

Afghanistan: How the West Lost its Way

by Tim Bird and Alex Marshall.

Yale University Press, 2011.

To the burgeoning bibliography about Afghanistan, and forming a powerful nexus with Frank Ledwidge's *Losing Small Wars*, comes this book, written by Tim Bird, a lecturer at the Joint Services Command and Staff College at Shrivenham, and Alex Marshall, a historian at Glasgow University.

Sandwiched between an introduction and a conclusion are seven chapters: The great enigma: Afghanistan in historical context; 9/11 and the response, 11-25 September 2001; 'Boots on the ground': From the arrival of the CIA to the emergency Loya Jirga, 26 September 2001-June 2002; 'Taking the eye off the ball?' The roots of Taliban revival in Afghanistan, 2002-2005; Return to the 'forgotten war', 2006-2008; The Pakistan problem; Silver bullets and the search for an exit, 2009-2011.

Although most of the ground has been covered in other books on Afghanistan, Pakistan and the ISAF and NATO engagement therewith, Bird and Marshall's forensic analysis of every twist and turn of the recent and largely disastrous Western engagement with Afghanistan feels fresh and is powerfully persuasive.

Afghanistan: How the West lost its Way demonstrates not only that Afghanistan as presently constituted is ungovernable, but that Western engagement with the country is doomed to fail, no matter how much money is spent or how many brave service people sacrifice their lives in its mine strewn streets, plains and mountains.

This is an essential book for all those who are interested in the current Afghanistan campaign and seek to understand it at a much deeper level than is easily available elsewhere: it is an invaluable contribution to the debate that must take place over the date for Western forces to leave Afghanistan, regardless of the way this reflects on them or the countries who sent them.

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