Securing the Indian Frontier in Central Asia

Confrontation and negotiation, 1865–95

Martin Ewans

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Central Asian Studies

Securing the Indian Frontier in Central Asia

The three decades between 1865 and 1895 marked a particularly contentious period in the relationship between Britain and Russia in Central Asia, which more than once brought them to the verge of war. Moderates tried to settle the problem by the negotiation of 'neutral zones', or firm boundaries, but the issue was complicated by misreading of intentions, much internal confusion and dispute, and considerable ignorance of the geographical and geopolitical factors involved.

This careful and detailed analysis examines the strategic thinking and diplomatic discourse which underlay the whole period, and in particular the succession of efforts to establish a frontier, which eventually brought the period to a close without a major confrontation being provoked. Based on relevant records in the Public Records Office and the British Library, as well as private papers, press comment, parliamentary debates and other contemporary accounts, Sir Martin Ewans provides a 'history of thought' of this crucial period in Central Asia. He provides an insight into the manner in which issues of war and peace were handled in the nineteenth century, and a fascinating case study of a great power relationship prior to the First World War. An important contribution to the study of Asian history, Tsarist Russia, imperial history and the history of British India, this book will also be of interest in India and Pakistan as a study of the events that led to the definition and consolidation of their northern frontiers.

Sir Martin Ewans is a former diplomat, who in the course of his career was closely concerned with Central Asian and South Asian affairs, including postings in India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Since retiring, he has written a number of books, including two on Afghanistan.

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So long as we retain our naval supremacy, the British Empire, except on the North-West frontier of India, is practically secure from attack. For India special arrangements must be made, and viewing England and Russia as continental powers in Central Asia . . . is regarded out here as essential to the maintenance of this great Empire.

Lord Roberts

Badakhshan is unquestionably the most important of all [the principalities] in Central Asia. Without possessing and colonising it we can never guarantee peace in Turkestan, or even the solidity of our rule there. . . . Possessed of it we could command the northern outliers of the Hindu Kush and the passes over this range . . . Without Badakhshan the Russians must consider themselves in Central Asia as guests, without settled habitation and unable to form one . . . Badakhshan, Kunduz and Balkh . . . are the advanced posts of the English, from which they intend . . . to give Russia no peace in her Central Asian possessions and to exhaust her means of putting down revolt . . . It is impossible not to express admiration for the far-sightedness of British policy.

Colonel Veniukov

Introduction

The aim of this book is to describe and analyse the relationship between Britain and Russia in Central Asia during the years 1865 to 1895, with a particular focus on the efforts that were made to establish a firm and sustainable dividing line between their respective spheres of influence. These efforts were ultimately successful in producing a frontier which has lasted to the present day. The three decades in question were significant because they were bounded by two decisive events; in 1865 by General Cherniaev's high profile storming of Tashkent, which overturned Russia's 'stationary' policy; and, at the conclusion, by the Pamir Agreement of 1895, in which the two powers put the finishing touches to their frontier negotiations. Central Asia was significant because it was the sole region in the world where Russia, with her preponderant military strength, could bring effective pressure to bear on British territory. Elsewhere, British naval power gave her a decisive invulnerability, and her Indian empire was immune to attack from the sea. From the direction of Central Asia, however, there was a perceived threat, if not of actual invasion, then at least of an advance sufficient to generate unrest, or open up opportunities for subversion, in this 'jewel of the British Crown'.

Immediately prior to 1865 Russia's policy in Central Asia, as it was presented by her ministers and approved by Tsar Alexander II, had been to join up and consolidate the advances that had earlier been made along the lower Syr Darya and to the east in Siberia. Further advances had been expressly ruled out and a declaration had been made that this was the limit of Russia's ambitions.[1] In May 1865, however, General Cherniaev took Tashkent, and his action, although wholly unauthorised, was approved by the Tsar.[2] In the words of a Russian historian, this initiative 'unsteadied the international equilibrium'.[3] The weakness of the Central Asian khanates was exposed: they were unlikely to serve as stable and friendly neighbours, and were open to easy conquest. With military influence now uppermost, Russia's subsequent advances, while sometimes opportunistic, were perceived as serving two main strategic objectives. One was to be able to apply pressure on Britain in order to advance Russian interests in Europe and the Near East, where the primary interests of both powers lay, and where strategic and political advantage was a compelling imperative. That this was deliberate policy is shown by the instructions that were given to Baron de Staal, when he was appointed Ambassador in London in 1884. The Tsar's views were explained to him as the following: while he wished Britain and Russia to remain at peace, Britain had become fundamentally hostile to Russia ever since the Crimea had been occupied and Russian naval power had been established in the Black Sea. Because Britain was invulnerable elsewhere, the Tsar had ordered the creation of a military position in Central Asia which Britain would respect because it posed 'the threat of intervention in India'.[4]

The occupation of Central Asia would also bring a further major advantage, defensive in nature. Although the British were broadly unaware of it, the Russians were no less nervous about the security of their possessions in Turkestan than the British were about their Indian empire. The further they advanced, they believed, the more secure their hold. Russia's natural frontier was seen to lie on the Hindu Kush to the south, which would provide both a defensible limit and, if necessary, a launch pad for operations beyond.

It was not surprising that Britain should have been nervous about these Russian advances, which many believed had India as their ultimate objective. There had been earlier evidence of Russian ambitions in this direction and plans for an invasion of India had at various times been drawn up by Russian generals.[5] The Russian military were smarting from their humiliation in the Crimean War and made no secret of their wish to march on India. Following the 'Indian mutiny' of 1857, the British lacked confidence in the security of their Indian empire, particularly in the event of a Russian army appearing in the vicinity. They were also concerned about the reliability of the intervening states, Afghanistan, Kashmir and the hill states between the two. Afghanistan in particular, it was feared, might well prove hostile, to the extent of coming to an accommodation with Russia. There was also much uncertainty about the appropriate counter to any Russian advances: should a British army advance through Afghanistan, or should any threat be met on the Indus?

Compounding these problems was an appreciable ignorance of the geography of the region, combined with a curious lack of appreciation both of the logistic difficulties which would attend any Russian assault on India, and indeed of Russia's ability to mount such an operation at all. In 1877 a British attempt to prepare an invasion of Central Asia fell apart for logistical reasons almost before it had started,[6] while in 1880, General Skobelev took all of five months to collect supplies for a relatively limited attack on the Turkmen fortress of Geok Tepe. The difficulties of terrain and supply effectively ruled out any Russian expedition against India over the considerable distances involved. Also unrealistic were the estimates of Russian offensive capability. As early as 1830, the British Ambassador at St Petersburg, Lord Haytesbury, had made what turned out to be a sound judgement:

> Whatever wild projects may be germinating in the heads of Russians generally, the Emperor and his government have, I am convinced, too thorough a consciousness of the real weakness of the country, to entertain for an instant a serious thought of even embarking on so gigantic an enterprise as the marching of an army to India . . . Even admitting its possibility (which is

> a bold admission) Russia is far too behindhand in civilisation, as well as in everything which constitutes real military greatness, to allow the entertainment of such a project for many, many years to come.[7]

This toxic brew of ignorance, fear and misperception combined to create what has been called 'one of the most nefarious vicious circles in history'.[8] When a crisis arose in the relationship between the two powers, the Russians were tempted to exert pressure in Central Asia, as the only region where this was possible, and this generated a British response which was in turn seen as provocative. A growing legacy of mistrust, exacerbated by what seemed to be an inexorable Russian advance, complicated the incidents that arose, and a mutual misreading of intentions gave diplomats an exceptionally difficult task in resolving disputes. In the three decades in question, the two most powerful states in Asia were more than once to come to the verge of war, and it took them the whole of this time to resolve their differences to the extent that they ceased to regard each other as a major threat. The period is one of considerable complexity, but, if only because it led to the settlement of India's frontier with Central Asia, it is by no means lacking in historical interest.

1 Prelude

Russian expansion southwards was a process which extended over several centuries. In 1552, Tsar Ivan IV conquered the Muslim khanate of Kazan, which lay to the east of Muskovy, and two years later occupied Astrakhan, securing for the Russians the lower reaches of the Volga River and the northern shores of the Caspian Sea. The rapid introduction of Christianity and governmental institutions brought about the successful integration of those territories, but Russian preoccupations elsewhere, principally their penetration of Siberia, were such that it was not until the 1730s that they made any further moves southward. They then built a fortress at Orenburg and established a fortified 'Orenburg Line', running from the north-east of the Caspian Sea along the Ural River and eastwards to Omsk, where it met a West Siberian Line, which ran along the Irtysh River to Semipalatinsk and Ust-Kamenogorsk. The two lines extended over 2,000 miles in all and were guarded by some 20,000 men. The motives in building them were partly to help subdue the Bakshirs, whose territories lay east of the Volga and across the southern Urals, and partly to support the Kazakhs, who had sought Russian protection to the south. While the region remained restless, the strategy proved effective, supplemented by progressive colonisation and a gradual extension of control over the northern Kazakh steppe. For nearly a century, the Russians were faced with no significant threats and were under no pressure to move further: a natural frontier of a thousand miles of mostly empty steppe and desert separated them from the khanates of Central Asia, the nearest locations of settled populations of any significant size. There were just two aberrations: in 1717 a 3,500 man expedition sent to Khiva was massacred piecemeal on arrival; and in 1801 Tsar Paul, who was at that point becoming deranged, decided to send a force of 22,000 Cossacks, under the command of General Orlov, to march on India, despite there being little or no knowledge of the terrain or logistics involved. On the way, Khiva and Bokhara were to be reduced and India itself was to be made a Russian dependency. Even before the force had reached Orenburg, it had suffered severely from the bitterly cold winter conditions, and was only saved from complete annihilation when Paul was assassinated and urgent orders were sent for its return.

West of the Caspian, the Russians were more active. Early in the eighteenth century, Peter the Great's expansionist ambitions in the Caucasus brought him into conflict with the Ottoman and Safavid empires. He succeeded in occupying Derbent and Baku, but his gains were short-lived, and in 1737 the Russians withdrew to the north of the Terek River. Later in the century Catherine the Great again took the initiative: Georgia was annexed in 1801, and there followed further hostilities both with the Ottoman Empire and with Persia. The Ottomans sued for peace in 1812, and the same year the Russians defeated the Persians in a major battle at Aslandaz and captured the fortress of Lenkoran. In 1813, with the help of British mediation, the Treaty of Gulistan was signed, confirming the Russians in their possession of Georgia and consolidating other territorial gains.[1] In 1826, the Persians tried to restore their fortunes, and Russia and Persia again went to war. The Russians proceeded to capture Tabriz and in 1828 the Persians were forced to sue for peace. Under the terms of the Treaty of Turkmanchai, they lost further territory and rights of navigation on the Caspian Sea, and had to accept a crippling indemnity.[2] Persia was reduced to little more than a Russian protectorate, a status which was not to change significantly over subsequent years.

East of the Caspian, the Russians reviewed their policies and objectives in the early nineteenth century. By that time, progressive influxes of Russian colonists had inflamed feelings among the Kazakhs, and revolts among them were becoming increasingly frequent, some of which found support from the Khanate of Khiva.

In 1818, the Russian Foreign Ministry commissioned a study by an official with considerable experience of Central Asia, G. S. Vinskii.[3] His recommendation, which he indicated had already been commended by Tsar Alexander, was that an expedition should be sent to subdue and annex Khiva, as a means of pacifying the region and creating conditions conducive to the strengthening of Russian trade, both generally and, in particular, with Khiva and Bokhara. Vinskii suggested that the ultimate objective might be trade with India, but gave no hint at all of a wish to extend military activity beyond Khiva. The idea of subduing Khiva was, however, to remain in Russian minds. In 1819, an officer by the name of Nikolai Muraviev was sent by General Yermalov, the governor of the Caucasus, to travel to, and report on, that khanate.[4] Muraviev was landed on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea and, after a near-disastrous journey across the desert, found himself under arrest and on the knife-edge of survival. However, the calculation of the Khan of Khiva was apparently that it would be wise not to antagonise the Russians and Muraviev managed to report back, principally with harrowing stories of Russians who had been captured and sold to the khanate as slaves. The Khan expressed a desire for friendly relations with Russia, and Muraviev found evidence of an active commerce between Khiva, Astrakhan and Orenburg. Like Vinskii, he argued strongly for a military expedition to Khiva, partly to effect the release of the Russian and other slaves, and partly to exploit the commercial opportunities, Khiva being the key to 'the whole trade of Asia, including India'.

Eventually, in 1839, the Russians advanced against Khiva.[5] Not only was this an attempt at pacification, it was also a response to a British invasion of Afghanistan, which had just taken place, and which seemed to the Russians to pose a risk to their interests in Central Asia. The expedition was caught in unusually severe winter weather, however, and had to retire to Orenburg with heavy losses. Learning from this catastrophe, the Russians engaged instead in a progressive programme of fort-building. In 1846 Fort Novo-Alexandrovsk was founded on the east coast of the Caspian, and Fort Rainsk, later replaced by what was called Fort No. 1, was established near the mouth of the Syr Darya on the Aral Sea. In the 1850s, the Russians, led by General Perovsky, started to engage the Kokand Khanate. Supported by a small flotilla of steamers which had been brought from Sweden in sections, and had been assembled and launched on the Aral Sea, they pressed up the Syr Darya from their fort at Rainsk. A Kokand fort at Ak-Mechet, some 300 miles upriver, was captured in 1853 and occupied as Fort Perovsk, and a Kokandian force sent to drive them back, were defeated. To the east, the Russians created a new 'Siberian Line' southwards from the Irtysh River, and in 1854 erected a fort at Vernyi, the present day Alma Ata. They were now at close quarters with the three Muslim khanates of Central Asia: Khiva, Bokhara and Kokand.

Up to the end of the eighteenth century, Britain was minimally concerned with any threat to her Indian empire from the north-west, the East India Company's coastal presidencies of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay being far removed from the regions which had over the centuries been exposed from predations from that quarter. In 1789, however, Lord Mornington, later Marquis Wellesley, embarked on a policy of expansion, convinced that the only way to ensure profitable trading conditions for the company was to achieve paramountcy in the subcontinent, bring other powers to heel and end the constant wars that had plagued it. Wellesley eventually overreached himself, plunged the company into debt and was recalled. But as his policies bore fruit and the British presence moved to the north-west, so he was compelled to consider the possibility of a threat to his territories from that direction and the best means of countering it. The advice he received from his generals was that any invader should be met some distance from British territory.[6] They recognised that the farther an Indian army operated from its base, the greater the risk to its communications, but they were clear that an even greater risk would lie in a defensive posture, when an invading force would have the opportunity of subverting indigenous power centres and attaching them to its banner. Wellesley thus became the first proponent of what was to become known as the 'forward policy' in the defence of the north-west frontier.

British concern was also aroused by French activity. Later the same year, a French fleet under the command of Napoleon left Toulon and landed in Egypt a force of some 35,000 men. In London, the view was taken that the ultimate French intention was to invade India, and prompt countermeasures were taken. Five thousand troops and £½ million of bullion were despatched to India, and a naval force was sent to seal off the entrance to the Red Sea. To these military precautions were added diplomatic measures. Approaches were made in Constantinople and St Petersburg, while an envoy was sent to Baghdad with instructions to obstruct any French advance. A treaty was also concluded with Persia that would, hopefully, against undertakings of British assistance, enlist Persian support against the French. By that time, however, Nelson had all but destroyed Napoleon's fleet in Aboukir Bay and the immediate French threat, if it had existed, had clearly receded.

John Malcolm, the envoy who was sent to Persia, composed before returning to India a despatch that discussed for the first time the possibility of a Russian overland attack on India.[7] Malcolm was not unique in having a only a vague understanding of the relevant geography, but inclined to the view that the most probable route for an invasion might lie across the Caspian Sea to Astrabad and then through Meshed, Herat, and Kabul or Kandahar. His analysis was not only original but remarkably perspicacious, since, unknown to him or anyone else, Napoleon and Tsar Paul had been discussing an initiative for a concerted invasion of India. In late 1800 Napoleon proposed an alliance against the British and a plan under which a French army of 35,000 men would march through the Balkans and cross the Black and Caspian seas to Astrabad. There it would join up with a Russian army of equal size and both forces would march together via Herat and Kandahar to India. However, Napoleon did little or nothing to implement the plan, with the result that Paul launched his own abortive attempt.

Russia's expansion southwards and her war with Persia gave rise to fresh misgivings among British diplomats in the region. Harford Jones, the Minister at Baghdad, now speculated about the possibility of a combined Franco-Russian attack, suggesting that the French might this time advance through Persia.[8] In 1804, Napoleon started to make overtures to the Shah and in 1807 he showed his hand, following his military successes in Eastern Europe earlier that year and the opportunity they seemed to provide for the passage of an army overland to India. In May 1807, he concluded the Treaty of Finkenstein, which offered the Persians support against Russia in return for undertakings to make troops and facilities available should the French decide to march on India, and he quickly followed this up by sending a strong mission to Persia under General Gardane with instructions to undertake the necessary reconnaissance. At the same time, Gardane was to assist with the training and equipping of the Persian army. Gardane acted vigorously and within only a few weeks produced a plan that envisaged the despatch of a combined Franco-Persian force of some 40,000 to 50,000 men via Teheran, Herat, Kandahar and Kabul to Peshawar, while a diversionary force would sail to India from the Île de France.[9] Whether anything would have come of this it is impossible to say, since the kaleidoscope was again shaken when, having defeated the Russians at Friedland in July 1807, Napoleon met Tsar Alexander at Tilsit. The treaty concluded there, at their famous conference on a raft anchored in the River Niemen, dealt principally with the affairs of Europe, but the two leaders also discussed the possibility of a joint invasion of India. Although Napoleon tried to assure the Persians that he would act as mediator between them and the Russians, the immediate outcome was the frustration of Gardane's mission. With France and Russia as allies, Persia could no longer rely on French support if, as seemed inevitable, Russia were to renew her aggressive designs against Persia in the Caucasus.

Whether, as has been suggested, there was a British agent at Tilsit is unclear, but in any event rumours of the agreement there were soon circulating, to the considerable alarm of both London and Calcutta. In September 1807, the Secret Committee of the East India Company's Board of Control addressed a despatch to Lord Minto, the new Governor-General, warning him of the supposed threat and suggesting a number of measures he might take to meet it.[10] Minto, who was also convinced that the threat existed, hastily summoned John Malcolm and sent him to Tehran to secure a defensive treaty with the Shah. However, arriving in May 1808, Malcolm adopted so high-handed an attitude that he was not permitted even to enter the capital and withdrew to India to urge stronger measures against the Persians. Meanwhile, London had sent their own emissary, Harford Jones, who did rather better. Arriving just after Gardane had left, he secured in 1809 the so-called 'Preliminary Treaty', which bound the Shah to safeguard British interests and prevent any European power that might threaten India from crossing Persia.[11] In return, Britain undertook to assist Persia with troops, or at least with arms and military instructors, if she were faced by a European aggressor. The Shah would also receive a subsidy and British officers to train his army. At the same time, Minto responded to London's urgings by sending missions to other rulers, to enlist their support in resisting any French advance. His envoy, Mountstuart Elphinstone, succeeded in securing a treaty with Shah Shuja, the then Emir of Afghanistan, although this was frustrated when the Emir lost his throne only a few weeks later. A mission to the emirs of Sind also obtained little of substance, but another official, Charles Metcalfe, secured a treaty with the Sikh leader, Ranjit Singh, which was to cement Singh's relationship with the British over the next thirty years.

On Malcolm's staff in Teheran was a young officer, John MacDonald Kinneir, who was the first British commentator to analyse, on the basis of his own observations and those of his fellow officers, the options open to a European power for an invasion of India. The analysis, which appeared as an appendix to his book *Journey through Asia Minor, Armenia and Koordistan*, published in 1818, is a remarkably sane and objective document.[12] In all but ruling out the possibility of any invasion and doubting any intention on the part of the Russians to invade, it contrasts favourably with the Russophobic effusions on the subject that were now beginning to appear in Britain.

Foremost among these was General Sir Robert Wilson's book *A Sketch of the Military and Political Power of Russia.*[13] Wilson was a cavalry officer of considerable distinction, who had fought in a succession of battles preceding and during the Napoleonic Wars. He was present at the Battle of Friedland and appears to have been the person who may have procured, through an agent, the intelligence on what had been agreed at Tilsit. He was in Russia during Napoleon's invasion and took part in much of the campaigning, for which he was decorated by the Tsar. It might have been thought, therefore, that he would have regarded the Russians as comrades in arms. The opposite, however, was the case and he returned to England deeply critical of the atrocities they had perpetrated against their French prisoners. In 1817 he published his book, in which he claimed that Russia's plans were to attack the Ottoman Empire and, when its submission had been secured, to commence an invasion of India. The book caused a considerable stir and was extensively debated, although it had little or no immediate practical impact, Russia being widely admired for her achievements in the Napoleonic wars.

During the late 1820s, however, fears about Russian intentions towards India again began to surface, arising once more from concerns about Persia's ability to withstand Russian pressure. This was the price for Britain's failure over the years to give Persia consistent and effective support, while assuming commitments that were beyond her ability to fulfil: as one historian put it, 'the barrier erected to keep Russia away from Afghanistan had tumbled down at the first blast of trumpets'.[14] Following the Treaty of Turkmanchai, the policy of support for Persia as the first line of defence against Russian inroads in the region had to give way to calculations of the best way to ensure that Afghanistan was preserved as an effective barrier. Fears of Russian designs against India were fuelled by another soldier in the Wilson mould, Lieutenant-Colonel George de Lacy Evans, who in 1829 produced a book with the title *On the Practicability of an Invasion of British India.*[15] Evans had no doubt at all that the Russians were aiming for India: his thesis was that they would most probably attack it through Khiva, up the River Oxus and over the Hindu Kush to Kabul and the Khyber Pass. His belief was that they could reach India in the course of two campaigns. The book aroused considerable interest and was taken very seriously in political circles, from the Cabinet downwards. Particularly concerned was the President of the Board of Control, Lord Ellenborough, and he and the Duke of Wellington, the Prime Minister, discussed the issue. While the Duke was less convinced of the ability of the Russians to despatch an army to India, he was impressed by the Russian commander in the Caucasus, General Paskiewitch, who was openly hostile to Britain. Ellenborough for his part, while not believing that an invasion was imminent, foresaw progressive Russian encroachments in Central Asia, assisted by the growth of Russian commerce.

To respond to the supposed threat, Ellenborough proposed two sets of measures. The first was to acquire influence in Central Asia by means of commercial penetration, and here his specific proposal was that the River Indus should be surveyed for its potential as a commercial route. His other concern was to acquire more information about what was, for the British, still largely unknown territory. Previous reports and surveys were dug out, and further investigations authorised. In 1830, a young army officer by the name of Arthur Conolly, who was returning from leave in England through Russia, was encouraged to complete his journey overland through Central Asia. He was kidnapped on the road to Khiva and was lucky to escape with his life, but he succeeded in travelling via Herat and Kandahar to the Indus and ultimately to British India. His report was reasonably sober in assessing the difficulties that a Russian army would face en route to India,[16] but after completing his journey he collaborated with an Indian official, Charles Trevelyan, in producing a despatch[17] which assessed the threat from Russia in alarmist terms. The two saw Afghanistan as Persia's replacement as the key buffer state protecting India, and they advocated both political and commercial initiatives to consolidate it as such.

The consensus of the advice that Ellenborough received was that the key to a successful invasion of India was Herat. An army could establish and maintain itself there, and the road to Kandahar would be open. Khiva was also seen as a possible base for a move up the Oxus to Balkh, and thence over the Hindu Kush to Peshawar, but there were obvious doubts about the ability of an army to surmount the difficulties of this route. The importance of Herat was also part of the thesis of a book, *The Progress and Present Position of Russia in the East*, which was published in 1836 by John McNeill on the eve of his appointment as Ambassador to Persia.[18] Echoing Evans, Trevelyan and Conolly, he saw Russia as a predatory and expansionist power, which had succeeded in advancing its territories step by step until its borders had expanded significantly in the direction of India. Now that Persia was under its control, it had only to extend its influence to Herat to be within manageable reach of India, and to be able to foment unrest and disaffection among the British subject peoples there. McNeill's fears were soon realised when in 1837 the Persian ruler, Mohammed Shah, advanced on Herat with a sizeable army. With it was a contingent of Russian 'deserters', and a little later it was joined by Count Simonich, a former general and now the Russian Ambassador in Teheran. Herat came under siege, while an agreement, guaranteed by Simonich, was concluded between the Persians and the Afghan chiefs who ruled Kandahar. Simonich also gave the Shah money to enable him to continue the siege; and in July 1838 a major assault, directed by Russian officers, was mounted on the city.

The debate about how best to respond to this seemingly threatening situation now assumed urgency. In a despatch to the Governor-General, Lord Auckland, the Board of Control had earlier urged him to action but left the nature of that action to his discretion. The most obvious course, which was urged by McNeill, was to reach an agreement, bolstered by a subsidy, with the Afghan Emir, Dost Mohammed.[19] The problems here were that the latter had himself opened communications with the Russians and was at odds, principally over the ownership of Peshawar, with Ranjit Singh, Britain's long-time ally. A young officer, Alexander Burnes, was brought into action and sent to Kabul, although his initial instructions were, oddly, to do no more than negotiate a commercial agreement with the Emir. Burnes, however, was no diplomat. He had little hesitation in disregarding his instructions, and tried both to engineer an agreement between Dost Mohammed and Ranjit Singh, and to detach Kandahar from the Persian alliance. Auckland was never willing to unlock the key to the impasse by exerting pressure on Ranjit Singh to make some concession over Peshawar, although the latter might well have been receptive. Burnes succeeded only in arousing Dost Mohammed's expectations and then dashing them, with the result that, by April 1838, his mission had failed.

The Russians, meanwhile, had not been inactive. Even under Russian guidance, the siege of Herat had been conducted with incredible incompetence, while its defence had been bolstered by the chance presence of a British artillery officer, Eldred Pottinger. However, late in 1837 a young Russian officer, Ivan Vitkevich, was spotted by the British while on his way to Kabul, where he arrived at the end of the year, offering Dost Mohammed a Russian alternative to the failing British overtures.[20] With the departure of Burnes, Vitkevich appeared to have been left in command of the field.

The British now took more decisive steps. In May 1838, a force was sent to Kharg Island in the Persian Gulf, and when the Shah asked the British envoy who had brought him the news whether this meant war, he was told bluntly (and in breach of instructions) that it did.[21] The Shah promptly lifted the siege and withdrew. Strong representations were also made in St Petersburg, with the result that Simonich and Vitkevich were both disowned and recalled. It has never been clear precisely what Simonich's and Vitkevich's instructions were, and hence what the Russians' motives were at the time. While it seems that commercial ambitions existed, it is more possible that the Russians were fishing in troubled waters and hoping to extend their influence within the territories contiguous to India. Certainly this is how Auckland saw the situation, with the result that he decided during the summer of 1838 that he should invade Afghanistan. Then ensued the disastrous First Anglo-Afghan War, when a British army was annihilated as it retreated from Kabul in the winter of 1841–42. Although a so-called 'Army of Retribution' succeeded in briefly re-occupying the city the following summer, the reality was clear: even if a British army could force its way into the centre of that remote and mountainous country, a prolonged occupation was simply not sustainable. More than that, the debacle produced a climate of opinion in Britain which decreed that Afghanistan should be left severely alone. As a later Viceroy, Lord Lytton, complained,[22]

> Lord Auckland's unhappy Afghan expedition has been a lasting misfortune for India, for it has paralysed the commonsense of all his successors, and bequeathed to the Government of India perfectly unreasoning panic about everything that concerns our relations with Afghanistan.

The Russians, for their part, had also learnt a lesson from the disastrous attempt to invade the Khanate of Khiva in the winter of 1839–40, as well as from the Shah of Persia's failure to capture the city of Herat with their support. For over a decade, enthusiasm for a 'forward policy' ebbed on both sides: indeed a degree of detente developed between the two countries. In 1844, Tsar Nicholas paid a state visit to Britain, where he found himself in substantial agreement with Robert Peel's government over policy towards the Ottoman Empire, and gave assurances that Russia had no territorial ambitions in Central Asia. On the ground, too, no causes of friction arose, even though both empires were engaged in consolidating and extending the territories they controlled. Early in 1843, contrary to the wishes of the government in London, Sir Charles Napier defeated the Emirs of Sind and annexed their domains. In the Punjab, a struggle for succession took place following the death in 1842 of Ranjit Singh, who had ruled for more than three decades. Power fell into the hands of the Sikh army, which decided to take the offensive against the British. After two wars and several bloody battles, the Sikhs were finally defeated in 1849 and the Punjab was annexed, while Kashmir and

Ladakh, also part of Ranjit Singh's territories, were placed in the hands of a subservient Maharaja.

In the 1850s, however, the mood again changed. The year 1848 had witnessed widespread rebellions across Europe, and Tsar Nicholas's reaction had been to repress the Hungarians and tighten his rule in Russia itself. In response, anti-Russian sentiment again increased in Britain, leading eventually to her participation in the Crimean War in 1854. The British had also been unsettled the previous year, with a fresh attempt on the part of the Persian Shah to seize Herat, and a convention had been forced upon him containing an undertaking on his part to desist. In 1856, however, he again attacked the city and, in response, a British force was landed at Bushire. The brief war which followed brought about the Shah's submission: while there was no evidence of Russian collusion, the incident served to increase British susceptibilities. Once again, Herat featured prominently in British concerns, as it was to continue to do during the nineteenth century.

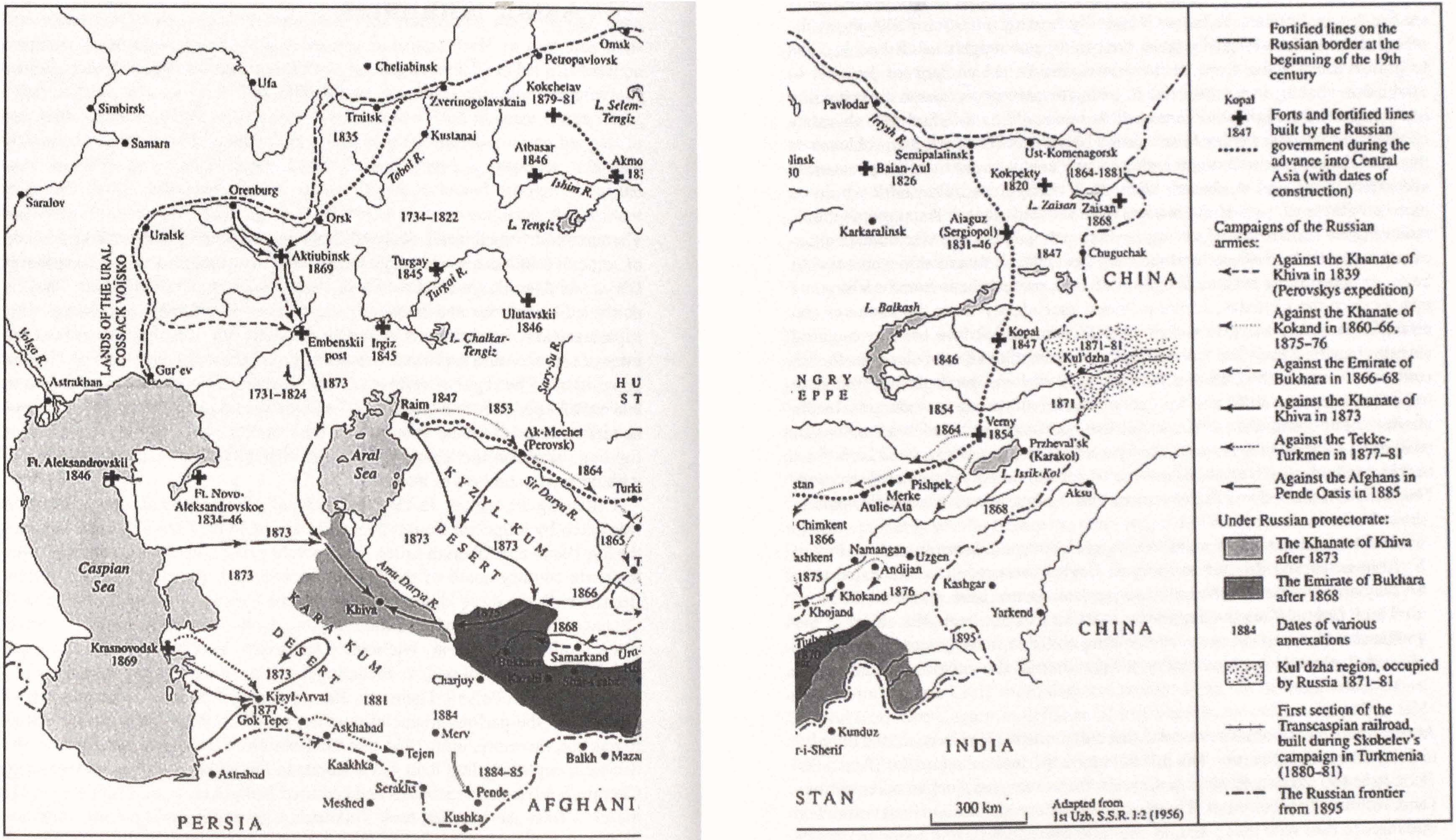
There was, therefore, a considerable background, stretching back to the beginning of the century, to the period of more intensive confrontation which developed between the two powers in Central Asia from the mid-1860s onwards. Britain had more than once been concerned for the safety of her Indian empire and was disinclined to give Russia much benefit of the doubt. Their territories had grown closer over the years, with the Russians on the line of the Syr Darya and the British in possession of Sind and the Punjab. It was hardly to be expected that this growing proximity would develop into a comfortable relationship.

2 Russia and the Central Asian Khanates

The three Muslim khanates, Kokand, Bokhara and Khiva, with a total population of some 5–6 million, were concentrated in highly populated oases along the Syr Darya and Amu Darya Rivers, in a vast area of desert and semi-desert. They had no settled boundaries and frequently went to war in efforts to establish political supremacy. Their rulers were in theory absolute, but in practice there was little internal cohesion and they exercised only limited authority over their multi-ethnic populations. The regimes were medieval in character – backward, obscurantist and brutal – and they had lost most of the culture and prosperity they had enjoyed in earlier times. Because their armies were undisciplined and their methods of fighting primitive, the Russians had little difficulty in routinely defeating them with far fewer numbers of troops.

