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## **Imperial Rivalry with the Russian Empire Transcript**

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# IMPERIAL RIVALRY WITH THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE

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**PICTURE 2: MAP OF THE GREAT GAME** - The term 'The Great Game' has a resonance about it, calling up vague memories of derring-do in the mountains and deserts of Central Asia, of the conflict for mastery between two great empires in the nineteenth century, the Russian and the British. For the historian, it refers to the Anglo-Russian competition from Constantinople on the Bosphorus to India, taking in Egypt, Turkey, other Arab lands, Persia and the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, Central Asia and North-West India. [For the romantic, it centred on the territory which stretched from the Caucasus Mountains in the west, across the great deserts and mountains of Central Asia, to Turkestan and Tibet in the east.] The British feared, and many Russians hoped, that the prize was India. It lasted from approximately 1807 to 1914, but particularly from 1829, when Russia defeated the Ottoman Empire and Persia, and 1907, when the two countries signed the Anglo-Russian Agreement, which set out their respective spheres of influence. What has to be kept in mind, however, is that these activities in Asia cannot be separated from questions of the European and Far Eastern balances of power. Russia and Great Britain may have combined to restrain Napoleonic France, but Great Britain and France combined against Russia and in support of Turkey during the Crimean War of 1854-1856. Equally, Russia and Great Britain were competitors in Tibet and China, but united against Germany in China and in the Great War. No eternal friends nor eternal enemies, just eternal interests, and for Great Britain, the eternal interests included the expansion and safety of the Empire.

In the early years of the nineteenth century, Russian troops, led by the horse-riding Cossacks, fought fierce tribesmen southwards through the Caucasus and towards northern Persia. This was too far away from India for the British at that point to take much notice, and in any case, Napoleon demanded their full attention. In 1807, however, their attention was gripped, not by the Russians, but by the French. **PICTURE 3: NAPOLEON AND ALEXANDER I AT TILSIT** - Intelligence reached London that Napoleon and Tsar Alexander I had signed a treaty of alliance at Tilsit. Russia was to aid France in the war against Great Britain; in return, Russia would receive two territories of the Ottoman Empire in Europe, Moldavia and Wallachia. If the Sultan refused to surrender them, France and Russia would attack Turkey, and the Ottoman lands in Europe, which included Greece and the rest of the Balkans, would be partitioned between the two countries. This was bad enough, but during the discussions, Napoleon had also suggested that they should together invade India and tear it from the hands of the British. Napoleon's plan - which died with his defeat - was that a French army of 50,000 should march across Persia and Afghanistan, and there join forces with the Cossacks for the final thrust across the Indus River into India. However, he had no idea at all of the geography, of the terrible climate, the deserts and the mountains. However, neither did the British, who had heretofore depended on the sea routes. What were the strategic land routes, over which the French and the Russians might march? They had no idea, but it was vital that they find out.

Orders went out to explore and map the routes by which an invader might approach India. **PICTURE 4: LT. HENRY POTTINGER** - This is a picture of Lt Henry Pottinger of the East India Company. He and a friend, Capt. Charles Christie, volunteered to explore the area between India and Persia. **PICTURE 5: CENTRAL ASIA** - Disguised as Indians, and accompanied by a local horse dealer and two servants, they left Bombay by sea to Sind, and from there by land to Kalat. They were immediately recognised as Europeans, and even as British officials, but they escaped in the middle of the night and, after the usual adventures - bandits, suspicious tribesmen, narrow escapes - they reached Nushki, near the boundary between Afghanistan and Baluchistan. Had anyone they met realised what they were doing, a painful death would have resulted, since the tribesmen would have assumed that they were mapping an invasion route in order to conquer them; notes had to be made carefully and hidden on the body. At Nushki, Christie went northwest to Herat, and thence to Isfahan, whilst Pottinger travelled through Kerman to Shiraz, and joined Christie in Isfahan. Each had feared the other had died, but when each heard that there was another European in the town, they agreed to meet - but only after some minutes did they recognise each other. Others followed over the years, filling in the blanks on the maps.

