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Revisiting the Great Game: The 19th Century Anglo-Russian Rivalry in Central Asia

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Abstract:

The British loss of the thirteen colonies and the American independence in 1883 moved Britain to concentrate her efforts on India in which the English East India Company had established its foothold from the beginning of the seventeenth century up to the Indian Mutiny (1857). Upon this latter historical event, the British Government took the overall control of India due to the dysfunction of the East India Company. However, the British direct rule of India was problematic, for it was challenged by the Russian southwards expansion, thus culminating in an Anglo-Russian rivalry for power and influence in the region. Historians named this type of Cold War between the two empires, 'the Great Game.' The result of such a game was that coterminous regions with both powers' spheres of influence were submitted to military and political dominance.

Keywords: Anglo-Russian Rivalry, Central Asia, spheres of influence, military dominance

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1.Introduction

Conflicts over territory and its resources have always been part of human nature. The value of territory depends on its resources, which drive man to resort to force to expropriate such a territory of his fellow man. A case in point was European and Russian powers' imperialism in Africa and Central Asia, which culminated in an Anglo-Russian crisis (1875-1878).

King Dost Mohammad's reign of Afghanistan (1826-1839) witnessed a series of disagreements with Britain which culminated in a four-year war in 1838, as a result of British rivalry with the Russian Empire, an imperial rivalry better known as the Great Game. The Great Game denotes an Anglo-Russian competition and intrigue for the quest for political power and influence along with territorial aggrandizement in Southwest Asia and Central Asia. Ahmed Rashid, a Pakistani journalist, states that the Great Game was "a clandestine war of wits and bribery and occasional military pressure as both powers kept each other at a respectful distance, by maintaining Afghanistan as a buffer state between them (Rashid, 2011)." Professor Dominic Lieven (2011, p.11) defines the phrase as 'the geopolitical rivalry that set Great Britain against Russia over a period that ranged from the 1830s to the early 1900s'."

Most noteworthy is that John William Kaye, the British Historian, was the first to use the expression 'Great Game,' (Rezun,1986) after taking it from the letters of Arthur Connolly, the British explorer and spy to Central Asia that the Amir of Bukhara beheaded in 1842 (Hauner, 1984). However, Arthur Connolly did not use the exact phrase, 'Great Game'. He worded it 'Grand Game' to denote the same historical fact, that is, the Anglo-Russian competition in Central Asia. The Russian diplomat and statesman, Count Karl Robert (1780-1862), termed the Anglo-Russian competition, 'the Tournament of Shadows. 'Rudyard

Kipling, however, is credited to have made the expression 'Great Game' known to the public, in his novel, entitled Kim.

2.The Balance of Power of Britain and Russia

2.1 Britain's Economic Power

Doubtless, the British surpassed the Russians in terms of infrastructure which not only aided goods transport but also improved the communication channels between the empire colonies. For instance, the Russians started to build the railroad system in Central Asia in the 1880s, when the British had already completed the construction of 1,000 miles of track in India alone. Additionally, the fact that the Industrial Revolution started in England in the 1750s had enabled Britain to make great strides in industrialization and oil drilling, and therefore accumulate capital, which prerequisites Russia did not possess. Despite the aforementioned British advantages, she did not ignore Russia's ambitions because the Russians' progress within Central Asia was threatening.

Map 1: The Great Game: British and Russian Expansion (1846-1900)

Source: Stephen Tanner, Afghanistan, U.S.A., Da Capo Press, 2002, p.128

2.2. Russia's Major Power

Historically, the Russian conquest of Central Asia is a throwback to Peter the Great's rule of Russia (1682-1725). His motives were mainly political and economic, namely to keep trade routes free from the Kazakhs' inroads and to consolidate the Russians' presence in Asia. To achieve such a purpose, they established on the Ural River the Orenburg base whose purpose was to deter the Kazakhs from attacking the Russian merchants. A second motive that drove the Russians to expand in Central Asia was their pressing need for raw material, namely cotton, to keep their textile industry running.

In addition to the aforementioned political and economic incentives, the Russian military counted, among their ranks, upon men like Cherniaev, who was eager to display his military feat to win glory, promotions, and medals. Hence, to win their superiors' sympathy and ultimately achieve their dreams, they made of Russian expansion their main goal. A further motive that underlay the Russians' occupation of Central Asia was to exert pressure on the EIC.