Following the capture, in 1853 and 1854, of Ak-Mechet and Vernyi, a decision was taken by a Special Committee, and confirmed by Tsar Nicholas, to join up the Syr Darya and Siberian Lines.[1] This would create a contiguous defensive line, in fertile country south of the Kazakh steppe, and hopefully provide a stable frontier with the three khanates. However the Crimean War and a revolt in the Caucasus then intervened, and little further advance was made over the next few years. Following the war, Nicholas's successor, Tsar Alexander II, was preoccupied with internal reform, including the emancipation of the serfs, as well as by an uprising in Poland. There was also a pressing need for financial recovery in the light of the parlous financial position in which Russia now found herself. It was not, therefore, until 1864 that the Russians started to implement the 1854 decision, deploying less than 4,000 troops in the process. Forces under Colonel Cherniaev advanced westwards and captured Aulie-Ata, while Colonel Verevkin marched from Ak-Mechet, took Turkestan City and joined up with Cherniaev. Acting on his own responsibility, the latter went on to attack the city of Chimkent, a move not in the original plan. He stormed it after a short siege, justifying his action by alleging its strategic necessity and the lack of time to seek authorisation, but above all by its success.

In November 1864, the Russian Foreign Minister, Prince Gorchakov, and the Minister of Defence, D. A. Miliutin, submitted a memorandum, which was approved by the Tsar, recommending strongly that no further advances should be made.[2] Having reviewed the Russian progress across the Kirghiz steppe and the



Omsk
Petropavlovsk
Cheliabinsk
Ufa
Simbirsk
Samara
Saratov
Troitsk
1835
Zverinogolovskaia
Kustanai
Kokchetav 1879–81
L. Selem-Tengiz
Atbasar 1846
Akmo
Tobol R.
Ishim R.
Orenburg
Orsk
1734–1822
L. Tengiz
Uralsk
LANDS OF THE URAL COSSACK VOISKO
Aktiubinsk 1869
Turgay 1845
Turgai R.
Ulutavskii 1846
Volga R.
Embenskii post
Irgiz 1845
L. Chalkar-Tengiz
Sary-Su R.
Astrakhan
Gur'ev
1731–1824
1873
Raim
1847
1853
Ak-Mechet (Perovsk)
Aral Sea
Ft. Aleksandrovskii 1846
Ft. Novo-Aleksandrovskoe 1834–46
1864
Sir Darya R.
KYZYL-KUM DESERT
Turki
1873
1865
Caspian Sea
1873
Amu Darya R.
1866
KARA-KUM DESERT
Khiva
1875
1868
Krasnovodsk 1869
Bukhara
Samarkand
Karshi
Shahr-i-Sabz
Charjuy
1873
Kizyl-Arvat 1877
1881
Gok Tepe
Askhabad
1884
Merv
Tejen
Kaakhka
1884–85
Pende
Serakhs
Meshed
Astrabad
Kushka
Balkh
Mazar
PERSIA
AFGHANISTAN
Pavlodar
Irtysh R.
Semipalatinsk
Ust-Kamenogorsk
Baian-Aul 1826
Kokpekty 1820
(1864–1881)
L. Zaisan
Zaisan 1868
Karkaralinsk
Aiaguz (Sergiopol) 1831–46
1847
Chuguchak
CHINA
L. Balkash
Kopal 1847
1871–81
Kul'dzha
1846
HUNGRY STEPPE
1871
1854
Verny 1854
1864
Przheval'sk (Karakol)
L. Issik-Kol
Pishpek
Merke
Aulie-Ata
Aksu
1868
Chimkent 1866
Tashkent
Namangan
Uzgen
Andijan
1875
Khokand 1876
Kashgar
Khojand
Yarkend
CHINA
1895
Kunduz
Mazar-i-Sherif
INDIA
300 km
Adapted from 1st Uzb. S.S.R. 1:2 (1956)
Fortified lines on the Russian border at the beginning of the 19th century
Kopal 1847
Forts and fortified lines built by the Russian government during the advance into Central Asia (with dates of construction)
Campaigns of the Russian armies:
Against the Khanate of Khiva in 1839 (Perovskys expedition)
Against the Khanate of Kokand in 1860–66, 1875–76
Against the Emirate of Bukhara in 1866–68
Against the Khanate of Khiva in 1873
Against the Tekke-Turkmen in 1877–81
Against the Afghans in Pende Oasis in 1885
Under Russian protectorate:
The Khanate of Khiva after 1873
The Emirate of Bukhara after 1868
1884 Dates of various annexations
Kul'dzha region, occupied by Russia 1871–81
First section of the Transcaspian railroad, built during Skobelev's campaign in Turkmenia (1880–81)
The Russian frontier from 1895

Map 1 The Russian Advances in Central Asia

Source: Pre-Tsarist and Tsarist Central Asia, Routledge, 2003 successful joining up of the Syr Darya and Siberian lines, they argued that the advances made so far had established a strategically sound position. Of the khanates, neither Bokhara nor Khiva presented any present danger, Khiva being too weak and Bokhara linked to Russia by trading interests. Kokand, on the other hand, had for a long time been a 'most insecure neighbour'. Russia had had to protect the Kirghiz from its incursions, and it had not proved possible to establish a reliable relationship with it, owing to internal unrest and the instability of its regime. It remained to be seen if Russia could be satisfied with this state of affairs, or whether further action would be needed. However, the problem was that every new conquest brought with it a significant increase in military resources and expenditure, and weakened, rather than strengthened, Russia. It would be more profitable to 'stop at the borders of the settled Central Asian populations, rather than to include [them] among the Empire's subjects and take on the burden of improving their livelihood and securing their safety'. Russia's priorities should be to consolidate the regions already occupied; protect them from banditry and attacks from the khanates; secure a 'moral ascendancy' over the khanates and establish peaceful trading relationships with them; and reduce costs by securing supplies locally. Russia had now brought the whole of the Kirghiz lands under her control and was established in a fertile, settled region. Chimkent constituted an important strategic point and its occupation would permit a reduction in the numbers of troops in rear garrisons. The two ministers concluded that the Russian position in Central Asia was sufficiently assured, and provided a good basis for a peaceful relationship with the khanates, which should not be further threatened. The British Ambassador in St Petersburg, Lord Loftus, was clear about this policy:

> I believe that the Emperor and the Imperial Government are anxious to abstain from extending Russian territory in Central Asia, whilst at the same time they are desirous of obtaining a complete control over the small states of which Central Asia is composed . . . As far as I can learn, the object of the Russian Government is . . . by avoiding collision, to obtain entire influence over Turkestan by conciliatory means through the existing Rulers of the several States.[3]

At the same time, Gorchakov decided that a diplomatic move was needed in order to calm international nerves. His initiative took the form of a circular (Appendix 1) designed to explain Russian policy. Its thesis was that, just as other nations faced with unruly tribes on their borders, the Russians had had to resort to military measures to deal with them; and, as one tribe was pacified, so trouble had arisen with the one beyond it, and so on.

> Such has been the fate of every country which has found itself in a similar position. The United States of America, France in Algeria, Holland in her Colonies, England in India – all have been irresistibly forced, less by ambition than by imperious necessity, into this onward march, where the greatest difficulty is to know when to stop.

The result of the recent moves, however, had been to put the Russian presence

> in the immediate neighbourhood of the agricultural and commercial populations of Khokand . . . a more solid and compact, less unsettled, and better organised social state, fixing for us with geographical precision the limit up to which we are bound to advance, and at which we must halt, because, while on the one hand any further extension of our rule, meeting, as it would, no longer with unstable communities, such as the nomad tribes, but with more regularly constituted States, would entail considerable exertions, and would draw us on from annexation to annexation with unforeseen complications; on the other, with such States for our future neighbours, their backward civilisation, and the instability of their political condition, do not shut us out from the hope that the day may come when regular relations may, to the advantage of both parties, take the place of the permanent troubles which have up to the present moment paralysed all progress in those countries.

There were some odd features to this circular. It was never communicated officially to governments, but merely sent to Russian missions for their general guidance. The British Ambassador at St Petersburg had to make a specific request before being allowed sight of it.[4] Nevertheless, early in 1865 it was published in full in the Russian press. The Russian historian, N. A. Khalfin, has asserted that Gorchakov produced it as a deliberate piece of misinformation, a cover for the forward moves that were about to take place.[5] Particularly in the light of the Gorchakov/Miliutin memorandum, however, this seems unlikely. Gorchakov was very probably wholly sincere in composing it, but his thesis was badly flawed. He both underestimated the propensity of Russia's generals in Central Asia to act independently, if not positively to disobey orders, and he overestimated the likelihood of the khanates becoming peaceful and profitable neighbours. As long as the Russians were on the Orenburg and Siberian lines, there had been little difficulty in keeping local tribes in reasonable check. It was only when they advanced to the borders of Kokand and Khiva that major problems with 'unruly neighbours' began. Little more than six months from the issue of the circular, General Cherniaev, again in defiance of instructions, as well as the policy laid down in the Gorchakov/Miliutin memorandum, went on to storm and capture Tashkent.[6] It was this action that triggered the new phase of Russian imperial expansion, leading to a progressive advance virtually to the natural boundaries of the Pamirs, the Hindu Kush and the mountains of Khorassan, and the imposition of Russian hegemony across the region.

There has been a good deal of debate over the reasons for this advance. There have been suggestions that there may have been economic and commercial motives: the protection of existing trade, a search for secure and profitable markets and, more particularly, a desire to exploit the region's cotton-growing potential. There is, however, scant evidence of interest in the region on the part of Russian commercial or industrial leaders, and it was to contribute very little to the overall volume of Russian trade or development. Moreover, by 1884 the cumulative net deficit on Russian activities there had amounted to all of 115 million roubles.[7] Attention has also been drawn to the concept of 'manifest destiny' which underlay the imperial expansion of the time, the belief that Russia had a mission to replace 'the elements of Mahommedan fanaticism' with a 'higher form of civilisation'.[8] Another view is that the Russians' humiliating defeat in the recent war had gravely damaged national pride, and this had only been partially restored by the pacification of the Caucasus achieved by Prince Baryatinsky between 1857 and 1859. But there can be little doubt that it was the role of the Russian generals and the military establishment generally which exercised the major influence. The generals' motives were partly to enhance Russian prestige and further her 'civilising mission', but more narrowly and importantly to gain glory, honours, promotion and bounty for themselves and those under their command. Voices in the military urged that to leave a vacuum in Central Asia would give the British the opportunity to fill it, while an advance, on the other hand, would strengthen Russia's hand in dealing with Britain in crises in Europe or the Near East. As Miliutin put it:

> In case of a European war we ought particularly to value the occupation of that region, which would bring us to the northern borders of India and facilitate our access to that country. By ruling in Kokand we can constantly threaten England's East Indian possessions. This is especially important, since only in that quarter can we be dangerous to this enemy of ours.[9]

There was even the thought among the military that an advance might open up the opportunity of an assault on India. Several plans were produced and were given serious consideration by the Russian General Staff. Of them, the most detailed was that produced in 1854 by General Chikhachev, which envisaged a force of 30,000 men advancing from Astrabad and Turkestan, with the cooperation, or at least acquiescence, of the Persians and Afghans.[10]

The despatch in 1857 of a Russian mission under Colonel Ignatiev to Khiva and Bokhara was also a significant factor.[11] The purpose of the mission was partly to embellish the 'vague idea' that Russia had of the two khanates, to improve conditions for trade, and to 'make one more effort to incline the rulers . . . to a more reasonable behaviour in regard to Russia'. The mission failed to reach any agreement with the Khivans, who were greatly disturbed at the appearance of Russian steamers at the mouth of the Syr Darya. Nor was much achieved at Bokhara, although a treaty was concluded with the Emir. More significant was Ignatiev's perception of the military and political weakness of the two khanates, and he urged his government to forestall the British by annexing them. After a successful mission to China, he returned to St Petersburg as head of the Asia Division of the Foreign Ministry, where he showed himself to be a strong advocate of further military moves in Central Asia. He and the other 'hawks' were not appeased when in 1859 Dost Mohammed, seemingly with British backing and encouragement, succeeded in extending his power over areas of what was to become Afghan Turkestan, the lands lying between the upper Amu Darya and the

Hindu Kush. Less successful was a reconnaissance by a Russian agent, Nikolai Khanikov, who in 1858 reached Herat, with the intention of proceeding to Kabul and opening a relationship with Dost Mohammed. The latter, however, true to his commitment to the British, refused to receive him.[12]

There was no unanimity in St Petersburg over the wisdom of any advance. Gorchakov, who was very much orientated towards European diplomacy, was much concerned at the possible effects on relations with Britain and more widely. In his view, what was above all needed was a period of peace. At the Treasury, M. Kh. Reitern had an eye to Russia's financial weakness and considerable debt burden, and tried to set limits on expenditure. Miliutin, for his part, although by no means a thoroughgoing hawk, was in favour of modest expansion. The principal problems which this group of ministers had were threefold. The first was that they had little control over the far distant military commanders in Central Asia, who were all too prone to take matters into their own hands and face any consequences later. The second problem was that there was no central cabinet and little effective coordination between the ministries: quite often, for example, the Foreign Ministry gave out information and assurances which turned out to be false, or at the least misleading. Sometimes, this seems to have been straightforward disinformation, and the Ministry acquired, not least in Britain, a reputation for duplicity. Often, however, it was simply because they did not know what was happening or what the government's or the generals' intentions were. The third problem was with Tsar Alexander, who exercised his autocratic rule in a vacillating manner. While he could be persuaded to exercise restraint and be mindful of his foreign relationships, in practice he rejoiced at fresh Russian conquests and rewarded successful commanders, even if, in achieving successes, they had disobeyed orders. This propensity the commanders knew all too well.

With a population of some 100,000, Tashkent was the richest town in Central Asia and a long-time trading partner with Russia. Up to that point, Russian policy had been to keep it independent under Russian influence, but its status was threatened as a result of hostilities between Kokand and Bokhara. Seeing his opportunity, in late 1864 Cherniaev advanced towards the town, but found it too strong to take. He then asked for permission to make a second attempt the following spring, but, receiving a message ordering him not to proceed, he deliberately refrained from opening it until he had committed his troops. Against heavy odds, he assaulted the town, which surrendered after two days' bitter fighting. When, immediately after its capture, he was ordered to evacuate it, he refused to do so, arguing that any retreat would irrevocably damage Russian prestige. Aware that his action had the approval of the Tsar, who had hailed it as a 'glorious affair', he went on to resist efforts by General Kryzhanovsky, his superior at Orenburg, to bring him back into line. More than that, he proceeded to send a delegation to Bokhara, to insist that the latter recognise the Syr Darya and the Naryn rivers as the Russian frontier. When the Emir of Bokhara detained the delegation, Cherniaev was compelled to commence operations against him. Eventually St Petersburg stepped in and relieved Cherniaev of his command, and in March 1866 he was replaced by General Romanovsky. He left behind him considerable administrative and financial disorder, together with a situation in which Romanovsky was committed to hostilities with Bokhara. He proceeded to defeat the Bokharans in a series of offensives and also took the town of Khojand in the Ferghana Valley. He too then exceeded his orders and was replaced. The Turkestan region was formally incorporated into the Russian Empire and in 1867 it was created as a separate province, under General K. P. Kaufman, a protégé of Miliutin, who wasted little time in further extending Russian rule. In March 1868, the Bokharans were provoked into declaring a holy war against Russia, to which Kaufman responded by taking Samarkand. A major battle followed, in which the Bokharans were routed and the khanate was declared a Russian dependency. Kaufman then set about consolidating his administration, and had no hesitation in using his wide powers to 'decide all political, frontier and commercial affairs, despatch trusted agents to neighbouring states, conduct negotiations and sign treaties or resolutions affecting Russia's relations with those countries'. He faced considerable problems, including lack of money and competent staff, but sensibly chose to rule, at least initially, with the help of indigenous power structures. He succeeded in creating an administration which, although to a degree corrupt and incompetent, was at least an improvement on the oppressive, semi-feudal regimes which it replaced. Its main shortcoming was that, subordinated to the Ministry of War, it barely began to address the social and educational needs of its populace, in contrast to the British record in India.

3 The British Debate

Whereas the earlier Russian advances did not attract much notice in Britain or India, no doubt because they were taking place in obscure and still distant regions, it was an altogether different matter when, in the 1850s, the Russians started to engage the Central Asian khanates and the Persians occupied Herat. There was then a keen debate in India about the best means of defending the western frontier. General John Jacob, the Commissioner in Baluchistan, urged the Governor-General, Lord Canning, that what was required was the seizure and holding of points beyond it:

> A war *within* our own territory with a European army might be ruinous to our reputation, and might entirely undermine our strength, although that strength might have sufficed successfully to meet a world in arms in a field *beyond* our own boundary.[1]

There were, Jacob argued, two main routes through which an army could invade India, the Khyber Pass and the Bolan Pass. The former could be watched from Peshawar; to guard the latter, troops should immediately occupy Quetta, and access to it should be ensured by means of an extension to the Sind railway. An advance should then be made to Herat, which should be occupied with a force of 20,000 troops. India would then 'be as firmly locked in our grasp as if surrounded by the sea'. Canning, however, was unresponsive; instead, war was declared with Persia and the Shah was compelled to retire from Herat.

Ten years later, Jacob's successor, Sir Henry Green, revived the issue, with the support of the Governor of Bombay, Sir Bartle Frere. Both, however, met firm opposition from Lord Lawrence, who became viceroy in 1867, and who, more than any other Indian statesman, gained a reputation as the exponent of what came to be called, often with a pejorative overtone, the policy of 'masterly inactivity'. Both Lawrence and his Council were unsympathetic. They did not see in what was happening in Central Asia any need for a modification of policy. To fortify and occupy Quetta would entail considerable expense, the Afghans and Persians would be unnecessarily alarmed, and Quetta could be occupied at any time if the need should arise.

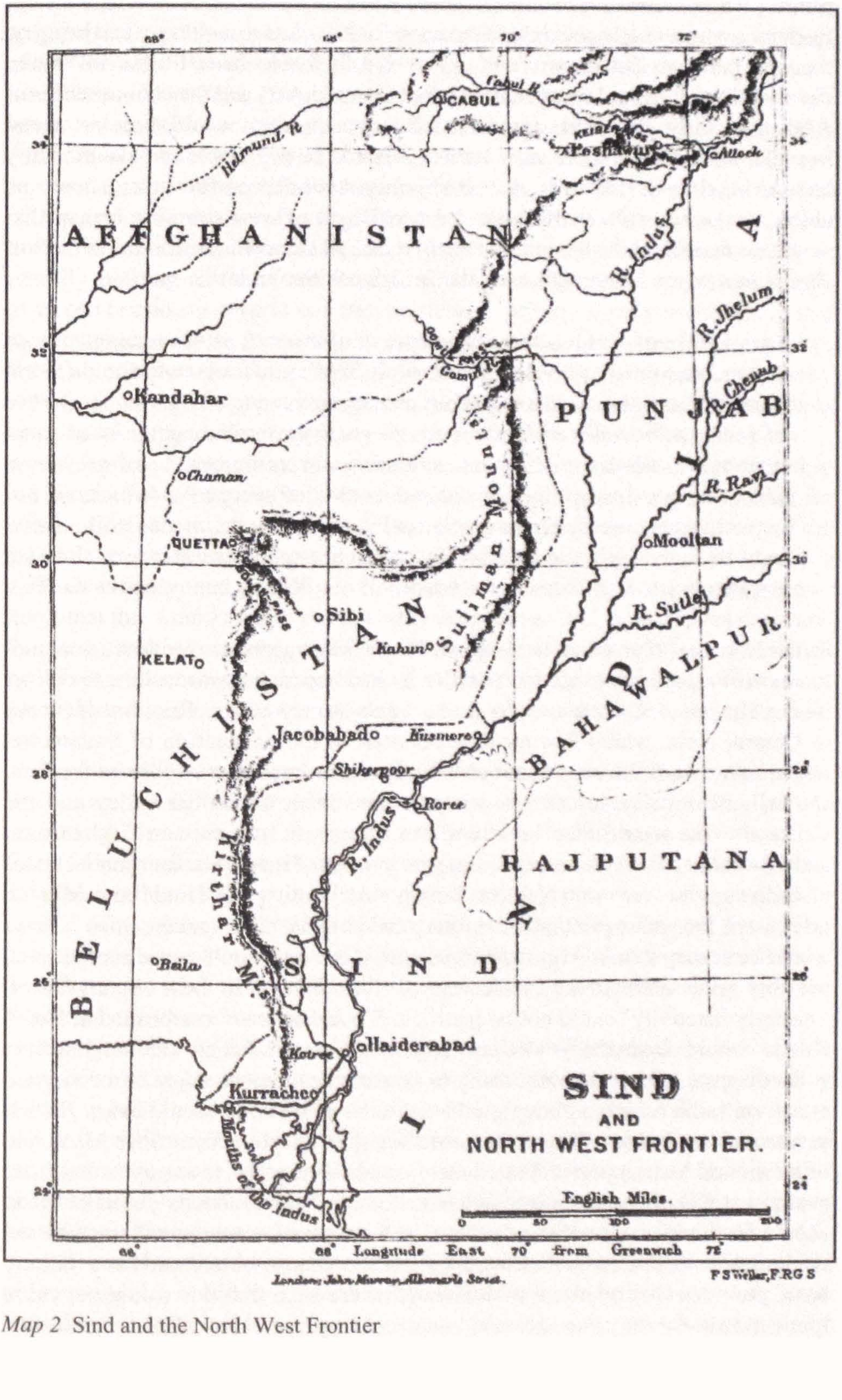
In Britain, one of the most articulate on the issue was Major-General Sir Henry Rawlinson, a highly respected soldier, diplomat and Member of Parliament, whose career had taken him first to Persia and then to Kandahar as political agent during the First Anglo-Afghan War. He then served in Baghdad and subsequently spent four years studying cuneiform scripts, in which he became an expert. He was a member of the first India Council, spent a year as Minister in Persia and again served on the India Council until his death in 1895. In 1865 and 1866 he published two articles in the *Quarterly Review* in which he put forward a vigorous exposition of the 'forward policy'.[2] Since the First Anglo-Afghan War, he observed, both Britain and Russia had each advanced their territories by a thousand or so miles, to the point where their political frontiers were only a few hundred miles apart. Surprisingly, Britain appeared not to be much concerned: some took the view that for Russia to substitute civilisation for the 'grovelling superstition, the cruelty, the depravity, the universal misery' of the Central Asian khanates was wholly commendable, and that it might be preferable to have a common frontier with a 'reasonable and responsible neighbour', with opportunities for trade which were currently lacking.

Having erected this Aunt Sally, Rawlinson proceeded to knock it down. India was a conquered country, where 'a certain amount of discontent must be ever smoldering'. A Russian presence on her frontier would fan such discontent into a 'chronic conflagration', and, while Russia was currently friendly and pacific, there was no guarantee that such feelings would last. Even when Russia was still at some distance, 'there would seem to be coming on that same disturbed and dangerous state of native feeling which was observable at the time of the first Persian seizure of Herat'. It would be a mistake to try to reach some engagement with Russia: any commitment on her part would be unreliable and Britain needed to preserve her freedom of action. Should Russia advance to the Amu Darya, then consideration should be given to an advance to Kandahar and even to Herat. While there was no immediate danger, Britain should be ready to take up arms again if her interests were to be seriously menaced.

The argument did not stop there. In 1867, Lord Lawrence produced a memorandum in which he made the case for the 'stationary policy'.[3] Britain, he asserted, had learnt her lesson in the First Anglo-Afghan War. Afghanistan had no resources to provide for an invading army: indeed the Afghans had barely enough for themselves. Their nature was also such that they would never tolerate foreign rule:

> The Affghans do not want us; they dread our appearance in the country. The circumstances connected with the last Affghan war have created in their hearts a deadly hatred to us as a people.

It would not be possible to advance a force in the direction of Kabul or Kandahar without the Afghans believing it to be the forerunner of the occupation of their country. Neither town could be occupied without the construction of fortifications, which, to be garrisoned effectively, would require a considerable army, possibly not less than 30,000. Ammunition and supplies would have to be provided from India, the costs would strain Indian finances, and India in any case had no more troops than were sufficient for its internal security. An advance into


AFFGHANISTAN
BELUCHISTAN
PUNJAB
BAHAWALPUR
RAJPUTANA
SIND
INDIA
CABUL
Cabul R.
KEIBER Pass
Peshawur
Attock
Helmund R.
R. Indus
R. Jhelum
R. Chenab
R. Ravi
R. Sutlej
Gomul Pass
Gomul R.
Suliman Mounts
Kandahar
Chaman
QUETTA
Bolan Pass
Sibi
Kahun
KELAT
Mooltan
Jacobabad
Kusmore
Shikarpoor
Roree
Hala Mts
Hirthar Mts
Beila
Kotree
Haiderabad
Kurrachee
Mouths of the Indus
SIND
AND
NORTH WEST FRONTIER.
English Miles.
0
50
100
200
Longitude East 70° from Greenwich
66°
68°
70°
72°
34°
32°
30°
28°
26°
24°

London: John Murray, Albemarle Street.

F S Weller, F.R.G.S

Map 2 Sind and the North West Frontier

Afghanistan would lessen the distance which Russia would have to march her armies, while increasing the British force's distance from its base of operations. Such an advance might also be looked upon by Russia as a challenge, and bring on the very collision Britain was trying to avoid. It should be left to an advancing enemy to face long and tiring marches from Central Asia and the consequences of Afghan hostility. He did not agree that a Russian approach would stimulate unrest in India – and even if there were unrest, it would be preferable to have the army near at hand to deal with it. A British army stationed on the Indus should be able to deal easily with any Russian force which, at an inevitable cost, managed to penetrate that far. British interests required that all the available money and effort should be applied to strengthening the British position in India:

> I am firmly of opinion that our proper course is not to advance our troops beyond our present border, not to send English officers into the different states of Central Asia; but to put our own house in order, by giving the people of India the best government in our power, by conciliating, as far as practicable, all classes, and by consolidating our resources. I am greatly in favour of opening up lines of communication of every kind, which, on full consideration, are likely to prove useful, so far as the means will permit; but I strongly deprecate additional taxation to any important extent: and I am equally averse to increasing the burden of our debt by unproductive works.

Rawlinson, however, stuck to his guns. The following year he produced a memorandum, developed from a speech which he had hoped, but was unable, to deliver in the House of Commons.[4] In it, he again reviewed the Russian advances in Central Asia, which had by then resulted in the occupation of Samarkand and pressure on Bokhara. Sooner or later, Russia's frontier would lie on the Amu Darya, with much improved communications with the Volga valley and the Caucasus. She would then be bound to exercise an influence in Afghanistan, and this in turn would have repercussions in India. There were four main classes of Indians who were not open to British conciliation: the Hindu and Muslim priesthood, the native princes, the military and political class, and the 'mob'. These would be susceptible to Afghan intrigue and, if aroused, could cause acute unrest, possibly necessitating troop reinforcements from Britain. In these circumstances, 'masterly inactivity' could not be justified. If ever she were established at Herat, Russia would have the whole military resources of Persia and Afghanistan at her disposal, and, if she were really in earnest, the outcome might be a concerted attack on India which, although unlikely to be successful, would cause Britain severe embarrassment. Three measures should be adopted: Emir Sher Ali should be subsidised and supported immediately, at whatever price, to ensure 'a dominant position at Kabul and to close that avenue of approach to Russia'; a major effort should be made to recover lost ground in Persia; and communications with the Afghan frontier should be improved. Quetta should also be occupied as a military base, provided that relations with Sher Ali were such that this would not cause him concern.

The India Office's response to the memorandum was to send it out to Calcutta under cover of an official letter, and to invite comments.[5] These took the form of a despatch from Lawrence,[6] enclosing a series of minutes written by members of his Council, all couched in forthright terms. The Commander-in-Chief, General Sir William Mansfield, (later Lord Sandhurst), conceded that 'diplomatic vigilance was needed over Russia's activities in Asia, and that it would be right, once Afghanistan was no longer in a state of civil war, to establish a friendly and supportive relationship with the Emir'. But he was clear that 'the alarm testified with regard to Russia, as affecting British interests in India, is more unreasonable than it is possible to describe. As a military and vast political power, we have literally nothing to fear from Russia, whether she stop at her present limits, or spread her power even to our own borders . . . We are simply invincible in that country against all the Powers in the world, provided we are true to ourselves'. Other contributors discounted talk of disaffection among the Muslim community in India or among the population generally. Lawrence himself repeated the points he had earlier made, that 'any active interference in the affairs of Afghanistan . . . would, under present circumstances, engender irritation, defiance and hatred in the minds of the Afghans, without in the least strengthening our power either for attack or defence'; that it would be 'impolitic and unwise to decrease any of the difficulties which would be entailed on Russia' by meeting her 'half way in a difficult country, and possibly in the midst of a hostile or exasperated population'; that this would require considerable expenditure and increased taxation; and that 'an attitude of readiness and firmness on our frontier' should be accompanied by 'giving all our care and expending all our resources for the attainment of practical and sound ends over which we can exercise an effective and immediate control'.

Rawlinson did not escape some implied criticism. Lawrence commented acidly that it was 'not difficult for public writers, who are often wanting in detailed and accurate information, and who may write without a full sense of political or financial responsibility, to advocate or suggest measures which for a moment may delude or influence the public'. Others deplored his proposals as an 'untimely revival of the policy of 1838, which nearly ruined the empire, and the effects of which we have still to get over'. Mansfield commented that 'a great mischief is done by those who, from whatever cause, occupy themselves in preaching the falsehood of our weakness in India'.

As, therefore, the Russian advance in Central Asia brought them into hostile contact with the khanates, so there was an intensification of the long-standing debate, in both Britain and India, over the appropriate response. While there were two broad differences of view, they were not entirely polarised. The advocates of the 'stationary policy' did not altogether rule out efforts to extend British influence beyond the boundaries of India, and in Afghanistan in particular. Lawrence himself was the person who, as viceroy, made the initial overtures to Sher Ali, once it was clear that he was firmly on his throne. The advocates of a forward policy were also at odds over the extent to which it should be implemented. Some considered it sufficient to occupy Quetta and possibly other stretches of territory above the passes, while others advocated the occupation of Kandahar, Herat or even Kabul. Yet others believed that the 'scientific frontier' lay along the Hindu Kush, perhaps with outliers to its north, while the most extreme were for the forcible expulsion of the Russians from Central Asia altogether. In practice, the 'stationary school' were in the driving seat until 1876, influenced by two deeply ingrained experiences: that of the catastrophe which befell the army in Afghanistan in 1842, and that of the 'Indian mutiny' in 1857. The one aroused strong resistance to the idea of another advance into Afghanistan, while the other aroused fears of internal unrest or worse should the Indian army be called upon to operate beyond the frontier.

4 Anglo-Russian Negotiations, 1865–73

As the Russian advance in Central Asia continued, to the accompaniment of the debate over the appropriate British response, so thoughts in both London and Calcutta turned to the possibility of negotiating a territorial settlement which might prevent an eventual confrontation between the two powers. In July 1865, the then Foreign Secretary, Lord John Russell, no doubt influenced by the fall of Tashkent the previous month, decided to try to reach 'the basis of an understanding' with the government in St Petersburg that neither country had any intention of extending their territories in the region. He proceeded to consult his colleague at the India Office, Sir Charles Wood;[1] but the latter, while not opposed to 'most unreserved communication between the two countries on all matters connected with their future movements and designs in Central Asia', was opposed to any agreement that might tie British hands in circumstances which at the time could not be foreseen, and thought it 'better to abstain, at present, from contracting any definite engagements'.[2] The idea was also opposed by Rawlinson, then a member of the India Council, who, along with others, was not only sceptical about the value of any agreement with the Russians, but was clear that British freedom of action should be maintained. 'It would', he wrote,[3]

> be a suicidal policy on the part of England to place in the hands of Russia such an instrument of possible mischief as the right of interference in the rectification of our north-west frontier which she should derive from any mutual agreement to remain within our present limits. It would be, in fact, to invite rather than stave off the threatened evil: to call up to the hall-door the wolf that is now merely prowling in the back-yard.

Russell nevertheless persisted and discussion centred round the wording of a communication that might be sent to the Russians. The India Office insisted that the Foreign Office draft below, already lacking in strength, should have the words in italics deleted:[4]

> . . . Still, there are circumstances in the present situation of the British and Russian Empires which might give rise to anxiety, and Her Majesty's

> Government, being fully persuaded of the friendly and pacific sentiments of the Emperor of Russia, are desirous to remove every cause of danger which might threaten the future good understanding of England and Russia.
>
> Her Majesty's Government consider it would be useful for this end if the two Powers were to *come to an understanding to the following effect* make friendly explanations to each other, based on the present state of affairs.
>
> 1. The two Powers declare that they have no intention to extend their territories in such a manner that their frontiers would approach each other more nearly than they do at present.
>
> If a deplorable necessity should force either of them to change this resolution, the Power contemplating such extension would make a full and frank exposition to the other of the causes which have enforced this change, and the extent to which the increase of territory is in contemplation.
>
> *2. That both Powers* Her Majesty's Government on their part are determined to *will* respect the present state of possession in Central Asia.
>
> *3. That both Powers* Her Majesty's Government will also respect the independence of the Persian Monarchy, will be careful not to encroach upon the territory of Persia, and will act in *concert to* such a manner as may best support and strengthen the sovereignty of the Shah.
>
> *Her Majesty's Government are of opinion that* If His Majesty the Emperor of Russia will be prepared to make analogous declarations, *an exchange of Notes might take place, without the formality* Her Majesty's Government think that *in that case* without the formality of a Convention an exchange of Notes might take place which would tend to settle the minds of the inhabitants of Central Asia, and to prevent misunderstandings, thereby affording a fresh security for the maintenance of Peace between the two Countries.

