THE DOORMAT OF EMPIRES

I couldn't agree with Jack Kelly more in his approval of Zero's firing General McChrystal.

Stanley McChrystal is an insufferably arrogant putz whose criminally stupid Rules of Engagement in Afghanistan deserve more than being relieved of his command.

They deserve a court-martial and prison. His "courageous restraint" ROE's are directly responsible for getting our soldiers killed. He thinks the lives of Afghans are more important to save than Americans. As of last week, one of those Americans fighting and risking their lives to bring freedom to Afghanistan - and one of those lives McChrystal's political correctness is jeopardizing - is my son.

Afghanistan is personal - for me, and because of 9/11, it should be for all Americans.

Here we'll dispense with the idiotically ignorant myth that Afghanistan is the "Graveyard of Empires." Afghanistan has been steamrollered by conquerors for millennia. Then, next week, we'll discuss how easy it would be for us to do so and why it's important that we do.

In 327 BC, Alexander the Great married a beautiful princess named Roxanne in Balkh, capital of Bactria. She was the daughter of the King of Bactria, Oxyartes, and Alexander had just conquered his kingdom. Bactria is now northern Afghanistan - Alexander's wife was Afghan.

Alexander subdued all of Afghanistan because, for over 200 years, it had been part of the Persian Empire he had vowed to conquer. The tribes of Afghanistan had been conquered by the founder of the Persian Empire, Cyrus (599-530 BC) in the 550's. After Alexander's death in 323, Afghanistan was ruled by his general, Seleucus Nicator (358-281 BC) as part of the *Greek Seleucid Empire*.

At this moment, US and NATO forces are preparing to secure Afghanistan's second largest city, Kandahar. The city was founded by Alexander in 330 BC and is in fact named after him, from the original *Iskandaria* (Alexandria - *Iskander* being the Persian pronunciation of Alexander's name).

In 250 BC, the Greek governor of Bactria, Diodotus, saw his chance to break free of the Seleucids, and established the *Greco-Bactrian Kingdom*. It expanded until it became known to the Romans as "the extremely prosperous Bactria of a thousand cities." Under the rule of Demetrius Aniketos (Greek for "Invincible," r. 200-180 BC), Greco-Bactria expanded to control present-day eastern Iran, Pakistan, and northwest India.

Under Menander Soter (Greek for "Savior," r. 165-130 BC), the Greek kingdom expanded across northern India to what the Romans called the Menander Mons (Mountains of Menander), today's Naga Hills that form the border between India and Burma. The religion and art of the entire region was a syncretism known as Greco-Buddhism.

After a series of invasions by Hun-like nomadic peoples from China and Central Asia - the Yuezhi, Parthians, and Scythians - Greek rule of Afghanistan and northern India was reduced to a pocket of the Punjab, and came to end under Strato II in 10 BC.

A branch of the Yuezhi called the Kushan came out on top, and became so Hellenized in taking over Greek Bactria they adopted the Greek alphabet and Greco-Buddhism, worshipping Zeus and Herakles (Hercules) as a demi-god.

The *Kushan Empire* expanded in the 1st century AD to control a vast swath of Central Asia and India. By the 3rd century it was so huge that it fell apart - in the west to resurgent Persians known as the Sassanids (named after Sassan, grandfather of their founder Ardashir I, r. 206-241 AD).

The Sassanid Persians conquered what is now Afghanistan in the 240s, imposed their religion of Zorastrianism upon the inhabitants, and incorporated it into a gigantic empire stretching from current Kazakhstan to Egypt. Their main focus, however, was war with Rome.

In 259, King Sharpur I captured Roman Emperor Valerian, and after killing or enslaving 70,000 Roman soldiers, flayed Valerian alive and kept his skin as a trophy.

