Hello and welcome history friends patrons all to our special series on my PhD thesis. Last time we began assessing the Opium War and its context, and here we continue with this analysis, while looking at a similar situation in Afghanistan. How was NH used in these circumstances, both to justify the government’s policy, and to aid the opposition’s effort to undermine this campaign? We also looked at the HS, an idea which suggests that NH contained an inner logic and formula which dictated how it worked, and what it demanded, with rigid consistency. This idea, proposed by the historian Avner Offer, deserves further investigation. Here we bring this conflict to its end, with important conclusions on how the ethic worked, and how even political opponents could succumb to its pull. We’ve a lot to get through so without any further ado, I will now take you back to chapter two of my thesis.

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The importance of adhering to the honour-script by repelling insults and asserting Britain’s position was thus plain – without this adherence, other lesser powers would take advantage of perceived weakness.[[1]](#footnote-1) One could argue that another aspect of vindication was the act of reminding the Chinese of British power, so they would not underestimate or disrespect it in the future.[[2]](#footnote-2) The Tories were attacked for their cynicism and inconsistency;[[3]](#footnote-3) was it really credible to suggest that if the government absorbed the insult, they would have been satisfied?[[4]](#footnote-4) Allied to the charge of dishonourable mismanagement was that of immorality, which reminded the public of the detestable opium trade. When independent peer Earl Stanhope chaired a London meeting, he attacked the war as ‘one of the most flagitious, unjust, and disgraceful that had ever been entered into’, insisting that if it continued ‘we should have no ground of complaint against France’ or any other nation ‘for want of faith.’[[5]](#footnote-5) According to this view, Britain would incur shame if she fought a war for opium, and such shame would damage national honour as severely as the perceived failure to respond to insult.

Other sources, particularly of Anglo-Indian origin, were more belligerent.[[6]](#footnote-6) However, this pro-war position was undermined by those Ministers and their allies who contended that war was not declared, and would only occur if the Chinese did not peacefully submit to the demands of the military expedition.[[7]](#footnote-7) However unlikely this possibility, Ministers could publicly cling to it while preparing for war. This façade was maintained into the summer, as Parliamentary questions pertaining to letters of marque;[[8]](#footnote-8) the cost of the expedition;[[9]](#footnote-9) its composition and leadership;[[10]](#footnote-10) the role of opium in the war, and the possibility of banning it,[[11]](#footnote-11) were all similarly disposed of by claiming that it depended on how the Chinese reacted. Even when an Order in Council permitted the seizure of all shipping on the Chinese coast, Palmerston asserted that the distance of the theatre excused the government for planning for every contingency.[[12]](#footnote-12) In July, the Commons approved war credits of £173,000, despite the state of war not technically existing.[[13]](#footnote-13) By then, British and Empire soldiers had begun their first campaign for the Chusan Archipelago.

Indeed, after the initial controversy, the conflict with China moved to the background, and was rarely discussed in Parliament.[[14]](#footnote-14) The government’s survival of Graham’s Motion granted de facto sanction to the war, and Peel’s new administration [August 1841] pursued it to the end. Still, the claim that the war had been launched to vindicate British honour proved durable. Members later rejoiced in military victories,[[15]](#footnote-15) and there was room even to commend the soldiery for not reverting to dishonourable excess in their quest for vindication.[[16]](#footnote-16) Others, like the Duke of Wellington, maintained that they would always support a British government which fought for British rights and honour.[[17]](#footnote-17) Furthermore, the opium trade, and the impossibility of suppressing it, was retroactively conceded by Peel’s government.[[18]](#footnote-18) Much was made of the need to demonstrate British power to the Chinese, and inculcate within them a respect for British prestige which their inherent barbarism made it otherwise impossible to comprehend.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Since it could conceivably be claimed that Britain did not desire a war of conquest with China, and sought only the vindication of its honour, Members were compelled to support this vindication.[[20]](#footnote-20) The conflict subsequently developed into precisely such a war for conquest, as Chinese cities were bombarded, and land was seized, but the mission of vindication – possible only through a satisfactory treaty – remained in the forefront.[[21]](#footnote-21) ‘We are unfortunately still engaged in hostilities with the Chinese Empire,’ said the Earl of March in early 1842, but such a war ‘could not be avoided without compromising our national honour.’[[22]](#footnote-22) The Sino-British relationship was in this sense a useful tool, as several decades of resentment could be drawn upon, where Captain Elliot’s treatment was presented as the final straw in a litany of insults.[[23]](#footnote-23) Public knowledge and outcry over the opium trade was palpable, yet even this moral dilemma could not intrude upon the necessity of vindication. The rhetoric of honour was thus a valuable tool in the government’s arsenal, but it was one tool among many, featuring alongside the vagueness of the war’s status, and the imperatives of secure commercial relations.

Thus, it may be argued that while Melancon’s identification of national honour as the cause of the war was ‘ultimately perhaps overstretched,’[[24]](#footnote-24) the ethic did provide Ministerial unity, and granted access to a rhetorical well which did not necessarily have to resonate with the public to distract from governmental failure or obfuscation.[[25]](#footnote-25) ‘The appeal to national honour,’ Melancon discerned, ‘neatly tied together the interests of state and the political interests of the cabinet.’[[26]](#footnote-26) Conversely, it should be noted that this ‘appeal to national honour’ was underwhelming, particularly in comparison to other campaigns for vindication.[[27]](#footnote-27) No Ministers made public speeches in support of the war during the critical months of spring and summer 1840[[28]](#footnote-28) – save for those made in Parliament – and the general tone of the media suggests that the country had become resigned to the requirements of the honour-script, rather than jubilant about the prospects of a war of vindication. This may be explained by the murkiness of available documentation, and the widely publicised evils of opium which remained open to criticism.[[29]](#footnote-29)

Still, the necessity of vindication in a region so close to India was never seriously challenged.[[30]](#footnote-30) This may have been a pragmatic decision, since the punitive expedition to China amounted to a *fait accompli*, and could not be stopped once launched. It proved the first in a succession of reinforcements, which enabled British and Empire forces to inflict several crushing defeats.[[31]](#footnote-31) This cloak of glory and the passage of time moved the conflict beyond its original parameters. To ‘make the Chinese sensible of the extent of the outrage they had committed,’ China was forced to pay compensation both for the seized opium, and for the expenses Britain incurred waging war against it.[[32]](#footnote-32) The quest of vindication was brought to the forefront, refining the original casus belli,[[33]](#footnote-33) while the commitment to seize no territory was ignored, an inconsistency which Palmerston, by then in opposition, justified in the then jubilant mood.[[34]](#footnote-34) Even from opposition, Russell could use the rhetoric of honour to reassert the necessity of seeking satisfaction, a task which had only led to war because of Chinese intransigence.[[35]](#footnote-35) This necessity may have granted the government a degree of plausible deniability, though contemporaries arguably saw through such claims.

