary of state was sent on 4 January 1869, a week before Lawrence’s departure from India. It would doubtless have taken some time to collate minutes and memoranda from the many contributors, but the slow response suggests that Lawrence and his colleagues may have been seeking to provide a detailed and definitive reply to the sort of proposals they had heard in various guises, officially and publicly, for several years. This possibility is supported by a request in the joint minute that ‘a course of action’ be adopted in order to avoid ‘the perpetual recurrence to these exciting topics’, and in order to ‘strengthen the hands of those who have to conduct the affairs of India on the spot’.³⁴ The procrastination of Lawrence and his colleagues may also have been influenced by the expectation that their memoranda would receive more attention after the general election in Britain, perhaps from a new secretary of state. In the event, the Liberals won the election and the despatch was addressed to the Duke of Argyll, who had replaced Northcote at the India Office. The voluminous response comprised: a joint minute, signed by Lawrence and most of his executive council; nine individual memoranda written by civil officials and military commanders, most of whom had considerable experience of the north-west frontier; and three supplementary minutes.³⁵ The signatories to the joint minute wrote

³³ Rawlinson, ‘Memorandum on the Central Asian Question’, pp. 37-9.

³⁴ Government of India to secretary of state for India, 4 Jan. 1869, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 14, p. 45.

³⁵ The joint minute was signed by Lawrence and Sir William Mansfield (commander-in-chief in India and military member of Lawrence’s council), Henry Sumner Maine (law member), Richard Temple (financial member and foreign secretary), and John Strachey. The individual minutes were written by

‘under a deep sense of our responsibility for the welfare of all classes in India, and for the permanence of the British power.’³⁶ They seem to have shared Lawrence’s understanding of how such considerations were interdependent; for the joint minute emphasised that the security of British India was primarily a question of good government within its existing frontiers rather than pre-emptive measures beyond them. The joint minute accordingly declared that:

Should a foreign power, such as Russia, ever seriously think of invading India from without, or, what is more probable, of stirring up the elements of disaffection or anarchy within it, our true policy, our strongest security, would then, we conceive, be found to lie in previous abstinence from entanglements at either Cabul, Candahar, or any similar outpost; in full reliance on a compact, highly-equipped, and disciplined army stationed within our own territories, or on our own border; in the contentment, if not in the attachment, of the masses; in the sense of security of title and possession, with which our whole policy is gradually imbuing the minds of the principal Chief[s] and the Native aristocracy; in the construction of material works within British India, which enhance the comfort of the people, while they add to our political and military strength; in husbanding our finances and consolidating and multiplying our resources; in quiet preparation for all contingencies, which no Indian statesman should disregard; and in a trust in the rectitude and honesty of our intentions, coupled with the avoidance of all sources of complaint which either invite foreign aggression or stir up restless spirits to domestic revolt.³⁷

Brigadier-General Henry Lumsden, Sir Donald McLeod (lieutenant-governor of the Punjab), Colonel Reynell Taylor (commissioner of Ambala, who had worked under Henry then John Lawrence in the Punjab, and had commanded the Corps of Guides on the north-west frontier), G.N. Taylor, W.H. Norman, R.H. Davies, Mansfield, Lawrence and Temple. The supplementary minutes were written by Temple, Lawrence and Mansfield. The joint minute records that Maine ‘concur entirely’ in Lawrence’s minute. Government of India to secretary of state for India, 4 Jan. 1869, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 14, pp. 43-84.

³⁶ Government of India to secretary of state for India, 4 Jan. 1869, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 14, p. 44.

³⁷ Government of India to secretary of state for India, 4 Jan. 1869, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 14, p. 44.

In other words, Indian government officials thought that if foreign power ever contemplated invading India or prompting insurrection within it, a military response offered only a partial defence. They believed that the security of British India relied primarily on *civil* measures: the ‘previous abstinence’ from ventures in Afghanistan; the sympathies of Indian peasants and aristocrats; the construction of infrastructural works; and in ‘husbanding’ finances, that is to say not wasting money on speculative advances outside India. This emphasis on internal security measures was reinforced in the individual memoranda. The memorandum written by Sir Donald McLeod is particularly striking in this regard. McLeod was a Haileybury contemporary of Lawrence’s, an evangelical, and the serving lieutenant-governor of the Punjab. He argued that ‘the devising of means by which our own internal administration of India may be rendered more popular than at present... is of far more importance as a means of securing us immunity from dangers of whatever kind than all other considerations whatever.’³⁸ The lieutenant-governor of the Punjab—on the very spot where Rawlinson envisaged so many vulnerabilities—therefore preferred, as a measure of security, administrative reform throughout India, rather than garrisons on its frontiers.

These Indian government officials weighed several administrative considerations: the difficulties of establishing, supporting, and supplying troops in isolated positions; the financial outlay which an advance beyond the existing frontier would entail; and the probable effects of such measures on Indians. The signatories to the joint minute argued that these pragmatic considerations deserved ‘fully as much attention as the gradual advance of Russia in Central Asia... on which many writers have been led too

³⁸ McLeod proposed that the ‘yeomanry’, middle classes, and gentry of India should be given a much larger share in the details of administration. Memorandum by D.F. McLeod, 10 Oct. 1868, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 14, enclosure 2, p. 50.

exclusively to dwell.’³⁹ Many of them clearly saw the Russian ‘threat’ as extremely remote. The contrast between their practical assessment of Indian priorities and Rawlinson’s imaginative memorandum was considerable. While Rawlinson conjured up a vision of seventy thousand troops descending on India under Russian leadership, government of India officials thought about hard, practical details of administration. These officials determined that theoretical or at least distant threats from Russia were easily outweighed by immediate concerns of governing.⁴⁰

The measures proposed by Rawlinson—providing armaments, a subsidy, British officers and possibly a military contingent to Sher Ali Khan—would have proved extremely expensive. This did not seem to concern Rawlinson, who argued that ‘whatever the price it must be paid’.⁴¹ Rawlinson seems in fact to have been entirely unconstrained by the sort of fiscal considerations that preoccupied Lawrence and his fellow administrators in India. Rawlinson also favoured the establishment of a British garrison at Quetta, an object from which he thought Britain should not be deterred ‘by mere considerations of expense’.⁴² There seemed to be no limit to the amounts Rawlinson thought should be spent in order to protect the north-west frontier from the dangers he envisaged.⁴³

³⁹ Government of India to secretary of state for India, 4 Jan. 1869, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 14, p. 44.

⁴⁰ Another practical detail of administration considered by officials in India was the attitude of Indian troops who would be relied on for any forward movement. Colonel Reynell Taylor (commissioner, Ambala) considered that Indian troops would at first be eager to discharge a new role (in Afghanistan), but in time would bridle at the distant and disagreeable service. Memorandum by Colonel R. Taylor, 23 Nov. 1868, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 14, Enclosure 3, pp. 56-7.

⁴¹ Rawlinson, ‘Memorandum on the Central Asian Question’, p. 38.

⁴² Rawlinson, ‘Memorandum on the Central Asian Question’, p. 41.

⁴³ This contention is reinforced by Rawlinson’s approach to Persian policy. In the same memorandum, he also urged the governments (in Britain and India) to support Persia against Russia, on the basis that only a strong Persia could resist Russian pressure on Herat. ‘Our officers should again be placed in positions of influence and power with the Persian troops... Presents of improved arms, and perhaps artillery, would testify to our awakened interest... Investments of English capital in banks, in railways, in mining operations, and other commercial enterprises... would create a further bond of union

Lawrence's approach to Indian finance was utterly different. He believed that imposing only low levels of taxation was not merely a question of fairness (for Indian subjects), but of security (for British rule). As noted in the dissertation introduction, light taxation was in Lawrence's opinion 'the panacea for foreign rule in India.'⁴⁴ He thought that the level of taxation was critical for the security of British rule because 'so long as the masses are pretty well off, they are fairly content and peaceable. There is much natural docility and respect for power and authority in the people.'⁴⁵ However, it seemed clear to Lawrence that 'all' Indian subjects were 'strongly against further taxation', and that they were 'especially' hostile to the introduction of any new kinds of taxation.⁴⁶ He also knew from experience that his compatriots in India were extremely reluctant to pay what he thought was 'their share' of government expenditure.⁴⁷ Financial questions in fact preoccupied Lawrence throughout his tenure as governor-general. 'Finance', he told Northcote somewhat dejectedly towards the end of 1867, 'has been the bane of my administration'.⁴⁸ Lawrence's colleagues in the government of India shared his judgement that economy was an essential safeguard for British rule. One of their principal criticisms of Rawlinson's scheme for active interference in Afghanistan was its expense. The joint memorandum stated that:

We foresee no limits to the expenditure which [Rawlinson's proposals] might require, and we

between the countries... our mission should be kept up on a very liberal scale.' Rawlinson, 'Memorandum on the Central Asian Question', p. 40.

⁴⁴ Lawrence to Cranborne, 5 Nov. 1866, Lawrence Mss/31, no. 48.

⁴⁵ Lawrence to Cranborne, 8 Nov. 1866 (1), Lawrence Mss/31, no. 49.

⁴⁶ Lawrence to Cranborne, 19 Dec. 1866 (2), Lawrence Mss/31, no. 58.

⁴⁷ There were recurrent deficits in the period 1866-68, partly because Lawrence was unable (due to opposition from within his executive council) to retain a low income tax. He did manage to pass a licence tax on traders and professions, but this was met with protests from the British community in India. Lawrence was only able to reintroduce an income tax on the eve of his departure. Steele, 'Baron Lawrence'.

⁴⁸ Lawrence to Northcote, 16 Nov. 1867, Lawrence Mss/32B, no. 65.

protest against the necessity of having to impose additional taxation on the people of India, who are unwilling, as it is, to bear such pressure for measures which they can both understand and appreciate.⁴⁹

In other words, the government of India thought that Indian subjects were unwilling to pay taxation even for measures that they might ‘understand and appreciate’, such as irrigation projects, roads and railways. To increase taxation in order to finance a speculative mission to Afghanistan or the construction of a new post beyond the frontier would be resented fiercely, because it would not benefit Indians. These objections were made with even greater force in some of the individual responses. R.H. Davies for example professed perplexity as to why Russia’s approach to British India’s ‘natural and impregnable ramparts’ (meaning the mountains of the north-west frontier) should be ‘the pretext for advocating the transfer of our scanty surplus from public works and defensive preparations to the fallacious projects of an unavailing, if not mischievous diplomacy.’⁵⁰

The equanimity of Lawrence and his colleagues regarding Russian expansion in central Asia seems to be at odds with what historians have said about contemporary British attitudes to Russia. Thomas Otte for example has written that a ‘profound mistrust of Russia and her ambitions’ was ‘firmly rooted in the Victorian mind’, including in the minds of Foreign Office officials and British diplomats. Otte argues that this reflected the growth of ‘Russophobia’ in the middle of the nineteenth century, as well as the formative political experiences of British officials. The ‘Palmerstonian generation’ had reached positions of seniority around 1850, when frictions with Russia were growing,

⁴⁹ Government of India to secretary of state for India, 4 Jan. 1869, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 14, p. 44.

⁵⁰ Minute by R.H. Davies, 27 Dec. 1868, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 14, Enclosure 9, p. 79.

while the ‘high-Victorians’ undertook their political apprenticeships during the Crimean war and its aftermath.⁵¹ However, it is hard to discern this ‘profound mistrust of Russia and her ambitions’ in the arguments of Lawrence and his colleagues.

Envoys

Lawrence was obdurately opposed to Rawlinson’s proposal that British officers be sent to Afghanistan. Lawrence’s opinion was informed by historical precedent (the first Afghan war) and by pragmatism (he thought Indian envoys could gather better intelligence than British officers). He thought that British political officers had a tendency to aggravate Anglo-Afghan relations. Lawrence cited as a precedent the case of Sir Alexander Burnes, whose murder in Kabul in 1841 preceded Britain’s disastrous retreat from Afghanistan. ‘If we had never sent Burnes to Cabul’, Lawrence told the secretary of state, ‘we need never have had a Cabul war.’⁵² Lawrence knew from conversations with the former Amir, Dost Muhammad Khan, that Afghans would deeply resent any interference in their domestic affairs. In his memorandum of November 1868, Lawrence recounted:

When I met Ameer Dost Mahomed Khan at Peshawur in February 1857, he told me that it was his wish, and the earnest desire of all Affghans, that we should not interfere in their quarrels, but should allow them to manage their own concerns, and to fight out and settle their own domestic broils in their own way. The Chiefs and people of Affghanistan, he assured me, one and all, mainly dreaded, and would ever most strongly resent, interference on our part in such affairs.⁵³

⁵¹ Otte also argued that official perceptions of Russian ambitions included an expectation (among senior British diplomats at least) that Russia’s financial weakness might constrain her territorial expansion in central Asia. For part of his argument about official attitudes, Otte cites J.H. Gleason, *The Genesis of Russophobia in Great Britain*. T.G. Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind: The Making of British Foreign Policy, 1864-1914* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 42-5.

⁵² Lawrence to Cranborne, 4 Oct. 1866, Lawrence Mss/31, no. 39.

⁵³ Memorandum by Sir John Lawrence, 25 Nov. 1868, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 14, Enclosure

His conversations with Dost Muhammad seem to have convinced Lawrence that the presence of British officers in Afghanistan would lead to their maltreatment or death. At Peshawar in 1856, Dost Muhammad had told him that although a Muslim Indian would be acceptable, he would rather give up his subsidy than have an English officer imposed upon him. Lawrence reported the Dost as saying: ‘I cannot be sure of his life. My enemies would kill him if only to embroil me with your Govt’.⁵⁴ On that occasion the Dost yielded to pressure from Lawrence (who was acting under instructions from the governor-general, Lord Dalhousie) and allowed three English officers to go to Kandahar. The mission was led by Henry Lumsden.⁵⁵ Lawrence cited the experience of Lumsden’s mission as evidence of how British officers could obtain no useful intelligence in Afghanistan. In his individual memorandum, Lawrence stated:

My belief is that Major H. Lumsden and the Officers with the Mission at Candahar in 1857 were in great personal danger, and that so it will usually be with Agents similarly situated, especially in times of commotion. Nay, more, I am persuaded that they were utterly helpless, and in a condition of practical imprisonment. They could have done more at Peshawur than they were able to do at Candahar. A native would not be in personal danger in such case, and he could make friends and acquire influence and information in a manner impossible with a European.⁵⁶

4, p. 60.

⁵⁴ Lawrence to Cranborne, 22 Jan. 1867, Lawrence Mss/32A, no. 8.

⁵⁵ Lumsden was accompanied by Lieutenant Peter Lumsden (his brother) and Dr Henry Bellew. The purpose of their mission was to ensure that British subsidies to Amir Dost Muhammad Khan were used to pay troops employed to defend Afghanistan against Persia (following the capture of Herat). The men arrived at Kandahar on 25 Apr. 1857. Shortly afterwards, news of the outbreak of the Mutiny ‘made their position extremely hazardous’. They nonetheless remained at Kabul throughout the Mutiny, despite constant fears of attack. Lumsden returned to India in May 1858, and was promoted lieutenant-colonel and subsequently (1859) made CB. T.R. Moreman, ‘Lumsden, Sir Henry Burnett (1821-1896)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed.).

⁵⁶ Memorandum by Sir John Lawrence, 25 Nov. 1868, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 14, Enclosure 4, p. 63.

Lawrence's assertion that Lumsden and his two compatriots 'could have done more' at Peshawar (in British territory) reinforced his point that much could be done *within* the existing territories of British India. Lawrence was not alone in this pessimism about the prospects of any mission to Afghan cities, which was shared for example by Colonel Reynell Taylor. Taylor had extensive experience of the north-west frontier and the tribes beyond, having commanded the Corps of Guides.⁵⁷ In his individual memorandum, Taylor expressed his opinion that 'the re-appearance of fair faces' in the streets of Kabul would be extremely unpopular, on the grounds that they would be regarded as the forerunners of occupation.⁵⁸

Lawrence's pessimism about British envoys was reinforced by Afghanistan's isolation from British military and naval power. He told Cranborne that a mission 'to barbarous & fanatical people', like those in Afghanistan, 'with no means on our part of over awing them is sure to come to grief some day.'⁵⁹ Lawrence later elaborated his concerns in a letter to Sir Stafford Northcote, comparing the relative safety of British officers in coastal areas with those in isolated, inland posts:

Our representatives in Muscat & Zanzibar are generally speaking quite safe, because the Rulers of those countries know that their ports are readily accessible to our Men of War; and that we could bombard their towns, stop their commerce in a few days' notice, & even bring to bear on them troops, at a trifling cost, which they could not resist. In these circumstances consists the

⁵⁷ Taylor served throughout numerous campaigns in India, including the Mutiny, the Ambela war and several hill expeditions. He was appointed commissioner of Peshawar (1862) and subsequently commissioner Ambala (1865). In 1866 he was made CSI. E.G. Parry, 'Taylor, Reynell George (1822-1886)', rev. M.G.M. Jones, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed.).

⁵⁸ Afghan reactions to British officers would be suspicion, dislike and 'hostile animus'. Memorandum by Colonel R. Taylor, 23 Nov. 1868, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 14, Enclosure 3, p. 58.

⁵⁹ Lawrence to Cranborne, 22 Jan. 1867, Lawrence Mss/32A, no. 8.

real security of our officers. But if we send our officers into distant countries, difficult of access, the Rulers of which are ignorant of our resources, and secure in their isolation... those officers will be at the mercy of such Potentates who if angry will not be deterred from doing them harm.⁶⁰

Scholars have identified the absence of naval power as a general limitation on British foreign policy in central Asia, although specific examples of when and how this constrained official decision-making have proved elusive.⁶¹ However, it seems clear from Lawrence's correspondence that his opposition to sending British envoys to Afghanistan was reinforced by the country's location beyond the arc of the Royal Navy's guns, and by his recognition that only a plausible threat of force could provide 'real security' for British officers. As always, everything depended on the specific circumstances. Lawrence was therefore prepared to send a British envoy to Kashmir, even though that country was isolated from British military and naval power. This was because of his assessment of the character of its inhabitants and the allegiance of its ruler: whereas the Afghans were 'barbarous & fanatical people', Kashmir was 'inhabited by a mild and docile people, and belongs to a chief who is our ally and feudatory.'⁶²

Lawrence was also determined to prevent British explorers from venturing beyond the north-west frontier. In June 1868 Rawlinson had asked the secretary of state for India to permit George Hayward to explore parts of the frontier. (This was the month before Rawlinson penned his memorandum on 'the Central Asian Question'.) Rawlinson was

⁶⁰ Lawrence to Northcote, 20 Jan. 1868 (1), Lawrence Mss/32B, no. 75.

⁶¹ See, e.g., P. Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy, 1865-1980* (London, 1985), p. 34; Greaves, 'British policy towards Afghanistan', 44.

⁶² Lawrence to Fergusson, 9 Apr. 1867, Lawrence Mss/32A, no. 24.

at this time a vice-president of the Royal Geographical Society, and he advised the Society to protest to the British government regarding the lack of British exploration in the Himalayas. Possibly acting on his advice, the Society agreed to finance Hayward's expedition.⁶³ Northcote reported to Lawrence that Hayward wanted to 'open the road' from Peshawar to Yarkand (through Swat and the Chitral valley) and that, according to Rawlinson, Hayward had travelled in Afghanistan before, was 'quite capable of passing for a Mussulman', and intended to travel 'at his own risk' (though with financial assistance from the Society).⁶⁴ Northcote thought that the expedition might lead Britain into 'embarrassments', despite Rawlinson's assurance that nobody would ask the government to extricate Mr Hayward from 'any scrapes he might get into.' Northcote was 'uneasy lest his journey should lead to mischief. He would, if detected, be taken for a spy, and his visit might raise suspicions as to our intentions.' Northcote referred the matter to Sir Donald McLeod, recommending that he communicate with Lawrence. Northcote also asked Lawrence to write to McLeod on the subject.⁶⁵ Lawrence was unequivocal in his opinion on this matter and replied to Northcote as follows:

I am strongly of opinion that it will be a great mistake to allow [Mr Hayward] to travel from our borders into Central Asia. The route through Swat and the Chitral Valley is, I believe, the most dangerous of all the routes. I do not think that any European, certainly any Englishman, could travel in such a disguise as not to be found out. The news of his intention would proceed him from Peshawur to a certainty. Should anything happen to him it will certainly prove embarrassing to us, whatever he or Sir H. Rawlinson may say to the contrary. If we allow Mr Hayward to try his chance on what principle can we restrain our own officers from undertaking similar expeditions? As it is, we have the greatest difficulty in this way. Nothing short of a

⁶³ Duthie, 'Sir Henry Creswicke Rawlinson and the Art of Great Gamesmanship', 255-6.

⁶⁴ Northcote to Lawrence, 12 June 1868, Lawrence Mss/29, no. 28.

⁶⁵ Northcote to Lawrence, 12 June 1868, Lawrence Mss/29, no. 28.

positive command on your part will induce me to relax the existing restrictions. Sir H. Rawlinson has not, I suspect, any personal knowledge of the Tribes on our Western Border, and of their extraordinary animosity to Europeans.⁶⁶

In the event Northcote agreed with Lawrence's assessment, and the restrictions were not relaxed. It was however difficult to prevent adventurous Britons from defying such orders. Hayward later (while Lord Mayo was governor-general) set off on an expedition to explore the Pamirs. Having travelled through Kashmir, in July 1870 he reached Darkot, close to the river Oxus. There he was killed in mysterious circumstances.⁶⁷

Masterly inactivity

This chapter has argued—contrary to the arguments of some scholars—that Lawrence's approach to Afghanistan should not be understood on the basis of memories of the first Afghan war and his brother's captivity. However, Lawrence did recognise the persuasive value of comparing contemporary proposals for interference in Afghanistan with the first Afghan war. In response to Rawlinson's memorandum Lawrence argued that 'any serious attempt to restrain Russia's advance by active measures on our part in Affghanistan would seem to me certainly to lead to a policy resulting in our eventual occupation of that country, as was the case in 1838.'⁶⁸ Some of his colleagues went even further in their allusions to this disastrous period of British history. R.H. Davies was particularly scathing: 'I regret that I cannot regard Sir H. Rawlinson's proposals otherwise than as an untimely revival of the policy of 1838, which nearly ruined the

⁶⁶ Lawrence to Northcote, 7 July 1868, Lawrence Mss/33, no. 47.

⁶⁷ By this time Hayward was no longer sponsored by the Royal Geographical Society. Sir Henry Newbolt later wrote the poem 'He Fell Among Thieves' about Hayward. It has been suggested that the Maharajah of Kashmir and the ruler of Chitral were involved in Hayward's death, but there is no evidence for this: P. Hopkirk, *The Great Game: On Secret Service in High Asia* (London, 2006), pp. 340-5.

⁶⁸ Memorandum by Sir John Lawrence, 25 Nov. 1868, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 14, Enclosure 4, p. 61.

empire, and the effects of which we have still to get over.’⁶⁹ This was an arresting comparison, given the spectacular reverses Britain had suffered during the first Afghan war, and was an argument Lawrence would later make great use of around the time of the second Afghan war.⁷⁰

On the eve of his departure from India, Lawrence made a farewell speech in Calcutta in which all of the pragmatic, administrative concerns discussed in this chapter found full expression.

It is true that I have resolutely set my face against any proposal which, in my judgment, appeared to have a tendency to draw the Government of India into active interference in the affairs of Central Asia. I feel sure that it will prove, unless circumstances change entirely, a cardinal error, if we take such a step. Such interference must, sooner or later, involve us in hostilities there, either with the people or with their enemies—probably with both. Our true policy is to avoid such complications; to consolidate our power in India; to give to its people the best government we can; to organise our administration in every department on a system which will combine economy with efficiency; and so to make our Government strong and respected in our own vast territories. On the Western frontier we should be specially strong and ready, but without interfering in the internal concerns of the adjacent hill tribes, except when it becomes necessary to do so, in order to maintain peace and security. Active interference in the complications of Central Asia would almost certainly lead to war, the end of which no one could foresee; and which would involve India in heavy debt, or necessitate the imposition of additional taxation, to the impoverishment of the country, and to the unpopularity of our rule. On the other hand, by standing fast as long as may be possible on our own border, we can be ready to meet invaders with advantage. Invasion may never come, but if it do come, it should

⁶⁹ Minute by R.H. Davies, 27 Dec. 1868, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 14, Enclosure 9, p. 79.

⁷⁰ This will be considered in chapter VII.

find us well prepared to repel it.⁷¹

This speech provides a much better insight into Lawrence's Afghan policy than speculation about the 'Afghan ghost'. His public words echoed much of what he had told ministers privately and officially: Britain's 'true policy' was 'to consolidate our power in India' within existing—and already 'vast'—territories, and 'to give to its people the best government we can'. The departing governor-general warned that abandoning this policy would 'almost certainly lead to war' and the creation of indebtedness or additional taxation, 'to the impoverishment of the country, and to the unpopularity of our rule'.

* * *

Lawrence's approach to Afghanistan was therefore a consequence of his administrative priorities in India. He remained, after the ruptures of the Mutiny, confident about the 'great and palpable' benefits of British rule; and he was determined that the limited resources of the governing power must not be wasted. Lawrence was in this sense a pragmatic imperialist, deploying his resources only where he thought they would secure some return. In contrast, Rawlinson was more adventurous, and utterly unconstrained by fiscal and administrative considerations. Comparisons with his colleagues in the government of India suggest that Lawrence was in this sense representative of many senior administrators. Accustomed to making choices with limited resources, Lawrence's colleagues recognised both the likely costs and opportunity costs of adopting a more active policy in Afghanistan: money expended against a Russian

⁷¹ Farewell speech of Sir John Lawrence, reproduced in [Malleon], 'Sir John Lawrence', 720.

chimera could not be used on the administrative projects in India that provided more effective security for British rule.

Defending his Afghan policy in his farewell speech in Calcutta, Lawrence had also alluded to the importance of prestige. He explained that if British officers were sent to Afghanistan they would most likely suffer some type of maltreatment, and Britain would, as a matter of prestige, have to punish this by military force.⁷² In this sense, the greatest hazard in sending officers to Afghanistan was not the likelihood they would be killed, but that their deaths would provoke an expedition of vengeance that would divert Britain's imperial project in India. This important question of prestige will be examined in the following chapter, although by reference to an example in Africa not India.

⁷² Farewell speech of Sir John Lawrence, reproduced in [Malleon], 'Sir John Lawrence', 720.

IV

The importance of prestige:

Britain, India and Abyssinia, 1867-1868

Lawrence recognised that an ostensibly small act, such as sending British officers as envoys to Afghanistan, could set off a chain of events requiring ever-increasing intervention outside India. This risk of escalation—in significant part a consequence of the imperatives of ‘prestige’—was starkly illustrated by the British expedition to Abyssinia, 1867-68. The decision to launch the expedition was taken by the Foreign Office and then endorsed at a cabinet meeting of the minority Conservative government.¹ Although the expedition was sent to Africa it was very much a British Indian affair: it was planned in India, commanded by officers from the Bombay army and relied on Indian troops, supplies and transport animals. Its official objective was to liberate a small number of British subjects—in particular a consul and envoy—held as captives by King Tewodros II in his mountain fortress at Magdala.² However, the foreign secretary and other officials justified the expedition by arguing that liberating the captives and ‘punishing’ Tewodros were necessary in order to maintain the prestige that they, in common with many journalists, perceived was essential for the control of India. This chapter will argue that prestige has been neglected in the existing scholarship about Britain’s empire; and that official perceptions about prestige constrained as well as induced particular policy decisions. The chapter will also consider the connections between policy in Abyssinia and Afghanistan, by contrasting the boldness of British action in Africa with Lawrence’s circumspection in central Asia.

¹ Parliament was asked to approve its costs, but not the expedition itself.

² *Hansard*, 189 (21 Aug. 1867), col. 1635.

Historians of empire have identified a perceived need to maintain prestige as a general, if somewhat vague, consideration in the conduct of British foreign policy. For example, Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher argued in *Africa and the Victorians* that foreign secretaries and party leaders, throughout the partition of Africa, ‘had to respect the public’s thirst for peace, economy and prestige, its traditional shibboleths of trusteeship and anti-slavery. No powerful business interests must be offended or jettisoned. Disasters in Britain’s foreign ventures had to be avoided.’³ Prestige is thus identified as one of several considerations for policy-makers. There is no specificity about exactly how prestige influenced particular policy decisions; nor is any evidence offered in support of the assertion that the public had a ‘thirst’ for prestige, and that ministers had to respect this. There is no examination of the conflict between pursuing peace and economy while maintaining prestige.

More recently, Ronald Hyam has proved less reticent on the subject of prestige. In *Britain’s Imperial Century*, he first attempts to define the term, favouring Harold Nicholson’s ‘power based upon reputation’ and the formula of Dean Acheson (former US secretary of state) that ‘prestige is the shadow cast by power’.⁴ Hyam identifies prestige as a factor in some specific cases of imperial expansion: ‘[i]n part the acquisition of Sindh (1839-43) was an act of pre-emptive expansion against the French. Prestige entered in, because the British had been defeated in Afghanistan, and they needed a victory to halt the erosion of imperial confidence. Personal ambitions also played a part...’⁵ However, although there is some specificity in Hyam’s discussion,

³ R. Robinson and J. Gallagher with A. Denny, *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism* (London, 1981), p. 23.

⁴ R. Hyam, *Britain’s Imperial Century, 1815-1914, A Study of Empire and Expansion* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp. xvi-xvii.

⁵ Hyam, *Britain’s Imperial Century*, p. 32. The personal ambitions were those of Lord Ellenborough (governor-general of India), who ‘conceived the desire to be an empire-builder’, and General Sir

there is little examination beyond the assertion—for which no evidence is offered—that prestige was a factor in British territorial expansion. It will be argued in this chapter that the importance of prestige has been significantly underestimated in existing scholarship, and that the expedition to Abyssinia illustrates how it could constitute not merely a context but a significant motive for intervention.

The British captives in Abyssinia

In January 1862 Charles Duncan Cameron, British consul to Abyssinia, took up his post at Massawa on the east African coast. In the same year, King Tewodros II of Abyssinia (usually referred to as Theodore in contemporary British accounts) decided to ‘sound out’ certain European governments on his preparations for hostilities against Egypt. Cameron was asked to go to England personally and to return with Queen Victoria’s reply. Instead, he sent Theodore’s letter home and visited some Sudanese border provinces. This aroused Theodore’s suspicions, and when a courier arrived from London in November 1863 without any message to the King but with instructions for Cameron to leave Abyssinia and return to Massawa, ‘the storm broke loose’.⁶ In January 1864 Cameron was arrested, on the charge of interfering with the internal politics of the kingdom, and put in chains. He was then sent to Magdala, Theodore’s fortress in the Abyssinian highlands, along with two missionaries who had been arrested on other grounds. In response, the Foreign Office sent Hormuzd Rassam, first assistant political agent at Aden, to obtain Cameron’s release. When Rassam reached Theodore’s camp in January 1866 he was initially received favourably, but ultimately he too was

Charles Napier, who ‘was determined to redeem an otherwise lack-lustre career’.

⁶ S. Rubenson, ‘Ethiopia and the Horn’, in J.E. Flint (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa Volume 5 c.1790 to c.1870* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 79.

imprisoned.⁷

In July 1867, Henry Seymour proposed in the House of Commons that more active measures, including military force, should be taken in order to procure the release of consul Cameron and the other British subjects.⁸ Seconding the motion, Sir Henry Rawlinson presented the matter as one of duty, arguing that liberating the British officers was imperative in order to ‘vindicate the national honour’.⁹ Rawlinson first summarised the three arguments he had heard against sending an expedition to Abyssinia: the risk to the lives of the captives; the overwhelming difficulties of operating in a distant, inhospitable territory; and the disproportionate cost in terms of men and money. Rawlinson then attempted to refute all of these objections. He first observed that all attempts at conciliation had failed, and that previous examples (in China and Afghanistan) suggested the proximity of British troops would tend to improve the captives’ prospects, rather than endanger them. Secondly, Rawlinson conceded that an expedition to Abyssinia would certainly meet with great hazards, but mere difficulty was no reason why Britain should ‘flinch’ from its duty.¹⁰ Finally, countering the objection to the inevitable expense of any expedition, Rawlinson offered an explanation of the importance of prestige to British control of India. It is worth citing at some length, because subsequent parliamentary debates concentrated to a significant extent on this question of prestige, and because leading ministers referred to Rawlinson’s arguments as persuasive authority.

⁷ Rubenson, ‘Ethiopia and the Horn’, p. 79. H.M. Chichester, ‘Cameron, Charles Duncan (d. 1870)’, rev. L. Milne, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed. May 2006).

⁸ Henry Seymour (MP for Poole), *Hansard*, 189 (26 July 1867), cols. 234-7. Seymour had served as joint secretary to the Board of Control from 1855 until the East India Company’s abolition in 1858.

⁹ Sir Henry Rawlinson (MP for Frome), *Hansard*, 189 (26 July 1867), col. 238.

¹⁰ Rawlinson, *Hansard*, 189 (26 July 1867), cols. 238-41.

I have now, Sir, to refer to the third objection, which concerns the cost of the expedition, and which declares such cost to be out of all proportion to the benefit to be derived from it. This objection is chiefly urged by Gentlemen who disregard, or at any rate undervalue, the advantages of 'prestige'... 'Prestige' may not be of paramount importance in Europe, but in the East, Sir, our whole position depends on it. It is a perfect fallacy to suppose that we hold India by the sword. The foundation of our tenure, the talisman—so to speak—which enables 100,000 Englishmen to hold 150,000,000 of Natives in subjection, is the belief in our unassailable power, in our inexhaustible resources; and any circumstance therefore which impairs that belief, which leads the Nations of the East to mistrust our superiority and to regard us as more nearly on an equality with themselves, inflicts a grievous shock on our political position. It is impossible, Sir, in such matters to trace cause and effect with mathematical precision—much must depend upon opinion; but in illustration of what I have said, I will give it as my opinion, derived from a very careful scrutiny of passing events, that the Sepoy outbreak in 1857 was mainly—I will not say wholly—attributable to the loss of 'prestige' we had incurred from our exhibition of weakness in the Affghan War. Since we had allowed our Envoys, Colonels Stoddart and Conolly, to be murdered at Bokhara without making any effort to avenge their fate, and since by retiring from Affghanistan we had confessed our inability to hold the country, it was evident that we were human and might succumb to pressure; and hence, I believe, arose the germ of that confidence of the Sepoys in their own power which led them to try conclusions with us. And if, Sir, a Nemesis thus overtook us in 1857, the same Nemesis may again overtake us now, if we exhibit to the East such a miserable example of moral cowardice and military weakness, as to allow our Envoys to perish in an Abyssinian dungeon and yet make no sign, show even no desire to wipe such a stain from the escutcheon of England.¹¹

In subsequent parliamentary debates, several prominent officials made arguments that shared the logic of Rawlinson's assertions about prestige. However, there was no

¹¹ Rawlinson, *Hansard*, 189 (26 July 1867), cols. 241-2.

consensus about the intended audience for this demonstration of Britain's military strength and moral resolve. Rawlinson explicitly envisaged an audience comprising India and her neighbours in 'the East', and made no reference to Britain or Europe. Although ministers to some extent shared this concern for Indian audiences, they also considered reactions in both Britain and continental Europe.

That is however to anticipate events somewhat. At the time of Rawlinson's speech (July 1867), the government was not prepared to commit itself to an invasion of Abyssinia. The Conservatives had spent very little of the previous decade in government, but in June 1866 the Earl of Derby was able to form his third cabinet.¹² In this minority government it was Derby's son and heir, Lord Stanley, who became foreign secretary. In response to the motion, Stanley first expressed his agreement that 'nothing could be more repugnant to our feelings as a nation, nothing less creditable to us as a matter of honour', than to leave Cameron and the other British subjects at the mercy of Theodore.¹³ However, Stanley was anxious to explain to parliament the myriad risks of an expedition to Abyssinia. His concern was not that significant military resistance would be encountered, but that Abyssinia's climate, remoteness and topography would make operations there extremely dangerous. Stanley elaborated at some length on these perils: the climate was hostile (extreme heat at one season, heavy rains at another); Magdala was at least three hundred miles from the coast, and would have to be approached through mountainous terrain without any roads; much of this country was thought to be destitute of water; and through this desert any British force would have to carry its supplies. There were several 'unknowns' in all of this, including how Abyssinians would respond to the presence of armed strangers. Lord Stanley declared

¹² Derby's first cabinet lasted from Feb. 1852 to Dec. 1852; his second from Feb. 1858 to June 1859.

¹³ Lord Stanley, *Hansard*, 189 (26 July 1867), col. 251.

that it would be unwise for the government to commit to an expedition without much more information about its practicability:

I am sure, therefore, that the House will feel that, however anxious we may be to attain the object we all have in view, it would be madness to throw a British army into an unknown country, in a tropical climate, far from the sea, very far from its reserves and its supplies, without a full previous investigation as to the means of moving, feeding, and keeping them in health.¹⁴

The risks outlined by Stanley were daunting, and he acknowledged that an invasion of Abyssinia might bring military and political disaster.¹⁵ He revealed that inquiries would be made of the relevant authorities (the War Office and the India Office) but warned parliament that the government would not undertake an expedition unless it satisfied a test of proportionality, such that it was ‘practicable with only a reasonable expenditure of men and means.’¹⁶ Stanley is usually regarded as a cautious foreign secretary, and the editor of his journals concluded that he was opposed to the expedition.¹⁷ There seems to be no evidence for this from the published journals, which reveal only Stanley’s reluctance to write anything about Abyssinia.¹⁸ Other historians have also concluded that Stanley was opposed to the enterprise; and that he insisted on making further inquiries in the hope that the authorities ‘might solve his problem’ by declaring an

¹⁴ Lord Stanley, *Hansard*, 189 (26 July 1867), cols. 251-2.

¹⁵ Lord Stanley, *Hansard*, 189 (26 July 1867), col. 252.

¹⁶ Lord Stanley, *Hansard*, 189 (26 July 1867), cols. 252-3.

¹⁷ *Disraeli, Derby and the Conservative Party: Journals and Memoirs of Edward Henry, Lord Stanley, 1849-1869*, ed. J.R. Vincent (Hassocks, 1978), p. xvi.

¹⁸ The reader of the published journals learns only that the ‘the rescue of the Abyssinian prisoners’ was the first of the ‘chief questions’ under discussion at the Foreign Office on 1 Nov. 1866, and that at a cabinet meeting of 11 May 1867 the government had resolved not to send an expedition to Abyssinia. Entries for 1 Nov. 1866 & 11 May 1867, *Journals and Memoirs of Lord Stanley*, ed. Vincent, pp. 269, 308.

invasion of Abyssinia to be impossible.¹⁹

The India Office however told Stanley that British Indian forces were able to invade Abyssinia and reach the captives, though it also reminded him that the decision whether or not they should rest with the Foreign Office.²⁰ Less than a month after Stanley's attempts to dampen public expectations, Britain's commitment to use military force in order to free the captives was included in the Queen's statement at the prorogation of parliament.²¹ Stanley had stated that the expedition would only be launched if inquiries indicated that it could be carried out with merely 'a reasonable expenditure of men and means'. Given the scale of the undertaking, it is hard to understand how it satisfied that test of proportionality. The expedition comprised thirteen thousand soldiers (nine thousand of whom were Indian troops), twenty-four thousand camp-followers, and fifty-five thousand mules and other transport animals, all conveyed from India to the east African coast by a fleet of nearly three hundred ships.²² Lieutenant-General Sir Robert Napier, commander-in-chief at Bombay, was appointed to lead the expedition. This seemed to be upping the stakes even more; a less senior officer would have been less risky to British prestige, should anything go amiss in Abyssinia. The objective of this imperial armada was to rescue one British consul (Cameron), one British envoy (Rassam), and perhaps three other British subjects.²³ The projected financial cost was

¹⁹ N. Rodgers, 'The Abyssinian Expedition of 1867-1868: Disraeli's Imperialism or James Murray's War?', *Historical Journal*, 27 (1984), 140.

²⁰ Rodgers, 'The Abyssinian Expedition', 142.

²¹ This was not a declaration of war as such, but a declaration of intent. The Queen's statement read as follows: 'The Communications which I have made to the reigning Monarch of Abyssinia, with a view to obtain the Release of the British Subjects whom he detains in his Dominions, have, I regret to say, thus far proved ineffectual. I have therefore found it necessary to address to him a peremptory Demand for their immediate Liberation, and to take Measures for supporting that Demand, should it ultimately be found necessary to resort to Force.' *Hansard*, 189 (21 Aug. 1867), col. 1635.

²² A. Moorehead, *The Blue Nile* (Harmondsworth, 1962), pp. 233-5.

²³ The only other British subjects seem to have been Lieutenant Prideaux (Bombay army) and Dr Henry Blanc (Indian Medical Service), who had accompanied Rassam on his special mission, and Henry Stern, a missionary. According to the list sent by Napier to the secretary of state for India shortly after

commensurate with this massive military and logistical challenge: the government estimate in November 1867 was that the total expenditure would be £3,800,000.²⁴ This estimate eclipses the £2,300,000 subsequently sought from parliament in order to underwrite the 1882 expedition to Egypt; and makes the £300,000 requested for the Gordon relief expedition seem almost trifling.²⁵ The government's estimate for the Abyssinian expedition however proved extremely optimistic. The Conservatives later increased their estimate to £5,000,000, and raised the income tax from fourpence to sixpence in order to meet the expense. The revised estimate had in turn to be increased, and the Liberal government in 1869 put the total expense at £9,000,000.²⁶ This figure comfortably exceeded the total cost of all civil departments of government in 1867, was approximately sixty per cent. of the amount spent on the army and ordinance, and on its own constituted more than one eighth of Britain's gross public expenditure for 1867.²⁷

Press opinion

Rawlinson's arguments about the importance of prestige to British rule in India were consistent with opinions expressed in many newspapers, especially those on the political right. The day after the Queen's declaration at the prorogation of parliament,

Magdala had been stormed, there were sixty captives in all: Cameron, Rassam, Prideaux, Blanc, Stern, and a number of predominantly German, Swiss, and French missionaries and artisans, together with their wives and children. Lieutenant-General Sir Robert Napier to the secretary of state for India, 14 Apr. 1868, Appendix G (List of the Captives), *Abyssinian Expedition. Copy of two despatches from Sir Robert Napier to the Secretary of State for India, dated respectively 14th April and 12th May 1868*, Parliamentary Papers 1867-68 (337) (hereafter '*Parliamentary Papers Abyssinian Expedition*'), pp. 7-8. Although these 'Europeans' were liberated by the British expedition, they had not been referred to in the Queen's parliamentary declaration of Aug. 1867.

²⁴ Disraeli (chancellor of the exchequer), *Hansard*, 190 (26 Nov. 1867), col. 192.

²⁵ Expenditure for the expeditions to Egypt and the Sudan are taken from Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, pp. 115-7, 144.

²⁶ W.F. Monypenny and G.E. Buckle, *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield* (VI vols., London, 1910-20), vol. V, p. 45.

²⁷ British government expenditure for the year 1867: army and ordinance, £15.1 million; navy, £10.7 million; education, art and science, £1.42 million; works and buildings, £0.82 million; salaries of public departments, £1.54 million; law and justice, £3.55 million; colonial, consular and foreign, £0.54 million; gross public expenditure, £67.2 million. B.R. Mitchell, *Abstract of British historical statistics* (Cambridge, 1962), p. 397.

the *Standard* signalled its approval of this display of resolve: Theodore ‘must be punished and the *prestige* of our name restored, however high the cost may be.’²⁸ In a later article, the *Standard* amplified its arguments in favour of military action:

Whatever injury has accrued to us through the captivity of our countrymen in Abyssinia has been of a kind to affect directly and principally that *prestige* which is the basis of British dominion in the East, and the maintenance of which is a matter of vital consequence to British India... There are doubtless many thousands jealous and curious eyes turned from the East to the Abyssinian question—watchful, with no vague or sentimental interest, to see how far England is able to protect her subjects from outrage against the Abyssinian tyrant. There can be no greater mistake for us than to suppose that the natives of India generally are careless observers of our foreign policy. They are naturally even more interested than we are ourselves, in watching the rise and fall of that *prestige* which represents to them the empire of England.²⁹

Like Rawlinson, the *Standard* considered that the audiences for which British prestige had to be restored were Indian and eastern. In support of this contention, it offered practical reasons why Indians were not indifferent to events in Abyssinia: there was commercial intercourse between the Abyssinian coast, Aden, the Persian Gulf and India, and thousands of Indian Muslims made the annual pilgrimage to Mecca.³⁰

Some sections of Anglo-Indian opinion were even more insistent that the British government had to take action in Abyssinia. In this piece, which appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette* just under a month after the original had been published in India, the *Bombay Gazette* described a belligerent attitude among the British community in India:

²⁸ *Standard*, 22 Aug. 1867, p. 4 (emphasis in original).

²⁹ *Standard*, 10 Oct. 1867, p. 4 (emphasis in original).

³⁰ *Standard*, 10 Oct. 1867, p. 4.

We believe that we are correct in stating that the general feeling throughout the Bombay Presidency, and indeed throughout India generally, is that our honour and prestige imperatively call upon us to chastise those semi-barbarous natives of Abyssinia in a summary manner. Indeed, it may be said that some indignation has been aroused here at the dilatoriness and seeming indifference and apathy with which the Home Government moves in this matter. It has even been proposed by a writer in a Bengal journal that, in case the Home Government decides to take no warlike action in the matter, an expedition be got up in India of 200 British volunteers, who would be despatched to Abyssinia to fight their way to the prison house of Consul Cameron and his fellow captives at Magdala.³¹

The prospect of two hundred British volunteers charging into the desert and possibly swelling the ranks of the Abyssinian captives may now seem absurd or even comic. But such an undertaking would have seemed entirely plausible to ministers in London. Lord Stanley had in fact received several offers from gentlemen eager to lead a mission into the country.³² (There was subsequently an unofficial—and unsuccessful—mission to liberate the captives, as we shall see.) The enthusiasm for action evident in the *Bombay Gazette* article may have been encouraged by the expectation that an expedition would draw its troops principally from the Bombay presidency, as ultimately proved to be the case.