Meanwhile, in 1821, the Greeks declared their independence from the Sultan. It was about this time that the term 'the Eastern Question' was coined, and the question was, what was going to happen to the Ottoman Empire, and what were the Great Powers going to do about it? The Question was not answered until the end of the First World War when the Empire

disappeared, but meanwhile, it was a recurring focus for the Powers, and particularly for Russia and Great Britain. The problem with the Greek declaration of independence was, would Russia intervene? Rumours swirled around that she would. Tsar Alexander I wavered, and then died, **PICTURE 6: TSAR NICHOLAS I** - but his successor, Tsar Nicholas I, decided to intervene. By 1829, the Sultan had been defeated, and as a result Russia gained more territory along the Black Sea and the right for her commercial vessels to gain access to the Dardanelles; she also vastly increased her influence at Constantinople. Then in 1833, the revolt of Mehmet Ali, the Sultan's nominal viceroy in Egypt, threatened to drive out the Sultan and conquer the entire empire. In 1833, Russia convinced the Sultan to sign the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi, which promised dominance over the Turks: she undertook to protect Turkey from external attacks, whilst the Sultan promised to close the Dardanelle Straits to foreign warships whenever Russia was at war.

The other Great Powers, and particularly France and Great Britain, objected strongly to the treaty. In general, they wanted to contain Russian expansion, but the British had other concerns, and this was the threat to India. **PICTURE 7: MAP OF OTTOMAN EMPIRE** - It was a vital interest of Great Britain that the Russians not be allowed to sail a war fleet out of the Black Sea through the Dardanelles Straits and into the Mediterranean. Were they able to do so, they could continue around the Horn of Africa and up to the coast of India, presenting a dire threat to British control. In 1839, Mehmet Ali, supported by France, again rose against the Sultan, and Great Britain acquired Aden for a naval base, which would enable her to control the approaches to India from the Indian Ocean. Fortunately for Great Britain, the Powers convinced Nicholas that he should abrogate the 1833 treaty, and by the London Straits Convention of 1841, they all agreed that the Straits would be closed to all warships of any nation, excepting those of the Sultan's allies during wartime. Nicholas now also abandoned the idea of reducing the Sultan to a dependant of Russia, and returned to the idea of partitioning Turkish territories in Europe, whilst British fears of a seaborne threat to India died down.

However, in Central Asia, the British in India were becoming increasingly alarmed by the Russian overland threat, which was moving closer to the northern border. **PICTURE 8: MAP OF THE CAUCASUS** - This is a map of the Caucasus, showing the Caucasus Mountains, extending roughly from the north-eastern side of the Black Sea and ending around Baku on the western side of the Caspian Sea. They are a formidable barrier, and the establishment of the Russians, led by the Don Cossacs as shock troops, on the southern side of the mountains opened up northern Persia to Russian influence, if not conquest. **PICTURE 9: CURRENT MAP OF CENTRAL ASIA** - I thought that I'd show this current map so that you can orient yourselves, since the area of the previous map is roughly the northern parts of Georgia and Azerbaijan today. **PICTURE 10: MAP OF CENTRAL ASIA** - If we now return to this map, you can see why the British might be worried, and why they wanted the unknown territory mapped: Persia through Afghanistan to India. **[The passes]** And on the right side of the map is a territory which would be a source of Anglo-Russian conflict later in the century: Tibet.

Late in the 1830s, the British had to decide how to deal with the growing Russian threat. Curiously, they may have misinterpreted the intentions of the Tsar. In those days before telegraphs and telephones, the control by London or St Petersburg or Paris or Vienna of their men in the field could be tenuous; it would certainly take time to respond to a local crisis. This, of course, left a lot of scope to the men on the ground, and they sometimes overstepped the mark. More than once, the Russian Foreign Secretary, Count Nesselrode, disavowed the activities of Russian agents, considering it much more important that Russia and Great Britain co-operate in Europe to contain France. Russia had been expanding into Asia for some time, after all - this was not a new habit - but those she conquered were nomadic tribes, not settled states. The other Powers had no objection, as long as she did not threaten their interests.

**PICTURE 11: HENRY RAWLINSON** - But now Great Britain did see her interests as threatened: she feared a Russian invasion through the Khyber or Bolan Passes. The fear was heightened by the discovery of Henry Rawlinson, a young subaltern. He spent the years 1833 to 1839 in Teheran, the capital of Persia, as a member of a British mission re-organising the Persian Army. One day he was riding near the eastern border, on a journey to the Shah of Persia's camp on the way to Herat, the great oasis city in western Afghanistan. This was a city revered by the Persians as a centre of their ancient culture but since 1747 had been under the control of the Afghans. Rawlinson glimpsed a group of mounted men ahead of him who turned out to be a Russian officer with his escort of Cossacks. The Russian officer told Rawlinson that he was carrying gifts to the Shah. Rawlinson carried on to the Shah's camp, where the Shah told him that the gifts were not for him, but for Dost Mohammed, the Emir of Afghanistan. Just then the Russian, whose name was Capt. Yan Vitkevich, rode into the Shah's camp; he was indeed headed for Kabul. 'Rawlinson, who had just ridden 700 miles from Teheran, promptly turned his horse around and rode back to raise the alarm. When the news reached Calcutta and London that's exactly what it caused.' [www.geocities.com]