Significantly, this use of rhetoric was not confined to the Chinese example. A brief contrast with the concurrent crisis in Afghanistan [1838-1842] may be instructive. Although initially successful in establishing an Anglophile regime in Kabul, by early 1842, the situation collapsed, and Britain suffered a defeat equalled only by Isandlwana in 1879.[[36]](#footnote-36) Britons were aghast at the perceived betrayal of their puppet regime, the imprisonment of civilians, and the destruction of a British regiment, which were presented through the lens of national honour.[[37]](#footnote-37) Unlike the resignation which greeted news from China, Britons anxiously followed news of the Afghan debacle, to the extent that the Kabul campaign has been regarded as an early example of a ‘media war.’[[38]](#footnote-38) Upon learning of the catastrophe in spring 1842, Peel’s Conservatives emphasised the importance of responding to insult, in language not dissimilar to that used by the Whigs following news of Captain Elliot’s detention. However, the Afghan insult was arguably more severe, since it contained the unprecedented destruction of a British column. British military honour necessitated a swift response, and it would have been politically impossible to abandon the theatre without acquiring the appropriate satisfaction.[[39]](#footnote-39)

The honour-script demanded immediate satisfaction, and gelled with the necessity of vindication for reasons of prestige, Indian security, and imperial interests. If honour was not vindicated, the disaster could be viewed as a fatal symptom of British weakness, rather than a singular event. It was markedly more difficult to defy the honour-script when facing such a stark military defeat. Nor was there room for forbearance when facing offences from these ‘uncivilised’ powers. This intolerance towards insults from a non-European theatre was consistent with the general train of Victorian foreign policy.[[40]](#footnote-40) Suffering an insult from an ‘uncivilised’ power was not merely unpalatable, it also threatened British presentations of its empire and world power status. The rhetoric of national honour associated colonial defeat with imperial instability through anxious, urgent language which contemporaries understood and professed to believe in. One discerns that insults from France, the United States, and even Spain (see below) were subject to negotiation, whereas regions susceptible to imperial expansion demanded immediate military retaliation.

In the Chinese case, Melancon argued that ‘Economic interests…were only part of a larger, complex set of motivations in the decision-making process; the most important motive was honour.’[[41]](#footnote-41) Yet, one could argue that economic imperatives were aided by the appeal to honour, and that the prospect of stable trade relations, twinned with financial compensation, were incentives which informed the Cabinet’s decision to deploy the ethic. The likelihood of victory may have influenced this policy, alongside an inherent racism and sense of entitlement which balked at placing Asian rights on a parity with Britain’s.[[42]](#footnote-42) Additionally, it may be argued that the goals of restoring of equal trading relations with China, or establishing a favourable buffer state in Afghanistan, were articulated through the rhetoric of honour to detract from criticism and cynicism. Such tactics did not shield Ministers from scrutiny, but they provided a viable rhetorical framework which excused any misgivings for the sake of national honour.

Like the Chinese case, critics condemned the immorality of the Afghan policy which had facilitated these disasters in the first place.[[43]](#footnote-43) Parrying such charges, Ministers warned of the danger to India which would follow if national honour was not vindicated in Kabul, mirroring the concerns of the East India Company towards China.[[44]](#footnote-44) Yet, some challenged, was it not ludicrous to claim that Britain’s unrivalled position could be threatened by such middling powers?[[45]](#footnote-45) Indeed, the inherent brittleness this suggested in Britain’s Indian influence moved Benjamin Disraeli to challenge the logic of such a sensitive prestige[[46]](#footnote-46) – a significant contribution considering his later behaviour during the Eastern Crisis.[[47]](#footnote-47) When a successful Afghan campaign technically redeemed the previous defeat in late September 1842, there was still room to condemn the excess of soldiers on the ground in Kabul, who razed the site of the betrayal in the city’s bazaar.[[48]](#footnote-48) Critics maintained that immoral conduct, in both China and Afghanistan, undermined the claim to satisfaction. Afghans would remember Britain’s character for excess, it was claimed, far more than the spectacle of triumph.[[49]](#footnote-49) It was also argued that British immorality would make evangelising more difficult in these regions in the future.[[50]](#footnote-50)

Yet, the Chinese and Afghan cases also show how the vindication of honour could overcome objections both to the policy’s conception, and to the government’s subsequent conduct. It seemed what mattered most was that because of these campaigns, ‘Honour had been retrieved.’[[51]](#footnote-51) When news of the Afghan triumph reached London in December 1842, it was cause for satisfaction.[[52]](#footnote-52) Peel insisted that it was ‘impossible to contemplate these services without feeling proud of the British name.’ The Prime Minister congratulated Members that ‘while we were thus vindicating the honour of the British name in the north-west of India’, a campaign of ‘consummate skill’ was underway in China. Considering such effective campaigning, Peel declared himself ‘willing to believe that these unquestionable proofs of the military reputation of England…notwithstanding the long interval of peace, stands as high as it did during the excitement of the war.’[[53]](#footnote-53)

Parliament voted its thanks for both triumphs in a dedicated session, and advocates of retributive justice turned to asserting the necessity of vindication. According to the standards of the honour-script, by its victory in Kabul, the government had ‘restored the British name’ – a synonym of prestige.[[54]](#footnote-54) Even in opposition, Russell contended that favourable results would follow this vindication of honour.[[55]](#footnote-55) Critics were required to focus on the finer details of the situation in their attacks. Indian Governor-General the Earl of Ellenborough may have been upheld as ‘the successful vindicator of our honour,’[[56]](#footnote-56) but Whig critics emphasised his personal negligence,[[57]](#footnote-57) just as Tories had charged Melbourne’s government with imperilling national honour in China through similar negligence. Explanation for the opium war was reduced to a response to insult, and similarly Peel could declare that ‘the insult has been avenged,’ when reflecting on the campaign in Kabul.[[58]](#footnote-58) Ultimately, the rhetoric of honour boasted a political resonance which added to its effectiveness.

