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The Great Game in Nineteenth Century

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The Concept

To study about the Great Game in the context of Silk Road is very important because not only it changed the trade dynamics but also brought in its wake, a new dimension to the contacts between the regions lying along the Silk Road. Central Asia became an object of colonial rivalry from the early nineteenth century when Britain and Tsarist Russia emerged as the main contestants in Central Asia.



Map 1 Central Asia

Source [Accessed January13, 2016 URL: <http://www.britannica.com/place/Kazakhstan/images-videos/Central-Asia-Central-Asia-political-map/64702>]

With beginning of the industrial revolution, the imperial powers needed more and more money as well as resource to finance its growth along with need of new market to sell the finished products. The trade aspect in the earlier chapter shows how the Western powers craved for new markets. This chapter is going to show one aspect of fight for control over vast stretch of land which was strategically important for control of resources and existing colonies between the Eurasian powers, beginning from the early 19th century which came to be known as ‘THE GREAT GAME’. Evgeny Sergeev contends that the Great Game was a multifaceted conflict, “a complex, multilevel decision-making and decision-implementing activity directed by [the] ruling elites” of Britain and Russia.

The Great Game was studied extensively by many scholars to understand the intricacies of the event and its after-effects. In this context, studies of Peter Hopkirk are worth mentioning. The thing that makes Hopkirk’s research different from others is that apart from studying the research of his predecessors, he also went through the archives of the former India office. He also verified thing personally by visiting most of the battlegrounds where armies have fought covertly and openly over the time.

He published his work in the name of “The Great Game: The struggle for Central Asia”. The work is divided into 37 chapters discussing all the three phases of this historical event, carrying all important activities of Russia and Britain in Central Asia and Middle East. The book should not be seen only as the study of war between two Great powers but also reveals how a vast untouched territory came on the international map.

The Great Game inadvertently heralded the era of discovering new geographical arenas which practically was never studied. For the first time, the area of Central Asia spreading across hundreds of thousands of kilometres came on the international map. Now, if we connect the dots together, mountain tracks extending from India-China in Central Asia were once part of the famous ancient Silk Road which in recent times has become an area of study and research by different institutions like UNESCO.

The relations between Russia, Kiev region and Central Asian region started thousand years before the Great Game event. The famous Russian orientalist Khanykov in his work ‘Explanatory note to a map of Aral sea and Khiva khanate’ concludes that trade routes between Russia and Central Asia were very well established in the eighth century. This was primarily because of occupation of certain Russian regions by the Mongols who used to have trading relations with the merchants of the east. The imprints of trade relations are well reflected in the chronicles of Russian merchants from Bukhara and Khiva. The mighty empire of Tamerlane facilitated the revival of trade between Europe and Far East. In sixteenth century, embassies from khanates of Khiva, Bukhara and Balkh visited Moscow. In work of professor V V Bartold, the diplomatic relations between Russia and khanates of Central Asia began 250 years before the beginning of the Great Game. Before that, neither Russia nor Britain maintained any diplomatic contact with Central Asia.

It is important to mention that Balkh was part of Bactria, then of Greco Bactrian kingdom and even of the Kushana states. Though such contacts were not very frequent, but it is important to note that these things, which were happening on the borders of India, did not grab attention of the British scholars for a very long time. It is also important to note that the state of Balkh was frequently occupied by the khans of Afghanistan, Bukhara and at times even by the rulers of North India. The evidence of diplomatic relations can be confirmed from the fact that in state archives of ancient Russian records, it clearly reflects that from seventeenth century, 12 and 16 embassies from khanates of Bukhara and Khiva visited Moscow respectively.

Later in seventeenth century, Russia also reciprocated by sending its embassies to the kingdoms of Central Asia. Some of the events can be recapitulated in this context like Russian ambassadors Daudovkasimov and Shapkim went to Bukhara in 1657 to buy Russians out of prison and slavery. They also attempted to find out routes to India and enquired about the then Mughal emperor. This fact can be verified by the events mentioned in ancient Russian archives. Russia sent one of its rich merchant Semyon Malenkay to India through Oman in late seventeenth century.

