

2/29 If only one could leap so light and bold as to touch down four years later.

Extraordinary *Post*. Cover headline: "Prince at War: Harry scatters Taliban with his machine gun." The lad in question sits within a sandbagged redoubt, both hands on the trigger grips of the tripod-mounted weapon. The camera's caught him as he turns away briefly from his vigilant scanning the field of *out there* to flash us a winning grin from beneath his camo'd K-pot. "Prince Harry," the caption reads, "mans a machine gun at an observation post in southern Afghanistan, where he has been secretly stationed for the past 10 weeks."

All quiet on the café front – you're the sole customer so far – so your mind freely reels. Back to certain lines from Hilaire Belloc's "The Modern Traveler:"

*I shall never forget the way
That Blood stood on this awful day
Preserved us all from death.
He stood upon a little mound
Cast his lethargic eye around,
And said beneath his breath;
'Whatever happens, we have got
The Maxim Gun, and they have not.'*

Written circa 1894 to celebrate the first deployment of the Vickers Maxim in the British South Africa Company's war against the Ndebele, Belloc's doggerel also contains, a stanza or two later, these bracing lines:

We shall not fear the Hottentot

For we have the Maxim Gun, and he has not.'

Belloc was an odd sod of French-English mix, who, in a more ecumenical mood, also penned the jingle:

Noel, noel, noel, noel,

May all my enemies go to Hell.

Noel, noel.

Asked once why he wrote so prolifically, Belloc replied: "Because my children are howling for pearls and caviar." A great friend of Chesterton's and himself profoundly Catholic, Belloc freely compared the arrival of Protestantism to the siege of Vienna by the Turks. He also hated Semites, whether Islamic or Jewish, with equal fervor. And he feared their *revanche* for the crimes they imagined true Christians had committed against them.

But this diverts, as it were, Sir Cecil's railway from its destined course, and we must come back to the main track, for it is on the *Post's* inside spread, pp. 4-5 that things get weirder still. Here, Prince Charles and Lady Di's younger son sits, his gear spread round him, upon his bunk inside a bunker that the paper calls Forward Operating Base Delhi. He's bare-headed now – his helmet's placed domically on the floor [*Gen is an Overturned Bowl.* ☒] – and his short-cropped reddish hair sticking up in spikes lends him a certain air, blue eyes and all, of the youthful Johnny Rotten.

"It's just nice to be here with all the guys and just mucking in as one of the lads," runs the quote superimposed on the pic. In one hand Harry hold what looks like

small bottle of green Gatorade from which he is about to take a swig. Still camo-panted, his boots rest on what might be either a kilim or a rug with a fairly shallow pile. Much of the fabric is obscured by the Prince's feet, the bits of odd stuff lying on it, and also by the cropping of the photo itself. But as you look more closely, trying to make visual sense of the rug's pattern you experience one of those moments, part *Aha!* and part *Oh shit!*, a "No-it-can't-be-but-of-course-it-is" recognition of the ineluctable Thing Itself.

So you turn the paper 90° clockwise, the better to identify the images knotted into the weave: Hand grenades. A Soviet tank. Helicopters. Troop carriers. An A-K 47. A machine gun with tripod, not unlike the one on the paper's cover. It's firing off a burst all on its own, autonomously or by God's will, in any case without benefit of gunner. The rug also bears words, but these are difficult to read. They might be place names identified with a particular group of people. Hard to say.

Beneath this page-wide pic, two smaller photos, their content easily imagined from their captions: "WAR BUDDIES: Chilling out with members of the British Army's storied Brigade of Gurkhas." And "HEIR TRIGGER: Manning a tank machine gun with an army comrade."

Somewhere along the path connecting Chaucer and Belloc, England possessed a Bard, who purportedly once wrote, in a play called *The Life of King Henry the Fifth*, some verses along these lines:

SCENE I. France. Before Harfleur.

Alarum. Enter KING HENRY, EXETER, BEDFORD, GLOUCESTER, and Soldiers, with scaling-ladders.

Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more;
Or close the wall up with our English dead!
In peace there's nothing so becomes a man
As modest stillness and humility:
But when the blast of war blows in our ears,
Then imitate the action of the tiger;
Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood,
Disguise fair nature with hard-favour'd rage;
Then lend the eye a terrible aspect;
Let pry through the portage of the head
Like the brass cannon; let the brow o'erwhelm it
As fearfully as doth a galled rock
O'erhang and jutty his confounded base,
Swill'd with the wild and wasteful ocean.
Now set the teeth and stretch the nostril wide,
Hold hard the breath and bend up every spirit
To his full height. On, on, you noblest English.
Whose blood is fet from fathers of war-proof!
Fathers that, like so many Alexanders,
Have in these parts from morn till even fought
And sheathed their swords for lack of argument:
Dishonour not your mothers; now attest
That those whom you call'd fathers did beget you!
Be copy now to men of grosser blood,

And teach them how to war. And you, good yeoman,
Whose limbs were made in England, show us here
The mettle of your pasture; let us swear
That you are worth your breeding; which I doubt not;
For there is none of you so mean and base,
That hath not noble lustre in your eyes.
I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,
Straining upon the start. The game's afoot:
Follow your spirit; and upon this charge
Cry "God for Harry, England, and Saint George!"
Exeunt. Alarm, and chambers go off.