One discerns that in Afghanistan and China, divisions existed among Tories, Whigs, Liberals, Radicals, and Irish MPs, rooted in the interpretation of what national honour required, and where it resided. Visible even within political parties, this manifested in a striking spectacle where Members criticised their own government, and used their understanding of national honour to do so. This illustrated not merely the magnitude of the task of persuasion, but also the inherent difficulty of gathering political support for a contentious policy. Governments struggled under scrutiny levelled from the opposition and backbenchers, but there were reasons for pushing through these obstacles and pursuing one’s goals to fruition. Critics could impugn dishonourable conduct, but if said conduct brought a triumphant outcome, it was politically difficult to condemn an administration which had overseen the fulfilment of national honour’s demands. After all, it was established that the government was dutybound to defend national honour wherever it was impugned.[[59]](#footnote-59)

This, perhaps, was the key to honour’s rhetorical and ideological power. It was difficult to educate the public on the nuances of the opium trade, or the strategic importance of erecting a buffer state in Afghanistan against Russian encroachment to India, but the rhetoric of honour provided a familiar language which, at its core, justified military intervention. As Palmerston understood, ‘whenever events may call for the display of our military or naval power, to maintain the interests, or vindicate the honour of the country,’ then ‘the army and navy of Great Britain will be found as they have ever been, fully equal to the maintenance of those interests or the vindication of that honour.’[[60]](#footnote-60) National honour was also a convenient tool in moments of crisis. One discerns that in comparison with other cases, the government’s victories in China and Afghanistan amounted to making the best of a dangerous situation. In both instances Ministers were taken by surprise, and then driven to respond by the expectations established by the honour-script. British honour, British influence over India, and Britain’s prestige across the world required a show of force. The ethic facilitated what would otherwise have been an impossible policy hastily adopted by a beleaguered government, presented to an unsympathetic Parliament, and followed by a mostly uninterested public.

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I think it’s fair to say that NH, although a belief system, was also recognised by now as a useful tool which could aid the government’s policy. As the radically inclined Whig Benjamin Hawes asserted in April 1840, if ‘the national honour was not to be indicated from injury and insult – then he must say, that one of the greatest misfortunes which could befall would occur to this country,’ as its ‘very existence in Asia and Europe depended upon its conduct in this critical and difficult emergency.’ Britain did not seek ‘conquest or extent of dominion; her object was not aggression nor aggrandisement; all she sought was reparation from insult and injury.’ Finally, Hawes asserted that ‘the country and the merchants felt that insults to British subjects were not to be slightly committed, especially in India, where Britain was powerful more by her moral than her physical influence.’

This messaging was maintained by former ministers even after they had left office. In 1842 Lord Russell reminded Members that the purpose of the expedition to China had been ‘to resent insults and injuries offered to her Majesty's officers, and her Majesty's subjects,’ but that ‘If the terms which were originally proposed by her Majesty's representative had been acceded to by the Chinese, full satisfaction would have been afforded us.’ However, ‘as that reparation was refused, instructions were given for the attack of the defences on the Chinese coast; the island of Chusan and several towns were taken by our troops, and a portion of the Chinese forces were destroyed.’ Russell insisted that this was ‘the course to which we had been compelled to resort to obtain reparation for the insults and injuries offered to us as a nation.’

Where the opposition did not accept this fact in 1840, pro-government organs were on hand to criticise them for their cynicism. Edinburgh’s *Caledonian Mercury* noted that as soon as war was made against the Chinese, ‘the ensign of national honour was lowered, and the dirty yellow flag of faction, hoisted’, while ‘the bold warlike defiance of the Tories sank into a womanly treble for peace, peace, at all hazards.’ It observed that ‘if Lord Melbourne and his colleagues had been passive under all the insults of the Chinese’, then ‘the cry would have been, that the Government…was laying the country prostrate’ before them, yet ‘when the Cabinet remonstrates in defence of the nation’s rights, then they are accused of thirsting for war.’ To explain this need for vindication, some papers reflected on the years of insults inflicted by the Chinese, which convinced them that Britain would never repel future insults, however severe.

Thus the weekly liberal paper *The Era* asked ‘How is it, that so long a period has not been sufficient to make the Chinese acknowledge our superiority?’ The reason was plain: ‘we have permitted them to treat us with insult and indignity – because in every disagreement, we have invariably submitted to their dictation, and bowed to their despotism. It is as true between nations as it is between individuals – that those will never obtain respect who do not respect themselves.’ The Era considered that while the casus belli with the Chinese before 1839 was clear – ‘our national honour demanded it, and all scruples of conscience would have been removed’ – now, ‘there is such a strange jumble of interests and wrongs, fair and illicit trading, that it has become a question on which the disputant on either side may alternately claim the victory.’ Yet, concluding its case, ‘if the grounds of the war are in the present instance trifling’, this did not necessarily matter as ‘it must not be forgotten that we had a long series of insult and indignity to strengthen it,’ while the promised results would be ‘very beneficial to the human race.’

China was one issue, but it is interesting to see how the Tories reacted to the Afghan insult when they were in power. The sheer scale of the defeat in Kabul in early 1842 certainly shocked British opinion, but once they had collected themselves, it was business as usual in seeking satisfaction and reasserting British prestige in Afghanistan. As the former Governor General for India and architect of the Afghan war the Earl of Auckland explained, he invaded Afghanistan: ‘because he considered it essential to the safety of our empire in India; because he saw a danger approaching the Indian territory’, which ‘would have left us without power, without stability, without safety.’ It was only after painful deliberation and close consultation with informed agents that he ‘resolved at once to dispel the danger which was most imminent, and which danger, he firmly believed, could now be represented as no longer formidable, solely because that decisive step had been taken.’