The *Pall Mall Gazette* also argued for an expedition to Abyssinia, although it used different language to make the case. Professing distaste for the word prestige, it instead

³¹ *Bombay Gazette*, 9 Aug. 1867, printed in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 5 Sept. 1867, p. 6.

³² Stanley had, unsurprisingly, declined such offers: ‘Whatever the original motive of the King in detaining these men might be, it was clear that it had become with him a policy to get into his hands as many Europeans as possible, and we did not think it desirable to increase the number.’ *Hansard*, 189 (26 July 1867), col. 250.

preferred to advocate an expedition on grounds of ‘duty’. This proved to be a theme in the parliamentary debates, where a number of politicians seemed reluctant to refer directly to prestige. This reluctance may in part be explained by etymology: contemporary definitions suggested prestige was a French word denoting primarily ‘illusion produced by sorcery’, and secondarily illusion of any sort effected by the arts that appeal to the eye of the imagination.³³ The *Pall Mall Gazette*’s substitution of ‘duty’ for ‘prestige’ seems to have been a matter of semantics; its argument avoided the word prestige but was made expressly on the basis of what *impression* would be made in India, should Britain not wipe off its ‘disgrace’ in Abyssinia.³⁴

The Times was more sceptical about the relationship between war in Abyssinia and British prestige or honour. An editorial in September 1867 complained that ‘[t]he prestige of the English name, concerning which our countrymen in the East always evince the most unnecessary anxiety, will not be increased by a fruitless, or even by a successful, incursion into Abyssinia. The honour of England is not to be advanced by a war with a tribe of savages.’³⁵ However, a subsequent editorial (only one month later) to some extent accepted the logic of the prestige argument, providing this assessment of public opinion in Britain:

Still, the country acquiesces in the war as inevitable, and nine people out of ten would give the same reason for supporting it. It is essential to the maintenance of our ‘prestige in the East,’ and upon our ‘prestige in the East’ depends not only the security of our Indian Empire, but the

³³ *Liverpool Mercury*, 28 Nov. 1867, p. 6.

³⁴ The *Gazette* argued that ‘we have a special interest in doing [our duty] in the present case, inasmuch as a failure to discharge that duty would be regarded all over India as peculiarly disgraceful, and inasmuch as disgrace in India is a most serious matter.’ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 29 Nov. 1867, p. 1.

³⁵ *Times*, 12 Sept. 1867, p. 6.

personal safety of thousands of our countrymen.³⁶

The Times conceded that by leaving ‘Consul Cameron and his fellow-captives’ to their fate ‘we should probably imperil more lives than we stake upon the expedition.’³⁷ The logic of this argument was that abandoning Cameron and Rassam would embolden rulers in ‘barbarous’ courts to insult, incarcerate or even kill British envoys. This argument was itself premised on questions of reputation and prestige: invading Abyssinia was meant to show tyrants wherever situated that they too would receive such punishment were they to mistreat British officers. *The Times* also contended that even if Theodore left Magdala on hearing news of the British mission, his flight, combined with the recovery of the prisoners, ‘may produce a permanent and salutary impression on the Oriental mind.’³⁸ The word ‘impression’ is significant in this context, and suggests that *The Times* shared the logic of the prestige argument.

The Liberal *Daily News* was scathing in its criticism of the wisdom of an expedition to Abyssinia. It was extremely sceptical that the invasion would build up ‘in India that prestige which our great Indian authorities so often assure us needs repair.’ The *Daily News* even adopted a mocking tone to the logic behind the expedition: it was ‘an odd thing to send a consul to build up British influence in a country where the cities are villages... It is an odd thing to send two-and-thirty thousand people to Abyssinia to set two at liberty. It is an odd thing to send the native subject Indian to fight for us in another country, in order to impress him with the extent of our power to hold his own.’³⁹ These sounded like powerful criticisms: would Indians really be impressed by

³⁶ *Times*, 12 Oct. 1867, p. 6.

³⁷ *Times*, 12 Oct. 1867, p. 6.

³⁸ *Times*, 12 Oct. 1867, p. 6.

³⁹ *Daily News*, 27 Dec. 1867, p. 4.

Britain's imperial strength if Indian troops were sent to rescue British subjects in Africa? One might have expected some leading Liberal politicians to criticise the government's policy along these lines. In late 1867, they had an opportunity to do so in parliament.

Parliament and prestige

Parliament was recalled for an emergency session in November 1867, so that the government could obtain approval for paying the expenses of the expedition. By the time politicians gathered at Westminster, an advance brigade had already landed on the east African shore (at Zula, on 30 October) in order to construct a railway and two piers, for disembarking troops and stores.⁴⁰ The government was therefore seeking approval for costs some of which had already been incurred; a state of affairs that concerned Disraeli.⁴¹ Disraeli was at this time chancellor of the exchequer and leader of the Conservatives in the House of Commons. However, he seems to have made most of the arrangements for the November session, as the prime minister was ill.⁴²

During this emergency session the arguments of leading ministers, in seeking to justify the invasion of Abyssinia, echoed much of what Rawlinson had said in July about prestige, duty and honour. The main debate in the Commons took place on 26 November, as part of the vote of supply. Disraeli set out the government's position and sought approval for an initial credit of £2,000,000, premised on an estimated total

⁴⁰ T.R. Moreman, 'Napier, Robert Cornelis, first Baron Napier of Magdala (1810-1890)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed. May 2008).

⁴¹ As far back as 8 Sept., Disraeli had shared his anxiety with the Earl of Derby: 'I must call your consideration to the difficult and dangerous position to which, it seems to me, your Government is drifting. We are carrying on a war, and an expensive war, without the sanction of Parliament.' Disraeli to Lord Derby, 8 Sept. 1867, cited in Monypenny and Buckle, *Life of Beaconsfield*, vol. IV, pp. 568-9.

⁴² Derby was afflicted by a fit of gout in late Sept. 1867. Monypenny and Buckle, *Life of Beaconsfield*, vol. IV, p. 569.

expenditure of £3,800,000. He summarised the government's position, claiming that military intervention was now imperative: 'it was absolutely necessary to the interests of this country that there should be a recourse to arms, in order to vindicate the honour of the Throne'.⁴³ Disraeli thus invoked the 'honour of the Throne', a formulation that suggested he had non-Indian audiences in mind for the impending display of British military might.

In contrast, the foreign secretary clearly had Indian audiences in mind. Lord Stanley's speech is of particular importance, because the Foreign Office had primary responsibility for the decision to launch the expedition. As we have seen, in July Stanley had been at pains to explain the multitudinous risks of action in Abyssinia. Now however, he argued that the (prestige-driven) security of India made the expedition imperative:

We have to consider opinion in India as well as here. If Europe alone were concerned... [Britain's] diplomatic position would have been somewhat affected: but still I suppose no very serious evil in an Imperial sense would have arisen. But how would it be in India? The possession of India is no doubt a great glory, but it is also a great responsibility, and under some circumstances a great danger. We rest our position there on what is vaguely called prestige. We hold our power in India not indeed exclusively by the exercise of force, but in a great measure by the knowledge that, however mildly and justly British authority may be exercised, it is backed in the last resort by a power which cannot be resisted. It follows as a consequence of this position that whatever it may cost we cannot allow that idea to be dispelled; we cannot accept an insult from any uncivilized tribe, and merely say we are very sorry, but it is out of our power

⁴³ Disraeli, *Hansard*, 190 (26 Nov. 1867), cols. 181, 189-90, 192.

to punish it.⁴⁴

This is a striking statement by Lord Stanley. It is explicit not only that he had an Indian audience in mind but that Indian interests were driving British foreign policy. The perception in Anglo-Indian organs such as the *Calcutta Review* was that the influence was very much the other way around.⁴⁵ Stanley's parliamentary explanation for the decision to send the expedition is also striking because its conceptual and geographical scope appeared to be limitless: 'whatever it may cost' Britain could not let an idea be dispelled (the knowledge that British authority was 'backed in the last resort by a power which cannot be resisted'). In fact, Stanley went on to suggest that there were limits to this logic, but only very distant ones: where an undertaking was 'physically impossible' there would be no duty to intervene. In support of this judgement, Stanley gave the example of Colonels Stoddart and Conolly, who were imprisoned and subsequently executed in Bukhara (this was the episode Rawlinson had claimed was a main cause of the Indian Mutiny).⁴⁶ On this basis Stanley distinguished the present case. For all the hazards of a march to Magdala, it was not impossible; and where an undertaking was *possible* then there was 'in honour and duty no choice but to go forward.'⁴⁷ This was a remarkable precedent to set. Had Lawrence read Stanley's speech—and he did scrutinise parliamentary debates on Indian questions—he might have grimaced. It was

⁴⁴ Lord Stanley, *Hansard*, 190 (26 Nov. 1867), cols. 211-2.

⁴⁵ For example, in May 1867, writing on the subject of the British captives in Abyssinia, the *Calcutta Review* asserted there was 'no doubt that in the main, the foreign policy of India must be made to bend itself to the requirements of the mother-country, but at the same time England's prestige is now so intimately interwoven with her Indian administration, that it seems to us the height of folly to overlook for merely European considerations the effect of English policy upon the stability of our rule in India.' Anon., 'The British Captives in Abyssinia', *Calcutta Review*, 89 (May 1867), 215.

⁴⁶ Stanley explained that it was believed at the time 'that to send an expedition from India to Bokhara was an undertaking physically impossible. England was not then in possession of the Punjab; the distance from the then existing boundaries of India was over 1,200 miles; the road lay over some of the highest mountains in the globe, through countries very thinly peopled, and whose inhabitants, where any existed, were fanatically hostile. The rescue of those officers was therefore not attempted simply because it was judged to be impossible.' *Hansard*, 190 (26 Nov. 1867), col. 212.

⁴⁷ Stanley, *Hansard*, 190 (26 Nov. 1867), cols. 212, 214.

exactly this type of prestige-driven response to the ‘insult’ of envoys that reinforced his conviction that none should be sent to central Asia, where the behaviour of an Amir or Khan might make Theodore’s conduct seem merely eccentric.

The Commons debate continued two days after Stanley’s speech. Austen Layard spoke with particular force about the importance of prestige to Britain’s interests, and not only in India. Layard was at this time the Liberal MP for Southwark, but he had been under-secretary (to Earl Russell and then the Earl of Clarendon) at the Foreign Office from 1861 to the fall of the Liberal government in 1866.⁴⁸ He had therefore worked at the responsible department during the events that culminated in the captivity of Cameron and Rassam. Earl Russell relied on Layard as a specialist in eastern matters, and the selection of Rassam as envoy seems to have been heavily influenced by Layard.⁴⁹ Layard declared that:

It is no question of ‘Indian prestige;’ but it is a question of the prestige of England—that is to say, of her reputation, honour, power, as a great nation both in the East and in the West, of her ability to avenge and punish insult, and to protect her representatives and her subjects... This is an Imperial question and one not limited to India alone, although it no doubt arises from the fact of our being an Eastern as well as a European Power. Whilst we hold our Indian Empire we must be prepared to maintain our influence, our interests, and our position in the East... The very maintenance of our Indian Empire depends upon the conviction that its populations entertain of our greatness and strength, of our power to punish insults and to enforce our rule.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Layard was later British ambassador at Constantinople. J. Parry, ‘Layard, Sir Austen Henry (1817-1894)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed. May 2006).

⁴⁹ Nini Rodgers describes Rassam as a ‘protégé’ of Layard’s. Rodgers argues that Earl Russell blamed James Murray (assistant under-secretary and head of the consular department in the Foreign Office) for Cameron’s captivity, and avoided using Murray as an Abyssinian adviser after May 1864, leaning increasingly on Layard. Rodgers, ‘The Abyssinian Expedition’, fn. 46, 138.

⁵⁰ Austen Layard, *Hansard*, 190 (26 Nov. 1867), col. 274.

Layard thus shared the logic of the prestige argument made by Rawlinson and Lord Stanley, but envisaged an imperial as well as an Indian audience watching Britain's response to events in Abyssinia. Sir Stafford Northcote spoke after Layard. As secretary of state for India, Northcote had a particular interest in the expedition, the planning and execution of which fell to his department. Northcote first made an observation about the preceding debate: '[s]ome people say we are going to war, not only for prestige, but for prestige in India.'⁵¹ Northcote said he disliked the word prestige, and explained that the purpose of prosecuting a war in Abyssinia was upholding the principle of inviolability of the sovereign's envoys. This, Northcote argued, was of particular importance to India, because British envoys to 'semi-barbarous countries' were typically envoys of the Indian empire. He provided examples of British ambassadors, envoys, or political agents in Burma, Nepal, Cashmere, Zanzibar, Muscat and Aden.⁵² Northcote thus made the same argument elaborated in *The Times's* editorial of one month before: leaving Cameron and Rassam to their fate would jeopardise the safety of their compatriots in similar positions throughout the world, especially 'the East'. Although Northcote was reluctant to use the word prestige, his justification for intervention was premised upon it. As he asserted later in his speech, 'India really gains something by the organization of so powerful a force, and by the display of her strength to her neighbours.'⁵³ The idea of such a 'display' of military strength fitted squarely within the prestige arguments made by Rawlinson, Stanley and Layard, although those men were prepared to make the case by embracing the actual term.

⁵¹ Northcote, *Hansard*, 190 (28 Nov. 1867), col. 371.

⁵² 'In fact, Envoys or Agents, accredited by the Indian Government are scattered over all parts of the East.' Northcote, *Hansard*, 190 (28 Nov. 1867), cols. 371-2.

⁵³ Northcote, *Hansard*, 190 (28 Nov. 1867), col. 379.

Northcote's immediate predecessor as secretary of state for India, Viscount Cranborne, also found the word prestige somewhat distasteful. Like Northcote, he sought to emphasise different motives for sending the expedition:

I confess it appears to me that if the motives which the Government have assigned for this war are the real ones, or anything like them, it is one of the most wicked wars ever undertaken. I believe that the nation generally consents to go into this war on this very clear and distinct principle—that a person employed on behalf of England to go on a service of danger has while on that service been maltreated and imprisoned, and that, therefore, on every consideration of honor, it is the duty of England to relieve him from his position. Well, when there is a principle of honor in the case, and when, representing our honorable nation, we desire to carry that principle into effect, it seems to me to be a degrading course of proceeding to parade before Europe and the world all those wretched considerations, such as the effect the expedition may have on the minds of populations in this or that part of the East, or what it may do in maintaining for us that mysterious something which we call 'prestige.'... I wish that by common consent we could banish from the Parliamentary vocabulary a word which has so unpleasant an etymological connection with deceit.⁵⁴

Cranborne supported the decision to invade Abyssinia, endorsing 'the thorough justice and necessity of this war'.⁵⁵ His protest against the terminology used by his colleagues is potentially misleading. Although Cranborne recoiled from speaking of prestige, his emphasis on the more palatable constructs of 'honour' and 'duty', and his argument as a whole, shared much of its logic with the earlier arguments of Rawlinson, Stanley, Layard and Northcote. As Cranborne acknowledged later in the same speech, if Britain did not rescue its agents 'from the hands of barbarous or half-civilized Courts', the

⁵⁴ Cranborne, *Hansard*, 190 (28 Nov. 1867), cols. 404-5.

⁵⁵ Cranborne, *Hansard*, 190 (28 Nov. 1867), col. 407.

effect ‘would be fruitful of evil’. This was not something specific to India, but ‘as much an Imperial interest as anything that could be named.’⁵⁶ The reason of course that failing to take action would be ‘fruitful of evil’ was that elucidated by *The Times* and by Northcote. This was a matter of reputation, honour and prestige, however unpalatable the latter word was to some ministers. Many years later, Salisbury acknowledged the importance of prestige in governing India. However strong frontiers and fortresses were, ‘if the *prestige* of the Power coming against you is greater than your own, it will penetrate through that barrier; it will undermine your sway; it will dissolve the loyalty and patriotism of those you rule’.⁵⁷

The reluctance of some ministers to invoke prestige as a justification or motive for invading Abyssinia merits some comment. It seems likely that what Cranborne had indicated expressly—the etymology of the term—caused some unease. It also seems possible (although one can only be tentative) that what Northcote and Cranborne found distasteful was not so much the word prestige, or the idea of going to war for it, but the notion of somehow playing to the public gallery. These men may have perceived that an emphasis on prestige was consistent with the politics of demagoguery, rather than rational debate and detached foreign policy-making. Cranborne later showed considerable frustration regarding public pressure to respond in kind following German and Russian seizures of ports in China.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Cranborne, *Hansard*, 190 (28 Nov. 1867), cols. 404-5.

⁵⁷ R.L. Greaves, *Persia and the Defence of India, 1884-1892: A study in the foreign policy of the third Marquis of Salisbury* (London, 1959), p. 67 (emphasis in original).

⁵⁸ In Nov. 1897 Germany seized a naval base in northern China. Russia then followed the German lead, and laid claim to another northern harbour, at Port Arthur. Cranborne (by this time Lord Salisbury) as a matter of personal sentiment attached little importance to obtaining ‘territorial compensation’ for the German and Russian actions. Nonetheless, he resignedly anticipated ‘that “the public” will require territorial or cartographic consolation in China. It will not be useful, & it will be expensive but as a matter of course we shall have to do it.’ Lord Salisbury to Chamberlain, 30 Dec. 1897, cited in Otte, ‘The Politics of Foreign Policy’, p. 389.

Rumours

The idea that maintaining British prestige was necessary for the control of India seems to have been reinforced by official anxiety about the danger posed by rumours circulated within the subcontinent. Such rumours might be imported from outside India through trade connections or religious pilgrimage; considerations to which ministers showed great sensitivity. In his parliamentary speech, Northcote emphasised that Indian traders from Bombay had contacts at Massawa and around the Red Sea. He also described how ‘hundreds and thousands’ of Indians travelled to Mecca each year, and naturally heard reports of events in the countries bordering the Red Sea. If these pilgrims heard ‘anything affecting the character and conduct of England’ they would spread these tidings across India on their return.⁵⁹ Layard explained the risks this posed in the case of the British captives in Abyssinia:

the thousands of Indian Mussulman pilgrims who yearly flock to Mecca would inevitably hear that a petty sovereign, whose dominions were not far off, had imprisoned and maltreated an Envoy of the Queen of England and had defied her power, and that we had accepted the insult and taken no step to release her messenger. They would return to India and spread these tidings through the length and breadth of the land—as they come from all parts of the peninsula—and the result would be a contempt for the power of England, which would inevitably lead to the most serious results.⁶⁰

Ministers were mindful of anecdotal evidence about the power of rumours in India. For example, Lord Stanley recollected that news of the disaster at Kabul (1841-42) was

⁵⁹ Northcote, *Hansard*, 190 (28 Nov. 1867), col. 372.

⁶⁰ Layard, *Hansard*, 190 (26 Nov. 1867), cols. 274-5.

known in the bazaars of the Madras Presidency before it had reached the British authorities. For Stanley, this was proof of ‘how far and how fast intelligence sometimes travels among an Oriental population’.⁶¹ Stanley was anxious to describe not merely the speed of rumours but their potency, and to this end offered some observations about their role in the origins of the Mutiny:

I believe that the conviction which the Sepoys had come to entertain of their own power—a conviction without which the great mutiny would never have taken place—was founded to a very considerable extent on the rumours—no doubt greatly exaggerated and distorted rumours—of what was said and thought in England with respect to what was called the breakdown of our military system in the Crimean war.⁶²

Layard had a different theory about the origins of the Mutiny. He had visited India at the time, in order to ascertain for himself its causes. The cause Layard heard more than any other was the loss of British prestige following the mutiny of two Indian regiments (at Hyderabad and Berhampore) that Lord Dalhousie had ‘passed over and condoned’. The natives of India, Layard was told, understood from these events that the government of India was not powerful enough to punish the offenders. For Layard this was proof of ‘the incalculable disasters which may arise from what is termed, for want of a better word, “loss of prestige.”’⁶³

It seems clear therefore that a number of leading British officials and politicians were sensitive to considerations of prestige, and that in the case of Abyssinia such considerations constituted not merely a context for the decision to send the expedition

⁶¹ Stanley, *Hansard*, 190 (26 Nov. 1867), col. 212.

⁶² Stanley, *Hansard*, 190 (26 Nov. 1867), col. 212.

⁶³ Layard, *Hansard*, 190 (26 Nov. 1867), cols. 275-6.

but a principal motive for it. Further, the fact that officials (including the foreign secretary, Lord Stanley) placed such emphasis on prestige in their parliamentary speeches either advocating or justifying the invasion suggests they thought arguments about prestige would have rhetorical force. The essence of these arguments was that a tangible force in India (British soldiers) was in itself insufficient to safeguard British interests on the subcontinent and beyond, and that an intangible force (prestige) was also necessary for this purpose. It followed from this premise that maintaining an *impression* of strength was fundamental to British power. Some of the evidence cited by the politicians who spoke most forcefully about the importance of prestige was inconsistent, as they for example ascribed different causes to the Mutiny of 1857. Rawlinson pointed to the loss of prestige during the first Afghan war (1838-42); Stanley cited the Crimean war (1854-56); and Layard referred to the mutiny of two native regiments in India (1857). But although these men disagreed about the ways it might be lost, they nonetheless agreed that the security of India depended on maintaining prestige.

Liberals

Layard seems to have spoken about the importance of prestige with more force than his Liberal colleagues. One might in fact have expected many Liberals to contest the idea that invading Abyssinia was necessary for the sake of British prestige. Most Liberals instead chose to criticise the government on constitutional grounds relating to various alleged ‘abuses’ of parliament. They protested that the government had kept parliament in ignorance of its preparations for war, and had only announced its intentions at the August prorogation.⁶⁴ Liberals also claimed that the 1858 Government of India Act,

⁶⁴ See e.g. the speech of Robert Lowe (MP for Calne), a former secretary to the Board of Control (1852-

which prohibited the use of Indian revenues for military operations beyond the frontiers of India, had been breached.⁶⁵ Gladstone voiced his objections on both of these constitutional questions.⁶⁶ Gladstone did not, however, protest about the merits or objectives of the expedition:

I am wholly unprepared to censure or condemn the policy which the Government have pursued... the Government appear to me in their general conduct to have been guided on the one hand by those mingled sentiments of regard to the honor of the country and the fair and just lights and claims of British subjects, more especially of a British Envoy, and on the other hand by that love of peace, which upon the whole is what we wish to find in those by whom the affairs of the country are administered... This expedition having been undertaken in the name of the country, and in a cause which is undoubtedly just, the first wish of our hearts and minds must be for its success.⁶⁷

It is possible that Gladstone's muted criticism of government policy was part of a temporary political truce during the November session, following the serious illness of Disraeli's wife.⁶⁸ But it is nonetheless striking that he chose to protest solely about constitutional questions, rather than the politics of prestige. Liberals who criticised the government's emphasis on prestige during the November session in fact seem to be

55) and later chancellor of the exchequer (1868-73) and home secretary (1873-74), *Hansard*, 190 (26 Nov. 1867), cols. 193-203: 'We are asked to vote money, a great portion of which has been already spent, and to give our sanction to an expedition which has already started.'

⁶⁵ Section 55 of the Act: 'Except for preventing or repelling actual invasion of Her Majesty's Indian possessions, or under other sudden and urgent necessity, the revenues of India shall not, without the consent of both Houses of Parliament, be applicable to defray the expenses of any military operation carried on beyond the external frontiers of such possessions by Her Majesty's forces charged upon such revenues.' *Hansard*, 190 (28 Nov. 1867), col. 359.

⁶⁶ Gladstone argued that when the government determined to send an expedition from India to Abyssinia it should have announced that intention in parliament. Further, Gladstone complained that it was 'at least doubtful whether the Act of 1858 has been obeyed.' *Hansard*, 190 (26 Nov. 1867), cols. 299-300.

⁶⁷ Gladstone, *Hansard*, 190 (26 Nov. 1867), cols. 296-7.

⁶⁸ R. Shannon, *Gladstone: Heroic Minister 1865-1898* (London, 1999), p. 45.

rather elusive. Only Lord Lyvedon and Henry Fawcett seem to have done so. Lyvedon objected to the word prestige, noting that it originally meant ‘illusions’, and challenged the government’s contention that Britain’s reputation in India depended upon the invasion of Abyssinia.⁶⁹ Fawcett was the MP for Brighton and was at this time earning a reputation for his ‘individualism, and independence of party managers’.⁷⁰ He was certainly blunt in his criticism of the government’s position:

As to loss of prestige... The people of India—or at least the intelligent people of India, who alone would be likely to hear of it—would have concluded, if we had declined to send an army to Abyssinia, that our refusal arose, not for fear of King Theodore, but solely from an unwillingness to intrust, for the sake of a few prisoners, some thousands of men to a pestilential climate and an unknown country.⁷¹

In some Radical publications the tone was also scathing. *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper* sought to make a patriotic argument based on the constitutional ‘abuses’ committed by the government. It complained that ‘the English people—whose credit has been used to the extent of at least four millions sterling—have had no more control over the war with Abyssinia than the subjects of Napoleon. The English public will not show themselves ready to buy prestige in the East, at the expense of their rights at home.’⁷² This was the sort of argument made by leading Liberals such as Gladstone and Lord Hartington a decade later, when they attacked Disraeli’s government for pursuing ‘prestige-driven’

⁶⁹ Lyvedon, *Hansard*, 190 (19 Nov. 1867), col. 34.

⁷⁰ According to his entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, by the end of the 1860s Fawcett had emerged at the head of a group of ‘maverick’ Liberal MPs sometimes referred to as ‘Fawcettites’, and notable for their university background, radical individualism, and independence of party managers. They included Charles Dilke, Auberon Herbert, Walter Morrison, and Lord Edmond Fitzmaurice. L. Goldman, ‘Fawcett, Henry (1833-1884)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed. May 2006).

⁷¹ Fawcett, *Hansard*, 190 (28 Nov. 1867), col. 381.

⁷² *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*, 1 Dec. 1867, p. 1.

foreign policy in Afghanistan and southern Africa.⁷³ In 1867 however, it was left to Radicals like Fawcett and publications such as the *Daily News* and *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* to condemn the Conservative government's stated appetite for prestige. It is hard to be certain why Liberals were so reticent on this question. One possibility is that Liberals felt uncomfortable criticising the government because much of what had gone wrong in Abyssinia—including the appointment and captivity of Cameron and later Rassam—had occurred during the Liberal administration of 1859-66. Liberal criticism may also have been muted in part because the objections of the expedition were in a sense defensive (liberating the captives) rather than aggressive (acquiring new territory for example). That hypothesis would certainly be consistent with Liberal reaction after the completion of the expedition, when Gladstone expressed his satisfaction that it had been confined to its original objectives.⁷⁴

Sir John Lawrence and Abyssinia

Lawrence mentioned Abyssinia in a letter to Northcote in July 1867, before the government had committed itself on the question. Lawrence thought that the British captives should not be left to perish, and that a military force would succeed in an attempt to liberate them.⁷⁵ This opinion occupied only a few lines in a long letter covering the varied terrain of irrigation works, prison construction, the degree of control exercised by central government over the Bombay presidency, and certain misdeeds of

⁷³ J. Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe, 1830-1886* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 334-5. The Liberal critique of Conservative foreign policy around the time of the second Afghan war will be considered in chapter VII.

⁷⁴ Gladstone declared that: 'we are indebted to the Government for the firmness and decision with which, from first to last, they persisted—acting therein, I must say, in accordance with public opinion and the enlightened mind of the nation—in confining the operations of this Expedition to its legitimate purpose, and in refusing to be led beyond the line of duty and wisdom by any visions, however flattering and seductive.' *Hansard*, 193 (2 July 1868), col. 527.

⁷⁵ 'I must say that I think we ought not to leave the captives to perish, without making a suitable effort to release them. Mere expostulation and diplomacy will do nothing. A Military force under a good commander, backed by a little good policy, ought and would succeed, I incline to think.' Lawrence to Northcote, 18 July 1867, Lawrence Mss/32B, no. 43.

officers in Burma. At no point in Lawrence's correspondence with the secretary of state did he suggest that liberating Cameron and Rassam was necessary for (or even that it would be beneficial to) the security of British India. On hearing that the government had resolved to send an expedition, Lawrence conveyed his satisfaction to Northcote: 'I am glad of this. I am sure that we owe it to our prestige, and above all to the captives, to make a thorough effort for their release.'⁷⁶ However, Lawrence envisaged a non-Indian audience for the prestige to which he had referred. His subsequent letters make clear that he thought the expedition was not necessary for Indian security, a point he made emphatically in January 1868:

I cannot admit that India has the slightest interest in the question at issue between England and King Theodore. We shall be neither stronger nor weaker out here, if he is duly punished for his misdeeds. Abyssinia is too distant from India; the communications between the two countries are too slight for the people of India to take any interest in what goes on in the former part of the world. The true grounds of the war are the vindication of England's honour, and the propriety of doing all we can to release the captives.⁷⁷

Lawrence had a reason to downplay the importance of the expedition, because he was in disagreement with Northcote about which government would pay the ordinary expenses of the troops deployed from India. Lawrence thought it 'quite obvious' that the British government was to blame for allowing Cameron to leave his 'proper post' at Massawa and become entangled in Abyssinian politics in the interior: why he asked 'should India bear a share of the cost of a war thus brought on?'⁷⁸ Nonetheless, it seems clear from

⁷⁶ Lawrence to Northcote, 3 Aug. 1867, Lawrence Mss/32B, no. 47.

⁷⁷ Lawrence to Northcote, 2 Jan. 1868, cited in Bosworth Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence*, vol. II, p. 525.

⁷⁸ Lawrence to Northcote, 20 Jan. 1868 (1), Lawrence Mss/32B, no. 75. In the event, the government of India paid for all the ordinary expenses of the troops provided from India, and the British government met all other expenses. Rodgers, 'The Abyssinian Expedition', fn. 87, 145.

Lawrence's earlier and subsequent correspondence that his assertion to Northcote (that inflicting punishment on Theodore would make the British position in India 'neither stronger nor weaker') reflected his sincere assessment of the situation. When Lawrence heard of the success at Magdala he was certainly pleased: it was 'glorious' news, the dangers of a long campaign had been averted, and the troops and 'equipage' sent from India were 'generally approved'. Lawrence even expressed his hope that the government would grant his friend Sir Robert Napier a pension. But at no point did Lawrence express satisfaction or relief that the security of India had been strengthened because an Abyssinian ruler had been punished and the captives liberated.⁷⁹

Lawrence's stance demonstrates that it was possible and indeed logical for contemporaries to value prestige and yet not accept that the expedition to Abyssinia was necessary in order to defend the British hold on India. There seems to have been a genuine disagreement on this matter between Lawrence and Northcote. Northcote made arguments to Lawrence that were consistent with his earlier statements in parliament, and seemed surprised that Lawrence did not share his assessment of the security repercussions: 'do you seriously believe that such tameness would fail to produce its effect in India, or in the countries adjoining India?'⁸⁰ Yet Lawrence *did* believe that 'such tameness' (that is to say, not sending an expedition to Abyssinia) would have no impact on the security of British India.

Lawrence's approach to the Abyssinian captives was in important respects consistent with the sentiments of the *Calcutta Review* and the *Times of India*. Before the

⁷⁹ Lawrence to Northcote, 3 May 1868 and 13 May 1868, Lawrence Mss/33, nos. 31 & 32.

⁸⁰ 'What I hold is, that India, surrounded as she is by semi-civilised neighbours with whom she is obliged to enter into occasional diplomatic relations, is far more interested in maintaining the principle of the inviolability of envoys than England is.' Northcote to Lawrence, 9 Dec. 1867, Lawrence Mss/28, no. 54.

announcement of the expedition, the *Calcutta Review* had argued that efforts should be made to liberate the British subjects, especially Cameron and Rassam, because the ‘insult and disgrace’ of their captivity had to be ‘wiped out’.⁸¹ This would also have been the place for the *Calcutta Review* to argue that the expedition was *necessary* for the prestige-driven security of India, but it did not do so. Similarly, in a later article, written after the expedition had returned, the *Calcutta Review* characterised the undertaking in terms of the ‘national honour’ of ‘England’, rather than the security of India.⁸² It offered no comment on the effect the successful expedition had had on Indians and their regard or fear for the power of Britain. Instead the article concentrated on the effect in Britain.⁸³ The *Calcutta Review* acknowledged that the ‘excessive expenditure’ of the campaign was severely criticised, both in Britain and India, but asserted that nonetheless ‘the Abyssinian war was a glorious enterprise’ and the enormous cost was ‘perhaps justified’ by the results (although the piece is silent on what these results were).⁸⁴ All of this is consistent with Lawrence’s opinion that the ‘true grounds’ of the invasion were ‘the vindication of England’s honour, and the propriety of doing all we can to release the captives’ (rather than restoring prestige for the sake of British rule in India). The news of the capture of Magdala and the release of the captives reached Bombay on 30 April 1868. The *Times of India* stated that throughout India this news would be met ‘with a sense of relief and much rejoicing, as it has been in Bombay’.⁸⁵ The reasons for such ‘relief and rejoicing’ seem to have been that scarcely any loss had befallen the British forces, and that all of the captives had been liberated without the ‘slightest harm’; not that British India was more secure

⁸¹ Anon., ‘The British Captives in Abyssinia’, 216.

⁸² Anon., ‘The British Expedition to Abyssinia’, *Calcutta Review*, 50 (Jan. 1870), 217.

⁸³ ‘Those who were in England last year will not have forgotten the thrill of joy which shot through the country on receipt of the telegram, announcing the rescue of the Abyssinian captives and the fall of Theodore’s stronghold.’ Anon., ‘The British Expedition to Abyssinia’, 217.

⁸⁴ Anon., ‘The British Expedition to Abyssinia’, 221.

⁸⁵ *Times of India*, printed in *Daily News*, 25 May 1868, p. 6.

because of the restoration of British prestige.

Lawrence was however mindful of a threat to the security of India *consequent* on the expedition to Abyssinia. Its vast scale, and reliance on troops from the Bombay army, meant that the military presence in India had been significantly reduced. Lawrence told the secretary of state in December 1867 that the number and strength of infantry regiments in India was consequently ‘on as low a scale as is safe’. Lawrence was acutely sensitive regarding the need, on security grounds, to maintain a visible presence of these soldiers:

the presence of these troops is very important in a political point of view. They are if I may use such an expression the open & visible emblems of our power. They prevent mischief. I believe that India is now as quiet and the people as well disposed as they have ever been since the Mutiny: as they are ever likely to be. But the full complement of British troops is very important to keep everything in its proper place.⁸⁶

Cranborne had recently made this very point, during the November parliamentary debates. He warned that India would be less secure for the duration of the expedition, simply because her garrison would be smaller. The only guarantee that this reduction in troop numbers would not ‘pass into any real danger’ was that the governor-general had the power to raise any additional troops that he thought were necessary. However, Cranborne thought this was a dangerous precedent, as much would depend upon the character of the particular governor-general:

I have such confidence in the stern mould in which the character of Sir John Lawrence has been

⁸⁶ Lawrence to Northcote, 18 Dec. 1867, Lawrence Mss/32B, no. 71.

formed as to feel certain that, regardless of the smiles or of the frowns of any Ministry, if he should think that India needed the raising of more troops he would raise them in a moment. It is not any present danger I fear as resulting from the present step; but, having regard to the future, I do not like India to be looked upon as an English barrack in the Oriental seas from which we may draw any number of troops without paying for them. It is bad for England, because it is always bad for us not to have that check upon the temptation to engage in little wars which can only be controlled by the necessity of paying for them. But it is bad—very bad—for India, because if there were a weak, or a timid, or too facile a Governor General in that country at the time of any similar operation, you might have India seriously denuded of troops in order to suit the Imperial interests, while there would be this precedent to prevent you from censuring any officer who pursued such a course.⁸⁷

Although Lawrence considered that India was not particularly vulnerable at the time the expedition was sent, it is worth emphasising that the Mutiny had taken place only ten years earlier. Yet in 1867, thirteen thousand soldiers were removed from their duties in India, for an indefinite period, in order to invade Abyssinia. This illuminates one of the consequences of official perceptions about prestige: they could exert a distorting effect on priorities of security. By the logic of Rawlinson's prestige argument, it was safer for British India that this proportion of its garrison was sent to another continent in order to rescue a British consul, than it was to leave the full complement of troops in India and risk Indians hearing rumours about the indignities to which the Queen's representatives were subject at the hands of an African ruler. Rawlinson seems to have seen nothing odd about this. He even claimed that 'by sending Indian troops to Abyssinia for the purpose of vindicating our national honour, we were only taking a measure of precaution as legitimate as would be the enlistment of fresh Indian battalions for the

⁸⁷ Cranborne, *Hansard*, 190 (28 Nov. 1867), cols. 405-6.

purpose of overawing a disaffected district [in India].⁸⁸

The special status of consuls and envoys

Arguments in favour of sending an expedition to Abyssinia concentrated not on ordinary British subjects but on the two British subjects who were acting as representatives of the Queen and therefore of the state. These men were Charles Duncan Cameron (British consul to Abyssinia) and Hormuzd Rassam (a sort of special envoy to Theodore, following Cameron's captivity). The motives for intervention may therefore be distinguished from those cited by Lord Palmerston in relation to 'Don' Pacifico in 1850. In that case Palmerston had deployed British warships in order to collect relatively modest compensation due to (among others) David Pacifico, a Gibraltarian Jew. Defending his actions in the Commons, Palmerston asserted that 'as the Roman, in days of old, held himself free from indignity, when he could say *Civis Romanus sum*; so also a British subject, in whatever land he may be, shall feel confident that the watchful eye and the strong arm of England will protect him against injustice and wrong.'⁸⁹ To some extent the Don Pacifico case was exceptional: the House of Lords condemned Palmerston's actions, his own colleagues had misgivings, and only his oratory in the Commons may have saved him from censure there too.⁹⁰

However, in 1867 there was a clear consensus that it was the special status of Cameron and Rassam that made intervention imperative. The distinction between mere subjects and the higher category of Britain's official representatives was evident in the arguments of Henry Seymour, who had proposed the parliamentary motion in favour of

⁸⁸ Rawlinson, *Hansard*, 190 (28 Nov. 1867), cols. 384-5.

⁸⁹ *Hansard*, 112 (25 June 1850), col. 444, cited in D. Steele, 'Temple, Henry John, third Viscount Palmerston (1784-1865)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed. May 2009).

⁹⁰ Steele, 'Viscount Palmerston'.

a rescue mission. Seymour had argued that if Britain ‘invested any person, however humble, with the sacred character of Ambassador, he should, by reason of the office he filled, be as much considered as though he were the highest noble in the land.’⁹¹ The critical term here is *invested*: the distinguishing factor between an ordinary subject and Britain’s official representatives was that the latter had been *invested* by the state with special status. Officials were unanimous in emphasising this distinction. Lord Stanley stated that the Britons held captive by Theodore were ‘not merely our fellow-countrymen, but Envoys who have been commissioned by the Sovereign’.⁹² Similarly, Disraeli said that the government was disposed ‘to exhaust every possible means of obtaining the freedom of these persons, especially those who represented the Majesty of the country’.⁹³ Gladstone also made this distinction, when considering the government’s obligations to ‘the fair and just lights and claims of British subjects, more especially of a British Envoy’.⁹⁴ This distinction was also clear in newspaper commentary in Britain and India. As the *Pall Mall Gazette* put it: ‘it is our duty to protect our fellow-subjects, and our imperative duty to protect our diplomatic representatives, against insult and injury’.⁹⁵ The *Calcutta Review* was of the same opinion: ‘there are not only British subjects, but two representatives of Her Majesty to be released’.⁹⁶

Press opinion and political reaction to the expedition’s success

In proposing his motion for action in Abyssinia, Henry Seymour had claimed that the captives’ fate had aroused great interest among the public.⁹⁷ Government ministers acknowledged as much in the subsequent parliamentary debates. Disraeli for example

⁹¹ Seymour, *Hansard*, 189 (26 July 1867), cols. 234-5.

⁹² Stanley, *Hansard*, 189 (26 July 1867), col. 251.

⁹³ Disraeli, *Hansard*, 190 (26 Nov. 1867), col. 183.

⁹⁴ Gladstone, *Hansard*, 190 (26 Nov. 1867), col. 296.

⁹⁵ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 29 Nov. 1867, p. 1.

⁹⁶ Anon., ‘The British Captives in Abyssinia’, 216.

⁹⁷ Seymour, *Hansard*, 189 (26 July 1867), col. 235.

recognised ‘the general interest which for a long time the subject has commanded throughout the country’.⁹⁸ The likely popularity of announcing a mission to Abyssinia was a tactical consideration Disraeli weighed when considering whether parliament should be recalled in November 1867. The alternative was holding the matter over until February 1868, by which time even more expenses would have been incurred without the sanction of parliament. Disraeli confided to Derby that although the prospect of recalling parliament early was ‘a very disagreeable one’ it also had one significant advantage: ‘[a]t present the contemplated expedition is popular with the country, and the expenditure already incurred would not only be condoned, but might, under the peculiar circumstances, be justified.’⁹⁹

Policy-makers may also have been emboldened in their decision to launch the expedition by their perception of supportive public opinion. Lord Stanley was remarkably frank on this score. When asked in the Commons why the government had not resolved to send a mission earlier, Stanley was explicit about the role of public opinion:

Moreover, between the period of the debate and the time at which we agreed to send out the expedition, the subject had been much in the public mind and had been much discussed in the public press, and we felt convinced in adopting a policy of action we should have the support of public opinion, of the existence of which up to that time we could not satisfy ourselves, and without the support of which in this country no enterprize can be reasonably undertaken. Without these three things—first, the conviction that the employment of force was necessary; next, that the expedition was physically possible; and lastly, that we should be supported by

⁹⁸ Disraeli, *Hansard*, 190 (26 Nov. 1867), col. 184.

⁹⁹ Disraeli to Derby, 8 Sept. 1867, cited in Monypenny and Buckle, *Life of Beaconsfield*, vol. IV, p. 568-9.

public opinion in the use of it—we could not, and we ought not to have decided to act.¹⁰⁰

Fortunately for Lord Stanley and the government, the Abyssinian expedition was a complete military success. Napier engaged Theodore's troops on a plain below the fortress at Magdala on Good Friday, 10 April 1868. Seven hundred of Theodore's men were killed (and over one thousand wounded), while losses among Napier's forces amounted to only twenty men wounded.¹⁰¹ The following day Theodore released the captives. Napier demanded that Theodore should surrender and, following his refusal, on Easter Monday Magdala was stormed. Just before the first British soldiers reached him, Theodore shot himself.¹⁰²

The British military victory at Magdala was decisive, and the Abyssinian expedition is remembered as a one-sided affair. Napier's troops were armed with breech-loading rifles; Theodore's cavalry had only shields and spears. This asymmetry however obscures just how vulnerable Napier's forces were, particularly once they had left the coast. They were fortunate that Theodore made no attempt to harass them on their march inland. It was also fortunate that Theodore's army (at its peak nearly eighty thousand strong) had disintegrated to the extent that only four thousand men remained to fight at Magdala.¹⁰³ Moreover, British military superiority would have counted for little had Theodore chosen to kill his captives before disappearing into the Abyssinian highlands. Theodore had ample opportunity to do this. In such an eventuality, the British rescue mission would have evolved into a punitive mission, seeking vengeance

¹⁰⁰ Stanley, *Hansard*, 190 (26 Nov. 1867), cols. 219-20.

¹⁰¹ Napier to the secretary of state for India, 14 Apr. 1868, *Parliamentary Papers 1867-68 Abyssinian Expedition*, p. 2.

¹⁰² Rubenson, 'Ethiopia and the Horn', p. 80.

¹⁰³ 'Though a foreign intervention eventually became the immediate cause of Tewodros's fall, it was clear in 1867 that he had failed in his attempt to reunify Ethiopia and that his end was imminent.' Rubenson, 'Ethiopia and the Horn', pp. 75, 80.

for the death of the Queen's representatives.¹⁰⁴ But Napier's large force, operating in trackless desert, was not equipped for such an operation. This not unlikely scenario would surely have injured British prestige much more than merely abandoning the captives.

Napier's despatches reveal his anxiety about the reaction of Abyssinian tribes to the presence of the British forces, for he was reliant on their collaboration for flour and grain for his soldiers and animals. He admitted to the secretary of state that he could not have reached Magdala without native assistance.¹⁰⁵ Certain rebel chiefs had not only granted Napier the right to march through their territories, but assisted him with guides, provisions and pack animals.¹⁰⁶ Napier also reported that Theodore's fortress at Magdala was one of the strongest he had ever seen, and might have been made 'quite impregnable'. Had Theodore 'been properly supported by his soldiers,' Napier concluded, 'we could not have escaped very severe loss in entering it.'¹⁰⁷

In the event these risks did not materialise, and government ministers were eager to celebrate the success of the mission. On 2 July 1868 Disraeli moved that the thanks of the House of Commons be given to those who had planned and accomplished 'one of the most remarkable military enterprizes of this century.'¹⁰⁸ Although much of the subsequent parliamentary debate concentrated on Napier and his troops, government

¹⁰⁴ Rawlinson had argued that the expedition should be sent even if the captives were killed, in order to 'exact retribution for their fate': *Hansard*, 189 (26 July 1867), col. 242. Layard agreed that such a course would be necessary: 'even should the King—as it has been suggested that he may do—put his captives to death, even then we shall be bound to persevere in this war in order to punish him for the outrage he has committed.' *Hansard*, 190 (26 Nov. 1867), col. 277.

¹⁰⁵ Napier to the secretary of state for India, 14 Apr. 1868, *Parliamentary Papers Abyssinian Expedition*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ Rubenson, 'Ethiopia and the Horn', p. 81.