Sassanid wars with Rome and Constantinople continued for 350 years, culminating in the Persian army of Khosrau II destroying Jerusalem in May, 614, slaughtering 90,000 Christians in cold blood and demolishing the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

This prompted Emperor Heraclius in Constantinople to invade Persia in 621, wiping out Khosrau's army at the Battle of Nineveh in December 627, and terminating the Sassanids. Unfortunately for mankind, the resultant anarchy made it easy for wild tribes to pour out of Arabia and seize Jerusalem, the whole Middle East, and Persia in the name of Islam 20 years later.

The main city of western Afghanistan is Herat. It is dominated by a huge ancient fortress known as the Citadel of Alexander, *Qala-e-Iskander*, because it was originally built by Iskander in 329 BC. In 652 AD, fresh from sweeping across Sassanid Persia, an Arab army seized Herat. From there, Arabs and Moslemized Persians began forcing Islam upon the peoples and tribes of Afghanistan. It took them 300 years.

Then in the 960s, a group of Turkic slaves, guards of the Arab-Persian rulers, seized control of the eastern Afghan city of Ghazni. The son of one of them, Mahmud of Ghazni (971-1030), conducted a horrific reign of Moslem pillage and slaughter, directed primarily at Buddhist-Hindu India, prompting historian Will Durant to comment: "The Mohammedan Conquest of India is probably the bloodiest story in history."

The Ghaznavid horror was ended by a far greater one: The Mongol hordes of Genghiz Khan (1162-1227). In 1220-21, Mongol butchers decimated much of Afghanistan, killing over a million

people each in Herat and Balkh alone. A Chinese scribe with the Mongols registered surprise at seeing a cat in the ruins of Balkh - surprise that the Mongols left one single thing alive. Afghanistan has never really recovered to this day.

As the *Mongol Empire* dissolved in the 1300s, a new one arose, led by yet another horrific conqueror, Tamerlane (Timur-e-Lang, 1336-1405). He was a Moslem Persian-speaking Mongol-Turk from near Samarkand in present-day Uzbekistan dedicated to massacring entire cities - Moslem or infidel, it didn't matter to him.

In creating his *Timurid Empire*, his first invasion of Afghanistan was to wipe out a just rebuilt Herat in 1370. Then he rebuilt it again from which to rule Afghanistan. By 1390, his subjugation of Afghanistan was complete.

100 years after Tamerlane, a new conqueror arose. Zahir ud-din Mohammed (1483-1531) was born in the Fergana Valley of current Uzbekistan. Dreaming of ruling an empire like his great-great grandfather Timur, he adopted the nickname of Babar ("Tiger" in Persian), recruited an army of Tajiks, crossed the Hindu Kush, and captured Kabul in 1504.

He then made a deal with the new Shah of Persia, Ismail I, to divide Afghanistan in half, Ismail getting the west, him the east. With his back covered, he launched his completion of Timur's goal of conquering India. With his victory over the Sultan of Delhi at the Battle of Panipat in 1526, the *Mogul Empire* was born. The Hindus of India called Babar "The Mogul," The Mongol.

Afghanistan remained divided between the Persian and Mogul Empires for 200 years.

In the 1730s, a Turkmen bandit chief in northern Persia named Nadir figured out how to seize control of the disintegrating Persian Empire and declared himself Shah. Even before he consolidated his control over Persia, Nadir Shah (1688-1747) focused on subduing revolts in Afghanistan. He conquered Herat in 1730, then Kandahar and all of Afghanistan in 1738.

In Herat, Nadir Shah recruited Pushtun fighters of the local Abdali clan into his army. He was particularly taken with one of them, Ahmad Abdali for his "young and handsome features," who became his personal attendant or *yasawal*. Sufficiently pleased with the services such a yasawal provided, Nadir promoted Ahmad - at age 16 - to commander of the Pushtun forces, and then later promised to make him King of Afghanistan.

Shortly thereafter in 1747, Nadir Shah managed to get himself assassinated. Ahmad thereupon declared himself heir to Nadir's Afghan dominions and his title *padshah durr-i dawran* - "king, pearl of the age." He was 25 years old. The Abdalis changed their tribal name to Durrani, after Ahmad's new title.