But just as some Radical MPs challenged the motive for war with China, the Conservatives were challenged both for their justification of war with Afghanistan, and their conduct in that war. The Radical and free trader Dr John Bowring – later to serve as Consul of Canton – considered the Afghan war ‘from first to last, anything but honourable to our national character’ since ‘We had little to be proud of in the invasion of a country of which we had nothing to complain’. Not to be outdone, Bowring’s fellow Radical John Roebuck challenged the House to show him ‘anything so degrading to English honour and honesty as our conduct with respect to India?’ He added ‘You are afraid of the powerful, and therefore you generously and gallantly attack the weak. In the whole series of unjust wars, I defy you to show me anything so degrading as this to British honesty and honour.’ He challenged the notion that because ‘we have a strong enemy, are we to do injustice to a weak friend,’ exclaiming that ‘We fear Russia on the Caspian, and we crush Dost Mohammed in Kabul!’

Joseph Hume, the Radical Irish MP for Kilkenny, reflected that although ‘He was not one that discredited the Afghan war’, yet he ‘could not say that the conduct of affairs there reflected any credit upon us.’ Indeed, Hume regretted that as they withdrew, British soldiers ‘had left indelible marks on our character which would last as long as many who then heard him lived.’ Hume was certain that ‘Having redeemed our military character, which was of much more importance than many supposed, we ought to have retired with magnanimity’, and since the ‘authors of the treachery’ which had once facilitated the destruction of her army in Afghanistan could not be found, ‘we ought to have left without revenging ourselves upon the innocent population.’ The destruction of Kabul’s bazaar, Hume declared, ‘was an act so barbarous, that he could not find anything like it even in the conduct of the Goths.’

Nor were Radicals and Irish the only forces opposing the Afghan campaign. Remarkably, considering his later pursuit of a still more disastrous invasion of Afghanistan in late 1878, none other than Benjamin Disraeli opposed the war, distinguishing himself from his peers as he did so. Disraeli discerned that the Afghan War had been launched to restore Indian confidence in British power, yet he ‘really did hope that in these hard, dry, matter-of-fact, Income-tax days, statesmen would be prepared to offer some more substantial reasons for their policy, than the expediency of restoring "confidence in our star."’ He added ‘If he believed that "confidence in our star" alone, or principally, constituted the tenure by which we held India, he should despair of holding that country for any considerable period,’ and ‘So far from being of opinion that our empire in India was one easily to be shaken, he believed on the contrary, it was one maintained by a power not inferior to that by which any existing authority maintained its rule.’ Disraeli presented the view that British influence in India could withstand a defeat which ‘would, to a certain extent, perhaps, sully the character of our arms’, adding that ‘if our empire in India could be shaken, or even endangered, by such a defeat, he must conclude that we held our sway by a very feeble and fragile tenure.’

But the fact of victory had a way of overcoming this opposition, and enabling contemporaries on both sides to bask in the glory. The Conservative Viscount Courtenay reflected that the Afghan war – ‘a war maintained in a country of peculiar difficulty, against foes of unknown numbers and unascertained resources, against the machinations of unparalleled treachery’ – could be a source of great satisfaction as Britons could see ‘that the honour of the British name has been vindicated, and the superiority of the British arms established on the scenes of our former reverses.’ Courtenay reasoned that if the government ‘continue to show themselves ready and anxious to maintain peace at the risk of everything but national honour’ then it would both receive and deserve ‘the confidence of a portion of the country.’ Even Lord John Russell now felt ‘the utmost confidence that these gallant exploits are a proof that every interest of England will be maintained, and that English honour will be vindicated, in whatever quarter of the globe it may be infringed or violated.’ While rejoicing ‘most sincerely in the success of our arms in Afghanistan’, and being ‘delighted that the honour of the British arms has been re-established.’ Russell believed ‘we are only beginning to see the good consequences of the invasion of Afghanistan’, which would contrast British influence favourably with native princes.

Clearly then, policymakers were hampered by opposition even when they brought forward the rhetoric of honour in their arguments. By far the most effective argument was military victory, and this enabled Members to retroactively justify both the Chinese and Afghan campaigns. This was the beginning of British expansion into China, and was arguably also the beginning of the century of humiliation which remains a prescient part of Chinese memory to this day. Both China and Afghanistan would reappear in the future, and the motives for making war there again, as we will see, were always consistent with NH. NH did cut through the moral and political opposition, especially since the opium trade was roundly unpopular in British opinion. The best way to overcome this difficulty was to recast the conflict as one in the name of NH, rather than a drug trade, and if it is true that Glenn Melancon overstated NH as a motive for the Opium War, I would argue that the language accompanying NH made intervention easier. Similarly, in Afghanistan, while prestige and the fate of the hostages were pressing concerns, the act of reasserting British supremacy and sending a message to Russia were also strong motives. Had contemporaries been honest, the discourse might have looked very different, but we know by now that these individuals were well aware of NH’s mobilising power, and its ability to cut through difficult arguments while resonating with the public. In the next episode, we’ll look at a situation which was apparently ripe for the deployment of this honour-based language – an intolerable insult inflicted by the ungrateful rulers of Spain. I hope you'll join me that, but until then my name is Zack, thanks for listening, and I’ll be seeing you all soon.