On the other hand, the British loss of the thirteen colonies made them grow adamant not to lose India, and the very thought of a potential loss of it, made them develop some sort of paranoia and obsession. In 2007, Professor Philippa Levine expresses this idea as follows:

> The EIC's hold on India was tightening at much the same time that the American colonies broke away from Britain. The loss of America was as much a psychological as an economic blow. The failure of British trade in the East Indies (Indonesia and the Spice Islands) and the barriers to trade in China before the 1840s made India a particularly important site of British interest, their principal foothold in Asia (p.62)

3. Britain and Russian Spheres of Influence

In addition to the Anglo-Russian competition in Central Asia, these powers' rivalry also grew in the Middle East, which compelled them to have good relations with Turkey and Persia. These latter states were of crucial importance as Russia's and Britain's military and commercial communications ran through them. The Russians were anxious that they might fail to control the declining Ottoman Empire, for it was a route to their homeland. Turkey was especially more important for Britain, because, having it under its influence, meant having under her control the Suez Canal, Britain's lifeline to India.

Within the Anglo-Russian imbroglios in Central Asia, Afghanistan was of the utmost importance for both powers. For the Russians, it constituted an outlet for India. By the same token, the British wanted Afghanistan to be a barrier country so that they could consolidate their empire, and eventually, secure their political and economic interests in India.

4. British Fears about Russia's Aggrandizement

An archival source stressed the fact that the prospect of an invasion of India was commonplace in the first years of the nineteenth century, not only within the European general public but also within the European political and military elite (De Evans,1828). The author of On the Practicability of an Invasion of British India, Lieut.-Colonel De Lacy Evans maintained that to prepare for contingencies, the Bengal Government then gave the political agents assignments to secure Hindustan then, the most vulnerable, and from which a likely European invasion might be launched.

Several other factors gave rise to British fears that India might fall in the hands of the Russians, and thus were to move the British to intervene in Afghanistan in 1838: Russia's annexation of some of the Persian territories, the Persians' siege of Herat in 1837, the

Russians' steady expansion in Central Asia, and their political agents' manoeuvres in Kabul in 1837.

Yet, two interesting facts were sufficient to cause British concern in the 18th and 19th centuries: Peter the Great's alleged statement, in 1725, that Russia should move towards India, and the nineteenth century Russians' expansion eastwards and southwards Central Asia, 'at a rate of 55 square miles a day (Osborne, 2010). Peter the Great's statement, along with Russia's expansion obsessed Britain for a century, from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth century. This expansion was, in the long run, to decrease British India's and Russia's geographic frontiers, from 4,000 miles, in the eighteenth century, to 1,000 miles in the mid-nineteenth century.

4.1. British Expansion in Central Asia in Central to Protect its Indian Colony

As a reaction to Russia's systematic expansion in Central Asia, Britain took the following measures: the capture of the territories from which the potential threats might be posed, and the making of barrier states to stem the Russian advance towards India. The need to shield India from external threats drove the British to form a circle of protection around it. Accordingly, they seized Seychelles (1797), the Cape of Good Hope (1797), and Malta (1800). Because the Burmese encroached on Indian territories, they waged two wars in 1824 and 1852 against the latter, during which the British annexed parts of Burma.

To the East, China was closely connected to British interests in India, for a significant fraction of the East India Company's profits derived from its commercial activities with China. The result was that these commercial activities drained the Chinese Government coffers, for the latter had to barter tea and silver for opium. The Chinese authorities' efforts to stop the flow of Indian opium led, in 1839 and again in 1856, to war and subsequently, to Britain's annexation of the island of Hong Kong in 1841. Because Aden was contiguous with the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea, the British captured it. In fact, its seizure enabled them to ensure the

supply of their ships in coal on their way to India. As a result of these territorial acquisitions, the British made the boundaries of India secure.

In addition to the British annexation of the territories from which European invasion of India might occur, they considered the idea of buffer states. Indeed, the Russian intermittent expansion in the first years of the nineteenth century was to arouse Britain's fear that India might be encroached upon. Such a situation made Britain think of buffer states that would separate India from Russian footholds. These were Afghanistan, Persia, and Tibet, all of which, had borders with India. This led both rivals to compete to have these states under their respective influence (Williams,1980).

4.2. British and Russian Interests in Afghanistan

Of the aforementioned buffer states, Herat, which Persia subjected to the blockade, was strategic, for the British considered that it was a gateway to India. However, Afghanistan as a whole was of utmost importance for them. Therefore, they saw it judicious to establish friendly relations with its Amir, Dost Mohammad. So, how did the Anglo-Afghan relations develop into mutual hostility?