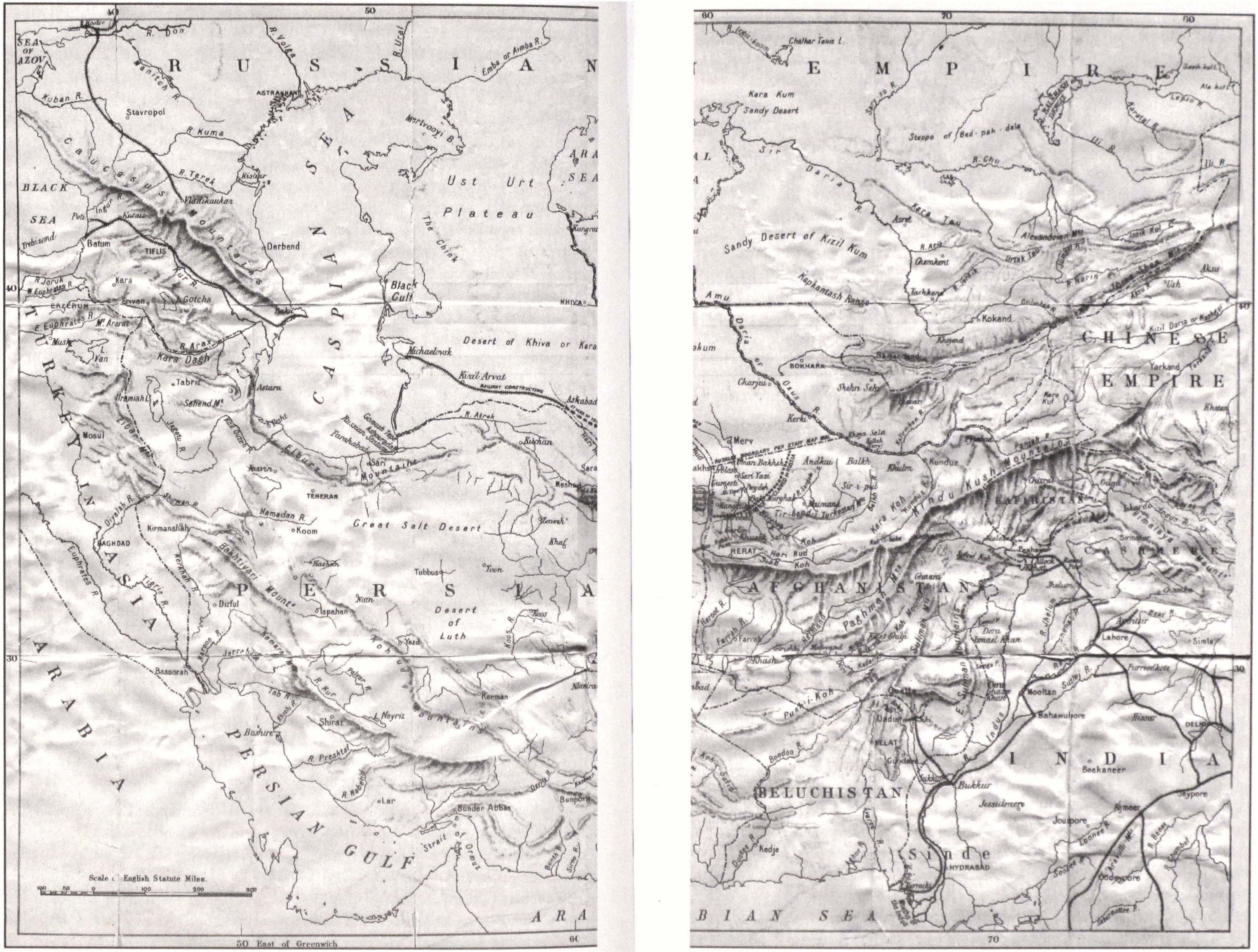
In August 1865, the amended draft, which Palmerston had shown to Queen Victoria for her personal approval, was sent to Savile Lumley, the Chargé d'Affaires at St Petersburg, who duly presented it to Gorchakov.[5] The latter, who had already suggested that the British government was attaching too much importance to events in Central Asia,[6] responded by saying that he did not understand what object Russell had in mind in desiring this interchange of declarations; as a practical man he did not see what was to be gained by it. The Tsar's views on Central Asia had been publicly announced and even published – Russia desired no extension of territory, a peaceful and settled state of affairs and an open road for commerce to Kashgar, for all the world and not for Russia alone. There was currently a problem over Bokhara, which had invaded Kokand, and 'it was difficult to see what might arise' from the action of the 'barbarous leaders of the hordes' of that khanate. He could also not understand the connection of Persia with Central Asia: he had never suspected the British government of any intention of encroaching upon the territory of the Shah. He had no difficulty in replying to Russell as regards the 'fond' of his proposition, but felt somewhat embarrassed as to the 'forme' in which it would be made. He would nevertheless think it over.[7] When, however, his reply arrived, it ignored Russell's proposal completely and made no mention of Persia, but merely gave an assurance that Russia's only interest was the security of her frontiers, the development of commerce and peaceful relations with her neighbours.[8]

Lumley subsequently gave a fuller account of what had clearly been an uncomfortable interview.[9] He had been received by Gorchakov with some apparent impatience, although it had been difficult to gauge his immediate reaction as he had taken the despatch and, when reading it, had held it in front of his face with a cigar in his mouth. He had remarked that Russia was only doing in Asia 'by compulsion' what Britain had always done in India, and the Indian government ought to understand this. Asked about the purpose of the suggested exchange, Lumley had referred to the possibility of alleviating fear and anxiety among the tribes on the Indian frontier. Asked if Russell had instructed him to say this, Lumley could only reply that 'that idea' would be found in the despatch. The Khan of Kokand, for one, was concerned at Russian advances and had already asked Britain for assistance, while the Emir of Bokhara also appeared to be nervous of possible British activity. Lumley summed up the exchange rather lamely by reporting that Russell's initiative had 'to a certain extent defined British policy in Central Asia and Russia, and leaves Her Majesty's Government free to take such measures as may be found necessary to protect her commercial routes between Britain and India'. On returning to his post, the British Ambassador, Sir Andrew Buchanan, made a rather more astute judgement. While he had been assured by the Tsar personally that Russia had no ambitious designs in the region and that her empire was already large enough[10] – and while it was satisfactory to have had assurances from Gorchakov, even if not in a formal manner –

> with regard to the eventualities of the distant future, it would perhaps be rash to expect that any declaration, however honest, and however formal, Prince Gorchakov might give, would indefinitely restrain this nation from seeking to follow out what many Russians are believed to consider the Mission of Russia in the East.[11]

On that sensible note, Russell allowed his initiative to lapse. Leaving aside the naïveté and ineptness of this initiative, what clearly killed it was Gorchakov's inability to consider it seriously, given the imminent likelihood of further Russian advances in Central Asia.

These advances continued. Contrary to their declarations, the Russians did not evacuate Tashkent, and in May 1866 there followed the Bokharans' defeat in battle and the occupation of Khojend. When this stimulated a mild British protest, to the effect that it did not seem to accord with Russia's professed intention


RUSSIAN EMPIRE
SEA OF AZOV
BLACK SEA
CASPIAN SEA
ARAL SEA
Caucasus Mountains
Ust Urt Plateau
Desert of Khiva or Kara Kum
TURKEY IN ASIA
ARABIA
PERSIA
PERSIAN GULF
Strait of Ormuz
Great Salt Desert
Desert of Luth
Elburz Mountains
Bakhtiyari Mount.
Kuh Rud Mountains
Stavropol
Vladikavkaz
Tiflis
Batum
Poti
Trebizond
Kars
Erivan
Erzerum
Mt. Ararat
Baku
Derbend
Astrakhan
Tabriz
Mosul
Baghdad
Kirmanshah
Dizful
Bassorah
Teheran
Koom
Ispahan
Yezd
Kerman
Shiraz
Bushire
Lar
Bunder Abbas
Krasnovodsk
Michaelovsk
Kizil Arvat
Askabad
Meshed
Kuchan
Khiva
Black Gulf
Sandy Desert of Kizil Kum
Steppe of Bed-pak-dala
Kara Kum Sandy Desert
Sir Daria R.
Amu Daria or Oxus R.
Bokhara
Samarcand
Tashkend
Kokand
Khojend
Chemkent
Merv
Herat
Hari Rud
Kunduz
Balkh
Khulm
Andkui
Hindu Kush Mountains
KAFIRISTAN
AFGHANISTAN
Paghman Mts.
Sulimani Mts.
Ghazni
Peshawar
Attock
CHINESE EMPIRE
Yarkand
Khotan
Aksu
Ush
Thian Shan Mts.
CASHMERE
Himalaya Mounts.
Lahore
Amritsar
Simla
Mooltan
Bahawulpore
Delhi
Bukkur
Sukkur
Jessulmere
Jodhpore
Jeypore
Ajmeer
Oodeypore
Beekaneer
BELUCHISTAN
Kelat
Sinde
Hydrabad
Kurrachee
INDIA
ARABIAN SEA
Scale of English Statute Miles.
50 East of Greenwich
40
50
60
70
80
30

Map 3 Weller's Map of Central Asia

to respect the states of Central Asia, Gorchakov responded that it was for the military to decide such issues and that it would be absurd to see in them any threat to British India.[12] As has been noted,

> the pattern was now established. Year after year Russian troops would penetrate deeper into the heart of Asia. A flurry of alarm would run from Calcutta, or Simla, to Whitehall. The British Ambassador in St. Petersburg would call on Russia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, ask for an explanation, receive assurances of the Tsar's determination not to annex an inch of land anywhere, send a despatch to that effect to Her Majesty's Principal Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and leave the matter there until Russia's next move reopened the whole issue.[13]

Late in 1867, in order to add weight to his conviction that a 'stationary policy' should be adhered to in India, Lawrence suggested an arrangement whereby the British and Russian governments should reach an agreement on their respective spheres of influence.[14] Russian advances had, he pointed out, recently been so rapid that her influence would soon, if it had not already, become as paramount in Samarkand and Bokhara as it had for some time been in Kokand. There seemed to be some doubts about the wisdom of such an expansion on the part of Russian statesmen, who 'aver that the late advances have been prosecuted not in fulfilment of any predetermined line of aggressive progress, but by the attitude and schemes of Bukhara'. If so, it might be seen as in the interests of both governments that 'up to a certain border the relations of the respective governments should be openly acknowledged and admitted as bringing them into necessary contact and treaty with the tribes and nations on the several sides of such a line'. Such an understanding would enable both sides to be relaxed about the activities of the other. The response from the India Office, however, was frosty: the government saw no reason for any 'uneasiness or jealousy', and the Russian advances appeared to be 'the natural result of the circumstances in which she finds herself placed, and to afford no grounds whatsoever for representations indicative of suspicion or alarm on the part of this country'.[15]

A year later, when, a few days before he finally left India, Lawrence responded to the arguments put forward by Rawlinson in his memorandum of July 1968, he returned to the charge, and suggested that

> Endeavours might be made to come to some clear understanding with the Court of St. Petersburg as to its projects and designs in Central Asia, and that it might be given to understand in firm but courteous language, that it cannot be permitted to interfere in the affairs of Afghanistan, or those of any state which lies contiguous to our frontier . . .
>
> Failing that, we might give that power to understand that an advance towards India, beyond a certain point, would entail on her war, in all parts of the world, with England.[16]

The odd thing about this communication was that while the first sentence formed the conclusion of Lawrence's despatch, the much more extreme advice in the second sentence was buried in one of the batch of enclosed memoranda. This time, however, attention was paid, and Lord Clarendon, who had succeeded Russell as Foreign Secretary in the new Liberal government, responded in March 1869 by making a fresh proposal to the Russians.[17] He did not doubt, he told Brunnow, the Russian Ambassador, that Russia had no aggressive intentions in the region, but, as England herself had found, there tended to be difficulty in controlling a nation's power at a distance. There was always the possibility that 'some aspiring Russian general' might indulge in intrigues and 'disturb the Indian population on the frontiers', so creating 'a right to remonstrate'. He urged, therefore, in the interests of the existing good understanding between the two governments, that they might recognise 'some territory as neutral between the possessions of England and Russia, which should be the limit of those possessions, and be scrupulously recognised by both powers'.

That this was not the most sensible of ideas promptly became apparent when Gorchakov seized the opportunity to suggest that Afghanistan might form the territory in question.[18] Nothing, he assured Clarendon, could better suit the views of the Tsar, who 'looks upon Afghanistan as completely outside the sphere within which Russia might be called upon to exercise her influence. No intervention or interference whatsoever, opposed to the independence of that State entered into his intentions'. The Tsar himself underlined Gorchakov's response by expressing to Buchanan his appreciation of the initiative and gave a personal assurance that he had no desire to acquire further territory.[19] Both London and Calcutta were aghast: not only did this mean that Russia would have a free hand up to Afghanistan's frontiers, wherever they might lie, but the Indian government would be precluded from exercising influence in that country – a state of affairs which would be wholly unacceptable. As Rawlinson put it, Russia could absorb Bokhara and Afghan Turkestan 'without England being able to address to it a word of remonstrance', but England 'could not punish a raid of the Wazirs or Mohmands or even address expostulations to Kabul, without a quasi-violation of our engagements'.[20] Gorchakov had, moreover, made it clear that his views of the extent of territory controlled by Sher Ali differed considerably from those held by the British. Basing himself on a contemporary map, which showed areas of Afghanistan north of the Hindu Kush in a different colour from those of the remainder of the country, he suggested that Sher Ali's writ did not run beyond that natural barrier.[21] Clarendon therefore promptly backtracked, first claiming that he was not sufficiently informed whether Afghanistan had all the conditions required for a neutral zone,[22] and then, once he had consulted the India Office, conveying the 'decided opinion' that it did not.[23] It was possible, he suggested, that if Russian troops advanced to Afghanistan's 'ill-defined and uncertain' frontiers, disputes might arise in which the two powers might well become involved. To solve the problem, he proposed that the upper Amu Darya should be 'the boundary line, which neither power should permit their forces to cross'. This would leave a large tract of country, neutral or belonging to the Khan of Khiva, between Afghanistan and the territory already acquired by Russia, thus removing 'all fears of future dissension'. The idea of tracing the frontier along the line of the Amu Darya, which formed the basis of the eventual agreement, was thus launched. Brunnow's immediate comment was that Khiva was south of the Amu Darya and, if the Khan became troublesome, Russia could hardly be expected to refrain from chastising him.

These exchanges took place at a time when Sher Ali was engaged in reasserting his authority north of the Hindu Kush and there was a risk that his forces might clash with those of Bokhara. Both this possibility and the Clarendon/Gorchakov exchange prompted the Indian government, with Rawlinson's assistance, to formulate its views on where the boundary line should lie.[24] These were, as later investigations were to reveal, far from accurate, particularly in concluding that under Dost Mohammed Afghanistan had possessed all the territory south of the Amu Darya as far west as Kershi and Charjui, which belonged to Bokhara, and that Sher Ali had duly inherited all that territory and was in effective control of it. Buchanan, reinforced this conclusion by suggesting to the Tsar personally that the British government 'could not deny to Sher Ali the right to re-establish his authority over the Provinces which had acknowledged the sovereignty of his father'.[25]

For a while there was deadlock, as the two Foreign Secretaries met at Heidelburg while 'taking the waters'.[26] In response to Gorchakov's assurance that Britain had no cause for apprehension over Central Asia, since the Tsar considered that extension of territory was extension of weakness and had no intention of going further south, Clarendon set out his views at some length. Russia had already made considerable advances, and if these were to be extended further, 'Britain might have to take means for her own protection'. She had no fear of invasion, since there was no question of the mountainous divide between Central Asia and India being surmounted by a large army. However the 'nearer approach of the Russians, and intrigues with native Chiefs might keep the Indian mind in a ferment and entail upon us trouble and expense'. Britain knew from her own experience how difficult it was to control military commanders from a great distance. Gorchakov for his part conceded that Russian commanders had in the past 'all exceeded their instructions in the hope of gaining distinction'. But nothing was to be feared from the present Governor of Turkestan, General Kaufman, who already possessed all the honours any man might desire. Moreover, while there were still issues to be settled with Bokhara, the Tsar was determined not to retain Samarkand. Clarendon in turn assured Gorchakov that there was nothing to fear from Sher Ali and that the assistance given to him by the Indian government had no reference at all to the Russian advances, but was solely aimed at helping him to maintain order in his own country. These assurances notwithstanding, nothing was conceded on the substance. The outcome of Clarendon's efforts at 'doing his Gorchakov'[27] was that while he pressed his boundary proposal, the latter continued to insist on the desirability of having Afghanistan as a neutral zone. All that was agreed was that an Indian official, Douglas Forsyth, who was due to go to St Petersburg to discuss trade matters, should pursue the issue there.

In the 1860s, Forsyth had been Commissioner at Jullundur. In that capacity he had been responsible for several northern territories, including Ladakh, and had escorted Sher Ali when the latter had paid a visit to India early in 1869 for talks with Lawrence's successor as Viceroy, Lord Mayo. The latter, no less than Lawrence, was keen that attempts should be made to reach an understanding with the Russians and, since Forsyth had first-hand knowledge of Central Asian affairs, he had been sent by Mayo to London, and hopefully to St Petersburg, with a brief to discuss political, as well as trade issues. It was unfortunate that when the time came Mayo's party was no longer in power in London, and that the Duke of Argyll, the Secretary of State for India, wanted nothing to do with the initiative. However Forsyth was able to enlist the support of Sir Roderick Murchison, the President of the Royal Geographical Society, and through him obtained an introduction to Brunnow. The latter in turn recommended him to Clarendon, who sent him to see Gortchakov in Baden-Baden. The outcome was an invitation to St Petersburg.

Bolstered by briefings from Mayo, Forsyth had a series of discussions with various members of the Russian government. He reported that both Miliutin and Stremoukhov, the head of the Asia Department of the Foreign Ministry, had, while still promoting the concept of a neutral zone, agreed to accept as part of Afghanistan those provinces which Sher Ali actually held. Beyond them, he should not attempt to exercise any interference or influence, and Britain should exercise its good offices to restrain him. The Russian government would in turn exercise its influence to restrain the Emir of Bokhara from transgressing the limits of Afghan territory. There was, however, disagreement over the status of Badakhshan, which Stremoukhov did not believe to be in the possession of Sher Ali. Forsyth produced a memorandum supplied by Mayo, which concluded that Dost Mohammed had acquired the province in 1859, and that in 1863, after his death, an attempt had been made to throw off the Afghan yoke, but the Emir of Bokhara had refused to assist.[29] According to Forsyth, he and Stremoukhov then met the members of an embassy from Bokhara, who happened also to be in St Petersburg, and obtained from them a 'distinct declaration' that since Dost Mohamed's death, Bokhara had had nothing to do with Badakhshan or the territories south of the Amu Darya: 'the idea of Bokhara having any power over Badakhshan was evidently not for one moment entertained by the Ambassador'.[30] Forsyth believed that he had thus obtained Russian agreement over the territorial question, and Buchanan indeed reported categorically that this was the case.[31] But both had to accept that the Russian government would call for a report from General Kaufman, which would hopefully clear everything up.

It took Kaufman nearly three years to respond. The excuses eventually tendered by Gorchakov for the delay – the distances involved, the complications of the subject, the absence of genuine sources of information and the impossibility of direct enquiry – barely held water, and the likely truth was that the Ministry of War under Miliutin, to whom Kaufman was subordinate, had no interest at all in any negotiations over a frontier, but was simply intent on advancing Russian territory. It was also the case that Kaufman was for part of the time in the throes of preparing a major military campaign against Khiva. In default of a response, in May 1870 the Indian government again, at Buchanan's suggestion, formulated their views on the frontier question.[32] Their despatch once more revealed considerable ignorance. There was no ambiguity about their assertion that before his death, Dost Mohammed had consolidated his power in the Turkestan provinces from Badakhshan to the Persian frontier, and that they were now in the possession of Sher Ali. But their definition of the eastern section read:

> The northern boundary is the Oxus [Amu Darya] . . . eastward to Punjab and Wakhan, and thereafter the stream which passes Wakhan up to the point where the range of the Hindu Kush meets the southern angle of the Pamir Steppe.

Apart from the absurdity of the reference to the Punjab, there were in fact several streams which combined to form the main river and the reference to the meeting of the Hindu Kush and Pamirs was vague in the extreme. For some reason, the traditional view, that the source of the Amu Darya was the stream leading from Lake Sarikol, the so-called Wood's Lake, was ignored; and, insofar as the formulation meant anything, it suggested that Russia would be free to acquire territory over the whole of the Pamirs north of the Amu Darya and as far as the range dividing them from Chitral and Hunza. The formulation was put to the Russians[33] but failed to elicit a response until the following November, when Gorchakov wrote[34] to restate the three principles of agreement: that the limits of Afghanistan should be the territory actually in the possession of Sher Ali; that beyond them he should as far as possible be restrained by the British government from acts of aggression; and that the Russian government should similarly restrain the Emir of Bukhara. Beyond that, Gorchakov signalled the eventual Russian position by disputing that Sher Ali necessarily held the territories seized by Dost Mohammed, and insisted that on account of the vagueness of the evidence ('unworthy of credence . . . problematic, hypothetical and often contradictory'), nothing should be settled before Kaufman had reported. The outcome should not be compromised by basing it on 'incomplete and conjectural data'.

A further year then passed, until Lord Granville, who had succeeded Clarendon as Foreign Secretary, again took the initiative. In his despatch of 17 October 1872, while noting that still nothing had been heard from Kaufman, he insisted that Sher Ali's possession of 'the territories up to the Oxus as far down as Khoja Saleh' was 'fully established'.[35] The Emir had been told that he had the right to defend them if invaded, but were he to overstep their limits, the British government would 'remonstrate with him'. Because they had been able to assure him that his frontiers would be respected by the states under Russian influence beyond them, he had been amenable to British advice and had followed a peaceful policy, but the key to continued peace and the removal of 'all cause of uneasiness and jealousy' between Britain and Russia in Central Asia lay with the Russian government's endorsement of these frontiers. Granville then produced a fresh definition of the frontiers in question, the critical passage of which, as originally drafted, read:

> Badakhshan, with its dependent district Wakhan, from the Sarikol, Wood's Lake, on the east, to the junction of the Kotchka River with the Oxus (or Penjah) [*on the west, the stream of the Oxus*] forming the northern boundary of this Afghan province throughout its entire extent.

As a result of a clerk's error, the words in italics were omitted, so rendering the passage nonsensical, and there was a minor storm when the London press got wind of the omission. No correction was sent to the Russians, however, nor did any appear in the final printed text. Nor did it much matter, since the Russians contested the definition anyway.

At length, in December 1872, Kaufman's long-delayed report arrived.[36] Its main conclusion was that while the Amu Darya could be regarded as the limit of Sher Ali's possessions from its junction with the Kotchka River down to Khoja Saleh, it had been impossible to discover any traces of Sher Ali's exercise of sovereignty upstream, especially in Badakhshan and Wakhan. While it had not been feasible to send officers into these territories to make an on-the-spot assessment, all the evidence was that Badakhshan had not been bequeathed by Dost Muhammed to Sher Ali, but had regained its independence, and that Wakhan, although not strictly part of Badakhshan, was also independent. The chiefs of Badakhshan looked upon themselves, and were looked upon by their neighbours, as independent, although they did pay tribute to Sher Ali as a means of protecting that independence. There were no signs of the normal instruments of sovereignty, notably the presence of Afghan officers or the collection of taxes. In forwarding Kaufman's report, Gorchakov reverted to the neutral zone concept and argued that the existing state of peace in the region should be guaranteed by both powers.[37] To alter it by allowing Sher Ali to extend his rule to Badakhshan and Wakhan would bring him into 'dangerous contact' with Kashgar, Kokand and Bokhara, create a 'precarious basis' for the maintenance of peace and 'lead him straight into collision with Russia'. So unlikely did these contingencies, and particularly the reference to Russia, appear to British observers that they took it to be a cover for other Russian designs in the region. The main route for east–west trade between Western and Central Asia had traditionally passed through Badakhshan and Wakhan to Yarkand and Kashgar, and it was understandable that Russia might not wish it to be in Afghan hands; also that Russia might have her eye on control of the main passes south to Gilgit and Chitral, and thence to Kashmir and the Punjab. In any event, Granville did not let Kaufman's conclusions go uncontested. He pointed out that Sher Ali had conquered Badakhshan, had received the formal submission of its chiefs and people, and had appointed a local governor.[38] He had the right to impose whatever form of administration he chose, and the fact that, for a short experimental period, he had chosen to receive a fixed proportion of the revenues of the province in lieu of taking over its financial and other administration did not detract from the fact that he enjoyed absolute sovereignty. If doubts were to be raised about this, he might well be tempted to assert his claims forcibly and Bokhara might then intervene, to the detriment of the peace of Central Asia which both Britain and Russia wished to maintain.

To all appearances, therefore, the long, desultory series of contacts and negotiations which the two governments had conducted over the previous seven years appeared, at the end of 1872, to have reached an impasse.

5 The Agreement of 1873

It was in November 1869 that Buchanan first got wind of Russian preparations for 'serious operations' against Khiva.[1] Questioned by him about reports of the establishment of a base at Krasnovodsk on the east coast of the Caspian Sea, Gorchakov insisted that it was intended merely to be a 'factory' and would be used purely for commercial purposes.[2] It would give greater security to trade and open a shorter caravan route to Central Asia. While it would be guarded by a small armed force, it would be incorrect to describe it as a fort. This was in fact, as Gorchakov almost certainly must have known, highly economical with the truth. In March of that year, General Cherniaev, the captor of Tashkent, who had been seconded to the Asiatic Department of the Foreign Ministry on his return to St Petersburg, had prepared a memorandum urging that Russia must give herself the capability of making a 'diversion towards India' whenever a split developed with Britain on the European front.[3] The aim was not to invade India, which would have been far too costly an enterprise, but to oblige the British to reinforce their troops there and so weaken them in Europe. Having taken Tashkent, Russia had a 'superlative base' for action towards India, but the distance to it from the military base at Kazan was such that it would take all of eight months to move any sizable number of troops from the one to the other. Britain, by contrast could reinforce India within four months via the Cape of Good Hope, or two months once the Suez Canal had been opened. An operational base should therefore be established on the eastern shore of the Caspian, to which troops could easily be moved from the Caucasus. Krasnovodsk Bay was the most suitable place, and the establishment of a commercial operation there, supported by a small military force, would provide the opportunity to extend Russian influence and gain knowledge of the shortest routes to Central Asia. This would 'upset no one, impose no obligations on ourselves and allow the natural course of events to show us what needs to be done and how to do it'. From the outset, therefore, the occupation of Krasnovodsk was essentially a strategic move.

The Russian move provoked an altercation with the Persians, who protested that their frontier lay north of Krasnovodsk. The Russians disputed this, insisting that Persian territory did not extend beyond the Atrak River and that Turkman tribes to its north were an independent people. As the British government took the same view, the Persians were left without support and conceded the Russian case.[4]

The clear inference was that Russia was preparing for an assault on Khiva, at least in the first instance. However, in a further interview with Buchanan late in 1869, Gortchakov went on to 'deny positively' any intention of attacking that khanate. Unless some provocation was given, there was 'no idea' of going to war, and still less of occupying it.[5] Buchanan nevertheless continued to receive reports of military preparations, while Gorchakov continued to deny that any were taking place.[6] There might, he admitted, be a desire among the Russian military to make further conquests in Central Asia, but he and the minister of war would remain of one mind in ruling them out. A few weeks later, Buchanan was assured by the Tsar personally that he had 'no feeling of covetousness' in Central Asia, and he too stressed the commercial nature of the base at Krasnovodsk.[7] By the summer of 1870, relations between the Russians and the Khan of Khiva seemed to Buchanan to have deteriorated, and he was inclined to believe that an expedition against the khanate was more likely to take place than not.[8] It did not, however, materialise in the course of that year, and in the summer of 1871 Buchanan was still receiving firm assurances that there was no intention of undertaking such an enterprise. In March 1872, Buchanan's successor, Lord Loftus, reported deteriorating relations with Khiva, and concluded that a decision had been made to mount an expedition which would take place as soon as 'weather and circumstances' permitted. Three reconnoitring parties had been sent out. The main factor hindering the Russians, in Loftus's view, was the considerable outlay in men and money that would be required.[9] In October, despite press reports to the contrary, he was still receiving assurances that no expedition had been prepared or decided upon,[10] although relations with the Khan of Khiva remained unsatisfactory: in particular, he had not released Russian prisoners who were in his hands.

Pressures for an attack on Khiva had in fact been building up over the previous three years. Kaufman and his subordinates in Turkestan had sought permission for an expedition as early as 1870, and Miliutin had conceded its inevitability the following year.[11] One of the reconnoitring expeditions mounted from Krasnovodsk in 1872 had then failed, creating a perceived need to restore Russian prestige in the region. Towards the end of the year, the decision was taken by the Committee of the Council of the Empire, under the presidency of the Tsar, to invade Khiva the following spring, and Miliutin was charged with the preparation of a plan of operations.[12] 'Konstantin Petrovich,' the Tsar instructed Kaufman, 'take Khiva for me'.[13] This was the situation – an impending attack on Khiva which had been consistently and vigorously denied, and the impasse in the exchanges over the extent of Sher Ali's possessions in the north-east of his country – with which Brunnow was faced towards the end of 1872. He proceeded to go over Gorchakov's head with a personal appeal to the Tsar,[14] with the result that a close advisor, Count Shuvalov, was sent to London at the beginning of 1873 as the Tsar's personal envoy. He made an excellent impression on Granville, who described him as 'good looking, civil and intelligent. As pleasant a Russian as I have met'.[15] One of his tasks, which he carried out successfully, was to arrange the marriage of the Duke of Edinburgh to the Tsar's daughter, the Grand Duchess Marie Alexandrovna. The other was to try to reassure Granville about Russian attitudes and activities in

Central Asia. According to Shuvalov,[16] the Tsar 'knew of no question in Central Asia which would affect the understanding between the two countries'. It was true that there had been no agreement over some details of Afghanistan's boundaries, but there was no suggestion that this should be a cause of difference between the two; indeed, the Tsar was 'determined that it should not be so'. Shuvalov had every reason to believe that agreement would be reached at a very early date. Meanwhile an expedition to Khiva had been decided on for the spring. Its purpose was to punish acts of brigandage, recover fifty Russian prisoners and teach the Khan that he could not trifle with Russia. Not only was it not the intention to annex Khiva, but positive orders had been prepared to prevent this, and a prolonged occupation was out of the question. On this, Granville could give explicit assurances to Parliament.

Granville in turn assured Shuvalov that if the expedition to Khiva was carried out with the object and within the limits stated, it would 'meet with no remonstrance' on the part of the British government, although it would undoubtedly 'excite public attention'. For that reason, an early settlement of the boundary question was important. Three weeks later, a letter arrived from Gorchakov to the effect that 'as an act of courtesy,'

> considering the difficulty experienced in establishing the facts in all their details in those distant parts, considering the greater facilities which the British government possesses for collecting precise data, and, above all, considering our wish not to give to this question of detail greater importance than is due to it, we do not refuse to accept the line of boundary laid down by England.[17]

Brunnow's comment to Granville, when transmitting the letter, was that it was 'not half civil enough', and he described its postscript (which he did not transmit but allowed Granville to read) as containing nothing but 'des bêtises'.[18] It gave as the reasons for agreeing that the question was of no importance for Russia, that the assurance that Britain would exercise its influence with the Afghan Emir was 'as good as a guarantee', and that Russia was 'glad to do what was agreeable to the present charming government of the Queen'. The grudging tone of the letter may well have been due to Gorchakov's resentment at having been bypassed by Brunnow and Shuvalov.

Khiva was then attacked by three armies, which converged on it from Krasnovodsk, Orenburg and Tashkent. The Khan was permitted to retain his position, but effectively lost his freedom and was forced to pay what was for him a large indemnity, while the Russians seized his territory on the right bank of the Syr Darya. The excuse given to the British this time was that Kaufman had exceeded his instructions. As a Russian author commented, 'Our diplomats apparently trusted in our fighting generals who will always be able to prove that military circumstances prevent the exact fulfilment of that which was proposed'.[19] Reinforcing this interpretation, there is a view that the assurances given by Shuvalov must have been sincerely intended, if only because he was not a man who would have acted dishonourably in misleading the British.[20] On the other hand, the record shows that Kaufman's negotiations with the Khivans were closely controlled by Miliutin, and that he kept the Tsar informed. The eventual treaty with Khiva was approved in advance, although the Foreign Ministry had not been informed.[21] Shuvalov appears to have been considerably upset, and to have petitioned the Tsar either to withdraw from Khiva or explain that circumstances had materially altered. The Tsar did neither, but instead put the blame on Kaufman. Shuvalov's assurances were deliberately dishonoured.

Together with Granville's letter of 17 October 1872, Gorchakov's letter comprised the 'Agreement' of 1873 (Appendix 2). On a number of counts, it was much criticised. In the first place, it was far from being a formal treaty or exchange of notes, carefully thought through and negotiated. Rather, as Curzon later remarked, it consisted in 'a hesitating acceptance by one party of certain suggestions put forward in a somewhat tentative manner, at an earlier stage, by the other'. Given also the 'gross geographical ignorance' in which it was conceived,

> rarely, if ever, has so important an issue, involving, as it did, the territorial delimitation of the sphere of two great Powers, been approached in so haphazard a fashion, or settled in so unscientific and so inconclusive a state.[22]

One of the questions which the agreement raised, but left unanswered, was the extent of British responsibility for preventing Sher Ali from infringing it. From the outset, when the Emir had finally succeeded in establishing his rule in Afghanistan, the Russians had been nervous that he might threaten Bokharan territory. This nervousness intensified after Mayo had met Sher Ali at Ambala in 1869 and had given him support, both moral and material, as a result of which he had been able to re-establish Afghan rule north of the Hindu Kush. In his letter accepting Granville's definition of the frontier, Gorchakov had laid stress on Britain's supposed engagement

> to use all her influence with Sher Ali, in order to induce him to maintain a peaceful attitude, as well as to insist on his giving up all measures of aggression or further conquest It is based not only on the material and moral ascendancy of England, but also on the subsidies for which Sher Ali is indebted to her. Such being the case we see in this arrangement a real guarantee for the maintenance of peace.