¹⁰⁷ Napier to the secretary of state for India, 14 Apr. 1868, *Parliamentary Papers Abyssinian Expedition*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁸ Disraeli, *Hansard*, 193 (2 July 1868), col. 522.

ministers sought political credit for having appointed him, and for the success of the expedition. According to Disraeli, when the invasion ‘was first mooted it was denounced as a rash enterprize, pregnant with certain peril and probable disaster. It was described, indeed, as one of the most rash undertakings which had ever been recommended by a Government to Parliament.’¹⁰⁹ This was a considerable exaggeration, because (as we have seen) parliament had been remarkably united in supporting the government. Disraeli then described the hazards encountered by the troops, in order to emphasise the scale of the achievement. He singled out Napier for particular praise:

Over this land [Lieutenant-General Sir Robert Napier] guided cavalry and infantry, and—what is perhaps the most remarkable part of the Expedition—he led the elephants of Asia, bearing the artillery of Europe, over African passes which might have startled the trapper and appalled the hunter of the Alps.¹¹⁰

Napier had indeed ‘led the elephants of Asia’ across Abyssinia: forty-four of them had been shipped out from Bombay, in order to carry the heavy guns during the march to Magdala.¹¹¹ The elephant seemed a potent symbol—immediately conjuring up an oriental image—of Britain’s status as an ‘Eastern power’. Disraeli could not resist indulging in more patriotic rhetoric, remarking that the expedition had resulted in ‘an event of peculiar interest to an Englishman... the standard of St. George was hoisted on the mountains of Rasselas.’¹¹² Disraeli’s rhetoric was presumably intended to extract political capital out of an undertaking that although not as controversial as he suggested,

¹⁰⁹ Disraeli, *Hansard*, 193 (2 July 1868), col. 522.

¹¹⁰ Disraeli, *Hansard*, 193 (2 July 1868), col. 522.

¹¹¹ Moorehead, *The Blue Nile*, p. 234.

¹¹² Disraeli, *Hansard*, 193 (2 July 1868), col. 523. Rasselas was a prince of Abyssinia, featured in Samuel Johnson’s 1759 publication *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*.

had certainly been fraught with risks, as well as incredibly expensive. The Conservatives had been out of office for a considerable period, and even now enjoyed only a minority government. By acclaiming the expedition's success, Disraeli was drawing attention to the Conservatives' capacity to make hard choices, and carry them through, in the vital arena of imperial policy.

Disraeli also expressed a sense of righteousness that the expedition had not been motivated by a desire to acquire a new empire in Africa, and had not resulted in the annexation of new territory:

When it was first announced that England was about to embark on a most costly and perilous Expedition merely to vindicate the honour of our Sovereign and to rescue from an unjust but remote captivity a few of our fellow-subjects, the announcement was received in more than one country with something like mocking incredulity. But we have asserted the purity of our purpose. In an age accused, and perhaps not unjustly, of selfishness and a too great regard for material interests, it is something, in so striking and significant a manner, for a great nation to have vindicated the higher principles of humanity. It is a privilege to belong to a country which has done such deeds. They will add lustre to the name of this nation, and will beneficially influence the future history of the world.¹¹³

Disraeli's choice of the word 'lustre' accords with the emphasis the government had placed on prestige. There was of course an element of bombast in his language. Yet the satisfaction Disraeli expressed publicly seems to have been consistent with his private correspondence. Reflecting on this episode some years later, Disraeli maintained the pride he had expressed in parliament in 1868: 'I do not look back to the Abyssinian

¹¹³ Disraeli, *Hansard*, 193 (2 July 1868), cols. 525-6.

[war] with regret: quite the reverse. It was a noble feat of arms, and highly raised our prestige in the East.¹¹⁴

In the House of Lords, the Earl of Derby also rejoiced in the success of an undertaking that he proclaimed would ‘ever be memorable in the annals of our country.’¹¹⁵ Derby reminded parliament that the two principal aims of the enterprise had been achieved: ‘to vindicate the honour of the country’ and to relieve the sufferings of the captives.¹¹⁶ The triumph was emphatically an imperial one, which had harnessed the diverse resources of a global empire: ‘it is no light matter that troops raised in the centre of Asia should, under the conduct of a British General, obtain a triumphal success in the heart of Africa, in a region which the boldest travellers had hardly ever penetrated.’¹¹⁷

It is clear then that both Derby and Disraeli sought to extract political advantage from the success of the Abyssinian expedition. As we have seen, Disraeli and Stanley thought that their decision to go to war had been a popular one, based on positive press coverage. However, it is difficult to discern if the Conservatives’ approach was shaped by assumptions or calculations regarding the legion of new voters enfranchised in 1867. There were valid reasons for exulting in the expedition’s triumph irrespective of the increased electorate, and not only because it allowed a minority government to claim administrative competence on imperial questions. It was in a sense only natural that the government should seek some credit after the mission’s success, for had it ended in military disaster, or had the captives been killed, the government would certainly have

¹¹⁴ Disraeli did not even regret the expense. ‘Money is not to be considered in such matters: success alone is to be thought of.’ Disraeli to Lady Bradford, 2 Oct. 1875, cited in Monypenny and Buckle, *Life of Beaconsfield*, vol. V, pp. 45-6.

¹¹⁵ The Earl of Derby, *Hansard*, 193 (2 July 1868), col. 490.

¹¹⁶ The Earl of Derby, *Hansard*, 193 (2 July 1868), col. 491.

¹¹⁷ The Earl of Derby, *Hansard*, 193 (2 July 1868), col. 493.

received the blame. Derby was in no doubt about this political risk.¹¹⁸ Moreover, the enterprise had proved exceptionally expensive; ministers presumably hoped that exulting in its success might blunt Liberal criticism about its financial costs.¹¹⁹

Although the Conservatives clearly sought to profit politically from the success of the Abyssinian expedition, it is hard to find evidence in support of Freda Harcourt's hypothesis that the expedition emanated from a 'new' imperialism that emerged *circa* 1867. This imperialism was 'new', Harcourt suggested, because of its 'intimate association' with the political conditions following the second Reform Act. Harcourt cited the Abyssinian expedition as an example of this new imperialism in practice, claiming that Disraeli was able 'to mould the Abyssinian Expedition into a national cause involving all the classes'.¹²⁰ Harcourt however offered no evidence in support of this hypothesis. In contrast, Nini Rodgers has argued that the second Reform Act and the expedition were 'coincidental rather than consequential'. For Rodgers, the decision to launch the campaign was the product of a departmental government rather than an initiative from a Disraelian cabinet.¹²¹ Rodgers concluded that it was 'happenings in Africa, rather than a spirit of 'new imperialism' at home, which shaped the behaviour of Britain's governors.'¹²²

A consciousness of the new electorate may however have been evident in the

¹¹⁸ 'The country, certainly, would have been deeply disappointed, and heavy blame would have fallen upon the organizers of the Expedition, if, instead of being able to rescue the captives from that imprisonment in which they had languished so long, the result of the Expedition had failed to accomplish the great object in view, and had only exposed them to a cruel death.' The Earl of Derby, *Hansard*, 193 (2 July 1868), col. 492.

¹¹⁹ A general election loomed. The Liberal electoral campaign criticised Disraeli's profligacy in financing the expedition, and came into office pledged to further retrenchment: see H.C.G. Matthew, *Gladstone 1809-1898* (Oxford, 1997), p. 220.

¹²⁰ F. Harcourt, 'Gladstone, Monarchism and the "New" Imperialism, 1868-74', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 14 (1985), 41-2.

¹²¹ Rodgers, 'The Abyssinian Expedition', 136-7.

¹²² Rodgers, 'The Abyssinian Expedition', 149.

government's recognition of the role of all ranks in the expedition's success. The resolutions moved in parliament explicitly acknowledged the 'Discipline, Gallantry, and Endurance' displayed by the men of the army and navy, as well as the officers.¹²³ Some individual privates were even singled out for praise during the parliamentary debates. For example, the Earl of Malmesbury (Lord Privy Seal), having mentioned the names of 'the gallant Generals', also provided 'two names of another class in our force—the names of Drummer M'Guire, and Private Bergin of the 33rd Regiment, who were the first two men at the storming of Magdala.'¹²⁴ Similarly, the Duke of Cambridge lauded the commitment of all ranks, from 'the gallant General, who commanded, down to the youngest drummer'.¹²⁵

Abyssinia and Afghanistan

During the November parliamentary debates, Sir Stafford Northcote sought to link British policy in Abyssinia with that in Afghanistan. He did this by arguing that the invasion of Abyssinia would allow Lawrence more latitude for pursuing his cautious policy in Afghanistan. Northcote told the House of Commons:

I say that at the present moment the policy of Sir John Lawrence, which has been characterized sometimes half sneeringly, I am afraid, as 'a policy of masterly inactivity,' is what we ought in every way to support and strengthen, and I can conceive of nothing more important to a Governor General who is anxious to carry out that policy than that it should be understood that he is actuated by a deliberate conviction, and not by any doubt as to his strength. I say therefore it is of the utmost importance that Sir John Lawrence's hands should be strengthened by unmistakable evidence that India has strength, and that the Government of England has force

¹²³ The Earl of Malmesbury, *Hansard*, 193 (2 July 1868), col. 476.

¹²⁴ The Earl of Malmesbury, *Hansard*, 193 (2 July 1868), col. 478.

¹²⁵ The Duke of Cambridge, *Hansard*, 193 (2 July 1868), col. 483.

and determination to avenge insults and secure the liberties of her subjects.¹²⁶

This is an intriguing statement by the secretary of state for India. Northcote's argument suggests that policy-makers wishing to avoid active interference in some places might have to intervene elsewhere, in order to prove that their passivity in the first place was not borne out of weakness. Recognising certain criticism of Lawrence's Afghan policy, Northcote therefore asserted that such policy would be supported by 'unmistakable evidence that India has strength'; and what better evidence could be provided than sending a force from India to a mountain fortress in Abyssinia? The audience in this case comprised Britons (critics of Lawrence's Afghan policy), whether at home or in India. Northcote thus anticipated that Lawrence's critics would find it harder to complain that the British authorities were indifferent to Indian security if British troops were engaged in a mission 'to avenge insults' in Africa. In making this argument Northcote was in one sense responding to criticism of 'indifference' prevalent in some newspapers in India and Britain. As the *Calcutta Review* had complained before the announcement of the expedition:

But of late it would seem as though we had been acting on the *laissez faire* principle, simply drifting with the stream,—as though the Abyssinian question had been characterised by that 'masterly inactivity,' for which we are becoming so famous, and which may some day cost us so dear.¹²⁷

The question of envoys also connected British policy in Abyssinia and Afghanistan. At the same time that parliament was acclaiming the success of the expedition, Rawlinson

¹²⁶ Northcote, *Hansard*, 190 (28 Nov. 1867), cols. 373-4.

¹²⁷ Anon., 'The British Captives in Abyssinia', 214.

sent his memorandum on the 'Central Asian Question' to the secretary of state. One of his main proposals was that British envoys should be sent to Afghanistan, and Rawlinson seized on the opportunity to suggest that events in Abyssinia made this recommendation even sounder. He claimed that Britain's triumph in east Africa would inoculate British envoys from harm in central Asia: 'the prestige of our recent Abyssinian triumph would, no doubt, give an additional personal security to our envoy.'¹²⁸

The notion that prestige would somehow protect British officers in central Asia held no attraction for Lawrence. He told Northcote that 'no matter how completely we may punish Theodore', British officers sent to distant countries that were 'secure in their isolation' would remain very much 'at the mercy' of potentates.¹²⁹ As discussed in chapter III, Lawrence thought that envoys to 'barbarous' courts far from the sea, and thus the protection of British naval power, would always be vulnerable. To Lawrence's mind, the Abyssinian expedition only illustrated this vulnerability. Lawrence was not alone in having reached a conclusion quite contrary to Rawlinson's optimistic assertions about British envoys. Disraeli acknowledged in parliament, with considerable understatement, that in future it would be 'wise to be more cautious in opening relations with Sovereigns such as the King of Abyssinia.'¹³⁰ Disraeli's admission illuminates an important characteristic of prestige: that it acted to *constrain* as well as prompt certain policy decisions. One manifestation of this was the reluctance of officials to send British envoys to hostile parts of the world, because they recognised the potential for entanglement should such envoys be maltreated. To put it more simply, if British

¹²⁸ Rawlinson, 'Memorandum on the Central Asian Question', p. 39.

¹²⁹ Lawrence to Northcote, 20 Jan. 1868 (1), Lawrence Mss/32B, no. 75.

¹³⁰ Disraeli, *Hansard*, 190 (26 Nov. 1867), col. 190.

officers were ‘insulted’ in any way, then the maintenance of prestige would demand a mission in order to extract redress (or rescue the officers from captivity, or avenge their deaths). Such missions were not only expensive, as Abyssinia had proved, but extremely dangerous, as Abyssinia might have proved. At his farewell speech in Calcutta, Lawrence explained the path to escalating intervention he envisaged by sending officers to remote, ‘lawless’ places such as Afghanistan:

If we send agents into remote countries where the government is rude, and the people bigoted and lawless, we subject them to ill-treatment and insult, which we must be prepared to punish by force of arms. I know how strong and how admirable is the spirit of enterprise and devotion which would prompt hundreds of my countrymen cheerfully to incur such risks: but we must look to the national consequences that may result, and I for one cannot say that they justify sanction to such undertakings.¹³¹

This constraining factor also helps to explain Lawrence’s insistence that Indian Muslims (and not British officers) should be sent to Afghanistan in order to gather information about events in central Asia. Not only were the former of more practical use in obtaining intelligence, they were less likely to be attacked by their fellow-Muslims in Afghanistan. In any case, they were more ‘expendable’ than the British alternative, in that their incarceration or even death would not produce demands for punitive missions. Some ministers seem to have thought that the same logic might apply to junior British officers. The man chosen to negotiate Cameron’s release, Hormuzd Rassam, was a relatively junior officer (first assistant political agent at Aden). The Earl of Clarendon (foreign secretary at the time of the appointment) had deliberately selected a junior officer because he thought that if anything happened to a more senior official Britain

¹³¹ Farewell speech of Sir John Lawrence, reproduced in [Malleon], ‘Sir John Lawrence’, 720.

would have been obliged to send an expedition to obtain his release, or avenge his death.¹³² Clarendon's tactic had not been successful. The difficulty for policy-makers was that once a man, however junior, was sent on an official mission he was connected, by appointment and purpose, to the British crown and state. Even the objects such a man carried might elevate his status. In this case, Rassam carried a letter signed by the Queen, and politicians were sensitive to this fact. Disraeli was particularly animated on this point: 'Her Majesty even deigned that her Envoy should be the bearer of a letter bearing the Sign Manual of Her Majesty.'¹³³

It was possible for politicians to draw other lessons from the experience of Abyssinia. Layard deprecated the pressure put on the Foreign Office by meddling and adventurous Britons:

And for heaven's sake let this unhappy business serve as a lesson to us in future to avoid that brood of adventurers, schemers, speculators, and intriguers, who are for ever thrusting upon the Foreign Office their plans and recommendations for the extension and establishment of British influence, interests and trade, in distant and barbarous lands, regardless of the result to this country and to the difficulties and dangers in which they may involve us.¹³⁴

Layard possibly had one particular 'intriguer' in mind: Charles Tilstone Beke. Dr Beke (the university of Tübingen awarded him a doctorate in 1834) had spent the years from 1840 to 1843 travelling in Abyssinia, seeking to advance commerce, aid the suppression of the slave trade and elucidate the sources of the Nile. Beke produced propaganda on Abyssinian affairs, and 'angled' unsuccessfully for appointment as British consul to

¹³² *Hansard*, 189 (26 July 1867), col. 234.

¹³³ Disraeli, *Hansard*, 190 (26 Nov. 1867), col. 182.

¹³⁴ Layard, *Hansard*, 190 (26 Nov. 1867), col. 278.

Abyssinia.¹³⁵ In response to the captivity of Cameron and the other British subjects, Dr Beke wrote numerous letters to newspapers and to the Foreign Office, and also gave public addresses on the subject. He then accepted a commission from the family of Henry Stern (a missionary, and one of the British captives) to travel to Abyssinia in order to seek his release. Beke twice went to Abyssinia, the second time in 1866, but after apparent initial success ultimately failed in his objective and was blamed, ‘probably unfairly’, for exacerbating a delicate situation.¹³⁶ After the failure of his unofficial mission, Dr Beke urged the Foreign Office to assist materially one of the Abyssinian chiefs hostile to Theodore. Beke identified a suitable candidate, and offered to return to Abyssinia (as British ambassador) to organise this rebel chief’s bid for the crown.¹³⁷

Britain, Europe and India

The arguments made by officials advocating or justifying the use of military force against Theodore envisaged a variety of audiences for whom the maintenance of British prestige was thought to be important. For Rawlinson, audiences in India and neighbouring eastern countries were clearly paramount. This was true to some extent in Northcote’s case, though the way he linked criticism of Lawrence’s Afghan policy and more active measures in Abyssinia made it clear that the secretary of state also conceived of a British audience. Stanley’s speech during the emergency autumn session of 1867 was explicit in envisaging an Indian audience for the expedition. But his journals suggest he also had European audiences in mind:

¹³⁵ D. Crummey, ‘Beke, Charles Tilstone (1800-1874)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed.).

¹³⁶ Beke provided the British government with information, maps, and advice, which he claimed greatly assisted Napier’s expedition. He was ‘incensed’ that a grant of £500 was all that he received in return. The award in 1870 of a civil-list pension of £100 per annum mollified him somewhat. Crummey, ‘Charles Tilstone Beke’.

¹³⁷ Rodgers, ‘The Abyssinian Expedition’, 142.

20 Apr. 1868. News came of the storming of Magdala, and death of Theodore, with slight loss on our side. Thus ends, more fortunately than could have been expected, a war on which we embarked with extreme reluctance, and only from a sense of the impossibility of doing otherwise. It has cost £5,000,000, or nearly so, but the money has been well spent, for it has proved not only that an English army could fight, which was not doubted, but that it can march and shift for itself in an extremely difficult country, which was not thought to be our strong point.¹³⁸

As foreign secretary, Stanley would have been sensitive to how Britain was perceived in continental Europe. What he wrote in his journals about the perception of the ‘English army’ was presumably made with that European audience in mind. This would be consistent with Jonathan Parry’s contention that empire resonated in British politics because of continental competition. Parry has argued that in foreign politics, ‘Europe was always at the centre of the plot, even when the action was set somewhere else.’¹³⁹ Of course it was possible to conceive of Indian *and* European audiences, as Stanley seems to have done. It was also possible to imagine a still wider audience. The *Calcutta Review* for example seems to have conceived of a global audience for the expedition. ‘The world scarcely knows’, it proudly declared in January 1870, ‘whether to admire most the excellent organisation which ensured success, or the moderation and clemency with which that success was associated.’¹⁴⁰

The Abyssinian expedition also illuminates the influence of India on British foreign

¹³⁸ *Journals and Memoirs of Lord Stanley*, ed. Vincent, p. 333. (As we have seen, the expense in fact rose to £9,000,000.)

¹³⁹ Parry was referring to the resonance of empire in British politics in a slightly later period (the 1870s and 1880s), but the argument seems to have force for other periods. Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism*, p. 20.

¹⁴⁰ Anon., ‘The British Expedition to Abyssinia’, 218.

policy. The authors of *Africa and the Victorians* argued that British officials, throughout the nineteenth century, recognised the ‘imperative’ of preserving the communications between Britain and India, on grounds of both security and commercial prosperity.¹⁴¹ In this way Robinson and Gallagher demonstrated that British foreign policy was driven by concerns for the security of India (specifically the sea routes to India, through the Suez canal and around the Cape). Although the authors were reluctant to consider the influence of perceptions about prestige in this account, it is not inconsistent with their argument to suggest that this preoccupation with security *included* a concern for prestige in India. Viewed in this way, it was not only ‘the safety of the routes eastward’ that had to be defended, but also Britain’s prestige; variously to British, European and global audiences. Without recognising that perceptions about prestige also influenced British officials, it would be impossible to understand why a vast army was sent from India to Africa to rescue a few British subjects.

Robinson and Gallagher’s theory was premised on the utility of India to Britain, which they explained in military terms: with the control of India came ‘the control of an army and of an almost inexhaustible reserve’. Moreover, Indian taxpayers bore the cost of their own occupation, and about half of the British army was billeted upon them. ‘The Indian empire thus provided a uniquely self-financing army, which allowed Victorian governments to exert power in the Far and Near East without always having to foot the whole bill.’¹⁴² Robinson and Gallagher argued that the ‘ambit of Indian power is described by the movement of her troops’, providing the Abyssinian expedition as one

¹⁴¹ ‘British positions and interests in half the world stood or fell upon the safety of the routes eastward.’ Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, p. 13.

¹⁴² Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, pp. 12-3.

example of this.¹⁴³ This must be correct: without control of India and thus the ability to use its human resources to fight overseas, Britain would not have been able to ‘punish’ the King of Abyssinia. India did not only provide the troops, supplies and animals for the invasion of Abyssinia, but the expedition was planned in and commanded by officers from India, a fact that attracted some comment in Britain.¹⁴⁴

However, the expedition also demonstrates something quite different: not the military power gained by controlling India, but the (prestige-driven) vulnerabilities it created. For without an empire in India, officials would not have perceived the same imperative to rescue the captives and thereby demonstrate that Britain had the power to ‘punish’ the King of Abyssinia. To put it another way, British control of India made the expedition to Abyssinia both *possible* and *necessary*. In this way, the Abyssinian expedition of 1867-68 illuminates not only the ‘ambit of Indian power’, but its vulnerabilities too.

* * *

Sir Robert Napier was richly rewarded for his success in Abyssinia. He was thanked by parliament, raised to the peerage as Baron Napier of Magdala and Caryngton, and awarded a pension of two thousand pounds per annum. He was also made a knight grand commander of the Star of India (GCSI), and received the freedom of the City of London, citizenship of Edinburgh, and a doctorate of civil law from the university of

¹⁴³ The authors list several other significant movements of Indian troops, including to the following countries: China (1839, 1856 and 1859); Persia (1856); Singapore (1867); Hong Kong (1868); Afghanistan (1878); and Egypt (1882). Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, p. 12.

¹⁴⁴ *Hansard*, 193 (2 July 1868), col. 484.

Oxford.¹⁴⁵ Consul Cameron fared less well. He returned to England in July 1868, retired on a pension of three hundred and fifty pounds per annum, and died less than two years later.¹⁴⁶

The vote of thanks to Napier avoided the word prestige. Instead it acclaimed the ‘Energy, Courage, and Perseverance with which he conducted the recent Expedition into Abyssinia, resulting in the Defeat by Her Majesty’s Forces of the Army of King Theodore and the Vindication of the Honour of the Country by the Rescue from Captivity of Her Majesty’s Envoy and other British Subjects, and by the Capture and Destruction of the strong Fortress of Magdala.’¹⁴⁷ Referring to the ‘vindication of the honour of the country’ was more palatable for etymological and political reasons. However, it is explicit in the arguments made by several government ministers and other politicians (as well as journalists), that the decision to launch the expedition was both motivated and understood to a significant extent as a question of maintaining the prestige that was thought essential to the control of India. There was certainly little tangible to be gained at Magdala, and no question of economic motives: official returns showed no British trade at all between India and Abyssinia.¹⁴⁸ Without acknowledging the influence of prestige on policy-makers, it would be hard to understand why in 1867 the British government resolved to send thirteen thousand soldiers from their prized possession to the east African coast, there to trek hundreds of miles across almost unknown desert, in order to set at liberty a consul, an envoy and a handful of other British subjects. It was emphatically an imperial enterprise, a point sometimes

¹⁴⁵ Moreman, ‘Baron Napier of Magdala’.

¹⁴⁶ Cameron died in Geneva in May 1870. Chichester, ‘Charles Duncan Cameron’.

¹⁴⁷ *Hansard*, 193 (2 July 1868), col. 476.

¹⁴⁸ ‘The Returns received from India do not exhibit any direct Trade between India and Abyssinia.’ *India and Abyssinia. Return of the direct export and import trade between India and Abyssinia annually for the last ten years; distinguishing the quantities and customs value of each article both ways, and the total annual value*, Parliamentary Papers 1867-68 (111), p. 1.

misunderstood because no new territory was annexed. According to Sven Rubenson, writing in *The Cambridge History of Africa*, the expedition ‘was in no way part of a colonial venture.’¹⁴⁹ It is hard to imagine a more sonorously colonial venture: Indian troops, commanded by British officers from India (later decorated with imperial honours), assisted by Indian supplies, Indian elephants and other transport animals, all sent in an imperial flotilla from India to Africa to a significant extent because of perceptions about prestige and its importance in India.

The expedition also hints at the sort of difficulties Lawrence encountered in maintaining his policy of vigilance in Afghanistan. This chapter referred to an article in the *Bombay Gazette* that revealed a belligerent attitude among the British community in India before the government had announced its decision to invade Abyssinia. According to the *Bombay Gazette*, ‘indignation’ had been aroused among Anglo-Indians ‘at the dilatoriness and seeming indifference and apathy’ of the British government in taking action. The article also described reports that, if the government did not send an expedition, two hundred British volunteers from India would take it upon themselves to do just that.¹⁵⁰ This was the restless, bellicose spirit Lawrence encountered on the north-west frontier, where the stakes were much higher. This was also the sort of belligerence that publications in Britain commonly attributed to officers in India. These metropolitan perceptions will be considered in the following chapter.

¹⁴⁹ Rubenson, ‘Ethiopia and the Horn’, p. 81.

¹⁵⁰ *Bombay Gazette*, 9 Aug. 1867, printed in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 5 Sept. 1867, p. 6.

V

‘Our Indian armies pine for war’!**Perceptions of army officers in India, c.1864-1869**

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the army had been generally regarded as an arm of state oppression and a ‘taxpayer-funded aristocratic bolthole’.¹ In her article on the growth of ‘Christian militarism’ in mid-Victorian Britain, Olive Anderson argued that the Crimean war began ‘a dramatic change in the attitude towards the army of British society in general, and of the religious public in particular’. The Indian Mutiny was also important in changing perceptions: throughout 1858, preachers identified Christian virtues with military ones. The Mutiny and the Crimean war had together given credibility to the idea of the ‘soldier-saint’. Anderson concluded that by the late eighteen-sixties many different sections of the religious public in Britain had adopted ‘broadly sympathetic’ attitudes towards the officers and men of the army, the external aspects of military life ‘and even towards the military ethos’. This was a new development and a rapid one (accomplished in little more than a decade). Anderson therefore traces the Christian militarism of late nineteenth century Britain to the time of the Crimean war, the Indian Mutiny, and the American civil war.²

Subsequent and influential research by Anne Summers has suggested that *competing* forms of militarism existed in Britain; that popular enthusiasm for militarism as a sporting pastime (the Volunteer corps) was often accompanied by ‘a deep aversion’ to the forces of the crown. Summers argued that it was possible and respectable to preach the ideal of British subjects united in defence of their homeland while at the same time ‘decrying the imperialistic adventures of the Regular Army’. In the middle of the

¹ Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism*, p. 77.

² Anderson, ‘The growth of Christian militarism in mid-Victorian Britain’, 46, 52, 72.

century, the ‘deepest antipathy’ between popular and professional militarism was ‘vividly expressed by the refusal of the mid-Victorian Volunteer corps to wear uniforms of a regimental scarlet colour.’ Summers concludes that it may not have been until the shock of reverses in the Boer war that British society would support anything resembling a continental militarism.³

Summers’s arguments complement slightly earlier research by Hugh Cunningham into the Volunteer Force. Cunningham found that volunteering was popular: by the end of the summer of 1860, there were more than one hundred thousand volunteers. Although the Volunteers were envisaged as an institution for the middle-classes, within ten years they were largely working-class in composition. For Cunningham, this is the most striking feature of volunteering, given that it usually required some financial expense. Britons seem to have taken to volunteering for social as well as military reasons. Cunningham attributes its working-class appeal to the varied attractions of recreation, the desire for social mobility and respectability, patriotism and perhaps pressure from employers who were already officers in the corps.⁴

John MacKenzie has argued that colonial war played a vital part in transforming the reputation of the army. He positions India as central to this transformation: men trained to suppress domestic disorder in Britain were instead deployed, much more acceptably to the British public, throughout the subcontinent. Although the Mutiny provided ‘the moral touchstone’, MacKenzie asserts that subsequent campaigns on the north-west

³ Even then, popular militarism (as with the National Service League) remained staunchly liberal (e.g., it proposed a Swiss system of national military training, not a German one). A. Summers, ‘Militarism in Britain before the Great War’, *History Workshop Journal*, 2 (1976), 106-8, 111, 115.

⁴ Volunteering was also popular with politicians: in 1868, some 90 MPs held commissions in the Volunteers. Cunningham argued that the force therefore had a political power greater in many ways than the Regular Army. H. Cunningham, *The Volunteer Force: A Social and Political History, 1859-1908* (London, 1975), pp. 1-3.

frontier and in Afghanistan were also ‘suffused’ with some of this holy purpose. In this sense, the army became the instrument of a ‘moral purpose’ in the world.⁵

The present chapter questions some of this historiography, particularly the contention that the army enjoyed a much-improved public image after the Mutiny. It argues that in the period 1864-69, metropolitan newspapers depicted British army officers in India as restless, bellicose and ‘ambitious’ (for promotion and honours). This portrait was particularly prevalent in the Liberal press, which viewed the British community in India as a ‘military society’ where public opinion was indistinguishable from military opinion. Such publications consequently attributed the affinity many army officers had for more active policies in Afghanistan to this militarism. Newspapers on the political right scorned some of these perceptions, but they also recognised that the ambition of frontier officers might lead Britain into another Afghan war. Such pessimistic assessments were by no means confined to journalists. A number of officials in Britain and India—including Sir Charles Wood, Lord Elgin and Sir John Lawrence—scribed similar motivations to those who bridled at the policy of frontier restraint. The officials also worried about the independent power of the military authorities in India, especially the commander-in-chief. Some senior military commanders were themselves frustrated by the belligerence of those clamouring for British intervention in Afghanistan. The focus of the present chapter is the perceptions of army officers in the British press; however, in order to understand the cultural purchase of these perceptions, some of the evidence available to contemporaries will be examined. It will be argued that these perceptions have important implications for our understanding of the army’s public image, and the vitality, in at least part of the British world, of a species of militarism;

⁵ J.M. MacKenzie, ‘Popular imperialism and the military’, pp. 3-4, 8 in J.M. MacKenzie (ed.), *Popular imperialism and the military 1850-1950* (Manchester, 1992).

one that was prevalent long before the Boer war and patriotic leagues of late Victorian and Edwardian Britain.

Military critics of ‘masterly inactivity’

Some of the strongest criticism of Lawrence’s policy of ‘masterly inactivity’ came from serving or former British army officers in India. Sir Henry Rawlinson provides one such example: he had served as an army officer in India, Persia and Afghanistan (1827-42), and by 1858 held the rank of major-general following a brief stint as British minister to Persia.⁶ Rawlinson advanced his arguments not just privately, as with his memorandum on the ‘Central Asian Question’ (which he sent to the secretary of state for India in July 1868), but in public through articles in periodicals such as the *Quarterly Review*.⁷ Several army officers also criticised Lawrence’s policy in published accounts of particular campaigns or memoirs of their service on the frontier. Lieutenant-General Sir Sydney Cotton for example publicly lambasted the unsatisfactory condition of security arrangements in India and the folly of ‘inactivity’ in Afghanistan. Cotton had been deployed all over India in a long and distinguished career starting in 1810. He had served in and commanded a number of hill expeditions on the north-west frontier, and during the Mutiny successfully commanded an expeditionary force sent to ‘punish’ mutineers that had crossed the Yusufzai border. For his frontier services Cotton was made KCB (promoted GCB in 1873).⁸ In 1868 Cotton published *Nine Years on the North-West Frontier of India, from 1854 to 1863*. This was partly a memoir of his service, but also a tract in which he advocated several forward measures in Afghanistan,

⁶ Rawlinson’s ‘uncompromising attitude towards Russia’ led to his resignation from the post of minister to Persia in 1859: Ferrier and Dalley, ‘Sir Henry Creswicke Rawlinson’.

⁷ See e.g. [H.C. Rawlinson], ‘The Russians in Central Asia’, *Quarterly Review*, 118 (Oct. 1865), 529-81.

⁸ H.M. Chichester, ‘Cotton, Sir Sydney John (1792-1874)’, rev. J. Lunt, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed.).

along lines similar to those proposed by Rawlinson. Cotton claimed that Britain's position in India was precarious, and that the north-west frontier was particularly vulnerable: 'we live in India, and more particularly on a disturbed frontier, like the Affghan border, continually, as it were, on a mine with a burning fuse ready for explosion'. Cotton argued that Kabul should be occupied by British troops, as this would provide 'a sure and certain check upon the progress of foreign powers' in central Asia, and thus constituted a 'very necessary measure of security to our Indian Empire.' His stated concern was not a direct invasion of India, but that Russia would be able to take advantage of discontent among the people of India (who were ever ready to shake off the British 'yoke').⁹ The general also scoffed at the notion that commercial interests were driving Russia's advances in central Asia:

Russia has something more in view than an extension of her trade; and is, at this moment, gradually working on towards the Golden Prize. She may have, perhaps, no easy matter to accomplish her object, if left to herself, but she well knows the frailty of our institutions, and must be well aware that an empire of such magnitude, composed of such restless and disaffected materials, cannot easily be held together amidst foreign and domestic difficulties, more especially with our existing systems of civil government... Is it the old policy of pooh-poohing all indications of impending evils, that causes us to be inactive?¹⁰

Cotton's prescription for 'the frailty' of British India's institutions was that military rather than civil government should prevail in all recently acquired Indian possessions. He therefore insisted that civil officials within the government of India 'must yield implicitly to military necessities'. Similarly, mere 'financiers' in India 'must be made

⁹ Lieutenant-General Sir Sydney Cotton, *Nine Years on the North-West Frontier of India, from 1854 to 1863* (London, 1868), pp. 6-7, 131-2, 304.

¹⁰ Cotton, *Nine Years on the North-West Frontier*, p. 132.

subservient to all the important requirements of the troops, and not the troops to the views and desires of the financiers.’¹¹

The Liberal press

British newspapers writing in support of Lawrence’s Afghan policy seemed in little doubt that his critics were motivated by martial enthusiasm. This assessment was prevalent in *The Times*, which expressed considerable suspicion regarding the motives of those who advocated active interference in Afghanistan. *The Times* regretted that the announcement of the Abyssinian expedition had created a ‘military ferment’ in Bombay. An editorial of December 1867 explained its understanding of the motives of army officers in India and the nature of Anglo-Indian society:

In plain words, what Abyssinia is at present to the Bombay army, Afghanistan is at all times to the armies of India at large. There is hardly a soldier, certainly not an officer, in either of the three Presidencies who would not hear with delight that an invasion of Central Asia had been decided upon... The officers are panting for preferment and burning for action of any kind, and, as soldiers give the tone to Indian society, civilians fall in with their views. It is loudly argued, therefore, that the progress of Russia in Central Asia should be encountered by advances from our own side; that we should at once enter Afghanistan and occupy, as strategical positions against a future conflict, Quettah, Candahar, Cabul, and perhaps Herat, and that our North-Western frontier should thus be carried up to the borders of Persia and Tartary.¹²

This short passage includes several important themes in the metropolitan discussion of Anglo-Indian militarism. First, a distinction is made between soldiers and officers; it was the latter whose motivations were dissected in British broadsheets. Secondly, the

¹¹ Cotton, *Nine Years on the North-West Frontier*, pp. 6, 287.

¹² *Times*, 11 Dec. 1867, p. 8.

officers are characterised as ‘panting for preferment and burning for action of any kind’; that is to say they were perceived to be eager for promotion, as well as combat. Thirdly, it is considered self-evident that civilians within the British community in India would share the sentiments of their compatriots in the army, because ‘soldiers give the tone to Indian society’. Fourthly, proposals for territorial expansion into Afghanistan are understood as originating with military personnel. Finally, it is implied that army officers would use the ‘progress of Russia’ as a pretext for initiating military advances that appealed to them on martial grounds. *The Times* thus interpreted proposals for interference in Afghanistan not as a strategic response to the propinquity of a rival power (Russia) in central Asia, but as a natural product of the instinctive belligerence of British officers in India. In an editorial the following week, this implication was made explicit:

[Sir John Lawrence’s] arguments, however, though irresistible in themselves, produce but little effect in India, where the real influence at work is not the fear of Russia, but the desire of military employment. Our Indian armies pine for war, and the prospects for war are upon the whole most alluring upon the north-western frontier.¹³

The Times perceived no difference between the ‘public opinion’ of the British community in India and the opinion of the British armies in India.¹⁴ The newspaper had for some time characterised British India as a ‘purely military society’, where another expedition to Afghanistan would inevitably prove popular.¹⁵ This perception was not unique to metropolitan publications; it had for some time been a prevailing view among

¹³ *Times*, 18 Dec. 1867, p. 8.

¹⁴ ‘Public opinion in India—that is, the opinion of the Indian armies, is strongly in favour of intervention [in Afghanistan]’. *Times*, 2 Jan. 1868, p. 6.

¹⁵ *Times*, 8 Sept. 1863, p. 6.

civilian officials in India. As Lawrence had explained to the governor-general, Lord Dalhousie, before the Mutiny: ‘public opinion is essentially military in India. Military views, feelings and interests are therefore paramount.’¹⁶ That military views and interests should be paramount has been understood by historians as a consequence of a ‘garrison mentality’ that prevailed within British India.¹⁷ A corollary of this mentality was an enthusiasm for warfare, as the contemporary historian (and former army officer in India) John William Kaye observed.¹⁸ In his history of the first Afghan war, Kaye explained matter-of-factly that in India ‘every war is more or less popular. The constitution of Anglo-Indian society renders it almost impossible that it should be otherwise.’¹⁹

Several post-Mutiny measures may have reinforced the grip of this ‘garrison state’ and its attitudes to warfare. Britain’s military presence had been significantly increased, so that from 1858 at least sixty thousand regular British soldiers were stationed in India (roughly three times the pre-Mutiny number). A ratio of approximately one British to two Indian soldiers was maintained until 1914. Moreover, Indian soldiers were no longer entrusted with artillery, arsenals and the principal forts, all of which were now held by British soldiers. These measures were implemented in an attempt to ‘overawe the Indian soldiery’ and to minimise the chances, or at least the seriousness, of another

¹⁶ John Lawrence to Lord Dalhousie, 20 Sept. 1850, cited in D. Peers, ‘The Indian Army and the British Garrison State in India, c.1800-1858’, p. 57, in A.J. Guy and P.B. Boyden, *Soldiers of the Raj: The Indian Army 1600-1947* (London, 1997).

¹⁷ Peers, ‘The Garrison State’, p. 58.

¹⁸ Kaye is an important observer. He served as an artillery officer in India (1831-42), before embarking on a literary career. He established (1844) and edited the *Calcutta Review*, before returning to England c.1845. His published works include *History of the War in Afghanistan* (1851), *The History of the Sepoy War in India, 1857-8* (III vols., 1864-76) and *Lives of Indian Officers* (1867). His prolific writing did not prevent him working as a civil servant: in 1856 he joined the East India Company, and in 1858 succeeded John Stuart Mill as secretary of the foreign department of the India Office. He was made KCSI in 1871. His *Sepoy War* remains a standard work. E.J. Rapson, ‘Kaye, Sir John William (1814-1876)’, rev. R.T. Stearn, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed.).

¹⁹ J.W. Kaye, *History of the War in Afghanistan* (II vols., London, 1851), vol. I, p. 361.

mutiny.²⁰

According to the editorial line in *The Times* it was not merely the prospect of combat that led army officers to favour military intervention in Afghanistan:

The invasion of Afghanistan for the purpose of obtaining command of the country would be popular in India, because it would mean war, and because war implies not only active employment for a military population, but chance of promotion, glory, and gain. Anglo-Indians therefore speak on this subject with a prepossession so strong as to impair the value of their conclusions.²¹

There were practical reasons why army officers in India may have been motivated by opportunities for promotion and ‘gain’. It was not until 1871 that the practice of promotion by purchase was abolished; before that time promotion for less wealthy officers could be extremely slow. Such officers could not afford to make the ‘over-regulation’ payments, and consequently had to wait for promotion without purchase.²² There were proportionally more impecunious officers on the subcontinent than in Britain: men from less wealthy backgrounds ‘usually sought service in India’, where the sport and social life enjoyed by the home officer could be experienced at much reduced expense.²³ However, the peacetime difficulties of obtaining promotion were alleviated

²⁰ In 1869, the garrison included 64,858 British and 120,000 Indian troops: Spiers, *The Army and Society*, p. 138.

²¹ *Times*, 2 Sept. 1868, p. 6. An earlier editorial had made the same argument: ‘When the British troops were returning from Magdala their satisfaction at the close of the war was, we were told, greatly enhanced by the prospect of a fresh expedition. Of Abyssinia they had seen enough, but the expectation of a campaign on the North-Western frontier of India inspired them with new hopes of employment and distinction.’ *Times*, 10 June 1868, p. 9.

²² Vacancies caused by deaths (or by full-pay retirements) were not common in peacetime: in the period 1849-53 only 30% of all promotions were filled without purchase (none in the Brigade of Guards and only 8% in cavalry regiments). Promotion could not be purchased in the ‘scientific’ branches of the army (the artillery and engineers), and was extremely slow. Spiers, *The Army and Society*, p. 19.

²³ Spiers, *The Army and Society*, p. 23.

by the advent of war, which presented quite different opportunities for advancement. When an officer was killed his commission was forfeited to the crown, thereby enabling the senior officer of the lower rank to be promoted without purchase.²⁴ A war or ‘campaign’ such as those that frequently occurred on the north-west frontier of India also offered opportunities for promotion not dependent on the death of other officers. Traditionally brevet promotions had been distributed only on special royal occasions, but after 1854 they were awarded more frequently. Officers might therefore transfer to different regiments, in order to serve in as many campaigns as possible, where distinguished service could be rewarded by brevet promotion.²⁵

As for the opportunities for ‘gain’ offered by warfare, this was partly a question of cash: officers who served in campaigns tended to receive generous field allowances and more chances of prize money.²⁶ What *The Times* meant by opportunities for ‘glory’ is more complex. This was usually construed in the metropolitan press as the desire to obtain honours and awards that carried social prestige, and will be considered later in this chapter. There were, therefore, entirely practical reasons why officers in India might have welcomed any proposal that made action in Afghanistan more likely. Although the first Afghan war had demonstrated that fighting there was very dangerous, many officers clearly perceived it as a considerably less perilous venture than fighting a European power. Lieutenant-General Cotton certainly had no fears on this score.²⁷

²⁴ The same was true of death caused by illness; officers stationed in unhealthy tropical cantonments might also receive promotion more quickly than would otherwise have been possible: see Spiers, *The Army and Society*, p. 19.

²⁵ A brevet promotion conferred an army rank on its recipient, but not a regimental rank (e.g. an officer who was a major within his regiment could rank as a brevet lieutenant-colonel and hold the latter rank when away from his regiment): Spiers, *The Army and Society*, p. 19.

²⁶ Peers, ‘The Garrison State’, p. 58.

²⁷ ‘There is really nothing whatever to dread in Afghanistan. It is a mere bugbear. A few resolute men, it is well known, might have saved our troops and our credit at that unfortunate period of our Indian history.’ That ‘unfortunate period of our Indian history’ was a reference to the first Afghan war. Cotton, *Nine Years on the North-West Frontier*, p. 133.

The Times's characterisation of British army officers in India was consistent with the prevailing view in several Liberal newspapers. The *Daily News* looked on Anglo-Indian 'ambition' regarding Afghanistan with particular suspicion, as this piece from December 1867 illustrates:

Almost every mail from Calcutta brings us intelligence of the difficulty which the Governor-General has in restraining the bellicose ardour of a powerful party in the Indian service. Our Indian officers are a noble set of fellows; they are in fact only of too generous a temper. One half of them cannot live without somebody to govern and bring under "rhythmic drill" and the other half will soon die of vexation if we do not give them leave to go and fight somebody. For the last two years a grand expedition into Affghanistan has been their sleeping and their waking dream. With Sir John Lawrence it is very clear that such an enterprise is contrary to sound policy, but impetuous spirits are not convinced by his reasoning. They cannot bear to see the revenues extracted from the rice-eaters of India frittered away upon tanks, and irrigation canals, and anicuts, when Affghanistan is an unappropriated prize, and they burn to go where glory awaits them.²⁸

Although the *Daily News* here adopted a mocking tone not evident in *The Times*, its points were essentially the same: it was difficult for Lawrence to restrain 'the bellicose ardour' of British officers, who constituted a 'powerful party' within Anglo-Indian society, and who viewed Afghanistan as a 'prize'. It is perhaps not surprising, given this cynicism about the motives of army officers, that the Liberal press also articulated a fear that military authorities in India would exploit expeditions on the north-west frontier as pretexts for much larger military objectives. This anxiety seems to have surfaced

²⁸ *Daily News*, 27 Dec. 1867, p. 4.

whenever large forces were massed on the frontier. As the *Daily News* commented on an expedition mounted in 1868 against certain Hazara tribes on the north-west frontier: ‘it does not appear probable that this formidable army was brought together merely to punish some turbulent hill-men.’ For it would be only too easy for the ‘party of aggression and annexation... to pick out of these frontier operations some *casus belli* with the Afghans.’²⁹ A later piece contrasted the commander-in-chief unfavourably with the governor-general: it was rumoured that Lawrence favoured ‘moderate and inconspicuous measures’ for quelling a local disturbance, while Sir William Mansfield ‘inclined to the plan of a striking display of military power, the fame of which might reach to Cabul and Herat and Teheran, and even to the Russian outposts on the Oxus.’³⁰

Unlike the *Daily News*, the *Pall Mall Gazette* was critical of Lawrence’s Afghan policy and advocated more active steps on the north-west frontier, including the occupation of Quetta.³¹ The *Pall Mall Gazette* was nonetheless suspicious of militarism within Anglo-Indian society, and interpreted news of frontier expeditions in the same unflattering light as the *Daily News*:

There has been displayed by portions of the press in Calcutta and the North West Provinces, and by the military correspondents thereof, a blind or perverse determination to make of the Hazara disturbance an occasion for the movement of an army far larger than was deemed needful to invade the *terra incognita* of Abyssinia, and for the disposal of that force in such a way as would have confirmed the Affghans in their chronic dread of invasion projects from this side of the Indus. This politico-military restlessness, countenanced, it is to be feared, by our ambitious Commander-in-Chief, and restrained with difficulty by our strong-handed Viceroy, reveals the

²⁹ *Daily News*, 24 Sept. 1868, p. 4.