They even explored new ways and routes for carrying out large trade in silk with China. Moreover in early eighteenth century, Peter the Great, also sent number of expeditions to the Central Asia, when he received intelligence that Yarkand (now Xinjiang) has large deposits of goods, as no one knew where the region is.

Apart from diplomatic relations, several incidents reflect political relations between Russia and the then kingdoms of Central Asia. For instance, in 1622, the Khivas crown prince tried to conspire against his own father with the help of Russian Tsar. Tsar refused to give support to the prince who tried to lure the Tsar by offering extension of Russian jurisdiction over Khiva after winning the war. Instead, in 1700, Tsar acknowledged the sovereignty of Khiva on the petition of Sheikh Niyaz, an embassy from the khan of Khiva. When Khiva was succeeded by a new ruler, Arab Muhammad, in 1703, the then Tsar, Peter the Great confirmed the decision and announced in Moskovskiy Vedomosti.

Following political contacts, during the same period Russia took many bold steps, though not very successful to establish trade relations with Central Asia on a commercial basis. As we all know that waterways is the cheapest mode of transport, Russia wanted to use the voluminous flow of Amu Darya (which is known to be the largest river of Central Asia) to establish extensive trade channel in Central Asia by diverting its flow back to its older courses as per which it would flow into the Caspian sea once again instead of Aral Sea. This also reflects the prestige of Russia, as well as its technological capabilities. Nevertheless, we should not forget the real motive of Russia, which was to establish trade link with India, which then was known as golden bird all over the world.

To realize this ambition, Russia sent an expedition to Central Asia in 1717 which came to be known as Bekovica Cherkasskiv expedition. This expedition was seen as a catastrophe by Western historians as links between Russia and Central Asia (especially Khiva) were snapped for almost a century post this expedition. But Russian archives prove that this was not so because in the year 1720, embassy from Khiva visited Russia. Moreover, Russia sent its Italian ambassador Florio Benveni in 1725 to the capitals of Central Asian kingdoms for studying new ways to realize the division of Amuriya.

Many more embassies were sent from Russia to Central Asian khanates (especially Khiva and Bukhara) and vice versa to accelerate the trade relations between the two regions.

IMPERIALISTIC AMBITIONS BEHIND THE ADVENT OF GREAT GAME

Central Asia remained disturbed for centuries as European powers were keen to establish their power over the Central Asian region. With the beginning of the nineteenth century, Central Asia became politically very unstable which was eyed as an opportunity by European powers to establish control over the region as well as its rich mineral resources.

Since, at that time, the Great Britain was the sole superpower in Asia and it feared that some other European power might take the advantage of the political disintegration of the Central Asia and ramp their way to India, which was considered as jewel of the British crown. France was the first European power which began military advancement to gain control over Central Asia. But because France was facing political turmoil internally, it was not able to put full focus and strength towards Central Asia. The next player to enter the Game was Russia which mobilized the army and caravans along the branches of ancient Silk Route which extended up to borders of India through Central Asia.

The Tsarist Russia's massive expansion and the way they were taking over the khanates of Central Asia created fear in the mind of Britishers. This in historical terminology is known as 'Russophobia'. British were not able to figure out exact strategy of Russia and its ability to control such a vast area. This is because of two factors. One is that, Russian culture and the culture of Central Asia is entirely different. Second is that Russia was far behind in the technological progress when compared with the progress of the Great Britain. But if we consider the massive

resources Russia had and the way they were taking over Central Asian Empire one after another was a reason for British to worry. This made British feel less secure about their position on India. Once Russia gains control of the Central Asia, it won't be much difficult for it to take over the British India which was then known as golden sparrow all over the world.

