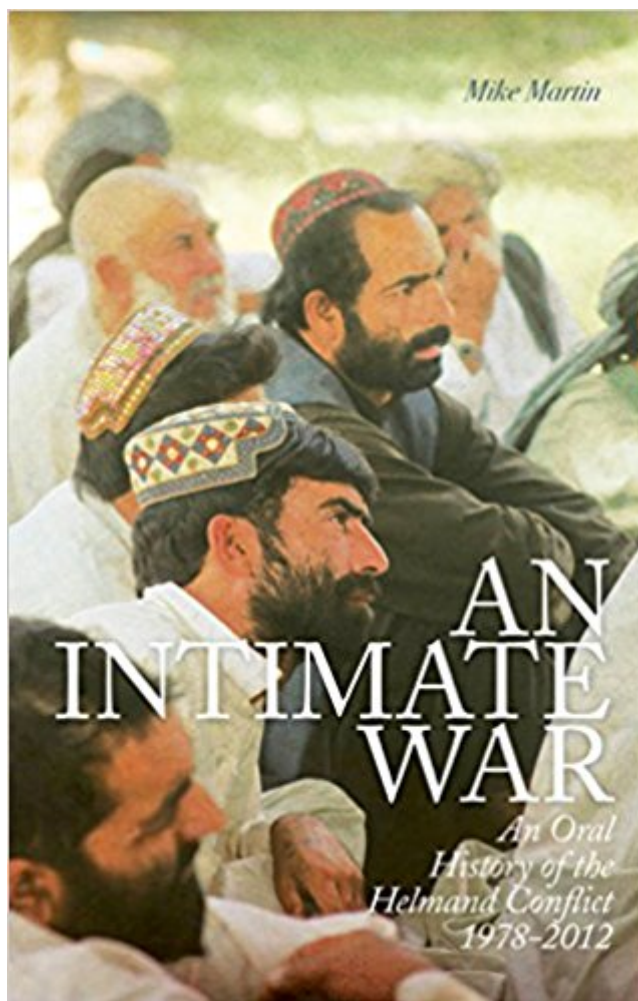


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An Intimate War: An Oral History Of The Helmand Conflict, 1978-2012



Synopsis

An Intimate War tells the story of the last thirty-four years of conflict in Helmand Province, Afghanistan as seen through the eyes of the Helmandis. In the West, this period is often defined through different lenses - the Soviet intervention, the civil war, the Taliban, and the post-2001 nation-building era. Yet, as experienced by local inhabitants, the Helmand conflict is a perennial one, involving the same individuals, families and groups, and driven by the same arguments over land, water and power. This book - based on both military and research experience in Helmand and 150 interviews in Pashto - offers a very different view of Helmand from those in the media. It demonstrates how outsiders have most often misunderstood the ongoing struggle in Helmand and how, in doing so, they have exacerbated the conflict, perpetuated it and made it more violent - precisely the opposite of what was intended when their interventions were launched. Mike Martin's oral history of Helmand underscores the absolute imperative of understanding the highly local, personal, and non-ideological nature of internal conflict in much of the 'third' world.

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Customer Reviews

good

Best reference if you're going to be working or researching Helmand Province, Afghanistan. Read many books on the topic and this is the best reference out there. Due to the intricate details, it is a slow read to retain information.

A must read for anyone interested in or engaged with Helmand, Afghanistan.

Surreal - and at times hard work - but well worth the read.

Shipping took too long. Product is just fine.

BLUF: Doesn't discuss British or American tactical operations in detail; contains a useful in-depth discussion of the Taliban, Afghan society and social forces in Helmand from informed western perspective. Strongest feature of the book: The author often takes a position contrary to what you might believe about the conflict. Martin, a Pashto speaker who spent almost two years in Helmand as both a serving officer and War Studies PhD candidate at King's College, conducted numerous interviews with Afghans. Although the title specifically refers to this publication as "An Oral History" it is not. Rather, it is a well-written narrative account of events that seamlessly blends oral testimony along with official documents and the author's own experiences. His basic premise is that US Special Operations, the British, and US conventional forces misread the conflict in Helmand province. Westerners saw it as a "Taliban versus the Populace/Karzai government" when in reality it was a civil war among competing factions that had been ongoing for several decades. The Helmandis, who quickly realized that the Americans and British did not understand the internal dynamics of the province, used the US and UK military to pursue and further their own agendas. Organization. In addition to an introduction and conclusion, the main body consists of six chapters, all averaging 30-35 pages each, covering 1) Pre-1978 Helmandi History, 2) From the Saur Revolution to the Soviet Withdrawal, 1978-89, 3) From the Soviet Withdrawal to the US Intervention, 4) From the US Intervention to the Return of the Angrez 2001, 5) From the Return of the Angrez to the US Re-Engagement 2006, 6) From US Reengagement:

Counterinsurgency, 2009. There are also a series of appendices, to include a timeline of key events, list of provincial officials, and one outlining tribal and family trees. This book is worth the time you will spend reading it. It effectively conveys the message that "there is no black and white in war, only various shades of grey." Highly recommended. One alibi - I bought the edition sold on .UK. I don't know if it differs from the books being sold in the US.

This impressive book began as an academic thesis and is brought to life by relevant and diverse contemporary operational experience; the text is amplified in quality by the perspicacity of a considerable intellect. Mike Martin demonstrates that the success of any military intervention or assistance operation, is only as effective as the proponents' understanding of the operating environment. That understanding was boasted by many in Afghanistan, including one former NATO commander, who ironically opines how useful this book would have been to him had it been written during his tenure of command. Men like Mike were present throughout; if only they had been afforded a voice. It is the product of considerable study and demonstrates precisely the appetite for learning and adaptation essential to keep armed forces relevant in such difficult times. It should have been encouraged, nurtured and I am proud of the small part I played in helping Mike obtain sponsorship for his thesis and supporting him in getting the book published despite MOD attempts at censorship. Planning for British military involvement in Afghanistan was blighted by inadequate or confused policy direction and a complete lack of understanding of the Afghan context, particularly in the South of the country. This is an institutional malaise, despite protestations to the contrary. The army has shown an alacrity to learn tactical lessons that has not been replicated at the operational or strategic levels. The aspiration to develop better levels of operational level understanding has not been supported by the right attitudes and emphasis in policy or execution. Senior officers have boasted operational level understanding and vied for the strategic high ground. In reality the quality of British military strategic thought and advice has been poor, and yet those involved in Iraq (as Chilcott will soon report) and Afghanistan would have us believe they made not a single mistake in either theatre. The book signals an opportunity for a change in attitudes and mind-set. Reform would start with a willingness to admit mistakes and embrace the need for different ways of doing MOD and staff headquarters business, instead of the prevailing cuts-driven mentality that protects heritage at the expense of capability. It needs leadership from senior officers of a different pedigree: people born of a much better-informed selection process, reinforced by appropriate education programmes at key stages of long careers

and training that equips people for their specialist jobs. The army deserves open-minded innovators prepared to challenge the dogma of establishment. The army must learn better to distinguish between cuts and reform, and wake up to the need for further change, starting amongst its senior leaders. All you who serve: beware charm that masks hubris; regimental loyalty that breeds group-think and cronyism that passes for career management.

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