The Russian Government altered the Anglo-Afghan peaceful political relations. In fact, the arrival in Kabul of Ivan Vitkevic, Russia's political agent in 1837, co-occurred with that of Alexander Burnes, Lord Auckland's envoy to Dost Muhammad. Both men claimed to establish commercial relations with Afghanistan. However, the Amir of Afghanistan showed more readiness to conclude a pact with the British than the Russians, with the proviso that they helped him recover Peshawar from the Sikhs (Reunion, 2007). Because the British ignored his request, he deemed it necessary to deal with the Russians, a step that was both to damage the Anglo-Afghan relations, and to hasten British military intervention in Afghanistan. The purpose of such intervention was to dethrone Dost Mohammad and re-

enthrone King Shah Shuja, the British perfect candidate as he was more willing to work with the British rather than the Russians.

Being aware of the Russian schemes, the British thought it fitting to make of Afghanistan a buffer state that would act as a shield against a potential expansion of Russia towards India. In their effort to enforce their plan, the British first resorted to diplomatic channels with the Afghans. In 1837, they commissioned Alexander Burnes to Afghanistan to convince Amir Dost Mohammad Khan (r. 1826-1839 and 1843-1863) to ally with Britain against Russia, and to accept the British buffer state scheme. Dost Mohammad Khan asserted that he would agree on the condition that the British would assist him to recover Peshawar, then under the Indian princes. This was the Amir's basis of negotiations. Because they were against antagonizing the Indian princes, the British rejected the Amir's condition, and subsequently, the negotiations broke down. Given the stalemate that the negotiations reached, Lord Auckland issued a formal declaration; he called 'the Simla Manifesto' in which he justified British intervention in Afghanistan. Subsequently, the first Anglo-Afghan War broke out in 1838(Sabahuddin,2008).

Now whether British intervention in Afghanistan was founded or not, this remains an issue. In fact, while the 19th-century British political elite argued that the Russians' southwards expansion was a real threat to India, the Russians' held that they had no intention of invading it. In this respect, in a video, presented by Rory Stewart, Tatiana Zagarodnikova, a Russian historian, asserted that the British claim that Russia intended to invade India was a British military subterfuge to compel British Parliament to finance their military expansions. She expresses this idea in the following words:

> ..... to my mind, it was a game, kind of making face, towards the audience, towards public opinion. Another thing is that that was a wonderful pretext in the

> parliament to demand more money for military purposes, for keeping big armies in India, and so on (2012).

William Dalrymple, the British historian, believes that the nineteenth British military elites exaggerated the Russian threat and were, therefore at all costs, determined to dethrone Dost Mohammad and enthrone Shah Shuja. In the words of William Dalrymple:

> As we know in our own time, if you create a phantasm, a horror figure of your own imaginings, that figure can actually come into being. You can imagine a threat into life. Just like the neo-cons had wanted to topple Saddam Hussein long before 9/11, and 9/11 gave the neo-cons the excuse they were looking for. In the same way the Hawks, the Russophobes, in the British establishment in Simla and in Calcutta, had wanted to pre-empt the Russians in Central Asia (Rory, 2012).

Equally, Francis Henry Skrine and Edward Denison Ross, authors of a book entitled, The Heart of Asia, contended that the Russian threat to India was a British pure conjecture (1889). They accounted for the British Public's increasing fear by stressing the role that the media then played to shape public opinion that the Russian threat was real and that Britain should wage war against Russia. One such open military confrontation was the Crimean war (1853-56). Skrine and Ross also argued that a Russian potential invasion of India required Russia to possess a formidable naval power capable of outweighing that of Britain, which power the Russians lacked.

5. Russian Imperialism in Central Asia

Russian imperialism covers the period that extends from the late 19th century to the early 20th century, albeit the Russian expansion in Central Asia had started long before the

nineteenth century, precisely under Ivan IV in the 15th century(Raziullah, 1984). However, Russian expeditions, then, did not make much headway.

What characterized Russian imperialism was that it was more particularly directed towards Central Asia, as a new Russian commercial class emerged, seeking markets and investments in regions contiguous with Russia (Spring, 1979). As a result, the Russian administration was concerned that its peripheral states, though still less industrialized, would be prone to the European rival powers' influence, notably Britain, which prospect, the Russians believed, would enable the latter to preempt them in the region. An overview of the geography and history of Central Asia is crucial to understand the importance of this region for Russia, and her scramble to have a foothold there, and why Britain was concerned about the Russian expansion into Central Asia.