In nineteenth century, Russia reached to the borders of Afghanistan, which made British restless. British considered Afghanistan as the last zone to secure their position over the British India. Thus an era of rivalry between the two Great powers began. The rivalry was multifaceted, at times; it was conducted covertly, at times openly. At times, it was fought between ministries of two countries, at times diplomatically. Both the country used all its intelligence power and secret service agent to consolidate their positions and attack the enemy. The fight was very intense and bloody.

Considering this scenario, we can understand that situation of imperialist power Britain ruling over India. Great Game in nineteenth century made India a power to reckon with. India was the heart and soul of the British Empire, as it not only fuelled the industrial revolution of Britain, but also provided resources, finance and army (though everything was taken by force) for securing British colonies all over the world.

Considering the possible consequences of Russia taking over British India, British launched an offensive attack over Afghanistan, to gain control over the region in 1839. This was referred as the first Anglo Afghan war which was fought for four years from 1839-1842. It can be considered as the one of the first and important conflicts during Great Game period. This war ended in a disaster for British as British were routed badly. Moreover, those who tried to escape were looted and killed on the way. Only one doctor out of the whole contingent managed to reach India. This humiliating defeat demoralized British, so much that they dropped the idea of controlling Afghanistan directly. Later, they used their puppet ruler strategy to keep Russia at a distance. British always kept a close eye on Russian movement along the British India border.

One thing worth noting is that, the intelligence division of both rivals gained so much from the Great Game period that they were advantageously placed (at least in intelligence) during world war period. Best of the commandoes and spies were used during this century long period of Great Game, who entered each other's areas in the guise of travellers, scholars, and merchants etc. to get the information about the strategy of the opponent. All these events which happened in lifeless deserts of Central Asia, along highest mountain ranges of the world, were discussed in different newspapers, journals, articles, books and secret service documents.

The conflict of regional and global interest between the two powers was given the name – the Great Game. This term was actually coined by Lt. Arthur Connolly who belonged to the sixth Bengal light infantry of the British Indian army. But the term Great Game came into prominence from the novel 'Kim' (1901) which was authored by Rudyard Kipling. In essence, the Great Game was a race between Russia and Britain to exercise strategic control over the areas especially Central Asia which lied between the two empires (i.e. between Tsarist Russia and the British India). Later, Afghanistan was created as the buffer state to cool down the heat between two rivals.

Generally, we refer Great Game on historical time scale between the two events i.e. Russo-Persian treaty of 1813 and the Anglo Russian convention of 1907. Though some of the experts consider the period between 1907 to 1917 as less intense conflict period of the Great Game. Different scholars have divided the Great Game in different phases in their research. But, the crux is same in all of them. Moreover, the term Great Game is still used as a geopolitical term in recent times where Great powers of the world exercise their influence to pursue their own interests.

The Great Game period matches with the period when Britain underwent massive industrial revolution. As British possession in India were crucial for fuelling the material hungry machines of Britain, Britain not only modernized their firearms, but also provided British navy with more sophisticated equipment.

But all these technological advancements in defence could never guarantee whether Britain would be able to withstand Russian attack and retaliate quickly and effectively. All these factors pushed British Indian government to dispatch exploration teams to north and north western frontiers of British India which were till then not explored. British explorers and cartographers mapped the region which enabled the mobilization of British troops,

But for mobilization of army, British administration was also to make alliances with the local warlords in the region where Russian movement was aggressive. Generally, these alliances were unstable, but worked well for arousing in British 'Russo-phobia'.

If we analyze the Russian interest, its control over Afghanistan would bring them one step closer to the waters of Indian Ocean. This would not only give added advantage of access to maritime trade between Asia and Europe, but also enable them to increase their naval presence in the region. So to realize this, Russia occupied Central Asian region which later disintegrated and formed five Central Asian republics- Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. We can clearly see that both the rivals fought tooth and nail to establish their control in the region. But, beauty of the Great Game lies in the fact that both the rivals never declared any open war on each other during the Game. Moreover, both countries fought in the heartland of Central Asia most of the times which was equally unknown to both. In later phases, it has few events along western borders of British India. Interestingly, we can also draw a conclusion that there was no open war because both sides equally faced the fear of invasion by others.