³⁰ *Daily News*, 8 Oct. 1868, p. 4.

³¹ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 30 May 1867, p. 1.

presence in our commonwealth of elements which the weak and inexperienced Viceroy elect will be powerless to restrain. In the face of these perils we can only trust to the firmness of the more thoughtful civilians whom Sir John Lawrence will leave behind.³²

The *Daily News* had also expressed its anxiety about the consequences of Lawrence's departure (his term as governor-general would expire in January 1869). It praised Lawrence for having 'struggled persistently and not unsuccessfully against the aggressive impulses of the official classes in India', but speculated that after the Earl of Mayo's arrival there would be 'a strong temptation to let go the tight rein which alone has bridled-in heretofore the warlike temper of the Anglo-Indians.' The *Daily News* seemed extremely pessimistic on this score: it was 'as likely as not that Lord Mayo, through ignorance or through vanity, may deliberately reverse the course of the State ship'.³³ A suspicion underlying this fear may have been that Mayo, a Tory, would prove more susceptible to 'the warlike temper of the Anglo-Indians' than his predecessor, but this does not seem to find expression in the press commentary.³⁴ It is however clear from the *Pall Mall Gazette* piece that it was not only British army officers but also British journalists in India who were perceived as bellicose. This equality of treatment is consistent with the metropolitan view that militarism thrived across Anglo-Indian society.

The *Pall Mall Gazette* also contrasted attitudes to the military in Britain with those prevalent in the British community in India. Contemplating the large armies of France

³² Note the use of the term 'ambitious' to describe the commander-in-chief, Sir William Mansfield. *Pall Mall Gazette*, 30 Oct. 1868, pp. 9-10.

³³ *Daily News*, 24 Sept. 1868, p. 4.

³⁴ Some prominent advocates of intervention in Afghanistan (including Rawlinson) were Conservative MPs. However, the identification of the Conservative party with forward policies in Afghanistan did not come until the Conservative administration of 1874-80.

and Prussia, Britons at home simply moralised on the ‘wickedness and folly of it all’, and were proud of their one hundred and fifty thousand reservists who, in the case of real need, would constitute merely ‘an armed mob of brave men’. In contrast, ‘a certain proportion of our countrymen in India would like nothing so much as to go to war in Afghanistan for the sake of the various attractions which war always offers to what is essentially a military society.’³⁵ This distinction has important implications in historiographical terms, for it suggests that although Britain itself in this period remained hostile to it, militarism nonetheless flourished in a part of the British world long before the Boer war and the various patriotic leagues that are thought to have heralded the arrival of militarism in the mother country. This is a view also supported by the correspondence of certain officials, as we shall see. Before turning to that, some different perceptions in the Conservative press will be considered.

The Conservative press

Conservative publications were less critical than their Liberal counterparts in depicting British army officers in India. Newspapers such as the *Standard* scorned the idea that the military authorities in India would use frontier expeditions as pretexts for larger operations, or for advances into Afghanistan. It claimed that such concerns were ‘purely the creation of certain alarmists in the English press.’³⁶ In the case of the 1868 expedition against the Hazara tribes (that caused alarm in the pages of the *Daily News* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*), the *Standard* regretted that General Wilde’s campaign had been subjected ‘to a good deal of that kind of criticism at home, which consists in investing every active step taken by the Indian Government as a move towards a new conquest and a fresh annexation.’ Certainly, Wilde was commanding a large number of

³⁵ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 30 Dec. 1867, pp. 1-2.

³⁶ *Standard*, 8 Jan. 1868, p. 4.

troops; but it was false economy (as ‘history showed’) to deal with unrest on the north-west frontier without large forces. The *Standard* noted that the last eighteen years had witnessed no less than twenty-three different expeditions against the Hazara tribes.³⁷

However, publications on the political right also recognised that British officers were themselves a risk to peace in India. Surveying the strength of the north-west frontier in 1864, the *Morning Post* made the following observation:

We are amply strong enough just now in that quarter, and have probably more to fear from the restlessness and presumption of our own people than from any provocation which we are likely to receive for some time to come at the hand of others.³⁸

It says much about metropolitan perceptions that a Tory publication, less than six years after the Mutiny, saw more danger to Indian peace from ‘the restlessness and presumption’ of British officers than from insurrection in India (on its own or in combination with a foreign power). It is also striking that Conservative publications such as the *Quarterly Review* recognised that the ‘ambition’ of frontier officers may lead Britain into another Afghan war. An article in April 1865 considered British and Russian policy in equivalent terms:

Russian policy has always run in the groove of political intrigue, and her agents cannot perhaps extricate themselves from it if they would; we too are under constant temptation to coquet with the politics of these [central Asian] states; either party may be led by Asiatic adroitness, the ambition of frontier officers, or other causes, into a course which may lure both parties on into a

³⁷ *Standard*, 9 Oct. 1868, p. 4.

³⁸ *Morning Post*, 26 Jan. 1864, p. 4.

monstrous expenditure of blood and treasure.³⁹

The first Afghan war was of course an obvious precedent for such a ‘monstrous expenditure of blood and treasure’. Yet the *Quarterly Review* also published, shortly afterwards, an article by Rawlinson warning that ‘outworks are as necessary to the defence of empires as of fortresses’, and that accordingly Herat and Candahar offered necessary strategic positions for the defence of India from ‘Russian encroachment.’⁴⁰

The fact that a leading Tory organ, which provided an outlet for Rawlinson’s forward proposals in Afghanistan, also recognised the danger posed by British officers suggests that the perceptions prevalent in the Liberal press had a cultural purchase that to some extent straddled different political affiliations.

Officials

The depiction of British army officers in India in the metropolitan press was to some extent consistent with the perceptions of a number of prominent officials. Sir Charles Wood, Lord Elgin and Sir John Lawrence seem to have been extremely wary of the difficulty of maintaining civilian control over the military authorities in India, and of the restlessness, bellicosity and ambition of British officers. While secretary of state for India, Wood on several occasions urged Elgin to keep the commander-in-chief close at hand:

I think the Commander in Chief should not absent himself too much from the seat of Govt. There is a natural tendency in everybody in that position to set up for an independent power. The best means of avoiding that evil is to have him down in the presence of the Governor

³⁹ Anon., ‘Travels in Central Asia’, *Quarterly Review*, 117 (Apr. 1865), 515.

⁴⁰ [Rawlinson], ‘The Russians in Central Asia’, 581.

General; where he must be subordinate. Therefore do not allow [Sir Hugh] Rose to be too much away from you.⁴¹

In subsequent letters to Elgin, Wood elaborated his concerns. He worried that the commander-in-chief was too much of an independent power in India, describing him as ‘a potentate’ with too much patronage at his disposal. Moreover, when the particular incumbent was rather ‘awkward’ (like Sir Hugh Rose) it made the governor-general’s position very difficult.⁴² In order to increase civilian control over the commander-in-chief, Wood investigated a proposal to convert the post into a combined ‘minister of war’ and commander-in-chief, resident at Calcutta (thus in the same place as the governor-general).⁴³ Wood’s correspondence shows that he was concerned both with the institutional structure (the office of the commander-in-chief) and the personality of the particular incumbent at this time (Rose). General Rose may of course have been an unusually awkward commander-in-chief.⁴⁴ Wood certainly seems to have thought so, as he described Rose as both ‘wrongheaded’ and ‘tiresome’.⁴⁵

Lawrence also seems to have found Rose rather difficult, even though he generally got on very well with military men. Lawrence’s father and two elder brothers had served as army officers in India, and he had considered following in their footsteps. As he happily told a subsequent secretary of state, he had lived all his life among soldiers and had ‘a strong personal feeling towards them.’⁴⁶ Nonetheless, Lawrence shared Wood’s unease

⁴¹ Wood to Elgin, 10 May 1862, Elgin Mss/7, f147.

⁴² Wood to Elgin, 30 Oct. 1862 & 26 Nov. 1862, Elgin Mss/7, f428 & f452.

⁴³ Wood to Elgin, 26 Nov. 1862, Elgin Mss/7, f452.

⁴⁴ Rose, Hugh Henry (1801-85): commander-in-chief in India, 4 June 1860 - 31 March 1865; KCSI (1861); GCSI (1866); created Baron Strathnairn (1866). Rose ‘was not a popular commander’ and could come across as ‘autocratic’: B. Robson, ‘Rose, Hugh Henry, Baron Strathnairn (1801-1885)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed. Oct. 2008).

⁴⁵ Wood to Elgin, 30 Oct. 1862, Elgin Mss/7, f428.

⁴⁶ Lawrence to Cranborne, 4 Jan. 1867, Lawrence Mss/32A, no. 2.

about the power of the commander-in-chief in India. Lawrence favoured Wood's proposal to curtail that officer's powers by making him also a 'minister of war' resident at Calcutta, to the extent that it would 'place the military power under the civil authority'. Lawrence withdrew his support only after further enquiries revealed that the military authorities in India had developed Wood's proposal such that it would actually, in Lawrence's opinion, 'consolidate & increase the military authority in India & render it practically independent of any control in India.'⁴⁷ Lawrence was also determined that the governor-general should be able to exercise the prerogative of clemency and thus interfere in the decisions of courts martial and the commander-in-chief.⁴⁸ Moreover, Lawrence not only supported Wood's proposals for reducing the number of British troops garrisoned in India, but was prepared to go even further in such reductions.⁴⁹

Wood's concerns were not limited to the power of the commander-in-chief. He also perceived dangers from senior commanders whose belligerence rendered their opinions on frontier wars inherently untrustworthy. His suspicions came to the fore during a war against Bhutan (1864-65).⁵⁰ Wood suspected that officers favoured extending the territorial scope of the conflict not on account of strategic necessity, but because of their martial enthusiasm. This is explicit in a letter he wrote to Lawrence in August 1865:

I shall be quite satisfied about Punakha if you determined on going there... I believe and will believe whatever you tell me you are satisfied of yourself in such matters. I thoroughly trust you & I am disposed to trust Mansfield's opinions on such points; but in regard to operations against

⁴⁷ Lawrence to Wood, 15 Jan. 1865, Lawrence Mss/30, no. 5.

⁴⁸ Lawrence to Wood, 15 Jan. & 1 July 1865 (2), Lawrence Mss/30, nos. 5 & 42.

⁴⁹ Lawrence to Wood, 18 Sept. 1865 (2), Lawrence Mss/30, no. 55.

⁵⁰ In 1863, Ashley Eden was sent on a mission to Bhutan, in order to negotiate a treaty intended to secure free trade and halt raids into British territory. Eden's mission had no military support; he became a 'virtual prisoner' of the Bhutanese and was forced to sign a 'humiliating' treaty. Britain accordingly went to war against Bhutan in Nov. 1864. See H.M. Stephens, 'Eden, Sir Ashley (1831-1887)', rev. K. Prior, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed.).

native tribes in the hills I do not believe in the opinions of mere military men.⁵¹

It is striking that Wood also trusted the new commander-in-chief in India, Sir William Mansfield.⁵² Lawrence too was greatly relieved by the appointment. He told Wood that ‘Mansfield & I get on very well together. I find him an excellent man of business, prompt, intelligent, and thoughtful. I thank God every day for the change.’⁵³ It is clear therefore that individuals mattered, as well as institutional structures.

The thirst for honours

An essential feature in the metropolitan portrait of army officers in India was ‘ambition’, a term used to suggest officers’ desire for honours as well as promotion. Around the time of Lawrence’s viceroyalty, the crown dispensed a variety of honours to the officer class. Generals could aspire to a peerage.⁵⁴ Less senior officers might hope to obtain a baronetcy, knighthood or at least one of the lower awards in the chivalric orders. There were several paths to a knighthood, including through the ‘Most Honourable Order of the Bath’ and the ‘Most Exalted Order of the Star of India’. Since its expansion in 1815, the order of the Bath had been divided into three different classes (of increasing seniority): companion (CB), knight commander (KCB), and knight grand cross (GCB). The separate classes allowed service to the state to be ranked and classified. They also provided a structure through which men could strive to advance; ‘a ladder of advancement for the ambitious in the army, the navy and the civil service.’⁵⁵

⁵¹ Wood to Lawrence, 12 Aug. 1865 (3), Lawrence Mss/26, no. 45 (emphasis in original).

⁵² Mansfield, William Rose (1819-76): commander-in-chief in India, 14 March 1865 - 8 Apr. 1870; created Baron Sandhurst, 1871.

⁵³ Lawrence to Wood, 14 Aug. 1865, Lawrence Mss/30, no. 49.

⁵⁴ By way of example, and using only officers already appearing in this dissertation, Sir Colin Campbell (after the Indian Mutiny), Sir Robert Napier (after the Abyssinian expedition), Sir Hugh Rose and Sir William Mansfield (in each case after serving as commander-in-chief in India) all received peerages.

⁵⁵ D. Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British saw their Empire* (London, 2001), p. 86.

The Star of India was a much more recent order (established in 1861) and followed the same ranking system as the Bath, thus comprising: companion (CSI), knight commander (KCSI), and knight grand cross (GCSI). It was however very different to the order of the Bath, in that it was conferred both on British and Indian subjects; typically British governors, Indian princes and the civil servants of both countries.⁵⁶

The ‘ladder of advancement’ is illustrated by Lawrence’s progression through increasingly senior and prestigious ranks of the honours system. His career demonstrates that receiving one knighthood was no impediment to receiving others; he was in fact a knight four times over. Lawrence was made KCB in 1856 (for his administration in the Punjab), and promoted GCB in 1857 (for his Mutiny exploits). He became a baronet in 1859, and was made KCSI in 1861 (at the inception of the order), subsequently promoted GCSI in 1866. In 1869, having completed his five years as governor-general, he was created Baron Lawrence of the Punjaub and of Grateley.⁵⁷

John Mackenzie has identified a ‘scramble’ to participate in colonial conflicts on the part of British officers. He ascribes their enthusiasm to a variety of motives: the excitement of the ‘sporting event’, the desire for promotion and the ‘lust’ for medals that developed in the later nineteenth century.⁵⁸ However, historians have been reluctant to go further and suggest that military ‘ambition’ was itself a *cause* of British imperial expansion. British historians have nonetheless made this argument in the case of Russia. H.H. Dodwell, writing in *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, asserted that

⁵⁶ An even more prolific period for honours lay ahead, and two further Indian orders were established in 1878 (to coincide with Queen Victoria’s assumption of the imperial title): the Most Eminent Order of the Indian Empire, and the Imperial Order of the Crown of India (for women). See Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*, p. 80.

⁵⁷ Steele, ‘Baron Lawrence’.

⁵⁸ MacKenzie, ‘Popular imperialism and the military’, p. 11.

Russia's advances through central Asia were partly motivated by ambition: '[m]ilitary organisation, too, made for expansion. Military governors could not look for rewards and promotion by a peaceful administration.'⁵⁹ This account of Russian motivation was written when Britain still ruled India, but it is to some extent supported by more recent research. Rose Greaves has argued that Russia's conquest of central Asia was in part carried out by over-zealous officers who acted unofficially, although it also resulted from decisions taken by the central government, requiring expenditure on forts and railways (and later subsidies).⁶⁰ Historians may of course be susceptible to the same assumptions about Russian motives that preoccupied some contemporary Britons. Rawlinson was in little doubt that military ambition was a factor in Russian expansion, as his 1868 'Memorandum on the Central Asian Question' underlined:

Russia has always attributed to her military chiefs a degree of power in influencing the national policy which in this country we find it difficult to realize. She used to explain the slow progress that was made in subjugating the Caucasus by pointing to the self-interest of the army, which forbade the premature closing of so fertile a source of promotion and honours.⁶¹

In *Imperialism and Social Classes* J.A. Schumpeter argued that imperial expansion was undertaken by aristocrats, whose status and security were threatened at home (by industry, urbanisation and democracy) and who thus sought consolation in knightly

⁵⁹ Dodwell continued: 'In 1869 Kaufmann's appointment as governor-general was defended by Prince Gortchakoff expressly on the ground that he had already gained every honour that a Russian general could hope for.' H.H. Dodwell, 'Central Asia', p. 408, in H.H. Dodwell (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the British Empire, Volume V The Indian Empire 1858-1918* (Cambridge, 1932).

⁶⁰ Greaves, 'Themes in British policy towards Afghanistan', 37.

⁶¹ Rawlinson, Memorandum on the Central Asian Question, p. 32. This was an argument often made in periodicals, including in this case the *Saturday Review*. 'Little definite as is our knowledge of Russian movements in Central Asia, a variety of information from different sources, no less than the analogies of Indian conquest, leads to the conclusion that the zeal of individual officers, and a sort of public opinion seconding it, have had more to do with aggression on the Tartar principalities than any schemes concerted at St. Petersburg.' Anon., 'Afghanistan and India', *Saturday Review*, 29 (19 March 1870), 369.

endeavour on the imperial frontier.⁶² His hypothesis has not proved popular with historians of Britain. David Cannadine for example has argued that the British aristocracy played only a subordinate role in the creation of the British empire.⁶³ For Cannadine, the expansion of the British honours system has great sociological significance. It offered a means by which Britons could visualise the diverse constituents of the empire as a whole; a sociological equivalent of maps with British territories coloured red. Indians as well as Britons were awarded many of the same honours (such as the Star of India) and this sort of social hierarchy ‘homogenised the heterogeneity of empire’. Cannadine certainly found anecdotal evidence that many people ‘yearned’ for honours, but he did not consider the impulses to territorial expansion possibly created by such yearnings.⁶⁴ Similarly, Edward Spiers has recovered evidence that subalterns in India were eager to ‘see some action’ and win medals for gallantry, but he did not explore whether this enthusiasm contributed to the forces driving imperial expansion.⁶⁵

Lawrence’s correspondence as governor-general suggests he devoted considerable attention to scrutinising candidates for a variety of awards, in particular the Star of India. His attention to this topic was in part a consequence of the post-Mutiny policy of seeking to attach the ‘traditional’ or ‘natural’ rulers of India to British rule. However, much of the demand came directly from British officers, putting themselves forward for awards. Lawrence was in no doubt that the grant of such honours was ‘greatly valued’

⁶² J.A. Schumpeter, *Imperialism and Social Classes* (1919).

⁶³ However (as Cannadine recognised), Schumpeter had not intended to explain British expansion. D. Cannadine, ‘The empire strikes back’, *Past and Present*, 147 (1995), 180-194.

⁶⁴ Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*, pp. 85-90, 98.

⁶⁵ Spiers argues that, following news of the first outbreak of mutiny in 1857: ‘Many of the younger subalterns looked forward to the campaign as an opportunity to see “some action” and win a few medals, including the much coveted Victoria Cross. Lieutenant, later Field Marshal Earl, Roberts wanted this reward more than any other: “Oh! if I can only manage it”, he confided to his mother, “how jolly I should be!”.’ Spiers, *The Army and Society*, p. 128.

by recipients, and provided the state with ‘a cheap way of recognising merit & making men contented.’⁶⁶ Some economy was also necessary, and Lawrence quickly dismissed claims from candidates he considered unworthy. Honours and distinctions ‘will do more harm than good’, he told Northcote, ‘unless they are given with a sparing hand.’⁶⁷ Part of the value of awards, according to Lawrence, was that they could ‘stimulate’ men to ‘do their duty’. He wrote to Sir Charles Wood in this vein in January 1865, while putting forward the claims of Sir Robert Montgomery:

Montgomery has done very well as Lt Govr of the Punjab. His administration has been very successful; & he leaves the country prosperous & contented. I hope that you will be able to recommend to Her Majesty that some mark of honor be conferred on him. He was made a K.C.B. for his services in Oude. I do not think that it would be too much to make him a Baronet. I know that he would like this very much. If not, he should have the 1st class of the Star of India, but he would greatly prefer the Baronetcy. Such things from the State, after all, are well bestowed, if they stimulate men in such positions to do their duty.⁶⁸

Presumably Montgomery would have ‘greatly preferred’ a baronetcy because he was already a knight of the Bath; and because a baronetcy, unlike the various knighthoods, was a hereditary honour and in this sense a step up the ladder of advancement.⁶⁹ It is implicit from this letter that Montgomery had spoken to Lawrence on the subject. In Lawrence’s correspondence there are in fact numerous examples of men who pressed

⁶⁶ Lawrence to Wood, 5 Jan. 1865 (2), Lawrence Mss/30, no. 3.

⁶⁷ Lawrence to Northcote, 7 July 1868, Lawrence Mss/33, no. 47.

⁶⁸ Lawrence to Wood, 23 Jan. 1865 (1), Lawrence Mss/30, no. 7.

⁶⁹ In the event Montgomery was not to receive a baronetcy. Instead, he was awarded (in Feb. 1866) what Lawrence had suggested to Wood as the alternative, the GCSI. Montgomery had received the KCB in 1859. On his return to England in 1868 he was appointed a member of the council of India. At least one of his relatives went on to receive higher honours: Bernard Law Montgomery, 1st Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, was his grandson. J.A. Hamilton, ‘Montgomery, Sir Robert (1809-1887)’, rev. P. Penner, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed.).

their claims on him, often with great specificity about which class of which award they desired. This illustrates the sensitivity many Anglo-Indians had to subtle differences in rank, and the social prestige conferred by different categories and classes of honours.

The subtle gradations in the honours conferred on officers can be distinguished from the awards available to ordinary soldiers. A new medal for military service on the north-west frontier was pressed on officials by army officers and like-minded MPs in 1868. These sorts of medals had a certain democratic quality, in that they were awarded to *all* soldiers who had served in particular campaigns. Those who advocated the grant of such medals recognised that the ‘social value of this honorary distinction to the soldier who wears it on his breast is immense, and the country reaps the benefit in the aspirations excited throughout the army, and the recruits who are drawn by an honourable ambition.’⁷⁰ The secretary of state told Lawrence that he was ‘favourable to such rewards where there is any fair ground for them’. Northcote however also seemed concerned that each award generated the appetite for more. He observed that the grant of a medal for service in New Zealand had ‘set every one agog for similar rewards.’⁷¹

Lawrence recognised that the thirst for honours could stimulate officers to do rather more than their duty. In a letter to Cranborne, he identified officers’ hopes for achieving ‘distinction’ as one of the factors behind their desire to extend British frontiers:

I cannot understand what impels our leading men every now & then to overlook all that we have to do in ‘British India’; and to try to bring us into contact with the people in distant, difficult &

⁷⁰ Note the emphasis that in this case the ambition was ‘honourable’. A. Kinnaid to editor, *Times*, 31 July 1868, p. 10. See also parliamentary questions from A. Kinnaid and Colonel Sykes, *Hansard*, 193 (27 July 1868), cols. 1822-3.

⁷¹ Northcote to Lawrence, 21 July 1868, ‘Lawrence Mss/29, no. 38.

hostile regions. I presume it must be the love of novelty, the desire for change, the hope of distinction. British Officers at a long distance from controlling influence, & having little on their hands, must do something if it were only to shew that they are necessary. They thus are imperceptibly led to concoct schemes & propound undertakings...⁷²

The restlessness Lawrence described may in part have been a consequence of the long periods of leave granted to officers: as much as four months annually for captains, five months for majors, and six months or more for colonels in the Brigade of Guards.⁷³ Lord Elgin was even more forthright in attributing the desire for more active frontier policies to officers' aspirations to win honours and distinction. During his tenure as governor-general, Elgin shared his assessment of the motivation of a notable advocate of forward policies with the secretary of state, Sir Charles Wood:

[Sir Bartle] Frere, you tell me, finds fault with our policy in Affghanistan. I have no doubt that it is considered slow by a good many of his friends on the frontier. What chances of diplomatic distinctions, and perhaps even Military Rewards, we are foregoing!... I am wholly opposed to that prurient intermeddling policy which finds so much favor with certain classes of Indian officials. It is constantly thrusting us into equivocal situations... Nothing in my opinion can be more fatal to our prestige and legitimate influence... As to Frere. He is a great deal too hasty in his judgements on such matters for my taste.⁷⁴

Later events in southern Africa suggested that Frere was indeed 'a great deal too hasty'.⁷⁵ Elgin seems to have had no doubt that in at least some instances the impulses

⁷² Lawrence to Cranborne, 4 Oct. 1866, Lawrence Mss/31, no. 39.

⁷³ Spiers, *The Army and Society*, p. 26.

⁷⁴ Elgin to Wood, 21 May 1863, Elgin Mss/5, f152.

⁷⁵ 'Disraeli's government with some justification made Frere the scapegoat' for the disaster which obliterated the 1st / 24th Imperial regiment at Isandlwana on 22 Jan. 1879. J. Benyon, 'Frere, Sir (Henry) Bartle Edward, first baronet (1815-1884)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford,

to territorial expansion emanated from British officers eager for honours and distinction. This suggests that the arguments made by contemporary Britons, and by some historians, about the motives of Russian advances in central Asia might also be applied to British expansion on the Indian frontier. Although there was no expansion into Afghanistan while Lawrence was governor-general, when Lord Salisbury as secretary of state for India in 1875 resolved to send British officers to Kabul he was influenced by a number of former army and political officers in India. Chief among the influential advisers to Salisbury at that time was none other than Sir Bartle Frere.⁷⁶

Mountstuart Grant Duff also connected contemporary criticism of Lawrence's Afghan policy with the desire of British officers to open up new fields for distinction. Grant Duff was parliamentary under-secretary of state for India during the Liberal administration of 1868-74, during which time he handled most Indian business in the Commons, because the secretary of state (the Duke of Argyll) sat in the Lords.⁷⁷ In a Commons debate on Indian finance in 1870, Grant Duff praised Lawrence's resilience in the face of a 'mania' among British officers for obtaining the knighthood of the Bath:

Sir John Lawrence, in spite of discouragement, in spite of taunts, in spite of Russophobia, and that still more dangerous complaint, which ever raged along the Indian frontier line, and was known as the K.C.B. mania, held his hand, and preserved an attitude of friendly observation.⁷⁸

Grant Duff also considered that British and Russian expansion were similar at least in

2004; online ed. Jan. 2008).

⁷⁶ Duthie, 'Lord Salisbury, the "Forward" Group and Anglo-Afghan Relations: 1874-78', 193.

⁷⁷ Duff, Sir Mountstuart Elphinstone Grant (1829-1906): Liberal MP for Elgin burghs, 1857-81; under-secretary of state for India, 1868-74; made Privy Counsellor, 1880; governor of Madras, 1881-86; CIE, 1881; GCSI, 1887; president of the Royal Geographical Society, 1889-93; president of the Royal Historical Society, 1892-99. H.C.G. Matthew, 'Duff, Sir Mountstuart Elphinstone Grant- (1829-1906)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed. Jan. 2008).

⁷⁸ *Hansard*, 203 (5 Aug. 1870), col. 1620.

the sense that each was propelled by the respective officers' thirst for honours. In parliament, he later offered this assessment of the connection between officer motivation and state expansion: 'Russia is impelled and dragged forward towards our border partly voluntarily, partly involuntarily. She is dragged forward involuntarily by her own officers, who suffer under a disease which we may call the St. Ann mania, and which is as nearly allied to that K.C.B. mania which we know so well in India as scarlatina is to scarlet fever.'⁷⁹ This perception regarding the motivation of British officers seems in fact to have been not uncommon among Liberal politicians with experience of Indian administration. Shortly before the British invasion of Afghanistan in 1878, Lord Halifax (Sir Charles Wood had been created Viscount Halifax in 1866) warned the secretary of state for India that military men would always favour military campaigns as a source of honours and promotion.⁸⁰

Officials were also frustrated by what they perceived as the tendency of army officers to exaggerate the likelihood of another mutiny.⁸¹ Elgin seems at times to have been exasperated on this score.⁸² Some officials also seem to have been wary of a sort of natural momentum that a forward move in Afghanistan might initiate. This momentum

⁷⁹ Grant Duff, *Hansard*, 215 (22 Apr. 1873), col. 856.

⁸⁰ Halifax to Lord Cranbrook, 19 Sept. 1878, cited in R.J. Moore, *Sir Charles Wood's Indian policy 1853-66* (Manchester, 1966), p. 152.

⁸¹ Cotton provides one such example. In his memoirs he claimed to have seen intercepted letters (written after the Mutiny) from Hyderabad, addressed by Muslim sepoys of a rearmed corps at Peshawar to fellow Muslims in the Nizam of Hyderabad's territory, calling on Muslims generally to rise and rid themselves of the 'common enemy'. Cotton, *Nine Years on the North-West Frontier*, p. 305.

⁸² Elgin wrote to Wood in June 1862 about the 'follies' committed by 'military panic mongers in the North West' of India. Elgin was 'disgusted' with a letter he had received from the commander-in-chief, Sir Hugh Rose, which was 'full of all the trash which his gossiping officers report to him'. Apparently (Elgin reported to Wood) 'the stock in trade of these blockheads now is the existence of designs for the assassination of Europeans.' Elgin felt he knew enough of his 'Military friends' to feel 'quite sure that a topic of this kind, when once broached, must be the subject of conversation at every mess table'. Elgin understood that in the wake of the Mutiny, 'it will not do for me to adopt the happy go lucky tone and to pooh pooh what professes to be information. To preach common sense from a safe distance is equally futile. It therefore occurred to me that the only thing practically to do would be to go to the headquarters of the panic, surround myself by native troops, and put a stop to the nonsense by example.' Elgin to Wood, 17 June 1862, Elgin Mss/2, f130v.

could be attributed not necessarily to the ambition of British officers for distinction and honours, but to their ‘energy and spirit of enterprise’. This was a point made by Richard Temple in a minute he wrote in response to Rawlinson’s memorandum on the ‘Central Asian Question’ in 1868. Temple is an important observer in that he was (at the time of writing) the financial member of Lawrence’s executive council, and also foreign secretary to the government of India. He thought that the ‘energy’ of British officers led to the ‘onward tendency’ of British India. Temple accordingly argued that even a limited intervention in Afghanistan—such as sending envoys to Kabul—would inevitably beget further intervention:

The study of British political affairs in Asia generally, and on the north-west frontier of India in particular, impresses me with a sense of the onward tendency which ever impels us. So long as some rigid bounds are observed it is just possible (and no more) to check this tendency. Once those bounds are over-passed the tendency becomes irresistible. If British Officers cross the Affghan border troops will follow sooner or later. If one part of Affghanistan is occupied the occupation will spread to other parts, till the whole is occupied, or until some tremendous consequence arises. The very energy and spirit of enterprise which happily distinguish our countrymen generally would in this case prove irrepressible. And the Government, once embarked on such a course, would be committed by the proceedings of its own servants, if by nothing else, to go on and on.⁸³

Temple might have had the first Afghan war in mind as a precedent for this ‘onward tendency’, or perhaps the annexation of the Punjab. Africa also provided an example, in the form of the Abyssinian expedition: once consul Cameron had left his post on the coast and entered Abyssinia, Britain found itself reacting to events in a way which beget

⁸³ Minute by R. Temple, 8 Dec. 1868, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 14, enclosure 5, p. 68.

more intervention (Cameron's captivity; Rassam's mission to relieve Cameron; Rassam's captivity; and ultimately the invasion).

Reinforcing perceptions of Anglo-Indian militarism

Political affiliation or inclination would naturally have influenced an individual's view of the army. Sir Charles Wood and Grant Duff were members of the parliamentary Liberal party, and Elgin and Lawrence could reasonably be described as Liberal-leaning in this period. Many Liberals thought that the army needed reform to make it less of a sectional interest, and Liberal governments implemented reform in 1871 (abolition of purchase) and throughout their administration of 1880-85.⁸⁴ However, Wood and Grant Duff were unusual in that they served long terms at the India Office (and in Wood's case also at its precursor, the Board of Control) and therefore had experienced the ways in which army officers and the military authorities could seek to influence policy decisions. Moreover, the evidence available to contemporaries from a variety of stridently non-Liberal sources—British journalists in India and army officers themselves—must have contributed in their own right to the perceptions discussed in this chapter. The reports and observations made by journalists in India were often disseminated in the British press, for example by newspapers such as *The Times* that had the financial resources to engage 'Indian' correspondents. That paper's Calcutta correspondent was apt to remark how the exhilaration of war relieved the 'dullness' of life in cantonments. Thus in 1868, when the government of India had 'wisely resolved to mass a large force at Abbotabad', the correspondent observed that 'the dullness all India has been complaining of is likely to come to an end sooner than was expected.'⁸⁵ Similarly, after the expedition to Abyssinia had been announced, the Calcutta

⁸⁴ Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism*, pp. 78-9.

⁸⁵ Calcutta correspondent, *Times*, 15 Sept. 1868, p. 7.

correspondent treated it as a tonic for the British community alongside the arrival of cooler weather at the end of the long Indian summer. ‘What with Abyssinia and the cold weather’, the relieved correspondent reported, ‘India begins to revive.’⁸⁶

Officers themselves also contributed to assumptions about their ambition. Lewis Pelly, an army and political officer in India, writing in 1865, described reaction to the news that Britain was to invade Afghanistan in 1838: both the ‘pick of the civil service and the flower of the army sought the frontier at any sacrifice of emolument, and feverishly impatient of unknown roads to honour and power.’⁸⁷ The memoirs of Lieutenant-General Cotton probably did little to improve the metropolitan image of army officers in India. Cotton argued that ‘real soldiers’ could only be found where there were opportunities for learning (that is to say, wars). As a consequence of the frequency of warfare in India, it was natural that India offered Britain great opportunities for military training. Cotton in fact viewed India as an enormous ‘military nursery’.⁸⁸

A review of Cotton’s book in *Reynolds’s Newspaper* suspected more than an element of self-interest in the general’s motivation: ‘we suspect, whilst penning his “solemn warnings” to the English Government, and recommending the appointment of a military bashaw to rule India, he was sitting before a mirror, having himself in his own eye all the time.’⁸⁹ Other newspapers adopted a similar approach in considering proposals for

⁸⁶ Calcutta correspondent, *Times*, 5 Nov. 1867, p. 12.

⁸⁷ L. Pelly, ‘British India’, *Fortnightly Review*, 2 (15 Aug. 1865), 34.

⁸⁸ Cotton, *Nine Years on the North-West Frontier*, p. 313. Cotton had written to Mansfield in this vein in 1858: ‘India is or ought to be the great nursery or school’ for British officers. Of all Britain’s imperial possessions, only India offered such a ‘great field for the exercise of military talent and ingenuity’. Accordingly, Cotton thought that ‘to India mainly, the Crown should look for officers of military experience in her European Wars.’ Major-General S. Cotton (commanding Peshawar division) to Major-General Sir W.R. Mansfield (chief of the staff in India), 11 June 1858, cited in Cotton, *Nine Years on the North-West Frontier*, p. 320.

⁸⁹ *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 24 May 1868, p. 2. (The word ‘bashaw’ seems to be a variant of ‘pasha’, meaning a sort of chief, or provincial governor.)

military rule in India. For example, a piece in the *Times of India* (and reprinted in the *Daily News*) was sceptical regarding the motives of those who advocated the occupation of Quetta. Those advocates were ‘arraigned before the bar of public opinion on a double indictment—Russophobia and ambition.’ The *Times of India* noted that the idea of occupying Quetta had originated with the late General John Jacob (in 1854, as war with Persia approached). It was suspected that Jacob had wanted an entire army under his independent control, in a trans-frontier empire of which he would have been ‘the virtual ruler, if not actual dictator’.⁹⁰

This chapter has necessarily concentrated on civilian perceptions of army officers and military authority in India. However, it was quite possible for senior officers themselves to interpret proposals for forward policies as expressions of belligerence. Sir William Mansfield was commander-in-chief in India and a member of Lawrence’s executive council. In his official response to Rawlinson’s memorandum on the ‘Central Asian Question’ in December 1868, Mansfield stated that he ‘thoroughly concurred with his Excellency the Viceroy in the policy pursued during the last four years.’ Mansfield also recorded his ‘conviction’ that Britain had already ‘reached the proper limits of territorial development’ in India. Mansfield’s minute was in important respects similar to the concerns and complaints his civilian colleagues in the government of India had made about those who proposed advancing beyond the existing frontier. Mansfield thus declared: ‘I entirely decline to follow in the wake of those who are constantly striving to excite the military spirit in England and India against Russia.’⁹¹ This at first seems a remarkable statement by a British general, let alone the commander-in-chief in India.

⁹⁰ *Times of India*, reprinted in the *Daily News*, 21 Aug. 1867, p. 6.

⁹¹ Minute by W.R. Mansfield (24 Dec. 1868), *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 14, enclosure 8, pp. 75-6.

However, it seems less remarkable when seen in the context of government of India officials worn down by constant repetition of forward proposals by serving and former army officers, and given the ubiquity of suspicions about the fertile ground Anglo-India offered for militarism.

* * *

Anne Summers has argued that the ‘process by which professional militarism became popularised and domesticated was a slow and difficult one.’ Only by the end of the nineteenth century was the ‘Regular’ army, as distinct from the Volunteers, coming to be adopted as ‘a truly national institution’ in Britain.⁹² In 1858 John Bright had described Britain’s military and foreign policies as ‘a gigantic system of outdoor relief for the aristocracy’.⁹³ The period 1864-69 seems much closer, not just chronologically but in terms of attitudes, to Bright’s speech than to the militarism of late nineteenth century Britain. The evidence examined in this chapter also supports two linked hypotheses. First, if Summers (whose arguments have been influential) is correct that militarism in Britain flourished only from the end of the nineteenth century, then it seems to have had a much earlier antecedent in the wider British world. For it is clear that during Lawrence’s tenure as governor-general a powerful strand of metropolitan and official opinion regarded army officers in India with great suspicion, and Anglo-India as fertile soil for militarism. In other words, militarism may have flourished (and was certainly perceived by many Britons to flourish) in the British world (specifically, in India) long before the various patriotic leagues and ‘shock’ of Boer war reverses that are thought to have heralded the arrival of militarism in Britain itself.

⁹² Summers, ‘Militarism in Britain’, 107.

⁹³ John Bright at Birmingham, 29 Oct. 1858, cited in Summers, ‘Militarism in Britain’, 107-8.

Secondly, it is possible that some of the evidence used by scholars may have contributed to unduly positive assessments about the army's enhanced image, or the speed with which that enhanced image arrived in Britain after the Mutiny. Edward Spiers for example seems to be persuaded of the enhanced reputation of the army on the basis of the 'ecstatic receptions' received by returning regiments.⁹⁴ However, as acknowledged by Spiers, the army suffered recruiting difficulties from as early as January 1858.⁹⁵ Moreover, reactions during the febrile atmosphere of the Mutiny and its aftermath are potentially a very misleading barometer of public opinion. This is because contemporary Britons may have understood the heroics of the army in 1857-58 as actions *in defence* of something. This perhaps straightforward observation seems to have been underestimated in the existing literature. Exactly what the army was perceived to be defending would have depended on an individual's perspective, but it was possible to interpret the army's actions as defending the 'honour' of violated women, or Christianity, or the British empire in India, or the empire more broadly in the sense of its associated prestige. Scholars seem to acknowledge as much, without ever saying so explicitly: Havelock's troops were after all 'avenging' something which had already happened (the Cawnpore massacre); and many pious Britons interpreted the Mutiny as a challenge to Christianity itself.⁹⁶ By analogy one might make the same point about the Volunteer corps, the *raison d'être* of which was home *defence*.⁹⁷ In contrast, the idea that Britain needed garrisons in Afghanistan as an immediate

⁹⁴ Spiers, *The Army and Society*, pp. 139-40.

⁹⁵ Some officers had hoped that the 'new lustre' to the reputation of the army would attract a sustained flood of new recruits. However, by as early as January 1858 an initial boom of new recruits had already started to decline. Military historians have therefore recognised that the appeal of the army as a career had not been transformed by the Mutiny. See Spiers, *The Army and Society*, p. 140.

⁹⁶ Anderson, 'Christian militarism', 49; MacKenzie, 'Popular imperialism and the military', p. 4. See also Spiers: at the height of the Mutiny, Britain expected vengeance, and wished the military to administer that vengeance as swiftly and as firmly as possible. Spiers, *The Army and Society*, p. 127.

⁹⁷ Cunningham, *The Volunteer Force*, p. 2.

defensive measure was far from self-evident. Estimates varied, but even by the end of Lawrence's term as governor-general Russia remained at least seven hundred miles from the north-west frontier of India.⁹⁸ Of course, seven hundred miles seemed a little too close for some, who documented the 'alarming' advance of Russia towards British India's vulnerable frontier in a variety of media. The influence of those arguments and public criticism of Lawrence's 'masterly inactivity' will be considered in the following chapter.

⁹⁸ [Malleon], 'Sir John Lawrence', 709-11.

VI

The limits of ‘masterly inactivity’, 1864-1869

Sir John Lawrence’s ‘masterly inactivity’ was publicly criticised on the basis that Britain’s apparent passivity would allow Russia to establish her influence at Kabul. In order to counter this threat, these critics argued that Britain should take more ‘active’ measures, including the provision of armaments and money to one of the protagonists in the Afghan civil war. For the first four years of his term as governor-general, Lawrence resisted all such proposals. Many writers in the imperial metropolis celebrated his refusal to yield to the pressure of the ‘panic-mongers’. However, Lawrence feared that repeated press criticism in Britain would, inevitably, condemn his policy to modification after his departure from India. By the end of his term, he remained steadfast on what he considered the most important policy decision; accordingly no British envoys or troops crossed the frontier into Afghanistan. However, on two other matters, Lawrence seems to have offered concessions to public pressure for more forward measures in Afghanistan. His acquiescence in the construction of new railway lines to the north-west frontier, and his decision to provide material assistance to Sher Ali Khan, were made in the hope of reducing the likelihood of ‘plunging’ into Afghanistan. Although Lawrence was probably too pessimistic when assessing the breadth and seriousness of criticism of his Afghan policy, he cannot be seen as exceptional in this sense, for his anxieties were shared by many of his colleagues in the government of India. These officials ascribed much greater weight to their perceptions of press and public opinion than historians who have considered the ‘official mind’ have allowed. This chapter will therefore argue that portraits of British policy-makers exhibiting a ‘rational detachment’ from external influences such as press opinion may

require some qualification.

Press criticism: Indian domestic policy

The Orissa famine of 1866, in which an estimated one million Indians died, was perhaps the greatest failure of Lawrence's tenure as governor-general.¹ His reaction to the reporting of this event shows Lawrence's sensitivity to criticism in the British press. Some metropolitan newspapers criticised Lawrence's irrigation policy, his response to the famine and the possible adverse effects of the government of India's summer 'exile' in Simla. Lawrence had initiated the annual migration to Simla on grounds of his own health and the government's increased productivity in the cooler climes of the hills (Simla was located in the north-west of the country, in the foothills of the Himalayas).² This decision had already provoked some criticism, which was now amplified; the government's absence from Calcutta allowed it to be depicted as geographically remote and indifferent to the famine's victims (Orissa lay in the east, nearer Calcutta). Having read criticism of his policy in *The Times*, Lawrence offered his resignation to the secretary of state for India, Viscount Cranborne:

I see that some of the good folks at home attack me for my shortcomings regarding the famine, & complain of my going up to the Hills every year. Being personally interested in this question I am probably a bad judge in the case, and I am therefore resolved to put myself in your hands. If you think it is desirable that the G.G. should not go to the Hills in the hot season, I shall in no wise demur to this view, & I am ready to give up my Commission in that case & go home in the Spring.³

¹ Steele, 'Baron Lawrence'.

² Lawrence's medical advisers said he should not remain in Calcutta during the hot season: see Lawrence to Cranborne, 6 Dec. 1866 (1), Lawrence Mss/31, no. 52.

³ Lawrence to Cranborne, 6 Dec. 1866 (1), Lawrence Mss/31, no. 52.

Cranborne seems to have thought this was a disproportionate reaction to what was merely predictable press criticism. He reassured Lawrence that his resignation would be ‘nothing less than a calamity’.⁴ Cranborne thought that the criticism of Lawrence personally had been ‘wholly unjust’ and wrote in this vein to the editor of *The Times*, J.T. Delane. However, Cranborne was not at all surprised at the newspaper criticism.⁵ Lawrence’s sensitivity to this criticism would presumably have been made more acute by his sense of responsibility for having failed to prevent an enormous loss of life. His sense of responsibility is evident from the letter in which he offered to resign:

It is possible that I might have been more alive to what was going on in [Orissa] had I been in Calcutta... We had heard that a great scarcity was anticipated. I urged the [lieutenant-governor of Bengal, Sir Cecil Beadon] to active measures such as the importation of grain; but he, resting on local information objected to act and the views of the Council generally were with him. I might & perhaps ought to have overruled them, & insisted on prompt action. I blame myself for not so doing.⁶

However, even allowing for his sense of responsibility, Lawrence seems to have overestimated the seriousness of the criticism of his policy and conduct regarding the famine. After the original piece in *The Times*, Cranborne ‘observed no further attack of the kind’.⁷ If the subsequent parliamentary debates are any guide to metropolitan opinion, then Lawrence does not seem to have been subjected to particularly harsh criticism. He must have read the records of these debates, as his later letters refer to

⁴ Cranborne to Lawrence, 18 Jan. 1867, Lawrence Mss/28, no. 3.

⁵ ‘I confess I do not wonder at the attacks—though they were wholly unjust towards you. There has been something grievously wrong either about the personnel, or the system, of the Public Works Dept in India.’ Cranborne to Lawrence, 10 Dec. 1866, Lawrence Mss/27, no. 46.

⁶ Lawrence to Cranborne, 6 Dec. 1866 (1), Lawrence Mss/31, no. 52.

