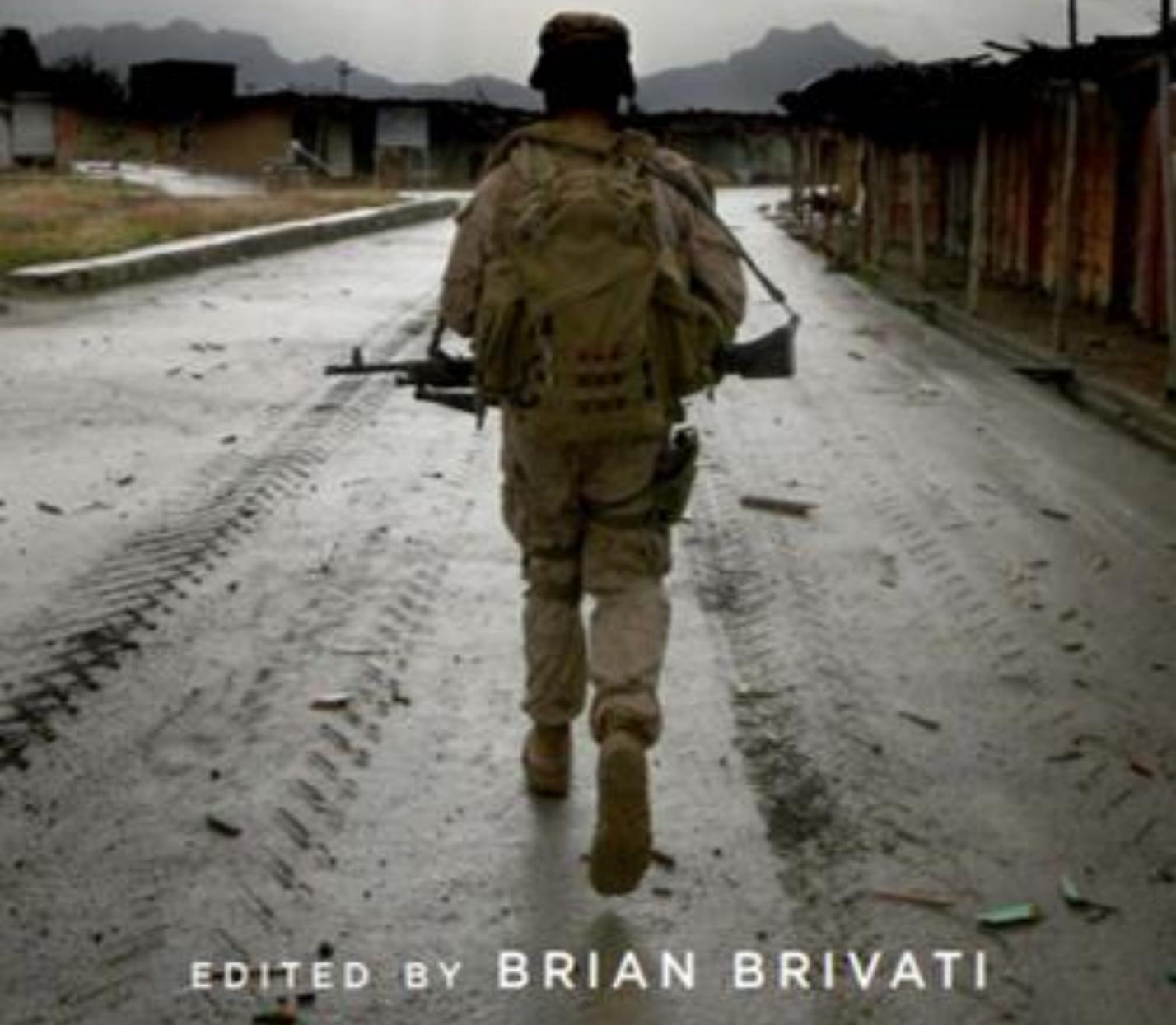


LOSING AFGHANISTAN

THE FALL OF KABUL AND THE
END OF WESTERN INTERVENTION



EDITED BY BRIAN BRIVATI

LOSING
AFGHANISTAN

LOSING AFGHANISTAN



THE FALL OF KABUL AND THE END
OF WESTERN INTERVENTION

EDITED BY
BRIAN BRIVATI



Biteback Publishing

First published in Great Britain in 2022 by
Biteback Publishing Ltd, London
Selection and editorial apparatus copyright © Brian Brivati 2022
Copyright in the individual essays resides with the named authors.