The 'feared' invasion, expected by both parts, never came to pass. David Fromkin says that "the nature of the dispute has been described in many different ways" (Fromkin; 1980:941). If the "Great Game resulted from complex disagreements between England and Russia", the author states that "the weight to be attributed to each of the cause of the Russian-British rivalry is still the subject of contention among historians". (Fromkin; 1980:941)

The period of the Great Game encompasses wide range of events spread over a century. Some of them worth mentioning are the military and scientific missions done in Kashgaria, Pamir, Kokand, Bukhara, Khiva, Afghanistan and north east Iran extending up to Caucasus. The events like struggle of Tibetan Buddhists, Muslims of Uyghur against Chinese emperor for their freedom and sovereignty have some roots in the Great Game. Paralleled, entire Central Asia and adjoining regions were engulfed in troubles like bloody war in Afghanistan, war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, declaration of independence like Chechnya, civil war in Tajikistan, struggle between different religious communities etc.

The understanding of sequence of events along the Silk Route and its branches during the Great Game gives us insight to many of the present days territorial and border disputes, religious fundamentalism, ethnic rivalries etc. which came about in this enormous region. Based on sequence of events and nature of rivalry between the Great Britain and the Tsarist Russia, whole Game can be classified in phases. (Hopkirk, 2002:51)

The beginning of the first phase was marked by Russia's military adventures in the Caucasus and Central Asian region towards the end of eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century. The movements in Central Asia were a wake up alarm for the British officials of the East India Company who were the masters of the British India. Since British were not very sure about the exact intentions of Russia, they played safe and acted defensively and cautiously towards Russian movements. When Russia began its defensive attack on Central Asian khanates, the officials of the British India could sense the looming threat, so they sent numerous expeditions to explore the ways to the northern borders of British India which till then remained unattended.

Europeans were not very clear about Russia as on one hand they were moved by Russia's step of ending slavery, but on the other hand they were worried and horrified by the terrors caused by the Russian military adventures. With the beginning of the nineteenth century, in order to keep their colonial ambitions alive, British government became more

active towards Central Asian issues which changed entire face of the Great Game. The imprints of rivalry and increasing tensions became visible in the defence strategies of the British Indian Empire as well as in foreign and colonial policy of the Great Britain. During this period all methods from secret spy missions to covert military attack were used to increase the sphere of influence in the Great Game region.

With the advancement of Russian Tsar Troops in the Central Asia and the way they were taking over Khanates (Khiva, Bukhara and Kokand) of Central Asia one after another created fear in the minds of British government about their possessions in the Indian subcontinent. Since Russia was backing the ruler of Afghanistan, British also feared that the ruler might become strong enough to fight British and Russia might use this platform as the Launchpad for pursuing its colonial ambitions in Indian subcontinent. Lacking proper information about the region, British India took an impulsive decision to launch attack on Afghanistan which came to be known as the first Anglo Afghan war (1838).

The attempt to keep Afghanistan under a puppet ruler Shah Shiya to secure the north western frontiers of British India, but the attempt was very short lived and unstable. British military support was necessary. Due to presence of alien army, the situation turned very hostile so much so that by the beginning of the fourth decade of the eighteenth century local mobs started attacking British on the streets of Kabul. Later, British troops were forced to vacate the city because of constant civilian attacks. Though civilian attack might sound very small, but they were very lethal. The British contingent in Kabul had 4500 troops roughly of which only around 700 were Europeans and rest were all Indian. When situation turned ugly, British army began to retreat. On the way, a series of attacks were made by the local Afghan warriors who looted in mob. This was one of the biggest nightmares the British had in the colonial phase. Out of all, one man William Brydon who was the doctor managed to return back. Rest, whole of the army was wiped out on the way. Some of the documents of the British India suggest that, later, a handful of Indian soldiers also managed to return. These misadventures of British government cooled down British desperation to control Afghanistan for a while.