Central Asia, whose geography is 12, 8 million square kilometres, holds a pivotal position in the Asian continent. It extends from the Caspian Sea in the West to China in the East, and from Afghanistan in the south to Russia in the North. Central Asia comprises five countries: Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. These are modern countries that the former Soviet Union had colonized.

Historically, Central Asia enjoyed considerable political significance for centuries. The Turks, Mongols, Chinese, and other peoples crossed the region into Afghanistan in quest of goods and artefacts from Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Egypt. What is more, it was through Central Asia that merchants, travellers, and adventurers passed to move from China to modern Istanbul and from there to Rome. There, markets would be supplied with silk and inexpensive types of artefacts, all coming from Asia, which aroused the Russians' and British ambitions and subsequently led to the scramble for the region. The population in Central Asia, largely nomadic, was an aggregate of peoples united with ties of clan, tribes, and religion.

Map 2: Central Asian States

Source: http://asiasociety.org/central-asia-political-history-19th-century present.

The separate Khanates namely, Bokhara, Khiva, and Kokand were important states in Central Asia (see map 3, p.12). The Khanates were, in fact, countries that took the names of their capital cities. Even though they were autonomous, their political and religious ties were strong(Roudik,2007). At the top of the political structure, was the Emirate of Bokhara, headed by the Amir to whose emirate, the Khanates of Khiva and Kokand, came to be subordinate.

Map 3: Russian Penetration in Western Central Asia in the 19th and 20th Centuries

Source: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1998

Before the Russian Empire annexed the Central Asian khanates, the latter enjoyed political and religious unity. At the head of the khanates were khans, a term that denotes a title that is used to mean lord of chief and is considered an elite title of respect. Because of this political structure, the three khanates became so closely tied that the threat to one khanate would affect the two others, for they shared the same religious faith and political structure. In this political and administrative organization, the clergy were to strengthen the khanates' relationship, in that they managed the three states' affairs. In these states, Islam was the religious faith, and the Amir of Bokhara was the religious leader of all the Muslims in Central Asia. One of the eminent Amir's to whom the power of Bukhara was accredited in the second half of the 18th century was Shah Murad (r. 1785-1800).

In fact, in the history of Bukhara, Shah Murad is known today to be the one who had made Bukhara a powerful emirate. In his effort to make Bokhara a powerful emirate, Shah Murad had to initiate some administrative, judicial, and military reforms. To ensure the smooth collection of taxes that would keep the wheels of his government turning, he divided the emirate into districts, which themselves were divided into sections, where the sharia law was enforced. Equally, there were some 300 mosques and madrassas, which were to make Bokhara a religious and educational centre that comprised Turks, Tajiks, Arabs, Iranians, Afghans, Armenians, Chinese, Hindus, and Jews. Bokhara also included nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples, namely Uzbeks, Turkmens, Kazakhs, and Kara Kalpaks.

Khiva was also an important khanate. If today, the khanate is divided between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, before the 19th-century Russian invasion, it was located along the Amu-Darya River, south of the Aral Sea. Owing to the proximity of Khiva to the Silk Road and its relative political independence, the Uzbeks, who were formally nomadic, chose it as their perpetual dwelling. The location of the khanate also aroused the Russians' ambitions since the eighteenth century, as the latter discovered, in the event of an invasion of India, that they had to pass through Khiva, hence its importance. In consequence, they sent two expeditions to subdue it: the first one in 1717 and the second in the winter of 1839-1840. Yet, both expeditions were doomed to failure because of the Russians' insufficient cognizance of the geography of the region (Cheshire, 1934).

Kokand, which is today a city in North West Afghanistan, was formally a powerful khanate that a Ming leader named Abdelkarim founded around 1740. In the 19th century, it was an important centre of trade and handicraft. Its importance grew from the fact that it was located in the proximity to Fergana Valley, which is now located in eastern Uzbekistan. Additionally, Kokand had more than 300 mosques, which made it a religious centre that the Khans supervised. However, from the 1840s, the power of Kokand declined, due to its

antagonism with Bokhara on the one hand, and its infighting on the other. Such a condition both eased the Russian conquest of it in the second half of the nineteenth century, and the subsequent intensification of the Anglo-Russian rivalry in the region, which culminated in the Crimean war (1853-56) which opposed Russia to the allied forces of Britain and France.