**PICTURE 12: NORTHERN INDIA** - What should Great Britain do? The Government decided to try to create a balance of power with independent states under British influence. In the late 1830s, the Punjab, the territory labelled Sikhs on the map, and Sind

were independent, **PICTURE 13: RANJIT SINGH** - with the Punjab in particular under the control of the one-eyed Ranjit Singh, a strong, charismatic and friendly ruler. The British hoped that alliances with them, and with a united Afghanistan under British influence, would protect the northern part of British India. Afghanistan was difficult. It was - and is? - 'a land of mountains, ferocious warriors, uncompromising Islam, vicious tribal rivalries and a political complexity that entwines bloodlines, religion, history, opportunism and treachery' [Ibid.] unfathomable to the outsider. **PICTURE 14: DOST MOHAMMED** - The predominant ruler of Afghanistan was Dost Mohammad. Although he had, now and again, flirted with the Russians, a British officer at his court now had a close friendship with Dost Mohammed and there was a possibility that a more official relationship with British India might be possible.

**PICTURE 15: LORD PALMERSTON** - At this point, London took a hand. The Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston, had been afraid of confronting Russia over Persia, where their position was strong and that of Great Britain was weak. Afghanistan was different, since Palmerston believed that the reverse was the case, and he therefore gave his approval for a plan of the Governor-General of India, Lord Auckland. Palmerston thought that taking Afghanistan in hand would not only save Herat for Afghanistan and stop Persia, it would also check Russian expansion and strengthen the British position in both Central Asia and the Ottoman Empire. **PICTURE 16: LORD AUCKLAND** - In January 1838, therefore, Auckland wrote a letter to Dost Mohammed demanding that he give up friendly relations with the Russians. The British officer was asked to leave the court, and the Emir again turned to the Russians. **PICTURE 17: SHAH SHUJAH** - Auckland then decided to invade Afghanistan, depose Dost Mohammed, and install in his place as a puppet Shah Shujah, who had been the Emir until he was deposed in 1809, after which he had lived as a pensioner of the British.

**PICTURE 18: BOLAN PASS** - In April 1839, an army of 21,000 British and Indian soldiers marched into Afghanistan through the Bolan Pass, one of the two routes into India which the British feared the Russians might use. **PICTURE 19: GHAZNI, THE LAST ENEMY STRONGHOLD BEFORE KABUL, FALLS AFTER THE GATES ARE BLOWN OPEN** - By the autumn, Dost Mohammed had been overthrown, Shah Shujah installed at Kabul, and the British were in control of the country. But their control sat on very shaky foundations. **PICTURE 20: MAP OF AFGHANISTAN** - This map of Afghanistan shows the type of terrain with which the British had to cope - the mountain ranges can be 3,000m high. Not surprisingly, it was almost impossible to control the whole country from Kabul in the north, but even more fundamental problems included tribal conflict, Shah's unpopularity, the inadequacy of his own armed forces, and, of course, resentment of the British themselves. Conquering it had been easy; maintaining political control whilst trying to limit Britain's expenditure and responsibility proved impossible, and by 1841, it was clear to Auckland that maintaining Afghanistan as a buffer state was not worth its cost; Palmerston, however, would not accept this.

**PICTURE 21: RETREAT FROM KABUL** - A rising in Kabul in late 1841 soon expanded into a national insurrection of tribal chiefs against the British and Shah Shujah. In January 1842, a temporary agreement signed by most of the tribal chiefs guaranteed a safe conduct to India for the men of the garrison and their women and children, a total of 16,000. In fact, it soon came under attack by two of the chiefs who had not signed the agreement as the British struggled through the cold, mountainous terrain. **PICTURE 22: LAST STAND OF THE 44th** - This picture shows the last stand of the 44th at the village of Gandamak, where their bones can still be found [Hopkirk]. A few officers and non-combatants were taken as prisoners or hostages and the rest were massacred. Only one man, Dr Brydon, escaped and made his way back to India to report what had happened. The withdrawal of British troops was postponed until revenge could be taken. They re-occupied Kabul in September 1842, where they rescued the hostages, blew up the bazaar, and engaged in a blaze of destruction and killing. By December, they were back in British India. The war, however, had been a complete failure, Shah Shujah was murdered, and Dost Mohammed returned to the throne. Nevertheless, the British had showed their striking power, and the Emir mostly took care not to incur their wrath. **PICTURE 23: LIEUTENANT HARRY FLASHMAN** - It should be noted that there is an alternative history of the campaign by George Macdonald Fraser, who insists that there was, in fact, one other survivor, a Lieut. Harry Flashman, but this claim has not yet secured a place in mainstream histories of the period.