Meanwhile, Russia made considerable military advances in the Central Asian region. under the leadership of Mikhail Skobelev, Konstantin Kaufman and Chemyayev, the Russians ramped their way and approached southwards steadily. In 1865, Tashkent was officially brought under the Russian empire. Moreover, independence of Bukhara was taken away in a peace treaty signed in 1868, Samarkand was also annexed in the same year and by the seventh decade of the nineteenth century, Russian empire extended up till the northern bank of Amudariya.

The British India by this time faced another shocking the form of 1857 revolt. Post 1857 revolt, British policy changed and now they focused more on keeping their possessions intact instead of expanding it by military operation. This is why, post 1857, successive British governments viewed Afghanistan as the buffer state between the two Great empires of Asia. But still, time to time, British made attempts to expand their control. Like in 1876, in a letter to queen victoria, the British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli proposed flushing of Russians out of Central Asia. This proposal was followed by royal titles act, 1876. This added empress of India to victoria list of titles and hence putting her at the same level as the Russian emperor. The timeline of the Great Game between 1874-1885 encountered the most aggressive policy from both the sides.

The second period extends from 1907 to 1917 i.e. for about ten years. Though the duration of this phase was very small, the covert struggle did not step between the two rivals. The means resented by both the sides were more or less same i.e. sending agents under cover of local population, merchants and travellers etc.

The third phase of the Great Game took place after the Russian revolution of 1917. When the Bolsheviks under the command of Lenin set out to “liberate, by means of armed revolt, the whole of Asia from imperialist domination’.(Hopkirk; 2002:61)

But it is very important to note that the main objectives of the two rivals Russia and Britain remained same regardless of individual goals. With the Bolshevik revolution, all the previous treaties were nullified which again buzzed a new alarm for the British India. The third anglo Afghan war is a very evident example of it in which Amanullah assassinated his own father and the ruler Habibullah khan and thereafter declared full independence and launched a massive attack along the northern frontiers of British India. Though, the preparations done by British India, Indian cartographers and army came to rescue and brought the war to stalemate. The Rawalpindi agreement of 1919 between the Afghan ruler and the British India resolved the issue.

After this, Amanullah tried to establish a well-structured Afghan kingdom. In his efforts, the foreign affairs of Afghanistan were re-established after several decades. The treaty of friendship, signed in May 1921, between Afghanistan and USSR is one of the examples that reflects the re-establishment of foreign affairs. Russian Soviet Republic backed Amanullah with reserves like cash, military equipments etc. The relations after this treaty remained equivocal between Russian Republic and Afghanistan.

The British influence over Afghanistan diminished after the friendship treaty between Afghanistan and Russia. The British imposed sanctions and diplomatic reasons in response to the treaty. British realized that the policy of the Afghan government was to gain control on all Pashtun speaking groups on both sides of the Durand line.

To this action of British India, in 1923, the ruler of Afghanistan Amanullah responded by taking the title of "Badshah" i.e. emperor. Moreover, to reduce the stress and pressure from British side, he allowed Muslims who fled from the Soviet Union to take refuge in Afghanistan. But, at the same time, to maintain equal closeness to Russia he offered space to Indian nationalists in exile.

In 1928, Amanullah was forced to abdicate his throne as he was not able to strengthen his own army. All his reform programmes seemed to wane. But it was Muhammad Nadir Shah who was benefitted the most from this turmoil. He ruled from 1929-33.