Yet neither the Crimean War nor the costly expeditions that threatened the drain of their treasury deterred the Russians from pursuing their campaigns in Central Asia. Even though the Russian forces were defeated in the war, they pursued their expansion policy. They, indeed, launched military expeditions on the three main Muslim khanates of Central Asia: Kokand, Bukhara, and Khiva. The result of these expeditions was that the Russians incorporated Kokand and Khiva into the Russian Empire, respectively in 1868 and 1876, whereas, they annexed Bukhara in 1873. In 1878-81, a Russian military force pursued its expedition against the warring tribes in Turkmenia, North of Persia, and Afghanistan, which expedition ended with the subjugation of these tribes. To justify their expansion policy in Central Asia, Chancellor, Prince Gorchakov alleged in 1864 that the Russians, like their homologues the English, French, Americans, and Dutch in other parts of the globe, were conducting a 'civilizing mission' whereby they strove to stabilize their border by dealing with "half-savage, nomad populations possessing no fixed social organizations (Raziullah 1984, pp.106-135).

Given the Russians' determined expansive policy, how would the British successive governments contend with such facts, and thus secure their political and economic pull in Central Asia? And, how far would they be successful in keeping Afghanistan under their influence and then ensuring the territorial integrity of India? Then, how would the British deal with the Afghan Government?

6. British Reaction to the Russian Expansion Policy and its Effects on Afghanistan

In the wake of the Indian Mutiny (1857), the British Government felt compelled to effect some administrative, political, and military reforms. The purpose of these reforms was to respond to the challenges posed within the context of British-ruled India and the international one, due to the Russian expansion policy. And once again, Afghanistan would be the victim of the Anglo-Russian rivalry.

In accordance with the intended reforms, British Parliament enacted the India Act in 1858. The result was the suppression of the East India Company and its Board of Control, and the British Government's hold of the company's assets.

George Macaulay, Trevelyan asserted that was not really abolished. What changed was the name; so thenceforth, the name Governor-General became Viceroy. He added that the introduction of the telegraph wire and the steamship would decrease their freedom of action in Asia. George Macaulay Trevelyan, British History in the Nineteenth Century (1782-1901) London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1930, p.323

The forces of the Company were disbanded and their regiments absorbed into the newly created Indian Army. The Indian army was further reformed under John Lawrence's viceroyalty (1864-1869), in that the Queen's body of soldiers and previous EICs were blended, and the Indian soldiers were forbidden to serve in the artillery units, and the number of European troops was increased. For the sake of effectiveness, the aforementioned India Act created the post of a viceroy, who was the direct representative of the Crown. It also appointed a Governor-General of India and created a new Cabinet post, that of the Secretary of State who was responsible for the government of India and other British colonies. This government official was assisted by the Council of India, an advisory body that was composed of fifteen members under the Government of India Act that the British Parliament passed in 1858 (Bayly, 1988.) This council's main task was to ensure effective intelligence

between India and Britain. This advisory body had also the power to give financial approval on loans and expenditure(Mahajan,2001). Yet, unlike the preceding President of the Board of Control, the Secretary of State did not need to convene it to declare war or conclude peace with a given country, no matter how great expertise its members had.

It was on the aforementioned reforms that the British Government banked to react to Russian Southwards expansion in Central Asia, which reaction ultimately affected Afghanistan stability. However, the British politicians held divergent views about the policy to adopt vis-à-vis Russia and Afghanistan.

6.1. The British Schools of thought to Counter Russian Expansion

Two schools of thought featured British nineteenth-century policy vis-à-vis these two countries: the 'masterly inactivity' and the 'forward policy. 'Whereas the advocates of the 'masterly inactivity' policy preferred to avoid direct intervention in Afghanistan, the supporters of the 'forward policy' believed that the only way to protect India from a potential Russian expansion was to move forward to occupy the Kabul-Ghazni-Kandahar line. Hassan Kakar, A Political and Diplomatic History of Afghanistan (1863-1901),(Boston, Brill's Inner Asian Library, 2006, p.177).

6.1.1 The Liberals' Masterly Inactivity

The term 'masterly inactivity' was coined by Sir John Lawrence, Governor-General to India from 1864 to 1869. It was the Liberals' policy of appeasement vis-à-vis Russia and Afghanistan upon the end of the First Anglo-Afghan War provided Russia would not encroach upon Afghanistan being a gateway to India. The masterly inactivity deterred the Liberals from interfering within the Afghan internal affairs. George Bruce Malleson (1825-1898), the English officer in India and author of The Russo- Afghan Question and the Invasion of India explained the phrase in the following words:

> Russia might do as she pleased in Central Asia, provided she did not touch Afghanistan; whilst British India should remain inactive, not encumbering herself with an offensive alliance with a power beyond its actual frontier, least of all with Afghanistan, and taking care to give no pledge to support the dynasty of the actual ruler of that country (p. 66).