And late this morning in the online *Messenger*, appears this pic and caption
front page and center:



Pool photo by John Stillwell

“Harry Withdrawn From Afghanistan: Britain’s Ministry of Defense on Friday ordered an abrupt end to Prince Harry’s previously secret tour of duty, citing media reports on his presence.”

God for Harry. Ah yes, and heaven help us all.

Turn back to the *Times* front page to find that in the seconds it took to subvocalize and type out the two sentences above the pic of Harry in Helmet and Shades has been replaced by:



Pool photo by John Stillwell

The caption’s the same. But clearly we’ve switched historical drama for comedy (sort of) and landed in the midst of *The Winter’s Tale*, wherein the last words of an unfortunate Sicilian nobleman, bracketed by stage directions, run thus:

[Thunder]

The storm begins. Poor wretch.

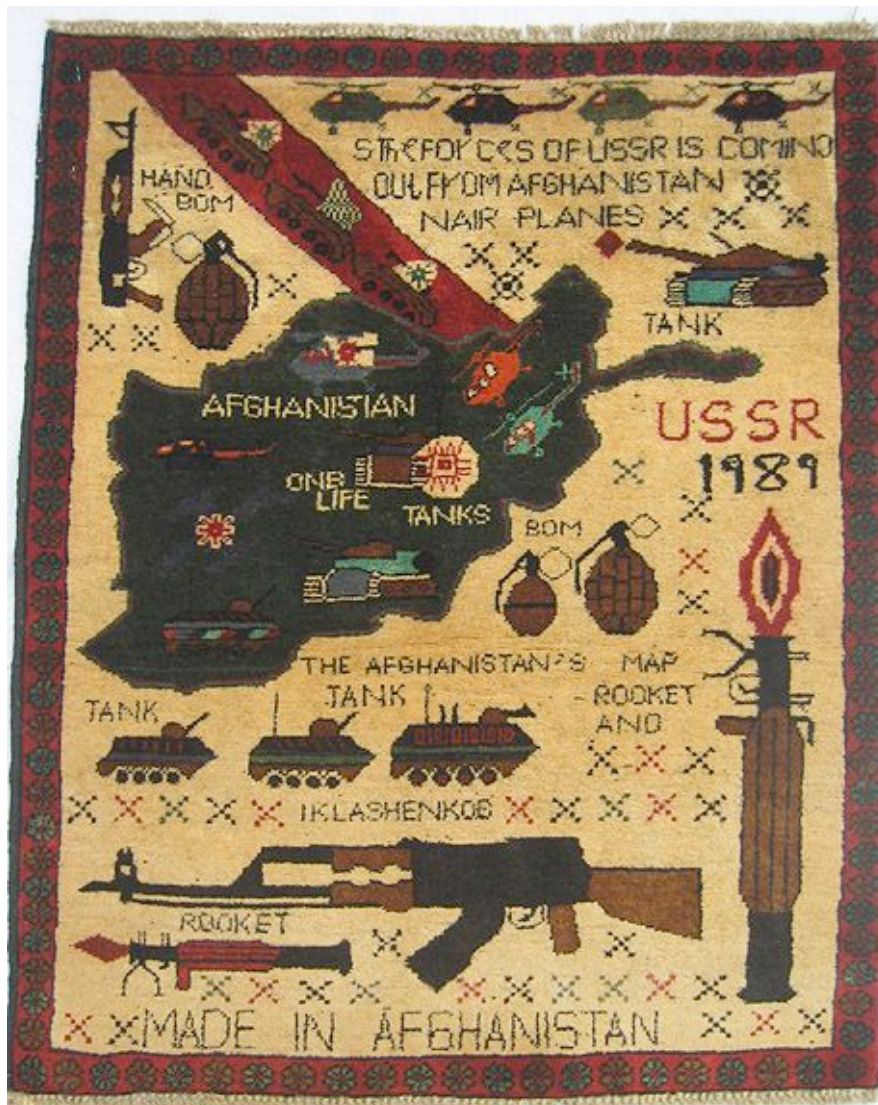
That for they mother’s fault art thus expos’d

To loss and what may follow! Weep I cannot,

But my heart bleeds; and most accurs'd am I
To be by oath enjoined to this. Farewell!
The day frowns more and more. Thou'rt like to have
A lullaby to rough. I never saw
The heavens so dim by day.
[Noise of hunters and dogs within]
A savage clamour!
Well may I get abroad. – This is the chase.
I am gone for ever.
Exit, pursued by a bear.