⁷ Cranborne to Lawrence, 10 Dec. 1866, Lawrence Mss/27, no. 46.

them in some detail.⁸ Although he had been accused of ‘apathetic indifference’ to the plight of the famine’s victims, this accusation came from a backbencher; in contrast government ministers exonerated him from blame. The new secretary of state, Sir Stafford Northcote, first noted that the governor-general ‘was especially distinguished for his intense interest in the welfare of the people of India’. Northcote judged that ‘no blame whatever could be imputed’ to Lawrence for having not overruled the authorities in Bengal.⁹

It seems therefore that Lawrence displayed greater sensitivity to press criticism than ministers in London thought was warranted. Commenting on separate criticism in the British press that concerned Lawrence, Northcote seemed barely perturbed: ‘I had not seen the attacks to which your letter alludes: but if such attacks are the worst which you have to encounter you may I think sleep very quietly on your pillow.’¹⁰ Although neither Cranborne nor Northcote had been personally criticised in these newspaper ‘attacks’, their muted reactions suggest that Lawrence’s sensitivity may partly have reflected his relative inexperience of British politics and public life. That was certainly the hypothesis put forward in a review of Lawrence’s administration in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*:

We do not hesitate to avow that Sir John was extremely sensitive to the attacks of the press. This is easy to account for. He had not been trained in that rough public life through which an English statesman has to hew his path... As Chief Commissioner of the Punjab he had been

⁸ Lawrence to Northcote, 4 Oct. 1867, Lawrence Mss/32B, no. 56.

⁹ The backbencher was Patrick Smollett (MP for Dunbartonshire). *Hansard*, 189 (2 Aug. 1867), cols. 786, 816-7.

¹⁰ The ‘attacks’ in question were made in British newspapers following the Agra *darbar* of 1866. Lawrence’s address to the assembled Indian chiefs had received criticism for being ‘unduly austere’. Northcote to Lawrence, 2 Apr. 1867, Lawrence Mss/28, no. 15.

held up by the press as a pattern administrator. After the terrible events of 1857, the English press vied with the Anglo-Indian in endeavouring to do him honour. It was only after he became Viceroy... that the tone of the Indian press changed. Then he was attacked; then he was loaded with abuse... Sir John felt these attacks, and winced under them; they annoyed and vexed him; but not one of them affected his policy.¹¹

Lawrence's private correspondence suggests that his sensitivity to press criticism was also a consequence of his belief that the printed word—irrespective of its veracity—exercised a powerful influence on readers. British press reporting of the Bhutan war in 1865 seems to have disturbed Lawrence. He complained to Sir Charles Wood that parliamentary debates on the subject demonstrated not only the ignorance of many speakers but 'how much people at home are misled by newspaper reports.'¹² He subsequently shared with Wood his pessimism regarding the powerful effects of press criticism. 'Constant iteration of the same accusations, however fallacious,' Lawrence believed, 'produces an impression both in India & in England'.¹³ He was so concerned about the influence of misleading reports in the press that he later explored the possibility of establishing some outlet for the government of India's official views. Northcote thought that such an outlet was 'a necessary weapon of defence in these days. Even in England it would have its advantages; but in India I should fancy it was essential.'¹⁴ The proposal was however dropped due to a lack of agreement in

¹¹ [Malleon], 'Sir John Lawrence', 743. The article was published anonymously but *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824-1900* attributes it to George Bruce Malleon, an army officer and military historian. Malleon served in India from 1842 until 1877, when he retired with the (honorary) rank of major-general. He was made CSI in 1872. Malleon was a 'frequent contributor' to the *Calcutta Review* from 1857, and was also a correspondent of *The Times*. His publications included *History of the Indian Mutiny* (III vols., 1878-80, in continuation of vols. I & II of J.W. Kaye's *A History of the Sepoy War in India, 1857-1858*, III vols., 1864-76). See E.M. Lloyd, 'Malleon, George Bruce (1825-1898)', rev. J. Falkner, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed.).

¹² Lawrence to Wood, 2 June 1865, Lawrence Mss/30, no. 36.

¹³ Lawrence to Wood, 21 Dec. 1865 (1), Lawrence Mss/30, no. 73.

¹⁴ Northcote to Lawrence, 29 Oct. 1867, Lawrence Mss/28, no. 46.

Lawrence's executive council.¹⁵

It is possible that the speed of communications between Britain and India increased Lawrence's sensitivity to press criticism. By 1865, the governor-general at Calcutta could receive telegrams from London in three days.¹⁶ Telegrams however were used only sparingly, for the transmission of urgent information.¹⁷ Letters sent from London, and voluminous articles, editorials and reports of parliamentary debates from the imperial metropolis took from four to six weeks to reach India.¹⁸ One can only be tentative, but it is conceivable that the delay in receiving such detailed reports increased Lawrence's sense of anxiety about events in distant Britain.

In defence of 'masterly inactivity'

The famous *Edinburgh Review* article defending Lawrence's foreign policy was published anonymously in January 1867. Its author declared that Lawrence's 'opinions with respect to Russia... tend clearly towards the conclusion which the quietists would advocate—a masterly inactivity.'¹⁹ Although published anonymously, *The Times* was in no doubt that the article conveyed practically an official representation of the governor-general's 'real policy and views'.²⁰ That assessment was correct. Its author was J.W.S.

¹⁵ Some of his colleagues (Richard Temple and Sir William Mansfield) favoured an official government of India organ, 'open & avowed'; others (Henry Maine and John Strachey) preferred a 'secret service system'; while Sir Henry Durand was 'against any regular paid understanding with the Press'. Lawrence inclined to the first opinion. Lawrence to Northcote, 11 Aug. 1868 (2), Lawrence Mss/33, no. 58.

¹⁶ Lawrence to Wood, 4 March 1865 (2), Lawrence Mss/30, no. 17.

¹⁷ Based on a review of his correspondence, telegrams were used during Lawrence's term as governor-general for conveying urgent details regarding: the outbreak, progress and termination of military operations (including the Abyssinian expedition and several expeditions on the north-west frontier); resignations and appointments of ministers (and ministries) in Britain; and appointments to the government of India sanctioned by the India Office.

¹⁸ The speed of communications between Britain and India was discussed in the dissertation introduction.

¹⁹ [Wyllie], 'Foreign policy of Sir John Lawrence', 44.

²⁰ *Times*, 23 Jan. 1867, p. 6.

Wyllie, under-secretary in the Foreign Department of the government of India, and he had written the article at Lawrence's express request.²¹ Wyllie deprecated that the 'phantom of a Russian invasion' had survived in the minds of many Englishmen, especially in India among the 'panic-mongers of the Calcutta press'.²² His article's target audience was however quite clearly in Britain. That explained the choice of periodical: this was an attempt by Lawrence to counter the publicity won by his opponents in Britain. The length of the article (forty-seven pages) and its serious tone were consistent with Lawrence's views on the power of written arguments to affect public opinion. Moreover, Wyllie included voluminous extracts from Lawrence's official correspondence with the contending parties in the Afghan civil war; correspondence that before this point had never been revealed to the public (and which would not be published officially until 1878). This approach was novel, as the author noted.²³ In this sense the article may have been an experiment in the approach Lawrence was then considering for the diffusion of the government of India's views.

The article sought to persuade readers—on strategic, financial and practical grounds—that a forward policy in Afghanistan would be most unwise. Wyllie thus emphasised some diverse themes: the difficulties which Russia would face in any attempt to invade India; the strategic wisdom of defending India from the existing frontier; the intractable nature of Afghanistan and its inhabitants; and the enormous expense of establishing new garrisons beyond the existing border. Wyllie also reassured readers that Lawrence was not at all indifferent to events in Afghanistan; in fact he secured useful intelligence from

²¹ J.W.S. Wyllie, *Essays on the external policy of India*, ed., with a brief life, by W.W. Hunter, (London, 1875), p. xx.

²² [Wyllie], 'Foreign policy of Sir John Lawrence', 42.

²³ [Wyllie], 'Foreign policy of Sir John Lawrence', 2. The correspondence was published officially in 1878 in *Afghanistan Correspondence*.

a variety of sources and ‘scouts’.²⁴ This last revelation was almost certainly intended to counter press criticism that Lawrence’s inaction was tantamount to ‘indifference’.²⁵ Wyllie’s public arguments against interfering in Afghanistan—developed in a second article, this time published in the *Fortnightly Review*—echoed much of what Lawrence had written in his correspondence with ministers in London.²⁶

Press criticism: Afghan policy

Journalists in Britain assumed that an invading army’s most likely route from central Asia to India would be through the Khyber pass, though occasionally they reported rumours that Russia had found new ways through the Himalayas.²⁷ On account of the perceived strategic significance of the Khyber pass, Lawrence understood that a proposed railway route from Lahore to Peshawar (at the foot of the Khyber) would attract public support from those anxious about Russian advances in central Asia. Lawrence however believed that the construction of irrigation works should have priority over railways. He told Cranborne that irrigation was of ‘very much more importance than new lines of communication’. This was partly on account of the human consequences of famine in India, which Lawrence seemed anxious to convey to ministers in London: ‘[t]he misery, the loss of life, the poverty which follow a failure of the rain at the usual period in India, are almost inconceivable to those who have not lived among the people in a famine year.’²⁸

²⁴ [Wyllie], ‘Foreign policy of Sir John Lawrence’, 44-7.

²⁵ An editorial in *The Times*, published in the same month as the *Edinburgh Review* article, thought the charge that Lawrence had ‘no foreign policy’ had been so ‘persistently repeated’ that it was proper to consider the whole question again. *Times*, 23 Jan. 1867, p. 6.

²⁶ J.W.S. Wyllie, ‘Masterly Inactivity’, *Fortnightly Review*, 6 (Dec. 1869), 585-615. By this time, Wyllie was no longer serving in an official capacity, and wrote in his own name.

²⁷ E.g. it was reported in late 1868 that a route by way of Kashmir might also be practicable. See *Times*, 9 Dec. 1868, p. 9.

²⁸ Lawrence to Cranborne, 31 Aug. 1866, Lawrence Mss/31, no. 31. Lawrence had experienced the effects of famine first hand as a settlement officer in the drought-stricken Etawah district of the North-Western Provinces, c.1838: Steele, ‘Baron Lawrence’.

Lawrence's preference for irrigation was also a question of finance: he was doubtful that any new railway lines would prove remunerative, but confident that irrigation works would 'prove a profitable investment' for the government. If railways had to be constructed, Lawrence preferred (on financial grounds) to complete India's internal communications by the construction of feeder lines. As for proposed new lines: 'in our present financial difficulties, I am for postponing them all.'²⁹ However, notwithstanding his clear, strong views on this matter, Lawrence agreed to proceed with the construction of railways to the north-west frontier. He wrote a letter to Northcote in October 1867, explaining the reasons for his acquiescence:

I am firmly of opinion that any advance of the Russians in the present generation in India is a perfect delusion; but, on the other hand, I think... that if we could quiet men's minds and put a stop to an agitation which may lead to some foolish movement forward, that it would be a politic measure. If you consider that there is no danger of any such agitation proving successful, then I am for taking our time, and consolidating and developing our resources, by completing and undertaking such lines in the interior of India, which are likely to prove remunerative in a short time after completion. But, if you think that there may be danger from the excitement which may then arise, then I am willing to go in for such a moderate scheme.³⁰

In a later letter, Lawrence consoled himself regarding the likely costs of the Lahore-Peshawar line: 'if its construction will only satisfy those who cry out for interference in Central Asia it may repay in that way the cost of construction'.³¹ By January 1868, his

²⁹ Lawrence to Cranborne, 31 Aug. 1866, Lawrence Mss/31, no. 31. Lawrence's reference to 'our present financial difficulties' contemplated forthcoming annual deficits. As discussed in chapter III, there were recurrent government of India deficits in the period 1866-68.

³⁰ Lawrence to Northcote, 23 Oct. 1867, Lawrence Mss/32B, no. 60.

³¹ Lawrence to Northcote, 19 Dec. 1867, Lawrence Mss/32B, no. 72.

surrender was complete. He reported to the secretary of state: 'I am ready to accept whatever you may decide on as regard railways from Lahore to Peshawur... Anything is better than plunging into Afghanistan.'³² It seems clear therefore that Lawrence's acquiescence in the construction of the railway line to Peshawar was in his mind a concession to public anxiety about Russian advances and related criticism of his 'passive' Afghan policy. Lawrence's fear is explicit: that public 'agitation' about Russia, if unchecked, might lead to 'some foolish movement forward' into Afghanistan. He was not alone in making this connection between public opinion and policy-making, for Northcote also thought that constructing such railways would ultimately strengthen the case for 'abstention' in Afghanistan. The secretary of state had informed Lawrence: 'I entirely approve of your views on the Central Asian question: but I think it will strengthen the hands of the abstention party if we show that we are taking steps to strengthen our N.W. frontier.'³³ In other words, the calculations of ministers in the metropolis, as well as officials on the imperial periphery, took account of their perceptions of public pressure. They were prepared to make concessions to that pressure, in the hope of protecting more cherished policy objectives.

This preparedness to offer concessions on particular policy questions also seems to have been evident in Lawrence's belated decision to support Sher Ali Khan. Lawrence had recognised the late Dost Muhammad's son and nominated successor, Sher Ali Khan, as Amir of Afghanistan. However, several of Dost Muhammad's other sons contested the succession, and for extended periods Sher Ali's position seemed extremely precarious. However, such were the vicissitudes of the civil war that it was impossible for officials to predict which one of the contending parties would ultimately emerge triumphant.

³² Lawrence to Northcote, 2 Jan. 1868, Lawrence Mss/33, no. 2.

³³ Northcote to Lawrence, 17 Nov. 1867, Lawrence Mss/28, no. 49.

Having already recognised Sher Ali as Amir of Afghanistan, Lawrence was determined to avoid recognising another chief as anything more than the Amir of a particular Afghan province. Lawrence was also determined that no assistance (whether money, weapons, British officers or troops) should be offered to any of the protagonists. Supporting a particular chief ran the considerable risk that if he were then defeated this would damage British prestige and prejudice subsequent relations with him. An official despatch from the government of India to the secretary of state in April 1866 outlined this policy of 'strict neutrality':

The cause of the Ameer Shere Ali is by no means finally lost, and we consider that, until such a result is reached, we are bound equally by good faith and by considerations of policy to recognise no other Chief as Ameer of Affghanistan. Should the present contest terminate in a disruption of the kingdom into two or more principalities, it will be time enough to give these our recognition when they develop themselves in a form having some appearance of stability. In the meantime we intend maintaining an attitude of strict neutrality, leaving the Affghans to choose their own rulers, and prepared to accept with amity whatever Chief may finally establish his power in the country.³⁴

Lawrence and his colleagues in the government of India planned to observe developments from a distance by obtaining intelligence from Indian agents, until such time as one protagonist proved himself sufficiently powerful to attract British support. From his conversations with Dost Muhammad, Lawrence was confident that the warring chiefs would have no objection to such a policy. He was therefore frank in explaining his neutrality, as in this letter to Amir Muhammad Afzal Khan (who at the

³⁴ Government of India to the secretary of state for India, 21 Apr. 1866, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 5, p. 9.

time of writing had established himself at Kabul, in place of his rival Sher Ali):

My friend! the British Government has hitherto maintained a strict neutrality between the contending parties in Affghanistan. Rumours, I am told, have reached the Cabul Durbar of assistance having been granted by me to Ameer Shere Ali Khan. I take this opportunity to request your Highness not to believe such idle tales. Neither men, nor arms, nor money, nor assistance of any kind, have ever been supplied by my Government to Ameer Shere Ali Khan. Your Highness and he, both equally unaided by me, have fought out the battle, each upon your own resources. I propose to continue the same policy for the future... My friend! as I told your Highness in my former letter, the relations of the British Government are with the actual Rulers of Affghanistan.³⁵

Lawrence went on to explain that for as long as Sher Ali held Herat (and maintained friendship with the British government) he would be recognised as the ruler of that place. Upon the same principle, Lawrence was prepared to recognise Afzal Khan as Amir of Kabul and Kandahar. Lawrence in return expected Afzal Khan to recognise as binding the engagements concluded between the British government and his father, Dost Muhammad (the Anglo-Afghan Treaties of 1855 and 1857). Lawrence also requested that, in accordance with the 1857 treaty, a *vakeel* (Muslim envoy) be deputed to Kabul. Afzal Khan accepted this request in April 1867.³⁶

However, the longevity of the civil war tested the patience, and possibly the nerves, of some of Lawrence's compatriots. By January 1868, Colonel John Adye could contain himself no longer. The colonel wrote to the editor of *The Times*, in protestation at the

³⁵ Khureeta to His Highness Ameer Mahomed Ufzul Khan, Walee of Cabul and Candahar, 25 Feb. 1867, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 7, p. 14.

³⁶ Khureeta to His Highness Ameer Mahomed Ufzul Khan, Walee of Cabul and Candahar, 25 Feb. 1867, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, nos. 7 & 9, pp. 14 & 18.

apparent passivity of ‘masterly inactivity’:

Instead of standing aloof and allowing them to fight out their miserable squabbles [in Afghanistan], we should associate ourselves with the legitimate sovereign of the country, lend him our support by the presence of a befitting envoy, and assist him with money and arms if necessary, to maintain his position... “Masterly inactivity” is, in short, a selfish attempt to ignore the responsibilities of our high and powerful position in the East; it is at best but a poor and ignoble policy, and in reality its success is impossible.³⁷

It may or may not have been a coincidence that Colonel Adye’s book on the Ambela war had just been published.³⁸ But it was certainly easier to demand assistance be given to Afghanistan’s ‘legitimate sovereign’ than it was to identify such a person. In one sense the ‘legitimate sovereign’ was Sher Ali Khan, Dost Muhammad’s son and nominated successor. In a practical sense however—as Lawrence had acknowledged in his letter to Afzal Khan—the relations of the British government were with ‘the actual Rulers’ of Afghanistan. In this sense the ‘legitimate sovereign’ was simply whichever Amir won the civil war; and at the time of Adye’s letter to *The Times* that remained a very uncertain matter. Lawrence read the letter and then (about six weeks after it had appeared in *The Times*) wrote to Northcote, observing that Colonel Adye had been ‘trying his hand’ on the question of Afghan policy, and had ‘got a good deal beyond his depth.’³⁹

³⁷ Colonel J. Adye to editor, *Times*, 4 Jan. 1868, p. 6.

³⁸ Adye’s book was *Sitana: a mountain campaign on the borders of Afghanistan in 1863* (London, 1867): it was at this time regularly featured in the classified section of *The Times*. Adye, Sir John Miller (1819-1900): Royal Artillery officer; served in the Crimean war and Indian Mutiny; from 1859 commanded the artillery in the Madras presidency; deputy adjutant-general of artillery in India, 1863-68; CB, 1855; KCB, 1873; GCB, 1882. See E.M. Lloyd, ‘Adye, Sir John Miller (1819-1900)’, rev. J. Lunt, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed.).

³⁹ Lawrence to Northcote, 16 Feb. 1868, Lawrence Mss/33, no. 10.

Yet later that year Lawrence decided to support Sher Ali Khan with armaments and money. Lawrence had always made it clear that any such support should only be granted if Britain could have confidence that the protagonist, once supported, would thereafter defeat his enemies.⁴⁰ However, at the time Lawrence chose to intervene, all the intelligence suggested Sher Ali's position was extremely vulnerable, as Lawrence himself recognised in a letter to Northcote at the end of October 1868. Lawrence judged that Sher Ali's position at Kabul was 'very precarious': he had done some 'unwise things' since his return to Kabul, still had 'a formidable rival' in the form of his nephew Abdur Rahman Khan, and had reason 'even to distrust his own son Yakoob Ali'.⁴¹ Lawrence had hitherto cited the uncertainty in Afghanistan as a reason for not interfering. Now, he argued that the very precariousness of Sher Ali's position was a reason for doing exactly the opposite. In December 1868, he explained this altered logic to the new secretary of state, the Duke of Argyll: 'as I see that the difficulties of the Ameer to maintain his army are very great, I have told the L.G. of the Punjab to send him 6 lakhs of rupees, or to allow him to draw to that extent on Peshawur.'⁴² The closest Lawrence comes to explaining this change of tack is in an earlier letter to Northcote:

I doubt much the efficacy of any attempt at mediation on our part. I believe that it would only lead to misconception and further distrust. Should Sher Ali succeed in recovering power, and I see any hope of doing good, I will be prepared to help him (as I see this is the view in England) in the shape of some money. But... I am afraid that he is touched in the head & cannot be relied on. My own opinion is that we cannot do better than leave both parties alone, until some man of ability and character comes to the front.⁴³

⁴⁰ Lawrence to Northcote, 29 July 1868, Lawrence Mss/33, no. 53.

⁴¹ Lawrence to Northcote, 29 Oct. 1868, Lawrence Mss/33, no. 75.

⁴² Lawrence to Argyll, 22 Dec. 1868, Lawrence Mss/33, no. 84. Six lakhs of rupees were worth approximately sixty thousand pounds.

⁴³ Lawrence to Northcote, 17 Aug. 1868, Lawrence Mss/33, no. 60.

Lawrence's comment 'as I see this is the view in England' was unlikely to have been a reference to directions from the India Office. As discussed in chapter II, Northcote was at this time distracted from Indian questions by electioneering and other domestic political questions, and had devolved considerable latitude on Lawrence for the determination of policy in Afghanistan. Given Lawrence's views on the power of journalism and his sensitivity to press criticism, it seems likely that what he meant by his expression 'the view in England' was public criticism of his 'inactivity'. That interpretation is consistent with an argument made at the time by J.W.S. Wyllie. The decision to aid Sher Ali Khan roused Wyllie to write a third article on Indian foreign policy, and historians have treated this as a continuation of his public defence of Lawrence's frontier policy.⁴⁴ However, in this article Wyllie criticised Lawrence for succumbing to the clamour for interference in Afghanistan, and excoriated the 'new' policy of alliance with Sher Ali.⁴⁵ Wyllie's explanation of Lawrence's eleventh hour decision is worth recovering:

For his own part Sir John Lawrence still believed that the right thing to do was nothing, or next to nothing. Yet on all sides he felt a pressure to do something. He had braved the impatient taunts of the Anglo-Indian press for nearly five years; but now there were signs of restlessness among his own official advisers. Voices began to be heard in the council-chamber, arguing from the analogy of international custom in Europe that British officers should be deputed as diplomatic agents to the principal cities of Central Asia; a course to which Sir John Lawrence entertained deep-seated objections. He looked to England for guidance, and found cold comfort there. He saw that there existed among some portion of his countrymen at home a craving for

⁴⁴ E.g. David Steele treats Wyllie's three articles as a consistent series expounding 'Lawrence's case' on Afghan policy: Steele, 'Baron Lawrence'.

⁴⁵ J.W.S. Wyllie, 'Mischievous activity', *Fortnightly Review*, 7 (March 1870), 278-308.

action and intervention; but from the stand-point of Simla he had no means of gauging the extent or depth of the sentiment, and his apprehensions magnified its proportions out of all semblance to the reality.⁴⁶

This article seems to have attracted little notice in the contemporary press.⁴⁷ Lawrence himself thought very highly of Wyllie, and had recommended him for his successor's private secretary.⁴⁸ Presumably, as Wyllie recognised, Lawrence's decision also had other causes; one of which may have been the news that Sir Henry Rawlinson was shortly to be appointed to the council of India in London.⁴⁹ Lawrence would have been concerned by the appointment of such a prominent advocate of forward policies to the secretary of state's advisory council. Although Rawlinson's various public and private proposals had hitherto been fended off, Rawlinson would obviously now have a much greater opportunity for influencing policy. Furthermore, his views might be more persuasive if made in combination with other councillors. The impact of Rawlinson's appointment to the council might thus be compounded by the existing presence there of Sir Bartle Frere, the man whose 'hasty' approach to frontier questions Lord Elgin had found alarming in 1863. Although Lawrence could not know what effect Rawlinson's appointment would have, he knew that Rawlinson had consistently agitated for more active measures in Afghanistan, and was unlikely to stop now that an official door had opened to him. Lawrence also knew that at least one of his colleagues now favoured limited measures of intervention.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Wyllie, 'Mischievous activity', 282-3.

⁴⁷ The *Saturday Review* printed a very short piece discussing Wyllie's article: see Anon., 'Afghanistan and India', 368-9. There seems to have been little other contemporary comment.

⁴⁸ 'Lord Mayo could hardly get a better man': Lawrence to Northcote, 16 Oct. 1868, Lawrence Mss/33, no. 73.

⁴⁹ Northcote to Lawrence, 30 Sept. 1868, Lawrence Mss/29, no. 47. Lawrence would have learned of Rawlinson's appointment in late Oct. 1868 or shortly thereafter.

⁵⁰ Government of India to secretary of state for India, 4 Jan. 1869, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 14, pp. 43-81. In his memorandum, Brigadier-General Henry Lumsden expressed his 'cordial agreement'

Although news of Rawlinson's admission to the council of India in London must have increased Lawrence's pessimism about the survival of his cautious policy, Wyllie's assertion that Lawrence observed 'a craving for action and intervention' in Britain and that 'his apprehensions magnified its proportions' seems to be the most powerful factor behind his belated decision to support Sher Ali Khan. The outgoing governor-general clearly felt that he had failed to counter the public arguments of his critics. The previous year, he had urged Northcote to assist him in this endeavour, requesting permission for the publication of papers that demonstrated the complexity and fluidity of the political situation in Afghanistan, the consequent difficulty of predicting which chief would prevail, and the possibility that four distinct territories might ultimately emerge, each controlled by one of the protagonists (based respectively at Kabul, Kandahar, Herat and Balkh):

I hope you will allow these papers and the previous ones connected with the occupation of Quetta to be printed; the Press is agitating for a movement, and their constant repetition gradually influences men's minds, particularly if they do not hear the other side of the question.⁵¹

Northcote however would not accede to this request, much to Lawrence's regret.⁵²

Wyllie's *Edinburgh Review* article had manifestly not stemmed public criticism of Lawrence's policy. The expression 'masterly inactivity' was still used in praise of that

with Rawlinson's 'general views of the subject', but suggested that a military contingent should be sent alongside a subsidy to Sher Ali Khan. Lumsden was not representative however, and Lawrence had strong support from most of his councillors (see minutes of R. Temple, W.H. Norman, W.R. Mansfield and R.H. Davies (enclosures 5, 6, 8, 9)).

⁵¹ Lawrence to Northcote, 8 Oct. 1867, Lawrence Mss/32B, no. 58.

⁵² 'I am sorry that you consider that the papers on the Central Asian policy had better not be published. The opposite party have had their say; indeed Sir H. Green's views on the occupation of Quetta have been published in extenso.' Lawrence to Northcote, 20 Jan. 1868, Lawrence Mss/32B, no. 75.

policy, as Wyllie had intended, but it was also used in criticism.⁵³ From some quarters, criticism of Lawrence's policy was in fact becoming more intense. In March 1865 the Calcutta correspondent of *The Times* had observed merely a 'desire' among some Anglo-Indians 'by means of subsidies and political agents to make Affghanistan and other Powers on our frontier "political buffers" between us and Russia.'⁵⁴ Two years later, the correspondent's reports had become more urgent and strident. In May 1867 (four months after Wyllie's *Edinburgh Review* article) the correspondent declared that Britain should have seized several Afghan outposts long ago:

Undoubtedly, the time seems approaching when to seize Quetta, Cabul, Candahar or Herat will be too late, and we may have reason to regret that we have deliberately left ourselves without a support in Central Asia. Inaction is so cheap at the time that it is forgotten how dear it proves in the long run.⁵⁵

At the same time, the *Pall Mall Gazette* was demanding the occupation of Quetta.⁵⁶ The *Standard* adopted a similarly critical approach, and in early 1868 condemned the 'cheap forbearance' of Lawrence's policy. Apparently providence had ordained that the Afghan mountains (rather than the Indus river) were British India's 'true frontier'. It was simply 'monstrous to pretend that we have no business in Afghanistan. Nature has made our business there, and we have accepted the dispensation.'⁵⁷ It seems therefore that Lawrence's belated decision to interfere in Afghanistan was a concession to public

⁵³ As discussed in chapter IV, during the parliamentary debates about the decision to launch the Abyssinian expedition, Sir Stafford Northcote had observed: 'I say that at the present moment the policy of Sir John Lawrence, which has been characterized sometimes half sneeringly, I am afraid, as "a policy of masterly inactivity," is what we ought in every way to support and strengthen'. *Hansard*, 190 (28 Nov. 1867), cols. 373-4.

⁵⁴ Letter of the Calcutta correspondent, *Times*, 1 March 1865, p. 10.

⁵⁵ Letter of the Calcutta correspondent, *Times*, 28 May 1867, p. 12.

⁵⁶ 'With an advanced post at Quettah we should be in a far better position to treat, when the time comes, with the de facto ruler of Afghanistan.' *Pall Mall Gazette*, 30 May 1867, p. 1.

⁵⁷ *Standard*, 8 Jan. 1868, p. 4.

criticism of ‘masterly inactivity’ in Britain. As he had done on the question of railways to the frontier, Lawrence seems to have concluded that a mere gift of rupees and muskets was ‘better than plunging into Afghanistan’.

Lawrence and the ‘official mind’

Lawrence’s sensitivity to press criticism is hard to reconcile with the existing scholarship on the ‘official mind’. Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, in their account of the motives of Victorian expansion in Africa, described policy-makers making rational decisions, based primarily on strategic factors, with an aristocratic detachment from outside influences. Public opinion emerges as a possible influence on policy-making only fleetingly.⁵⁸ In Thomas Otte’s recent account of the Foreign Office ‘mind’, press and public opinion are almost entirely absent. Otte concentrated exclusively on the Foreign Office and the diplomatic service; official thinking about Afghanistan does not enter his account until around 1873, when the Foreign Office recognised that central Asian affairs could no longer be seen in isolation from developments in Europe.⁵⁹ Certainly, in the eighteen-sixties, the Foreign Office seems to have shown little interest in Afghanistan, except where it affected Persian policy.⁶⁰ Paul Kennedy has however considered the influence of press opinion on British ‘external policy’ (not just policy made at the Foreign Office). He concluded that it was only when normally supportive newspapers criticised particular policy decisions that

⁵⁸ Although the authors seem to have been reluctant to consider the influence of public opinion it briefly entered their story after the death of General Charles Gordon. ‘On 5 February, 1885, news reached London that Khartum had fallen and that Gordon was dead. The public was shocked and there were loud cries for revenge. On 6 February the Cabinet, fearing the danger to lower Egypt and the upsurge of opinion, took up Hartington’s policy and ordered Wolseley’s Nile expedition to grapple with the Mahdi.’ Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, pp. 151-2.

⁵⁹ Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind*, p. 73.

⁶⁰ E.g. following Dost Muhammad Khan’s advance on (and subsequent capture of) Herat. Wood to Elgin, 9 Nov. 1862, Elgin Mss/7, f435. Responsibility for Persian policy had been transferred from the India Office to the Foreign Office in 1859.

officials needed to be worried.⁶¹

Had Lawrence followed the pattern of behaviour suggested by Kennedy, he would have been reassured by support from Liberal publications like the *Daily News* and the *Manchester Guardian*, and not unduly concerned by the criticism of his policy in Conservative publications such as the *Standard*. ‘We certainly agree with the Governor General’, the *Manchester Guardian* declared in January 1867, ‘that whatever danger may threaten us from the side of Russia is remote, and that in any case we had better keep quiet till the suspicions of the panic-mongers are better confirmed.’⁶² The *Daily News* was still more supportive of Lawrence, and critical of Anglo-Indian belligerence. Britons in India, ‘to a man’, were ‘ardent to wrest from the approaching hand of Russia the unknown and barbarous regions of Central Asia... Against this tide of aggressive feeling Sir John Lawrence has fought manfully, and with success’.⁶³ The *Daily News* thought Lawrence’s ‘passive resistance’ was fortunate for both India and for England. It also agreed with Lawrence’s confidence about the strength of the existing frontier: while ‘the Sikhs are faithful to their salt we can defy in the Punjab any foreign foe; and if the Sikhs rise, it will not be to put a Russian Governor instead of an Englishman in Lahore. Our Indian frontier now is all but perfect’.⁶⁴ Moreover, had Lawrence followed the pattern of behaviour described by Kennedy he would have been especially reassured by coverage in *The Times*. In reading *The Times*—and it is clear from Lawrence’s correspondence that he scrutinised its coverage of Indian affairs—he would have seen that the editorial line supported and in fact praised his policy throughout his term in India. *The Times* also had no doubt that Lawrence’s Afghan policy was popular with his

⁶¹ Kennedy, *Background Influences on British External Policy*, p. 56.

⁶² *Manchester Guardian*, 22 Jan. 1867, p. 4.

⁶³ *Daily News*, 2 Jan. 1868, p. 4.

⁶⁴ *Daily News*, 2 Jan. 1868, p. 4.

compatriots in Britain: ‘Sir John Lawrence may reckon with confidence on the concurrence of his countrymen at home.’⁶⁵ This resolute editorial support entirely overwhelmed the criticism from the newspaper’s Calcutta correspondent. In any case, the Calcutta correspondent’s views were not representative of *all* Anglo-Indian opinion; the *Calcutta Review* for example offered Lawrence strong backing. When that journal reviewed his administration in April 1869, it gladly endorsed ‘Lawrence’s policy of watchfulness, without premature alarm or mischievous activity—an attitude which has been approved by Secretaries of State of both parties; and so far as it has been understood, approved by all moderate men.’⁶⁶

Lawrence, however, does not seem to have been reassured by the opinions of the ‘normally supportive newspapers’. Moreover, his perception of a growing public enthusiasm for intervention in Afghanistan was shared by some of his (serving and former) colleagues in the government of India. Charles Edward Trevelyan had considerable experience of Indian administration, having served as governor of Madras (1859-60) and then as finance minister in the government of India (1862-65) for part of Lawrence’s viceroyalty. In January 1868 Trevelyan complained in a letter to *The Times* that there had developed ‘a craving for action of some sort, and if this restless feeling is not turned into the right channel, it will sooner or later work us woe.’⁶⁷ Similarly, Richard Temple, setting out his reasons for opposing Rawlinson’s forward proposals, observed that ‘a large section of public opinion has been, is now, and probably will be, in favour of advancing. Considerable pressure is even now put on Government in this

⁶⁵ *Times*, 23 Jan. 1867, p. 6.

⁶⁶ Anon., ‘Administration of Sir John Lawrence’, *Calcutta Review*, 48 (Apr. 1869), 241-2.

⁶⁷ C.E. Trevelyan to editor, *Times*, 20 Jan. 1868, p. 8.

direction.⁶⁸

The perceptions of Lawrence and his colleagues suggest that scholars may have placed too much emphasis on the detachment of the ‘official mind’, a distortion perhaps increased by the associated assumption that policy was made in the imperial metropolis. The ‘aristocratic detachment’ of Foreign Office officials that impressed Robinson and Gallagher may be a concept of much less relevance to decision-making within the government of India. The five secretaries of state for India during Lawrence’s viceroyalty were aristocrats without exception.⁶⁹ However, the social background of Indian government officials was quite different. Although some of them (like Lawrence) received peerages or baronetcies during or on completion of their service, very few were born aristocrats.

* * *

It seems clear that Lawrence was sensitive to criticism in the British press. He was not exceptional in this sense, as many of his colleagues in the government of India also appeared anxious about the effects of public criticism at home. In Lawrence’s case, this sensitivity may have been a reflection of his inexperience in British political and public life, and his belief in the power of the printed word. Possibly these factors were rendered more acute by his distance from Britain. Having concluded that his Afghan

⁶⁸ Minute by R. Temple, 8 Dec. 1868, government of India to secretary of state for India, 4 Jan. 1869, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 14, enclosure 5, p. 68.

⁶⁹ Sir Charles Wood succeeded to a baronetcy in 1846 and was created Viscount Halifax in 1866; George Frederick Samuel Robinson succeeded to his father’s earldom (Ripon) and to a more senior one (de Grey, his uncle’s) in 1859, and was created Marquess of Ripon in 1871; Robert Arthur Talbot Gascoyne Cecil (styled Viscount Cranborne, 1865-68) succeeded as third Marquess of Salisbury in 1868; Sir Stafford Northcote succeeded to a baronetcy in 1851 and was created Earl of Iddesleigh in 1885; George Douglas Campbell succeeded as 8th Duke of Argyll in 1847.

policy was doomed to modification, Lawrence made concessions on two policy decisions by acquiescing in the construction of new railway lines to the north-west frontier and providing material assistance to Amir Sher Ali Khan. His correspondence is explicit that the former decision was made in the hope that it would check public 'agitation' that may otherwise lead to 'some foolish movement forward'. It seems very likely that the latter decision was made in the same hope. For both decisions were clearly preferable, in Lawrence's mind, to 'plunging into Afghanistan'. For this was the policy decision that really mattered, and Lawrence remained resolute that 'plunging into Afghanistan' (that is to say, sending British envoys to Afghanistan, with or without supporting troops) was suicidal folly. His decisions on railways and supporting Sher Ali were tactical concessions designed to safeguard this more important strategic objective. In this Lawrence was successful, and not only during his term as governor-general. The two men who succeeded him at Calcutta, Lords Mayo and Northbrook, showed no appetite to depart from this cardinal provision of 'masterly inactivity'. On this aspect of Afghan policy, Lawrence's sway in fact held until around 1875. The belated decision to back Sher Ali Khan was something of a gamble, as Lawrence recognised. Subsequent events suggested that Lawrence had backed the right Afghan horse: Sher Ali survived, defeated his rivals and consolidated his grip on Afghanistan. The Amir of Afghanistan would not, however, survive the more active policy of the Conservative administration of 1874-80, as we shall see.

VII

Lord Lawrence, the Liberals and Afghanistan, c. 1878

This chapter begins by tracing the continuation of Lawrence's Afghan policy during the Liberal administration of 1868-74. It then considers why the Conservative government of 1874-1880 resolved to force a British envoy on Amir Sher Ali Khan, placing this decision in the context of prevailing anxieties about Russian expansion in central Asia. The chapter then examines how certain prominent Liberals harnessed Lawrence's expertise about India and Afghanistan. Earl Granville and William Gladstone first consulted Lawrence in order to gather information about events in a country of which they knew little but with which Britain would soon be at war. Liberals also recognised that Lawrence's 'weight', and his reputation as a moderate, gave him great 'utility' as a public opponent of the government's policy. Lawrence was therefore encouraged to amplify his public condemnation of the abandonment of 'masterly inactivity' in advance of other Liberals, who would follow his example once more facts emerged about events on the north-west frontier. Moreover, when Liberals spoke publicly about the war they made repeated reference to Lawrence's name, in order to add authority to their arguments. It seems therefore that after nearly a lifetime on the imperial periphery Lawrence exerted a discernible influence on politics in the metropolis. His significance has however been neglected in the existing scholarship about Liberal opposition to the second Afghan war, in which Gladstone's rhetoric about the 'rights of the savage' has assumed a central importance. This chapter will argue that, notwithstanding Gladstone's historiographical allure, Lawrence's alternative humanitarian critique of government policy was more representative of the approach of many Liberals to war in Afghanistan.

Britain and Afghanistan, 1868-1874

Gladstone's first Liberal administration (December 1868 to February 1874) enthusiastically embraced Lawrence's Afghan policy. The secretary of state for India throughout this period was the Duke of Argyll, who had arrived at the India Office five weeks before the end of Lawrence's term as governor-general.¹ It was thus to Argyll that Lawrence (in January 1869) sent the voluminous government of India minutes responding to Rawlinson's memorandum of the previous summer. These papers may have impressed Argyll, given his subsequent statements on Afghan policy. Argyll was already acquainted with the outgoing governor-general, as Lawrence had stayed at Inverary Castle as the Duke's guest during his furlough in Britain after the Mutiny.² It was in fact Argyll who recommended Sir John for a peerage on his return from India, an honour conferred in April 1869.³ The impression Lawrence made on Argyll is evident from the subsequent parliamentary debates on the abandonment of Kandahar (1881). On that occasion, the Duke of Argyll declared that of all 'the great Indian authorities with whom I have been brought into contact there is not one who for solidity of judgment, for breadth of view, for strength and simplicity of character is, in my judgment, to be compared with Lord Lawrence.'⁴

There was some initial friction between Argyll and Lawrence's successor as governor-general, the Earl of Mayo, following the *darbar* with Amir Sher Ali Khan at Ambala.⁵

¹ Argyll was secretary of state for India from 9 Dec. 1868 to 17 Feb. 1874; Lawrence's term expired on 12 Jan. 1869.

² Bosworth Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence*, vol. II, p. 367.

³ Bosworth Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence*, vol. II, p. 597. Lawrence was created Baron Lawrence of the Punjab and of Grateley on 3 Apr. 1869. Parliament extended for the life of his first successor in the peerage the pension voted by the East India Company in 1858: Steele, 'Baron Lawrence'.

⁴ Bosworth Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence*, vol. II, p. 368.

⁵ This was discussed in chapter II. The essence of the initial friction was Argyll's concern that Mayo's overtures to the Amir might be construed as committing Britain to a particular course of action. Mayo however explained to the secretary of state that he was continuing Lawrence's policy and Argyll accepted this. Secretary of state to governor-general, 14 May 1869 and government of India to

However, it became clear that Mayo also favoured abstinence from interference in Afghanistan's domestic affairs. At the Ambala *darbar*, Mayo presented the Amir with an additional six thousand muskets, but made no request for sending British envoys or troops into his territories. In return, Sher Ali was merely required to increase facilities for trade, and maintain order in parts of the Afghan borderlands over which he had influence. Sher Ali also sought from Mayo an increased subsidy, a treaty of 'mutual assistance', and a promise that Britain would refuse to recognise any of his rivals as Amir. Mayo resisted all of these requests.⁶ Sher Ali thus had to be satisfied with Mayo's assurance that Britain would 'view with severe displeasure' any attempts on the part of his rivals to disturb his position as ruler of Kabul.

Lawrence's policy was the yardstick by which Argyll seems to have judged Mayo's actions relating to Afghanistan. Writing to Mayo in May 1869, Argyll made it plain that the government agreed with Lawrence's policy and expected to see it continued.⁷ Argyll also used Lawrence's policy as a public reference-point, in order to counter criticism that policy had changed since the arrival of the new governor-general. For example, in April 1869, Argyll defended Mayo's actions in the House of Lords, where he provided this reassurance: 'I have every reason to believe that Lord Mayo has consistently pursued the same policy of non-intervention and of the avoidance of entangling engagements, which was pursued by my noble Friend the late Governor General of India (Lord Lawrence).'⁸

Mayo was assassinated in the Andaman Islands (by an Afghan convict) in February

secretary of state, 1 July 1869, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, nos. 18 & 19, pp. 91-100.

⁶ S. Gopal, 'Bourke, Richard Southwell, sixth earl of Mayo (1822-1872)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed. Jan. 2008).

⁷ Secretary of state to governor-general, 14 May 1869, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 18, pp. 91-2.

⁸ Argyll, *Hansard*, 195 (19 Apr. 1869), cols. 1087-8.

1872. The new governor-general was the Earl of Northbrook, who ‘adhered to Lawrence’s school’ on questions of frontier policy.⁹ Northbrook had no desire to send British envoys to Afghanistan and thought that Russia’s advances in central Asia would actually increase her vulnerability. Argyll and Northbrook thus resisted continued calls for Russian expansion to be countered by a corresponding British movement beyond the north-west frontier.¹⁰

Some of this pressure for intervention in Afghanistan came from within the India Office. John Lowe Duthie has traced the emergence and activities in the period 1868-78 of a ‘cabal’ inside the secretary of state’s council of India, comprising Sir Henry Rawlinson, Sir Bartle Frere, Sir Robert Montgomery and Sir John Kaye. The cabal argued that a more robust diplomatic stand against Russian advances should be paired with active measures beyond the existing Indian frontiers leading to closer British relations with Afghanistan, Persia and Baluchistan. During the Liberal administration of 1868-74, these arguments were pressed on Argyll and Grant Duff (the under-secretary of state), but there was no change in policy.¹¹ It was only after a change of government in February 1874 and Lord Salisbury’s return to the India Office that the pressure exerted by the cabal became more effective.¹²

The Liberal administration did however seek a diplomatic understanding with Russia. Lawrence and some of his colleagues in the government of India, in their response to Rawlinson’s memorandum, had suggested that the British government should seek

⁹ D. Steele, ‘Baring, Thomas George, first earl of Northbrook (1826-1904)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed. May 2009).

¹⁰ Northbrook’s stance on Afghan affairs was reinforced by his determination to reduce Indian government expenditure and the deficit he had inherited. See Steele, ‘Earl of Northbrook’.

¹¹ Duthie, ‘The “forward” group in the India Office during Gladstone’s first ministry’, 36-40, 72.

¹² Duthie, ‘Lord Salisbury, the “Forward” Group and Anglo-Afghan Relations: 1874-78’, 181-208.

some understanding with Russia directly (rather than send envoys or troops to Afghanistan in order to pre-empt or forestall Russian influence). The intermittent Clarendon-Gorchakov negotiations ran from September 1869 to January 1873, and concentrated on what the northern limits of Afghanistan should be. It was understood in Britain that Russia had agreed to 'keep clear of Afghanistan' and that in return Britain would 'cease to importune' about Russia's activities in districts of central Asia far from the Afghan frontier.¹³

Frontiers of fear

Robert Arthur Talbot Gascoyne Cecil, 3rd Marquess of Salisbury, served as secretary of state for India during the first four years of the Conservative administration of 1874-80. This was Salisbury's second stint at the India Office; his first had lasted for nine months during Lawrence's viceroyalty.¹⁴ At that time, secretary of state and governor-general had worked in harmony on frontier questions, as the young Cecil embraced Lawrence's reluctance to meddle in Afghanistan. The following words were written by the future Marquess, in 1866, but they might easily have flowed from Lawrence's own pen: 'Indian resources are wanted for other work besides extension of territory just now. Several able men appear to regard the advance of Russia with apprehension: but I cannot bring myself to look on those advances even seriously.'¹⁵ During his second term at the India Office, Salisbury was confronted by renewed Russian activity in

¹³ Thornton, *For the File on Empire*, pp. 167-8.

¹⁴ Salisbury's first tenure as secretary of state for India (when he was styled Viscount Cranborne) had lasted from 6 July 1866 to 8 March 1867.