In principle and as part of the Liberals' 'masterly inactivity' policy the Afghans were free to manage their internal affairs but were forbidden to make friendly overtures with the Russians. In return for their compliance with the Liberals' will, they would receive yearly financial assistance and military equipment (Wilson, p.180.) As a matter of fact, the British Government of India displayed some caution as to favouring an Afghan claimant to the throne at the expense of another, during the Afghan Civil War (1863-1869). Lord Lawrence, at the head of this government, adopted the wait-and-see policy. A case in point was Sher Ali's elder half-brother, Muhammad Azim Khan who, in 1866, asked the Government of India to recognize him as the legitimate Amir of Afghanistan, after the latter had held Kabul in sway. Viceroy Lord Lawrence refrained from offering assistance to either party, preferring to leave the Afghans to solve their own problems. Yet, Lord Lawrence threatened to provide the enthroned Amir with pecuniary assistance and arms should the defeated party seek foreign assistance, in particular from Russia.

In consequence of the British masterly inactivity policy, the Russian Empire grew closer to Afghanistan, which the British wanted as a buffer state between both empires. This contiguity antagonized both the British and the Afghan Governments. The British Liberal policy-makers first pinned their faith in the Russians' assurances that Afghanistan would be outside the latter's sphere of influence. However, over time, they realized that they had been deluded and subsequently grew more concerned about the Russian expansion. As a result, they issued their diplomatic remonstrance about the Russian policy. Given these facts, the

Liberal adherents to the 'masterly inactivity' policy, those who once had been Governors-General of India, namely, John Lawrence (1864-1869), Lord Mayo (1869-1872), and Lord Northbrook (1872-1876) persuaded their Home Government to reach an agreement with the Russian administration to set up a demarcation line between Afghanistan and her northern border. Yet, the attempt failed due to the Russian procrastination on the one hand, and the weakness of the British Government on the other. In a correspondence with Viceroy Lord Lytton, the British Secretary of State for India (1876-1880), Lord Salisbury illustrated British weakness with regard to Russia in the following:

> Russia knows perfectly well that she is unassailable by us ... There is absolutely no point at which we could attack her with any chance of doing serious injury ... The result, of course, is that Russia, being unassailable by our arms, is deaf to our diplomacy and remonstrances upon the subject of her advance in Asia have become a trite and not very edifying Foreign Office form (p.216)

British inability to forestall the Russians' advance prompted Lord Gladstone, the Liberal Government leader, to reach an agreement with the Russian administration on the definition of the Afghanistan northern border. As the British had planned, there ensued some Anglo-Russian talks in 1873 between the Russian Imperial Chancellor, Prince Gorchakov, and Granville, the British Foreign Secretary. These talks ended with the declaration that the Oxus, commonly known as the Amu Darya River, formed the Afghan northern frontier that the Russian forces were not to encroach upon and that Afghanistan was to remain a neutral zone. Lord Clarendon was the first to utter the phrase 'neutral zone' in 1869, but the British Government argued against the phrase thereafter (Cheshire 1934, pp.85-97). According to Richard Bourke, the 6th Earl of Mayo, "Afghanistan can never be a neutral zone for India. It is bound to India geographically and politically, and must continue to be bound." Thus the

British administration used the term 'intermediate zone' instead, and thus refused the term 'neutral zone (Malleson 1885, p.34)

Gorchakov-Granville agreement neither put an end to the Anglo-Russian arguments nor appeased the Afghan Amir's fear. Despite British reservations regarding the phrase,' neutral zone', the Russians continued to use it, which gave the Gorchakov-Granville agreement some sort of ambiguity that benefitted the Russians as the agreement neither stopped their expansion nor forbade them from concluding treaties with Sher Ali, the Afghan Amir. To Sher Ali's fear that the Russian might invade Afghanistan, the British turned a deaf ear to the latter's call for assistance.