1. As Palmerston later reflected, ‘Depend upon it, that the best way of keeping any men quiet is to let them see that you are able and determined to repel force by force; and the Chinese are not in the least different in this respect from the rest of mankind.’ Palmerston to Sir John Davis, 9 Jan 1847 in Bourne, *Foreign Policy of Victorian England*, Doc. 41, p. 275. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For example, the Marquess of Abercorn reflected in February 1842 that ‘the justice of our claims upon that country having been universally recognized, and the success of our arms having proved that no effort on the part of China could for any long period resist those claims, there was every reason to expect, not only a satisfactory settlement of our dispute with that country, but that such an indication of our power would have been given, as would ultimately place our commerce with China on the most advantageous foundation.’ Marquess of Abercorn, HL Deb 3 Feb 1842 vol 60, cc. 7-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. On 20 April the *Morning Chronicle* criticised the cynicism of the Tories, who agitated for war in the past ‘not for the purpose of redressing wrong or vindicating national honour, but as a likely means of obtaining a party triumph in the House of Commons,’ though no sooner did the Tories ‘think that the Ministers are fairly committed’ to said war, do they ‘seek to visit them with a vote of Parliamentary censure’. The government could never satisfy the Tories in this political game, since any apathy for war with China would have ‘the ground of a precisely similar attempt’ at censure. *Morning Chronicle*, 20 April 1840. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Edinburgh’s *Caledonian Mercury* noted that as soon as war was made against the Chinese, ‘the ensign of national honour was lowered, and the dirty yellow flag of faction, hoisted’, while ‘the bold warlike defiance of the Tories sank into a womanly treble for peace, peace, at all hazards.’ It observed that ‘if Lord Melbourne and his colleagues had been passive under all the insults of the Chinese’, then ‘the cry would have been, that the Government…was laying the country prostrate’ before them, yet ‘when the Cabinet remonstrates in defence of the nation’s rights, then they are accused of thirsting for war.’ *Caledonian Mercury*, 23 April 1840. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Morning Post*, 25 April 1840. It was also printed in *The Times*, 25 April 1840. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The *Bombay Gazette* approved of the war ‘for the protection of our trade and the vindication of our honour.’ *Bombay Gazette*, 29 Jan 1840 in *West Kent Guardian*, 21 March 1840. The *Bombay Times* remarked on the ‘moral lesson’ which would have to be taught to the Chinese. *Bombay Times*, 25 Jan 1840 in *Caledonian Mercury*, 16 March 1840. The *Commercial Journal* described the composition of the flotilla sailing ‘for the purpose of vindicating British honour on the coast of China.’ *Commercial Journal* in *Dublin Morning Register*, 18 March 1840. This position was maintained for the duration of the war. In 1842 the *Indian Sun* thus explained that ‘National honour…becomes in some cases so entrammelled in adverse events, that recourse is as unavoidable as it is to be recommended; and when aggression proceeds from the opposing party, and violation of sacred and long-founded rights, persons, or institutions, attaches to their political conduct, the wounded sense of British authority and right cannot reasonably submit to the injury offered, nor the arm of vindication rest quiet.’ *Indian Sun*, 18 April 1842. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Responding to the question of prize money when Chinese ships were seized in war, the Attorney General declared that ‘such proclamations were not issued, except in cases where war had been declared, and there had yet been no such declaration. All that had been done was no more than an attempt to obtain reparation for injuries sustained.’ HC Deb 11 April 1840 vol 53, cc. 997-998. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. HL Deb 10 April 1840 vol 53, cc. 966-967. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. HC Deb 4 May 1840 vol 53, cc. 1183-1184. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. HL Deb 5 May 1840 vol 53, cc. 1208-1209. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. HL Deb 12 May 1840 vol 54, cc. 1-48. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. HC Deb 6 July 1840 vol 55, cc. 456-458. Also noteworthy was the Queen’s Order in Council of 4 April, which permitted the seizure of Chinese ships as prizes in the conflict. *The Times*, 16 April 1840. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. HC Deb 24 July 1840 vol 55, cc. 973-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The subject was raised just four times in 1841 and four times again in 1842. The government never shared details of the military campaign throughout these sessions. See in 1841: HC Deb 22 April 1841 vol 57, c. 974; HL Deb 29 April 1841 vol 57, cc. 1243-4; HC Deb 6 May 1841 vol 57, cc. 1491-2; HL Deb 7 May 1841 vol 58, cc. 6-7. In 1842: HC Deb 15 March 1842 vol 61, c. 608; HC Deb 17 March 1842 vol 61, cc. 759-97; HC Deb 21 March 1842 vol 61, c. 936; HC Deb 7 April 1842 vol 62, cc. 4-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. As George Berkely declared: ‘It must be a proud reflection in the breast of every Englishman, that a handful of men, schooled in forbearance, but determined on success, should in so short a space of time have humbled the bloated pride of an enormous—of a self-styled Celestial empire, the largest on the earth, and have taught its emperor, and his boastful and false commissioners for the future, to honour and respect the humblest merchant of this country who might hereafter trade to their distant shore.’ HC Deb 26 Jan 1841 vol 56, cc. 44-45. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Thus Mark Philips: ‘it is matter of congratulation to this country, that in attempting to vindicate our honour we have not been driven into any act of violence or bloody hostility against a nation who have been distinguished for want of good faith in their relations with this country.’ HC Deb 24 Aug 1841 vol 59, cc. 114-115. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. ‘I said that the war was a just and necessary war; I will go farther, and say if it had been otherwise—if it had been a war solely on the score of the robbery of the opium—if her Majesty's government were engaged in that war, and if their interests and honour were involved in it, I should have considered it my duty to make every effort for carrying it on with success, and have asked Parliament for the assistance which would have enabled her Majesty's servants to bring it to an early and successful termination.’ Duke of Wellington, HL Deb 2 Feb 1843 vol 66, cc. 30-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Thus in 1844 Lord Derby asserted: ‘the suppression of the Opium Trade by forcible measures, considering the determination on the part of the people of China to consume that drug, and on the part of the principal officers of the Chinese government to connive at its introduction, was hopeless; and…it was an object of considerable importance to induce the Chinese government, if possible, to consent to its introduction, and to legalise the trade, subject to such an amount of duty as they might feel inclined to propose.’ Lord Derby, HC Deb 10 Feb 1844 vol 72, cc. 473-474. Further expansion in India has also been connected to the securing of trade routes which would protect the opium trade. See J. Y. Wong, ‘British Annexation of Sind in 1843: An Economic Perspective,’ *Modern Asian Studies*, 31, No. 2 (May, 1997), 225-244. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *Blackwood*’s was assured that ‘by whatever presents and explanatory letters we court the personal strength and favour of the Emperor, the strength of our impression will rest upon our visible demonstration of power contrasted with our extreme forbearance in using it. That *must* make a favourable impression.’ ‘The Opium and the China Question,’ *Blackwood's Edinburgh magazine*, 47, No. 296 (Jun 1840), 737. It later predicted that within a decade, an army similar in composition and responsibility to that installed by the East India Company would be formed in China. Relying on the ‘exquisite imbecility and exquisite profligacy of Chinese nature,’ Blackwood’s asserted the Chinese ‘will acknowledge no ultimate restraint but that of physical force,’ but that ‘many times must the artillery score its dreadful lessons upon their carcasses,’ before China would acknowledge British rights. ‘Canton Expedition And Convention,’ *Blackwood's Edinburgh magazine*, 50, No. 313 (Nov 1841), 688. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The Attorney-General Sir Frederick Pollock thus declared in August 1843 that ‘It might be a subordinate object to get the price of the opium and obtain the expenses of the war, but the primary, if not the sole object of that war, was to vindicate the honour of this country.’ HC Deb 4 Aug 1843 vol 71, cc. 264-265. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. As Lord Lurgan explained, ‘He trusted satisfaction would be demanded for all the insults and injuries that had been heaped upon them. He could not for a moment believe, although such rumours had reached him, that any stipulations or treaties would be uttered into, and that satisfaction for the insults offered to them by the Chinese government would be obtained through the medium of a piece of parchment.’ HL Deb 26 Jan 1841 vol 56, cc. 13-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Earl of March, HC Deb 3 Feb 1842 vol 60, cc. 41-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. For example, weekly liberal paper *The Era* asked ‘How is it, that so long a period has not been sufficient to make the Chinese acknowledge our superiority?’ The reason was plain: ‘we have permitted them to treat us with insult and indignity – because in every disagreement, we have invariably submitted to their dictation, and bowed to their despotism. It is as true between nations as it is between individuals – that those will never obtain respect who do not respect themselves.’ The Era considered that while the casus belli with the Chinese before 1839 was clear – ‘our national honour demanded it, and all scruples of conscience would have been removed’ – now, ‘there is such a strange jumble of interests and wrongs, fair and illicit trading, that it has become a question on which the disputant on either side may alternately claim the victory.’ Yet, concluding its case, ‘if the grounds of the war are in the present instance trifling’, this did not necessarily matter as ‘it must not be forgotten that we had a long series of insult and indignity to strengthen it,’ while the promised results would be ‘very beneficial to the human race.’ *The Era*, 13 Dec 1840. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. David Brown, Review: ‘Britain's China Policy and the Opium Crisis: Balancing Drugs, Violence and National Honour, 1833-1840 by Glenn Melancon,’ *English Historical Review*, 120, No. 489 (Dec., 2005),

