

The British-Indian Way in Warfare in Afghanistan and North-West Frontier, 1839-1919

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Abstract

Is it possible to trace a cogent rationale underlying the seemingly chaotic nature of frontier warfare in colonial India? Can the multifaceted nature of the British-Indian Army's warfare in Afghanistan and the North-West Frontier of India [henceforth NWF] be brought under an overarching yet coherent notion of a British-Indian way in warfare? These are the central questions around which the thesis revolves. It comprehensively examines the different aspects of the British-Indian Army's warfare, such as strategy, tactics, logistics and command mechanisms, using environmental, technological and political factors as entry points. This thesis also takes into account the impact of warfare on the Afghan State by analysing the veracity of the discourse of state-building in Afghanistan. Furthermore, it delves into studying how the imperial imagination of the Indian frontier reconciled with the socio-cultural and political intricacies of the region. This thesis paints a holistic picture of warfare beyond the Indus in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by exploring the gulf between textual theory and practice pertaining to the conduct of war.

This thesis is based on multi-archival research in India and England. An array of archival records, such as private papers, secret records, general orders, campaign reports and

parliamentary papers, have been consulted. Apart from official archival records, printed primary sources such as memoirs and first-hand documents of the wars by different commanding officers have been utilised. The memoirs and private correspondences of the important figures in the politico-military echelon in Britain and India open a window into their inner mental realm, which the official records often fail to represent.