There were two major consequences of the spectacular failure in Afghanistan. One was a significant expansion of the British Empire in India itself. Both Sind and the Panja\*b were conquered and annexed to the Empire, Sind in 1843, the Panja\*b in 1849. The other result, curiously, was a marked improvement in Anglo-Russian relations over Central Asia, as the two had a tacit agreement to leave each other's sphere alone.

Within a decade, however, they clashed in the other area of concern, the Ottoman Empire. The ostensible cause was remarkably obscure. Under treaties negotiated in the 18th century, France was the guardian of Catholics in the Ottoman Empire, and Russia was the protector of Orthodox Christians. For several years, Catholic and Orthodox monks had disputed the

possession of the Church of the Nativity and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Palestine. Both countries made demands on the Sultan; he could not satisfy both, and he decided in favour of the French. Tsar Nicholas sent a diplomat, Prince Menshikov, to the Sultan, with instructions to negotiate a new treaty under which Russia could interfere whenever she decided that the Sultan was not doing enough to protect Orthodox Christians. **PICTURE 24: VISCOUNT STRATFORD DEREDCLIFFE** - Coincidentally, the British Government sent Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe to Constantinople as Ambassador. Upon his arrival, Stratford de Redcliffe learned of Menshikov's demands, and he convinced the Sultan to reject the treaty proposed by the Russians. When Nicholas learned that the Sultan had rejected the proposed treaty, he marched into Moldavia and Wallachia, possessions of the Ottoman Empire which were known as the Danubian Principalities, and in which Russia was acknowledged as a special guardian of the Orthodox Christians.

**PICTURE 25: MAP OF THE AREA OF THE CRIMEAN WAR** - The Principalities can be seen in the upper left corner of the map; their occupation brought Russia much closer to Constantinople and the Straits. Nicholas apparently thought that the other Great Powers, Great Britain, France, Austria and Prussia, would not object to this. The UK sent a fleet to the Dardanelles, as did France. At the same time, the Powers hoped for a diplomatic compromise, but negotiations failed. The Sultan declared war on Russia, sending his armies to attack the Russians near the Danube and in the Caucasus; late in 1853, Russian forces inflicted a heavy defeat on the Turkish army moving against Georgia. This happened at roughly the same time as the defeat of a Turkish flotilla by the Russian Black Sea fleet; the Turks had sailed from Constantinople along the coast of Asia Minor and were surprised in port at Sinop, which protrudes into the sea from the centre of the Turkish side of the Black Sea. This victory made it possible for the Russians to land and supply her forces on the Turkish side of the Black Sea. The destruction of the Turkish fleet, with its attendant threat of Russian expansion, seriously alarmed Britain and France; they sent an ultimatum to Russia to withdraw from the Principalities and, when Nicholas rejected the ultimatum, they declared war at the end of March 1854.

The Crimean War is not a very interesting war; were it not for Tennyson's poem, 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', and Florence Nightingale, it would have very little hold on the public's imagination. It was the battle of Sinop which swung the public behind the war: journalists were loud in their apprehension of this demonstration of Russian naval power. The British and French governments ignored the Straits Convention and, in defence of Turkey, sent their battle fleets into the Black Sea. Nicholas did not declare war, since it was in his interest to postpone a widening of hostilities whilst he was still preparing for war. However, since Nicholas did not evacuate the Principalities by the end of an ultimatum, Great Britain and France declared war on Russia at the end of March 1854.

There was a strategic problem. Britain and France could attack Russia directly only through the Baltic or the Black Sea; they hoped to destroy the bases essential to Russian coastal defences and to Russian control of the two seas. They blockaded the Gulf of Finland, trapping some thirty Russian ships of the line and diverting large numbers of Russian troops from fighting elsewhere. As for the Crimean Peninsula, the goal was the capture of Sevastopol, the principal Russian base on the Black Sea. As in the Baltic, the Russian fleet acknowledged its 'hopeless inferiority' [Gillard] by remaining in port and leaving the French and British fleets in command of the Black Sea. The fortifications of Sevastopol were formidable, and the allies settled down to a siege in the autumn and winter of 1854. Diversionary attacks by the main Russian army in the Crimea were defeated at the battles of Balaklava and Inkerman in October and November 1854, but Sevastopol was not finally abandoned by the Russians until September 1855.