In the meantime, the Russians pursued their advance southwards so steadily enough to increase both the British as well as the Afghan concern. The Russians' conquest of Central Asia was complete in 1884 with the annexation of Merv, a region attestive of early Islamic civilization. According to Professor Svat Soucek, a specialist in Central Asian history, it was not Merv's history that interested the Russians; it was rather its contiguity with Afghanistan and thence with India. Given the Russians' steady expansion and the concern it caused, and because the Anglo-Russian first talks about a frontier between both empires failed, the British insisted that new talks be held.

In fact, in 1869, Lord Clarendon, the British Foreign Secretary, held talks with Baron Brunnow, the Russian ambassador, over the prospect of an establishment of a boundary line between the two empires. The frontier line, Clarendon put forward, would be Amu-Darya, south of Bokhara (Cheshire, 1934). To Lord Clarendon's request, Prince Gorchakov asserted that Afghanistan was not within Russia's sphere of influence. Nevertheless, he objected to Clarendon's proposal that Amu-Darya was to be the frontier line between both empires. Then, to assure the British policy-makers, the Russian Government dispatched Count Shuvalov in 1873 to London, where he declared that they had no intention to incorporate

Khiva into the Russian Empire. But in the absence of a British firm policy towards Russia, the latter annexed Khiva.

What is noteworthy is that the 'masterly inactivity' policy, which the Liberals pursued, was a thorough blackout. In fact, when the Liberals were in office, the Governor of India, together with the Home Government, not only determined not to meddle with the Afghan internal affairs but also forbade their officials to know what was taking place beyond the Indian frontiers. A like policy aroused the curiosity of some British officials among whom the adherents to the forward policy. In a letter that Sir Henry Bartle Frere addressed to Lord Salisbury on 3 March 1876, he expressed his dissatisfaction about the Liberals' policy in the following:

I was grievously disappointed at the amount of knowledge possessed by men in excellent positions for learning what goes on amongst the Afghans. Of course, no intelligent, zealous man can be long in such a position without learning a vast deal about his neighbour over the border but the constant inculcation of a non-interference and know-nothing policy, the standing orders to frontier officers, the spirit of the orders being to turn their backs and shut their eyes and ears to all beyond the frontier, and the prohibition of using the most obvious means of getting information, all these have borne fruit, and very little of real diplomatic utility seems known of events, persons, motives, or parties beyond our border (Martineau 1895, 1895).

In view of the Liberals 'ineffective policy to stop the Russians' southwards expansion, an alternative stance was imperative to counteract such expansion. The Conservative Government led by Disraeli (1874-1880) was to consider the British policy towards the Russian administration.

6.1.2. The Conservative Forward Policy to counter Russian Expansion

The Conservative Government which came to power in 1874, pursued a policy that was opposed to that of the Liberals (Raziullah, 1984). In fact, they approached the issue differently by departing from the Liberals' 'masterly inactivity' policy and adopting the 'forward policy.' The main proponents of this policy who were to constitute the Council of India were: H. Rawlinson, Sir Henry Bartle Frere, Sir Robert Montgomery, Sir William Kane, and Sir Bulwer Lytton, the Viceroy to India who replaced Lord Northbrook in 1876. These conservative politicians did not trust the Russians' repeated assurances and promises that the latter failed to honour during the Liberals' tenure, but saw cause for alarm and, therefore, championed prompt actions to counterbalance British policy to forestall the Russian advance towards India via Afghanistan. Regarding Afghanistan, they opted for the control of the Afghan foreign policy, making of the Afghan Amir a ruler in name, not in fact, subservient to British power(Schofield,2003). As for the policy to adopt against the Russians' progress towards Afghanistan, the Conservatives conceived that the preemption of Russian possible progress on Kabul, and thence on India was the appropriate course of action to take. They were against the use of diplomacy with the Russians to deter them from advancing northwards.

Now, since the Khyber Pass was secure due to its contiguity with Peshawar, where the British had their garrison from which they would keep a watchful eye on the Pass, General John Jacob, the British commissioner in Sind, suggested that the British should equally occupy Quetta, where they would watch over the Bolan Pass, a gateway to India (Thornton,1954).

Once appointed as Viceroy of India (1876-1880), Lord Lytton announced the forward policy prospective vis-à-vis the Russian expansion. First, Afghanistan would be brought under British tutelage. Second, the British would advance further in the Indian

North-Western frontier to counter Russian potential progress towards India through Afghanistan. Third, the viceroy would compel the Afghan Amir to accept a British Resident in Kabul to inform the Government of India about the Amir's underhand machinations with the Russians (Eastwick,1879).