Whatever, may be the scenario, both the powers never came face to face, rather they squeezed Afghanistan as per their advantage. For instance, to suppress the Uzbek rebellion between 1930-31, Russia pressurized Afghanistan for help. British also wanted to keep Afghanistan in their sphere of influence, so they helped the Afghan ruler in creating forty thousand men professional army. During the period of World War Two we noticed similar interests of Britain and Russia in Afghan region when Germany occupied territories of USSR in 1941. Both Russian and the British government forced Afghanistan to flush out all German non diplomatic contingents. Afghanistan had no choice but to comply. A period of win-win co-operation continued between USSR and UK against Nazi movement till the end of Second World War. This phase of the Great Game entered in a new type of era due to geo-political changes, ideological changes that happened after the Second World War.

After giving blow by blow account of what all happened in the Great Game era, it is also important to have a look that how this chapter of history has been influenced by the scholars. There is no doubt in the fact that the contention between British and Russia led to the Great Game in the nineteenth century. However, according to some scholars, Great Game was not as intense as has been shown in the pages of history.

Gerald Morgan says that there exists no concrete proof of the British intelligence network in the Central Asian region. He mitigates the drama around the Great Game by saying that they were mere "unsubstantiated rumours" which "have been always common in Central Asia, regarding both Russia and the Great Britain." (Morgan; 1973:64)

Another scholar, Malcolm Yapp in his book 'The Legend of the Great Game' has given his analysis of the Anglo-Russian rivalry in the Central Asia. According to him, "the major concern of the British authorities in India focused mainly on the control of the local population, rather than in seeking to prevent the invasion of the Russian empire".

He is not negating the proposition that British India had expansionist tendencies but he says that for Britain priority was to maintain internal control of India, in the absence of which its interests at regional level could be undermined.

INDIAN CONNECTION TO THE GREAT GAME

The Anglo Russian agreement of 1873 brought to the surface the new problem of the actual delimitation of the Afghan, Chinese and the Russian frontiers in the upper Oxus region of the Pamirs. British officers like Gordon, Trotter and Biddulph in 1874 explored the Wakhan and the Pamir areas and their exploration brought to light a geographical problem which had political ramifications. Under the 1873 agreement, Afghan territory was considered to be the dividing line between Afghanistan and Russia but they found out that Afghan territory in the eastern extremity lay on both sides of river Oxus and this discovery disputed the very foundation of the accord. They realized that India is vulnerable to attack from the Hindu kush region because of the passes. The British never wanted to lose hold on India and they modified their strategic policy accordingly. They established a British agency in Gilgit in 1877 to meet the challenge posed by the Russian approach to the Pamirs. C M Mac Gregor, the quarter master general of the Indian army (1880-85) apprehended a Russian attack on India from the direction of Kabul, Herat, Chitral and Gilgit.

To avoid any invasion from the Russia, British adopted a two pronged strategy south of the Hindukush. In order to keep Russians at a safe distance, they started inducing Chinese to occupy as much area as possible in the Pamirs. Pamir was strategically important to both Russians and British. The Pamirs was the meeting point of the Kashmir frontier in Gilgit, Hunza and Chitral, the Afghan provinces of Badakshan and Wakhan, the Russian territory of Kokand and the Sarikol area of Chinese Turkestan. It was a potential gateway to India. As put by scholar, K.Warikoo in his article Great Game on the Kashmir frontier- “the British strategy geared itself to the task of creating a barrier between Russian and the British empires right on the Pamirs, simultaneously extending their effective control over the frontier areas in Gilgit, Hunza, Chitral and Yasin through the maharaja of Kashmir”. He further explores the reason on Kashmir becoming the focal point for the Great Game from late 1870s onwards- “first by occupying Kokand, Russia had acquired a legitimate control over the Pamirs which were the summer pasture of Kirghiz subjects of the erstwhile khanate of Kokand. Second, Chinese Turkestan now came within the effective range of Russia from their newly acquired territory in Kokand. As the Chinese authorities in Xinjiang were weak at that time, the British feared that the Russians would occupy Xinjiang next which would then prove to be an important supply base in the event of any further Russian attack on India via the Kashgar-Karakoram route. Third, the reports of Gordon, Trotter and Biddulph had underlined the strategic importance of the Hindu Kush passes which were now considered to be easily accessible, thereby making India vulnerable to any outside attack from the Hindu Kush and the Pamirs. Fourth, neither the Chinese nor the Afghans possessed any effective control over the Pamirs, leaving the area open for Russian penetration. Finally, the reports of Russian officers having explored the Pamirs and the Hindu Kush region further strengthened the British apprehensions.”