Or better still *Carry On: The Motorcycle Diaries – Down the Khyber Pass*. A touch too of T.E. Lawrence in the night – though “Al-Arance” gunned a Brough Superior, which this hog clearly ain’t.

Casse toi pauvre con, casse toi. What else to say to someone whose nickname, at least in the media’s coinage is “bullet magnet.”



Yes, this design, found at www.warrug.com looks very like the one on which Prince Harry rested his boots. Similar in design and iconography to many others, the dealer's titled this one "Four Helicopter on Top Row Soviet Exodus Yellow Map War Rug." Its full description runs as follows:

War Rug Width (decimal feet): 2.08

War Rug Length (decimal feet): 2.51

Knots per Inch - Horizontal: 12

Knots per Inch - Vertical: 12

Warp Depression: Full Warp Depression

War Rug Sales Status:

Country of Origin (estimated): Afghanistan

War Rug Style: Soviet Exodus

War Rug Ethnic Origin: Turkman

General Description: This new war rug is in perfect condition. This rug, though having the date of 1989, was made in 2002 and commemorates the year of the Soviet exodus. The writing is a beautiful addition to this war rug. The artist proudly recalls the feeling of the times and has written that the forces of USSR is coming out from Afghanistan. Also, she displays her wonderful understanding of the English language by naming various objects such as the Afghanistan map, tanks and rocket, and calls hand grenades hand bombs. For the artists homeland, she includes the blessing of long life among the depicted explosions within Afghanistan.

Description of wool: Like most rugs of this class the wool is soft and lustrous

Sheen of Wool: Very good

Handle: Firm

Selvedge: Two cord navy

Fringe: No kilim, overhand knots, short fringe

Pile Material: 6mm

Weft Material: white cotton

Warp Material: 1 black

Note to self: Weave it all in.

At J.'s fête d'anniversaire yesterday morning you asked M. what was up, astrologically, with Venus and Mercury appearing these days in the southeastern predawn sky only one degree removed, a phenomenon which you persist in getting up too late to see. "Love and communication," she replied, a if *wasn't that obvious?* Would that, would that.

Suppose. Suppose the girl child Diana Frances Spencer had been born in the opium-rich Afghan province of Helmand, just across the border from Pakistan? Would she have learned to weave rugs? Might she still have been alive on May 8, 2007, when US airstrikes, most likely from a Predator, killed forty civilians in the village of Heratyan, a few miles as the crow flies from Forward Operating Base Delhi, built in the ruins of a former madrassa, where young Harry sat so affably, before being hustled [*Exeunt*] from the scene?

Would she have displayed her "wonderful understanding of the English language by naming various objects such as the Afghanistan map, tanks and rocket, and calling hand grenades hand bombs"? And woven into her Turkmen rug, "the blessing of long life among the depicted explosions within Afghanistan"?

Questions only, requiring no answer, nor admitting any.

Yet, at the end of *The Winter's Tale*, Hermione, who has sacrificed herself for her husband returns from the dead as a kind of animate statue, something like *Alcestis* in the Euripides play. Shakespeare tries to spin the final lines happily, but there's too much history standing in the way, so it all just shuts down fast, like a dropping portcullis:

Lead us from hence where we may leisurely
Each one demand, and answer to his part
Perform'd in this wide gap of time since first
We were dissever'd. Hastily lead away.
Exeunt.

A play ill-made – all unresolv'd, and lacking in a ring of truth. Yet gentles all, tis not concluded, for the curtain will not fall. And thus the players, scriptless, soldier on without the slightest touch of Harry in the night.

Finally, finally, the idiot secretary connects you with Warren B., Oracle of Omaha, or is that Obama. “The party’s over,” sighs Warren, repeating like a golem the exact words he told the *Messenger*. Then he drones on some negative crap about how Berkshire’s off nearly 20% for the quarter. He sounds really bummed. Still you tell him your idea to revamp GM around the personal pleasure principle. Low costs, high profits. “I like it, Eric,” he says. “Really I do. Genital Motors – it’s got buzz. It’s just that insurance industry profit margins, including ours, will fall significantly in 2008. Prices are down, and exposures inexorably rise. We’re looking at lower insurance earnings during the next few years, bro.” Jeeze, and here you thought he was still riding the crest of the post-Katrina disaster cap biz blitz. Guess it’s time to look elsewhere for a partner. Too many dead-enders crashing all around these days.