As for the Russians, they could not begin to hope for a decisive victory: they could not strike at either the French or the British homelands, and they did not have the resources to threaten the British in Central Asia. Furthermore, they lived in fear that the Austrian Empire would join the war against them. The only real victory was the taking of the Turkish frontier fortress of Kars, but this did not happen until the end of November 1855, two months after the Russian retreat from Sevastopol; its only use was as a bargaining counter in the peace negotiations. **PICTURE 26: TSAR ALEXANDER II** - Tsar Nicholas had died in March 1855, and it was his son, Alexander II, who had to sign the Treaty of Paris. It deprived the Russians of two conditions which they thought essential to their security: first, the right to keep a battle fleet and bases in the Black Sea, which was now to be neutralised, with the warships of all nations perpetually excluded; and second, a special relationship with the Ottoman Empire, whose independence and integrity were now guaranteed by all of the Powers equally. In addition, her special privileges relating to the Danubian Principalities were transferred to the Great Powers as a group.

**PICTURE 27: MAP OF CENTRAL ASIA** - Russia's most intransigent enemy during the Crimean War had been Britain. Russia saw her as following the route of aggressive imperial expansion, a perception underlined by the fact that the British Government shortly thereafter went to war with the Persians. A consequence of Russian defeat was that her expansion at the cost of the Ottoman Empire was now blocked; she therefore now embarked on vigorous expansion in Asia, with conflict with the British a likely result. The British went to war with the Persians because of Afghanistan. The Persians were showing renewed interest in

Herat, at the same time as the British were coming to the opinion that it would be better if it were incorporated into Afghanistan. The Russians had the right to station consuls anywhere in the Shah of Persia's domains; if Herat were incorporated into Persia, it could turn into a Russian outpost for intrigue against India and, ultimately, a base for invasion. Dost Mohammed of Kabul was preparing to bring both Kandahar and Herat under his rule, and in December 1855, he had taken the first step by occupying Kandahar. When he threatened Herat, the ruler called on the Persians for aid, and in February 1856, Persian forces set off for Herat. Dost Mohammed sought British approval for his own designs on Herat and, as it happened, opinion both in London and Calcutta was coming to favour the inclusion of Herat in a united Afghan state as the best solution for the safety of India. In July 1856, London decided to demand immediate Persian withdrawal from Herat and to support Dost Mohammed's wish to control it. In September 1856 an expedition sailed from India to the Persian Gulf, and war between British India and Persia was proclaimed in November 1856.

The war was a short one, with peace restored in March 1857. The Shah agreed to withdraw from Herat, which his forces had captured the previous autumn, and to abandon claims to Afghan lands. The British also were granted most favoured nation treatment in commercial relations and in the stationing of consuls - and the latter particularly annoyed and alarmed the Russians. But the Russians were soon to learn about the May 1857 Mutiny in India, which demonstrated the vulnerability of the British Empire in Asia at the same time as they were fighting Russia's neighbours.

Alexander II planned to restore Russia to a position in which he could enjoy some control over neighbouring countries and the freedom to extend his dominions as had his forebears. He saw British activities in Asia as calculated to do irreparable damage to Russian power and influence there, and he accepted the need to counter them. He found the Mutiny encouraging. At first, he refrained from fighting, depending instead on traders and diplomats to extend Russian influence. Nevertheless, he and his advisers were agreed on the need to erect a barrier against the expansion of British power and influence right across Asia from the Black Sea to the Pacific - the area which Russia saw as her own future sphere of interest. Neutral territory between the two empires but belonging to neither was no longer seen as sufficient protection.

The increased activities of Russians in Asia caught the attention of British India. After the Afghan War, both civilian and military leaders in India had avoided policies which might lead to involvement in the politics of Kabul; this had gradually evolved into the strategic doctrine of 'masterly inactivity'. Its principle assumption was that the British could not add to their security by reaching out for new frontiers, because the current frontier was as secure as any could be against a Russian invasion. The only way that security could be increased would be by promoting conditions beyond the frontier unfavourable to a Russian advance. Ideal would be an Afghanistan friendly to the British and unfriendly to the Russians. According to Sir John Lawrence, Governor of the Panjab, the only way to obtain this from Afghans determined at all costs to preserve their independence was to convince them that Britain had no designs on Afghan territory and that they would stay out of succession struggles. Therefore, the only threat to Afghanistan would be from Russia. They might ask for British help, but if they did not, the British could await the Russians in their own position, confident that they would have already been mauled by the Afghan tribesmen. This was a strategy which required an iron nerve not to be shaken by events in Asia.