Thus the country of Afghanistan was born. Ahmad Shah Durrani (as he is known to history,

1722-1773) and his army quickly gained control of Kandahar, Ghazni, and Kabul, took Herat from the Persians, and on to take Nishapur and Mashad in northeast Persia. Then he went for India, taking Punjab, Kashmir, and sacking the Mogul capital of Delhi in 1757. He declared a *Jihad*, Holy War against the Hindus and slaughtered them wholesale.

His particular animus was towards Indian Sikhs, who constantly rebelled. He finally could not put them down, retreated back to Kandahar, and died at age 50. The *Durrani Empire* subsequently disintegrated. By the early 1800s, Afghanistan was fragmented into warring tribal units with the Durranis controlling only the Kabul Valley. So in stepped the Brits.

The Great Game had begun. England had established their rule over India - the British Raj - and Russia was spreading its rule over Central Asia. Afghanistan was in between. By 1809, the Brits had a relationship with the last Durrani ruler, Shuja Shah in Kabul.

But Shuja Shah was overthrown and there was a chaotic Afghan Civil War that lasted until the leader of the Barakzai tribe, Dost Mohammed (1793-1863) managed to gain control of Kabul and Kandahar in the 1830s. When Dost became buds with the Russians, the Brits freaked and decided to try and put Shuja Shah - an exile in India for 30 years - back in power.

Big mistake. The *First Anglo-Afghan War* started well enough. The Brits took Kandahar, Gazni, then Kabul, Dost fled, and Shuja installed as Afghan Emir in 1839. The Brits then tried to keep Shuja in power with a garrison of less than 5,000 troops. Dost's son, Akbar Khan, began a guerrilla war against them.

By 1842, the Brits had to flee. Led by the amazingly incompetent General William Elphinstone, 4,500 soldiers (of whom less than 700 were European, the rest mostly Indian), along with 12,000 Indian servants and Afghans, retreated out of Kabul for Jalalabad. Of the 16,500, only one, army surgeon William Brydon, made it to Jalalabad alive.

This horrific annihilation of January 1842 is the source of the "Graveyard of Empires" myth. It was never repeated. By September, a British Army had marched back into Afghanistan and leveled Kabul to rubble. Akbar Khan was put to the sword. Dost Mohammed promised to do as he was told, which he did as Emir until his death in 1863.

When Sher Ali Khan, Dost's son as Emir, began making nice with the Russians, the Brits tried to send a diplomatic mission to Kabul which Sher Ali stopped at gunpoint. This triggered the *Second Anglo-Afghan War* in September 1878. When Sher Ali found that Moscow would not help him against 40,000 Brit soldiers, he fled, the Brits took Kabul and Kandahar without much problem.

By May 1879, the new Emir, Mohammed Yaqub Khan, had signed a peace treaty with the Brits that granted Afghanistan sovereignty in exchange for England formally controlling all Afghan foreign affairs. When warlord revolts broke out in Ghazni, Herat, and Kandahar, the Brits handily

snuffed them out. Then they replaced Yaqub with his cousin Abdur Rahman Khan. This second war was over by July 1880.

Abdur Rahman (1840-1901) was Dost's grandson. He spent his emirship pacifying and putting down constant tribal revolts through his country. In 1893, he and British diplomat Mortimer Durrand negotiated the demarcation of the border between Afghanistan and British India.

The resultant Durrand Line demarcates Afghanistan's entire eastern border (now with Pakistan), 1,610 miles long, from China to Iran. It was confirmed by Afghan rulers by treaty in 1919, 1921, and 1930 - then rejected in 1949 after Pakistan became independent.

Mortimer Durrand then negotiated a treaty between Russia and England in 1895 to demarcate the *Wakhan Corridor*, a panhandle 100 miles long and 10-40 miles wide stretching all the way to China so that the British and Russian Empires would, however thinly, be separated by a strip of Afghanistan. The Wakhan now separates Tajikistan from Pakistan.