Brian Brivati has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 to be identified as the editor of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the publisher's prior permission in writing.

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition, including this condition, being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

Every reasonable effort has been made to trace copyright holders of material reproduced in this book, but if any have been inadvertently overlooked the publisher would be glad to hear from them.

All the contributors to *Losing Afghanistan* are writing in their personal capacity and their views do not necessarily represent the views of the organisations they work for; nor does their presence in this volume constitute an endorsement by them or the organisations in which they work of the views of other contributing individuals and organisations.

ISBN 978-1-78590-731-9

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Set in Minion Pro

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY



This book is dedicated by its contributors to a number of different groups of people. To the women and girls of Afghanistan who have seen their dreams snatched away with the return of the Taliban. To the service men and women and their families who served in Afghanistan over the past twenty years in the NATO coalition and in the security forces of Afghanistan, and to the memory of all those who lost their lives.

*The tumult and the shouting dies;
The Captains and the Kings depart:
Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice,
A humble and a contrite heart.
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget – lest we forget!*

RUDYARD KIPLING, 'RECESSIONAL'

All proceeds from this collection will be donated to the Afghan Writing Project at Untold Stories which supports women writers in Afghanistan. Their first collection of stories, *My Pen Is the Wing of a Bird*, will be published in February 2022 by MacLehose Press, an imprint of Quercus Editions Limited.

CONTENTS

Introduction	xi
The Text of Hate	1
<i>Masood Khalili (translated by Robert Darr)</i>	
AFGHAN WITNESS 1	3
Zarifa: Policewomen Face a Dangerous Future	
PEOPLE	7
Chapter 1 What Now? The Future in Afghanistan	9
<i>Jill Suzanne Kornetsky</i>	
Chapter 2 Someone's Gotta Say It: Unspoken Ground Truths and Mistakes Not to Repeat	29
<i>Jill Suzanne Kornetsky</i>	
Chapter 3 From Taliban to Taliban: Cycle of Hope, Despair on Women's Rights	43
<i>Heather Barr</i>	
Chapter 4 Stolen Promises: The US Retreat and the Afghan Diaspora	53
<i>Laura Cretney</i>	
Chapter 5 A Failure of Leadership	77
<i>Mahmud Khalili</i>	
Chapter 6 A Conversation with Former Minister of the Interior Masoud Andarabi	91
<i>Masoud Andarabi</i>	

Chapter 7	Dispatches: Extracts from the Journalism of Hollie McKay in Afghanistan <i>Hollie McKay</i>	103
<hr/>		
	AFGHAN WITNESS 2	113
	Ghulam: A Young Man Tries to Escape Being Recruited by the Taliban	
<hr/>		
	NEIGHBOURS	117
<hr/>		
Chapter 8	Islam-Inspired Ways of Avoiding the Resource Curse in Afghanistan <i>Omar Al-Ubaydli</i>	119
<hr/>		
Chapter 9	The View from Iraq <i>Dr Haider al-Abadi</i>	131
<hr/>		
Chapter 10	Hostile Takeover of Afghanistan – Regional Approach and India’s Concerns <i>Arun Sahgal and Shreyas Deshmukh</i>	151
<hr/>		
Chapter 11	‘No End of a Lesson’: The End of Liberal Internationalism and the New Isolationism <i>Brian Brivati</i>	171
<hr/>		
	AFGHAN WITNESS 3	187
	Sakhi: Losing My Culture Overnight	
<hr/>		
	FOREVER WAR	191
<hr/>		
Chapter 12	‘The Enemy Is in Kabul’ <i>Dr Alia Brahimi</i>	193
<hr/>		
Chapter 13	Intelligence Needs Understanding: Reasons for the West’s Failure in Afghanistan <i>Nick Fishwick</i>	203
<hr/>		
Chapter 14	Battling for Narrative Advantage in Afghanistan: NATO TV and a Digital-First Strategy <i>Thomas Dodd</i>	213
<hr/>		
Chapter 15	The Intelligence Failure and the Cultural Failure of the West to Think in Generations <i>Philip Ingram MBE</i>	227
<hr/>		