¹⁵ Cranborne to Lawrence, 27 Aug. 1866, Lawrence Mss/27, no. 32. One month earlier, Cranborne had made similar remarks in public during a speech at Stamford: 'statesmen of all parties have arrived at the conclusion that we now hold in India pretty well as much as we can govern, and that, at all events, until we have more thoroughly consolidated our authority there, and have left the marks of it by diffusing all the benefits of the civilization which we ourselves enjoy among the population of that vast empire... we should be pursuing an unwise and dangerous policy if we tried to extend our borders or to lessen the power or the permanence of those native rulers upon whose assistance we have so long relied. (Cheers).' Viscount Cranborne at Stamford. *Times*, 13 July 1866, p. 6.

central Asia. After a five-year lull, in 1873 Tsarist forces had made further advances and in March of that year the city of Khiva became a Russian protectorate.¹⁶ Salisbury nonetheless appeared to maintain his previous equanimity about the risk to British India posed by Russia. In 1877 he offered the following observation to the House of Lords:

I cannot help thinking that in discussions of this kind, a great deal of misapprehension arises from the popular use of maps on a small scale... the distance between Russia and British India is not to be measured by the finger and thumb, but by a rule. There are between them deserts and mountainous chains measured by thousands of miles, and these are serious obstacles to any advance by Russia.¹⁷

However, Salisbury's private correspondence suggests that he had in fact become increasingly anxious on this issue. Over two years earlier, he had confided to the prime minister, Disraeli, that he was 'getting uneasy as to our lack of information from Afghanistan... we know nothing.'¹⁸ In contrast, there was no dearth of reports of Russian 'intrigue'. For example, in the same year that Salisbury was 'getting uneasy', Rawlinson published his alarmist *England and Russia in the East*. There was much old material in this book, which contained several of Rawlinson's earlier articles and memoranda (including his 1868 memorandum on the 'Central Asian Question'), and just two chapters of new material. It was published in March 1875 and by August had run to a second edition, with over one thousand copies sold.¹⁹ In retaliation for the anticipated Russian occupation of Merv, Rawlinson advocated the occupation of Herat, either with Amir Sher Ali Khan's consent (in which case Britain would be establishing something

¹⁶ Duthie, 'The "forward" group in the India Office during Gladstone's first ministry', 56-7.

¹⁷ *Hansard*, 234 (11 June 1877), col. 1565.

¹⁸ Salisbury to Disraeli, 2 Jan. 1875, cited in Cecil, *Life of Salisbury*, vol. II, p. 71.

¹⁹ Duthie, 'Sir Henry Creswicke Rawlinson and the Art of Great Gamesmanship', 264-5.

resembling a protectorate in Afghanistan), or without it. Rawlinson claimed he had used only personal correspondence (not official records) to write *England and Russia in the East*, and that its arguments were his own rather than those of the government.²⁰ However, while many of his earlier publications had been written without official responsibility, Rawlinson had been a member of the secretary of state's council of India since 1868, and was by 1875 much less of a marginal figure than he had seemed during Lawrence's viceroyalty.²¹ Moreover, it seems that Rawlinson's long-held views were now beginning to resonate with increasing anxiety about Russia in the metropolitan press.

An example of the extent of this anxiety is provided by a piece in *The Times* from 1879, which reassured its readers that the Tsar's new yacht would not—contrary to speculation—be equipped with any more powerful guns than four-pounders for saluting (nor be defended by armour).²² This was an odd rumour; not least because the yacht in question was being built on the Clyde. However, speculation of this sort was not confined to newspaper columns. Some politicians warned that, without a forward movement by Britain, 'hordes of Cossacks would swarm like locusts over our frontier to feed and fatten upon the resources of India.'²³ Anxiety about Russia could also transcend political allegiance: a great 'Russophobe' like David Urquhart could therefore achieve considerable popularity amongst Radical, working-class Britons.²⁴ Frederick

²⁰ Duthie, 'Sir Henry Creswicke Rawlinson and the Art of Great Gamesmanship', 264-5.

²¹ It was more difficult to regard Rawlinson as isolated in his views about Russia, as Salisbury had done in 1867. At that time Salisbury could tell Lawrence: 'I quite agree in your views about the advance of the Russians in Central Asia. In fact, with the possible exception of Sir Henry Rawlinson I never heard of any body in [Government] who took the opposite view.' Cranborne to Lawrence, 4 Feb. 1867, Lawrence Mss/28, no. 5.

²² *Times*, 20 Oct. 1879, p. 4.

²³ Lord de Mauley, *Hansard*, 234 (11 June 1877), col. 1563. The same debate had elicited Salisbury's remarks about the 'popular use of maps on a small scale'.

²⁴ H. Cunningham, 'The Language of Patriotism, 1750-1914', *History Workshop Journal*, 12 (1981), 21.

Burnaby, the Conservative parliamentary candidate for Birmingham, in 1878 went as far as proclaiming: '[w]ould to God we were at war with Russia!'²⁵ Burnaby had published an account (in its ninth edition by 1877) of the situation in Afghanistan, which included translations of Russian publications presenting her existing possessions in central Asia as merely 'an *étape* on the road to further advance'.²⁶ In the 1880 general election, Burnaby attacked Gladstone and leading Liberals as 'friends of Russia'. Although defeated, Burnaby gained over fifteen thousand votes in the Radical Birmingham stronghold of John Bright and Joseph Chamberlain.²⁷

These were the winds by which Salisbury was buffeted. It seems unlikely that he was immune from their effects, because what he perceived to be the absence of reliable information from Afghanistan gave him nothing to set against myriad reports of Russian plots. As he had confided to Disraeli in 1875: 'it is very uncomfortable to think that for all we know Russia may have covered the country with intrigue.'²⁸ On the eve of the second Afghan war, a letter to *The Times* compared reports of Russian plots to a 'troublesome nightmare, whether real or unreal'.²⁹ This was Salisbury's predicament: he did not know whether that 'troublesome nightmare' was real, or unreal. Salisbury's anxiety was not limited to fears about Russian progress: there were persistent rumours that Muslims would rise in a *jihad* against the British, and Salisbury was also concerned about Muslim 'fanaticism', whether organised or spontaneous.³⁰ In 1871, W.W. Hunter's *The Indian Mussalmans*—which viewed Muslims in India as 'seditious masses

²⁵ *Times*, 5 Nov. 1878, p. 8.

²⁶ F. Burnaby, *Ride to Khiva: Travels and Adventures in Central Asia* (II vols., 1877), vol. I, pp. v-vii.

²⁷ R.T. Stearn, 'Burnaby, Frederick Gustavus (1842-1885)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford 2004; online ed.).

²⁸ Salisbury to Disraeli, 2 Jan. 1875, cited in Cecil, *Life of Salisbury*, vol. II, p. 71.

²⁹ *Times*, 10 Oct. 1878, p. 10.

³⁰ Gopal, *British Policy in India*, pp. 95-8, 104.

in the heart of our Empire’—had both described and nourished these sorts of anxiety.³¹ Without definite information it was difficult to measure the extent of any Russian or Muslim threat (or combination thereof). Salisbury’s considerable anxiety about events in Afghanistan is explicit in the official despatch he sent to Northbrook on 22 January 1875, directing that British officers be sent into the Amir’s territories:

Her Majesty’s Government have followed with anxious attention the progress of events in Central Asia... [and] cannot but be struck with the comparative scantiness of the information which it is in your Excellency’s power to supply... Her Majesty’s Government are of opinion that more exact and constant information is necessary to the conduct of a circumspect policy at the present juncture. The disposition of the people in various parts of Afghanistan, the designs and intrigues of its Chiefs, the movement of nomad tribes upon its frontier, the influence which foreign powers may possibly be exerting within and without its borders, are matters of which a proper account can only be rendered to you by an English Agent residing in the country... I have therefore to instruct you to take measures, with as much expedition as the circumstances of the case permit, for procuring the assent of the Ameer to the establishment of a British Agency at Herat. When this is accomplished it may be desirable to take a similar step with regard to Kandahar. I do not suggest any similar step with regard to Cabul, as I am sensible of the difficulties which are interposed by the fanatic violence of the people.³²

Salisbury’s description of the government’s ‘anxious attention’ regarding events in central Asia, the impression of the ‘scantiness of the information’ on which it had to rely and ‘the influence which foreign powers may possibly be exerting’ (Russia is not actually named) should be seen in the context of increasing anxiety about Russian

³¹ Gopal, *British Policy in India*, p. 100.

³² Secret despatch of the secretary of state for India to the government of India, 22 Jan. 1875, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 31, pp. 128-9.

expansion and the security of India before and during the ‘Eastern crisis’ (1876-80). It is worth emphasising the significance of Salisbury’s instructions to the governor-general: by directing that a British agency be established at Herat (at this time, within the Amir’s Afghan territories) the government was not merely abandoning the ‘masterly inactivity’ of Lawrence’s tenure in India but a continuous line of policy practised since the end of the first Afghan war in 1842. Historians have recognised the repercussions of Salisbury’s new policy; Duthie for example has asserted that the Herat decision ‘contributed in large part’ to Northbrook’s subsequent resignation as governor-general, and to the declaration of war on Afghanistan in 1878.³³ For the purposes of the present chapter, Salisbury’s despatch also suggests that, notwithstanding his jocular parliamentary remarks about the unnecessary anxiety caused by ‘the popular use of maps on a small scale’, he had lost his nerve over two years earlier.³⁴ For Salisbury did not just conceive of the Herat agency in terms of intelligence gathering: it was also intended to pre-empt any Russian influence.³⁵

It was not just Salisbury who appears to have lost his nerve. By the time of the second Afghan war, a language of fear had become commonplace among leading Conservatives and in *The Times*. Lord Beaconsfield (Disraeli had been created Earl of Beaconsfield in 1876) in December 1878 claimed he was unable to ‘indulge in the fancy’ that the frontier with Afghanistan was secure.³⁶ This type of terminology was ubiquitous in *The Times*, which by 1878 had adopted the language Rawlinson had used for some time. For example, in his *England and Russia in the East*, Rawlinson had

³³ Duthie, ‘Lord Salisbury, the “Forward” Group and Anglo-Afghan Relations: 1874-78’, 181.

³⁴ Salisbury’s parliamentary statement was made on 11 June 1877; his dispatch to Northbrook regarding Herat was dated 22 Jan. 1875.

³⁵ J.L. Duthie, ‘Pragmatic diplomacy or imperial encroachment?: British policy towards Afghanistan, 1874-1879’, *International History Review*, 4 (1983), 479.

³⁶ *Hansard*, 243 (10 Dec. 1878), col. 515.

written of ‘the giant strides which Russia is now making in the East’; three years later almost this exact phrase echoed in *The Times*. ‘One gigantic stride after another has been taken’, *The Times* observed with alarm, ‘and still Russia is moving on.’³⁷ *The Times* also emphasised the vulnerability of the north-west frontier and even wondered whether Britain’s imperial race was in decline.³⁸ The attitude of *The Times* is of particular significance in understanding increasing British anxiety to Russian progress in central Asia, because it had unequivocally supported Lawrence’s circumspect policy while he was governor-general.

During his second term at the India Office, Salisbury seems to have exhibited an anxiety about British India’s vulnerability that is difficult to reconcile with his stance during his first term. At that time, Salisbury had been eager to convince Lawrence that he would not even countenance the idea of a forward movement beyond the north-west frontier. Thus responding to a proposal to occupy Quetta in 1866, Salisbury had quipped to Lawrence: ‘I would as soon sit down upon a beehive.’³⁹ Yet in 1876, British forces occupied Quetta. His biographers have commonly ascribed Salisbury’s altered policy to external factors such as the ‘approach of the Russians and the obstinacy of the Afghans.’⁴⁰ However, Russian advances and Afghan ‘obstinacy’ were not new developments. Salisbury had contemplated both in 1866, yet concluded that Britain was ‘strong enough to give’ Russia or any other foes ‘a warm reception’ in the event of hostilities.⁴¹ What appears to have changed by 1875 was principally a question of interpretation: Salisbury’s decision to give a pessimistic reading to the limited

³⁷ H. Rawlinson, *England and Russia in the East* (London, 1875), p. v; *Times*, 10 Sept. 1878, p. 7.

³⁸ See e.g. *Times*, 10 Oct. 1878, p. 10 & *Times*, 9 Sept. 1879, p. 8.

³⁹ Cranborne to Lawrence, 10 Dec. 1866, Lawrence Mss/27, no. 46.

⁴⁰ E.D. Steele, ‘Salisbury at the India Office’, in R. Blake and H. Cecil (eds.), *Salisbury: The Man and his Policies* (1987), p. 129. Salisbury’s daughter also made this argument, in 1921: Cecil, *Life of Salisbury*, vol. II, p. 70.

⁴¹ Cranborne to Lawrence, 2 Oct. 1866, Lawrence Mss/27, no. 35.

intelligence received from the frontier, one which accorded with certain prevailing anxieties about British vulnerability. It is ironic therefore that Salisbury contrasted his own 'confidence' with the supposed susceptibility of Liberals to what he termed 'Lawrentian pessimism'.⁴² Lawrence in fact continued to express confidence about the dangers posed by Russian expansion.⁴³ Certainly, Salisbury appeared confident (unlike Lawrence) about invading Afghanistan: it was 'not likely to entail upon us any considerable efforts', as he breezily put it.⁴⁴ But Salisbury no longer appeared confident about Britain's capacity to resist Russian influence in Afghanistan. He would become more distrustful of Russia.⁴⁵ From the splendid isolation of Hatfield House, Salisbury appears to have been increasingly guided by fear, and placed an increasing emphasis on the importance of fear as an instrument of government. Attacking Liberal Afghan policy in 1884, Salisbury argued that the tribes of Afghanistan, those 'vast uncivilised multitudes, are not governed merely by the sword. They are governed by their imagination. (Hear, hear). They are governed by their fears.'⁴⁶ Moreover, the repercussions of Salisbury's pessimistic approach to Afghanistan would subsequently be felt far beyond the frontiers of India. In 1889, he determined that if Britain was to hold Egypt, then no other power could be allowed a hold over any part of the Nile valley. When Salisbury put this strategy into practice, 'the defensive psychology which kept watch over northern India had been transplanted into Africa. The frontiers of fear were on the move.'⁴⁷

⁴² J.L Duthie, 'Lord Salisbury, the "Forward" Group and Anglo-Afghan relations: 1874-78', 197-8.

⁴³ Lawrence also remained sceptical about the likelihood of an invasion by Russia: it would never occur 'should she follow the course which her own interests dictate'. See e.g. letter of Lawrence to editor, *Times*, 10 Jan. 1878, p. 4.

⁴⁴ *Hansard*, 243 (5 Dec. 1878), col. 63.

⁴⁵ L.M. Penson, 'The principles and methods of Lord Salisbury's Foreign Policy', *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 5 (1935/37), 96.

⁴⁶ Salisbury at Manchester, *Times*, 17 Apr. 1884, p. 6.

⁴⁷ Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, p. 288.

By the summer of 1878, the government of India had still not succeeded in carrying out Salisbury's instruction to place a British envoy in Afghanistan. In contrast, Britons that August learned that a Russian mission, 'escorted by Cossacks', had reached Kabul and apparently been received warmly by the Amir.⁴⁸ For those fearful of Russia, the most compelling explanation for this inequality of treatment was that the Afghan Amir had become increasingly susceptible to Russian influence.⁴⁹ A British mission was therefore despatched to Afghanistan in order to restore the diplomatic balance. It was refused passage beyond the Afghan border. This event was reported with some consternation in *The Times* ('THE MISSION STOPPED'), where it was noted that the Russians all the while remained at Kabul.⁵⁰ Journalists attuned to the perceived demands of prestige were quick to draw out the significance of the repulse of the mission. *The Times* observed gravely that 'this insolent rebuff' had occurred in the presence of Indians, and thus worried about its impact 'in the bazaars of India'.⁵¹ The Conservative press lined up to demand 'satisfaction for our outraged dignity.'⁵² An ultimatum was despatched by the government of India on 2 November 1878, demanding that the Amir agree to receive a permanent British mission by 20 November. Silence followed. Then on 21 November 1878 the war with Afghanistan began.

When parliament was convened in early December, the government argued that its invasion of Afghanistan was necessary in order to secure the north-west frontier of India. The government apparently also felt obliged to deny that it was ambitious for new territory. 'We have never desired', Sir Stafford Northcote (now chancellor of the

⁴⁸ *Times*, 13 Aug. 1878, p. 3.

⁴⁹ *Times*, 23 Sept. 1878, p. 5.

⁵⁰ *Times*, 23 Sept. 1878, p. 5.

⁵¹ *Times*, 23 Sept. 1878, p. 5; *Times*, 27 Sept. 1878, p. 5.

⁵² See e.g. *Morning Post*, 24 Sept. 1878, p. 4 & *Standard*, 24 Sept. 1878, p. 4. The *Liberal Daily News* however did not follow this line: see *Daily News*, 23 Sept. 1878, p. 4.

exchequer) reassured the Commons, ‘to enlarge our territories or to annex fresh soil, and certainly not such a country as Afghanistan; but what we have felt it our duty to provide for as well as we could was the security of India. Let me remind the House that it is a question not of ambition, or prestige, or covetousness, or anything of that kind.’⁵³

Northcote however seemed to be making his case for invasion to a significant extent on the logic of prestige. He argued that it was necessary ‘to maintain the confidence of the Native population in the British rule. Our power in India rests upon two bases—justice and strength, and it is absolutely impossible you can maintain security unless you are known to be strong.’ This was a variation of the prestige argument made at the time of the Abyssinian expedition. This became still clearer later in Northcote’s speech, when he referred to the prestige lost by the Amir’s refusal to allow the British mission to enter Afghanistan: ‘we should take steps to vindicate our honour, which is essential as part of our strength in India’.⁵⁴

Lawrence and the Liberals

Since his return from India in 1869, Baron Lawrence of the Punjaub had lived quietly. For a time he had served as chairman of the first London School Board (1870-73). He spoke in the House of Lords only occasionally. Lawrence was not therefore particularly conspicuous in British politics or public life in this period. He was suffering increasingly from ill health and this, together with his disinclination to appear in the public eye, made him a rather unlikely leading public critic of the Conservatives’ new Afghan policy. Nonetheless, Lawrence remained adamant that sending British envoys to Afghanistan would be a cardinal error. He thus wrote a series of letters to the editor of *The Times*, starting in January 1878—almost a year before the invasion—questioning

⁵³ Sir Stafford Northcote, *Hansard*, (243) 5 Dec. 1878, cols. 126-7.

⁵⁴ Sir Stafford Northcote, *Hansard*, (243) 5 Dec. 1878, cols. 126-9.

and criticising the government's altered policy.

The Times of 10 January 1878 included a long letter from Lawrence considering the merits of the recent British advance to Quetta.⁵⁵ Lawrence did not anticipate that Afghans or Baluchis would directly attack the British garrison at Quetta; his concern was that in times of hostility its communications and supplies would be cut off. This, he was quick to point out, was exactly what had happened in the first Afghan war. Lawrence also took the opportunity to express his criticism of a forward policy generally, because he was convinced that the occupation of Quetta was the first step in that direction. It would be followed by the occupation of Herat and Kandahar, as they were all links 'in one great chain'. Lawrence thus advanced several practical, political and military arguments against a forward policy. He was insistent that the Afghans would resent and ultimately resist the presence of foreign forces in their territories, and that Britain would have 'the mass of a warlike people against us'. The difficulties for British troops would be aggravated by the Afghan climate, the scarcity of water, the poverty of the land and its people, as well as the long distances between tracts of civilisation. In any case, Lawrence contended that in the unlikely event of an invasion of India, a more forward position would in fact prove a less advantageous line of defence (here he referred to the views of several illustrious generals, including the Duke of Wellington, Sir Henry Lawrence (his brother) and Sir Neville Chamberlain). Characteristically, Lawrence the administrator also noted that Indian and British soldiers alike would find occupying Afghanistan intolerable. Equally characteristically, Lawrence asserted not only that a forward policy would lead to 'evil consequences', but

⁵⁵ Lawrence started by describing Quetta's isolated location: nearly 6,000 feet above sea level, a considerable distance from the existing British frontier, and approximately 25 miles beyond the Bolan pass (on the road to Kandahar and Herat). The British garrison at Quetta was made up of 1,400 men. Lawrence's letter as published occupied a little over 2½ columns. Lawrence to editor, *Times*, 10 Jan. 1878, p. 4.

would ‘give a fatal blow to the already over-burdened finances of India.’ Finally, Lawrence argued that British trade would not benefit from an advance to Afghanistan.⁵⁶

Lawrence thus used many of the same arguments he had relied on to resist forward proposals during his viceroyalty. Parliamentary Liberals would ultimately make the same points to attack Conservative policy, though from much later in 1878. As governor-general, Lawrence had usually expressed his opinions in his private and official correspondence, whereas he now had to make his arguments publicly.⁵⁷ His biographers subsequently portrayed him as somewhat ill at ease in public debate. There seems to be some truth to this depiction, and his letters to *The Times* and his parliamentary speeches sometimes lacked the fluency enjoyed by his colleagues and critics. However, Lawrence understood that the public audiences to which he was speaking in 1878 might have different sensitivities from the officials to whom he had been speaking when governor-general. He certainly appreciated the polemical value of contrasting contemporary events with those preceding the first Afghan war; his letters to *The Times* made much greater use of this than had his correspondence from India. This was particularly evident on the old question of sending British envoys in Afghanistan. ‘Can we follow the policy of 1838-39’, Lawrence asked in a later letter to *The Times*, ‘without, in all probability, incurring similar results?’⁵⁸

Lawrence’s expertise seems to have helped some prominent Liberals, including William Gladstone and Earl Granville (Liberal leader in the Lords), to form their own views about Afghanistan. Granville’s reaction to developments even seems to have been based

⁵⁶ Lawrence to editor, *Times*, 10 Jan. 1878, p. 4.

⁵⁷ There were some exceptions to this, including Lawrence’s farewell speech in Calcutta and J.W.S. Wyllie’s 1867 *Edinburgh Review* article (discussed respectively in chapters III and VI).

⁵⁸ Lawrence to editor, *Times*, 2 Oct. 1878, p. 8.

partly on what he learned from Lawrence and Northbrook (whom he referred to as ‘*Hommes spéciaux*’). As Granville explained to Gladstone in September 1878: ‘I am much alarmed about Affghanistan. Lawrence & Northbrook think the state of things most dangerous.’⁵⁹ Granville on several occasions sought Lawrence’s opinions, reporting to Gladstone later in September: ‘I have been in communication with Lord Lawrence, who is... coming here for a night tomorrow’.⁶⁰ Gladstone’s diaries record that he also made use of Lawrence’s expertise: the two men met on 2 December, in order to discuss Afghan affairs. This presumably helped Gladstone prepare for his long speech (two and a quarter hours) during the Afghan debate in the Commons on 10 December 1878.⁶¹

Granville recognised that Lawrence offered not only essential knowledge about Afghanistan, but great political utility as a public opponent of government policy. Granville shared his thinking with Gladstone: ‘[Lord Lawrence’s] opinion must have great weight, and is entirely free from the objections to which our utterances are liable.’⁶² Granville meant that Lawrence’s opinions could plausibly be presented as non-partisan. This seems a reasonable supposition, based on his parliamentary record. Lawrence made only thirty-one speeches during his time in the House of Lords (1869-79), many of them extremely short. He spoke several times on the subject of education but most frequently on Indian questions. His speeches were, therefore, limited to subjects of which he had direct experience. Moreover, Lawrence’s language on contentious political issues had always been much more moderate than that used by the

⁵⁹ Granville to Gladstone, 9 Sept. 1878 & 30 Sept. 1878, *The Political Correspondence of Mr. Gladstone and Lord Granville 1876-1886*, ed. A. Ramm (II vols., 1962), vol. I, pp. 76, 80.

⁶⁰ Granville to Gladstone, 30 Sept. 1878, *Political Correspondence of Gladstone and Granville*, vol. I, p. 80.

⁶¹ *The Gladstone Diaries*, ed. M.R.D. Foot and H.C.G. Matthew (XIV vols., Oxford, 1968-94), 2 & 10 Dec. 1878, vol. IX, pp. 367, 369.

⁶² Granville to Gladstone, 30 Sept. 1878, *Correspondence of Gladstone and Granville*, vol. I, p. 80.

Liberal party's leaders. For example, Lawrence's criticism of the 1876 Royal Titles Bill was measured and rather polite (he suggested that a word comprehensible to Indians might be substituted for 'Empress'), in contrast to Granville's forceful, partisan rhetoric (comparing the Bill to the pretensions of continental emperors).⁶³

Lawrence's utility to the parliamentary party was not only his knowledge of Afghanistan and his reputation as a moderate Liberal. It was also possible for him to attack the government, without the Liberal leaders having to risk getting on the wrong side of events or public opinion. These tactical considerations are evident in a letter Granville wrote to Gladstone in November 1878:

I cannot help thinking that the opposition made by persons supposed to have special knowledge will have more effect, if you Hartington & I do not at present join in. Dizzy's answer to Lord Lawrence may oblige us to consider what course we should take. But a false move might do mischief at this moment. Every day must add to the conviction of sensible people that the new policy is wrong. On the other hand if the Ameer gives in and matters are patched up, our position would be a false one.⁶⁴

This passage merits some explanation. One of Granville's aims in writing was to persuade Gladstone not to join the 'Afghan committee' chaired by Lawrence. The committee had been formed in order to call for the publication of certain official correspondence, and to demand the recall of parliament in order to debate recent developments on the north-west frontier and the government's altered Afghan policy. One of Granville's concerns was that Gladstone's presence would enable Conservatives

⁶³ *Hansard*, 228 (30 March 1876), col. 860; *Hansard*, 228 (3 Apr. 1876), col. 1092.

⁶⁴ Granville to Gladstone, 16 Nov. 1878, *Correspondence of Gladstone and Granville*, vol. I, p. 88.

to claim the committee was motivated by party spirit, rather than national interest.⁶⁵ Gladstone, initially eager to join the committee, ultimately agreed with Granville's logic.⁶⁶ What Granville termed 'Dizzy's answer to Lord Lawrence' was Beaconsfield's response to a letter written to him by Lawrence (and also published in *The Times*), asking him to receive a deputation from the Afghan Committee.⁶⁷ Granville's circumspection is also evident: 'a false move might do mischief at this moment... if the Ameer gives in and matters are patched up, our position would be a false one.' Prominent Liberals would have been taking a political risk in joining such a committee: at the time of its formation, it was not certain what *casus belli* the government would present against the Afghan Amir. This official reticence was itself a source of criticism by the committee.⁶⁸ If it transpired that the government had a strong case for intervention in Afghanistan (had for example the Amir invited Russian forces to occupy parts of his territory), members of the committee might well have been left on the wrong side of public opinion. Lawrence was in this sense expendable. On several grounds—as a former ruler of the neighbouring Punjab, as a former governor-general of India, as a hero of the Mutiny, and as the signatory to the Anglo-Afghan treaties of 1855 and 1857—Lawrence had a standing to make his expert views known. Were he proved wrong, his reputation may of course suffer; but the Liberal party probably would not.

It was not until more facts emerged, and the second Afghan war had actually commenced, that most Liberals began to criticise the government in earnest. Even then,

⁶⁵ Granville to Gladstone, 16 & 20 Nov. 1878, *Correspondence of Gladstone and Granville*, vol. I, pp. 88-9.

⁶⁶ 'I have written to the Affghan Committee, approving of the reasonableness of their object, but declining to join on the ground that my name would do more to impede than to promote its attainment, by favouring the construction that cavillers would put upon it.' Gladstone to Granville, 18 Nov. 1878, *Correspondence of Gladstone and Granville*, vol. I, pp. 88-9.

⁶⁷ *Times*, 15 Nov. 1878, p. 8.

⁶⁸ Sub-committee of the Afghan Committee, *Causes of the Afghan War: being a selection of the papers laid before Parliament, with a connecting narrative and comment* (London, 1879), pp. v-vii.

many of them remained cautious. Granville for example confined his criticism of government policy in late 1878 to what he called ‘constitutional questions’.⁶⁹ A year later, Lord Hartington (Liberal leader in the Commons) was still using very moderate language to criticise the government’s Afghan policy.⁷⁰ Even Gladstone, though he seems to have been much less inhibited than his colleagues, held his fire until November 1878, when Beaconsfield made a speech at the Guildhall claiming that the existing north-west frontier was ‘a hap-hazard, and not a scientific one’ and therefore required ‘rectification’.⁷¹ Seeing in Beaconsfield’s speech ‘a new starting point’, Gladstone was soon afterwards making enthusiastic use of Afghanistan in his more general critique of the government.⁷² But this was a matter of days before hostilities opened (21 November 1878); ten months after Lawrence had outlined the basis of his opposition to the new policy by writing to *The Times*.

When Liberals criticised government Afghan policy, they often did so by explicit reference to Lawrence’s name, his knowledge about India and Afghanistan, and the policy he had pursued as governor-general. Gladstone was particularly enthusiastic about using Lawrence in this way. On 30 November 1878, Gladstone addressed about three thousand of his constituents at Woolwich, nine days after Britain had declared war on the Amir of Afghanistan.⁷³ This speech seems to have been ignored by some of Gladstone’s biographers.⁷⁴ Gladstone advanced three main arguments: constitutional,

⁶⁹ *Hansard*, 243 (5 Dec. 1878), cols. 27-38.

⁷⁰ See e.g. Hartington’s speech at Newcastle, *Daily News*, 20 Sept. 1879, p. 2.

⁷¹ Beaconsfield at the Guildhall, *Times*, 11 Nov. 1878, p. 9.

⁷² Gladstone to Granville, 16 Nov. 1878, *Correspondence of Gladstone and Granville*, vol. I, p. 87.

⁷³ An ostensible short-term cause of the war was the Amir’s refusal to receive the British mission. Conservatives would later use many other arguments to justify their Afghan policy, but at the time of Gladstone’s Woolwich speech they had in fact said very little about the new policy, or the origins of the war. Gladstone at Woolwich, *Times*, 2 Dec. 1878, p. 7.

⁷⁴ There is no reference to this speech in either of Shannon, *Gladstone*, or H.C.G. Matthew, *Gladstone: 1809-1898* (Oxford, 1997). Roland Quinault however considers Gladstone’s speech in R. Quinault, ‘Afghanistan and Gladstone’s Moral Foreign Policy’, *History Today*, 52 (2002), 30.

moral and strategic. The constitutional argument was that parliament had been ‘abused’ because information about Britain’s altered relations with Afghanistan had been withheld from it. Furthermore, when parliament was eventually convened it was not in order to debate the merits of the war but to approve the necessary funding. Gladstone presented this as ‘the insidious beginnings of a system which is intended to narrow the liberties of the people of England. (Hear, hear.)’⁷⁵ Gladstone’s moral argument was that the war in Afghanistan was unjust, and that there would be profound moral and religious repercussions of an unjust war. His strategic argument was that the forward policy was an error on military and political grounds. In making the first two arguments Gladstone had little need for Lawrence’s weight, but the strategic criticism was not one a metropolitan politician could make without supporting evidence. Gladstone thus invoked the names of a succession of Indian governors-general who had followed a policy of cautious vigilance in Afghanistan: Lords Canning, Elgin, Lawrence, Mayo and Northbrook. Referring to these men allowed Gladstone to argue that the determined reluctance to interfere in Afghanistan was not a party matter. The Earl of Mayo, Gladstone reminded his constituents with enthusiasm, had of course been ‘a Tory of the first water’.⁷⁶ It also allowed Gladstone to claim that Liberal opposition had a historical legitimacy.⁷⁷ The history of Anglo-Afghan relations may have seemed particularly resonant to contemporaries, because of the memory of the first war and the annihilation of a British force of sixteen thousand retreating from Kabul in 1842. That defeat was

⁷⁵ Gladstone at Woolwich, *Times*, 2 Dec. 1878, p. 7. Gladstone made this constitutional argument not only when the absence of information made it difficult to criticise other aspects of government policy. As late as March 1880—by which time Liberals could criticise the escalating financial costs of war in Afghanistan, and alleged atrocities committed by British forces—Gladstone continued to advance these constitutional criticisms. See e.g. Gladstone at Corstorphine, *Times*, 19 March 1880, p. 10.

⁷⁶ Gladstone at Woolwich, *Times*, 2 Dec. 1878, p. 7.

⁷⁷ During his Midlothian speeches Gladstone remarked that history was ‘among the most potent and effective of all the instruments of human education.’ Gladstone at Glasgow, 5 Dec. 1879, *Midlothian Speeches 1879*, *W.E. Gladstone*, ed. M.R.D. Foot (Leicester, 1971), p. 250.

relived in a proliferation of publications and paintings around 1878.⁷⁸ Gladstone, teasing out the sense of imperial hubris (in 1842 and, by implication, in 1878), urged his audience to remember that, ‘when apparently masters of the country... the greatest military disaster that has fallen upon England for generations was suffered with shame in the valleys of Afghanistan.’⁷⁹

Lawrence’s name was not merely invoked alongside those of other imperial administrators; it was given a special status. In an earlier speech in north Wales, Gladstone imputed particular significance to Lawrence’s testimony: ‘I need hardly tell you that of all living authorities, Lord Lawrence is undoubtedly the highest’. Gladstone then proceeded to quote Lawrence at length.⁸⁰ Audience reaction is of course difficult to measure, but when Gladstone referred to Lawrence during his Woolwich speech, his constituents cheered.⁸¹ Gladstone, careful to observe and record public reaction to what he said, must have thought this was an effective tactic; even after Lawrence died (in June 1879), Gladstone continued to refer to him in this way.⁸²

It is striking that even Liberals who, unlike Gladstone, had first-hand experience of Indian foreign policy nonetheless used Lawrence as a reference-point in their speeches. For example, the Earl of Northbrook, in a short speech on Afghan policy at Winchester,

⁷⁸ Lady Elizabeth Butler’s ‘The Remnants of an Army’ is a striking example. Dr. Brydon of the Bengal Army (seemingly the only survivor) and his pony are depicted, on the brink of death, before the gates of Jellalabad, after the British retreat from Kabul. Lady Elizabeth Butler, ‘The Remnants of an Army’, 1879. Tate Britain (N01553). For textual treatment of the retreat, published around the same time as Butler’s painting, see M. Morris, *The First Afghan War* (London, 1878). Morris described how ‘thousands fell beneath the murderous rain that poured down night and day upon the defenceless rabble... when Brydon reached Jellalabad on the 13th the army of Cabul had for all practical purposes disappeared from off the face of the earth.’ (pp. 87-90).

⁷⁹ Gladstone at Woolwich, *Times*, 2 Dec. 1878, p. 7.

⁸⁰ Gladstone at Rhyl, *Times*, 1 Nov. 1878, p. 8.

⁸¹ Gladstone at Woolwich, *Times*, 2 Dec. 1878, p. 7.

⁸² See e.g. Gladstone at Corstorphine, *Times*, 19 March 1880, p. 10.

referred to Lawrence no less than eleven times.⁸³ Northbrook had been governor-general himself, and more recently than Lawrence (1872-76). Of course, this very fact may have encouraged Northbrook to say little on his own part. However, this respect for his predecessor seems to have been genuine. As Northbrook told parliament, there was simply no man ‘whose opinion carries so great weight, both with the Natives and the English’.⁸⁴

It was not only Liberals who recognised Lawrence’s central position in the public debate about Afghanistan. *The Times* supported the government’s new policy, but acknowledged that ‘no reasonable man would wish to make up his mind’ about events on India’s north-west frontier without first hearing Lawrence’s arguments.⁸⁵ *The Times* in fact published numerous letters written by Lawrence to the editor in 1878, which were fiercely critical of the forward policy.⁸⁶ Although *The Times* sometimes juxtaposed Lawrence’s letters with those taking a contrary position, it nonetheless offered him a public forum for his arguments.⁸⁷ This forum was important in terms of reaching public audiences because parliament was not sitting in the months immediately preceding the war. *The Times* thus provided a sort of proxy for the debates which otherwise would have taken place at Westminster.

Conservatives also recognised Lawrence’s importance in public discussion about Afghanistan. The Earl of Ravensworth, presenting the government’s case for war in parliament, sought to emphasise the danger of a Russian advance through Afghanistan

⁸³ Northbrook at Winchester, *Times*, 12 Nov. 1878, p. 8.

⁸⁴ *Hansard*, 234 (15 June 1877), col. 1842.

⁸⁵ *Times*, 2 Oct. 1878, p. 9.

⁸⁶ *Times*, 10 Jan. 1878, p. 4; 2 Oct. 1878, p. 8; 19 Nov. 1878, p. 10.

⁸⁷ See e.g. *Times*, 2 Oct. 1878, pp. 8, 9.

by citing (fragments of) Lawrence's own viceregal despatches.⁸⁸ The prime minister too, although he publicly effected a sarcastic disdain for the 'Afghan committee' chaired by Lawrence, privately seemed anxious about the strength of public opinion behind its demand to convene parliament.⁸⁹ In the event, the committee's two objectives—the recall of parliament and publication of the secretary of state for India's despatches—were both conceded in December 1878. Furthermore, Beaconsfield's argument about 'scientific' frontiers was presumably intended to counter what Lawrence and other Liberals had said about the prohibitive expense of invading Afghanistan. A month after his speech at the Guildhall, Beaconsfield explained the benefits of 'rectification' to parliament: 'a scientific Frontier may be defended with a garrison of five thousand men; while, with a hap-hazard one, you may require for its defence an army of one hundred thousand men'.⁹⁰ His argument was that a 'scientific' frontier would, in the long run, prove much cheaper to defend than the existing frontier. Lawrence's influence on metropolitan debates about Afghanistan also seems to have been evident in the choice of officer to lead the (August 1878) mission to the Afghan Amir. Sir Neville Chamberlain was apparently selected because he was the greatest pupil of Lawrence; Conservatives hoped that if the Amir snubbed a prominent 'Lawrentian' such as Chamberlain, Lawrence's arguments against the government would be weakened.⁹¹ It seems therefore that throughout 1878 Lord Lawrence—having spent so much of his life in the imperial 'periphery'—was able to exert a discernible and significant influence not just on the Liberal party but on public debate in the metropolis.

⁸⁸ *Hansard*, 243 (5 Dec. 1878), col. 6.

⁸⁹ Beaconsfield's sarcasm: he refused to receive a deputation from the 'Afghan committee', apparently mindful that 'the Government and the country have already so frequently and so recently had the advantage of copious explanations' from Lawrence and others. *Times*, 20 Nov. 1878, p. 8. Beaconsfield's anxiety: he confided to Lady Bradford (19 Nov. 1878) that he wanted to avoid recalling parliament, but was concerned that 'the cry of the Opposition... may take the fears and fancy of John Bull'. Monypenny and Buckle, *Life of Beaconsfield*, vol. VI, p. 394.

⁹⁰ *Hansard*, 243 (10 Dec. 1878), col. 514.

⁹¹ Cowling, 'Lytton, the Cabinet, and the Russians, August to November 1878', 71.

Lawrence and the language of patriotism

Lawrence offered great utility in defence as well as attack, because he acted as a shield against Conservative claims that Liberal policy was pacifist, or not patriotic. On the eve of war, Lawrence declared ‘that to go to war with [the Amir] for refusing to receive our Mission, or for the rectification of our frontier, or, indeed, for any other cause which can at present be fairly brought against him, would be a gross injustice and a grave stigma on the character of the English nation.’⁹² In response some Conservatives accused their opponents of pacifism, a tactic endorsed by the prime minister himself, who sought to denigrate Liberals as the ‘peace-at-any-price’ party.⁹³ These sorts of attack were also directed against Lawrence personally, presumably on account of his public prominence in the press, the Afghan Committee, and in Liberal speeches. It was however extremely difficult to attack Lawrence in this way, and Liberals contested these patriotic claims with vigour. For example, when in parliament the Duke of Somerset questioned Lawrence’s patriotism, Lord Northbrook’s response was immediate:

I must say I do not think the noble Duke behind me (the Duke of Somerset) was quite fair in his remarks about the noble Lord a late Governor General (Lord Lawrence) for having joined the Afghan Committee... The noble Duke says that my noble Friend is not patriotic... Few men in this country have given such proofs as my noble Friend has done of patriotism, of vigour, of honour, and of a desire at any risk to maintain the British Empire in India; and yet, because he does not happen to agree with the noble Duke, he is to be spoken of in such terms. It is repugnant to all my feelings of justice and to every sentiment of propriety that a man of such distinguished services should be so spoken of in this House.⁹⁴

⁹² *Times*, 19 Nov. 1878, p. 10.

⁹³ Beaconsfield, *Hansard*, 243 (10 Dec. 1878), col. 520.

⁹⁴ Earl of Northbrook, *Hansard*, 243 (5 Dec. 1878), col. 73.

Northbrook did not need to describe Lawrence's heroic actions during the Mutiny; it was sufficient merely to allude to them. The conspicuousness of Lawrence in Liberal discourse challenged the Conservatives' claim that the war in Afghanistan was justified on the grounds of imperial patriotism (that is to say, that their policy was necessary in order to safeguard Britain's empire in India). As Sir Stafford Northcote explained: 'when we saw that a Russian Mission was received at Cabul at a time when an English Mission was refused... it was absolutely impossible, if we were to have regard to the question of our security, for us to remain inactive.'⁹⁵ Beaconsfield, adapting the imperial rhetoric of his 1872 Crystal Palace speech to the circumstances in Afghanistan, argued that Britons would expect nothing less than the 'maintenance of Empire'.⁹⁶ The refrain 'security of our frontier' was paired with 'security of our Empire': Conservatives cited the former as a prerequisite for the latter.⁹⁷ The problem for Conservatives was that the man whom the nation, themselves included, recognised as the 'saviour of India' was so publicly adamant that the 'vulnerable' frontier was in fact perfectly secure.⁹⁸

Lawrence was in this sense a peculiarly awkward opponent for the Conservatives. The language he used to oppose Conservative policy, and his prominence as a patriot, are hard to reconcile with Hugh Cunningham's argument that the Conservatives

⁹⁵ Sir Stafford Northcote, *Hansard*, 243 (5 Dec. 1878), col. 127. Beaconsfield made an almost identical argument: see *Hansard*, 243 (10 Dec. 1878), col. 515.

⁹⁶ Beaconsfield regarding Afghanistan, in 1878: 'That the House of Lords will decide that they will maintain the Empire... that is what I believe the people of England expect.' *Hansard*, 243 (5 Dec. 1878), col. 81. Contrast with 1872: 'I say with confidence that the great body of the working class of England... are for maintaining the greatness of the Kingdom and the Empire'. *Times*, 25 June 1872, p. 7.

⁹⁷ Cairns (the Lord Chancellor), *Hansard*, 243 (10 Dec. 1878), col. 450.

⁹⁸ Chapter I considered Lawrence's post-Mutiny reception in Britain. Conservatives and Liberals alike had acclaimed Lawrence's instrumentality in preserving Britain's empire in India in 1857-58. Moreover, some of the Conservatives who had done so had now reached prominent positions in the party. Beaconsfield himself had in fact singled out Lawrence as *especially* worthy in 1858: Lawrence 'probably deserved more than any other man in India, whether soldier, sailor, or civilian.' Disraeli, *Hansard*, 148 (8 Feb. 1858), col. 888.

monopolised the language of patriotism at this time. In his 1981 *History Workshop Journal* article, Cunningham argued that the language of patriotism—once the legitimisation of opposition—came to be closely identified with the political right. A striking aspect of his persuasive argument is its specificity: Cunningham identifies a particular moment—the political turmoil of the Eastern Question, in late 1877 and early 1878—which prompted a ‘decisive shift’ in the language of patriotism from Radicals to Conservatives.⁹⁹ Cunningham’s argument remains influential, although it has been qualified to some extent by more recent research highlighting the vitality of the patriotism articulated by Liberals and various left-wing organisations.¹⁰⁰ Some of the language used by Lawrence was explicitly patriotic, such as his assertion that war with the Afghan Amir would be ‘a grave stigma on the character of the English nation’. Moreover, Lawrence made these arguments in late 1878, on the eve of the second Afghan war; therefore *after* Cunningham’s ‘decisive shift’ in the use of the language of patriotism to the Conservatives. Lawrence’s use of patriotic language and his prominence in the public debate about government policy and war in Afghanistan seem therefore to further qualify Cunningham’s argument.

The Liberal critique of the second Afghan war

One of Lawrence’s objections to an advance beyond the north-west frontier was that its financial cost would ‘inevitably prove enormous’.¹⁰¹ An aversion to indebtedness came

⁹⁹ Cunningham, ‘The Language of Patriotism’, 22.

¹⁰⁰ See e.g. Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism*; P. Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack: Englishness, Patriotism and the British Left, 1881-1924* (Woodbridge, 1998); P. Readman, ‘The Liberal Party and Patriotism in Early Twentieth Century Britain’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 12 (2001), 269-302; P. Readman, *Land and Nation in England: Patriotism, National Identity, and the Politics of Land, 1880-1914* (Woodbridge, 2008). Cunningham also argued that the Conservative hold on the language of patriotism did not always lead to electoral success: see H. Cunningham, ‘The Conservative Party and Patriotism’, in R. Colls and P. Dodd (eds.), *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920* (London, 1986), pp. 283-307.

¹⁰¹ Lawrence to editor, *Times*, 10 Jan. 1878, p. 4.

naturally to many Liberals, including Gladstone, who told Granville he was ‘in horror at the prospect of heaping the new load of debt on India.’¹⁰² Sir William Harcourt concentrated on the question of Indian finance when he attacked government Afghan policy at the 1879 meeting of the Sheffield Liberal Association. Harcourt argued that ‘if there is any task which is worthy of the determined energies of the Liberal party it is that of retrieving the desperate condition of Indian finance. (Cheers.)’¹⁰³ Later in his speech, Harcourt explained why the question of Indian finance was so important: ‘we are in India on the brink of a financial precipice which threatens the very existence of our dominion in the East’.¹⁰⁴ Harcourt’s concern for ‘our dominion in the East’, that is to say the security of India, accords with what historians have concluded about the political influence of India on British policy-makers.¹⁰⁵

However, Lawrence made the financial case against war in Afghanistan by concentrating on humanitarian considerations rather than the security of British India. The administrative lens through which he viewed events showed most clearly the detrimental effects war in Afghanistan would have on India, and Indians. Since his return to Britain, Lawrence had emphasised the importance of great infrastructural works in India such as irrigation projects and the construction of roads.¹⁰⁶ He understood that these projects would be jeopardised as a consequence of war. There was a precedent for this, as Lawrence had recognised after the first Afghan war: ‘we chucked away fifteen millions in the Afghan war, and could not afford the material

¹⁰² Gladstone to Granville, 3 Oct. 1878, *Political Correspondence of Gladstone and Granville*, vol. I, p. 82.