The Indian authorities had in fact, in September 1869, succeeded in dissuading Sher Ali from making an incursion into Bokharan territory, and Granville, just a week before Gorchakov sent his letter concluding the agreement, had undertaken[23] that the British government 'will not fail to impress upon the Emir in the strongest terms{...}the obligation upon him to abstain from any aggression on his part'. The problem was that the British and Indian governments had thus assumed a degree of responsibility for Sher Ali's conduct without having effective control of it. They could talk to him and, to an extent, apply pressure, but their powers of persuasion were limited and, if they were to go too far, there was the risk that he would turn to the Russians. When the issue was aired in Parliament in April 1873, Gladstone insisted that Britain had undertaken to use no more than 'moral influence' on Sher Ali in the direction of peace, and that there had never been an engagement to use force.[24] This caused something of a storm in the Russian press, which maintained that it rendered the agreement null and void, but Gorchakov, despite his earlier use of the word 'insist', was prepared to concede that the statement was justified.[25]

The problem for the British government was intensified by the fact that the definition of the Amu Darya as the limit of Sher Ali's territory did not accord with the situation on the ground. Not only did Wakhan cover areas on both sides of the river, but two other territories, Shignan and Roshan, which extended across to its right bank, were dependencies of Badakhshan. Furthermore, the Emir of Bokhara had a claim to Darwaz, lying partly on the left bank where the river made its great northern bend downstream of its junction with the Murghab. The basic error was to assume that, as in Europe and elsewhere, a river could form a natural frontier, its main advantage being that it usually followed a clear-cut course, giving no grounds for dispute over the line of demarcation. Also, a river often marked a clear ethnographic or political boundary. In mountainous areas, however, where rivers ran through often narrow valleys, homogeneous populations tended to live on both banks and to form political entities. The true dividing lines lay rather along the watersheds, but in the 1860s and 1870s, there was just not enough geographical knowledge of the upper Amu Darya region to permit the tracing of such lines. Almost immediately after the conclusion of the agreement, Sher Ali had to be restrained from sending troops into Shignan, while in 1877, troops from Bokhara crossed the river into Darwaz. A compounding factor was that in both Shignan and Roshan, Afghan rule was thoroughly unpopular. The whole issue, arising from the practice described by Lord Salisbury as

> drawing lines upon maps where no human foot has ever trod . . . giving away mountains and rivers and lakes to each other . . . only . . . hindered by the small impediment that we never knew exactly where those mountains and rivers and lakes were,[26]

was to cause a succession of problems over the next two decades. They might have been resolved, or at least minimised, if the Murghab source of the Amu Darya had been chosen as the boundary, allotting to Afghanistan not only most of its trans-riverain territories, but also a considerable area of the Pamirs. But again, geographical knowledge was not sufficiently developed to allow of this solution being considered.

Yet another problem was that the agreement contained nothing at all about the nature or extent of the Russian sphere of influence to the north of the river. It seems to have been assumed that, although the Russians had effective control of Bokhara, the limits of their territory were sufficiently distant as not to be a factor in the equation. This soon became a bone of contention, when in April 1875 Gorchakov claimed that Russia was entitled to claim 'complete liberty of action in the territory situated between her frontiers and those of Afghanistan'.[27] This was immediately contested by the British government,[28] who informed the Russians that

> Her Majesty's Government could not regard with indifference, and as a matter with which they have no concern, further occupation and absorption by Russia of the regions which still separate Afghanistan from the Russian territory . . . and they must reserve to themselves the most complete liberty of action under all future contingencies as to the measures which may, in their opinion, be necessary to secure the integrity of Afghan territory.

Gorchakov replied in a conciliatory tone, conceding that the two countries should avoid, as far as possible, 'any immediate contact with each other, and any collision between the Asiatic states placed within the circle of their influence'.[29] This was not, however, to prevent the Russians from subsequently pressing forward their claims.

As if all this were not enough, a further defect in the agreement, again arising from geographical ignorance, was its assumption that Lake Sarikol, Wood's Lake, marked the boundary between Afghan territories and those of Kashgar. This appeared to be Kaufman's view, when he stated that that if Badakhshan and Wakhan were to be recognised as belonging to Sher Ali, 'his north-eastern boundary would touch the possessions of Yakub Beg'.[30] In fact there was no settled boundary at all between the two, and neither the Chinese nor Yakub Beg had advanced their outposts so far towards the west. This left a gap which the Russians were later to exploit. The Indian government, evidently spotting the omission, proposed that an approach should be made to the Russian government with a view to a demarcation of this frontier,[31] but Granville preferred to let sleeping dogs lie. He did not think it 'expedient to run the risk of raising without absolute and pressing necessity at the present moment, any question with Russia respecting the frontier of Yarkand'.[32]

Throughout the negotiations leading to the agreement, no word at all was passed to Sher Ali that limits were to be placed on his possessions beyond the Hindu Kush. He had been informed of the repeated Russian assurances that they would not interfere in his country, but, no doubt in an effort to avoid complications, nothing more. Once the agreement had been reached, the first he heard of it was from a reference in a letter written to him by General Kaufman. Fortunately, his reaction was not to distance himself from it, but rather to express his distrust of the Russians and to seek firm assurances of assistance in the event of Russian pressures or inroads.

Over and above these defects, the agreement fell down, as its critics were quick to point out, over the question whether any reliance could be placed on its observance by the Russians. In the view of Rawlinson and the 'hawks', no agreement, and no line of frontier, however well founded and formulated, would be likely to deter the Russians from pressing forward as and when they had the opportunity. As General Cherniaev put it, after he had been appointed Governor-General of Turkestan in succession to Kaufman, 'As long as England and Russia mean well towards each other their respective interests in Central Asia will not require the protection of a written agreement, which, on the other hand, is of such a character that Russia will easily find a number of pretexts for breaking it when necessary'. The 1873 Agreement, ill thought out and imperfectly formulated, was to raise more problems than it solved.

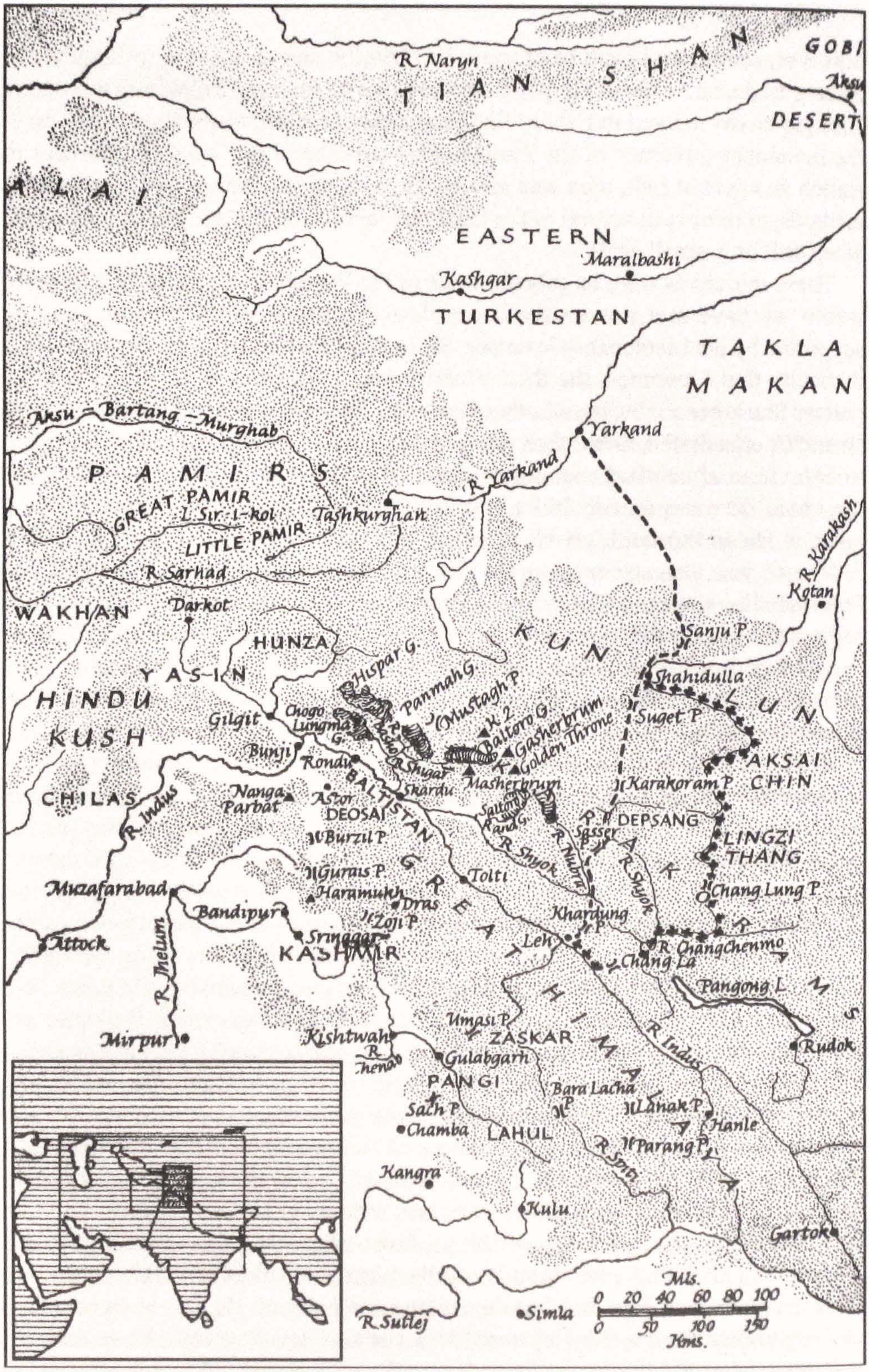
6 Kashgar

While, during the 1860s, British attention was largely focused on Russian advances in Turkestan, the situation to the east, in what was formerly 'Chinese Tartary', also began to attract the notice of the authorities in Calcutta and London. The region had for centuries been unsettled, but in 1760 the Emperor Ch'ien Lung had re-established Chinese rule, and a period of stability followed. During the following century, however, Chinese power again weakened, and, from the 1820s onwards, unrest spread. In the 1860s, a series of Muslim revolts, known collectively as the Tungan Rebellion, broke out, and in 1864, taking advantage of widespread chaos, a Khoja ruler, Buzurg Khan, started out from Kokand to reclaim the kingdom once held by his ancestors. He was then overthrown and exiled by the commander of his forces, Yakub Beg, who proceeded over the next two years to wrest power from the Chinese and the local factions, and to establish himself as the effective ruler of what was variously known as Kashgaria, Eastern Turkestan or 'Little Bokhara'.

From the first, Yakub Beg was nervous about his relationship with the Russians, from whose expanding territories access was much easier than it was through the higher and more difficult passes which separated Kashgaria from Kashmir and British India, or through the Taklamahan desert which separated it from Imperial China. A Russian envoy, Captain Valikhanov, succeeded in reaching Kashgar, disguised as a merchant, as early as 1859, and returned with the conviction that Russia ought to be able to dominate the region commercially.[1] Britain, for her part, had traditionally shown little or no interest in Kashgaria. William Moorcroft, an East India Company official who had travelled there in the 1820s, had been unable to convince his superiors either of its commercial possibilities or of the strategic inroads he believed the Russians were making in the region.[2] In 1846 and 1847, boundary commissions were sent to Ladakh in order to try to determine its frontier with Chinese territory, but received no cooperation either from the Chinese or the Kashmir administration, and returned having achieved nothing.[3] In 1861 a comprehensive report on the potential for trade between India and Eastern Turkestan was put together by the Punjab authorities.[4] It concluded that despite the physical difficulties in sending caravans over the high passes across the Karakorams, the potential was there, were it not for other limiting factors, notably the restrictiveness and corruption of the Kashmir authorities, Hunza raids on the caravan routes, and a lack of interest within Kashgaria itself. With Yakub Beg's seizure of power, however, sentiment began to change. In 1866, he sent a mission to Kashmir to discuss trade, and effectively put a stop to raids on the caravan routes. In 1868, a Kashgar envoy arrived in Lahore for discussions, also primarily about trade, with the lieutenant-governor of the Punjab. This stimulated the Indian authorities to station an agent at Leh, who was successful, by means of some fairly strong-arm methods, in removing several of the local restrictions. Trade then began to prosper, albeit still on a small scale.

These initiatives were largely the work of the Punjab official, Douglas Forsyth, whom we have met previously in a political context. While he was strongly supported by his Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Donald McLeod, it was only with great difficulty that Lawrence, the then Viceroy, was persuaded to go along with the policy. The latter's concern was that Kashmir, like other states on India's borders, should be conciliated, rather than pressured and antagonised: 'our policy . . . ought to be{...}one of avowed conciliation and scrupulous forbearance . . . to have, in the space between British India and Central Asia, at least one friendly State, and one Ruler, thoroughly well-disposed to British ascendancy and influence'.[5] Lawrence was also strongly opposed to explorations beyond the boundaries of British India. Not only were the explorers risking their lives, but their ventures beyond the reach of British authorities might well give rise to political complications. More than that, he was nervous that Yakub Beg might be encouraged to look beyond a trading relationship towards one which would assist him in resisting Russian pressure.

While officials could be reined in, however, there was little the Indian government could do about private travellers. In 1868, a British tea planter, Robert Shaw, believing that there might be a worthwhile market in Kashgar for Indian tea, set out in his private capacity, followed closely – although he was unaware of the fact – by another Briton, George Hayward, an ex-army officer whose journey was financed by the Royal Geographical Society in London. His objective was not trade, but exploration pure and simple; in this case his objectives being the Pamirs and the source of the Amy Darya, for which Kashgaria would be his launch pad. The two came into contact a short distance from Leh on the road to Yarkand, and a mutual antagonism promptly developed. Shaw was concerned that, after months of preparation, his expedition might be compromised by the presence of a second traveller whom the Kashgaria authorities would not be expecting, who was without any credentials and who was, moreover, in an unconvincing Pathan disguise. Hayward, however, was not to be put off, and it was agreed that Shaw would go first and Hayward wait a few days before following, on the understanding that Shaw would do his best to ensure him a favourable reception when he arrived. On reaching Shahidulla, a fort until recently occupied by the Kashmiris, Shaw was detained for several days, but was then allowed to proceed. He had, however, done nothing to ease the way for Hayward, who was also detained when he arrived. He managed, however, to depart for three weeks on a near-fatal march westwards across the Kun Lun plateau to the source of the Yarkand River. He too was then allowed to proceed to Yarkand, possibly by portraying himself as a member of Shaw's party.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R. Yarkand
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Kotan
Aksu – Bartang – Murghab
PAMIRS
GREAT PAMIR
L. Sir-i-kol
LITTLE PAMIR
Tashkurghan
R. Sarhad
WAKHAN
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Hispar G.
Panmah G.
Mustagh P.
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Skardu
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Astor
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Gurais P.
Haramukh
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Zoji P.
Tolti
Saltoro Pass and G.
R. Shyok
R. Nubra
Sasser P.
KUN
LUN
Sanju P.
Shahidulla
Suget P.
AKSAI
CHIN
Karakoram P.
DEPSANG
LINGZI
THANG
Chang Lung P.
KARAKORAMS
R. Shyok
Khardung P.
Leh
R. Changchenmo
Chang La
Pangong L.
Rudok
GREAT HIMALAYA
Muzafarabad
Bandipur
Srinagar
KASHMIR
Attock
R. Jhelum
Mirpur
Kishtwar
R. Chenab
Umasi P.
ZASKAR
Gulabgarh
PANGI
Sach P.
Chamba
LAHUL
Bara Lacha P.
Lanak P.
Hanle
Parang P.
R. Spiti
R. Indus
Kangra
Kulu
Gartok
R. Sutlej
Simla
Mls.
0 20 40 60 80 100
0 50 100 150
Kms.

Map 4 Baltistan and the Road to Yarkand

Source: *Where Men and Mountains Meet and The Gilgit Game*, by kind permission of John Murray

Shaw was duly impressed by Yarkand and its surroundings, 'a well-cultivated country full of villages', and saw it as a worthwhile potential market. Going on to Kashgar early in 1869, he was cordially received by Yakub Beg, but both he and Hayward, when he eventually arrived, were then kept in virtual isolation. Although neither man knew it, the reason was that a Russian mission, headed by a Captain Reinthal, had arrived a few weeks earlier, while Yakub Beg had also sent a personal emissary to St Petersburg. Everything was therefore 'on hold' until Yakub Beg could decide whether he could develop his relationship with Russia. As weeks passed, Shaw and Hayward became increasingly anxious: neither was allowed out of their quarters and both were closely watched. It was made clear to Hayward that there was no prospect of his proceeding to the Pamirs, while Shaw began to despair not merely of his trading prospects, but also of his life. Yakub Beg's despotic regime, whose 'nooses never swing idly on the gallows', did little to inspire confidence.

It was all of three months before Yakub Beg made up his mind. He was acutely aware that the Russians had stationed troops at no great distance from his capital and was disconcerted that they seemed reluctant formally to recognise his rule. The Russians themselves were in something of a quandary. They wished to develop trade, and to restore the commercial concessions they had earlier obtained from the Chinese. They were also concerned not to allow the British a predominant position in Kashgar, nor did they wish to antagonise Yakub Beg, who had good connections, and a common Muslim faith, with the peoples they had conquered in Turkestan. One solution would have been to invade Kashgaria, and this was actively considered. However, this would have upset the Chinese, who still regarded the territory as rightly theirs, and the Russians were not at the time sufficiently confident to take this extreme step. Nor would it have been easy for them to recognise Yakub Beg, again on account of the likely Chinese reaction. When his envoy returned from Russia with nothing to show for his visit, Yakub Beg seems finally to have decided to see what the British had to offer. He allowed Shaw and Hayward to leave, and expressed his interest in making contact with British India. The two men brought back a wealth of information, together with two beliefs.[6] One was that Kashgaria possessed commercial potential worth pursuing; the other that the Russians intended to invade the territory and that from there, it would be possible for them to send a military force to threaten Ladakh and northern India. Both believed that the Russians would be able to cross the region, with artillery, just as they had earlier crossed the Kirghiz steppes. Others, however, including the British War Office, were sceptical, arguing that the resources of the country would be 'utterly insufficient' for a modern army.

While Shaw and Hayward were in Kashgar, they were joined by a mysterious character by the name of Mirza Shuja.[7] Shaw suspected him of being an *agent provocateur*, but he was in fact a 'Pundit', one of the Indian agents who had been trained by Colonel Montgomerie of the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India to undertake clandestine geographical surveys in areas where it would have been dangerous for British surveyors to go. In the course of these journeys, these men, later immortalised in Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*, risked their lives as they traversed the mountains, disguised as traders or Buddhist pilgrims, concealing their surveying instruments in prayer wheels or other equipment. There was, inevitably, more to it than mere surveying: with frontier questions often on the international agenda, effective diplomacy was dependent on accurate geographical knowledge, while, from a military point of view, there was an obvious need for more information about the terrain to the north of India and the feasibility of armies penetrating the northern passes. For some three decades, a succession of Pundits travelled through the frontier regions, without, however, achieving the official recognition they undoubtedly deserved.[8] The Mirza himself succeeded in completing a spectacular mid-winter journey from Kabul to Badakhshan and thence across the Pamirs to Kashgar. He too was detained by Yakub Beg, but eventually found his way back through Leh to India.

When Mayo took over the Viceroyalty from Lawrence in 1869, a more active policy towards Kashgaria developed. Mayo saw the region as a potential sphere of British influence and was concerned to forestall Russian inroads. Formally, the Russians took the position that the territory was still Chinese: according to Gorchakov, 'Russia had treaties with China and could not enter into political relations with a successful insurgent against the authority of the Chinese Emperor', and he assured Buchanan that Yakub Beg had nothing to fear.[9] Mayo, however, was not convinced: as so often in British imperial policy, he saw commerce as the means of making headway and was greatly impressed by Shaw's pioneering venture. He started by applying pressure on the Maharaja of Kashmir, who had thwarted earlier attempts to develop commerce in the region, and concluded with him a comprehensive commercial treaty.[10] Yakub Beg had meanwhile sent his envoy to Calcutta and had invited Mayo to send an officer to accompany him on his return journey to Kashgar. In 1870, Forsyth was chosen to go, with a brief to follow up Yakub Beg's initiative, to try to find a basis for regular trade across the Karakorams, and generally to acquire intelligence about the country. The mission aroused strong Russian suspicions, but for various reasons it failed. The Kashmiri governor of Leh omitted to provide the provisions and ponies which had been requisitioned and it was only after a near-disaster that the mission was able to reach Yarkand. There, Forsyth learnt that Yakub Beg was campaigning away from his capital in a remote part of the country, whether deliberately or coincidentally it was impossible to say. There was nothing for it but to beat an ignominious retreat to Leh before winter set in. Forsyth's conclusion, both from the behaviour of the Yarkandis and the difficulty of the terrain, differed from that of Shaw and Hayward in seeing little prospect of a productive relationship.[11]

Mayo, therefore, was duly discouraged, while the Russians responded by exerting pressure on Yakub Beg. They had earlier occupied the former Chinese territory of Kuldja and built a fort and bridge on the Naryn River, not far from Kashgar, and an invasion of Kashgaria again seemed imminent. Hostilities were only avoided by Yakub Beg's acceptance in 1872 of a Russian mission under Baron Kaulbars, which offered to extend recognition to him in return for commercial concessions.[12] He once again saw an opportunity to play the Russians and British off against each other, and sent an envoy to Calcutta, who invited Northbrook, Mayo's successor, to despatch a further mission. By now, thanks to Shaw's efforts, there was considerable pressure from commercial interests in both India and Britain, and there was also the urge to counter the Russians. Despite his earlier scepticism, in 1873 Forsyth again set out, this time with an entourage of 350 men, including political officers, surveyors and scientists.[13] The logistical effort to support them was substantial, to the extent that the Ladakh economy was reckoned to have needed four years to recover from the strains put upon it. Forsyth and his party were allowed to move around and they formed a good opinion of Yakub Beg. After three months of negotiations, a commercial treaty was concluded, with provision for the posting of a British agent in Kashgar, and considerable military and other intelligence was acquired. The mission at first appeared to have been highly successful and Forsyth received a prompt knighthood on his return. Momentarily, Britain seemed to have the advantage. Little, however, resulted: the treaty remained unratified and Shaw, who had been sent to act as the agent, had no option but to withdraw. It was also by then realised that the commercial potential of Kashgaria was extremely limited. The population was small and the market was easily saturated. Moreover, after their occupation of Kokand in 1876, the Russians held the whip hand. Reinthal returned with a fresh mission while Shaw was still there, and in 1877 a delegation headed by a Colonel Kuropatkin reached Kashgar and imposed an agreement defining the border between Kokand and Yakub Beg's territories.[14]

Northbrook's successor, Lord Lytton, was at first dubious of the value of taking any further initiatives over Kashgaria. However, when Yakub Beg sent a permanent representative to India and urged Lytton to reciprocate, the latter's 'forward' instincts prevailed, and Shaw was again deputed as a 'commercial agent' in Kashgar. At that point, however, the whole house of cards collapsed. In 1877 Yakub Beg died, and at the end of the year a Chinese army, which had over several years been making its laborious way westwards, entered Kashgar and restored Chinese rule. Despite initial friction and abortive negotiations, in 1881 the Chinese and Russians negotiated the Treaty of St Petersburg, under which the Russians returned Kuldja to the Chinese and received substantial commercial privileges. A Russian Consul, Nikolai Petrovsky, was appointed, and successfully established himself as 'the virtual ruler of Kashgar'.

Whether Kashgaria mattered, in the sense that Russian occupation might have resulted in an invasion or subversion of Kashmir or northern India, is highly doubtful. While opinion was divided, it was hard to envisage a successful advance of a substantial army through the passes of the Karakorams. The Russians in any case showed no desire to risk the confrontation with China which any infringement of its territory would have involved. The boundary between Kashmir and Kashgaria was never satisfactorily delimited, an omission which has caused independent India a good deal of trouble.

Writing to Northbrook in 1875, Lord Salisbury's judgement of the Kashgaria issue seems well expressed:

> If any frontier ever gave safety we may surely contemplate with equanimity what goes on north of the Himalayas. What then is the advantage of encouraging and strengthening Yakub Beg? The trade obtainable seems hardly worth the effort. We have no means of sustaining him against an invasion. If we had, we should only, by doing so, concentrate the forces of the invader upon the lines of the Attrek and the Oxus. But, except so far as we have given Yakub moral support and increased his prestige, we are not, and have not been able to strengthen him. But our advances . . . have produced great irritation among the Russians.[15]

While it lasted, the Kashgar issue absorbed a good deal of British attention and effort, but it is hard to avoid the conclusion that in essence, it was an exercise in futility.

7 The Revival of the 'Forward Policy'

The Emir Dost Mohammed, who had ruled in Afghanistan since returning from exile in 1842, died in 1863. For the first decade after his return, he had little contact with British India and, having learnt his lesson, was also sensible enough to keep clear of the Russians. The relationship with Britain was, as the Governor-General, Lord Dalhousie, described it in 1854, one of 'sullen quiescence on either side, without offence but without goodwill or intercourse'.[1] Initially, the areas of Afghanistan that Dost Mohammed controlled were limited. Kandahar and Herat were effectively independent, while Afghan Turkestan was split between a number of petty Usbek khanates. His prime concern was to recover Peshawar, traditionally part of the Afghan kingdom, and, when the Sikhs and British went to war in 1848, he led a force of cavalry to support the Sikhs and regained possession of the city. However, when the Sikhs were finally defeated at the battle of Gujrat in 1849, he was forced to beat a hasty retreat through the Khyber Pass.

With the Crimean War imminent, Dalhousie decided in 1855 to make a modest alteration to the 'stationary policy' which the East India Company had observed since the end of the First Anglo-Afghan War. With the Russians encouraging Persia to attack Herat, he took the initiative to secure Dost Mohammed's friendship through the conclusion of a simple treaty, binding him and his successors to be 'the friend of the friends and the enemy of the enemies of the East India Company'.[2] The Company gave no reciprocal undertaking, but merely bound itself not to interfere in his territories. Dalhousie was highly gratified by this treaty, which 'entangles the government . . . in no inconvenient reciprocity, while it builds up for us a barrier against aggression from beyond, capable of being rendered solid by our aid, and strongly cemented by common interest and common danger'.[3] Early in 1857, when the Persians had attacked Herat and war had broken out between Britain and Persia, Dost Mohammed went down to Peshawar and signed a more substantial treaty, which offered him arms and a regular subsidy as long as the war lasted.[4] This treaty bore almost immediate fruit, since, when the so-called Indian Mutiny broke out later in 1857 and Dost Mohammed came under considerable pressure from Afghan religious leaders to declare a *jihad*, he chose instead to observe the treaty. Lord Roberts's view, which was widely shared, was that 'had Dost Mohammed turned against the British, I do not see how any part of the country north of Bengal could have been saved'.[5] When the Mutiny was at its height, Lawrence, then Governor of the Punjab, proposed that Peshawar should be handed over to the Afghans in order to make troops available elsewhere, but was dissuaded from taking this extreme step. Peshawar was thereafter beyond Dost Mohammed's reach.

Aided by arms and subsidies, Dost Mohammed was able to maintain a regular army and to unify and consolidate Afghanistan. In 1850 he conquered Balkh and in 1855 he extended his territories to include Khulm, Kunduz and Badakhshan. The following year he took Kandahar, and finally, in the year of his death, he conquered Herat. Although Afghanistan had as yet no recognised frontiers, in effect he established control over most of what later came to be regarded as Afghan territory. This he ruled personally and through his sons, whom he placed in charge of the more important provinces.

With the death of Dost Mohammed, Afghanistan was plunged into chaos. He had been unfortunate in that his two eldest sons and successive heirs-apparent, Mohammed Akbar and Ghulam Hyder, had both already died. He then nominated as his successor Sher Ali, the eldest son of his second wife, passing over two senior sons by his first wife, Mohammed Afzal and Mohammed Azim. The majority of Dost Mohammed's sixteen surviving sons refused to accept Sher Ali, and a struggle for power ensued.[6] For a brief period, Mohammed Afzal managed to seize power in Kabul, and it was not until 1869 that Sher Ali managed to defeat his half-brothers and established his rule on a firm basis.

While Dost Mohammed was alive, the British had refrained from recognising an heir-apparent and had made no commitment in support of his dynasty. Had they done so, or had Sher Ali received effective support from the outset, much trouble might have been avoided, not only in Afghanistan, but also for Anglo-Afghan relations. For the time being, however, the policy of strict non-interference prevailed. As described by Lawrence,

> our relations should always be with the *de facto* ruler of the day, and so long as the *de facto* ruler is not unfriendly to us, we should always be prepared to renew with him the same terms and favourable conditions as obtained under his predecessor. In this way we shall be enabled to maintain our influence in Afghanistan far more effectually than any advance of troops, a contingency which could only be contemplated in the last resort, which would unite as one man the Afghan tribes against us, and which would paralyse our finances.[7]

Sher Ali and his half-brothers were thus left to fight it out, formal recognition only being accorded when one of them appeared to be firmly in power. At the point when this was reckoned to be Mohammed Afzal, he was duly recognised. The result was that when Sher Ali finally prevailed, Afghanistan had been considerably weakened and he himself was resentful and suspicious, and far from being the comfortable and supportive friend and ally that British interests required.

In early 1869, Mayo, the then Viceroy, tried to recover lost ground. He invited Sher Ali to India and plied him with arms, money and Irish charm. He was also keen to respond positively to Sher Ali's requests that he should have a treaty formally guaranteeing Afghanistan against external aggression, together with a regular subsidy and a formal pledge to acknowledge him and his nominated successors as the rightful rulers of Afghanistan. Mayo argued the case with London, but was authorised to go no further than to promise that Britain would 'view with severe displeasure' any move on the part of the Emir's rivals to 'disturb his position', and would 'endeavour from time to time, as circumstances should require, to strengthen the government of Your Highness'.[8] No formal treaty was conceded, nor any regular subsidy or dynastic pledge, but renewed undertakings were given that Britain would refrain from interfering in Afghan territory or sending European officers to reside in it. The extent to which Sher Ali was content with these assurances was the subject of later controversy. He would have undoubtedly welcomed a British undertaking to recognise himself and his heirs, and formal assurances of further assistance, including a regular subsidy. But he seems to have genuinely liked Mayo and may have interpreted what he was offered in a more positive sense than was intended. In any event, he gave every appearance of being sufficiently satisfied to maintain a tolerable relationship, despite Mayo's assassination in 1872.

There matters rested until 1873, when Sher Ali was invited by Mayo's successor, Lord Northbrook, to send a representative down to Simla to discuss two developments. The first concerned the Afghan–Persian frontier in Seistan, which had been arbitrated the previous year by a British general. The second was Sher Ali's growing concern at Russia's progressive advances in Central Asia. The Seistan award was not too critical an issue: both the Afghans and Persians had objected strongly to it, which meant that it was probably reasonably fair. While strongly resenting it, Sher Ali eventually gave it his acceptance. However his fears over Russia were not so easily allayed. He asked for a firm commitment of support, in response to which Northbrook recommended to London that if the Emir unreservedly accepted and acted upon British advice, 'we will help him with money, arms and troops if necessary – we to be the judge of the necessity'.[9] London was nevertheless cautious, and Northbrook was instructed to tell Sher Ali that they did not at all share his alarm and considered there was no cause for it; but that he could be assured that 'we will maintain our settled policy in favour of Afghanistan, if he abides by our advice in external affairs'.[10] Northbrook evidently decided that he was authorised to be specific about the 'settled policy', and he assured Sher Ali that if British mediation failed to avert a threatened aggression, he would be afforded 'assistance in the shape of arms and money, and also, in case of necessity, aided with troops', the British government being 'free to decide as to the occasion when such assistance should be rendered, and also to its nature and extent', and to its being 'conditional upon the Emir himself refraining from aggression and on his unreserved acceptance of the advice of the British government in regard to his external relations'.[11] At the same time, Northbrook wrote a long letter to Sher Ali, detailing (for the first time) the outcome of the negotiations with the Russians over his northern frontier and conveying assurances of confidence in their value in strengthening Afghanistan's position and removing 'apprehension of danger from without'. The Russians, he assured the Emir, had declared unequivocally that Afghanistan lay 'completely outside the sphere within which Russia may be called upon to exercise her influence' and that 'no intervention or interference opposed to the independence of Afghanistan enters their intention'. The Russians had also accepted British views as to the limits of his territories.[12] There was again some controversy in Britain over the extent to which Sher Ali was satisfied with this outcome, which included further gifts of arms and money. After some hesitation, he accepted the arms, but did not touch the money, and he was much affronted when, late in 1874, Northbrook wrote to him to deplore his treatment of his eldest son, Yakub Khan, whom he had invited to Kabul under safe conduct but had then thrown into prison. Sher Ali also objected to the Indian government having sent messages and gifts to the Mir of Wakhan, who was his vassal, without first having asked his permission. Nevertheless, whatever his feelings, he did nothing which might have caused offence, other than to deny passage to a small number of British officials and travellers. Here he was only being sensible, since many Afghans still remembered the earlier British invasion of their country and there would have been a real risk to the visitors' safety, and therefore to his relationship with Britain, if they were to come to harm. Later events were to prove him fully justified.

In 1874, Gladstone's Liberal government fell, and the Conservatives under Benjamin Disraeli took office with a substantial majority. Lord Derby was initially Foreign Secretary and Lord Salisbury Secretary of State for India. In public, the Conservative government were initially relaxed over Central Asia. Disraeli declared in Parliament in May 1876 that:

> far from looking forward with alarm to the development of Russian power in Central Asia, I see no reason why she should not conquer Tartary any more than England should not have conquered India. I only wish that the people of Tartary may gain as much advantage from being conquered by Russia as the people of India for being conquered by England.[13]

Behind the scenes, however, Disraeli and Salisbury decided that a more active policy was needed. A major influence on their thinking was Sir Bartle Frere, a former Governor of Bombay, who composed a letter to the India Office,[14] which was printed and circulated within the government, where it had a considerable influence, in particular on Lord Salisbury. Frere's thesis was that while there were elements in Russian society, including the Tsar himself, who were, on grounds of expediency, opposed to further schemes of conquest, there were also various pressures impelling Russia to extend her territories, just as Britain had extended hers in India from Calcutta to Peshawar. These included a powerful combination of russianised Germans and military, mercantile and ultra-national political factions, together with a strong religious crusading element and a desire to abolish slavery. Russia would accordingly expand, whether her government wished it or not, until something stopped her. This could be either a natural or a political barrier 'such as finding herself on a frontier which she cannot pass without fighting an equally powerful nation on the other side and where that powerful nation is civilised like herself and able and willing to give her honest hearing and reasonable redress with regard to all frontier discussions'. In face of Russian advances, British policy had been stationary and defensive – in fact purely negative.

> We are ready enough to say what we will not do, but all efforts by any of the other Asiatic powers concerned have hitherto failed to elicit from the government, either here or in India, any declaration of what it will do under any given or conceivable combination of circumstances. This peculiarity in our policy will at once explain to any one who knows Orientals, or, in fact, anyone who knows mankind in general, the inherent weakness of our policy as compared with that of the Russians . . . Orientals generally misunderstand our present inaction. They suspect some deep designs, some secret understanding with Russia. If it is at once understood that nothing will move us till the Russians appear on our frontier, we shall certainly hasten that event by a great many years.