    1455-1457; 1456. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Glenn Melancon, ‘Honour in Opium?’, 869. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. *Ibid*, 871. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See Chapter Three. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Speeches critiquing the opium trade were much more common. See *London Evening Standard*, 28 April 1840. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. For example, in August 1841 William Sharman-Crawford declared before the Commons that ‘In his opinion, the war with China was one of the most unjust that ever was undertaken by a nation. It was a war to establish a contraband trade, and if any lives were lost a charge of murder might be preferred against those who were the instigators of it.’ William Sharman-Crawford, HC Deb 25 Aug 1841 vol 59, cc. 232-233. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. As the radically inclined Whig Benjamin Hawes asserted in April 1840, if ‘the national honour was not to be indicated from injury and insult – then he must say, that one of the greatest misfortunes which could befall would occur to this country,’ as its ‘very existence in Asia and Europe depended upon its conduct in this critical and difficult emergency.’ Britain did not seek ‘conquest or extent of dominion; her object was not aggression nor aggrandisement; all she sought was reparation from insult and injury.’ Finally, Hawes asserted that ‘the country and the merchants felt that insults to British subjects were not to be slightly committed, especially in India, where Britain was powerful more by her moral than her physical influence.’ Benjamin Hawes, HC Deb 8 April 1840 vol 53, cc. 755-757. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. The first successful campaign for Chusan was reported in *London Evening Standard*, 8 Dec 1840. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. In an August 1843 session Palmerston argued that ‘in order to make the Chinese sensible of the extent of the outrage they had committed, and that they might sufficiently feel the exercise of the power of Britain in vindication of their honour, it was thought expedient and proper to make them pay the expense of the war, in addition to compensating the injured parties.’ HC Deb 4 Aug 1843 vol 71, cc. 285-286. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. In the same session, Palmerston reminded Members that ‘It was entirely owing to the manner in which the opium had been extorted, that the late Government had felt that an outrage upon British subjects had been committed, which not only authorised but rendered necessary measures of hostility, should such be required. It had been said that what the late Government demanded was satisfaction for the injured honour of the country, and that one of the ways in which satisfaction was to be given was payment for the opium so extorted, and, from the commencement, in the instructions to Captain Elliot, and afterwards to Sir Henry Pottinger, the principle laid down was, that the compensation should be full.’ *Ibid*, cc. 284-285. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Later in the above session Palmerston declared ‘this country had obtained the valuable possession of the island of Hong Kong, and had, at the same time, secured many commercial advantages as the result of a war which had been forced upon us, and which was not undertaken for the purpose of gaining any such advantages, but which was very reluctantly entered upon, and which a strong sense of duty made it incumbent upon the Government of Great Britain to engage in for the purpose of vindicating the honour of the Crown, and of obtaining satisfaction for injuries inflicted on its subjects.’ *Ibid*, cc. 288-289. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Lord Russell reminded Members that the purpose of the expedition had been ‘to resent insults and injuries offered to her Majesty's officers, and her Majesty's subjects,’ but that ‘If the terms which were originally proposed by her Majesty's representative had been acceded to by the Chinese, full satisfaction would have been afforded us.’ However, ‘as that reparation was refused, instructions were given for the attack of the defences on the Chinese coast; the island of Chusan and several towns were taken by our troops, and a portion of the Chinese forces were destroyed.’ Russell insisted that this was ‘the course to which we had been compelled to resort to obtain reparation for the insults and injuries offered to us as a nation.’ Lord John Russell, HC Deb 17 March 1842 vol 61, cc. 793-794. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. It was famously recorded that only a single soldier survived to inform the garrison of Jalalabad of the catastrophe, though there is some debate over how many survived, with more survivors later materialising in a ‘distressed condition’ outside the fortress. See William Trousdale, ‘Dr Brydon's Report of the Kabul Disaster and the Documentation of History,’ *Military Affairs*, 47, No. 1 (Feb., 1983), 26-30; 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. As one contemporary soldier argued, if Britain showed a determination to crush the Afghans ‘and avenge our national honour with might and spirit,’ then ‘so long will they be quiet,’ but demonstrating ‘the least symptom of fear and backwardness,’ would mean that ‘every Mussulman in India will sharpen his sword to cut our throats, and risings and insurrections will be universal all over India.’ *Dover Telegraph and Cinque Ports General Advertiser*, 19 March 1842. This soldier’s perception of British power and prestige gelled with contemporary politicians and the assessments of historians of the Raj. See Chandra Mallampalli, ‘“A Fondness for Military Display”’, *Journal of Asian Studies*, 77, No. 1 (Feb, 2018), 139-159. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Shane Malhotra, ‘"If She Escapes She Will Publish Everything": Lady Sale and the Media Frenzy of the