¹⁰³ Harcourt at Sheffield, *Times*, 17 Apr. 1879, p. 10. Harcourt became Home Secretary after the Liberal general election victory in Apr. 1880.

¹⁰⁴ Harcourt at Sheffield, *Times*, 17 Apr. 1879, p. 10.

¹⁰⁵ Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, pp. 59-60.

¹⁰⁶ *Hansard*, 218 (24 Apr. 1874), cols. 1092-3.

improvements India required.’¹⁰⁷

Of course, ‘improvements’ benefited the governors, as well as the governed. A government of India despatch during Lawrence’s viceroyalty acknowledged this: the construction of infrastructural works in India would ‘enhance the comfort of the people, while they add to our political and military strength’.¹⁰⁸ This inherent duality occludes the question of whether particular administrators favoured such works primarily on security or humanitarian grounds. In Lawrence’s case, his Indian administration had been characterised by an unusual concern for the welfare of the governed.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, the coincidence in 1878 of war in Afghanistan with famine in India helps illuminate the emphasis on administrative-humanitarian (as opposed to security) considerations that characterised Lawrence’s opposition to government policy. The famine had started early in 1876, and an estimated five million Indians were ultimately to die of starvation.¹¹⁰ Lawrence frequently connected Indian finance with Indian famine, thus imbuing his opposition to government policy with a humanitarian resonance.¹¹¹ For Lawrence, it was a matter of fairness and good government that Indians should not have to foot the bill for a war that was ‘unjust’.¹¹² As he argued in a letter to the editor of *The Times*, published two days before the start of the war:

The expenses of the Afghan war of 1838-42 were very large, and those for the impending war must prove greater. We have not yet heard a word as to who is to bear them. I, for one, do not

¹⁰⁷ Lawrence to John Nicholson, 17 July 1853, Bosworth Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence*, vol. I, p. 406.

¹⁰⁸ Government of India to secretary of state for India, 4 Jan. 1869, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, p. 44.

¹⁰⁹ Lawrence’s concern for the welfare of Indians is for example evident in his long opposition to increasing the Indian salt excise, viewed by many of his compatriots as a supple instrument for raising revenue, but resisted by Lawrence because it fell ‘chiefly upon the poor’. See e.g. Lawrence to Cranborne, 16 Sept. 1866, Lawrence Mss/31, no. 35 and *Hansard*, 198 (23 July 1869), col. 547.

¹¹⁰ D. Washbrook, ‘Lytton, Edward Robert Bulwer-, first earl of Lytton (1831-1891)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford 2004; online ed. Jan. 2008).

¹¹¹ Lawrence, *Hansard*, 247 (19 June 1879), cols. 159-60.

¹¹² Lawrence, *Hansard*, 243 (9 Dec. 1878), cols. 269-71.

believe that the people of England will endure them, and as for the inhabitants of India, they are already, in my judgment, taxed beyond the public burdens which they ought to bear... The droughts and famines in many parts of the country of late years have caused great misery.¹¹³

Lawrence's sensitivity to famine was unlikely to have been shared universally, or even broadly. Many British administrators, weaned on the 'grim doctrines' of Thomas Malthus and on Adam Smith's strict injunctions against state interference in 'free' markets, accepted the 'inevitability' of famines.¹¹⁴ However, the Indian famine was an important component not only of Lawrence's opposition, but that of a number of other Liberals with experience of Indian administration. Northbrook, in the parliamentary debates on the use of Indian revenues to finance the Afghan war, argued that 'India should not be called upon to bear the cost... India has suffered recently from two severe famines; the people are impoverished'.¹¹⁵ Liberal administrators whose experience was derived not from India but the India Office could also see the war in this way. The Duke of Argyll (secretary of state for India, 1868-74) provides one such example. After Lawrence, Argyll was perhaps the most conspicuous Liberal opponent of government Afghan policy. As early as 1877, he had warned Lord Salisbury that it would be folly to force a British resident on the Amir.¹¹⁶ Argyll published a book on the 'Afghan question' in 1879, condemning government policy with such force that *The Times* declared him the 'Opposition's champion'.¹¹⁷ A great landowner, Argyll had experience

¹¹³ Lawrence to editor, *Times*, 19 Nov. 1878, p. 10.

¹¹⁴ Smith's ideas were taught at the East India Company's College at Haileybury, where many administrators were trained. British administrators were thus often reluctant to 'interfere', for example by regulating the price of grain, or stockpiling it. M. Davis, *Late Victorian holocausts: El Niño famines and the making of the third world* (London, 2001), pp. 31-2. Presumably not all Haileybury pupils absorbed these lessons: Lawrence himself had been educated there (1827-28).

¹¹⁵ Northbrook, *Hansard*, 243 (10 Dec. 1878), col. 478.

¹¹⁶ Argyll, *Hansard*, 234 (15 June 1877), cols. 1831-3. This was four days after Salisbury's remarks about the 'popular use of maps on a small scale'.

¹¹⁷ G.D. Campbell, Duke of Argyll, *The Afghan Question from 1841 to 1878* (1879). The review of *The Times* is appended at the back of the book (no page number). Lawrence too seemed impressed by

of famine because his tenants had suffered during the famine period of the eighteen-forties and eighteen-fifties.¹¹⁸ In 1874, his administrative experience led Argyll to conclude that famines demanded ‘increased responsibility on those who have charge of India’.¹¹⁹ In 1879, Argyll argued that this ‘increased responsibility’ had not been discharged by the government, which had ‘diverted to the purposes of a foreign war... taxation which we had promised to devote to insurance against the effects of famine.’¹²⁰

The third Earl Grey perhaps provided the clearest exposition of how some Liberal administrators perceived the connections between war in Afghanistan, and famine, finance and works of improvement in India. Grey had been colonial secretary (1846-52) and was one of the organisers of the Afghan committee.¹²¹ In December 1878, Earl Grey told the House of Lords:

I believe the people of India to be already over-taxed and to require relief. We know what heavy burdens have been thrown on the Indian Treasury by successive famines; we know, too, that various public works which are urgently wanted, and some of which would greatly assist in averting future famines, have been postponed, owing to the difficulty of finding money to carry them on. In such a state of things it seems to me that to employ the Revenues of India in carrying on an unrighteous war not to the advantage, but probably to the detriment, of India,

Argyll’s energy. ‘If you have not given your opponents an absolute quietus, you have, at any rate, given them something difficult to digest.’ Lawrence to Argyll, 17 Feb. 1879, *George Douglas, 8th duke of Argyll, 1823-1900: autobiography and memoirs*, ed. I.E. Campbell (II vols., 1906), vol. II, pp. 335-6.

¹¹⁸ The distress was partially relieved when Argyll paid for some of his tenants to emigrate to Canada. It is not however clear how deep Argyll’s sympathies for his own tenants were, and it seems likely that not all of the emigrants were volunteers. See K.M. Mulhern, ‘The intellectual duke: George Douglas Campbell, 8th duke of Argyll, 1823-1900’, PhD diss. Edinburgh University 2006, pp. 46-8.

¹¹⁹ Argyll, *Hansard*, 218 (24 Apr. 1874), col. 1065.

¹²⁰ Argyll, *The Afghan Question*, p. vii.

¹²¹ M. Swartz, *The Politics of British Foreign Policy in the era of Disraeli and Gladstone* (New York, 1985), p. 109.

would be most unjust.¹²²

The approach taken by Lawrence, Argyll, Northbrook and Grey suggests that Liberal humanitarianism around the time of the war in Afghanistan concentrated on Indians, rather than Afghans. This has been neglected in the existing scholarship, as historians have been drawn to Gladstone's rhetoric about Afghans during his Midlothian campaigns. One speech has proved particularly alluring, in which Gladstone declared that 'the sanctity of life in the hill villages of Afghanistan among the winter snows, is as inviolable in the eye of Almighty God as can be your own.'¹²³ There are valid reasons for examining Gladstone's 'rights of the savage' speech: historians have for example considered its relationship with 'moral' foreign policy, and the extent to which it explains Gladstone's 'appeal to mankind'.¹²⁴ It is tempting therefore to view his famous speech as representative of Liberal humanitarianism at the time of the war. Modern-day Liberals succumbed to this temptation on the eve of a more recent British invasion of Afghanistan, reciting Gladstone's speech in parliament and arguing that Britain should 'learn from history'.¹²⁵ However, Lawrence, Argyll, Northbrook and Grey show that an alternative humanitarian critique of government policy was popular among several leading parliamentary Liberals in this period.

¹²² Earl Grey, *Hansard*, 243 (10 Dec. 1878), cols. 420-1.

¹²³ Gladstone continued: 'Remember that... mutual love is not limited by the shores of this island, is not limited by the boundaries of Christian civilisation; that it passes over the whole surface of the earth, and embraces the meanest along with the greatest in its unmeasured scope.' Gladstone at Dalkeith, 26 Nov. 1879, *Midlothian Speeches*, pp. 93-4.

¹²⁴ Quinault, 'Afghanistan and Gladstone's Moral Foreign Policy'; J.L. Hammond and M.R.D. Foot, *Gladstone and Liberalism* (1964), p. 132.

¹²⁵ Lord Ashdown: 'It is history again. Exactly at the time when the punitive expedition was being sent in to avenge the deaths which my great grandmother witnessed and from which she escaped, Gladstone had the courage to stand up in his Midlothian campaign in a general election. While Lord Roberts was going into Kandahar he uttered words which ought to reflect down the ages and echo in our ears today. He said, "Do not forget that the sanctity of life in the hill villages of Afghanistan..."' Ashdown then continued to quote from Gladstone's rights of the savage speech, before concluding as follows: 'History is important in Afghanistan and we should learn from it.' *Hansard*, 627 (4 Oct. 2001), cols. 164-5.

The different emphases of Gladstone and Lawrence are further illuminated if their attitudes to ‘punitive expeditions’ against the Afghans are considered. In his ‘rights of the savage’ speech, Gladstone attacked this practice: ‘[t]he meaning of the burning of the village is, that the women and the children were driven forth to perish in the snows of winter. Is not that a terrible supposition?’¹²⁶ Gladstone was referring to allegations that General Roberts had issued orders for the ‘looting and burning’ of Afghan villages, and that Afghan prisoners had been tied in ropes and then ‘slaughtered in their bonds’.¹²⁷ In contrast, Lawrence had authorised similar expeditions on India’s north-west frontier while he was governor-general, and he had also explained to the secretary of state why burning villages was occasionally necessary.¹²⁸ Lawrence appears to have considered that such practices were an administrative necessity. He had previously explained to parliament that where the frontier tribes could not be ‘restrained’ from invading British India ‘by purely defensive measures, we had nothing for it but to retaliate and invade the lands of the spoilers. These expeditions, as a rule, had the best effect. It had been rare that a second expedition against a tribe became necessary’.¹²⁹ In 1878, Lawrence argued that Britain should by all means try to conciliate the Afghans, but ought never to forget ‘the necessity of the iron hand in the velvet glove’.¹³⁰

A number of other contrasts might be drawn between Gladstone on the one hand, and Lawrence and other Liberals on the other. For example, although Gladstone also connected the war in Afghanistan with the famine in India, he presented it as evidence

¹²⁶ Gladstone at Dalkeith, 26 Nov. 1879, *Midlothian Speeches*, pp. 91-2.

¹²⁷ These allegations had been made in the *Standard* (10 Feb. 1879) and were then raised in parliament by George Anderson (MP for Glasgow). *Hansard*, 243 (17 Feb. 1879), cols. 1312-3.

¹²⁸ Lawrence to Northcote, 18 Sept. 1867, Lawrence Mss/32B, no. 52.

¹²⁹ Lawrence, *Hansard*, 234 (15 June 1877), cols. 1840-1.

¹³⁰ Lawrence to editor, *Times*, 19 Nov. 1878, p. 10.

of the perfidy of the administration. He told his audience at Glasgow that money raised from Indian taxpayers and intended to provide insurance against the effects of famine had not been used for that purpose: '[t]he taxation was levied. The pledge was given. The pledge has been utterly broken.'¹³¹ For Gladstone, there was also political merit in linking Conservative policy in Afghanistan with other claimed foreign policy errors. In particular, Gladstone often juxtaposed the Afghan and Zulu wars. Gladstone's rhetoric on the Zulus in some respects echoed his 'rights of the savage' passage: 'a nation whom we term savages [the Zulus] have in defence of their own land offered their naked bodies to the terribly improved artillery and arms of modern European science'.¹³² There were of course similarities between Afghan and Zulu wars: both involved British military defeat, considerable expense and could be contrasted with traditional Liberal policy in those theatres.¹³³ However, Gladstone's rhetorical equivalence was presumably intended to support one of his principal charges at Midlothian: that the government's errors were linked.¹³⁴

Lawrence, however, appears not to have uttered a single word on the Zulu war. Argyll, so vociferous in his condemnation of the government's Afghan policy, actually supported the Zulu war. He argued that the Zulu threat had to be faced, and that Sir Bartle Frere 'had done nothing to compromise the honour of the Crown, or fair name and fame of England.'¹³⁵ Historians have argued that Liberal criticism in this period was highly partisan, and directed 'to an exceptional degree' against Beaconsfield

¹³¹ Gladstone at Glasgow, 5 Dec. 1879, *Midlothian Speeches*, p. 202.

¹³² Gladstone at Dalkeith, 26 Nov. 1879, *Midlothian Speeches*, pp. 90-1.

¹³³ J. Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain* (London, 1993), p. 279.

¹³⁴ 'What we are disputing about is a whole system of Government': Gladstone at Edinburgh, 25 Nov. 1879, *Midlothian Speeches*, p. 50.

¹³⁵ Argyll, *The Afghan Question*, p. viii.

personally.¹³⁶ Yet Lawrence appears never to have criticised Beaconsfield.¹³⁷ Liberal opposition, at least on the subject of Afghanistan, seems to have been less partisan and more moderate than historians have allowed.

One issue that seemed to unite Gladstone and his fellow Liberals was the constitutional critique of the Conservative party. Most Liberals seem to have made the sort of constitutional criticisms that Gladstone had advanced during his speech at Woolwich: in all international spheres, they condemned the government for acting without adequate parliamentary consultation.¹³⁸ Liberals claimed that the government's foreign policy was not merely a break with Liberal (even Palmerstonian) policy, but akin to 'the bastard imperialism of the Second Empire'.¹³⁹ Comparisons with France's 'Second Empire' (and therefore 'foreign despotism') were made easier by the apparent aim of the Conservatives to advance in Afghanistan until they had reached 'natural boundaries', a term associated with Napoleon III.¹⁴⁰ Similarly, other Liberals made legal arguments, based on their interpretation of the Anglo-Afghan treaties of 1855 and 1857, which they claimed bound Britain not to interfere in the Amir's territories.¹⁴¹ However, Lawrence himself—who had signed the treaties—seems not to have made any such argument.

Gladstone was in step with Lawrence, Argyll and most leading Liberals on the question of Russian expansion into Afghanistan. These men argued that fears of Russian

¹³⁶ P.J. Durrans, 'A Two-Edged Sword: The Liberal Attack on Disraelian Imperialism', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 10 (1982), 275.

¹³⁷ In private, Lawrence despaired about the governor-general, Lord Lytton. See Granville to Gladstone, 30 Sept. 1878, *Correspondence of Gladstone and Granville*, vol. I, p. 80.

¹³⁸ Parry, *Liberal Government in Victorian Britain*, p. 278.

¹³⁹ S.C. Cavendish, Marquess of Hartington, *Election speeches in 1879 and 1880* (London, 1880), p. 218.

¹⁴⁰ Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism*, pp. 334-5.

¹⁴¹ Viscount Halifax: 'by the Treaty of 1855, which we acknowledge still to be in force, we are bound to respect the territories of the Ameer.' *Hansard*, 243 (9 Dec. 1878), col. 253.

progress—dubbed ‘Mervousness’ by Argyll—were exaggerated; an opinion shared by the Liberal cabinet of 1880.¹⁴² In this sense most Liberals continued to express (in opposition and office) a mid-Victorian confidence that most Conservatives no longer felt inclined to share.¹⁴³ There were some exceptions to this from Radicals within the Liberal party. For example, Sir Charles Dilke’s arguments about British policy in Afghanistan are in some respects hard to distinguish from those of the Conservatives. He made a speech at Hammersmith in September 1878 (over two months before the war began) in which he contrasted the refusal of the Afghan Amir to receive an English mission with the ‘splendid reception’ afforded to the Russians. Dilke was suspicious both of the Amir and the Russians, and spoke in dark tones about the prospects of Cossack boots treading the streets of Kabul. Dilke even seems to have thought that it was axiomatic that war should follow a refusal by the Amir to receive Britain’s mission, a position utterly different to that adopted by the majority of his party.¹⁴⁴

* * *

Lawrence’s public criticism of the government’s Afghan policy provided further proof, in the eyes of some of his biographers, of their subject’s dutiful heroism. Bosworth Smith wrote that ‘there is no single step in the whole of his heroic life which was taken from purer motives, which showed a more lively sense of honour, a more genuine patriotism, a more unflinching moral courage; in a word, which is more characteristic of

¹⁴² Matthew, *Gladstone*, pp. 381-2.

¹⁴³ Gladstone saw nothing unnatural in Russian expansion, arguing that if Britain had been in Russia’s position, ‘we should most likely have eaten up Turkey long ago.’ Gladstone at West Calder, 27 Nov. 1879, *Midlothian Speeches*, p. 123. Gladstone had long advocated this even-tempered response to Russian expansion, arguing in 1857 that it was ‘not wise’ for politicians ‘to proclaim that the object of Russia is the destruction of our Indian Empire by encroachment through Affghanistan.’ *Hansard*, 146 (16 July 1857), col. 1631.

¹⁴⁴ Sir Charles Dilke at Hammersmith, *Times*, 5 Sept. 1878, p. 6.

the man, than this.’¹⁴⁵ This is a bold statement, but it has some force. Lawrence had shunned a conspicuous public life after his return from India in 1869, sheltering in the obscurity of the London School Board and speaking only occasionally in the House of Lords. It seems highly unlikely that assuming the role of a prominent critic of Conservative policy was in any way congenial to him. His reluctance can only have been increased by his age and poor health (he died in June 1879). Lawrence also had little to gain personally from his actions, and in the event incurred the wrath of some leading Conservatives. The enmity created by his public opposition is evident in Beaconsfield’s (unsuccessful) objections to Lawrence’s burial in Westminster Abbey.¹⁴⁶

Lawrence’s influence on parliamentary Liberals and on the contours of public discussion about Afghanistan also allows historians to explore new territory about him. His ‘utility’ for the Liberal party was manifold: as the ‘saviour of India’ he had an enduring patriotic reputation; as a former lieutenant-governor of the Punjab and governor-general of India he was perceived as an expert on policy matters pertaining to the north-west frontier; and his previous mild-mannered parliamentary interventions allowed him to appear as a moderate. The fact that Liberals recognised and then exploited what Earl Granville called this ‘utility’ demonstrates that homecoming imperial administrators, even in their twilight, could exert a significant influence on politics in the metropolis.

¹⁴⁵ Bosworth Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence*, vol. II, p. 635.

¹⁴⁶ Steele, ‘Baron Lawrence’.

VIII

Major Sir Louis Cavagnari, Afghanistan and imperialism in British culture, c.1879

There is a rich historiography regarding the ‘imperial factor’ in British culture. In his influential *Propaganda and Empire* John MacKenzie argued that an ‘ideological cluster’ in the late nineteenth century ‘came to infuse and be propagated by every organ of British life’. This ‘ideological cluster’ comprised a renewed militarism, devotion to royalty, hero-worship and racial ideas associated with Social Darwinism. Together these constituted a ‘new type of patriotism’, which derived special significance from Britain’s ‘imperial mission’. Although MacKenzie argued that much of this propaganda was successful he acknowledged that more precise evidence was required about its effects.¹ More recently, Catherine Hall has asserted that British culture was not only ‘permeated with empire’ but that ‘British identities were constituted through empire’. Hall is particularly impressed by the impact of British emigrants to empire—apparently ‘each brought their stories home’—and by the prevalence of the ‘fruits of empire’ such as tea and (for the rich) luxury goods like Kashmiri shawls.²

Bernard Porter has however called for more rigour in the way historians write about imperialism. In *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, his starting premise was that although Britain was undoubtedly an imperial nation, historians should not assume that it was also an imperial *society*. Having examined evidence for domestic imperialism empirically and sceptically, Porter criticised the tendency to ‘discover and describe’ what he termed ‘shards’ of imperial evidence without evaluating them or setting them in

¹ J.M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The manipulation of British public opinion 1880-1960* (Manchester, 1984), pp. 2, 253.

² C. Hall, ‘Culture and Identity in Imperial Britain’ in S. Stockwell (ed.), *The British Empire: Themes and Perspectives* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 201-2, 217.

the context of other evidence. He also criticised the presumption that imperial factors *must* have been overwhelming, instead arguing that the increase in imperial propaganda around 1880 may in fact suggest the difficulty imperial ideas had in establishing any purchase within British culture. For Porter, the British empire was primarily a project of certain élites (a ‘caste’ within the upper- and upper-middle-classes); an enterprise that neither required nor had the participation of significant numbers of Britons.³

The different conclusions reached by these historians may be explained partly by significant differences in methodology and definition. Porter insists on an empirical approach, whereas Hall rejects the ‘darkness of empiricism’ and emphasises unconscious, implicit assumptions.⁴ Porter defines ‘imperialism’ quite strictly, by reference to its Latin roots, whereas MacKenzie treats it as a much broader ‘ideological cluster’.⁵ However, even allowing for these differences in methodology and definition there remains a fundamental scholarly dispute about the strength of imperialism in British culture.

Peter Marshall has offered a different perspective by highlighting the importance of considering the empire over a long period (from the late eighteenth century to the nineteen-fifties). He has argued that the length of commitment to empire means that attempts to treat it as an ‘exogenous element’ in British history and isolate an ‘imperial factor’ are problematic. Marshall concluded that ‘empire acquired an enhanced position in any collective sense of British identity and probably maintained that position into the

³ B. Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford, 2004), pp. vii-xxiii. Porter has also published an essay on empire and British national identities, in which he argues that any imperial element was subordinated to stronger conceptions of national identity, like liberty: B. Porter, ‘Empire and British National Identity, 1815-1914’, in H. Brocklehurst and R. Phillips (eds.), *History, Nationhood, and the Question of Britain* (Basingstoke, 2004), p. 270.

⁴ Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, p. xiii; Hall, ‘Culture and Identity in Imperial Britain’, p. 200.

⁵ Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, p. viii; MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, p. 2.

1950s.’ However, he identified alternative authoritarian and libertarian interpretations of that identity, observing that the authoritarians (Chamberlain, Milner and Curzon) failed to impose their version of an imperial identity. Marshall also found that working-class support for empire remained somewhat elusive. Furthermore, prowess in classics or mathematics dominated the competitive examination for the Indian civil service, while overtly imperial subjects (like geography) never won academic prestige. Finally, Marshall argued that the great waves of emigration in fact had only limited connections with empire.⁶

This chapter considers the strength of imperialism in British culture by examining metropolitan reactions to the death of Major Sir Louis Cavagnari, the British envoy in Afghanistan. Major Cavagnari and his entire military escort were killed in September 1879, during an attack by Afghan soldiers on the British residency in Kabul. The prime minister’s immediate impression was that these events constituted a ‘national disaster’ that would have severe political repercussions for the Conservative government. Some historians have argued that the consequences were indeed as serious as Beaconsfield had feared. However, the present chapter will argue that this was not the case. First, British fears of Russia—which explained the perceived need for an envoy in Kabul—were undiminished after the attack. Secondly, a consensus on the need to avenge Cavagnari’s death blunted the force of Liberal criticism. Vengeance was immediately framed as a patriotic necessity, on grounds of national honour, dignity and prestige. This prestige-driven demand for vengeance was of course why Lawrence had been so adamant that British envoys should not be sent to Afghanistan. Ironically, the clamour

⁶ In the period 1815-1914, 62% of British emigrants went to the United States, by comparison with 30% to Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Only in the 1920s and 1950s did Commonwealth countries become the major destination. See P.J. Marshall, ‘No fatal impact? The elusive history of imperial Britain’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 12 March 1993, 8-10.

to avenge Cavagnari made it much harder for Liberals to oppose government policy after it had unravelled in exactly the way they had predicted. Thirdly, the attack on the residency may also have frustrated Liberal opposition because sheer excitement in a good story suppressed sober consideration of the steps that had taken Cavagnari to Kabul in the first place (a break with the policy of successive governments since 1842). Newspapers reported that Cavagnari and his small escort (less than eighty men) had maintained a 'heroic defence' against thousands of 'mutinous' Afghans, killing hundreds before finally being overwhelmed.⁷ The evidential basis for this account was thin, but it made for good copy. However, although newspaper reporting of Cavagnari's demise contained several imperial strands, these were not coherently presented and need to be set against other strands that had conflicting meanings. In particular, there was a morbid interest in exactly how the 'gallant major' had been killed, and what had happened to his body afterwards. Moreover, interest in Cavagnari seems to have been only fleeting. For these reasons this chapter argues that metropolitan reactions to Cavagnari's death do not provide persuasive evidence for the strength of imperialism in British culture around 1879.

Major Sir Louis Cavagnari

Following the repulse of General Sir Neville Chamberlain's mission to Sher Ali Khan in September 1878, Britain had invaded Afghanistan and defeated the Amir's forces. Sher Ali Khan died in February 1879 and was succeeded by his son Yakub Khan, who began peace negotiations with Britain. The result of those talks was the treaty of Gandamak (signed on 26 May 1879), by which the new Amir had to accept control over his foreign policy and a British envoy at Kabul. The man chosen as envoy was Major Sir Pierre

⁷ *Standard*, 15 Sept. 1879, p. 5.

Louis Napoleon Cavagnari, KCB, CSI, an army and political officer who had ‘distinguished himself’ during several frontier expeditions between 1868 and 1878.⁸ It was Cavagnari who negotiated the treaty of Gandamak, for which he was made KCB in July 1879. Cavagnari is thought to have gained the favour of the governor-general, Lord Lytton, and apparently influenced him by encouraging his forward policy in Afghanistan. Lytton for his part seems to have advanced Cavagnari’s career, and appointed him envoy at Kabul.⁹

Cavagnari and his small escort entered Kabul on 24 July 1879.¹⁰ Lord Salisbury seemed quite satisfied with the turn of events in Afghanistan, declaring in August that the government had ‘strengthened so that it is impregnable the only assailable frontier of India.’¹¹ *The Times* also appeared confident regarding the prospects for Cavagnari’s mission. On 30 August 1879 it provided some auspicious details from the mission’s entry into Kabul: an Afghan band had played the British national anthem, the conduct of the crowd was ‘orderly and respectful in the extreme’ and two elephants (with gilt and silver *howdahs*) had been placed at the envoy’s disposal. After this ‘honourable and ostentatious reception’ there was ‘every hope’ that the Afghans would ‘no longer resent

⁸ Cavagnari was born (in France) to an Italian father and Irish mother but was naturalized as a British subject in Dec. 1857. Having attended the East India Company military college at Addiscombe, Cavagnari arrived in India in July 1858, joined the 1st Bengal European fusiliers and served throughout the Oudh campaign (1858-59). In July 1861 he was appointed an assistant commissioner in the Punjab. In May 1877 he was appointed deputy commissioner of Peshawar and the following month was made a companion of the Star of India (CSI). G.C. Boase, ‘Cavagnari, Sir Pierre Louis Napoleon (1841-1879)’, rev. J. Lunt, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed. Sept. 2011).

⁹ Both Lytton and Cavagnari intended that he should bring Afghanistan more under British influence: Boase, ‘Sir Louis Cavagnari’.

¹⁰ Cavagnari had chosen a small escort on the grounds that the Afghans would resent a large escort, and because in any case his safety depended on the Amir. The escort comprised a secretary, a doctor, 25 men of the Guides Cavalry and 50 men of the Guides Infantry commanded by Lieutenant Walter Hamilton, VC. See B. Robson, *The Road to Kabul: The Second Afghan War, 1878-1881* (London, 1986), p.118.

¹¹ Salisbury at Hatfield Park, *Times*, 5 Aug. 1879, p. 4.

or view with suspicion the presence of British officers in any part of the country.’¹² *The Times* published an editorial on the page following this report, acclaiming the success of the government’s new policy in Afghanistan:

No doubt Sir Louis Cavagnari has difficulties before him to contend with... But the whole moral of the narrative is to make it clear that the policy which has brought this Embassy to Cabul bids fair to be crowned with success. It was a signal departure from the passive, almost indifferent, demeanour of several able Viceroy, and, among others, of the late Lord Lawrence... The events which have occurred under the guidance of Lord Lytton have been the subject of a long controversy in this country. But with the successful conclusion of the war and the arrival of the Embassy at Cabul all the main differences in opinion will, it is to be presumed, be discarded... No Government could abandon the position which has been acquired. The maintenance of an English representative, with a view to obtain exact and constant information, and for other pacific purposes, in Afghanistan, has become a fixed principle, from which there will be no reason and scarcely any temptation to depart.¹³

Four days later, there was an attack on the British residency in Kabul. Cavagnari and his entire escort were killed.¹⁴ According to George Buckle, the news of Cavagnari’s death (received at Hughenden on 6 September) was a ‘crushing blow to Beaconsfield’. The prime minister immediately sent a telegraph to the Queen in which he admitted to being ‘quite overcome’. Three days later, he wrote to Lord Salisbury. ‘This is a shaker,’ Beaconsfield told the foreign secretary, ‘and it is difficult, at the first breath, to recognise all the consequences of such a disaster. I fear they will be extensive and

¹² *Times*, 30 Aug. 1879, p. 8.

¹³ *Times*, 30 Aug. 1879, p. 9.

¹⁴ The sequence of events is not clear. It is thought that Afghan soldiers belonging to some Herat infantry regiments (in Kabul on routine relief) had demanded arrears in their pay from Cavagnari (on the basis that there may be gold in the British residency). Cavagnari firmly refused to meet these demands. The soldiers returned with their rifles and, aided by some inhabitants of Kabul, attacked the residency, setting it on fire. See Robson, *The Second Afghan War*, p. 120.

manifold.’ The following day Beaconsfield described the event in a letter to Lady Bradford as an ‘awful catastrophe’ and a ‘national disaster’.¹⁵ Historians have argued that the consequences of this ‘disaster’ were as serious as Beaconsfield had feared. R.C.K. Ensor, writing in *The Oxford History of England*, stated that when news of the attack and Cavagnari’s death reached England it ‘created a profound revulsion against the Beaconsfield policy.’¹⁶

However, that does not appear to have been the case. For one thing, although reports of the attack were rather opaque, some Britons nonetheless discerned the sinister influence of Russia. As the *Daily News* acknowledged: ‘very little is known for certain beyond our outposts on the frontier. We must trust for our information to rumours.’¹⁷ It was this very opacity that allowed contemporaries, if they were so inclined, to see Russian ‘intrigue’ behind the attack. *The Times* had initially approved of government policy on the basis that otherwise Afghanistan might become ‘a centre of Russian intrigue, and a possible base for Russian military movements.’¹⁸ Although it cited the arrears of pay of Afghan regiments as a possible motive for the attack, *The Times* had doubts about the allegiance of the Amir: why for example had the Russian mission not suffered a similar fate?¹⁹ The *Standard* was less equivocal, its Vienna correspondent reporting that ‘there is no one in Vienna who does not believe that Russian intrigue was the cause of that slaughter.’²⁰ *The Times* continued to support government policy in Afghanistan on the

¹⁵ Beaconsfield to Salisbury, 9 Sept. 1879 & Beaconsfield to Lady Bradford, 10 Sept. 1879, cited in Monypenny and Buckle, *Life of Beaconsfield*, vol. VI, pp. 478-81.

¹⁶ ‘It was the shock of Isandhlwana redoubled.’ R.C.K. Ensor, *England 1870-1914* (Oxford, 1936), p. 63.

¹⁷ *Daily News*, 15 Sept. 1879, p. 4.

¹⁸ *Times*, 10 Sept. 1878, p. 7.

¹⁹ *Times*, 8 Sept. 1879, p. 8.

²⁰ *Standard*, 15 Sept. 1879, p. 5.

basis of anxiety over Russia.²¹ Their resolve had been stiffened by the attack; there were now more, not less, reasons for supporting government policy in Afghanistan.²²

As staunch supporters of the government's forward measures in Afghanistan, it is perhaps not surprising that *The Times* and the *Standard* reacted to the attack on the British residency and the death of Cavagnari in this way. It is much more significant that although Liberals who had opposed government policy continued to do so, in the aftermath of the attack they seem to have found such opposition more difficult to maintain publicly. One problem for Liberals was that an apparently broad consensus on the need for vengeance blunted the force of their opposition. Avenging the death of the 'English' envoy—whose Italian father had fought with Napoleon at Waterloo—was framed as a patriotic necessity, on grounds of honour, dignity and prestige. Many newspapers therefore reiterated arguments they had made in September 1878, when Chamberlain's mission had been repelled at the Afghan border. Days after the attack, *The Times* argued that prestige was a particular concern in Afghanistan, 'where force alone commands respect'. Accordingly *The Times* insisted that 'exemplary chastisement' was required in order to maintain the security of India.²³ The Liberal *Daily News* (which had opposed the war) seemed not to demand, but to accept the inevitability of vengeance.²⁴ P.W. Clayden, who had vehemently opposed government policy in Afghanistan, shared this sense of resignation. His views were influential among Liberals, and Gladstone later used Clayden's research in his second Midlothian campaign.²⁵ Clayden acknowledged that, in the aftermath of the attack, there was 'of course, no difference of opinion among Englishmen as to the necessity of promptly

²¹ *Times*, 9 Sept. 1879, p. 3.

²² *Times*, 8 Sept. 1879, p. 5.

²³ *Times*, 9 Sept. 1879, p. 3.

²⁴ 'No time will be lost in avenging the outrage committed.' *Daily News*, 9 Sept. 1879, p. 5.

²⁵ Matthew, *Gladstone*, p. 307.

avenging this treacherous massacre.’²⁶ It was one thing to oppose the government’s decision to send a British envoy to Kabul, but despatching a large army there, in order to avenge his death, was not so much a policy that could be debated, as a patriotic duty. As a relieved *Saturday Review* concluded, there was ‘happily little conflict of opinion as to the necessity of an advance on Cabul.’²⁷

In this political atmosphere, it seems to have been difficult to attack the government without appearing to celebrate a British defeat. It was perhaps for this reason that the *Daily News* was somewhat timid in its condemnation of the government, and careful to acknowledge Cavagnari’s perceived bravery. It found a formula for this when on 10 September it wrote that ‘Cavagnari stuck courageously to his post, resolved to fulfil to the bitter end the insane mission with which he had been charged.’²⁸ This however seems to have been a difficult balancing act. Despite the hubris before the attack of newspapers such as *The Times* that had supported the war and prematurely acclaimed the success of government policy, the *Daily News*, rather than asserting its vindication, merely reprinted some of the statements made in favour of, and against, the establishment of British envoys in Afghanistan.²⁹ It appears that only in the *letters* columns did any sense of vindication find expression.³⁰ Abandoning this cautious criticism of the government could be politically dangerous, as Grant-Duff (Liberal under-secretary of state for India, 1868-74) learned after a speech at Elgin. Grant-Duff

²⁶ P.W. Clayden, *England Under Lord Beaconsfield: The political history of six years from the end of 1873 to the beginning of 1880* (London, 1880), pp. 469-80, 490-2.

²⁷ *Saturday Review* (reported in *Pall Mall Gazette*, 20 Sept. 1879, p. 3).

²⁸ *Daily News*, 10 Sept. 1879, p. 4.

²⁹ *Daily News*, 11 Sept. 1879, p. 2.

³⁰ ‘Sir,—The country is not likely to forget the sneers of the Prime Minister at what he was pleased to style the “copious explanations” of the late Lord Lawrence, when that noble patriot uttered his solemn warnings against the Afghan policy of the Government... the startling news of this week has sufficiently shown the un wisdom of [Lord Lawrence’s] detractors...’ The writer of the letter ended on a positive note however: ‘with a novelist ruling here, and a poet in India, it is lucky no worse calamity has yet befallen us.’ (Beaconsfield had published prose and Lord Lytton had published poetry.) *Daily News*, 11 Sept. 1879, p. 5.

was reported to have said that Salisbury's 'obstinate and wicked folly had been the death-warrant of the British Embassy at Cabul'. He was promptly condemned for appearing 'to exult over the calamity which has befallen us at Cabul.'³¹ The following month Sir William Harcourt did cite Cavagnari's death as evidence of the failure of government policy, but he treaded very carefully by describing the envoy as a hero and by lauding the strength and valour of British soldiers. Harcourt was reluctant to say more about Afghanistan, 'because in the presence of so dire a disaster every man will forbear to embarrass a situation full of danger in future'.³²

Similarly, what Gladstone did not say about Cavagnari and the attack on the British residency is instructive. In his Woolwich speech of December 1878 Gladstone had declared:

It is written in the eternal laws of the universe of God that sin shall be followed by suffering. An unjust war is a tremendous sin... the day will arrive—come it soon or come it late—when the people of England will discover that national injustice is the surest road to national downfall. (Loud and prolonged cheering.)³³

During his Midlothian speeches, Gladstone could have presented the disastrous events in Kabul as the 'suffering' following the 'sin' of the British invasion. The timing of Gladstone's campaign certainly provided an opportunity to do so: the residency was attacked on 3 September 1879, and Gladstone delivered his famous 'rights of the savage' speech on 26 November 1879. However, he seems to have made no reference at

³¹ *Daily Telegraph*, 12 Sept. 1879 (reported in *Pall Mall Gazette*, 12 Sept. 1879, p. 2) & *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 12 Sept. 1879, p. 4.

³² Harcourt at Southport, *Daily News*, 3 Oct. 1879, p. 6.

³³ Gladstone at Woolwich, *Times*, 2 Dec. 1878, p. 7.

all to Cavagnari in his Midlothian speeches.³⁴ This no doubt proved frustrating for Gladstone, who later professed perplexity as to why Cavagnari's demise did not have the political impact of General Gordon's death.³⁵ An important distinction between Cavagnari and Gordon was that apparently neither the public nor the government had known of the specific danger to which the former was exposed.³⁶ In contrast, it was known publicly that Gordon was in peril long before his death; a relief expedition was eventually despatched, but arrived at Khartoum two days too late. It was therefore possible for Conservatives to present Gordon's fate as the natural consequence of his 'abandonment' by the Liberal government.³⁷ It is difficult to understand Gladstone's reticence about Cavagnari and the reluctance of Liberals to attack government policy in the immediate aftermath of the attack, unless it is recognised that it was not in fact the 'disaster' Beaconsfield had feared. On the contrary, the death of an envoy—although in one sense the unravelling of government policy and the vindication of pre-war Liberal predictions—seems to have frustrated Liberal opposition in a curiously effective manner.

Jonathan Parry has argued that after the Conservatives adopted the policy culminating

³⁴ Quinault, 'Afghanistan and Gladstone's Moral Foreign Policy', 31.

³⁵ J. Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone* (III vols., London, 1904), vol. III, pp. 151-2.

³⁶ Cavagnari himself knew of the danger, but this only came to light after the attack. *Daily News*, 10 Sept. 1879, p. 4. Sir Stafford Northcote later explained to parliament that before the attack the government 'had no reason to believe that the position of our gallant Envoy Sir Louis Cavagnari and his colleagues was one of anxiety or danger.' Northcote, *Hansard*, 250 (5 Feb. 1880), cols. 108-9. Some Liberals later challenged the government's supposed ignorance of the specific danger to Cavagnari on the basis that it was widely known that sending British officers to Kabul was always going to be dangerous. See e.g. the speech of Earl Granville: 'The noble and learned Earl [Lord Cairns, the lord chancellor] said the attack could not have been anticipated... but the event which happened was always declared to be a certainty by Dost Mahomed, by Shere Ali, by Lord Lawrence, and by every experienced Anglo-Indian'. Granville, *Hansard*, 250 (20 Feb. 1880), cols. 1089-90. However, Granville did not suggest that the government had knowledge of any *specific* danger of the attack.

³⁷ A Conservative pamphlet thus asked: 'Upon whose head lies his blood?' *Publication of the National Union, No. 117*, LSE Selected Pamphlets (1885), LSE Library. Gordon was prominent in Conservative propaganda, particularly at Primrose League meetings. See J.H. Robb, *The Primrose League 1883-1906* (New York, 1942), pp. 183-8.

in the 1878 invasion of Afghanistan, it appeared to Liberals that ‘Disraelian imperialism’ rested not only on a forward policy in Asia (and in southern Africa) but ‘on the un-English idea of “prestige”: the desire for military glory, new territory and Napoleon’s idea of universal domination.’³⁸ However, as we have seen, contemporaries (Liberals included) seem to have understood the word ‘prestige’ not only in the sense described by Parry but also in a more general way as a regard for national reputation, dignity and honour. Certainly, Conservatives seem to have been most enthusiastic in making prestige arguments about Afghanistan around the time of the war.³⁹ Yet leading Liberals do not seem to have contested these arguments. For example, one month after the Kabul attack, Sir William Harcourt complained in a speech at Southport that ‘we are always being called on to take vengeance for outrages that need never have occurred; to expend hundreds of lives and millions of money to repair disasters, which by the most ordinary prudence might be averted. (Applause).’⁴⁰ Harcourt *did not* argue that the power of Britain (in India or anywhere else) did not rely on its ability to punish ‘insults’ such as the murder of its envoys. In other words, he did not assert that seeking vengeance was unnecessary; merely that the attack on the British residency ‘need never have occurred’ (that is to say, an envoy should not have been sent to Kabul in the first place). Therefore, although Liberals regretted the consensus about the need for vengeance they did little to challenge it. Their pessimism on this score was precisely because feelings about prestige—understood in the broad way contemporaries seem to have understood it—were indeed English. A connection can be made here with the

³⁸ Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism*, p. 335.

³⁹ In the parliamentary session starting in early 1880, Lieutenant-Colonel Home-Drummond-Moray (Conservative MP for Perthshire) asserted that whatever politicians thought of the government’s policy (and of the Afghan war), they would acknowledge ‘that when an Envoy of Great Britain and his Staff has been cruelly and treacherously murdered, the only course that could possibly be adopted was that of vindicating the dignity of this country and dealing prompt justice for the crime that had been committed.’ *Hansard*, 250 (5 Feb. 1880), cols. 63-4.

⁴⁰ Harcourt at Southport, *Daily News*, 3 Oct. 1879, p. 6. Harcourt became home secretary in the Liberal administration of 1880-85.

decision to send the Abyssinian expedition in 1867: during the parliamentary debates Liberals might (as chapter IV highlighted) have contested the argument that an expedition was required in order to restore British prestige, but they did not do so. Parry's argument that Liberals viewed the notion of prestige as 'un-English' seems to require some qualification therefore.

Cavagnari's death may also have frustrated Liberal opposition to government policy because sheer excitement in a good story tended to suppress sober consideration of policy. The *Standard* reported breathlessly, and with evident pride, that Cavagnari and his small escort had maintained a 'heroic defence' against an attack by four thousand mutinous Afghans, killing over three hundred of them before being overwhelmed.⁴¹ A headline in the *Penny Illustrated Paper* identified what quickly became an essential contrast within the narrative: 'AFGHAN TREACHERY AND BRITISH BRAVERY'.⁴² The accuracy of information from Afghanistan was very uncertain, as the *Daily News* had acknowledged. Yet, like so many other newspapers, it nonetheless reported—with a conviction that belied the difficulties of obtaining accurate information—that the British had died, swords in hand, while charging out of their burning residency.⁴³ Very few Britons were in fact involved in the defence of the residency. The Britons seem to have been Cavagnari, a secretary (Jenkins), a doctor (Kelly) and Lieutenant Hamilton; accompanied by seventy-five Indian troops from the Corps of Guides.⁴⁴ A subsequent

⁴¹ *Standard*, 15 Sept. 1879, p. 5.

⁴² *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 20 Sept. 1879, p. 180.

⁴³ *Daily News*, 11 Sept. 1879, p. 5. Even the Radical *Reynolds's Newspaper* (which had condemned government Afghan policy and fiercely criticised both the prime minister (Beaconsfield) and the governor-general (Lytton)) conformed to this heroic presentation, although it added a comradely touch by writing that Cavagnari died 'like a brave man, fighting to the last with his escort and his friends.'

Reynolds's Newspaper, 14 Sept. 1879, p. 1.

⁴⁴ Robson, *The Second Afghan War*, p. 118.

military commission concluded that great acts of heroism had taken place.⁴⁵ But this was confirmation of something that had been assumed from the very outset. ‘Doubtless Major Cavagnari and his gallant companions...’ *The Times* wrote with confidence just two days after the bare news of the attack had reached Britain by telegram, ‘made a gallant defence and sold their lives dearly’.⁴⁶

The tone of newspaper coverage of the attack seems to have been consistent with the sort of adventure narratives that were becoming popular in Britain. In 1868 the *Standard* had assigned G.A. Henty to Sir Robert Napier’s Abyssinian expedition, and an edition of Henty’s despatches (*The March to Magdala*) appeared later that year.⁴⁷ By the mid-1880s there was a market for adventure stories celebrating the ‘pluck’ of British soldiers across the empire.⁴⁸ In September 1879, newspapers were in no doubt that the attack made for exciting copy. The first sentence of the *Illustrated London News*’s coverage of the event on 13 September was ‘Distressing news from Cabul!’⁴⁹ But the newspaper reports seem to have reflected the *excitement* of recent events rather than any ‘distress’ caused in distant Britain.⁵⁰ The adventure narrative was so marked in these reports that when Henty came to write about the attack, there was scarcely any need to vary the script: “Now, lads!” Major Cavagnari exclaimed, “let us rush out and die

⁴⁵ Robson, *The Second Afghan War*, p. 121.

⁴⁶ *Times*, 8 Sept. 1879, p. 5.

⁴⁷ Some of Henty’s reports for the *Standard* were copied by the weekly *Illustrated London News*. Henty also made several drawings in Abyssinia, which were engraved and reproduced. A.P. Newbolt, ‘Henty, George Alfred (1832-1902)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed. May 2006).