Not only politics among the two powers, but internal politics also helped. Internal politics and rivalry between Hindu maharaja and unruly Dardic tribal chiefs plus British resort to direct action led to establishment of strong military garrison at Gilgit, making it the nucleus of defence arrangements. Not only this, British also created a buffer in the Pamirs between the British and Russian empires by concluding the Pamirs boundary agreement in 1895. Post that, focus of the two power rivalry shifted to Sarikol and Taghdumbash Pamirs where Chinese possessions in Xinjiang and the British Indian territory of Hunza. Russia also showed its interest in the area because of the fear of possibility of British extending their control over the taghdumbash pamirs where Chinese authority was minimal. Similarly, Russian post in tashkurghan attracted strong British reaction as they considered it a new move to threaten Hunza and Gilgit, and from there, Kashmir and India.

It was with the viceroyalty of Mayo that British started intervening in internal affairs of Kashmir so far so that Lord Mayo asked the Maharaja to “communicate with the British government on matters of importance more frequently than heretofore”. In between, suspicion, fear about Dardic tribal chiefs and the perpetual fear of Russian attack kept British guarded. Geographical exploration, cartography and mapping became tools to exercise imperialism. In 1874-75, the British Indian government received valuable survey reports on the Wakhan, Pamirs and Sarikol region from Colonel Gordon, Biddulph and Trotter, who had been purposefully sent to Kashgar in the company of Forsyth's second mission of 1873. Vulnerability of India from the direction of Wakhan made British Indian government convinced in 1876 about the necessity of expanding Kashmir's control over Chitral and Yasin right up to the south of the Ishkoman and Baroghil passes. There was stationing of a British agent in Gilgit, 1877.

When so much was happening from the British side, Russia was no mere spectator. While British actively wanted to have control over the frontier territories of Kashmir like Gilgit, Hunza and Chitral. Russian annexation of Kokand Khanate in 1876 invited a counter reaction from British as they wanted to expand their authority now. As we have seen British gained political control over Chitral and Yasin and also secured the right to station an agent in Gilgit. While a Russian newspaper observed the British paranoia as absurd, however they were concerned about British occupation of Chitral. In fact, one of the Russian officers Novitsky of the Russian general staff concluded “that the British cry of a Russian menace to India was meant to be used as a pretext for its own annexationist policy.” However, Russia also took help of cartographic tools, studied British military, strengthened its intelligence to gain strength. (Warikoo, 2009;34)

To gain insights in the Russian mind, these quotes are important. According to Russian foreign minister V. Lamzdorf, India was important for Russia as it represented a sensitive nerve of Great Britain, which when touched could force the British to drop its hostile stance. Similarly, General Kuropatkin, in contrast to general British opinion of being an ardent supporter of Russian advance to India, is reported to have advocated alliance with British in order to achieve a peaceful agreement for partition of Asia between two powers.

In spite of this they dispatched such experienced military officers to British India frontiers. According to Prof. Warikoo “it appears that Tsarist Russia had not closed its option to pressurize British by a mere show of force at India's north western frontier, as and when such a necessity arose in order to relieve itself in Europe.”

Development of intelligence networks, suspicion towards each other's activities and deeper rooted mistrust continued to manifest itself throughout the event of Great Game. Anglo Russian convention of 1907 calmed the things a little bit. However to meet the common threat they joined hands during World War 1. But the brief period of mutual co-operation came to an end on the eve of the October revolution in Russia. Now the British geared their imperial machinery not only to prevent the entry of Bolshevism into India but also destabilise the Soviet power in Russian Central Asia.