**PICTURE 28: MAP OF RUSSIAN GAINS IN THE 19th CENTURY** - The twenty years after the Crimean War saw a run of remarkable success for Russian foreign policy, with striking gains in Asia. Russia renounced the Black Sea clauses of the Treaty of Paris in 1870 with only token opposition, and a Russian battle fleet again sailed the Black Sea. In Central Asia, there was relentless Russian expansion. There were good reasons for military action to strengthen the Russian steppe frontier beyond the Volga. This was an unstable frontier with nomadic tribes, who resented Russian encroachments on their land. Russian traders risked attack, and Russian frontier settlers risked enslavement. The frontier had been extended and stabilised episodically, but by 1863, the conditions again existed for another burst of activity. First of all, there were energetic men on the spot who wished to drive into territory further east. Secondly, by the summer, a Polish crisis had cooled. And thirdly, 'in St Petersburg there was greater will for empire-building because Alexander II saw expansion in Asia as an important contribution to rebuilding Russia's position in the world, not simply as part of Russia's ancient and unhurried search for settled frontiers.' [Gillard] Thereafter, as shown by the map, Russia expanded dramatically. With solid military achievement in Asia, growing diplomatic success in Europe, and a more efficient administrative framework in Russia, Alexander II presided over Russia's return to the ranks of the great world powers.

The British were unsure about what, if anything, to do - continue masterly activity, or adopt what was termed a 'forward policy'? **PICTURE 29: BENJAMIN DISRAELI** - The latter view prevailed, partly because the Russian advances in Central Asia gave it credence, and partly because Benjamin Disraeli, who favoured such a policy, became Prime Minister in 1874. **PICTURE 30: MAP OF CENTRAL ASIA** - In 1874, Sir Robert Sandeman was sent to improve relations with the Baloch tribes and the khan

of Kalat, signing in 1876 a treaty that brought the khan's territories under British suzerainty. Then British officials in India turned again to Afghanistan. **PICTURE 31: THE HINDU KUSH** - This is a map showing the Hindu Kush. Proponents of the Forward Policy argued that the defence of India required pushing its borders to the natural barrier of the Hindu Kush so that Afghanistan, or least parts of it, such as Herat, would be brought entirely under British control.

**PICTURE 32: SHER ALI** - Since the death in 1863 of Dost Mohammed, Afghanistan had undergone its customary succession struggle, from which Sher Ali had emerged victorious. **PICTURE 33: LORD LYTTON** - In 1876, the new Governor-General, Lord Lytton, demanded that he allow a British mission to be sent to Kabul, but Sher Ali rejected the demand, arguing that if he agreed, the Russians might demand the same right. In the summer of 1878, the Russians sent an uninvited mission to Kabul; Sher Ali tried to keep the Russian mission out, but he failed. **PICTURE 34: SHER ALI** - Even Punch recognised his dilemma, as this cartoon, showing Sher Ali sandwiched between the British lion and the Russian bear, demonstrates. The Russians arrived on 22 July 1878, and on 14 August the British demanded that he accept a British mission. Sher Ali's son and heir then died, and he did not answer the British Note. **PICTURE 35: THE KHYBER PASS** - This is a picture of the Khyber Pass, which is a 33-mile passage connecting the northern frontier of India, now Pakistan, with Afghanistan; it was for thousands of years the traditional invasion route. At its narrowest point, the pass is only 3 meters wide. On its north side rise the towering, snow-covered mountains of the Hindu Kush. When their Note remained unanswered, the British dispatched an envoy, Sir Neville Chamberlain, with a small military force, but Afghan soldiers refused permission for him to cross the Khyber Pass. The British delivered an ultimatum to Sher Ali, demanding an explanation, his response was deemed unsatisfactory, and on 21 November 1878, the British invaded Afghanistan from three points, quickly occupying Kandahar and Jallalabad. Sher Ali fled to the Russians, but he received no assistance from them. He then died in February 1879, leaving his son Yaqub as emir.

With British forces occupying much of the country, Yaqub signed the Treaty of Gandamak in May 1879 to prevent a British invasion of the rest of Afghanistan. In return for an annual subsidy and some help to him if Afghanistan were invaded, the British gained control of Afghan foreign affairs, the extension of their control to the Khyber and Michni passes, and the cession of various frontier areas. However, on 3 September, the British resident in Kabul was assassinated, and British soldiers trudged back over the mountain passes, defeating the uprising by the re-occupation of Kabul. Yaqub abdicated, and within a year, the British were realising, again, that defeating the Afghan tribes did not mean controlling them. At this point, the Liberal Party under William Gladstone defeated Disraeli and the Conservatives, and the Forward Policy theoretically came to an end. **PICTURE 36: DR WATSON** - The Second Anglo-Afghan War has some permanent fame because of the participation of Dr Watson, shown in this picture taking a bullet in the shoulder from an Afghan soldier. The first time he met Sherlock Holmes, the great detective remarked, 'You have been in Afghanistan, I perceive.'