    First Anglo-Afghan War (1839-1842),’ *Book History*, 17 (2014), 272-297; 273. Sir Robert Sale’s wife was held in Kabul following the disaster, but her record of events earned plaudits from the Prime Minister, who later declared ‘I never should excuse myself if, in mentioning the name of Sir Robert Sale, I did not record my admiration of the character of a woman who has shed lustre on her sex—Lady Sale, his wife. The names of Sir Robert, and of Lady Sale will be familiar words with the people of this country.’ Sir Robert Peel, HC Deb 20 Feb 1843 vol 66, cc. 967-968. *The Times* interpreted the defeat not as proof of ‘Afghan prowess’, but ‘as demonstrations of the incapacity of the British generals,’ while looking ahead to a campaign to ‘uphold the reputation of British troops’ in the country, wherein a ‘brilliant exploit’ was anticipated. *The Times*, 5 May 1842. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. According to Sir Henry Baillie – later the Undersecretary for India – Britain was ‘now placed in such a position, that she had no other recourse but to take those steps which were best calculated to vindicate the honour of the British name.’ If anyone present wished to ‘preserve the British empire in India’, Baillie declared, then they must approve of such a policy without a single ‘dissentient voice’. J. H. Baillie, HC Deb 23 June 1842 vol 64, cc. 444-445. Tory MP and East India Company director James Hogg believed that ‘the period of failure and defeat was the time when such a discussion could not take place without compromising the character and the honour of the country.’ Surely this was a time ‘when action, and energy, and retribution ought to engross every thought and nerve every arm’. Hogg was certain that ‘Perfidy, without parallel, must be punished – murder, the most atrocious, must be avenged – and the national honour must be redeemed and asserted.’ Hogg, *Ibid,* cc. 507-508. The Prime Minister assured his divided party members ‘that in any course that her Majesty's Government may pursue, they will not forget to ensure that the honour of the British arms shall be fully maintained, and that no instances of gross treachery and perjury shall pass altogether unpunished.’ Peel was confident that ‘these disasters will be so far repaired that they will not, in the slightest degree, shake the confidence of the people of England in our supremacy.’ Peel, *Ibid*, cc. 521-522. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. The sensitivity to insult and necessity of acquiring satisfaction was also discernible in the 1867 invasion of Abyssinia, and the second invasion of Afghanistan in 1878. See Chapter Six. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Melancon, *Britain’s China Policy*, p. 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. As Morrison discerned, ‘Certain patterns of behaviour were expected of these mutually identified 'Great Powers' in order to uphold that elusive quality, imperial prestige.’ Alexander Morrison, ‘Twin Imperial Disasters. The invasions of Khiva and Afghanistan in the Russian and British official mind, 1839–1842,’ *Modern Asian Studies*, 48, No. 1 (Jan, 2014), 253-300; 255. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Radical and free trader Dr John Bowring – later to serve as Consul of Canton – considered the Afghan war ‘from first to last, anything but honourable to our national character’ since ‘We had little to be proud of in the invasion of a country of which we had nothing to complain’. HC Deb 2 Feb 1843 vol 66, cc. 161-162. John Roebuck challenged the House to show him ‘anything so degrading to English honour and honesty as our conduct with respect to India?’ He added ‘You are afraid of the powerful, and therefore you generously and gallantly attack the weak. In the whole series of unjust wars, I defy you to show me anything so degrading as this to British honesty and honour.’ He challenged the notion that because ‘we have a strong enemy, are we to do injustice to a weak friend,’ exclaiming that ‘We fear Russia on the Caspian, and we crush Dost Mohammed in Kabul!’ Roebuck, HC Deb 1 March 1843 vol 67, cc. 132-134. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. As the former Governor General for India and architect of the Afghan war the Earl of Auckland explained, he invaded Afghanistan: ‘because he considered it essential to the safety of our empire in India; because he saw a danger approaching the Indian territory’, which ‘would have left us without power, without stability, without safety.’ It was only after painful deliberation and close consultation with informed agents that he ‘resolved at once to dispel the danger which was most imminent, and which danger, he firmly believed, could now be represented as no longer formidable, solely because that decisive step had been taken.’ Auckland, HL Deb 2 Feb 1843 vol 66, cc. 49-50. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Irish Tory Robert Jocelyn, a veteran of the concurrent Opium War, questioned the argument of ‘the alleged necessity of supporting the prestige of British superiority, which it was said the native population of India believed to be on the wane.’ He also questioned the logic ‘that we held India by the sword and the bayonet’. If Britain’s position depended upon the opinion of the natives, and the mere reputation of British arms, then ‘where was the necessity of establishing a barrier on our frontier, or of entering on an unjust and sanguinary war to support a prestige allowed to be useless and of no importance?’ Viscount Jocelyn, HC Deb 23 June 1842 vol 64, cc. 497-498. He argued against a punitive expedition, and instead declared that the architects of the original expedition should be prosecuted, as their decisions did ‘degrade the British name’, reasoning that ‘a want of confidence in our power’ was ‘to the last degree undignified.’ *Ibid*, cc. 504-505. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Benjamin Disraeli, a Tory excluded from Peel’s government, discerned that the Afghan War had been launched to restore Indian confidence in British power, yet he ‘really did hope that in these hard, dry, matter-of-fact, Income-tax days, statesmen would be prepared to offer some more substantial reasons for their policy, than the expediency of restoring "confidence in our star."’ *Ibid*, cc. 448-449. He added ‘If he believed that "confidence in our star" alone, or principally, constituted the tenure by which we held India, he should despair of holding that country for any considerable period,’ and ‘So far from being of opinion that our empire in India was one easily to be shaken, he believed on the contrary, it was one maintained by a power not inferior to that by which any existing authority maintained its rule.’ *Ibid*, cc. 449-450. Disraeli presented the view that British influence in India could withstand a defeat which ‘would, to a certain extent, perhaps, sully the character of our arms’, adding that ‘if our empire in India could be shaken, or even endangered, by such a defeat, he must conclude that we held our sway by a very feeble and fragile tenure.’ Disraeli, *Ibid*,cc. 451-452. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. See Chapter Six. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. The son of former Prime Minister Earl Grey, Viscount Howick, questioned whether the conduct of soldiers in that campaign of reprisal was truly honourable, particularly ‘whether any and what orders had been issued for the destruction of the bazaar at Cabool?’ Who had ordered such a barbarous act? ‘If some satisfactory explanation’ was not given, ‘a deeper stain would be cast upon the British arms and character than by any disasters however great and lamentable.’ Howick, HC Deb 2 Feb 1843 vol 66, cc. 142-143. Joseph Hume, the Radical MP for Kilkenny, reflected that although ‘He was not one that discredited the Afghan war’, yet he ‘could not say that the conduct of affairs there reflected any credit upon us.’ Indeed, Hume regretted that as they withdrew, British soldiers ‘had left indelible marks on our character which would last as long as many who then heard him lived.’ Hume was certain that ‘Having redeemed our military character, which was of much more importance than many supposed, we ought to have retired with magnanimity’, and since the ‘authors of the treachery’ which had once facilitated the destruction of her army in Afghanistan could not be found, ‘we ought to have left without revenging ourselves upon the innocent population.’ The destruction of Kabul’s bazaar, Hume declared, ‘was an act so barbarous, that he could not find anything like it even in the conduct of the Goths.’ Hume, *Ibid*, cc. 144-145. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Former Lord High Chancellor and Radical Whig Lord Brougham condemned ‘a fierce, a brutal, an unchristian spirit of vengeance’ which compelled the British to return. Further, he determined it a ‘weak, an empty, a self-repugnant, aye, and a self-destructive policy’ that idea ‘to impress a notion, to leave a recollection of your power upon the nations of the East, forgetting that at the same time you are impressing it you are also leaving on their minds an unquenchable abhorrence of the European name and character; or, at least, of the name and character of the British Europeans.’ Brougham, HL Deb 2 Feb 1843 vol 66, cc. 39-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Thomas Macauley, HC Deb 9 March 1843 vol 67, 613-616; George Grey, *Ibid*, cc. 663-665. Joseph Hume disagreed, *Ibid*, cc. 650-651. As did Lord Stanley, *Ibid*, cc. 668-671. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Louis Dupree, ‘The First Anglo-Afghan War and the British Retreat of 1842: the Functions of History