What was needed was that British officers should be stationed 'on the Indian side of a well-defined frontier, exercising effective control of the polities of the semi-civilised races on our side of such a border, and in frank diplomatic communication with Russian officers on the other side'. The Afghan Emir should be told that Britain fully appreciated the danger with which the Russian advance threatened both him and Britain, and that 'we intend to stop all occasion for such advance in his direction, by assisting him so to govern Afghanistan that he shall give Russia no pretence for interference'. Quetta should be occupied as an advance post above the passes, strong enough to be defensible until reinforcements arrived from the Indus, with adequate communications leading to it. British agents should also be placed at Kabul, Herat and Kandahar, who, while refraining absolutely from interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs, would support the Emir 'actively and efficiently', so long as he maintained frank and friendly relations with Britain on all matters of foreign policy. A firm understanding should be reached with Sher Ali that if he did not follow British advice in his external relations, he could not count on their support, although relations with him should be broken only in the last resort. If it were clear that he was prepared to choose peace and effectual alliance, 'no small obstacle' should 'hinder our placing a British officer, not necessarily in the capital, but in a position to judge for himself, and to report to us, all that goes on at Kabul'.

While Frere discounted the likelihood of a Russian invasion of India, he believed that the consequence of a policy of 'masterly inactivity' might well be to leave Afghanistan open to a Russian presence and Russian influence. This would generate much unrest in India and attract 'all the disaffected, dangerous and criminal classes . . . and all the millions who still have some martial spirit left'. If a Russian envoy were to be established, formally or informally, in Kabul, and friendly relations prevailed between the two countries, the pressures that could be exerted on India, and by extension in Europe, would be considerable. There was an even more serious possibility:

> I have never seen any difficulty in a Russian agent impelling on us hordes of Asiatic barbarians . . . such as followed Nadir Shah and Ahmed Shah almost within living memory . . . Of course such a force would be met as soon as it appeared in India, and we may hope that it would be defeated, if not annihilated. But . . . who can tell what will happen once the rolling stone is put in motion? And all this, it seems to me, may be done without Russia committing herself to a clear casus belli, or being in any way actively unfriendly.

In terms of practical measures, the danger should be met as far away from India as possible. A preponderating influence should be established in Afghanistan through the stationing of a 'perfect Intelligence Department of European officers'. Subjugation or military occupation should not be attempted, but 'supreme influence' should be maintained by the employment of officers of suitable capacity.

In 1875 Sir Henry Rawlinson also once more published his views, this time in his book *England and Russia in the East*, in which he reprinted his earlier articles and rounded them off with a strong plea for a forward policy.[15] His thesis was that the Russian advance in Central Asia would continue 'as night follows day', the only element of doubt being the speed at which it would proceed. Britain must prepare herself for the inevitable contact, and determine the point at which she should say 'thus far and no further'. A critical point was Merv, an oasis south of Khiva, about half way between that khanate and Herat. At some point, Merv was bound to fall to the Russians and Herat would then be vulnerable to a *coup de main*. To prevent that happening, Britain should respond to any move on Merv by immediately sending a force of some 10,000 men to garrison Herat: 'Russia in possession of Herat would be a grip on the throat of India'. He did not believe that the cost of occupying Herat would be greater than the cost of reinforcing the army in India which would otherwise become necessary, and, with a distinct lack of realism, he was optimistic about the Afghan reaction:

> I still feel satisfied that we should receive the warm support of the great mass of the population in the districts that we traversed . . . Most assuredly, as far as the disposition of the natives is concerned, we should not have more difficulty in governing Candahar and Herat than the Russians encounter in governing Tashkent and Samarkand; while our long familiarity with Eastern administration, our consideration for Mahomedan prejudices, our prestige, our high reputation for justice and good faith, ought to make the task of maintaining the position far more easy to us than to our less experienced Northern neighbours.

Within the government, the view was that it was no use trying to exercise diplomacy in St Petersburg to counter Russian advances. As Salisbury put it to Northbrook,

> The Government are of the opinion that we can for the present do nothing as to the Central Asian proceeding of Russia in consequence of the strong

> assertions of the Russian Government. Lord Derby thinks the Emperor is perfectly sincere, but too good natured, and that he allows his officers at a distance to force his hand by disobeying his orders.[16]

What was needed was firm action on the ground to forestall any threat to the integrity of Afghanistan. The first question that arose was whether it was wise to rely on Sher Ali:

> Have you entirely satisfied yourself of the truth of the orthodox doctrine, that our interest is to have a strong and independent Afghanistan? My impression is that if you get it, it will turn against you. I have many misgivings as to the wisdom of making the friendliness of the Ameer the pivot of our policy. If with our help he subdues rebels and accumulates warlike stores, and fills his treasury, and drills his people; perhaps one day he may fancy, without any help, adding to all these blessings the loot of Hindustan . . . Any policy which turns on a reliance on him will I fear fail at the critical moment . . .[17]

The other, linked, part of the problem was that there was no reliable means of knowing what was happening in Afghanistan and beyond:

> We ought to be in possession of the correspondence that is passing between the Ameer and the Russian agents . . . We ought to be thoroughly informed on all matters strategical, geographical, political, on all questions of commissariat, of communication, of military position, on the road from Herat to our frontier . . . I reiterate my conviction (which is shared by the Prime Minister) that your means of information as to what goes on in the West and North West of Afghanistan are not as full and as rapid as is desirable.[18]

It had, Salisbury continued, been a mistake 'originally to allow [the Emir] to refuse the presence of an authorised agent at his court'. The only reporter *in situ* was the Muslim agent, or Vakil, accredited to Sher Ali's Durbar, and it was, Salisbury believed, unlikely that his reports would be either full or unbiased: 'He is a native and the Amir's particular friend, and tells us nothing'. A British envoy should be sent to Kabul and a military advance made towards Quetta and Herat: 'we cannot leave the keys of the gate in the hands of a warder of more than doubtful integrity, who insists, as an indispensable condition of his service, that his movements shall not be observed'.[19]

Receiving no encouraging response from Northbrook, Salisbury resolved at the end of 1874 to issue a formal instruction that an approach should be made to Sher Ali, proposing that, in return for the guarantees for which he had earlier asked, British officers should be stationed, if not at Kabul, then at Herat and Kandahar, to act both as sources of intelligence and as something of a deterrent presence. He first cleared his lines with Disraeli:

> I am getting uneasy as to our lack of information from Afghanistan. Almost all we hear of what happens on the Western frontier comes from St Petersburg or

> from Teheran . . . It has for many years past been the policy – the successful policy – of the Ameers to persuade the Calcutta government not to send a European representative into the country. We have only a native Agent who writes exactly what the Ameer tells him. Consequently we know nothing . . . I told you of the anxiety I felt on this subject four months ago. I propose therefore to instruct Northbrook formally to take measures for placing a resident either at Herat or Candahar. Cabul is too fanatical to be quite safe . . . But this is a measure of some little importance, and I should not be right in taking it unless it commends itself to your judgement'.[20]

Disraeli seeing no objection, Salisbury wrote to Northbrook formally and peremptorily early in 1875.[21] He cast doubts on the value of the Vakil's reporting, describing it as 'very meagre and of doubtful fidelity', and went on to assert that only a British Agent residing in the country could provide 'exact and constant information particularly where military matters were concerned'. Sher Ali should be pressed to accept a British Agency at Herat, and subsequently at Kandahar. Supplementing his despatch informally, he insisted that the present situation had the effect of

> placing upon our frontier a thick covert, behind which any amount of hostile intrigue and conspiracy may be masked . . . A Russian advance on India is a chimera, but I am by no means sure that an attempt to throw the Afghans upon us is so improbable . . . My fear is that unless the principle of our right to have a representative in Afghanistan as in the territory of every other friendly power be speedily established, you may find that some other influence has been there before you; and the status quo may be upheld by the Amir – or possibly his successor – not as now from caprice but in obedience to Russian counsels. Therefore I attach no light importance too this Herat mission . . . It ought to be impossible for Russia to make any attempt to make a party in that country without our knowing all about it.[22]

Northbrook and his Council, adherents to a man of the doctrine of 'masterly inactivity', objected strongly. They first asked whether Salisbury's instructions should be obeyed at once, or if some delay would be permissible. On being granted a delay, they put together a lengthy reply, drawing on the views not only of members of the Viceroy's Council, but also of the governor of the Punjab and other officers. Sher Ali, they maintained, would never agree to accept British officers, and even if he reluctantly did, they would never be given the access or mobility to enable them to report fully and accurately. A correspondence then developed, lasting several months, without the issue being resolved. Northbrook conceded that it was, in principle, desirable to have an officer in Herat, but he could only operate effectively if he was there with the 'willing consent' of the Emir, while Salisbury continued to insist that intelligence on Afghanistan and Central Asia was inadequate, and that, with the Russian advances bringing them closer to the Afghan frontier, it had assumed unprecedented importance:

> The real fear is that if Russia occupies – either materially or diplomatically – Afghanistan, she will require to be watched by a large force: in other words she will hold in check an important fraction of our scanty British army.[24]

There were three possibilities: Sher Ali might go over to the Russians; the Russians might be able to take advantage of internal disorder to establish their influence in the country; or a frontier clash might precipitate a Russian incursion. A means of speedy and accurate reporting was essential. Northbrook should proceed by asking Sher Ali to accept a 'temporary Embassy' to his capital, to confer with him on recent developments in Central Asia and influence him towards agreeing to the permanent posting of an officer 'on the frontier'. Northbrook again objected strongly, not only on the substance of the issue, but also at the idea of proceeding through the subterfuge of a temporary embassy. If a move were to be made, it would be better to invite Sher Ali himself to a personal conference and put the proposition to him direct. Before doing so, two questions of policy needed to be settled: whether he should be given unconditional assurances of protection against external attack, and whether assistance should be offered to fortify Herat and improve his army. Northbrook concluded by stating his belief that Russia had no intention of interfering in Afghanistan, and that no complaint could be levelled against Sher Ali over his dealings with that power:

> We are convinced that a patient adherence to the policy adopted towards Afghanistan by Lord Canning, Lord Lawrence and Lord Mayo, which it has been our earnest endeavour to maintain, presents the greatest promise on the eventual establishment of our relations with the Ameer on a satisfactory footing, and we deprecate, as involving serious danger to the peace of Afghanistan and to the interests of the British Empire in India, the execution, under present circumstances, of the instructions conveyed in your Lordship's dispatch.[25]

This was the final missive in an increasingly testy correspondence. It was clearly impossible for Northbrook to continue in post when so sharp a policy disagreement existed between him and his government. In April 1876 he left India, and his place was taken by Lord Lytton, a man of a completely different stamp, dedicated to the radical change of policy demanded by Disraeli and Salisbury.

8 The 'Forward Policy' Enforced

Robert Bulwer-Lytton was an unusual choice for Viceroy of India. A diplomat by profession, he had found himself, in his upper forties, in the relatively minor post of Minister in Lisbon, from which he was proposing to retire to private life. He had had no administrative experience, and no close knowledge of Indian affairs (although this initial ignorance was shared by many viceroys). Personally he was intelligent, but was also vain, arrogant, impatient and overbearing. Possibly due to his having to endure the fall-out from his parents' disastrous marriage, he was highly strung and subject, among other complaints, to debilitating migraines. He was by no means the government's first choice, several other candidates having been ruled out on account of poor health or family responsibilities, and he himself was hesitant about accepting the post, also on health grounds. Disraeli admitted to Queen Victoria that in normal circumstances he might well have been reckoned unsuitable. But with the Eastern Question again coming to the fore and the possibility looming of a confrontation with Russia, the government believed that he could be relied upon to pursue the vigorous policy that it desired. It was also probably no accident that Disraeli and his father, the novelist Edward Bulwer-Lytton, were close friends. As Disraeli put it to Salisbury,

> I have no doubt whatever, as to our course: we must, completely and unflinchingly, support Lytton. We chose him for this very kind of business. Had it been a routine age, we might have made what might be called a more prudent selection, but we foresaw what would occur, and indeed saw what was occurring; and we wanted a man of ambition, imagination, some vanity, and much will – and we have got him.[1]

Before leaving London, Lytton had a conversation with Shuvalov, the Russian Ambassador, who put to him two propositions.[2] The first was that a direct means of communication should be established between Kaufman in Tashkent and the Viceroy in Calcutta. According to Shuvalov, the Russian authorities in Central Asia had continuing problems with the Turkmen tribes, who often appeared to have been incited by their fellow tribesmen resident in Afghanistan. Given Britain's influence in that country, direct communication might well help in defusing that problem. The second proposition was that Britain and Russia had 'a common interest and a common foe' in Central Asia. The interest was civilisation, the foe Islamism. The two countries should together disarm all the Muslim states of the region and divide their territories between them. Lytton's response was that since any communication between Tashkent and Calcutta would have to pass through Afghanistan, where Russia had no right to intrude, the first proposition was inadmissible. As regards the second, Britain would never do anything to injure her Muslim subjects or allies. Lytton drew two conclusions from the conversation: that the Russians envisaged that their ultimate aim in Central Asia was to bring themselves into direct contact with British territory, and, from remarks dropped by Shuvalov, that Kaufman in Tashkent seemed to have, in contrast to Britain, easy and reliable contact with Kabul.

On his way to India, Lytton met Bartle Frere, with whose views he found himself in complete agreement. Having just visited India, Frere was insistent that relations with Sher Ali were extremely unsatisfactory and that there was still very little knowledge of his wishes and intentions. He was convinced that, whereas the Emir had previously been well disposed, he was now, for whatever reasons, inherently hostile. It was vital that a mission should be sent to test the ground.[3]

On arrival in India, therefore, Lytton had a straightforward political agenda. According to his biographer,

> The Prime Minister strongly impressed upon the new Viceroy his opinion that the policy of Russia gave cause for extreme anxiety and watchfulness; and that it was essential, even at the risk of failure, the possibility of which could not be denied, that an attempt should be made to induce the Ameer of Cabul to enter into more satisfactory relations with our Government; or, if such a result proved impracticable, that he should at least be compelled to show clearly the attitude which he intended to hold towards Russia and towards ourselves. Anything, Mr Disraeli thought, was better than the state of absolute uncertainty and suspicion in which our relations with Afghanistan were involved.[4]

Lytton's initial instructions (drafted by himself) were therefore predicated on the inability of the British government, in the face of the 'recent and rapid advance of Russian arms in Central Asia' to

> view with complete indifference the probable influence of that situation upon the uncertain character of an Oriental chief whose ill-defined dominions are thus brought between a steadily narrowing circle, between the conflicting pressures of two great military Empires, one of which expostulates and remains passive, while the other apologises and continues to move forward.[5]

Sher Ali should be pressed to accept British agents in Afghanistan, both to watch his frontiers and to confer with him personally. In return, he should receive the undertakings which had been withheld by Mayo and Northbrook: his subsidy should be fixed and increased, his son Abdullah Jan should be recognised as his heir, and he should be given a promise 'not vague, but strictly guarded and clearly circumscribed, of adequate aid against actual and unprovoked attack by any foreign power'. If his response were to be unsatisfactory, he should be 'distinctly reminded that he is isolating himself, at his own peril, from the friendship and protection it is in his interest to seek and deserve'.

Additionally, Salisbury and Lytton had a highly secret military agenda.[6] This had its origins in the confrontation which had begun in the Near East in 1875, when Bosnia and Herzegovina rebelled against Ottoman rule, followed by an insurrection in Bulgaria that was brutally suppressed by the Turks. With Russia threatening to intervene, a conference in Constantinople failed to resolve matters, with the result that, in 1877, Russia and Turkey went to war. Disraeli's government found itself in a bind: Britain's strategic interests required that the Russians should neither occupy Constantinople nor control the Dardanelles, from which they would threaten the Eastern Mediterranean and the sea route to India, now lying through the Suez Canal. However public sentiment over the Bulgarian atrocities was such as to rule out support for Turkey, and a policy of neutrality was, at least for the time being, unavoidable. For several months, the Russians were halted by a desperate Turkish defence of Plevna, but finally, in early 1878, they advanced on Constantinople. With jingoism now replacing neutrality in the public mind, war with Russia seemed inevitable: a British fleet was sent to the Bosporus, British forces were put on a war footing, £6 million was voted for extra army expenditure, Cyprus was acquired from Turkey to serve as a base in the eastern Mediterranean, and Indian troops were sent to Malta. As the confrontation developed, Disraeli's thoughts turned to the possibility of sending an army from India to deal a blow to the Russians in Central Asia. His reasoning was that the only means of engaging Russia in war was on land, and Britain could hardly confront Russia in the Balkans. In Central Asia, however, the Russians appeared to be relatively weak, and he believed it might be possible, with the introduction of a British army, to raise the Turkmen and the khanates against them. As he advised Queen Victoria, if war were to break out,

> Russia must be attacked from Asia, troops should be sent to the Persian Gulf, and the Empress of India should order her armies to clear Central Asia of the Muscovites, and drive them into the Caspian. We have a good instrument for this purpose in Lord Lytton, and indeed he was sent there with that view.[7]

Planning started in October 1876, when Salisbury sent Lytton a telegram asking him about the ability of the Indian army 'to strike a sudden blow in Central Asia'.[8] The latter's first reaction was highly positive: his impression was that 'we could, if required, strike a blow in the direction of the Caspian and perhaps cut off the Russian base of operations there'. At that season of the year the passes were blocked, but if a European war were to be delayed until the spring,

> we may meet it under favourable conditions. We shall have secured Khelat; and I have great hope that we shall have also secured a practical Afghan

> alliance, which with Sher Ali's present force (and the probability that the Mahomedan populations of central Asia will be prepared to rally round him) is not to be despised.[9]

A few days later, he relayed the advice given by General Sir Henry Norman, the Military Member of his Council, that all depended on the Afghan alliance:

> I have information that all the Mahomedan populations of Central Asia are at this moment *frantic* with Russia, especially since the Pasha's acceptance of the six weeks armistice, and that a word or sign from us would surround the Russian force with a ring of fire. In such a state of Mahomedan feeling I don't think that Sher Ali would *dare* to contract or avow a Russian alliance; and as the terms we now offer him are decidedly advantageous to himself, I think the moment is propitious, and the ultimate success of our negotiation more than probable . . . If we are allowed to go and thrash them (as we could most easily do) . . ., a single defeat or even a check would be fatal to their whole position. I believe that the Khanates would rise, and the tribes attack them, in all directions. So far as India is concerned, no event could be so fortunate as a war with Russia next spring.[10]

Thereafter, however, everything became rather murkier. The advice Lytton received, once he had consulted General Haines, the Commander-in-Chief, and his other generals was that the enterprise would be difficult and dangerous, and that its success would be dependent primarily on the successful exploitation of potential disaffection. If the inhabitants of Central Asia could be persuaded by political agents to rise against their Christian masters with the support of British India as 'the greatest and the only civilised Mohammedan Empire', an invasion might succeed.[11] Success was also dependent 'not only on the alliance of Afghanistan, but the unreserved and submissive cooperation of the Emir'. Lytton at that point became ambivalent. He remained bullish, but was undecided on the need for Sher Ali's cooperation. He had

> no doubt whatever that, with the cooperation of the Afghans, or the unopposed military use of their country, we could easily and speedily sweep [Russia] out of all her recent acquisitions in Central Asia. But we cannot afford to reckon on this acquiescence . . . I think that we ought now to be clearing and arming our decks without counting on a cutlass from Afghanistan, but also without signalling, in sight of the enemy, all along the line . . . If we can secure Sher Ali's alliance in time I think we ought, ourselves, to move rapidly against the Russians, advancing one or more columns on the Oxus and using the Afghans only as auxiliaries . . . Our military policy *here* should be promptly and effectively aggressive.[12]

In the event, however, it mattered not whether Lytton's views about the likelihood of disaffection in Russian Central Asia were well founded, nor whether Sher Ali, who by that time had become thoroughly alienated as a result of the pressures and threats which Lytton had levelled at him, would or would not cooperate. When it came to logistics, the whole plan fell apart. The military managed to establish a supply base at Kohat, and by January 1877 had collected sufficient supplies to equip and support a 3,000-strong spearhead force. To set in motion a whole army, however, was quite another matter. There was an acute shortage of pack animals, and even boots were in short supply. The plans were therefore shelved, and all hint of them was concealed from the British public, notably by heavy editing of the 'Blue Book' of official documents which was later published. It is probable, however, that they became known to the Russians. A letter from a Colonel Brackenbury which appeared in *The Times* on 8 October 1879 reported his having met General Skobelev in Bulgaria, who had enquired if he had any news from India. When asked the reason for the enquiry, Skobelev had replied, 'I cannot find out what has become of that column of 10,000 men that has been organised by your people to raise Central Asia against us'.[13] Brackenbury's conclusion was that the Russian government must have known something about the project, and it is arguable that this knowledge was a significant factor in stimulating their incipient invasion of Afghanistan in the spring of 1878.

On the political front, Lytton started by proposing to Sher Ali, in accordance with his instructions, that the latter should receive a British mission sent to notify him officially of his (Lytton's) arrival and of the assumption by Queen Victoria of the title of Empress of India.[14] This ostensibly anodyne agenda would, however, conceal an intention to engage Sher Ali over the substantive issues. Sher Ali had no difficulty in seeing through this subterfuge, and in May 1876 he replied diplomatically that he saw no need for such a mission, being entirely happy with the current relationship. He would, however, be glad to send his own envoy to meet the viceroy.[15] At that point, Lytton revealed to his Council the full extent of his instructions, which he had previously kept to himself. Several of its members were strongly opposed to them, believing that Sher Ali was within his rights in refusing to accept a mission, and that a 'waiting policy' was advisable, rather than a confrontation, probably leading to a war, caused by trying to thrust British agents on him. However a majority of the Council supported Lytton in resorting to threats, and Sher Ali was told that if he persisted in refusing to accept a mission, 'it will for this reason, cause the Viceroy sincere regret if your Highness, by hastily rejecting the hand of friendship now frankly held out to you, should render nugatory the friendly intentions of His Excellency, and oblige him to regard Afghanistan as a State which had voluntarily isolated itself from the alliance and support of the British Government'.[16] In response, Sher Ali proposed that the Vakil should go to Simla and convey his views to the viceroy.[17] In essence, they were that he wanted support in the form of troops and money should he be attacked from without or faced with internal disturbance, and he wanted recognition of his chosen heir. He did not want British agents in his country; he could not ensure their safety, they might make demands that he could not meet, and if he accepted British agents he would be unable to refuse Russian counterparts. He was, he insisted, within his treaty rights in returning this refusal.

When the Vakil returned to Kabul in September 1876, he brought what was in effect an ultimatum.[18] If Sher Ali were to receive the British support for which he had asked, the prior conditions were that he should receive British officers at Herat or on the Afghan frontier and adopt 'an attitude of friendship and confidence'. In that case, a treaty of alliance might be negotiated. Otherwise, Lytton would be unable 'to undertake any obligations on his behalf, or do anything for his assistance, whatever may be the dangers or difficulties of his future position'. An understanding with Russia, 'which might have the effect of wiping Afghanistan off the map altogether', was not ruled out, nor the introduction of an overwhelming force 'for the vindication of British interests . . . Their military power could be spread around him as a ring of iron, and, if he became our enemy, it could break him as a reed'. Relations with Afghanistan could not remain as they were: they must become either worse or better. Unless Britain could have her own agents on the frontier, and know what was going on there and beyond, that frontier could not be effectually defended. According to the Vakil,[19] this response caused consternation in Kabul, exacerbated by two separate developments.[20] The first concerned Khelat, where in 1854 the British had gained political control by concluding a treaty with the Khan, giving them, among other provisions, the right to station troops in 'such portions of his territory as they might find advisable'.[21] Late in 1876, they concluded a further treaty with the Khan, giving them the right to occupy Quetta and instal a garrison there. The second development was the movement of troops forward to the Indus and the bridging of the river at Attock. This probably formed part of the efforts to prepare for Disraeli's concept of attacking Russia in Central Asia through Afghanistan. Inevitably, however, both this and the occupation of Quetta were such as to cause Sher Ali considerable alarm, seeing them as directed against himself.

Around the same time, the government started to take exception to a correspondence which had developed between Sher Ali and General Kaufman.[22] At its outset in 1870, Sher Ali, who was both puzzled and concerned to have received letters from Kaufman, had been careful to show them to the Indian government and to seek advice on how he should reply. In content, Kaufman's letters had been consistently anodyne and no previous government or Viceroy had thought to take exception to them. They had also been tolerated for several months by Lytton and the Conservative government. In the spring of 1876, however, one arrived which set out in some detail the Russian attitude towards Kokand, which it was in the process of subduing. This was seen as a little too close to the bone and, on Lytton's urgings, a demarche was made in St Petersburg protesting at the fact that Kaufman was corresponding with a ruler whose territories had been admitted to be 'completely outside the sphere of Russian influence'.[23] Derby agreed to comply, although without enthusiasm, reckoning that the effort would be bound to be futile – 'They lie, so they either say the thing has not happened; or they promise it will not happen again and they break their word the next day'.[24] When tackled, Nicholas de Giers, the deputy at the Foreign Ministry, at first denied that there had been contact with Sher Ali, whether by letter or through agents. Having made enquiries, however, he described the correspondence as of a purely courtesy nature and insisted that there was no question of any arrangement, whether commercial or political, with the Emir.[25]

The inevitable effect of all these developments was to deepen Sher Ali's distrust of British intentions, and, faced with the Vakil's report, he seems to have thrown in his hand. He accepted Lytton's conditions, but insisted that he should have one more opportunity to state his case.[26] It was agreed that a senior member of his court, Syed Nur Mohammed, should go to Peshawar for that purpose, and accordingly, during January and February 1877, he conferred there with a senior British official, Sir Lewis Pelly. With Pelly ordered to insist on the prior acceptance of British agents and Nur Mohammed precluded from conceding their acceptance until Sher Ali's concerns had been fully aired, the meeting reached an immediate impasse and the terms of a possible treaty were never discussed. Nur Mohammed laid emphasis on two main points: that under the treaty of 1857, Britain had undertaken not to station British officers in Afghanistan; and that given the assurances received by Sher Ali at Ambala in 1869 and Simla in 1873, no new treaty was needed. Lytton's response was in effect to repudiate both the 1857 treaty and the assurances given by his two predecessors. Unhappily, Nur Mohammed was terminally ill at the time of the conference, and he died in Peshawar towards the end of March, without the conference having achieved an outcome. Sher Ali promptly sent a further delegate, with instructions to accept the British demands. Lytton admitted in his despatch reporting the conference that he knew very well that the concession was going to be made, and that all he had to do was to wait for it.[27] Before the new delegate arrived, however, Pelly, on Lytton's instructions, closed the conference, on the grounds that there was 'no basis for negotiation'. The reasons for this seemingly perverse decision, which was accompanied by the withdrawal of the Vakil from Kabul, were never satisfactorily explained, but it is probable that Lytton simply lost patience. Three members of Lytton's Council formally dissented from his long and tendentious account of the negotiations, but were persuaded to defer their objections to a later date.[28] Lytton's explanation was that:

> Liabilities which the British Government might properly have contracted on behalf of the present Amir of Kabul, if that Prince had shown any eagerness to deserve and reciprocate its friendship, could not advantageously, or even safely, be accepted in face of the situation revealed by Sir Lewis Pelly's energetic investigations. Under these circumstances, the prolongation of the Peshawar Conference could only lead to embarrassments and entanglements best avoided by the termination of it.[29]

What the situation was that Pelly's 'energetic investigations' had revealed was not explained. Sher Ali was now isolated from the British, but remained in friendly correspondence with Kaufman. A Turkish mission was sent by the Sultan in September 1877, with Lytton's encouragement, to try to promote Sher Ali's relationship with the British and his alienation from the Russians, but it failed to make any impression on the Emir, who maintained that his situation compelled him to preserve friendly relations with both powers.[30] Being now thwarted, Lytton's thoughts turned to the breaking-up of the Afghan state, but, receiving no support from London, he confined himself to trying to strengthen the British position among the tribes along the border with Afghanistan, as well as in Kashmir and the hill states to the north. His supposition appeared to be that Sher Ali would be overwhelmed by the cost of maintaining his army, which he would be unable to afford, and he also seems to have believed that the Emir was becoming less popular in his own country and hence might easily be overthrown.[31] He proposed to 'let the Amir (if I may use a coarse but expressive phrase of Prince Bismark's) stew for a while in his own gravy'.[32]

9 War with Afghanistan

The climax came in the summer of 1878 when, at the insistence of Britain, Germany and Austria, a Congress was held at Berlin designed to pressure Russia to forego many of the gains she had made as a result of her war with Turkey. The Tsar had already, prior to going to war, held a conference to decide what action to take should the British intervene.[1] The outcome was that he accepted Miliutin's recommendation that they should be threatened in Central Asia. A full-scale invasion of India was neither necessary nor desirable, but a demonstration towards Afghanistan should prevent them from intervening in support of the Turks.[2] It was hardly surprising that, under pressure at Berlin, Russia should have had recourse to just such a 'diversion towards India' in order to strengthen her negotiating hand. The basis for the operation was a plan drawn up by General Skobelev,[3] who recommended that three forces should be concentrated on the Caspian Sea, at Samarkand, and at Marghilan, north of the Pamirs; and that meanwhile an embassy should be sent to Kabul, to draw Sher Ali into an alliance and open up communications with dissident elements in India. The Samarkand force would then advance via Bamian to Kabul, the Caspian force via Meshed to Herat, and the Marghilan force southwards towards Chitral and Kashmir. The campaign would be conducted in two phases, the first a quick advance towards Kabul and the second a 'waiting game', during which relations would be established with India and 'mass Asiatic cavalry' organised to descend on it. At that point the further role of the Russian forces would be decided. The project was discussed by the Council of Ministers, and in June 1878 General N. G. Stoletov was appointed to head the mission to Kabul. His orders, which he received from the Tsar in Livadia,[4] were to encourage the Afghans to resist British attempts to establish themselves in Afghanistan. He should assure Sher Ali that the Russians would support him and assist him with financial aid. He should seek permission for Russian troops to pass through Afghanistan and he should offer his own services in a military role.[5] To back up the mission Kaufman mobilised 30,000 men in two forces, in Transcaspia and Turkestan, which were poised to march into Afghanistan, while a third force of 1,400 men, under General Abramov, was mustered at Marghilan and ordered to cross the Pamirs and create a diversion through the passes into northern India.

Sher Ali's reaction to the mission was one of 'dire alarm'.[6] He tried to persuade Kaufman to postpone it, but was told that it could not be recalled and that he would be held responsible both for its safety and for its 'honourable reception'.[7] The Emir clearly felt that he had no alternative but to accept it, no doubt having in mind the implicit threat that if he made difficulties, the Russians would replace him with his nephew, Abdur Rahman, who was living in Turkestan under Russian protection. On 25 July, Stoletov arrived in Kabul, but then exceeded his orders by signing a formal treaty which undertook that Russian military assistance would be provided if Afghanistan were attacked by a 'foreign power', that diplomatic relations would be established, and that the Afghan army would receive Russian assistance and instruction.[8]

Leaving Kabul on 23 August, Stoletov went to Livadia to report to the Tsar. Miliutin was ecstatic:

> In London they cannot swallow the fact that Sher Ali received the Russian mission of Stolietov with the utmost cordiality, while refusing to admit the British mission. But what an outcry will be raised when it is learned that the ruler of Afghanistan has himself sent a mission to Tashkent with a request to take Afghanistan under Russian protection and has declared that he will not receive the English in Kabul without General Kaufman's permission.[9]

By that time, however, the Treaty of Berlin had been signed, Russia had accepted her humiliation and all thought of a diversion in the direction of India had been abandoned. Kaufman was instructed to 'disabuse the Emir if the latter is counting on our material aid'. Russia must in no circumstances 'go straight to war with England over her present collision with Afghanistan', and even secret support for Sher Ali was not permitted:

> Our collision with that power [Britain] would be a signal for a general and stubborn war under circumstances and in a situation unfavourable to us. The support of the Afghan Emir would be fitting only if a break with England became inevitable. This is what we had in mind at the beginning of the current year when we were preparing for war. Now there can be no question of any active measures on our part.[10]

The Russian Foreign Ministry seems to have been kept in ignorance of the whole initiative. Shuvalov assured Lord Salisbury that both in Berlin and when he had been back in St Petersburg he had heard nothing of it, and that when, seeing reports in the papers, he had asked Gorchakov whether there had been a mission to Kabul, the latter had had replied 'putting his hand to his brow and reflecting – 'non, je ne le crois pas'.[11] Tackled by the British Embassy in St Petersburg, the Russian Foreign Ministry at first denied that any mission had, or would, be sent, and subsequently asserted that they had had no knowledge of its despatch, which had been at Kaufman's initiative, in the exercise of his discretion as governor-general of Turkestan.[12] The mission was purely 'one of simple courtesy' and in no way affected Russian assurances that Afghanistan was outside their sphere of influence.[13] In fact, according to Francis Plunkett, the British Chargé in

St Petersburg, it had been sent as a deliberate act following three meetings of the Council of Ministers.[14] Eventually the Russians admitted that it had been sent as a result of 'the necessities of the situation arising from the imminent prospect of war between Russia and Britain'. It had been a temporary mission, the need for which had since disappeared.[15]

In India, meanwhile, Lytton proposed strong measures.[16] Neither he nor the Indian government could accept the reception of a Russian mission in Kabul when the despatch of a British envoy had been repeatedly denied. The time had come to bring matters to a head. A temporary mission should be sent to Kabul to insist on the reception of British missions there whenever this was thought to be necessary, on the despatch of permanent missions to Herat, and possibly Balkh and Kandahar, and on British approval before negotiations were begun with any third country. British undertakings would be those already offered. If Sher Ali persisted in refusing to accept a mission, the Kurram Valley should be occupied and an advance made towards Kandahar, moves which Lytton was confident would ensure the Emir's compliance.