In the succeeding years, other tribal territories were forcibly occupied by the British. In 1883, they leased the Bolan Pass, through which British soldiers had passed in the First Afghan War, whilst in 1887 some areas of Baluchistan were declared British territory. The establishment of British control in the northwest frontier region did not lead to direct administrative control. Rather, local customary law continued, as did the traditional lines of authority and social customs upheld by the tribal chiefs. The frontier area served primarily as a buffer zone with Afghanistan between the British and Russian empires, and as a training ground for the British Indian Army.

**PICTURE 37: SIR HENRY DRUMMOND WOLFF** - Meanwhile, in Persia, neither the British nor the Russian governments had backed the use of economic imperialism to any great extent, but for the British, this changed in 1888 with the appointment of Sir Henry Drummond Wolff to Teheran. Drummond Wolff worked vigorously to give the British political and commercial domination of central and southern Persia. **PICTURE 38: PERSIA** - The Russians, too, stepped up their activities in Persia, with the government vigorously promoting trade as a means of consolidating and extending its political influence, and taking up the British economic challenge. By the end of the century, they had consolidated their already powerful position, from which the Persians had unsuccessfully tried to escape. The increasing Russian influence over Persia could be tracked by the building of railroads by the Russians to the Persian frontier. Furthermore, in January 1900, the Russians took advantage of the British pre-occupation with the Boer War to announce their intention of opening direct relations with Kabul, rather than going through the British, and they ostentatiously strengthened their forces on the Afghan frontier.

Great Britain, in fact, had for some years been growing increasingly aware of their relative military weakness compared with Russia. Russia could attack India much more easily than Britain could attack any part of the Russian Empire. Since 1885, the Russians had been developing a strategic railway system to transport troops and supplies to the Afghan border, whilst conversely, the Admiralty since 1892 had discounted any British capacity for retaliation at the Straits. But it was the exposure of their military deficiencies in fighting the Boers which forced the British to confront just how catastrophic might be the consequences of having to fight two major powers, such as the Russians and the French, simultaneously, a not unlikely

contingency, given that Great Britain was also in imperial conflict with the French. It was estimated that when the Orenburg-Tashkent railway was completed in 1904, the Russians would be able to put an army of 150,000 to 200,000 men into Afghanistan and reinforce it at the rate of 20,000 a month; the British had fewer than 300,000 troops at their disposal in India for internal security as well as frontier defence, and reinforcements from home in case of war would be limited and uncertain. The sense of helplessness in the face of growing Russian power to strike at India grew in the years that followed.

**PICTURE 39: MAP OF CENTRAL ASIA** - A word should also be said about Tibet, which only late in the 19th century assumed much importance in Anglo-Russian relations. It did not have the significance for India's north-east frontier that Afghanistan had on the north-west because Buddhist Tibet was not a war-like and unstable society and because it was remote from Russia's imperial frontiers. It became significant because Tibet was claimed by the Chinese to be part of their empire, although they did not exercise effective rule over it, and Tibet was one of the Chinese provinces which Tsar Nicholas II aspired to control. Rumours of Russian intrigues in Lhasa and of overtures to Peking had convinced the authorities in India that a Russian protectorate was in the offing, and they saw no reason for the Russian desire for Tibet except to use it as a base against India. **PICTURE 40:**

**LORD CURZON** - The viceroy of India since 1898 had been George Curzon, a man of energy and intellect and with an exceptional knowledge and understanding of the politics of Asia. He favoured a robust policy towards the Afghans and the Tibetans, and in 1902 he proposed to counter Russian penetration of Tibet by a British mission which would negotiate directly with the Dalai Lama, instead of with the Chinese Government as hitherto. In 1903, London finally agreed, authorising British participation in a conference with Tibetan and Chinese representatives to discuss boundary disputes with the British protectorate of Sikkim.