    and Folklore,’ *East and West*, 26, No. 3/4 (Sept-Dec 1976), 503-529; 526. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. *Chester Chronicle*, 9 Dec 1842. Correspondence dating from September were provided, detailing the release of British prisoners and the negotiations undertaken with Afghan chieftains. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Sir Robert Peel, HC Deb 20 Feb 1843 vol 66, cc. 969-970. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. The Conservative Viscount Courtenay reflected that the Afghan war – ‘a war maintained in a country of peculiar difficulty, against foes of unknown numbers and unascertained resources, against the machinations of unparalleled treachery’ – could be a source of great satisfaction as Britons could see ‘that the honour of the British name has been vindicated, and the superiority of the British arms established on the scenes of our former reverses.’ Courtenay reasoned that if the government ‘continue to show themselves ready and anxious to maintain peace at the risk of everything but national honour’ then it would both receive and deserve ‘the confidence of a portion of the country.’ Viscount Courtenay, HC Deb 2 Feb 1843 vol 66, cc. 65-68. The Marquess of Lansdowne agreed with these sentiments, but focused on the delay in acquiring satisfaction, hoping ‘no such hesitation was really entertained,’ both ‘as to the recovery of the prisoners and the recovery of their military honour—both objects most dear to them, and for which every means should have been employed, every nerve within their power should be strained.’ Lansdowne, HL Deb 2 Feb 1843 vol 66, cc. 24-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. He felt ‘the utmost confidence that these gallant exploits are a proof that every interest of England will be maintained, and that English honour will be vindicated, in whatever quarter of the globe it may be infringed or violated.’ Russell, HC Deb 20 Feb 1843 vol 66, cc. 970-971. While rejoicing ‘most sincerely in the success of our arms in Afghanistan’, and being ‘delighted that the honour of the British arms has been re-established.’ Russell believed ‘we are only beginning to see the good consequences of the invasion of Afghanistan’, which would contrast British influence favourably with native princes. *Ibid*, cc. 976-977. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Bickham Escott, HC Deb 9 March 1843 vol 67, cc. 647-648. James Hogg reminded Members that a second march on Kabul was never considered before Ellenborough arrived, but that shortly thereafter it was decided ‘to obtain the release of the prisoners, and to retrieve our military reputation, by the infliction of some signal and decisive blow upon the Afghans.’ Hogg, HC Deb 20 Feb 1843 vol 66, cc. 999-1000. Considering Ellenborough’s record, Hogg asserted that ‘no man could have shown a more anxious desire to retrieve the national honour’. *Ibid*, cc. 1003-1004. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Ross Mangles, Secretary to Bengal and Whig MP for Guildford, asserted that while Ellenborough was ‘entitled to thanks’, he believed ‘the margin of the noble Lord’s merit very small’, and that ‘the national honour had been in much hazard in his hands.’ Ellenborough, Mangles observed, had ordered a retreat from Afghanistan, had not planned a campaign of reprisal, and if his policy had been followed, ‘we should have been mourning over a humiliating defeat, and our national honour, and the character of our troops unvindicated.’ Mangles, HC Deb 20 Feb 1843 vol 66, cc. 1003-1004. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. ‘We have vindicated the honour of the British arms, on the scene of their former disasters. Our relation with Afghanistan—our unfriendly relations with Afghanistan—are closed. We are not called upon, as in the year 1840, to take steps for the purpose to avenge our disasters. The insult has been avenged. The credit of our arms has been re-established.’ HC Deb 1 March 1843 vol 67, cc. 190-191. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. As the Earl of Powis argued, ‘Our duty in the first place was to redeem the honour of the British flag, which had been tarnished’, and then to free her prisoners. ‘Happily, both these results were accomplished.’ Earl of Powis, HL Deb 2 Feb 1843 vol 66, cc. 8-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Viscount Palmerston, HC Deb 14 Feb 1843 vol 66, cc. 569-570. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)