Possibly to a greater extent than any other Viceroy of the period, Lytton gave considerable thought to Indian frontier policy. With a show-down with Sher Ali imminent, he added to his recommendations for action a long analysis dealing with the 'ultimate boundary' towards which Britain should aim in Central Asia.[17] Echoing Rawlinson, it was, he believed, almost certain that all the intermediate states between the British and Russian empires would before long be absorbed by one or the other and that their territories would become co-terminus. Britain must therefore select, while there was still time, a strong military line as the point of contact. The present line was hopelessly bad, since, in the event of a Russian advance, all the passes leading into India would be left in their hands. An incomparable line was presented, however, by the great natural boundary of the Hindu Kush. Its left flank was protected by the Persian Gulf, the deserts of Western Baluchistan and the fortress of Quetta, while the right was guarded by the great Himalayan ranges. The problems lay in the centre, between Quetta and Chitral. There, Merv was now out of reach and Russian advances had made it less likely that the line of the Amu Darya could be held. Outposts might be secured at Balkh and Maimana, but Bamian and the other debouches of the Hindu Kush should certainly be occupied. The crucial point was Herat, which for political, if not military, considerations should not be abandoned. To secure this line, there were three alternatives: either an alliance must be made with Sher Ali which would permanently exclude Russian influence from Afghanistan, or the Afghan kingdom should be broken up and Sher Ali replaced by a more friendly and dependent Emir, or such Afghan territory should be conquered and held as would be required for the security of the north-west frontier. For the moment, the Russian move provided one last opportunity to establish a more satisfactory relationship with the Emir.

With London's approval, Lytton therefore sent two letters to Sher Ali.[18] The first conveyed condolences on the death of his heir, Abdullah Jan, which had just occurred. The second contained a demand that a British envoy should be received immediately in Kabul. Sher Ali, bitter that he should have been pressured at a time of mourning, made it clear that if he were to receive a British mission, he would do so in his own time, and meanwhile any mission would be opposed by force.[19] Lytton then telegraphed to London on 8 September that, without delaying longer, he proposed to send the envoy on his way.[20] If, when he arrived in Kabul, the Russian mission was still there, he should refuse to open talks until it had been expelled.

All this was happening at a time when Parliament was in recess and ministers were scattered around the country. When Disraeli and Salisbury were informed of Lytton's proposal, their immediate concern was that to invite a confrontation with Russia in Kabul would be 'an affront which a great power could not endure', and could have ramifications which went well beyond Afghanistan.[21] Disraeli's judgement was that the Russian explanations were by then sufficiently satisfactory and that 'the whole matter would have quietly disappeared, the Russian projects having been intended for a contemplated war with this country, which I trust is now out of the question'.[22] If this was not to be the case, 'so long as they [the British public] thought there was "Peace with Honour" [as a result of the Congress of Berlin], the conduct of the Government was popular, but if they find there is no peace, they will soon be apt to conclude there is also no honour'.[23]

London accordingly telegraphed back,[24] ordering Lytton to hold his hand until they had received from St Petersburg a response to the diplomatic approaches which had been made there the previous month, of which Lytton had not been informed. Lytton, however, felt himself to be committed. He had already sent his envoy forward to Peshawar and had made it known in India that the mission was on its way. He did not, in any case, believe that Sher Ali would refuse to receive it. Disregarding the order, therefore, he despatched the mission on 21 September, only to have it stopped at the Khyber Pass. In London, Disraeli and his colleagues were united in condemning Lytton both for his precipitate action and for disregarding instructions not to send the mission through the Khyber Pass, but by a less provocative route through the Kurram or Kandahar. He had, Disraeli complained, 'by disobeying orders, only secured insult and failure'.[25] It was, however, agreed that national honour was now at stake and that some action had to be taken. The problem was that Parliament would have to be recalled if Indian troops were to be despatched beyond the Indian frontier, and so the government's case for action needed to be strong and defensible. A Cabinet held on 5 October decided that nothing should be done for the time being.[26] An intransigent letter from Sher Ali was then received.[27] Lytton demanded action, and there followed on 25 October what Disraeli described to the Queen as 'one of the most remarkable Cabinet meetings' that he remembered.[28] He began it by recommending acceptance of Lytton's proposal that he should send three columns a short distance into Afghanistan, to seize and hold the Khyber Pass, the Kurram Valley and the approaches to Kandahar, in the expectation that this would be sufficient to secure Sher Ali's compliance. However, he was opposed by several Cabinet members who questioned whether there was any case for military action. Salisbury was openly critical of Lytton for dictating policy and disobeying orders:

'unless curbed, he would bring about some terrible disaster'. Disraeli maintained that some demonstration of British power and determination was necessary, and that the occupation of the Kurram Valley in the first instance might bring the necessary pressure to bear on Sher Ali, without provoking a situation which would entail the recall of parliament. There seemed to be general agreement on this when Cranbrook intervened to insist that what was needed was 'war, immediate and complete'. Half measures were no use, and in any case war was inevitable sooner or later. Lytton's current proposals were not supported by the military members of his Council who considered that the troops to be deployed were dangerously insufficient. The Cabinet accordingly decided that military preparations should go ahead on a greater scale, while a final ultimatum should be given to the Emir, demanding a written apology and acceptance of a permanent mission. Otherwise he would be attacked. This was sent on 2 November, giving him a wholly insufficient time in which to reply.[29] On 21 November, the Second Anglo-Afghan War began.

The war fell into three phases, the first being the advances by the three columns. Sher Ali abandoned Kabul to his estranged son, Yakub Khan, and fled towards Russian territory, hoping to proceed to St Petersburg and enlist the support of the Tsar. He was, however, refused assistance by Kaufman and advised to make his peace with the British. Ill and dispirited, he died in Mazar-i-Sharif early in 1879. Meanwhile a treaty was concluded with Yakub Khan, containing the provisions which his father had for so long resisted.[30] The British were to retain the Khyber Pass and the districts of Kurram, Pishin and Sibi, so consolidating the frontier above the passes. A British officer, Major Cavagnari, was sent to Kabul with an escort, and all concerned congratulated themselves on the success of the campaign. The second phase began in September 1879 when Cavagnari was murdered and General Roberts was sent with a small force to occupy Kabul and avenge his death. Roberts defeated an Afghan army and succeeded in occupying Kabul, where he conducted what has been described as a 'reign of terror'. However he met stiff resistance in the hills around the city and was forced to retreat to Sher Ali's cantonment a short distance from it. There, he managed to repulse a mass attack, but found himself virtually marooned, dependent on long and vulnerable supply lines to India. The third phase, given the manifest impossibility of a prolonged occupation, was taken up in seeking a basis for a withdrawal. For a time, there seemed to be no alternative to a fragmentation of the country. Still adhering to the forward policy, Lytton advised Disraeli that:

> We may now be forced to take in hand the permanent disintegration of the national fabric it was our object to cement in Afghanistan, and in any case we shall probably be compelled to intervene more widely and actively than we have ever desired to do in that country. Still, the renewed, and perhaps extended, efforts now imposed on us can have no other result, if rightly directed, than the formal establishment of the undisputed supremacy of the British power from the Indus to the Oxus.[31]

The Cabinet in London agreed that 'Afghanistan as a whole could no longer exist',[32] and it was decided that Kandahar should be handed over to the local governor and Herat to the Persians (although the negotiations for this fell through). Even so, the exigencies of the situation remained such as to preclude any retention of a forward policy and it was fortunate that a new candidate for the Afghan throne emerged, in the person of Abdur Rahman, whom the Russians had allowed to return from exile in Samarkand. An agreement[33] was reached with him which provided for a guarantee of protection, a regular subsidy and British control of his foreign policy, but not the posting of British agents to Afghanistan. Instead, as with Sher Ali, a native Vakil was to be accredited to his court. On this basis, the British withdrew from Afghanistan with some semblance of honour, if not without a major military defeat. In July 1880, at the Battle of Maiwand, a British army was routed, and the garrison at Kandahar was only saved when Roberts arrived after his famous forced march from Kabul.

The central irony of the whole episode is that, had action not been precipitated, it would have been realised that the cancellation of the Russian initiative had rendered it unnecessary. The blame for the failed negotiations with Sher Ali and a needless war with Afghanistan has to be laid primarily at Lytton's door, or possibly at that of Disraeli, who appointed and supported him. His initial aim was to build up Afghanistan as a strong and stable ally, which would, with British assistance, stand up to Russian pressure.[34] But he proved incapable of conducting the patient negotiations required to bring this about. He was not prepared to address Sher Ali's grievances and concerns, which he interpreted as hostility. He barely attempted persuasion and resorted almost immediately to threats, and he insisted on the acceptance of prior conditions when, with a little more flexibility, he could very probably have obtained the concessions he required. To him, the Emir was 'a savage with a touch of insanity',[35] whereas in fact he was an astute ruler who was well aware of his true interests and by no means ignorant of the realities of the outside world. Finally, Lytton precipitated war in defiance of express orders, at the point where, as it happened, all reason for such action was evaporating following the settlement in Europe. There is also little doubt that the whole concept of forcing British officers on Sher Ali was fundamentally flawed. The Emir was certainly right to insist that the lives of any such officers would be at risk: the two British officers who had been posted to Kandahar to oversee the expenditure of the subsidies paid to Dost Mohammed in the context of the 1857 treaty had survived only as a result of the Dost's personal intervention. Moreover, they had been so constricted and isolated that they were useless as sources of intelligence on the country and its affairs, or even in supervising the spending of the subsidies. While the government of India was never to solve adequately the problem of acquiring intelligence on what was happening in Afghanistan and on its borders, the posting of European officers was not a realistic means to that end.

The decision to go to war was bitterly disputed in Britain. An 'Afghan Committee' was formed which published a detailed critique of the progression to war,[36] in the process accusing ministers of misleading parliament and the public.

Among the critics was Lord Lawrence, who wrote to *The Times* asking:

> What are we to gain by going to war with the Amir? Can we dethrone him without turning the mass of his countrymen against us? Can we follow the policy of 1838–39 without, in all probability, incurring similar results? . . . Are not moral considerations also very strong against such war? Have not the Afghans a right to resist our forcing a Mission on them, bearing in mind to what such Missions often lead, and what Burnes' mission in 1836 did actually bring upon them?[37]

An election was called early in 1880, in which Afghanistan was a major issue and which resulted in the replacement of Disraeli's administration by a Liberal government headed by Gladstone. The forward policy was promptly reversed and, although after considerable debate, Kandahar was abandoned. It was fortunate that the gamble of appointing Abdur Rahman paid off: he was never to be a comfortable ally, but he knew his Russians and had no hesitation in keeping them at arm's length.

It is worth noting the similarities between 'Lytton's war' and its predecessor, the First Anglo-Afghan War of 1838–42, if only because they illustrate George Santayana's thesis that 'those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it'. Both wars had their origins in British disquiet at Russian intrigues in Afghanistan, a country whose integrity was regarded as essential for the security of the north-western approaches to India. In the preludes to both wars, diplomacy failed and no agreements were reached with the incumbent emirs, although they were in all probability negotiable. In neither war were the British able to sustain a prolonged occupation of the country, given the extreme difficulty of access and supply, and the warlike propensities of its inhabitants. In both wars, British armies were heavily defeated and British envoys murdered. In both, the British candidates for the throne were seen as mere puppets, and stability was only restored when an emir took power whose independence was unquestionable. The difference was to be that the long period of relative calm which succeeded the First Anglo-Afghan War was not to be replicated after the Second. Within a few years, events in Central Asia were to trigger a fresh Anglo-Russian confrontation.

10 The Seizure of Merv

The conquest of Khiva by the Russians in 1873 left them facing the Turkmen tribes who lived in the region to the south and south-west of that khanate, between the Caspian Sea and the Amu Darya. The Turkmen comprised a number of tribes and sub-tribes of semi-settled nomads. Some were notorious as slave traders and 'the worst freebooters of Central Asia'. Some were peaceable, while others were warlike – indeed the only warlike people whom the Russians encountered as they extended their rule southwards towards Persia and Afghanistan. Until 1861, they had been to some extent subject to Persia, but in that year they had scored a crushing victory over a Persian army and the Shah's authority over them had never been restored. Of these tribes, the most formidable were the Tekke Turkmen, many of whom inhabited the Akhal oasis, a belt of fertile land close to the Persian border. The Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolaevich, the Viceroy of the Caucasus, pressed strongly for military action against the Turkmen, but was overruled on the authority of the Tsar,[1] and, for a time, while Khiva was being digested, the Russians adopted a cautious attitude.

On the British side, it was clear that the fall of Khiva had caused the strategic emphasis in Central Asia to shift towards the west, with Herat more than ever the focus of concern. Like the khanates of Central Asia, Herat was a shadow of its former self. Under the fifteenth century Timurid dynasty it had been a centre of Islamic art and culture, but now, when members of the British Frontier Commission visited it in 1885, it was found to be a squalid and ruinous town, its fortifications dilapidated and its inhabitants impoverished. The head of the Commission, Sir Peter Lumsden, confirmed what had previously been supposed, that:

> the Herat valley has in past times subsisted very large bodies of men for considerable periods, and there can be no question but that under favourable circumstances the resources of the valley will again in the future be capable of producing all the food and forage required for a large army. Herat has afforded a resting place, base and depot of supply, whilst from its position it covers Turkestan, overawes Khorassan and threatens Afghanistan and India. . . . In it concentrate the highways from Persia, the Caspian, Merve, Bokhara, and Afghan Turkestan; and from it, roads lead by Hazara to Kabul, and by Furrah to Kandahar and Sistan.[2]

When the Commission explored the hills to its immediate north, the so-called Parapomisus Range, they found that, by contrast to the mountain ranges and high passes which separated most of Afghanistan from Central Asia, they were 'easy to negotiate' and that several passes led to Herat from the north which could be driven over without making a road.[3]

The fall of Khiva also once again highlighted the position of Persia, towards which, following the brief war of 1856–57, British policy had been low key, if not virtually non-existent. After Samarkand had fallen to the Russians in 1868, the Shah had expressed alarm and had asked for British intervention to secure an agreement with the Russians guaranteeing his frontiers.[4] The British Minister, Charles Alison, was told firmly not to induce the Shah to expect any such thing.[5] When Khiva fell and the Shah once more asked Granville whether Britain and Russia could not reach some such agreement, he again received an unforthcoming response.[6] Alison's successor in Teheran, Taylour Thomson, then weighed in, urging that Persia should be strengthened militarily and possibly subsidised 'for the purpose of securing that country as a barrier for British India against Russia'.[7] In both India and London, responses were mixed. Northbrook, the then Viceroy, believed, with some justification, that Persia would be so unreliable an ally as to make this a futile undertaking. If Russia were to advance to the Persian Gulf, war would have to be considered, but short of that, there was little that could be done. Others in Calcutta, including the commander-in-chief, Napier of Magdala, disagreed, and urged that Persia should be supported.[8] In London too, the India Office was for action, but the Foreign Office against. The predictable result was that nothing happened, although a succession of agents, Captains Napier, Butler and MacGregor, were sent into the region in order to assess the situation. They all reported that Russia was exerting a powerful influence over Persia.

The Russians, therefore, were left with a free hand, and the military command in the Caucasus continued to press for action. When, late in 1874, Loftus in St Petersburg enquired about a proclamation issued by the Russian commander in Transcaspia, General Lomakin, demanding the allegiance of the Turkmen to Russia, he was told firmly that affairs in that region concerned Russia and Persia alone, and that 'it was not customary to interfere in the international relations between two independent states'.[9] Loftus replied suitably, but succeeded only in stimulating Gorchakov to compose another memorandum (Appendix 3) deprecating continued British protests, although again insisting that Russia had no expansionist designs in Central Asia. However the ink on it was barely dry when growing unrest in the Kokand Khanate developed into an uprising against the Khan and then assumed an anti-Russian complexion. Early in 1876, a force under Skobelev managed to crush the rebels and, at Kaufman's urging, the khanate was annexed as the province of Ferghana.[10]

In Transcaspia, the Russians did not do as well. As late as April 1876, St Petersburg was still preventing the Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolaevich from making any advances, but the latter continued to urge a more forward policy and some permanent establishment on the Atrek.[11] Eventually, in May 1877, in order to counter Persian efforts to secure an ascendancy over the Turkmen, Lomakin was authorised to march inland as far as Qizil Arvat, 145 miles from the Caspian. After a fierce battle, however, he was forced to retire to the coast, and a similar expedition the following year had no more success. In the light of this renewed activity, Lytton wrote his celebrated 'Merv despatch'.[12] He urged that British influence should be re-established in Persia and the Shah assured that he would have adequate support from Britain if he were to oppose further Russian moves in the direction of Merv. British officers should be sent to Merv to assist the Turkmen there and Britain should take 'some political and military moves as the course of events may render necessary to prevent Russia from obtaining a footing or even a dominant moral influence in Afghanistan'. Salisbury's reply was discouraging: the British government did not attach such importance to Lomakin's advance. The Russians had reasonable justification in chastising the Turkmen, and many years would elapse before the Russian frontier could be pushed as far as Merv. 'Pending that time . . . any military measures of precautions against the capture of Merv would be inopportune and might possibly be calamitous'.[13]

The Russians were therefore still unchallenged, and in 1879, a more determined effort was made: Lomakin attacked the main Turkmen fortress of Geok Tepe, but was driven off and once again forced to retreat to his base on the Caspian. This time, Russian losses were heavy and their prestige in the region suffered. Commenting on Lomakin's defeat, Miliutin wrote,

> Thus fate has decreed for Lomakin for the second time to show his weakness and inability before the half-savage Turkomans. Instead of correcting last year's mistakes, he repeated this year the same shameful retreat before that scum and thereby definitely stained the honour and decreased the charm of Russian arms in Central Asia.[14]

Such a defeat could not go unavenged, and, following a meeting chaired by the Tsar in St Petersburg the following March, Miliutin was successful in advocating a further attempt.[15] After five months of preparations, a powerful force under General Skobelev advanced on Geok Tepe and besieged it. Towards the end of January 1881, his troops exploded a mine under the walls of the fortress and, after fierce hand-to-hand fighting, forced their way in and routed the defenders. Of the 10,000 fighting men and the 40,000 civilians within the fortress, including women and children, those who survived fled in panic, pursued by Skobelev's Cossacks. The numbers killed were put by Skobelev at 14,500, as against 268 of his own men, a massacre which was widely condemned when the news reached Europe.

As part of Skobelev's preparations for the assault on Geok Tepe, a railway had been built from Krasnovodsk as far as Qizil Arvat, and the expectation was that this would be continued further. In the event, it reached the Amu Darya in 1885, Samarkand in 1888 and Tashkent by 1899, with a spur to Kushk on the Afghan border. In British eyes, this railway construction programme threatened to transform the whole strategic balance in Central Asia, giving the Russians an unprecedented ability to deploy troops in the region in numbers and at speed. Herat was widely seen as a likely Russian objective, and more immediately, the Russians were believed to have their sights on Merv. At one time a thriving commercial and cultural city, it had been sacked by the Bokharans in 1794 and had never recovered. The journalist Edmund O'Donovan, who visited it in 1881, described it as no more than a 'geographical expression', a space of cultivated land inhabited by half a million semi-nomad Tekke Turkmen whose main occupations were agriculture and the plunder of caravans.[16] Its location on the crossroads between Bokhara, Meshed, Khiva and Herat, however, gave it a strategic importance, and it was seen as a significant launch point for an advance towards Afghanistan.

In London, Lord Salisbury now grasped the importance of Merv, and, with Afghanistan in chaos following the murder of Cavagnari, in 1879 he made overtures to the Persians. The arrangement he proposed included the provisional cession of Herat to Persia, a Persian undertaking to keep the Russians out of Merv, and a commercial treaty.[17] Whether the Persians could have signed up to such a deal in the face of the inevitable Russian opposition is doubtful, but at the crucial moment the Conservative government fell and the Liberals took over. The negotiations with Persia were immediately broken off.

Although their freedom of action was thus still unimpaired, the Russians hesitated before building on Skobelev's success at Geok Tepe. Skobelev himself was withdrawn, and his successor, General Rorberg, was ordered to consolidate the region.[18] Prior to 1882, there was nothing to suggest that an initiative against Merv was being actively pursued. An 'instruction' from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued the previous year noted that while the numbers of pro-Russians in Merv were increasing, their opponents, the 'war party', presented no significant danger.[19] It should be made clear to the Mervians that Russia 'had no plans in mind for this region at all, and wished to maintain the most friendly relations with its population'. As a corollary, they must 'decisively refrain from secret relations with Britain and from military preparations'. Perhaps more significantly, this was also the military view. A memorandum submitted the same year by Generals Skobelev and Grodekov proceeded from the premise that to take Merv under Russian protection would require a major expedition.[20] This would entail a great loss of life and money, and would create 'political complications' with Britain. Before moving their frontier, Russia needed to consolidate the territory they already had. In May 1881 the Russians formally incorporated the Tekke Turkmen territories into the province of Transcaspia, with its headquarters at Ashkabad. In December of that year they concluded a convention with the Persians settling their common frontier as far as Sarakhs on the Hari Rud, although demarcation took some while to achieve.

A year later, the governor general of the Caucasus, General Dundukov-Korsakov, who had overall responsibility for Transcaspia, still judged that the status quo was broadly satisfactory, and that a 'hands off' approach would best serve Russian interests.[21] However pressures for a move towards Merv had by then started to build up, encouraged by a shift in sentiment occasioned by Skobelev's success at Geok Tepe on the one hand and the British evacuation of Kandahar on the other. Also a significant factor was a wish to complete the process of pacifying the Turkmen. A report from a Russian Central Asian expert, Engineer Lessar, while discounting rumours of British arms being supplied to the Mervians and of a possible threat to Merv by an Afghan army, judged that only the complete subjugation of the place by Russia could put a stop to the banditry and lawlessness that were inherent there.[22]

The most detailed and circumstantial account of the Russian seizure of Merv, which took place early in 1884, was provided by the journalist and author Charles Marvin.[23] Although he has to be treated with reserve as a strong Russophobe, he was not only a fluent Russian speaker and had access to revealing articles in the Russian press, but he had been sent to St Petersburg in 1882 by the radical politician Joseph Cowen in order to interview leading statesmen and military figures, including Skobelev, about the Russo-Indian question. Marvin was insistent that Russia was under no pressure at all to take Merv: she 'was not forced to occupy Merv by any circumstance on the spot compelling her, against her wish, to violate her numerous assurances to [Britain] . . . [The Mervians] had committed no outrages on Russia, and were committing none'.[24] As Lessar indicated, however, this is not how the Russians saw it. Their difficulties with the Turkmen had been acute. The Tekke Turkmen living in Merv were little different from those living in the Akhal oasis: many of them, indeed, had moved to Merv after the fall of Geok Tepe. They had been infiltrated by Muslim extremists under the leadership of one Siahposh ('black clothes'),[25] and their looting raids had continued. In 1881, they had invaded Khorassan and inflicted considerable damage and loss of life among the Persians.

There were also other factors at work within the Russian establishment. One was a perceived need to join up their Transcaspian and Turkestan provinces. Even after the occupation of Khiva, overland communications to Turkestan were long and tedious, and a route via the Caspian and Krasnovodsk would offer a much quicker and more convenient means of access. It was no accident that the railway from the Caspian was extended as far as Merv within a year from its fall to the Russians. Another factor, against a background of unrest and lack of confidence at home following the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, was an urge to compensate through victories abroad, and against the British in particular. The traditional mind-sets were also much in evidence, particularly among the military, many of whom, senior as well as junior, still wished for nothing better than be part of an invasion of India. General Skobelev had himself drawn up a plan in 1875, and General Kuropatkin was to produce another in 1886.[26] The concept was also very much alive that Britain should be threatened in Asia in order to weaken her in Europe, while equally persistent was the defensive aspect to Russian thinking and their lack of confidence about their position in the region. The existence of the 'forward party' in Britain and India was well known to them and they would not have been surprised when the then Quartermaster General of the Indian Army, General Charles Macgregor, produced in 1885 an analysis of the Russian threat to India which concluded by declaring that nothing would be finally resolved until the Russians had been driven out of Central Asia.[27] It was also significant that a map produced by the Russian War Ministry in 1884 showed the line of frontier running south from Sarakhs up the Hari Rud and then sweeping in an arc which brought it to within a few miles of Herat, before turning north-east towards Maimana.[28] To drive a 'wedge' into undemarcated territory between the Hari Rud and Murghab rivers was, as events were to show, an objective of Russian policy, at least within the War Ministry, and the seizure of Merv was the first step.

According to Marvin, the Russians decided that to storm the Merv oasis, where the Tekke Turkmen had built a fortress comparable to that at Geok Tepe, would be too costly and hazardous an undertaking, and they accordingly adopted a subtler means of acquiring it.[29] They first established a bazaar at Ashkabad and attracted there a number of Mervian merchants, who were treated generously and came to form the nucleus of a pro-Russian party. In February 1882, with the permission of the central government,[30] a Russian trade mission was sent to Merv, including among its number a Russian officer, Lieutenant Alikhanov, disguised as a clerk and translator to its leader. A Muslim and a Daghestani from Baku, Alikhanov had, as a cavalry captain, participated in the expedition against Khiva, but had then challenged a senior officer to a duel, was court-martialled and reduced to the ranks. An able and ambitious man, he began to work his passage back, was again commissioned, fought at Geok Tepe and was sent to Merv. There he reconnoitred the oasis and its approaches, and was instrumental in persuading a reluctant and suspicious assembly to accept Russian traders. An invitation was then sent to some leading pro-Russian Mervians to attend the coronation of Tsar Alexander III at St Petersburg. Led by one Makdum Kuli Khan, who had been prominent in the defence of Geok Tepe but now headed the Russophile party in Merv, they were duly impressed. In the autumn of 1883, troops were sent from Samarkand to Khiva and thence to the Tejend oasis on the lower Hari Rud, about two-thirds of the way between Ashkabad and Merv. Early in 1884, when Britain was distracted by events in Egypt and the Sudan, the Russians made their move. Alikhanov, now in military uniform and at the head of a force of Cossacks, arrived in Merv and gave its inhabitants the alternative of submission to Russia or invasion by a large Russian force, of which that at Tejend was the vanguard. The pro-Russian faction now being substantial, after an impassioned debate the majority of the Mervians capitulated and sent a delegation to Ashkabad to take an oath of allegiance to the Tsar. The Russian force at Tejend, led by General Komarov, the governor of Transcaspia, then accompanied the delegation back to Merv and, although there was some armed resistance, the oasis was taken by surprise and was occupied without difficulty. Alikhanov was promoted to major and appointed its governor. On 14 February, the official gazetteer in St Petersburg carried a telegram from General Komarov, reporting that:

> The Khans of the four tribes of Merv Turkomans and twenty-four Deputies, each representing 2000 Kibitkas, have this day at Ashkabad formally taken the oath of allegiance to Your Majesty for themselves and on behalf of all the people at Merv, conscious of their inability to govern themselves and

> convinced that Your Majesty's powerful government alone is capable of establishing and consolidating order and prosperity in Merv.[31]

Marvin was in no doubt that the occupation of Merv was the outcome of deliberate policy, much as the Russians tried to present it as a response to unforeseen developments. A third alternative, that it was an unauthorised initiative, in this case by Komarov and Alikhanov, can be dismissed as unfounded, since a report from Komarov to his superior in the Caucasus Military District makes it clear that his march on Merv was undertaken on instructions.[32] Marvin also points out that in this instance, the Russians never put unauthorised local initiative forward as an excuse.[33] He also cites the prior movement of troops – specifically the 17th Turkestan line battalion from Samarkand to Merv via Khiva – as evidence of deliberate intent.[34] Since they were under the command of the Governor of Turkestan, they could only have marched to Transcaspia under orders from the Ministry of War in St Petersburg. 'The whole of the operations culminating in the occupation of Merv', concluded Marvin, 'were directed by the authorities in the Russian capital',[35] and the evidence suggests that he was right. Much the same view was taken by Robert Michell, the Russian affairs specialist at the Foreign Office:

> It may not unreasonably be argued . . . that the Teke Turkmen Elders of Merv were rather cajoled and menaced into submission, than that the people of Merv made a spontaneous offer of allegiance to Russia. There is every appearance of the thing having been deliberately planned by the Russian authorities, and from the fact that no maslakhat or majliss was convened at Merv, it may be denied that the Elders of Merv acted in a representative capacity. Colonel Muratov's force on the Tejend may, indeed, have had an overawing effect on the people, who were not appealed to by their chiefs.[36]

Between 1873 and 1881, there had been a succession of diplomatic exchanges between the British and Russian governments over Russian intentions towards Merv. As early as 1874, there were rumours in St Petersburg of an intention to mount an expedition eastwards to the oasis and subdue the Turkmen tribes in its vicinity. The Turkmen proceeded to consult Sher Ali about the attitude they should adopt towards the Russians, and he in turn consulted the Indian government. His particular concern was that the Turkmen might take refuge in Afghanistan and that this might give him problems with the Russians. Granville put the question to Gorchakov, who repeated the assurance that Afghanistan was 'entirely beyond Russia's sphere of action'. Russia had no intention of undertaking an expedition against the Turkmen, although it would 'punish' them if they were to cause serious trouble. If the British authorities were to advise Sher Ali that he should in no case assist or protect the Turkmen, that should guard against any unwelcome eventuality.[37]

Also in 1874, the British government was informed that the Tsar had ordered that no further expedition should be undertaken in the direction of Merv,[38] and another assurance was given the following year that he had no intention of extending Russia's frontiers in the region.[39] The same year, there was a formal exchange of communications, the British government stating that they could not 'regard with indifference, and as a matter of no concern' further occupation of territory in the direction of Afghanistan:

> Such an event as the occupation of Merv, which would bring the line of Russian territory into direct contact with Afghan territory, would arouse the susceptibilities of the Ameer in the highest degree and possibly involve him in a common cause of defensive action with the Turkmen tribes on his borders. This might lead to complications which would eventually bring about the very result which both Governments wish to avert, viz. the contact of the two powers in Central Asia.[40]

In their reply, the Russians, while reserving their freedom of action, appeared to accept the British thesis. The Russian advances from Krasnovodsk – culminating in General Lomakin's defeat before Geok Tepe and General Skobelev's capture of that fortress – sparked fresh exchanges, and brought further assurances from the Tsar personally that while the Russians might advance as far as Ashkabad, Merv would not be attacked.[41]

In Britain, the subjugation of Merv provided the Russophobes with a field day, but the general reaction was, as *The Times* pointed out, to regard it 'not perhaps entirely without anxiety, but without any serious alarm', the more so as nobody was particularly surprised to learn that it had happened. The government, said *The Times*, should try to 'come to some serious understanding with Russia', but should at the same time 'rest the security of our Indian possessions on something more solid and more within our own control than any assurances that Russia is likely to give or likely to keep'.[42] In India, the Viceroy, Lord Ripon, reported that the news had 'created less excitement than might have been expected'.[43] On 22 February, the matter was raised in Westminster during the debate on the Speech from the Throne,[44] but the government were able to avoid serious criticism by insisting that diplomatic moves were under way, the substance of which could not at that point be revealed publicly. Privately, the government were furious, believing that the Russians had chosen their time deliberately, only weeks after Britain had taken the decision to commit troops to the Sudan. On the ground, they decided to resume the construction of the railway to Quetta. On the diplomatic front, the government's initial response was to send the Russians a lengthy Note instancing some thirty occasions since their occupation of Khiva when the Russians, including the Tsar personally, had given assurances that they had no intention of advancing to Merv. While it was admitted that they had reserved their freedom of action, there appeared to be no change of circumstances which might have necessitated their action. The Russian government should at least have given some advance warning of their change of view. To this the Russians replied that they had indeed always reserved their freedom of action, and that when Britain had herself added new territory to her frontiers in Asia, for example in Afghanistan, Khelat and Baluchistan, they, the Russians, had never protested.[46] The overtures made by the Mervians had been entirely unexpected, and were such that they could not be refused. Giers, now Gorchakov's successor as foreign secretary, insisted that the acceptance of the submission of the Turkmen of Merv was an 'act of local administration', brought about by 'force of circumstances, without any political premeditation'. There was no 'hostile combination' against Britain, nor any intention of taking advantage of the British government's embarrassments elsewhere. The previous assurances by the Tsar and his government had been given in perfect good faith, and they never had the slightest intention of conquering Merv. Circumstances had, however, entirely changed with the request for Russian protection. The officer deputed to administer Merv might perhaps be accompanied by a small escort, but the Russian government hoped that it would not be necessary to send any Russian troops there.

On a positive note, Giers recalled that in 1882, his government had suggested a joint delimitation of the frontier across the area between the Amu Darya at Khoja Saleh and the Persian frontier, which had been left vague in the 1873 Agreement.[47] This earlier suggestion had arisen from a proposal made by Granville, that Russia, Britain and Persia might combine to delimit the Persian frontier on its north and north-east, with Persia extending its territory up to the Amu Darya, across the region left unsettled under that agreement. Persia would recover the ascendancy over the Turkmen tribes which it had earlier enjoyed, while Russia would obtain a 'quiet and settled frontier' and Britain a 'comparatively civilised state between the territories of the Tsar and our own uncivilised allies and dependents on the North-West Frontier of India'.[48] Unfortunately, unknown to Granville, the Russians and Persians had included in their Frontier Convention of 1881 secret clauses under which Persia renounced all claim over the Turkmen tribes; and in any case the Shah would certainly not have wished to expose himself in this way. The Russian response was that the issue was one between Russia and Persia alone, in which neither Britain nor Afghanistan had any proper concern. They would, however, be prepared to supplement the 1873 Agreement by settling the frontier westwards from Khoja Saleh.[49]

In March 1883, Giers's suggestion was repeated in a conversation between Zinoviev, the head of the Asian Department of the Russian Foreign Office and Kennedy, the Secretary of the British Embassy,[50] while Abdur Rahman was also adding to the pressure, asking repeatedly for assistance in settling his boundaries and at one point asking for a map showing what they were.[51] London's responses were consistently sceptical. They felt that relations with Abdur Rahman were still delicate and there was no wish to complicate them by introducing the frontier issue. They doubted Russian good faith in respecting any treaty and were unwilling at that point to take any step which might entail recognition of Russian rights in the direction of Merv and Sarakhs. They were also doubtful about the wisdom of defining territories north of the Hindu Kush which Abdur Rahman might not be able to control effectively, thus threatening complications with Russia. He was therefore assured that his frontier had been fixed in 1873 and that it would not be in his interests to reopen the question, even though, in response to his request for a map, it had to be admitted that no accurate map existed.