**PICTURE 41: COL. FRANCIS YOUNGHUSBAND** - This is Col. Francis Younghusband, the leader of the mission. The Tibetans refused to negotiate with him, and although London did not share Curzon's desire to 'force a submissive relationship on Tibet', they reluctantly allowed increasing intervention during 1903 and 1904 in which Tibetan resistance was overcome and Lhasa occupied in August 1904. The agreement which Younghusband imposed on the Tibetans was so harsh that London repudiated some of it. They were apprehensive because Russia and Japan were about to go to war, and because Britain was tied to Japan by the Anglo-Japanese Treaty of 1902, she might be dragged into it. As it happened, Japan destroyed the Russian fleet, defeated her on land, and won the war, which significantly reduced Russian power.

This was also a time of apprehension and turmoil for Great Britain. In 1904 she was the perfect example of imperial overstretch, with colonies around the world and both Russia and France imperial enemies. She had financed a navy larger than those of Russia and France combined, and now Germany was promising to build a significantly large navy. Somehow, she had to lessen the multiple threats, and she did so by engaging in a series of negotiations. First of all, there was the United States: Britain agreed to abrogate a half-century-old treaty, which stated that the US and Britain would share control of any canal built through the isthmus of Panama, and allowed the US to have complete control. She also withdrew the Caribbean squadron of the Royal Navy, knowing that the US would herself patrol the waters, and re-deployed it more usefully. As for France: in 1904 the two countries sat down and negotiated the resolution of their outstanding imperial problems. In the Middle East, Britain was to exercise predominant influence over Egypt and France to have the same rights over Tunisia and Morocco. In West Africa, where they had been leapfrogging each other in staking claims to territory, the boundaries of the various colonies were determined. And in the Newfoundland fisheries, agreements tolerable to both were accepted. The outcome of the Anglo-French Agreement was a deepening of the Anglo-French entente and the laying to rest of the enmity which had caused repeated wars over the previous nine hundred years.

In 1907, a weakened Russia sat down with Great Britain to negotiate a settlement of their disputes in Asia. Firstly, they agreed to divide Persia into two spheres of influence, with a buffer zone in between. Britain agreed to Russian control over the northern third of the country and Russia agreed to British control over the southern third of the country, which bordered Baluchistan, meaning that neither would seek concessions of a political or commercial nature in the other's sphere. Each agreed not to oppose the other's attempts to gain concessions in the buffer zone. Secondly, the agreement recognised Britain's special interest in Afghanistan: the Russians agreed not to send its agents into the country, to negotiate with its ruler only through the British authorities, and to forego mining, railway and other concessions in the area of Persia closest to India. The British promised not to use its extensive influence in Afghanistan in a manner threatening to Russia. And finally, they agreed that Tibet would be a neutral buffer, with neither country attempting to gain a special position; they recognised Chinese suzerainty, and agreed not to deal directly with the Tibetan government. France strongly supported the negotiations and the outcome. Since 1892, she had had a defensive alliance with Russia, and the last thing she wanted was a war between Russia and Britain. The Agreement appeared to end that risk.



The Agreement did not, however, end tensions in Asia. The Russians saw it as reducing the risk of war whilst they continued to drive for more power and influence in Asia; the British, conversely, saw it as a step towards stable and friendly relations between two adjoining empires. With such opposite ends in view, tension was bound to remain. The Agreement allowed much scope for Russian expansion, and Russian power was on the increase - and the British government had not found a means to halt it.

It has been argued that whilst the Agreement marked the end of the Great Game, it was not the cause of its ending. [Gillard] Rather, the rise of Germany was a greater cause. Great Britain had to throw her weight into the balance against Germany, and the agreements with France and Russia over old imperial disputes not only represented a reduction in British commitments, but the opportunity, if necessary, for close co-operation with their traditional enemies. German ambitions in Asia, particularly in Persia and the Ottoman Empire, became increasingly threatening, and Russia was extremely concerned to check any extension of the influence of Germany and her ally Austro-Hungary in the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire. In the face of all of this, the 'Great Game' no longer seemed so central a concern.

Did the British win or lose the Great Game? They probably lost it, since by the end of the 19th century, Russia was the strongest Asia power. The Russian Empire was no longer vulnerable to British invasion, and the extension of British political and economic predominance over the countries closest to Russia was pretty improbable. Yet the Russians were too vulnerable in Europe to enable them to exercise untrammelled power in Asia. After Russia left the war in 1917, British troops entered the Caucasus and the trans-Caspian areas, and British ships commanded the Caspian Sea, with the intention of fending off German and Turkish moves against India. The Russian Empire disintegrated, and it looked for a brief moment as though Great Britain had won the Game. But the Soviets re-asserted authority over the peoples conquered in the 19th century, and Indian nationalism threatened British India from within. And within 20 years, the Russians and the British were again allies against Germany. The Great Game, in short, was over.