⁴⁸ Jonathan Parry cites as an example G.A. Henty’s *By sheer pluck* (1884), a celebration of the 1873 Ashanti campaign: Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism*, p. 344.

⁴⁹ *Illustrated London News*, 13 Sept. 1879, p. 230.

⁵⁰ The excitement also featured in broadsheets such as *The Times*, as for example in this short extract: ‘our Envoy and his escort massacred, the Ameer besieged in the Bala Hissar, his ordnance, stores, and magazines pillaged and destroyed, his troops in open mutiny, and a fanatical mob in possession of his capital...’ *Times*, 9 Sept. 1879, p. 8.

fighting hand to hand; better that than to be shot down defenceless here.”⁵¹

In all of the excitement it was difficult to recall that Cavagnari was in Kabul only because the government had departed from the policy pursued since 1842, by insisting on sending British envoys to Afghanistan. Similarly, the fact that Cavagnari’s fate was in one sense entirely unremarkable was glossed over. The vulnerability of Britons in Afghanistan had of course been one of the main reasons why governments had not sent them there. Lawrence and other Liberals had drawn attention to an obvious precedent demonstrating this vulnerability, by referring to the deaths in 1841 of Sir Alexander Burnes and Sir William McNaghten. This was a quite ‘remarkable repetition of history’, according to *The Times*.⁵² But in the days after the attack, the ‘repetition of history’ emphasised to contemporaries was the treachery of Afghans in killing British envoys, rather than the folly of sending those envoys to Afghanistan in the first place.⁵³

Implications

The celebratory reporting of the ‘heroic defence’ of the British residency in Kabul, together with the Liberals’ difficulties in sustaining their opposition to government policy, may at first glance appear as indicators of the cultural purchase of imperialism in Britain. The attack happened on the cusp of the period in which historians have identified an increase in imperial ‘propaganda’.⁵⁴ It is certainly possible to construe the

⁵¹ G.A. Henty, ‘For Name and Fame; A Tale of the Afghan War’, *Every Boy’s Annual*, XLIV [n.d. 1886?], pp. 375-6.

⁵² ‘It is a trite saying that history repeats itself, but it would be difficult to find a more striking illustration of its truth than is afforded by the attack on the British Embassy at Cabul. We have but to go back to the 2d of November, 1841, to find in the attack on Sir Alexander Burnes an occurrence almost identical with the assault on Sir Louis Cavagnari on the 3d instant.’ *Times*, 8 Sept. 1879, 8. See also *Daily News*, 9 Sept. 1879, p. 5.

⁵³ In 1879 it was remembered that the Afghan who had shot McNaghten in 1841 did so using a pistol which McNaghten had presented to him, as a gift, the day before: see e.g. *Daily News*, 9 Sept. 1879, p. 5.

⁵⁴ E.g. John MacKenzie’s influential *Propaganda and Empire* considers British public opinion in the

reporting of Cavagnari's death as a shrewd piece of imperial propaganda. The reports included several imperial strands. They suggested the 'treachery' of Afghans, thereby legitimising Britain's presence in Afghanistan (Cavagnari was the Amir's 'guest', a concept of particular importance in Islam, and his presence in Kabul was in accordance with the treaty of Gandamak); celebrated the 'pluck' of Britons (who were said to have inflicted vastly disproportionate losses on their attackers); and perpetuated an association between empire and heroism. Moreover, the press narratives cast the British in a flattering light as Christian underdogs in the face of a Muslim horde. Such reports even managed to depict Britain as the aggrieved party, by substituting a story of oppression (the 'treacherous massacre' once at Kabul), for one of domination (the military power that had taken Cavagnari to Kabul and imposed the terms of the treaty of Gandamak on the new Amir). The reports could also be construed as exploiting what John MacKenzie has termed the public's 'spectatorial fascination' with colonial warfare.⁵⁵

However, it is much easier to extract imperial content from newspaper reports than it is to measure how such reports may have been received.⁵⁶ It seems in the present case that although several imperial elements were present in the various reports, reconstructing the story in this way is a little misleading. In September 1879, the news as presented to contemporaries rarely seems to have had much coherence. The imperial strands in the narrative need to be set in the context of numerous other strands, some of which appear to have had meanings quite separate from empire. For example, there was a morbid fascination with the precise manner of Cavagnari's death, and great curiosity regarding

period from 1880 to 1960.

⁵⁵ MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, p. 6.

⁵⁶ This is a potential problem for all cultural history: Peter Mandler has urged historians to identify not only the discourse but to whom it belongs. P. Mandler, 'The Problem with Cultural History', *Cultural and Social History*, 1 (2004), 96-7.

what happened to his body afterwards. Even in the normally sober *Daily News*, this was a subject of particular interest. Initial reports stated that ‘the Envoy was knifed, and the bodies of the men were horribly mutilated.’⁵⁷ Five days later, an ‘eye-witness’ reported that Cavagnari had been ‘killed about one o’clock in the day by a clean cut between the eyes from one of those heavy triangular-shaped Kabuli knives which every man carries in Afghanistan. The knife must have penetrated the brain’.⁵⁸ A later report however suggested that Cavagnari had received a bullet wound in his forehead.⁵⁹ When General Roberts and his staff visited the scene of the attack one month later, they discovered ‘a pile of charred logs’. This was a sinister development, as it was thought to mark the spot where Cavagnari’s body had been burned. The *Daily News* solemnly informed its readers that excavations were to be made.⁶⁰ It would have been surprising if this had proved a worthwhile dig, given widespread reports that Cavagnari’s head (and his shoulders, possibly) had been taken from the British residency, and his body dragged through the streets of Kabul.⁶¹ These lurid reports appear to have had a meaning quite independent of empire; presumably as an indulgence for Victorians with morbid proclivities. Such people cropped up in some unlikely guises. One Reverend C. Swinnerton in 1880 published an account of the fighting at Futtehabad. Swinnerton appears to have been extremely proud of his title: ‘chaplain in the Field with the First Division, Peshawur Valley Field Force’, if the frequency with which he used it is any guide. Reverend Swinnerton displays a surprising (and not obviously theological) interest in the relative efficacy of the cut or the thrust as a means of penetrating the thick leather Afghan *postheens* ‘which clothed the enemy’. He seemed glad to have participated in, and melancholy when he reached the end of, ‘the most dashing affair of

⁵⁷ *Daily News*, 15 Sept. 1879, p. 4.

⁵⁸ *Daily News*, 20 Oct. 1879, p. 5.

⁵⁹ *Daily News*, 1 Dec. 1879, p. 3.

⁶⁰ *Daily News*, 15 Oct. 1879, p. 4.

⁶¹ *Daily News*, 27 Oct. 1879, p. 8.

the Khyber campaign.⁶²

How might contemporaries have reacted to the reports of the attack on the British residency and Cavagnari's death? It seems reasonable to suppose that British imperial administrators and army officers probably received this news in pre-eminently imperial terms. The attack was a stark example of what could happen to the inferior British (numerically speaking, of course) when collaboration with native peoples broke down. Readers of *The Times* may have received the news in this light, on account of their participation in empire. *The Times* approached Indian affairs on the basis that there were 'few families in this country without one member in the East'.⁶³ This statement is extremely misleading; what the newspaper presumably meant was that few families who read *The Times* were not connected in some way with 'the East'. That would have been a much more accurate statement. For the British upper- and upper-middle-classes, India offered employment in the army or civil administration that was financially rewarding and socially prestigious.⁶⁴

However, most contemporaries may not have received the news of the attack in pre-eminently imperial terms. Jonathan Rose, having scrutinised working-class memoirs for evidence of how ideas were received by ordinary Britons, has argued that men lapped up imperial fiction by Henty not because they identified with empire, but for educational value and sheer fun.⁶⁵ Moreover, Rose found that the 'intense localism' of the working-classes made it difficult for them to identify with many imperial

⁶² C. Swinnerton, *The Afghan War* (London, 1880), pp. 60, 64.

⁶³ *Times*, 3 Jan. 1878, p. 6.

⁶⁴ P.J. Marshall, 'Imperial Britain' in P.J. Marshall (ed.), *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 330. Between 1874 and 1914, 27% of matriculates from Balliol college, Oxford, went on to serve in the empire: Marshall, 'The elusive history of imperial Britain', 9.

⁶⁵ This explains Henty's popularity across the political left: J. Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (London, 2010), pp. 332, 348.

experiences. The same workers who cheered when the monarch visited Bolton were indifferent regarding royal visits to Delhi. Thus if rumours of war with the Zulus reached them, it was ‘too distant’ to disturb sleep or excite fear.⁶⁶ Most ordinary Britons may therefore have received reports of the attack on the British residency primarily as an entertainment. As the *Graphic* observed a few days after news of Cavagnari’s death reached Britain: ‘the *ennui* of the dull season has given place to the most intense excitement throughout the country; the terrible outrage, and the still more terrible consequences which are likely to result from it, being the absorbing topics of conversation.’⁶⁷

An imperial mayfly

In his defence of the British residency, Cavagnari was reported to have displayed many of the characteristics (such as gallantry, courage and phlegm) present in men who subsequently became imperial icons. For a moment it seemed that Cavagnari might be endowed with some sort of enduring heroic status. When politicians returned to Westminster in February 1880, some of them were quick to praise Cavagnari’s exploits. Sir Stafford Northcote suggested that ‘no day in the history of the Indian Empire of the Queen will shine more brightly, as far as the gallantry of her servants is concerned, than that on which her Envoy at Cabul and his fellows fell fighting in defence of the

⁶⁶ Rose concludes that few within the British working-classes were imperialists. Many were only vaguely aware that the empire existed; most of them would have struggled to name a couple of colonies. Most working-class memoirs do not mention the empire, and those that do usually viewed it sceptically. See Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, pp. 332-352. Bernard Porter has also argued that there is very little evidence from working-class memoirs to suggest that empire formed a part of national identity. Middle-class accounts, emphasising the ignorance of the working-classes about empire, pointed the other way. Porter also argued that empire did not ‘impinge’ through the formal teaching the majority of the population received in their schools, because the main theme of history books in ‘middling’ schools was liberty. Porter, ‘Empire and British National Identity’, pp. 262-3.

⁶⁷ *Graphic*, 13 Sept. 1879, p. 246.

Embassy.⁶⁸ Some leading Liberals also publicly acknowledged Cavagnari's perceived heroism. Earl Granville for example referred in the House of Lords to 'that gallant hero, Sir Louis Cavagnari'.⁶⁹

However, Cavagnari seems to have receded from public prominence with remarkable haste. One can only be tentative in suggesting why he was not the object of what Geoffrey Cubitt has termed 'collective emotional investment'. It is possible that suspicions within the army about his 'imperious' character became known more widely. Writing soon after the treaty of Gandamak, General Sir Neville Chamberlain described Cavagnari as 'inclined to be hasty and imperious... If he were left at Cabul as our agent, I should fear his not keeping us out of difficulties.'⁷⁰ Military historians have been no kinder, depicting Cavagnari as 'a man of rash and restless disposition and overbearing temper, consumed by the thirst for personal distinction' who exercised a 'pernicious' influence over the governor-general, Lord Lytton.⁷¹ The 'gallant major' therefore sounds as if he may have conformed to the metropolitan characterisation of British officers in India as restless, belligerent, and ambitious (described in chapter V). A pleasant character was not of course a prerequisite for 'lionisation', so this seems insufficient, in itself, to explain why interest in Cavagnari was ephemeral. Any enduring commemoration of his exploits may have been discouraged by a perception that Cavagnari was 'foreign'. He had been born in France to an Italian father. The inclusion of 'Napoleon' in his name probably didn't help, given that British national identity may

⁶⁸ Northcote, *Hansard*, 250 (5 Feb. 1880), col. 109.

⁶⁹ Granville, *Hansard*, 250 (20 Feb. 1880), col. 1089.

⁷⁰ Chamberlain was one of Cavagnari's superior officers. G.W. Forrest, *Life of Field-Marshal Sir Neville Chamberlain* (London, 1909), p. 494.

⁷¹ H.B. Hanna, *The Second Afghan War 1878-80* (III vols., 1899-1910), vol. I, pp. 119-20. More recently, Brian Robson offered a similar assessment of Cavagnari. 'Of his ability, charm and knowledge of the frontier there could be no doubt. But he was also self-confident to the point of arrogance, bold to the point of rashness and intensely ambitious.' Robson, *The Second Afghan War*, p. 118.

to some extent have been defined against France.⁷² This hypothesis also seems unsatisfactory in itself, for Cavagnari was presented as essentially English. After all, what could have been more phlegmatically English than his cool assertion—when told by the Amir that his life was in danger—that, should he die, there were many more to replace him?⁷³ Cavagnari was not thought to be particularly religious and this may be more important to understanding his ‘after-life’. John Morley (Gladstone’s biographer and Liberal cabinet colleague) had little doubt that this was why Cavagnari’s death stirred the public imagination so little in comparison with the fate of General Gordon.⁷⁴ Cavagnari’s relatively low rank may also have been a factor. Perhaps there were simply more exciting things to think about after Cavagnari’s death, such as the progress of the ‘avenging army’ towards Kabul. Or perhaps Cavagnari disappeared from public prominence so quickly because there was something transient about much imperialism in late nineteenth century Britain.⁷⁵

* * *

It seems therefore that the political repercussions of the attack on the British residency in Kabul were not as ‘extensive and manifold’ as Beaconsfield had feared. The immediate political consequence of the ‘treacherous massacre’ was a clamour to avenge Cavagnari’s death. Vengeance was framed as a patriotic necessity on grounds of

⁷² Linda Colley has argued that British national identity was defined against a real or imaginary ‘other’: against Catholic France (in particular during a series of wars from 1689 to Napoleon’s defeat in 1815 between predominantly Protestant Britain and Catholic France) and against a predominantly non-Christian, non-white colonial empire. L. Colley, ‘Britishness and Otherness: An Argument’, *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (1992), 309-329.

⁷³ *Daily News*, 10 Sept. 1879, p. 4.

⁷⁴ Morley thought that although his faith was ‘eccentric’ General Gordon was nonetheless able to seize the public imagination on its ‘higher side’. Morley, *Life of Gladstone*, vol. III, pp. 151-2.

⁷⁵ Peter Marshall has argued that the ‘showy high imperialism of the late nineteenth century can be demonstrated to have been superficial and ephemeral in its impact.’ Marshall, ‘The elusive history of imperial Britain’, 10.

national honour, dignity and prestige. This consensus for vengeance, together with sheer excitement in a good story, seems to have been strangely effective in frustrating Liberal opposition to government policy. This political consequence perfectly illustrates one of Lawrence's objections to sending British officers into the wilds of Afghanistan. As J.W.S. Wyllie had written many years earlier in the *Fortnightly Review*, Lawrence's stance on envoys was a natural product of his understanding that 'white faces, the Christian faith, and her Majesty's uniform, are to the unregulated patriotism and burning fanaticism of Central Asiatics what a red rag is to a bull.' Moreover, Lawrence recognised that 'the person of a British officer embodies so large an emanation of the Government's prestige, that the maintenance or vindication of his dignity and safety may, at any moment, create necessity for war, costly as that of Abyssinia and far more perilous.'⁷⁶ That is to say, once a British officer was sent to Kabul, it was likely not merely that he would be killed but that the government would have to avenge the 'insult' and 'exact redress'. Historians should nonetheless be cautious before concluding that either the consensus about the need for vengeance, or the celebratory newspaper reporting of the 'heroic defence' of the doomed residency, necessarily implies the strength of imperialism in British culture at this time. The morbid interest in exactly how Cavagnari had been killed, and what happened to his body afterwards, demonstrates that this was not just an imperial story. Moreover, interest in Cavagnari seems to have been fleeting. Some historians have spoken of the 'theatre' of empire. In that sense the curtain fell with almost indecent haste on Sir Louis Cavagnari, KCB, CSI. The 'gallant major' seems to have been an imperial mayfly.

⁷⁶ Wyllie, 'Mischievous activity', fn. 1, 282.

Conclusion

The formulation of Afghan policy, 1864-69

Responsibility for the government of India had in 1858 been transferred from the East India Company to the crown. Sir John Lawrence was therefore, as governor-general of India from 1864 to 1869, nominally under orders from a minister responsible to parliament. However, four secretaries of state in succession insisted that Lawrence should have considerable latitude for deciding what British policy in Afghanistan should be. This was partly because these ‘policy-makers’ were impressed with Lawrence’s knowledge of India and Afghanistan, as well as his reputation for strength. The disparity in respective knowledge between the secretaries of state and Lawrence was considerable: only Sir Charles Wood had significant previous experience of Indian administration. Yet even in Wood’s case, his reverence for Lawrence is clearly discernible. In correspondence with Lord Elgin, Wood referred to Lawrence as the ‘iron man’ whose opinion on frontier questions was so authoritative because he knew ‘the country & the people so well’.¹

The secretaries of state for India seem to have absorbed some of the contemporary reverence for Lawrence’s achievements during the Indian Mutiny. The account presented to and apparently received by many Britons was that Lawrence’s ‘vigour’ in the crisis of 1857-58 had secured first the Punjab and then Britain’s entire empire in India. His soubriquet—the ‘saviour of India’—neatly captured contemporary perceptions of Lawrence’s instrumentality in preserving British *imperium*. Lawrence’s post-Mutiny standing is also illustrated, as chapter I showed, by the array of official and

¹ Wood to Elgin, 26 June 1862 (1) & 16 Nov. 1863, Elgin Mss/7, f227 & /8, f263.

private honours conferred on him, as well as by public discussion concerning his claims to a peerage.

The authority exercised by Lawrence on Afghan policy was also a consequence of political events in Britain. The question of franchise reform was particularly significant in this regard, because it led to dissolutions and thus general elections (as well as, in Viscount Cranborne's case, his resignation). The tenure of ministers in this period was consequently rather precarious, and in some cases exceptionally short. Earl de Grey and Viscount Cranborne were particularly fleeting, surviving at the India Office for only five and eight months respectively. Such transience inevitably made it difficult for ministers to develop their views on complex questions of Indian foreign policy. Franchise reform, acting in concert with other domestic questions including Gladstone's Irish church disestablishment bill, also served to distract the attentions of ministers from their official responsibilities. The causal links between foreign policy and domestic events have been much debated by historians. Recent research has written persuasively about the 'constant interaction', or 'dynamic interaction', between British foreign policy and domestic politics.² Lawrence's private correspondence with his secretaries of state, a rich but hitherto neglected resource, includes compelling evidence of this 'interaction' at work. As Chapter II revealed, on the important foreign policy question of reviving the Indian Navy, Sir Stafford Northcote told Lawrence that he was unlikely to be able to carry such a measure because of domestic political events in Britain. 'We shall deal meagrely and tentatively, instead of boldly, with such questions as an Indian Navy...' Northcote admitted in August 1868, 'because a great battle is being fought over the Irish

² Respectively the arguments of Thomas Otte and Paul Readman: Otte, 'The Politics of Foreign Policy', 385-6; Readman, 'Patriotism and the Politics of Foreign Policy', pp. 260, 269-70.

Church.’³ Northcote also explicitly acknowledged, in October 1868, that his ‘electioneering distracts me sadly from Indian work.’⁴ It seems clear therefore that frequent ministerial changes and domestic political events contributed to the devolution of responsibility for Afghan policy to Sir John Lawrence.

The significance of this devolution of authority is enhanced because it occurred at a critical juncture in Anglo-Afghan relations. The combination of civil war in Afghanistan and Russian military expansion in central Asia revived an old British nightmare: that a foreign power would establish its influence in Afghanistan. This was a matter of significant strategic concern to Britain, because policy-makers perceived India’s north-west frontier as its most vulnerable border. The devolution of power from the imperial metropolis to its periphery illustrates that individuals could exercise authority outside constitutional frameworks. Influential scholarship on the powers exerted by imperial administrators has tended to concentrate on headstrong governors, who acquired new territory by exploiting slow communications with the metropolis or by disobeying instructions.⁵ Lawrence did neither. The authority for determining and developing British policy in Afghanistan was voluntarily surrendered to him. This demonstrates that the rules regarding the exercise of decision-making authority for Indian foreign policy were subject to both domestic circumstances in Britain and personalities (or more precisely, assessments of personality).

³ Northcote to Lawrence, 13 Aug. 1868, Lawrence Mss/29, no. 42.

⁴ Northcote to Lawrence, 14 Oct. 1868, Lawrence Mss/29, no. 49. See also Northcote to Lawrence, 17 Sept. 1868, Lawrence Mss/29, no. 45.

⁵ For the capacity of governors to exploit slow communications, see Galbraith, ‘The “Turbulent Frontier” as a factor in British expansion’, 151-3. For ‘disobedient’ governors, see Cowling, ‘Lytton, the Cabinet, and the Russians, August to November 1878’, 59-79.

Masterly inactivity

Contrary to the assertions of some historians, it has been argued that Lawrence's 'masterly inactivity' was not a reaction to the first Afghan war, when his brother was taken captive. Lawrence's Afghan policy has instead been explained in the context of his pragmatism, his administrative priorities in India, and his assessment that the greatest threat to the security of British India came from within its frontiers. Lawrence's stated ambitions as governor-general were to consolidate British power and to improve the 'condition of the people'. In pursuit of these objectives—which he thought were interdependent—Lawrence was determined to spend his resources on projects *within* India that would provide tangible benefits to the governed, for he believed that the Indian peasant ultimately provided the most effective security for British rule. Fiscal considerations were therefore paramount. Lawrence was adamant that light taxation was the 'panacea' for foreign rule in India; so much so that he preferred recurrent Indian government deficits and reductions in British troop numbers to the alternative of increasing taxation. It was these pragmatic, administrative and fiscal considerations that explain Lawrence's 'masterly inactivity'. These considerations are explicit in his correspondence with the secretaries of state. In October 1866 Lawrence wrote plainly and forcefully to Viscount Cranborne, explaining his confidence that existential threats in the form of Russian expansion were a chimera: 'believe me, our dangers & perils lie in India and not from beyond the border. All our money all our resources are wanted in India.' In the same letter, Lawrence went on to explain that in order for Britain to consolidate its hold on India it must 'pay the employees, and in particular the native part of them, better than we now do, and all this without adding materially to taxation. How is this to be done, if we go extending our occupation beyond the Frontier? We have

already in my mind gone too far.’⁶

Comparisons with his colleagues in the government of India show that Lawrence’s approach was consistent with the governing priorities of the ‘official mind’ in India. It is possible to make these comparisons because of an intervention by Sir Henry Rawlinson in the summer of 1868, when he sent a memorandum on the ‘Central Asian Question’ to the India Office. The memorandum was then forwarded to the government of India, where Lawrence and his colleagues rejected Rawlinson’s proposals in a voluminous series of minutes and memoranda. As chapter III explained, an overwhelming majority of civilian and military officials in India shared Lawrence’s assessment that adopting a more active policy in Afghanistan would come at a great cost. Quite simply, money expended against a remote Russian threat could not be used on the administrative projects in India that these officials believed would provide more effective security for British rule. The juxtaposition of Rawlinson’s proposals with the careful, sober analysis of these Indian officials is illuminating, for it reveals just how unconstrained Rawlinson was by the sorts of pragmatic, administrative and fiscal considerations that guided government of India officials.

Prestige

This dissertation has argued that prestige was an important consideration in British foreign policy decisions affecting Abyssinia, Afghanistan and India in the period 1864-79. In the case of Abyssinia, it is explicit in the arguments made by government ministers and other politicians that the decision to launch the expedition of 1867-68 was motivated, justified and understood in large part as a question of maintaining the

⁶ Lawrence to Cranborne, 4 Oct. 1866, Lawrence Mss/31, no. 39 (emphasis in original).

prestige that was considered essential to the control of India. The parliamentary speech of Lord Stanley is particularly striking in this regard. Stanley was not speaking from the fringes of government, for he was the foreign secretary. He argued that the prestige-driven security of India made the Abyssinian expedition imperative: the government had ‘to consider opinion in India’ because Britain’s control of India relied upon ‘what is vaguely called prestige.’⁷ Stanley explained to the Commons that Britain controlled India not exclusively by tangible force in the form of troops, but by an *idea*: that British power ultimately could not be resisted. It was therefore essential for Britain’s position in India, Lord Stanley insisted, that ‘whatever it may cost we cannot allow that idea to be dispelled; we cannot accept an insult from any uncivilized tribe, and merely say we are very sorry, but it is out of our power to punish it.’⁸

Considerations about prestige therefore influenced policy-makers at the time of the Abyssinian expedition. However, the case of Abyssinia should not be seen as exceptional in this sense. The research also highlighted the importance of prestige around the time of Britain’s 1878 invasion of Afghanistan. Government ministers did not always speak frankly on questions of prestige: thus Sir Stafford Northcote reassured parliament (two weeks after Britain’s invasion of Afghanistan) that the government was not motivated by ‘ambition, or prestige, or covetousness, or anything of that kind.’⁹ However, as chapter VII argued, Northcote made the government’s case for war on the basis of prestige. He asserted that Britain’s prestige had been damaged by the Amir’s refusal, a few weeks earlier, to allow General Chamberlain’s mission to cross the Afghan border. Accordingly, Northcote explained that Britain was obliged to ‘take steps

⁷ Lord Stanley, *Hansard*, 190 (26 Nov. 1867), cols. 211-2.

⁸ Lord Stanley, *Hansard*, 190 (26 Nov. 1867), cols. 211-2.

⁹ Sir Stafford Northcote, *Hansard*, (243) 5 Dec. 1878, cols. 126-7.

to vindicate our honour, which is essential as part of our strength in India'.¹⁰ Contemporary assumptions and perceptions about the importance of prestige also help to explain the clamour to avenge Cavagnari's death in September 1879, as chapter VIII highlighted.

Official perceptions about prestige also constrained particular policy decisions. Shortly after the Abyssinian expedition, Lawrence publicly articulated his opposition to sending British officers to Afghanistan. 'If we send agents into remote countries where the government is rude, and the people bigoted and lawless,' Lawrence told his Calcutta audience, 'we subject them to ill-treatment and insult, which we must be prepared to punish by force of arms.'¹¹ Lawrence certainly had other reasons for not sending officers across the frontier—as a practical matter, he thought that Indian Muslims would secure better intelligence—but his concern regarding the driving-force of prestige was clear. For Abyssinia proved what Lawrence feared: that prestige-driven responses to the 'insult' of envoys could prompt massive, protracted and expensive military intervention. In other words, Lawrence understood that if British officers were sent to Afghanistan they were likely to come to harm, and that Britain would—because of official and popular views about prestige—have to punish this by military force. Lawrence therefore saw that the greatest hazard in sending officers to Afghanistan was not the likelihood that they would die, but that their deaths would provoke an expedition of vengeance that would divert Britain's imperial project in India. In this way, prestige acted to constrain policy-makers.

Historians, although at times alighting on prestige, have for the most part been content

¹⁰ Sir Stafford Northcote, *Hansard*, (243) 5 Dec. 1878, cols. 126-9.

¹¹ Farewell speech of Sir John Lawrence, reproduced in [Malleon], 'Sir John Lawrence', 720.

to view it merely as one of several contexts in which British foreign policy decisions were made. Yet it is apparent from the public statements of ministers before the invasions of Abyssinia (1867) and Afghanistan (1878), as well as from press commentary in each case, that prestige could provide far more than merely the contextual background to policy-making. It is therefore worth speculating why prestige has been neglected in the existing scholarship. One possible explanation is simply that government ministers rarely referred explicitly to prestige in their correspondence and speeches. That would be consistent with one of the findings presented in chapter IV: that some politicians were reluctant to talk about prestige, in part because of its etymology. If this is the case, then the Abyssinian expedition's historiographical neglect is unfortunate, for the parliamentary debates about the decision to invade offer useful evidence of the importance contemporaries ascribed to prestige, especially in terms of the control of India. The Abyssinian expedition's scholarly neglect is exemplified by the fact that David Steele omits it entirely in his entry for Lord Stanley in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.¹² The same publication's entry for the secretary of state for India, Sir Stafford Northcote, is scarcely less reticent.¹³ These are surprising omissions, because Stanley and Northcote were the ministers with primary responsibility for an undertaking of vast military and logistical scale, considerable risk, and incredible expense.

One can only be tentative, but historians may also have neglected the importance of prestige on account of the term's inherent vagueness. For example, Jonathan Parry has

¹² D. Steele, 'Stanley, Edward Henry, fifteenth earl of Derby (1826-1893)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed. Jan 2008).

¹³ The reader of Northcote's biography learns merely that he 'was an advocate of the Abyssinian expedition, on which he spoke on 27 November 1867, but could not convince Lord Lawrence, the governor-general, that India ought to pay for its contingent.' W.D. Rubinstein, 'Northcote, Stafford Henry, first earl of Iddesleigh (1818-1887)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed. May 2009).

asserted that Benjamin Disraeli spoke of Britain's empire in a vague sense of global might, or prestige.¹⁴ The inherent vagueness of the term makes it difficult to go beyond such general assertions and suggest how prestige affected particular policy decisions. Many historians may also have neglected prestige because they have taken too narrow an approach to terminology. For example, the parliamentary vote of thanks to Sir Robert Napier following his success at Magdala made no reference at all to the word prestige. Instead it referred to 'the Vindication of the Honour of the Country.'¹⁵ It seems however that this was merely an alternative formulation, one perhaps more palatable for etymological reasons. As chapter IV argued, contemporaries understood the term 'prestige' in a broad sense, encompassing a regard for national 'reputation', 'honour', 'dignity' and the 'impression of strength'. Historians should surely be prepared to consider the concept of prestige in a similarly broad sense. This is an approach at least one historian has adopted in researching a later period of British (and German) history. Jan R ger's study of Anglo-German naval rivalry views the dreadnought fleets of both powers as 'floating platforms for the demonstration of sea power'. R ger found that contemporary discussion of fleet reviews concentrated on several concepts clearly related to prestige in its broader sense; for these 'displays', or 'demonstrations', of naval strength were designed to 'impress' the public at home and abroad. R ger thus speaks of 'the performance of power', describing naval displays as occasions at which 'an image of power could be created.' Admirals were accordingly interested in the 'image' and 'impression' that the fleet would make at reviews.¹⁶ R ger's approach provides a

¹⁴ J.P. Parry, 'Disraeli and England', *Historical Journal*, 43 (2000), 718, 725. See also: J. Parry, 'Disraeli, Benjamin, earl of Beaconsfield (1804-1881)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online ed. May 2011). Parry writes in the *Oxford Dictionary* entry that when Disraeli talked of empire, 'he meant the historic and symbolic greatness of England, exemplified by its power in Europe and its global prestige.'

¹⁵ *Hansard*, 193 (2 July 1868), col. 476.

¹⁶ J. R ger, *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 10, 203-8.

model for examining the importance of prestige in this broader sense, encompassing related concepts such as ‘image’, ‘impression’ and ‘demonstration’. It is submitted that further research on the importance of prestige to British foreign policy and British imperialism—especially but not exclusively in India—would be worthwhile.

Anglo-Indian militarism

During Lawrence’s tenure as governor-general many Britons seem to have regarded army officers in India with suspicion, and Anglo-India as fertile soil for militarism. The thesis based this argument on commentary in the metropolitan press, opinions expressed in the correspondence of officials, and on the statements of army officers themselves. In terms of press opinion, newspapers such as *The Times* and the *Daily News* depicted British army officers in India as restless, bellicose and ‘ambitious’ for promotion and honours. *The Times* complained that army officers would use Russian expansion as a pretext for initiating military advances that appealed to them on grounds of self-interest. Seen in this way, proposals for interference in Afghanistan were understood in the metropolitan press not as strategic responses to Russian advances in central Asia, but as a corollary of the belligerence of British officers in India. In other words, Lawrence’s foreign policy critics were not actually concerned about Russian progress, but were simply determined to secure expansion on the Indian frontier that would produce opportunities for combat, promotion, prize money and socially prestigious honours. An editorial published in *The Times* in December 1867 explained that Lawrence’s ‘masterly inactivity’ would inevitably be criticised by military opinion in India, because ‘the real influence at work is not the fear of Russia, but the desire of military employment. Our Indian armies pine for war, and the prospects for war are upon the whole most alluring

upon the north-western frontier.’¹⁷ Moreover, as the British community in India was a ‘purely military society’, there was no difference between ‘public opinion’ and military opinion in Anglo-India.¹⁸ This was not merely a perception within the Liberal press: as chapter V highlighted, Conservative papers also recognised that the ambition of frontier officers might lead Britain into another Afghan war.

Nor were these perceptions restricted to the press. The correspondence of officials ascribed similar motivations to those who bridled at the policy of frontier restraint. Officials also worried about the independent power of the military authorities in India, especially the commander-in-chief. The Earl of Elgin was explicit about his suspicions in his letters to the secretary of state, Sir Charles Wood. Elgin had ‘no doubt’ that Sir Bartle Frere and ‘a good many of his friends on the frontier’ found British policy a little ‘slow’. Elgin was clear why Frere *et al.* regretted the lack of more active measures: by pursuing a policy of restraint the government was denying frontier officers opportunities for ‘distinctions, and perhaps even Military Rewards’.¹⁹ Men whose experience of Indian administration came from the metropolis shared Elgin’s cynicism. For example, Grant Duff (parliamentary under-secretary of state for India, 1868-74) complained that the determination among British officers to obtain the knighthood of the Bath had reached frenzied proportions. Grant Duff thought that this ‘K.C.B. mania’, which ‘raged along the Indian frontier line’, helped explain why Lawrence’s Afghan policy was criticised by army officers.²⁰ Some senior military commanders were themselves frustrated by the belligerence of those calling for British intervention in Afghanistan. Sir William Mansfield, commander-in-chief in India, in his official response to

¹⁷ *Times*, 18 Dec. 1867, p. 8.

¹⁸ *Times*, 8 Sept. 1863, p. 6 & 2 Jan. 1868, p. 6.

¹⁹ Elgin to Wood, 21 May 1863, Elgin Mss/5, f152.

²⁰ *Hansard*, 203 (5 Aug. 1870), col. 1620.

Rawlinson's memorandum on the 'Central Asian Question' in December 1868, deprecated the activities of those who were 'constantly striving to excite the military spirit in England and India against Russia.'²¹

Anne Summers's argument that militarism in Britain flourished only from the end of the nineteenth century has proved influential.²² If this argument is correct, then militarism in Britain itself seems to have had a much earlier antecedent in the wider British world. For it seems clear that during Lawrence's tenure as governor-general militarism may have flourished—and was certainly perceived by many Britons to flourish—in the British world (specifically, in India) long before the various patriotic leagues and 'shock' of Boer war reverses that are thought to have heralded the arrival of militarism in Britain itself.

Although any argument about motivation must include an element of speculation (and of course motives are not causes) the consonance between perceptions in the metropolitan press and the assessments of ministers and imperial governors in India is striking. The breadth and strength of suspicions about the motivations of Anglo-Indian officers suggests that further research would be worthwhile. The key question is whether there was a causal relationship between officers' ambitions (for promotion, prize money and honours) and territorial expansion. Schumpeter's argument about the sociological causes of imperial expansion may provide a model for such inquiry, although in the British case a 'caste' of upper-middle- and upper-class military officers

²¹ Minute by W.R. Mansfield (24 Dec. 1868), *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 14, enclosure 8, pp. 75-6.

²² Summers, 'Militarism in Britain', 111, 115.

might be substituted for Schumpeter's class of aristocrats.²³

Press influences on British policy in Afghanistan

Lawrence feared that repeated press criticism, in Britain, would inevitably condemn his Afghan policy to modification. Having reached this pessimistic conclusion, he nonetheless remained resolute on what he considered the most important policy decision; therefore no British envoys or troops crossed the frontier into Afghanistan. Lawrence however made concessions to his press critics by acquiescing in the construction of new railway lines to the north-west frontier and by providing material assistance to Amir Sher Ali Khan. His correspondence is explicit that the former decision was made in the hope that it would check public 'agitation' that could otherwise have led to more active measures in Afghanistan. It seems very likely that the latter decision was made in the same hope. For both decisions were clearly preferable, in Lawrence's mind, to 'plunging into Afghanistan'. Lawrence was confident, as he told the secretary of state, that a Russian advance on India in his lifetime was 'a perfect delusion'. However, Lawrence also thought that if constructing the new railway line would 'quiet men's minds and put a stop to an agitation which may lead to some foolish movement forward' then it would be a price worth paying.²⁴ In a subsequent letter, Lawrence reported that he was prepared to accept 'whatever' the secretary of state might suggest regarding the proposed Lahore-Peshawar line. 'Anything', he told Northcote, 'is better than plunging into Afghanistan.'²⁵ It is ironic that the man in India, to whom so much discretion had been given by the secretaries of state in London, should ultimately have allowed criticism in Britain to influence him in the exercise of

²³ Bernard Porter has argued that the imperial classes were remarkably cohesive: 'almost a caste within a class'. Imperial work ran in families, with every male member of some families becoming colonial officers. Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, p. 41.

²⁴ Lawrence to Northcote, 23 Oct. 1867, Lawrence Mss/32B, no. 60.

²⁵ Lawrence to Northcote, 2 Jan. 1868, Lawrence Mss/33, no. 2.

that discretion in India.

Lawrence's sensitivity to criticism of his Afghan policy should not be seen as exceptional, for the secretary of state and government of India officials to some extent shared his anxieties. Sir Stafford Northcote made the same connection between public opinion and policy-making, believing that it would 'strengthen the hands of the abstention party' if it adopted measures (such as constructing the Lahore-Peshawar railway line) that would strengthen the north-west frontier.²⁶ Therefore, the calculations of the governor-general in India and ministers in London explicitly took account of public pressure. In India, Lawrence's government colleagues regretted that it was not difficult for press critics to advocate measures that could 'delude or influence the public.' These officials deprecated what they termed 'the constant allusions made in the newspapers' to Russian expansion in central Asia, and the difficulty of preventing 'unnecessary alarms'.²⁷

This dissertation has therefore challenged the historiographical contention that British officials exhibited a 'rational detachment' from external influences such as press opinion.²⁸ The behaviour of Lawrence in particular, but also his government colleagues, is also somewhat at odds with Paul Kennedy's more subtle argument about the influence of press opinion on British external policy. Kennedy argued that officials needed to worry only when normally supportive newspapers criticised particular policy

²⁶ Northcote to Lawrence, 17 Nov. 1867, Lawrence Mss/28, no. 49.

²⁷ Government of India to secretary of state for India, 4 Jan. 1869, *Afghanistan Correspondence*, no. 14, p. 45.

²⁸ As chapter VI discussed, Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, in their account of the motives of Victorian expansion in Africa, described policy-makers making rational decisions, based primarily on strategic factors, with an aristocratic detachment from outside influences. Similarly, in Thomas Otte's recent account of the Foreign Office 'mind', press and public opinion are almost entirely absent. Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, pp. 151-2; Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind*, p. 73.

decisions.²⁹ However, that was certainly not the approach followed by Lawrence and his government colleagues. Had they followed the pattern of behaviour described by Kennedy, officials would have been reassured by coverage in the *Daily News*, the *Manchester Guardian* and especially *The Times*. That they were not suggests that some qualification is needed to Kennedy's argument; for official perceptions of press and public opinion manifestly *did* influence particular policy decisions, at least relating to Afghan policy in the period 1864-69.

The domestic impact of British imperialism

Lord Beaconsfield feared that the September 1879 attack on the British residency in Kabul, during which the British envoy and his military escort were killed, would have profound political repercussions in Britain. However, chapter VIII showed that the immediate political consequence of the attack was a clamour to avenge Cavagnari's death. Vengeance was framed as a patriotic necessity on grounds of national honour, dignity and prestige. This consensus about the need for vengeance, together with sheer excitement in a good story, seems to have been effective in frustrating Liberal opposition to government policy. This metropolitan reaction (in this sense reminiscent of press reaction to the Abyssinian captives over a decade before) illustrates one of Lawrence's principal objections to sending British officers into Afghanistan: it was likely not merely that such officers would be killed but that the government would have to avenge what contemporaries termed the 'insult' by 'exacting redress'.

However, chapter VIII also argued that historians should pause before concluding that either the consensus for vengeance, or the celebratory newspaper reporting of the

²⁹ Kennedy, *Background Influences on British External Policy*, p. 56.

‘heroic defence’ of the residency, implies the existence of a strong culture of imperialism in Britain. Rather, the morbid interest in exactly how Cavagnari had been killed (and what happened to his dismembered body afterwards) demonstrates that the imperial strand was but one in a somewhat jumbled narrative. Moreover, interest in Cavagnari seems to have been fleeting.

This dissertation has also argued that Lawrence’s return to public prominence in 1878, as a leading critic of the Conservative government’s Afghan policy, should not be seen as a mere footnote to a life largely expended in India. Lawrence’s influence on parliamentary Liberals and on the contours of public discussion about Afghanistan seems to have been considerable. His significance has however been neglected in the existing scholarship about Liberal opposition to the second Afghan war, in which Gladstone’s rhetoric about the ‘rights of the savage’ has assumed a central importance. The historiographical allure of Gladstone’s Midlothian campaigns is understandable, but Lawrence’s alternative humanitarian critique of government policy was more representative of the approach of many Liberals to war in Afghanistan. Lord Granville was quick to understand what he termed Lawrence’s ‘utility’ for the Liberal party. As chapter VII highlighted, Lawrence’s ‘utility’ was in fact manifold: as the ‘saviour of India’ he had an enduring patriotic reputation that allowed Liberals to contest Conservative claims that their opposition lacked patriotism; as a former lieutenant-governor of the Punjab and governor-general of India Lawrence was perceived as an expert on the north-west frontier, with obvious standing to speak about Afghanistan; and his previous mild-mannered parliamentary interventions allowed him to appear, plausibly, as a moderate. The fact that Liberals recognised and then exploited this ‘utility’ demonstrates that returning imperial administrators could exert a discernible

and significant influence on politics in the metropolis.

This emphasis on Lawrence's metropolitan activities in 1878—an approach not followed by his biographers—provides an opportunity to examine some of the centripetal effects of British imperialism. To put it another way, what did Sir John Lawrence bring back from India? When John Hobson published his *Imperialism: A Study* (1902), he articulated a fear that British soldiers and administrators, returning from the empire, would bring with them the character of imperialism and take it to positions of power such as parliament. Having recently returned from the Boer war, Hobson expressed his anxiety about these centripetal effects of British imperialism:

As the despotic portion of our Empire has grown in area, a larger and larger number of men, trained in the temper and methods of autocracy as soldiers and civil officials in our Crown colonies, protectorates, and Indian Empire... have returned to this country, bringing back the characters, sentiments, and ideas imposed by this foreign environment... The wealthier among them discover political ambitions, introducing into our Houses of Parliament the coarsest and most selfish spirit of "Imperialism".³⁰

The spirit of imperialism that Hobson worried would be introduced into parliament comprised a disregard for the liberties of Britons and the pursuit of profitable commercial interests (he asserted that returning soldiers and administrators derived their incomes from the maintenance and furtherance of despotic rule). Referring pessimistically to 'the steady reflux of this poison of irresponsible autocracy', Hobson predicted that the imperialism brought back from empire would threaten peace, because of the constant temptation to go to war with 'lower races'. Hobson also wrote darkly

³⁰ J.A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (London, 1938), pp. 150-1.

about the ‘chronic danger and degradation of militarism’.³¹

It seems however that Hobson underestimated the strength and durability of liberal traditions.³² Lawrence certainly brought back some robust views on the merits of ‘punitive’ expeditions on the north-west frontier, as chapter VII discussed. However, Lawrence used his public platform in the House of Lords (and in his letters to *The Times*) not to undermine the liberties of Britons, or to pursue commercial interests, or to argue for war with ‘lower races’, but in order to protest against the folly of the forward policy, and subsequently war, in Afghanistan. Lawrence’s aims as governor-general of India had been essentially simple. As he told his friend the Duchess of Argyll in 1868, towards the end of his term in India: ‘I have done what I could to influence the conditions of the people, & maintain the credit of Her Majesty’s Government.’³³ These objectives continued to motivate Lawrence on his return to Britain. He brought back from India the same considerations and characteristics that had marked his tenure at Calcutta: pragmatism, fiscal prudence, and an administrative preoccupation that reconciled his determination to preserve British power with his sincere solicitude for the governed. Some of these concerns were evident in Lawrence’s last speech in the House of Lords, which he made on 19 June 1879. By this time, the giant of the Punjab was in

³¹ Hobson, *Imperialism*, p. 152. The sentiments expressed by Hobson in *Imperialism* were presumably strongly influenced by his recent personal experiences. He went to South Africa in 1899, as special correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian*. On his return, Hobson became a prominent opponent of the Boer war and spoke at public meetings, which were frequently broken up by jingoists. See: J. Townshend, ‘Introduction’, in Hobson, *Imperialism* (London, 1988), pp. 12-14, 25.

³² P.J. Durrans has argued that ‘in the final analysis neither British politics, nor the British people, nor the British constitution were to be “imperialised” in the manner predicted by Liberal critics of Disraelian imperialism and their successors. The dichotomy between liberalism at home and imperialism abroad remained. It was, however, an uneasy coexistence and it was to become progressively clearer that British democracy posed a threat to the Empire rather than the reverse.’ P.J. Durrans, ‘A Two-Edged Sword: The Liberal Attack on Disraelian Imperialism’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 10 (1982), 279.

³³ Lawrence to the Duchess of Argyll, 7 May 1868, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Special Collections, MS Eng lett d 74, folio 124.

poor health and, according to the *Hansard* reports, barely audible.³⁴ He died only eight days later. Characteristically, Lawrence reminded the Lords of ‘the extreme poverty of the people of India’, the suffering caused by recent famines and his opinion that the existing burden of taxation was already very great. The recent reduction of the cotton duties was therefore ‘an imprudent step’: the import duties on cotton goods ‘fell mainly on the richer classes, who were the chief buyers of the finer goods made in England, so that the remission was no relief to the great mass of the people, who wore the coarser goods made in India.’³⁵ This was the imperialism that John Lawrence brought back from India.

³⁴ Lawrence, *Hansard*, 247 (19 June 1879), col. 159.

³⁵ Lawrence, *Hansard*, 247 (19 June 1879), cols. 159-60.

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