THE NEW GREAT GAME

However, the Great Game- a term symbolizing mix of geopolitical imperatives, covert and overt military operations, intelligence service has metamorphosed itself into a new form in these times. Often termed as the “new Great Game”- it began post World War II and with the beginning of the cold war. The balance of power in world relations has moved from Great Britain to the United States of America. For its growth, progress and consolidation we seek not only to subdue Russia but will also assert its supremacy in the Middle East. Analysts have called this period as one of the new Great Game (Edwards, 2003). It is a term used to “describe the modern geopolitics in Central Asia, which is characterized by a competition between the United States, Britain and other NATO member states against Russia,

China and other states of Shanghai Co-operation Organization, for influence, power and hegemony in Central Asia and Trans Caucasus". (Edwards; 2003:85)

However, there is a slight twist to the new Great Game. The rivalry is not such to have control over a geographical area of Central Asia but has shifted to the oil- 'the black gold'. According to scholars, Karl Meyer and Shareen Brysac, "the pipelines, tanker routes, oil consortiums, and the signed contracts are the rewards of the new Great Game".(Brysac; 1999:23)

According to Nelson Olic, the "Great Game of today" is linked to the fact that "in the last fifteen years, the discovery of new promising reserves of hydrocarbons (oil and natural gas)" have been sparking "the interests of countries and large multinationals not only in terms of their exploitation, but also in term of their flow to the open seas". (Olic; 2004:2)

Americans re-launched this Game from 1992-93. Fall of the Soviet Union and the weakness of the Yeltsin's Russia added to their advantage. Basically, Washington wanted to increase its presence in the states that once formed part of the Soviet Union, as in former eastern Europe and the Balkans. Not only United States took advantage of the power vacuum that resulted from the collapse of Soviet Union but countries like Iran, Turkey, India, Pakistan, China and then Russia also took advantage of the power vacuum in the region.

It is also to be noted that Central Asian states have geographical constraints. They have no access to seaports to export their products. And thus they have to think of alternative ways to make their oil and natural gas to reach the target markets. And thus it is pre-requisite that their pipelines pass through the territory of at least one transit country. Thus "since the collapse of the Soviet Union, several pipeline projects have been negotiated and some have been implemented". (Bahgat, 2006:15).

This new Great Game revolves around black gold diplomacy and black gold diplomacy has several features. To begin from the historical context, we know that for past several decades, five Central Asian republics were the part of Soviet Union. So, when these countries gain independence, Moscow gained control over the pipelines of the Caspian Sea, or we can say that the dominance of Russia continued in the subsequent periods. According to one scholar, this could be because of the fact that "building a pipeline...requires complex arrangements and commitments, not only from a financial point of view, but also political one". (Crisan, 2008:9). Also, "despite some occasional disagreements, Russia still enjoys a special relationship, at the cultural, economic and political level, with these former soviet republics". (Torbakov, 2007:152-62)

However the old system is no longer appropriate for meeting the growing production of oil and natural gas in the region. Also, countries bordering the Caspian Sea want to break free from the Russian hegemony. In short, to lessen the Moscow influence and to ensure the independence of five Central Asian republics, it is necessary to diversify the pipeline network. In fact, it is a key strategy now.

Also, to build a pipeline system is not only about cost analysis but geopolitical interests also play an important role in the routes of these pipelines- "an argument that weighs in the decision to build these infrastructure is to weaken Russian influence in the region, as well as to deprive Tehran of any political or financial benefit." (Bahgat, 2006:19) there is a strained relation between Tehran and the international community and thus Iran, though being a perfectly viable option for oil exports from the Caspian sea to the Asian markets, is not a very meaningful choice.

Thus, the new Great Game is not only about competition for natural gas and oil, but the pursuit of economic influence is tangled with the desire for political clout

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