Chapter 16	Afghanistan: A Strategic Failure of Vision, Resource and Patience	239
	<i>Professor Paul Cornish</i>	
<hr/>		
Chapter 17	The Role of the Absence of Risk Management Thinking in the Collapse of Afghanistan	255
	<i>Safa Mahdi</i>	
<hr/>		
	AFGHAN WITNESS 4	265
	Esin: A Human Rights Defender Attempts to Protest Peacefully	
<hr/>		
	LIBERAL INTERVENTIONISM	267
<hr/>		
Chapter 18	The Future of Liberal Military Interventionism Post-Kabul	269
	<i>Graham Cundy</i>	
<hr/>		
Chapter 19	Questions About the Future of Liberal Interventionism	281
	<i>Lord Purvis of Tweed</i>	
<hr/>		
Chapter 20	General Dannatt, the Forever Wars and the Military Elite's Threat to Democracy	291
	<i>Professor Paul Dixon</i>	
<hr/>		
Chapter 21	The Post-Afghan Reset and the Case for Rebuilding EU-UK Security Cooperation	303
	<i>Stephen Gethins</i>	
<hr/>		
	AFGHAN WITNESS 5	315
	Gulnaz: A Mother Turns to Sex Work	
<hr/>		
	The Talib's Loud Recitation	319
	<i>Masood Khalili (translated by Robert Darr)</i>	
<hr/>		
	Contributors	321
<hr/>		
	Notes	325
<hr/>		
	Index	343
<hr/>		

INTRODUCTION

BRIAN BRIVATI

Twenty-five minutes ago the guns went off, announcing peace. A siren hooted on the river. They are hooting still ... We looked out of the window; saw the housepainter give one look at the sky & go on with his job ... So far neither bells nor flags, but the wailing of sirens & intermittent guns.¹

This was Virginia Woolf's diary description of Armistice Day, 11 November 1918, the end of the war to end all wars. In his chapter in this volume, the former Royal Marine Officer Graham Cundy describes the fall of Kabul in 2001: 'There was, he writes, 'little ceremony: the exchange of considerable amounts of US dollars and a handshake with Taliban commanders.' Also in this volume, the former Afghan Minister of the Interior, Masoud Andarabi, describes the fall of Kabul in 2021 at the end of the 'forever war': 'At noon, [the President] supposedly informed his chief of staff that he was going to take a nap. The chief of staff was in the dining room eating when he heard the helicopter. "What's going on?" someone asked. "The President's gone." President Ghani fled

Afghanistan and the Taliban walked back into Kabul. It remains unknown, at the time of writing, if any US dollars were involved, but neither bells nor flags featured on either occasion. There is a danger that, like that house painter in Bloomsbury in 1918, we too will only look up from our work for a moment to note this momentous event before returning to our daily lives. The purpose of this collection of essays is to make the case for *not* doing so. It is a plea that we should keep our gaze on the fate of the people of Afghanistan not only because this is a country of 38 million which is spiralling into economic collapse and famine but because the events in Kabul were made in Washington, London, Beijing and Moscow by action and inaction, by intervention and indifference. The title of this collection, *Losing Afghanistan*, implies that what has happened is a setback in an ongoing struggle. The nature of that ongoing conflict is seen differently by each of the writers in this volume. The aim has been to present a range of views and positions to embed the question of what happens next in the complexity of the kinds of decisions that need to be made and the decisions future voters have to make in supporting those decisions or not. We sit at the end of a twenty-year cycle in which more of our politicians chose to act rather than not to act. We are now in an age of isolationism where many Western states choose inaction instead. The authors in this collection take different stances towards this debate and many of them offer vital insights into thinking about questions of intervention and non-intervention and the responsibility to protect.

Losing Afghanistan to the Taliban matters on an individual human and national level, on a regional level and on a global level. This collection is therefore divided into sections to reflect these different levels and the themes, challenges and lessons that

INTRODUCTION

cut across them. The group of writers assembled here do not have a single perspective on the ideological questions around liberal interventionism. They care about Afghanistan because it is their home or because they have lived, worked or researched the issues on which the fate of Afghanistan touches. The collection is divided into four sections: People, Neighbours, Forever War and Liberal Interventionism.