Following the seizure of Merv, however, sentiment in London changed. In April 1884 Granville accepted Giers's renewed proposal, and suggested that a joint commission should be appointed to lay down the boundary line on the ground, commencing its operations the following autumn.[52]

11 The Panjdeh Crisis

New men were now in power in St Petersburg. Tsar Alexander III was nationalistic and oppressive at home where his father had been liberal and reformist. He was also expansionist abroad, but was a cautious man, careful not to take undue risks. Gorchakov, who had been ailing for some time, had died in 1883, while Miliutin, finding his position precarious under the new Tsar, had resigned. His successor, General Vannovsky, who had none of his predecessor's astuteness, pushed the military case hard. Giers, the new Foreign Secretary, was a man who has been much underestimated. A career diplomat with an unexciting record, he was reckoned, as a Protestant of German descent, to be out of the running for the top post. However, the Tsar chose him as a safe pair of hands who could be relied upon to take direction in important affairs, while dealing competently with the more routine. During the Panjdeh crisis and the subsequent negotiations he was obstructed at every turn by those opposed to a settlement, but he succeeded in retaining the confidence of the Tsar and worked unremittingly for peace. It was due principally to him that a diplomatic solution was eventually achieved.

The Russians lost no time in capitalising on their seizure of Merv. Early in May, General Komarov appeared at Old Sarakhs, on the east bank of the Hari Rud, where the Persians had recently re-established their authority. In response to an enquiry by the British Ambassador, Sir Edward Thornton,[1] Giers described the place as a small collection of mud huts occupied by Turkmen, and the general had gone there merely to settle disputes over water supply: the Persian-controlled the west bank of the river was unaffected. Shortly afterwards, however, Alikhanov arrived in Old Sarakhs with two hundred Turkmen settlers and two squadrons of Cossacks, and expelled the Persians. The Shah was naturally most concerned, and feared that the move might be a prelude to more extensive inroads into Khorassan, but realising that the Russians would be unlikely to take notice of any protest he might make, he solicited British support.[2] Granville's reply being evasive and hedged with conditions,[3] the Persians delivered their own protest in St Petersburg, but to no effect.[4] From a strategic point of view, the seizure of Old Sarakhs was even more provocative than that of Merv, since the supply line to it from the Caspian was shorter, as was its distance from Herat, towards which a relatively easy route existed southwards along the Hari Rud.

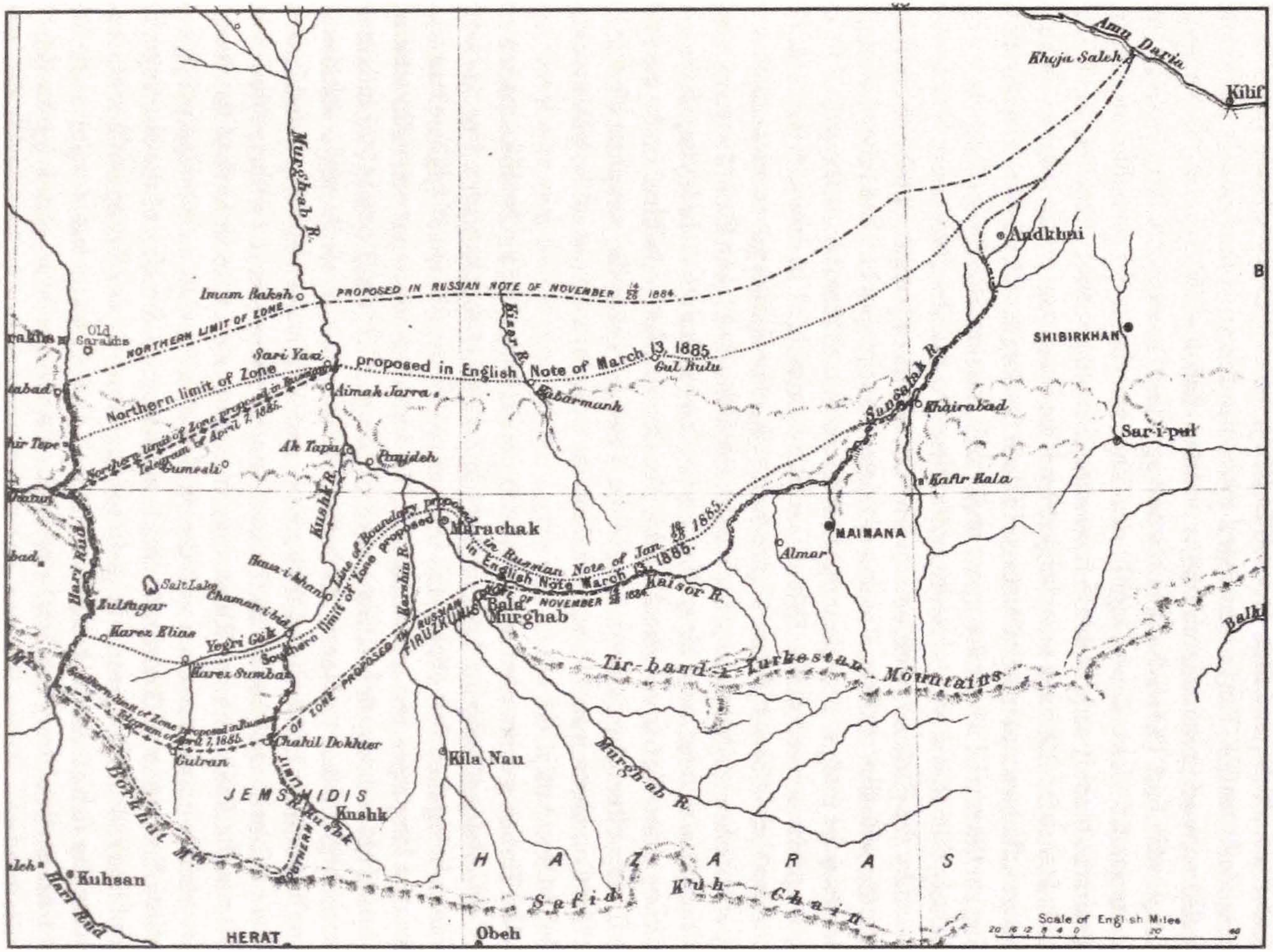
The following month, Dondukov-Korsakov visited Transcaspia and accepted the allegiance of the Sarik Turkmen who lived around the Iolatan oasis, some

50 miles south of Merv. 'With the subjection of [these] Turkmen tribes to our authority', he reported, 'tranquillity has been established over a wide territory to the south of Merv, between the borders of Persia and Afghanistan, which is also of military and strategic significance to us'.[5] Late in October, the Russians sent contingents up the Hari Rud to Pul-i-Khatun, some 40 miles south of Old Sarakhs.

Exchanges were meanwhile developing about the establishment of the Joint Frontier Commission which had been agreed in principle the previous April. At an early stage, it became clear that the main difficulty would be over the status of Panjdeh, a fertile, 40 mile-long valley situated on the Murghab River upstream of its juncture with the Kushk, some 100 miles south of Merv and 120 miles from Herat. The difficulty arose as a result of the vagueness of the 1873 frontier agreement, insofar as it dealt – or failed to deal – with the region lying between Khoja Saleh on the Amu Darya and the Persian frontier on the Hari Rud. The agreement had been explicit in designating Akcha, Siripul, Maimana, Shibergan and Andkhoi as districts which were in the possession of the Afghan Emir. To the west, however, in the area lying between the Murghab and Hari Rud rivers, known as Badghis, it stated merely that 'the Western Afghan frontier between the dependencies of Herat and those of the Persian province of Khorassan is well known and need not be defined' (Appendix 2). Unfortunately, no specific mention was made of these dependencies, and it was unclear whether Panjdeh was one. According to Colonel Charles Stewart, who had been posted as 'officer on special duty' in Khorassan and was the source of intelligence on the region, Panjdeh had 'always formed a part of Afghanistan ever since Afghanistan became a kingdom'. Some two or three decades previously numbers of Sarik Turkmen who had been driven out of Merv had settled at Panjdeh. They had acknowledged that they were on Afghan soil and had always paid revenue, in greater or less amount, to the Afghan government. An Afghan Naib, or Deputy Governor, had generally resided there.[6] The Russian government, on the other hand, maintained that Panjdeh had never belonged to Afghanistan, that no Sariks had ever been Afghan subjects, and that it was vital for the peace of the region that all the Sarik Turkmen should be united under Russian protection.[7] This view was shared by some British observers, who maintained that 'the Afghans had only occupied Panjdeh with the object of staking out a claim to it before the arrival of the Commission. Actually the Sarik Turkomans were independent of Afghanistan and there was a strong justification for the Russian claim that this section of them should, like the remainder of the tribe, be included in the Russian Empire. . . . On ethnological grounds alone, it was clear that only trouble would follow the adoption of any other course'.[8] The British government, on the other hand, accepted Stewart's report and insisted that the Emir's title to the territory was not vitiated by the fact that it divided a tribe; 'it happens not infrequently on other Asiatic frontiers that tribes are divided by territorial boundaries'.[9] On British advice, Abdur Rahman sent a small Afghan force to occupy Panjdeh in the summer of 1884, and the Russians duly protested and demanded its withdrawal.[10] The British refused to pass on the protest, and insisted that it would be for the Frontier Commission to take a view on the status of the territory.

Disagreements also developed over the arrangements and terms of reference of the Commission. The two governments agreed each to appoint a Commissioner, and that they would meet at Sarakhs in October 1884 to begin work. The Russians, however, then suggested that it would be preferable if they were to meet at Khoja Saleh on the Amu Darya, which had been named in the 1873 Agreement as the extreme limit of Afghan territory on that river.[11] The Russians had a point, in that it would hardly be possible to start on the Persian frontier and work eastwards in the absence of any agreement where the line should begin. The British, on the other hand, maintained that it would be a waste of time and effort for the Commissioners to meet at Sarakhs, and then proceed to Khoja Saleh and work back, rather than just work forwards. They also argued that since the most important – and complicated – interests were at stake in the western section of the frontier, these should be dealt with first. Given the 'anxiety and agitation' caused in Afghanistan by the annexation of Merv, it was highly desirable to allay other possible sources of agitation as quickly as possible.[12] It was not difficult to read between the lines and conclude that the Russians were keen to have the maximum possible time in which to exert influence and move situations in their favour (as indeed they were already doing) in the region where the 'most important' interests lay. Granville's view was precisely this, that it was 'almost certain' that 'these difficulties' were 'purposely created by the Russian govern-ment with the object of postponing the operations of the Commission until the Russian authorities on the spot had had time to arrange matters in the manner they thought most favourable to them'.[13] At the end of July, the Russians conceded the British case, but continued to insist that no Sarik Turkmen should be subject to Afghan rule, while the British government ruled out any concession which might prejudice the extent of the Afghan Emir's sovereignty. Already it was becoming clear that the two governments were laying stress on differing principles which should guide the Commission – political in the case of the British, ethnographic in the case of the Russians. Granville's explicit view was that the Commission should be guided by 'the political relations of the tribes which inhabit the country'.[14]

The British government meanwhile appointed General Sir Peter Lumsden as its Commissioner, who left London early in September to take up his post. He was far from being their first choice, but had had earlier experience of Afghanistan and knew the languages. To act as his staff, the Indian government recruited a party of surveyors and despatched them, with an escort of 200 cavalry and 200 infantry, across Afghanistan to Herat. With camp followers, the whole party consisted of no fewer than 1,600 men, 1,600 camels and 300 mules and horses, and it was to cause considerable strain to the economy of the region over the period that it was in the field. Colonel Ridgeway, its commander, later described the camp followers – numerous even for the Indian Army – as a 'motley, polyglot, undisciplined mob'.[15] There was much discussion of the size of the contingent, the military wishing to send a brigade and the viceroy an escort of a minimal size. Eventually it was decided that it should be limited to no more than might be required to repel 'any fanatical outbreak in a village or an attack by bandits'. Understandably, Abdur Rahman was reluctant to consent to its passage through


Amu Daria
Khoja Saleh
Kilif
Murghab R.
Imam Baksh
PROPOSED IN RUSSIAN NOTE OF NOVEMBER 14/26 1884
NORTHERN LIMIT OF ZONE
Old Sarakhs
Sari Yazi
proposed in English Note of March 13, 1885
Northern limit of Zone
Northern limit of Zone proposed in Russian Telegram of April 7, 1885
Aimak Jarra
Kisar R.
Gul Kulu
Sabarmanh
Andkhui
SHIBIRKHAN
Sangalak R.
Khairabad
Sar-i-pul
Kafir Kala
Ak Tapa
Panjdeh
Kushk R.
Gumseli
Line of Boundary proposed in Russian Note of Jan. 16/28 1885
Southern limit of Zone proposed
Marachak
in English Note March 13, 1885
MAIMANA
Almar
Hari Rud
Salt Lake
Haus-i-khan
Chaman-i-bid
Zulfagar
Karez Elias
Yegri Gök
Karez Sumbar
FIRUZKUHIS
Bala Murghab
OF NOVEMBER 14/26 1884
Kaisor R.
Tir-band-i-Turkestan Mountains
Balkh
Southern limit of Zone proposed in Russian Telegram of April 7, 1885
Chahil Dokhter
Gulran
Kila Nau
Murgh-ab R.
JEMSHIDIS
Kushk
Borkhut Mts
SOUTHERN LIMIT
H A Z A R A S
Kuhsan
Safid Kuh Chain
Hari Rud
HERAT
Obeh
Scale of English Miles
20 16 12 8 4 0 20 40

Map 5
The Western Frontier
Zones

his country, but finally agreed to do so on the understanding that it would avoid Kandahar and Herat, but would march from Quetta via Nukshi and the Helmand River, and then northwards along the Persian border. This entailed crossing well over 200 miles of unexplored desert, including a waterless stretch of 60 miles, but the journey was made expeditiously and without loss. For their part, the Russians appointed as their Commissioner General Zelenoi, an officer who had had considerable experience of frontier commissions.

By early September all seemed set for the Commission to meet and start its work in mid-October. At the beginning of that month, however, the Russians reported that General Zelenoi had been ill and that it would not be possible for him to meet Lumsden before the beginning of December, which meant that, due to the severity of the winter in the region, the Commission would not be able to commence its work until the following February.[16] Naturally enough, the suspicion was that this was another stratagem designed to delay the delimitation while the Russians strengthened their position on the ground. Lumsden duly arrived at Sarakhs early in November, only to find both it and Pul-i-Khatun occupied by Russian detachments. General Zelenoi then surfaced in St Petersburg and called on Thornton.[17] His message was that the Commission needed 'something to go on, some salient points marked out for their guidance, or a general line indicated'. In this case, there was nothing, and he urged that a zone should be agreed within which the frontier should lie. This might have as its northern limit a line between Sarakhs and Khoja Saleh, and as its southern limit a line extending from another point on the Hari Rud, along the Parapomisus Range and thence north-eastwards to Maimana, Andkhoi and Khoja Saleh. Granville's response was to agree in principle the idea of a zone, but insisted that it should be left to the Commission to decide what it should be, if only because an input would be required from the Afghan official who would be accompanying the British commissioner.[18] The Russians replied by setting out their own proposal for the zone. Its northern limit would now start well south of Sarakhs, while the southern limit would follow 'the natural line of the mountain chain which closes on the north the valley of Herat'.[19] At the same time, the British government protested the Russian occupation of Pul-i-Khatun, while the Russians continued to protest the Afghan occupation of Panjdeh.[20] In November, Alikhanov appeared at Panjdeh at the head of a small force, and exchanged insulting messages with the Afghan commander, General Ghaus-u-din, before withdrawing.[21] The latter then strengthened his positions and established an outpost at Sari Yazi, 30 miles to the north. In St Petersburg, Thornton and his staff were reporting that the military were gaining influence over the more conciliatory men in the Foreign Ministry, and that there was talk among the former of the desirability of taking Herat.[22] On 24 December, a meeting was held in St Petersburg at which it was decided that forces should be sent to occupy two points, one south of the Zulfikar Pass, some 25 miles south of Pul-i-Khatun on the Hari Rud, and the other on the Murghab. Because these moves would take time, it was also decided that the negotiations should be spun out.[23]

Diplomatic exchanges therefore continued. At the turn of the year, Granville accepted the Russian interpretation of the northern limit of the zone, while refusing to commit himself on the southern.[24] In response, the Russians changed their approach, and proposed that the frontier line should be determined within the zone by agreement between the two governments, and that it should only subsequently be demarcated by the Commission.[25] Lessar was sent to London in order to bring his local knowledge to bear and assist negotiations. The Russian proposal was predicated on the contention that neither Pul-i-Khatun nor Panjdeh formed part of the Afghan Emir's territory, and set out a line which would start south of the Zulfikar Pass, while also leaving Panjdeh in Russian hands. Shortly afterwards, reports came in that a Russian contingent had occupied the Zulfikar Pass, while a larger force was moving towards Panjdeh, dislodging the Afghan outpost at Sari Yazi in the process. Lumsden was instructed early in March to advise the Afghans to hold their positions and resist any Russian advance, while themselves not taking any offensive action.[26] As a precaution, the British Commission was withdrawn from Bala Murghab, where it had camped early in 1884, since it lay on the main route between Panjdeh and Herat and would be at risk in the event of a general Russian advance. Colonel Ridgeway and Captain C. E. Yate were left behind to liaise with the Afghans. On 12 March, the British Cabinet considered 'the somewhat menacing state of the questions connected with the frontier of Afghanistan, and especially the considerable advances of Russian troops', without, however, apparently reaching any conclusion.[27] On 21 March, as the Russian moves became increasingly threatening, the Queen sent a message to the Tsar, appealing to him to prevent the 'calamity' of an armed conflict.[28] In mid-March, the British government responded to the Russian proposal by suggesting that the line of frontier they proposed should form the southern limit of the zone within which the frontier should lie.[29] To this the Russians replied that they could not 'recognise the right of the Afghans to extend their sovereignty over territories which were not mentioned in the arrangement of 1872–73'.[30] In Cabinet, Gladstone was indignant at the Russian insistence on the adoption of their proposed line: the government could not 'proceed on a basis which substantially denies the equal footing of the two powers.[31]

With diplomacy thus deadlocked, the Russians pressed on southwards. In St Petersburg, Thornton's belief was that both the Tsar and Giers were in favour of a settlement, but that there was still much opposition to it among the military, whose influence extended to some of the officials in the Foreign Ministry.[32] His Military Attaché, Colonel Trench, reported that there was little desire in military circles to settle the issue:

> No secret is made that they do not wish to hamper their future movements, and they do not mean, whatever assurances to the contrary they may make, to be bound to a definite frontier for the very reason that they intend to take the first opportunity of seizing Herat.[33]

In early March, a substantial force under Alikhanov marched up the Murghab and established itself at Kizil Tapa, an eminence about a mile from the Kushk and Murghab confluence, where the Afghans had taken up positions covering the

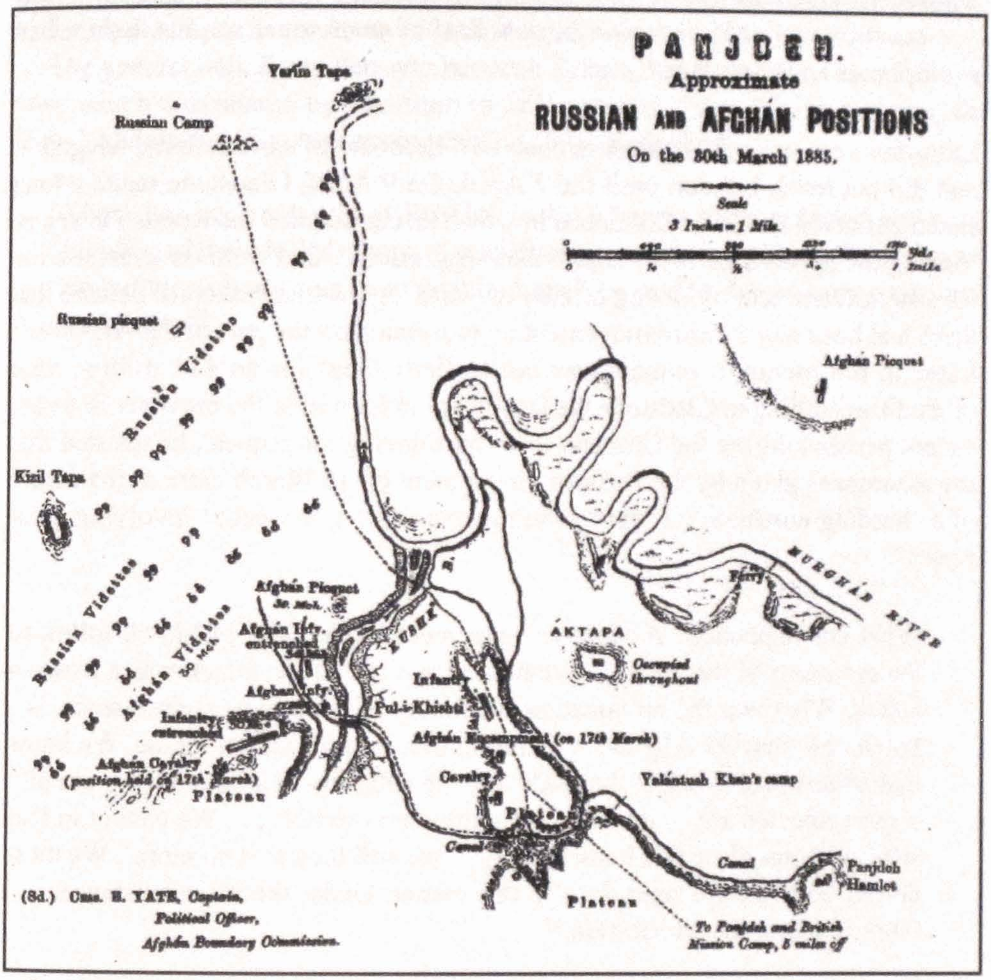
Panjdeh valley. Asked by Ridgeway to withdraw, Alikhanov insisted that his orders were 'to occupy the country as far as Pul-i-Khishti', the bridge across the Kushk River which separated the two forces. The Afghans now brought up reinforcements, and deployed 1,200 infantry and 800 cavalry, with two guns. They were, however, miserably armed with muzzle-loaders, as opposed to the breech-loaders in the hands of the Russians. The weather was, moreover, wet, and the Afghans had considerable difficulty in keeping the priming for their rifles dry. As Komarov arrived with further Russian troops, the Afghans crossed the Kushk in force, and dug themselves in on its left bank. Tactically, this was a suicidal move, as it left a river in their immediate rear, with access only over the narrow Pul-i-Khishti. In response to British protests, on 16 March Giers assured Thornton categorically that Russian forces would not advance from the positions they then occupied, provided that the Afghans did not 'advance or attack', or unless in the case of some 'extraordinary reason such as a disturbance in Panjdeh'. The Russian commanders had been sent the 'strictest orders to avoid by every possible means a conflict or an incitement to conflict'.[34] The following day, Granville read out in the House of Lords Thornton's telegram reporting these assurances. Giers later told Thornton that they had been approved by the Tsar personally.[35] The evidence suggests that orders were in fact sent, but were disregarded by Komarov and Alikhanov, possibly on the clandestine prompting of Dondukov-Korsakov.[36]

Having camped at Kizil Tapa, Komarov and Alikhanov set about trying to subvert the Sariks of Panjdeh. On 26 March, Captain Yate made contact with the Russians and showed them a telegram from Granville, which stated that the two governments had agreed that there should be no forward movement by either side. The Russians disclaimed any intention of attacking the Afghans, but insisted that they must withdraw from the left bank of the Kushk. In fact neither side could now afford to retire: the Afghans because they feared the inevitable – and possibly deadly – wrath of the Emir; the Russians (at least in the estimate of the British officers present) because the Turkmen were as yet incompletely pacified and liable to attack them had they withdrawn. The following day saw various inconclusive manoeuvres, possibly intended by the Russians to provoke the Afghans to fire the first shots, and on 29 March Komarov issued an ultimatum requiring the Afghans to withdraw from the left bank of the Kushk or be driven out. Yate again met Komarov's Chief of Staff, Colonel Zakrchevsky, and in a bizarre Great Game episode, they took lunch together between the two front lines. Yate once more achieved nothing of substance, but did not believe that the Russians would go so far as to attack the Afghans, and withdrew to continue his efforts to bolster the loyalty of the Panjdeh Sariks. Early the following morning, the Russians advanced and, when a shot was fired, developed a full-scale attack. Two Afghan companies died to a man in their entrenchments, and many more were killed as they tried to escape over the Pul-i-Khishti. The total Afghan casualties were of the order of 800 killed and 300 wounded, while the Russian casualties amounted to about 50. The Afghan survivors retreated from Panjdeh, but the Russians did not follow them. Yate withdrew to the Commission camp, evading what might have been an attempt by Alikhanov to secure his capture.

In the run-up to the battle, Lumsden had found himself in an increasingly invidious position. His communications with London were tenuous, consisting of couriers from his camp to and from Meshed and an unreliable telegraph thereafter. Like many British officers, he was an adherent of the 'forward school', and so believed that Britain should make a stand against the Russians in Central Asia and objected strongly to London's acceptance of successive Russian advances. Having advised the Afghans to resist their advance at Panjdeh 'subject to military considerations', he considered it a matter of military honour that he and his escort should stand by them. Had they done so, he believed that the Russians would not have dared to attack, or, if they had, they would have been repulsed. That this would almost certainly have provoked a general war seems to have been beyond his comprehension. His telegrams showed him becoming increasingly restless and impatient, both over the non-arrival of Zelenoi and the absence of instructions on what he should do as the Russian advances continued. It was, he complained, 'impossible for me to remain here in the position in which the Government has placed me without either joining the Afghans or retiring into Persia'. On 6 March he telegraphed that 'unless the government mean to support [its] officers by vigorous action, friction with Afghan authorities in Herat is likely to embroil us with Afghanistan. As none of my recommendations have been acted upon, I confess a want of confidence of support'. He was asked in response what recommendations had not been adopted and on what points did he require further instructions. There is no record of his reply.[37]

This was not the only problem. Another was that Lumsden was at odds with his deputy, Ridgeway, who was the Government of India's representative on the Commission. Lumsden regarded the Commission as responsible to the Foreign Office and objected to Ridgeway reporting to Calcutta. Since the newly arrived Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, had the task of keeping Abdur Rahman content with what the Commission was doing, this rapidly became a bone of contention. Lumsden was also criticised on the grounds that when the Russians were advancing, he had conducted an unnecessary retreat, in the process losing many of his party in a blizzard, and he had failed to advise the Afghans to withdraw from their 'suicidal position' across the Kushk, as Ridgeway had urged.[38] This had introduced an element of ambivalence to the situation, and enabled the Russians to argue that the existence of Afghan outposts on its left bank 'had not been foreseen when General Komarov was ordered on no account to break the confines of Panjdeh. Komarov could not compromise the security of his force in the face of a probable lack of discipline among the Afghan troops'.[39] Taking all this into account, the conclusion to which London came was that Lumsden should be withdrawn. According to Dufferin,

> It is evident that Lumsden's presence has been from first to last unfortunate; and that he has exhibited neither tact nor good judgement, nor even cool-headedness; and that the sooner we get rid of him the better.[40]


PANJDEH.
Approximate
RUSSIAN AND AFGHAN POSITIONS
On the 30th March 1885.
Scale
3 Inches = 1 Mile
0
440
880
1320
1760 Yds.
¼
½
¾
1 mile
Yarim Tapa
Russian Camp
Russian picquet
Russian Videttes
Kizil Tapa
Russian Videttes
Afghan Videttes
30 Men
Afghan Picquet
30 Men
Afghan Infy. entrenched
Afghan Infy.
Infantry entrenched
Afghan Cavalry (position held on 17th March)
Plateau
KUSHK
Infantry
Pul-i-Khishti
Afghan Encampment (on 17th March)
Cavalry
Plateau
Canal
Plateau
AKTAPA
Occupied throughout
Afghan Picquet
Ferry
MURGHAB RIVER
Yalantush Khan's camp
Canal
Panjdeh Hamlet
To Panjdeh and British Mission Camp, 5 miles off
(Sd.) Chas. E. YATE, Captain,
Political Officer,
Afghan Boundary Commission.

Camp Tirpul; 15th April 1885.

From a Survey by Sergt. Galindo 8th Hrs.

Map 6 The Battle of Panjdeh

For Gladstone and his government, the Panjdeh crisis could not have arisen at a worse time. Only two months previously, General Gordon had been killed in Khartoum, and the government had been vigorously criticised for its failure to send a relieving force up the Nile in time to rescue him. Gladstone not only felt personally affronted, but was clear that he could not now afford not to take a firm line. The Queen was in an equally belligerent mood:

> She feels naturally all the responsibility wh[ich] a declaration of war with Russia entails upon herself & her Government – as well as the very serious consequences wh[ich] may result to the country therefrom, tho she has not a moment's anxiety as to the ultimate issue. But on the other hand, after having done what she can to avert such a painful Eventuality, she feels it to be

> our bounden duty to be very firm & not to agree to any *patching up* of this *question* wh[ich] *goes much further* & is of *much* more serious import than appears on the surface.[41]

Lumsden's report of the battle was delayed on account of a break in the telegraph, and did not reach London until the 7 April. On 9 April, Gladstone made a long statement in the House of Commons in which he condemned the Russian attack as 'having the appearance of an unprovoked aggression', and went on to accuse the Russian government of having broken its word. He had no reason to believe that there had been any forward movement or aggression on the part of the Afghans.[42] Later in the month, a request was put to Parliament for an £11 million vote of credit, according to Gladstone the largest asked for within the previous 70 years, except perhaps during the Crimean War. Introducing the request, he insisted that the assurances given by the Russian government on 16 March were of the nature of a 'binding covenant', a 'very solemn covenant', a 'covenant involving great issues'.

> What has happened? A bloody engagement on the 30th of March followed the covenant of the 16th . . . What is certain is that the attack was a Russian attack. What was the provocation is a matter of the utmost consequence. We know only that the Afghans suffered in life, in spirit and in repute. We know that a blow was struck at the credit and the authority of a Sovereign – our ally – our protected ally – who had committed no offence. . . . We cannot in that state of things close this book and say – 'we will look at it no more'. We must do our best to have right done in this matter. Under these circumstances . . . there is a case for preparation.[43]

The army and militia in Britain were accordingly mobilised and the navy was put on full alert. Orders were sent to the Far East fleet to occupy Port Hamilton in Korea in anticipation of an assault on Vladivostok. In India, two army corps had already been mobilised under the command of General Roberts. One, amounting to 27,000 men and 78 guns, was placed in readiness, with the necessary transport and provisions, to go to Quetta. A second, amounting to 25,000 men and 72 guns, was also mustered, together with a reserve of 13,000 men and 30 guns. Reinforcements amounting to 13,000 men were promised from Britain. Dufferin reckoned that it would be possible, in the event of war, to muster a field force of some 64,000 men, leaving a garrison of 30,000 in India.[44] The cost would be of the order of £2.4 million. In London, documents announcing the outbreak of war were printed and held in readiness and the principal British embassies were sent guidance.[45] In St Petersburg, Colonel Trench reported the mobilisation of the Russian army in the Caucasus and the preparation of transport ships on the Caspian. He believed that if hostilities were to break out, the Russian intention was to seize Panjdeh and advance on Herat with all speed. Since they were closer to that city than the British, it was likely that they would be successful. They would then have gained both prestige and the strategic advantage. Herat should be fortified and put in a state to withstand a *coup de main.*[46]

The general belief was that war between Britain and Russia was inevitable, a view which was shared by Thornton in St Petersburg. 'Yes, I have just seen de Giers', he told the *Standard* correspondent, John Baddeley:

> There has been a battle at Panjdeh – the Afghans were defeated and five hundred of them killed. Some of our officers were present. There is nothing to do but to pack up; war is inevitable; I shall be told to demand my passports tomorrow.[47]

12 The Settlement of the Western Frontier

There were three main reasons why war was avoided. One was that Abdur Rahman kept a cool head; the second, that the British government adhered firmly to the Latin maxim, 'Si vis pacem, para bellum', or, as Salisbury later put it, 'willingness on good cause to go to war is the best possible security for peace';[1] the third, that when it came to the crunch, the Russians concluded that they could not afford a war – in effect they blinked first.

The British commitment to Abdur Rahman when he took the throne in 1880 was that provided he followed their advice unreservedly and had no political relations with any other foreign power they would, in case of unprovoked aggression against his country, 'aid him if necessary to repel it'.[2] If he had requested their support, therefore, and since it would have been impossible for them to provide this in Central Asia itself, they would have had little alternative to declaring a general war. As Kimberley put it, they were

> in an intolerable dilemma – on the one side a great war, on the other, the certain estrangement of the Emir . . . I would face the extremity of war rather than be false to our engagement to the Emir. If we were to desert him, the effect on our position in India would be disastrous.[3]

Dufferin's advice was clear. The army in India was too small, by a margin of some 20,000 men, to 'defy Russia in Afghanistan'.[4] Nothing could be done to prevent Russia from 'taking Herat tomorrow'. They could then 'intrigue with every Chief in Afghanistan', and 'creep up all the valleys from Faizabad to Girishk'. They would also take all Afghan territory north of the Hindu Kush. The only solution was 'the veto of the British Government at home and fear of ulterior consequences elsewhere than in the valley of the Hari Rud'.[5] Other considerations were the risk that Abdur Rahman might 'go over' to the Russians, and, most crucially, the question of public opinion in Britain in the aftermath of the events in the Sudan. The government at that point had all but fallen, and it would not now survive another foreign debacle. As Staal reported, 'a new humiliation would certainly be their last. It would put an end to their political existence'.[6]

It so happened that when the news of the Panjdeh battle broke, Abdur Rahman was in India as Dufferin's guest. The two men spent several hours in consultation, with Dufferin offering assistance in the form of arms and ammunition, and possibly money, should war break out between Britain and Russia, although he carefully refrained from promising troops. Abdur Rahman, however, was relaxed. He had never laid claim to Panjdeh and made no such claim now. 'About Badghis and Panjdeh he did not care a sixpence. The Sarik Turkomans were a lot of thieving ruffians, over whom he had no more influence than we [the British] had over the Afridis. He could not depend on them, and would not willingly fight the Russians for them'. Pressed further, he continued to insist that there was no crisis and that British assistance was not required: he expected to be able to manage without British troops.[7] As Dufferin put it,

> The Amir exhibited a brutal and stolid indifference to the whole business. When he was told that two companies had died at their posts, he said that of course they had, but what did it matter how many Afghans were killed, the remainder would go on fighting; it did not matter . . . The loss of two hundred or two thousand men was a mere nothing and, as for the General, that was less than nothing. There were lots of generals in Afghanistan.[8]

It is not difficult to appreciate Abdur Rahman's concerns. If war ensued between Britain and Russia, he would almost certainly lose his territories north of the Hindu Kush, which neither he nor Britain would be able to defend, and in all probability Herat would be lost as well. If the two nations were to fight on his soil, his people would suffer, his kingdom might well be split and he himself lose the throne. Even in time of peace, his instincts were always to avoid having any foreign officers, and still less troops, present in his country: to have them not only there, but embroiled in a war, would be catastrophic. He insisted that his people, who were 'ignorant, brutal and suspicious', would resent British assistance on the ground. He was, he told Dufferin, otherwise happy to leave matters entirely in British hands: he was not concerned at the loss of Panjdeh, but would wish to retain Zulfikar, Gulran and Maruchak to its south and west.[9] Dufferin in turn gave him a million rupees, twenty thousand breech-loading rifles, four heavy guns, two howitzers, a mountain gun battery and large quantities of ammunition.