Rahman's son Habibullah (1872-1919) signed a Treaty of Friendship with Britain in 1905 and made a state visit to Buckingham Palace in 1907. He resisted every demand of the Ottoman Sultanate - the spiritual leader of Islam - to join World War I on Turkey and Germany's side. He brought Western medicine to his country and made a number of educational and legal reforms.

Tragically, he was assassinated in 1919, with heavy suspicion falling on his son Amanullah - which was increased when Amanullah seized power and declared himself King of Afghanistan. As revolts mounted against him, he decided to distract them by declaring war on the infidel British. Thus began the *Third Anglo-Afghan War*.

The Brits, however, were ill-equipped to fight it, with their units in India, and the Indian Army, hollowed out just after WWI. Amanullah gathered thousands of Afghan tribesmen and, on May 3, 1919 invaded through the Khyber Pass. The Brits quickly rallied, and they, together with Gurkhas with bayonets chased the Afghans back across the Khyber.

The fighting became dicey, and a lot of it took place in what is now ultimate Apache country, Waziristan. Yet it took only a month before Amanullah sued for peace on June 3. Yes, the Third Anglo-Afghan War was won by the Brits in one month.

Amanullah lasted until 1929 when one too many revolts broke out, he abdicated, and his commanding general, Mohammed Nadir, went to India to ask for British troops. The Brits complied, and a British army marched to Kabul and installed Nadir as King. The main achievement of Nadir's rule was to combat tribal revolts against him by setting the tribes against each other in race wars, primarily Pushtuns against Tajiks and Hazaras.

A Hazara teen-ager bumped him off in 1933. Then Afghanistan got lucky. Nadir Shah's son,

Mohammed Zahir Shah (1914-2007), became King at age 19 - and Afghanistan entered a golden age of peace that lasted 40 years.

I first traveled through Afghanistan in 1963. You could go anywhere. I met guys who bicycled from Herat to Mazar-i-Sharif to Kabul with no problem. I saw women in full *tshadris* (the complete burqa with a mesh netting to see through) walking next to women in high heels, knee-length skirts, and bee-hive hair-dos on the streets of Kabul. It was a wonderful, exciting - and peaceful - place.

I was back in 1973. The end had begun. Zahir Shah's cousin Mohammed Daoud had staged a coup with Soviet money. Soviet weapons flooded in, along with Soviet agents. The Afghan Communist Party exploded in growth - so much it alarmed Daoud.

With good reason. Its leader, Hafizullah Amin, decided Daoud was more Afghan than Communist, staged a coup in April 1978, and had Daoud and his family shot. All Afghanistan erupted in uncontrollable rebellion. In December 1979, Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev ordered the Red Army to invade. KGB and Spetznaz agents entered the presidential palace in Kabul on December 27, shot Amin, and installed another Communist, Babrak Karmal, as the Soviet puppet.

Karmal lasted until 1986, when the Soviets replaced him with the thuggish head of KHAD, the Afghan KGB, Mohammed Najibullah.

As you know, I spent a lot of time in the 1980s with the Afghan Mujahaddin fighting the Soviets. The bottom line - as discussed in Charlie Wilson and Ronald Reagan's War (December 2007, and I really encourage you to read or re-read it) - is that as of August 1986, the Soviets had won. The Afghans were defeated. I saw it with my own eyes.

Then, on September 26, 1986, the first Stinger missiles were fired, shooting down two Soviet helicopters, and the war was back on. On February 15, 1989, the Soviets finished their retreat. It was Stinger missiles from Ronald Reagan that defeated the Soviets, not the invincible unconquerable Afghans who make a graveyard of every army that ever attempted to conquer them in all of human history.

You've now seen how this is complete, total, ignorant, uneducated rubbish. Afghanistan has been for thousands of years the Doormat of Empires.

Next week, we'll discuss how to make it a doormat again.