The chapters in section one, People, are written by Afghans (Mahmud Khalili and Masoud Andarabi) or by Westerns working in Afghanistan (Jill Suzanne Kornetsky and Hollie McKay) or focus on the impact on the Afghan people (Laura Cretney and Heather Barr). The focus moves out in the second section, Neighbours, to look at Afghanistan's neighbours from an economic perspective (Omar Al-Ubaydli), a comparative perspective (Haider al-Abadi), a regional perspective (Brigadier Sahgal) and a global perspective (Brian Brivati).

The final two sections of the book, Forever War and Liberal Interventionism, focus on the Western intervention in Afghanistan and the lessons that can be taken away from its ending. The views expressed range from those with a residual support for intervention (Graham Cundy) through to critical evaluations of the liberal interventionism (Lord Purvis and Stephen Gethins) to a perspective that is highly sceptical of military interventions (Paul Dixon). Between these poles, a range of analysis and explanation is offered on the context of the collapse and the extent to which it might have been predicted (Alia Brahimi and Safa Mahdi), on failures of intelligence and the conduct of the post-intervention nation-building project (Nick Fishwick and Philip Ingram) and a rarely told story of the efforts of winning hearts and minds carried out during the

twenty-year mission by NATO TV (Thomas Dodd). Many of the themes, arguments and much of the historical resonance of the withdrawal is captured by Paul Cornish in his essay on the fall of Kabul and the evacuation.

At the beginning and end of the book there are two poems and between the sections there are human rights stories. The poems are by Masood Khalili and were translated by Robert Darr. The human rights stories linking the sections are designed to bring the reader back throughout the text to the position and the experience of the people of Afghanistan.

The overarching lesson of the Afghanistan intervention should be that before we begin to construct any policy, launch any war or risk lives, we need to be sure of what we are doing, why we are doing it and if the people to be 'protected' truly want it to happen. Especially if we have never seen war. Especially if we live and bring our children up in the relative peace and affluence of the West. If we are to bring force down on the heads of perpetrators of gross human rights violations, for example, then we need to acknowledge that the innocent will die as a result of that endeavour. This is not a pacifist argument. It is almost the opposite. I believe that there are just wars and there is an overwhelming case for intervention in states that are failing or have failed. When, in 2005, the UN unanimously passed the Responsibility to Protect Resolution, this represented the possibility of a better future in which the international community would intervene.

There is an extremely powerful pacifist position that holds that because of the inevitable innocent victims of any military action, we should stay out of the affairs of other states and never intervene with force. There is also a strong case, aspects of which are

INTRODUCTION

presented in many of the chapters here, that the failure to manage post-intervention politics means that even where we can achieve regime change by military action, we seem incapable of then building new nations. There is much wisdom in both pacifism and in the critique of nation building as being an unachievable end product of intervention. However, the logic that led to the Responsibility to Protect Resolution still holds true. If we are not going to live in a world with first- and second-class citizens, the protected and the unprotected, then we need global institutions that embrace universalism. The root of universalism is equality: all lives are equal and all rights are enjoyed by all. This logic demands an international system that sees all citizens of all states as equally worthy of protection. If we can build an international community that bases its policies on the human implications of its actions rather than the implications for the competing and changing interests of the most powerful states, then perhaps, the lessons of the Afghanistan intervention will have been learned. We can turn our gaze onto the consequences and the meaning of both action and inaction. We should not be frightened of intervening if we have the victims of our inaction at the forefront of our minds, but the sobering lessons of the past twenty years and the reality of current geopolitics are that the age of intervention is now over. We live in the age of isolationism. We face a deeply uncertain future. My hope is that the essays in this collection, with the variety of positions they represent and with the first-hand knowledge that they offer, will provoke a renewed debate on how, when or if intervention is ever justified. My belief is that they should settle the debate on our collective responsibility, after twenty years of involvement, not to walk away. Our strategic patience might have been exhausted but our humanitarian patience

LOSING AFGHANISTAN

has to be renewed as we stand with the people of Afghanistan,
whatever the nature of the regime that governs them now.

Brian Brivati

Kingston upon Thames

December 2021