In response to the Conservative new policy, the Russian administration pursued a carefully thought strategy. It consisted of diplomatic intrigues; for instance, while assuring the British Government that they had no intention of acquiring further territories, the Russian military forces were, in fact, on the spot carrying out their policy of territorial aggrandizement(Williams,1880). However, when meeting with other governments' inflexibility, they would relinquish temporarily to pursue their territorial expansion policy whenever circumstances grew favourable. In a letter that Lord Palmerston, then Home Secretary, addressed to Lord Clarendon in 1853, he explained the Russian diplomatic intrigues in the following:

> The policy and practice of the Russian Government have always been to push forward its encroachments as fast and as far as the apathy or want of firmness of other Governments would allow it to go, but always to stop and retire when it was met with decided resistance, and then to wait for the next favourable opportunity to make another spring on its intended victim. In furtherance of this policy, the Russian Government has always had two strings to its bow—moderate language and disinterested professions at St. Petersburg and London; active aggression by its agents on the scene of operations (Malleson 1885, p.38)

So, despite the Russians' progress towards the Afghan frontier, causing alarm among the Afghans, the British Conservative politicians not only showed some reluctance to offer Sher Ali immediate assistance but also wanted a direct involvement in the Afghan foreign policy. They believed that by the appointment of a permanent British agent, they could get intelligence with India about Sher Ali's relations with the Russians and the latter's secret

activities in the region. As a result, this situation created a dilemma for the Afghan Amir because he had to decide between two courses of action with potentially undesired outcomes: either to foster close relations with Russia and contend with the possibility of a renewed British invasion of Afghanistan, or face a potential Russians' engulfment of Afghanistan as a result of their systematic and determined military progress southwards.

7. The Afghan Amir between the Russian Advance toward Afghanistan and the British Failed Assurances

Upon the First Anglo-Afghan War and the safe return of Dost Mohammad to Kabul in 1843, the Anglo-Afghan relations improved for more than twenty years, during which the two countries signed two treaties in 1855 and 1857. In the 1855 treaty, Britain promised to respect Afghanistan's territorial integrity, and in exchange, the Afghan amir pledged to show amity towards the British. Then, two years later, another treaty came to reinforce both countries' relations.

However, under Sher Ali, Dost Mohammad's successor, the Anglo-Afghan relations became inharmonious. This is because the British Government policy vis-à-vis Afghanistan did not promote Anglo-Afghan amicable relations, particularly when the British failed to honour their promises to assist Sher Ali in the event of a Russian invasion of Afghanistan. In fact, under Sher Ali, the Russian military forces became closer to Afghanistan, as the Russians managed to annex the three main Khanates of Central Asia in addition to Merv, which made the Russian in contiguity with Afghanistan. Equally, the Afghan Amir's banking on the British Government of India to assist him to deter a potential Russian invasion proved worthless. In addition, his repeated appeals to the British to forestall the Russian progress towards Khiva were met with mitigated assurances.

Equally, British attitude vis-à-vis Afghanistan contained some inconsistencies. One of these was that the British wanted the Afghans to foster amity towards them, but enmity

towards the Russians, without British material assistance, which attitude drove Sher Ali to describe them as self-seekers. Given the British inability to stem the Russians' advance and their unfulfilled promises, Sher Ali grew adamant not to bank on the British Government, which would eventually lead to the Second Anglo-Afghan War.

8. Conclusion

The Great Game, which denotes the Anglo-Russian rivalry for supremacy in Central Asia, covers the entire 19th century. Such a rivalry brought into opposition two imperial powers: Britain and Russia. To keep their industrial machinery operating both powers sought to secure markets overseas. In this respect, Russia focused its expansion southwards in central Asia to annex coterminous regions such as Khiva and Kokand. But British obsessive fear that Russia might encroach upon British colonized territorial possessions, particularly India, drove them to adopt the "forward Policy" to counter Russian advance southwards. As a result, they tried to make of Afghanistan a buffer state. In the 19th century, Britain intervened in Afghanistan repeatedly to coerce the Afghan successive leaders into bending to the British will, notably the rejection of Russian potential overtures with Afghanistan, and the maintenance of close and stable relations with Britain. However, in return for the Afghan Amir's' commitments to the British terms, the latter would have to help the Afghan Amir to restore Punjab from the Sikhs, which condition, the British were unwilling to honour for fear of putting at stake their friendly relations with the Sikhs. Within this imbroglio, central Asian states had to struggle to rid their countries of the British and Russian invasions.

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