Up to the eleventh hour, the British government failed to determine where it would draw the line, and, as the Russians approached Panjdeh, Dufferin received no clear response to his repeated requests for guidance. On 24 March, however, the Cabinet decided that if Russia did invade Afghan territory, they would, in Gladstone's words, 'support the Emir with the British forces of Her Majesty and concert with him the best means of giving the support (reserve choice of time, place and circumstances for our direct intervention in the fight)'.[10] Dufferin was sent a telegram saying that an attack on Herat would mean 'war with Russia everywhere', and this was followed up with a letter from Kimberley, the Secretary of State for India, explaining that

> Both my 'secret' and 'private' telegrams of the 25th about Herat were seen and approved by the Cabinet and expressed our 'innermost' mind on the

> subject. Our feeling is that it is now not a mere question about a few miles more or less of Afghan territory but of our whole relations with Russia in Asia.[11]

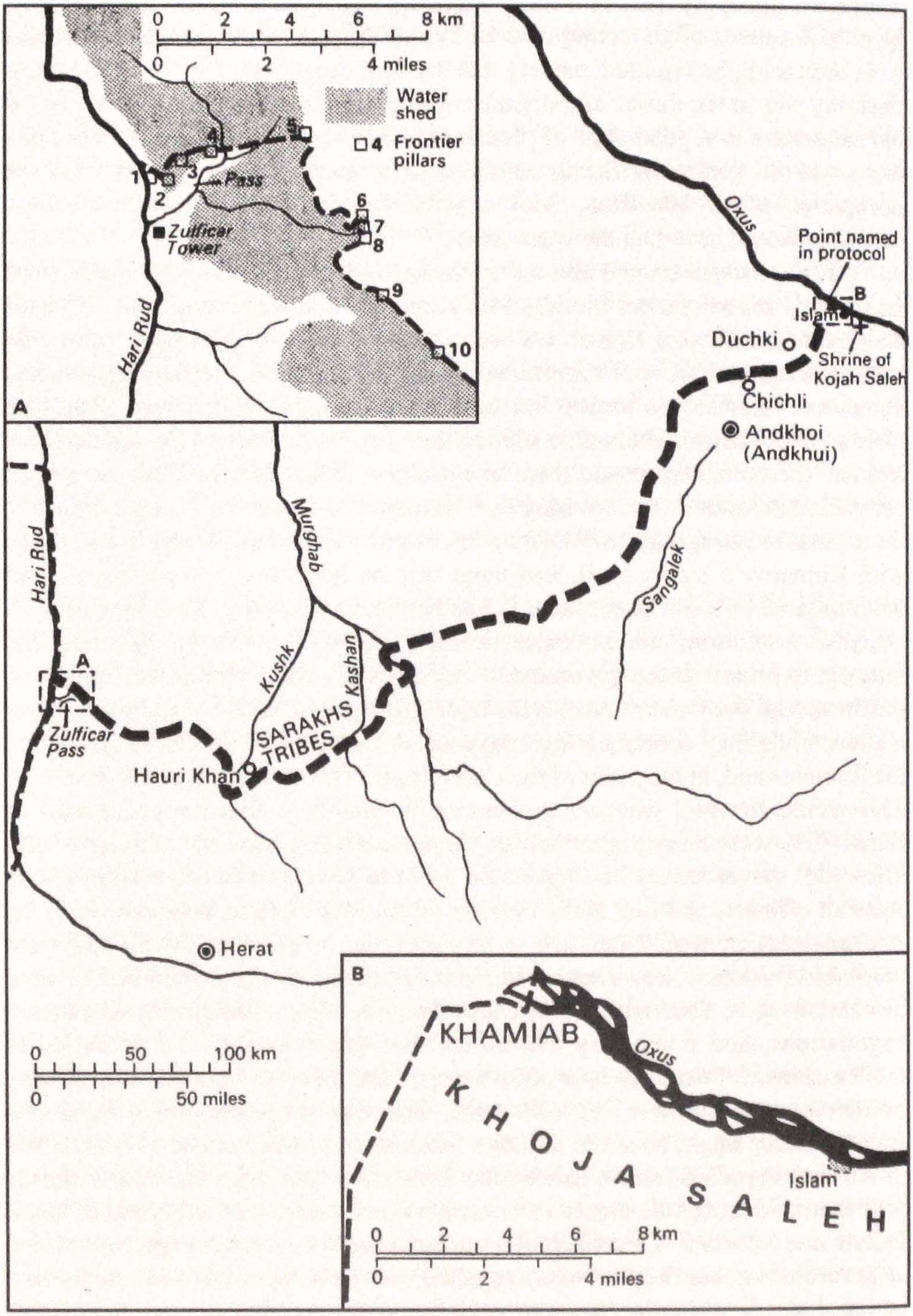
Kimberley could only conclude that Giers had been kept in the dark – 'completely hoodwinked' – by the military. Having just conceded a zone which 'gives near to compliance with our proposals', 'perfidy could go no further' if he had known what the Russians intended.[12] Instructions were sent to Thornton to make it clear that if the Russians were to advance against Herat, that would be a *casus belli*.[13] On the 28th, therefore, Thornton had an unpleasant confrontation with Giers. The latter asserted that Britain was preparing for war: troops were being assembled in India, with General Roberts in command and the Duke of Connaught in charge of the reserve, and there was talk of a naval attack in the Baltic. The impression in St Petersburg was that Britain was so embroiled in the Sudan as to 'wish to find, in another quarter, a pretext for abandoning that country altogether'. Was war intended? Thornton replied that it was the last thing Britain would desire, but she had engagements with the Afghan Emir which she was bound to maintain.

> We could not allow him to be deprived of territory which His Highness claimed, and which Her Majesty's Government believed to belong to Afghanistan, without an impartial investigation of his rights . . . Any attempt on the part of Russian troops to approach or occupy Herat would be equivalent to a declaration of war and would be accepted as such by Her Majesty's Government.[14]

Giers for his part insisted that there was no intention, nor had there ever been, of attacking Herat, and he gave this assurance to Thornton in writing the following day.[15] His own view was that the basic cause was 'the military character that the English government had given to its Commission', despite Russian protests at its size. This had been interpreted by the Afghans as an 'encouragement of their pretensions and covetousness'. The situation still had elements of danger and it was essential that negotiations should continue.[16]

At long last, therefore, the British government were anticipating events, rather than reacting after they had happened with undignified and ineffectual protests. They were, moreover, backing up their warning with active preparations for worldwide war. The Russians had therefore to weigh seriously the consequences of any further aggressive activity. Thornton's belief was that the senior military and those about the Tsar had no wish for conflict. The War Minister was in the throes of a complete reorganisation of the army, while the Finance Minister was 'at his wits' end for money'. Junior officers, however, were looking for opportunities for distinction, while the 'lower classes', who were by nature xenophobic and believed in 'Russia for the Russians', were all for war.[17] Two weeks later, he was reporting that the 'peace party' were gaining strength. Russians were 'a little alarmed' and did not feel at all prepared. The navy 'was nowhere' and the fortress of Kronstadt was 'not in good order'. There was also a growing realisation of the difficulties of supply which the army would have in Central Asia.[18] Early in May, he obtained news of a meeting chaired by the Tsar. 'I cannot but believe what I have been told', he reported, namely that the Tsar was advised by Vannovsky that the army was in the throes of reorganisation, and neither the navy nor the coastal defences were in a good state of preparation. The national purse was empty and there was no means of filling it. There was uneasiness and anger over the occupation of Port Hamilton. 'Most sensible Russians believe had there been a war, they would have had the worst of it'.[19]

Testy exchanges ensued about the responsibility for the Panjdeh battle, with Lumsden's assertions conflicting with Komarov's explanations. The Russians continued to insist that Komarov's orders not to make any aggressive movement towards Panjdeh had been superseded when he had found that the Afghans had entrenched themselves on the left bank of the Kushk, which was clearly an offensive movement. He had concluded that they had infringed the orders given and had therefore summoned them to withdraw. When they had refused he had compelled them to do so. Nothing that Komarov had done had been contrary to the arrangements agreed on.[20] Giers's final word was that the incident was closed with Komarov's report on it, and there was no reason why negotiations over the frontier should not be resumed.[21] The British Cabinet, too, were looking for a peaceful resolution, and Lumsden probably sealed his fate by choosing that moment to protest at the government's inaction. He urged that it was useless to continue with the Commission, which had merely enabled the Russians to delay matters while they continued their advance. A frontier line should be dictated to the Russians and, in the event of their refusing it, 'British troops should advance'. This would forestall what was otherwise inevitable, a Russian occupation of Herat.[22] He went on to argue that his Commission had been so 'humiliated and affronted' that it would be impossible for it to have any future relations with Russian officers, and that if the cession of Panjdeh were to be announced, the Afghan reaction would be such as to make the position of the Commission untenable.[23] Already, however, on 14 April, Granville and Kimberley had initiated discussions with Staal and Lessar about the possibility of restarting substantive negotiations, and Kimberley had hinted that Panjdeh might be conceded to the Russians.[24] Two days later, Giers responded that the Russians would have no objection to a restart.[25] On 24 April, Granville proposed that a 'head of a friendly State' might be asked to judge 'whether the agreement of 16 March was or was not departed from either by the Russians or the Afghans, and to decide how the incident can be closed in a manner consistent with the honour of Great Britain and Russia'.[26] Granville seems to have had the German Emperor in mind as the arbitrator, but the Russians suggested that the King of Denmark might be a better choice,[27] while the King of the Netherlands was also mooted. Staal commented that that he did not believe that his government would agree to an enquiry into the conduct of Russian military commanders, and so it proved.[28] The Tsar confirmed this reluctance – any judgement affecting Russian military honour was for him and no one else to make. According to Thornton, the Tsar 'would not venture to insinuate that Komarov was in the wrong, and especially having


0
2
4
6
8 km
0
2
4 miles
Water shed
4 Frontier pillars
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
Pass
Zulficar Tower
Hari Rud
A
Oxus
Point named in protocol
B
Islam
Duchki
Shrine of Kojah Saleh
Chichli
Andkhoi (Andkhui)
Hari Rud
Murghab
Sangalek
Kushk
Kashan
A
Zulficar Pass
SARAKHS TRIBES
Hauri Khan
Herat
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100 km
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50 miles
B
KHAMIAB
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Map 7 The Russo-Afghan Frontier, 1887

Source: Oxford University Press

defeated the Afghans. Such a charge might cost His Majesty the crown, and even his life'.[29] Early the following month the Tsar insisted that there should be no further discussion of the military question, although there might be reference to a foreign sovereign if 'any divergences of appreciation remained between the two Cabinets over the interpretation of the 16 March agreement' (a form of words which effectively consigned the proposal to limbo). At the same time he agreed that negotiations over the frontier should be resumed.[30] He later awarded Komarov a gold sword, ornamented with diamonds, bearing the words 'for courage'.

For many weeks, tension remained high. Lumsden having been withdrawn, Ridgeway was given command of the British Commission, and was provided with detailed instructions on what to do in the event of a further Russian advance. In May, Gladstone's ministry fell, under the weight both of Gordon's death and of what was widely seen as weakness over Panjdeh. Many Britons agreed with Lumsden that the country had been humiliated through not having supported the Afghans on the ground, and even Sir Robert Morier, who succeeded Thornton as ambassador in St Petersburg, was later to refer to the Gladstone government as 'the men who borrowed 11 million to cover their retreat'.[31] There was also much anger when it was revealed in June 1885 in the relevant 'Blue Book' that the Russians had been allowed to insist that Komarov's report on the battle, which was at odds with Lumsden's account, had closed the issue.[32] When the Conservatives under Lord Salisbury took office the following month, they took the same view of the crisis as their predecessors and sent a further warning to the Russians that any advance on Herat would mean war.[33] Thornton for his part remained apprehensive. The Russians' military preparations, he reported, 'were begun when there really seemed to be a danger of a conflict with England, and they have not been discontinued: indeed the change of our government seems rather to have intensified them'.[34] When negotiations were resumed in London in mid-May, it seemed to begin with agreement on a frontier line at least as far as the Murghab. But intense argumentation then developed over the issue of the Zulfikar Pass, with the British insisting that they were committed to the Afghans having it, and the Russians trying to deny the Afghans command of it.[35] The significance of the Pass did not lie, as might be supposed, in its being on a route between Sarakhs and Herat, but because, having a west-east axis, it was the only break in a long escarpment which extended on the east bank of the Hari Rud southwards from Pul-i-Khatun. It was thus a key point of passage between Khorassan and Badghis. Lessar's advice was that Zulfikar was of no importance, precisely because it did not affect north-south communications, but that the loss of Panjdeh would entail the division of the Sariks, and hence 'endless trouble which would need laborious and precarious work of colonisation',[36] and this was probably a key factor in Giers's earlier intimation that there would be no objection to exchanging Zulfikar for Panjdeh. That the Russians continued for several months to argue about Zulfikar has, therefore, probably to be put down to the dominance of the military lobby in St Petersburg. At the end of July, the British Cabinet seriously considered withdrawing the Commission in view of the financial strain of retaining a state of preparedness for war, and of the 'humiliation and discredit' of the negotiations over Zulfikar.[37] They were only with difficulty dissuaded by Ridgeway and the Indian government, who advised that if the Commission were disbanded, the Russians would be likely to march immediately on Herat.[38] There, Abdur Rahman agreed in July to a small number of British engineers going to the city and advising on means of putting it in a state of defence sufficient to prevent it succumbing to a *coup de main*.[39] With Britain paying the costs, its defences were remodelled, breech-loading rifles supplied to its garrison, and heavy guns installed. Sadly, the operation involved clearing fields of fire, with the result that Queen Gawhar Shad's spectacular Musallah, built in the fifteenth century and one of the glories of Islamic architecture, was levelled.

For some further weeks the deadlock over Zulfikar persisted, until in August, it was believed that another crisis point was imminent. Members of the British Commission and the Afghan military leadership in Herat got together and tried to reckon what chance they would have of holding the city if the Russians attacked. Their conclusion was that, with luck, they might be able to withstand a siege for as long as it might take for a relieving force to arrive from Quetta.[40] In September, however, there seems to have been a fundamental change of heart in St Petersburg. The Russians finally agreed to modify their position over Zulfikar and confirmed that they would be prepared to exchange it for Panjdeh, thus giving Abdur Rahman the three localities in Badghis on which he had laid stress. On 10 September the issue was resolved to the satisfaction of both sides and a protocol governing the resumption of negotiations was signed in London (Appendix 4).

In November 1885, therefore, a year after the British Commission had arrived in the region, British and Russian representatives met at Zulfikar and set up the first two boundary pillars. This time, at Russian insistence, the escorts consisted of 100 men on each side, and the bulk of the British escort returned to India. The British Commission had not entirely wasted the intervening months. They had taken the opportunity to carry out surveys of the region through which the frontier was to run, and so put themselves on roughly level terms with their Russian counterparts. Also, on their march from Quetta, they had succeeded in carrying forward the Indian triangulation system and eventually extended it as far as Meshed. Later, on their way back to India, they tied it in successfully with the triangulation which had been undertaken at Kabul during the Second Anglo-Afghan War. In this way, they established an accurate basis for the surveying that had to be done for the frontier delimitation, and the Russians used their calculations.[41]

To begin with, the work of demarcation proceeded fairly smoothly and a friendly relationship developed between the British and Russian teams. However it was not always possible to keep to the line set out in the Protocol, and Abdur Rahman was more then once moved to protest at amendments agreed by the Commissioners. A thorn in Ridgeway's flesh was Abdur Rahman's representative, Kazi Saiuddin Khan, who, due to Russian objections, was not a member of the British Commission, but was deputed to keep a watch on proceedings and report to the Emir. On more than one occasion, he went so far as to restrict the movements of the Commission in an attempt to dictate its work. As he was in the confidence of the Emir, Dufferin had an exasperating time in persuading the latter to prevent his representative from 'thwarting the British Commissioner and impeding the satisfactory settlement of your frontier'.[42] By the time that winter set in at the end of December delimitation had been completed over a stretch of 93 miles, as far as Maruchak. Here, however, a major difficulty arose. Had the frontier run along the initial intended line, eastwards across the desert from Sarakhs or thereabouts, there would have been few problems of land tenure in determining its course. However, in the region south of Panjdeh, between the Kushk and Murghab rivers, the Joint Commission found unexpectedly that there were complicated patterns of settlement, irrigation, cultivation and pasturage, and it was exceedingly difficult to trace an equitable line. Particularly affected were Sarik Turkmen who had been grazing side valleys of the Kushk and Kashan rivers south of the points at which these rivers were crossed by the line of demarcation. Nevertheless Ridgeway insisted on sticking to the letter of the Protocol and, at least temporarily, the Russians conceded the point.[43]

In March, delimitation resumed and by May the Commission had erected pillars as far as Dukchi, some 35 miles from the Amu-Darya. In general, the delimitation seemed to the British Commission to be fair, as it allocated to the districts agreed to be under the control of Abdur Rahman the pasturage to their north which had traditionally belonged to them. However, the process then ground to a halt as it was realised that although there might at one time been a place called Khoja Saleh on the river, there was now no sign of it. At issue was a region known as Khamiab, a strip of cultivated land on the left bank of the river, which had been in Afghan possession for some 37 years, since their acquisition of Akcha, and beyond which, in the wake of the 1873 Agreement, the local Afghan and Bokharan authorities had agreed a border between their respective territories. Instead of accepting this border, however, the Russian Commission claimed that the frontier should lie some 20 miles up-river, at a shrine known as Ziarat-i-Kwaja Salar. There was, however, no post or ferry there, as had been supposed in the 1873 Agreement. The British Commission suspected that the Russians were attempting to acquire an area of land outside Bokharan territory on which they could establish a frontier station, and, since it would mean the expulsion of numbers of Afghan settlements from a substantial stretch of fertile land, it was clearly in breach of the 1873 Agreement and was not something to which they could agree.[44] Instructions were issued from London and St Petersburg that every effort should be made to settle the issue on the ground, but deadlock persisted, until it was finally agreed in August that the Commission should be disbanded and negotiations transferred to one or other of the capitals. This was much to the relief of the British contingent, who were looking with some concern at the prospect of a third winter on the frontier, and it also relieved the anxieties of the Indian government, who saw the contingent as being at risk in the event of a serious rift with the Russians on the issue.

In April of the following year, it was agreed that Ridgeway should go to St Petersburg to try to conclude the negotiations. There, he found an unfriendly atmosphere, with the military still opposed to a settlement, while he received, at best, only lukewarm support from London. Salisbury, in particular, was in no hurry to complete the negotiation, which he feared would end in a compromise that Abdur Rahman would find unacceptable.[45] Morier had to argue vigorously for a settlement, principally on the grounds that it was desirable to clear away a potential source of trouble, that British good faith was involved, and that it was in British interests that Giers's hand should be strengthened vis-à-vis the military.[46] The atmosphere in St Petersburg was also such that in mid-May, he felt constrained to make it clear to the Russians that British opinion would never submit to a repetition of Panjdeh, the forcible occupation of land which was considered to belong to Afghanistan.[47] The negotiations were at that point hung up on three issues: the Sarik grazing lands between the Kushk and Murghab rivers; the land on the Amu Darya; and a new issue introduced by the Russians, the alignment of some thirty miles of frontier west of Dukchi. It was proposed that an exchange should be made – the Sarik pasturage for the Afghan land on the Amu Darya – but agreement was stalled over the amount of land that should be surrendered to the Sariks, over which the Russians were making excessive claims. Early in July, when it seemed that the Russians were ready to make adequate concessions, it was the turn of the British government to entertain doubts about the value of an agreement, and Ridgeway was summoned home to attend a meeting to review the whole policy. It took all his powers of persuasion, and his belief, from an audience with the Tsar, that he had the latter's support, to induce the government to allow him to carry on. The essence of the settlement he finally reached on 22 July was on the lines suggested, the exchange of the Sarik grazing land for the Afghan land on the Amu Darya,[48] while Giers and Morier between them settled the alignment west of Dukchi. Ridgeway's justification was that while the land he had secured was occupied and cultivated by Afghans, no Afghan had ever made use of the land he had relinquished.[49] A noteworthy aspect of the affair is that agreement was essentially secured by the negotiators on the spot – Giers, Morier and Ridgeway – despite there being elements in both governments who were strongly opposed. Abdur Rahman for his part, while accepting the frontier, urged that delimitation should be carried forward up the Amu Darya to the Pamirs. He was duly ignored, and an opportunity for settling the whole frontier issue, which Giers had also at one point suggested, was lost. This was to have serious consequences in the coming years.

The frontier attracted a good deal of criticism in Britain. Salisbury's view, expressed to Ridgeway, was that it 'is not worth the paper it is written on, but as you have begun, you had better finish it, if you can'.[50] The most detailed criticism was penned by George Curzon, the future Viceroy of India, who, as qualification for the post, had been travelling extensively in Asia and producing books and articles on its affairs.[51] Following a visit to the region, his view was that a 'scientific frontier' had been achieved to the north-west of India, but it was not the frontier demarcated by the Joint Commission. The obvious and easiest line of advance from Central Asia lay through Afghanistan and over one of the several passes that led through the mountain ranges into India. Rather than wait the arrival of a Russian force in the valley of the Indus, Britain had 'almost involuntarily and by accident' acquired territory on the far side of many of the passes which were formerly at the mercy of an invader. More than this, railways and military roads had been, or were being, built, most notably towards the Khyber Pass and through Quetta to the Afghan frontier which, supplemented by further lines providing lateral communication, would provide ready means of reinforcing and supplying these advance positions:

> The first battle for the Indian Empire will now be fought, not on the Indus, but far away between the Amran range and the Helmand; and even should that be decided against us, the victor would still find his path swarming with obstacles and beset with danger. Entrenched in a succession of almost invulnerable positions we might defy him to reach the Indus at all.[52]

By contrast, the frontier line established by the Joint Commission was anything but 'scientific' – rather it was a 'purely artificial and temporary frontier possessing no elements of stability or duration'. It mostly ran through a 'sandy, treeless, waterless desert', and no mountain valleys or passes gave it strength. The natural barrier, the Hindu Kush, lay to its south, and the land to the north of that barrier was indefensible. It still divided Turkmen tribes, and it advanced Russian territory to within 70 miles of Herat. It was possibly better than no frontier at all: it had arrested the advance of Russia and had thrown upon her the responsibility for any further war. It had also had the result of cementing relations with Abdur Rahman (who had warmly welcomed both Ridgeway and the remainder of the Commission when they returned to India via Kabul). But there was nothing in the nature of the frontier which gave it a guarantee of permanence: on the contrary 'Russia does not retreat . . . neither can she stand still', she would still be seeking a 'limit at once more stable and scientific'.[53]

Ridgeway himself had reservations about the frontier. Writing privately to Roberts, he described it as 'utterly indefensible, tactically, strategically, politically, it could scarcely be worse'[54] In public, however, he defended its value, citing as its main advantage the fact that it defined British responsibilities.[55] It being British policy not to permit 'interference by any foreign power with the external or internal affairs of Afghanistan', it was surely preferable to have a frontier which was 'known and admitted by Russia in a formal undertaking' than one which was 'unknown and disputed'. If the frontier had been left undefined, 'the peace of the world would be at the mercy of any ambitious frontier officer' and Russian encroachments would not have been checked:

> The demarcation of the frontier puts it in the power of Russia to force a war upon us at any time. Granted. But, on the other hand, it must be admitted that Russia will not violate the frontier until she is willing and ready to enter into war – certainly not in Central Asia only, but war all over the world. . . . In other words, war in Europe may be the cause of the violation of the Afghan frontier, but the violation of the Afghan frontier will not be the cause of war in Europe.

Russia would only cross the border if she believed she could do so with impunity: hitherto she had had a comparatively easy time and had been able to advance like 'a knife gliding through butter'. This had brought advantages to Central Asia, particularly in the abolition of the slave trade and the suppression of Turkmen raids. But the knife had now reached 'the hard side if the dish'. The demarcation had been the necessary corollary to the policy of guaranteeing Afghanistan against invasion; it had been satisfactorily carried out; and there was now a reasonable hope of its durability.

In the outcome, of course, those who thought that the frontier was bound not to last were proved wrong. But a firm frontier, and a limit to Russian encroachments, had not been finally secured. The scene now shifts to the upper reaches of the Amu Darya, to the Pamirs and to the hill states along the southern approaches to the Hindu Kush.

13 The Erosion of the 1873 Agreement

Until the 1860s, very little was known in British India about the Pamir region. The only Briton who had penetrated that far was, improbably, a naval officer, Lieutenant John Wood, who, as a member of a small mission to Afghanistan, had been sent in 1837 to explore the upper reaches of the Amu Darya.[1] Crossing Badakhshan in the depths of winter, he reached at Ishkashim the branch of the river known as the Panjah and marched upstream to what he believed to be its source, Lake Sarikol, commonly known as Wood's Lake and later to be named Lake Victoria. It was not until the Mirza arrived in 1869 that any further knowledge was acquired.[2] Taking much the same route as Wood, and meeting much the same extreme conditions, he reached a point on the river, known as Qala Panja, where the river bifurcated. Where Wood had taken the more northerly confluent, the Mirza chose the more southerly, known as the Sarhad, which he followed to its source before crossing into Kashgaria.

While Lawrence was Viceroy, no British officers were allowed to explore the region, but as an offshoot of Forsyth's second expedition to Kashgaria in 1874, a small party led by Colonel Gordon struck out from Tashkurghan across the Little Pamir to Wakhan, returning along Wood's route to Lake Sarikol and thence across the Great Pamir.[3] Two of their aims were to see if the Forsyth mission would be permitted to return from Kashgar through Afghanistan and to investigate the extent of Afghan territory in the region. In the course of their journey, they made several startling discoveries. One was of the Afghan claims to territory in Wakhan, Shignan and Roshan which extended across the Amu Darya. Reports of this had already come from two of Montgomerie's Pundits, the 'Havildar' and the 'Munshi', who had explored the region as an adjunct to Forsyth's first mission,[4] but the claims were now confirmed. They not only presented a clear risk of conflict with Bokhara, if not Russia, but also cast acute doubt on the validity of the 1873 Agreement, which had been concluded just the previous year. Gordon also found a further branch of the Amu Darya, flowing from the Little Pamir and variously known near its source as the Aksu, and further downstream as the Murghab and Bartang, which he described as the 'largest and longest of all the affluents of the Oxus' and believed to be the true source of the river, a conclusion which, if correct, would not merely have undermined the validity of the 1873 Agreement, but nullified a considerable part of it. Possibly more significantly, although, like

Wood and the Mirza, Gordon's party suffered from extreme conditions, they learnt from the local inhabitants that in summer the going across the Pamirs was relatively easy and they concluded that the region would be passable for troops. There was

> nothing to prevent the rapid advance of an army fully equipped to within a few miles of Sarhad. Not only is no road-making for the passage of field artillery necessary, but along the whole distance there is an unlimited quantity of the finest pasture in the world.

More significantly still, when they explored the passes leading south from the Pamirs across the Hindu Kush to Chitral, Yasin and Hunza, they concluded that several of them presented no great difficulties. According to Captain Biddulph, who reconnoitred them,

> by the Chitral or Gilgit routes and crossing either the Baroghil or Ishkumman Passes, the traveller goes through a gate by which without being for one day away from human habitation, he is practically landed in Central Asia in a single march . . . These passes are open for ten months of the year and guns have been taken across both of them within the last four years.[5]

All this refocused attention with a vengeance. Forsyth's conclusion, in contrast to the view taken by Shaw and Hayward, was that 'no serious attempt' could be made to send a force from Kashgar over the Karakorams:

> The severity of the climate, the difficult nature of the country and absolute want of fuel and forage for so many marches must prove insurmountable obstacles for any but very small bodies of men, while the arrangements necessary to keep up communication would entail such enormous expenditure and loss to make it practically out of the question.

Kashgaria could, however, well serve as a convenient source of supply and transport on the flank of a force which might penetrate through the easier passes to its west. According to Gordon,

> Kashgar, in the possession of Russia, could be made to produce a vast supply of food and carriage, and all that is required for the manufacture of war material . . . The people, though Mahommedans, are not liable to religious fanaticism like the Muslims of other parts of Asia. They are quiet, industrious and inoffensive, and appear indifferent to the faith of the dominant race.

It would be realised later that the geography was not so simple: both the Pamirs and some of the passes might be relatively easily crossed, at least for some months of the year, but the country south of the Hindu Kush, still mostly unknown, would be a different matter. As the British Delimitation Commission was later to put it, there was 'absolutely no comparison between the case of the Russian line of communication with the Pamirs and that from Kashmir . . . There is just about as much difference between scrambling up a cliff and walking a similar distance on the downs at the top'.[6] On the initial reckoning, however, Gordon's discoveries were highly disturbing.

The Russians moreover, had already been active in the region. In 1871, a Russian explorer, Alexei Fedchenko, had crossed the Alai and Trans-Alai ranges and had been followed in 1874 by N. A. Maier, who found a route to the Amu Darya further to the west.[7] In 1876, the Russian occupation of Kokand and formation of the province of Ferghana not only eased their path to the Pamirs, but, since the Kirghiz who grazed their flocks there in the summer were said to have owed allegiance to the Khan of Kokand, this gave them the pretext for a claim to the territory. Between 1876 and 1878, a succession of expeditions under Prince Wittgenstein, General Skobelev, Ivan Mushketov and Nikolai Severtsov explored the Pamirs, while yet other expeditions crossed Karategin and Darwaz, and one under Vasilii Oshanin even reached as far as Badakhshan.[8] There then followed, during the 1878 crisis, the advance across the Pamirs of General Abramov's column, which gave substance to the whole concept of a threat to British India from the north, in addition to that through Afghanistan. Even if the forces which might be deployed were likely to be small, the psychological effect of an advance and the opportunities it might provide for subversion among the hill tribes and in Kashmir were reckoned to be serious.

There were two possible courses of action on the boundary problem. One would have been to try to resolve it through diplomacy: to have approached the Russians on the basis that it had been agreed that Badakhshan and the Wakhan properly belonged to Afghanistan, and that the frontier should be adjusted, in the spirit of the 1873 Agreement, to take account of the political realities that had now been revealed. The alternative was to do nothing and hope that the issue would not come to a head. It is conceivable that this policy might have worked, had it not been for initiatives undertaken by Abdur Rahman after his accession as Emir in 1880. From the outset, he was concerned about his position in the upper Amu Darya region, perhaps more so than over Panjdeh. There had already been unrest in the area, with the risk of a confrontation between Afghanistan and Bokhara, particularly when the Bokharan force had crossed the river into Badakhshan in 1877, only to be repulsed the following year. In 1883, while a Russian expedition was in the region, Abdur Rahman ordered the Governor of Badakhshan to take over the administration of Shignan. Both Shignan and Roshan were occupied by Afghan troops and Afghan officials replaced the native chiefs, while the ruler of Wakhan, fearing arrest by the Afghans, fled from his territory into Chitral. A party belonging to the Russian expedition was then turned back from Shignan and prevented from proceeding to Wakhan.

Rawlinson, who had been the originator of the idea that the upper reaches of the Amu Darya should form the frontier, was now again asked for his views. Back in 1869, he had prefaced the advice he sent to Mayo with a warning that much was at stake.[9] It was likely that both Britain and Russia would continue to expand their territories to include the currently independent territories between them, and that whatever line was chosen would therefore become 'a permanent line of demarcation between the future confines of Great Britain and Russia in the East'. Moreover, both Badakhshan and northern Turkestan were 'essential to the safety of the Afghan ruler' and should on no account be called into question. On both counts, therefore, the line of the frontier required 'much care and consideration', which Rawlinson proceeded not to give it. He pronounced that the 'only real difficulty' lay on the western frontier, and devoted most of his memorandum to a discussion of the Afghan frontier to the west, south and east, while dismissing the most crucial, north-eastern section in two short sentences. 'The most convenient line of division', he wrote, 'should be to follow the main stream of the Oxus from Wood's Lake on the Pamir plateau to the Kerki ferry'. This would 'exclude from the Afghan limit the trans-Oxus district of Kolab which has sometimes been attached to Badakhshan, but retains command of all the great routes leading to India from the Oxus'. This proposal was accepted by Mayo and formed the basis of the formulation put to the Russians in 1872. In 1883, however, Rawlinson performed a remarkable about-turn.[10] He now asserted that 'no river bed, if easily crossed . . . can constitute in practice a territorial limit'. He noted that Wakhan, Shignan and Roshan, all dependencies of Badakhshan, extended across the river and constituted 'one single and individual community', which 'set at naught the principles of a fluvial boundary'. Given, therefore, the 'obsolete notion' of an Oxus frontier, 'it would be well simply to name on either side the limitary districts which thus come under the respective influence of Russia and of England'. He went on to note that Russian exploring and surveying parties had moved into the Pamirs. The extent of the Russians' claims was uncertain, but they probably included the 'great plateau of the Alai'. The Russian flag had been hoisted at Kara Kul, her officers had thoroughly explored the Alichur and Sarez Pamirs in the immediate vicinity of Shignan, had penetrated as far as the Chinese frontier and had taken observations at Wood's Lake. They were thus 'getting in perilous proximity to the passes leading to Gilgit and Chitral' and this required 'vigilantly to be watched'. The Emir of Kabul should be asked to catalogue the extent of his possessions 'with a view to the better definition of his frontiers in that direction and its possible official recognition by the British Government'.

Six months later, Rawlinson produced another memorandum, in which his criticism of the 'so-called arrangement of 1873' (and hence, implicitly, of his own role in suggesting its basis) was scathing:[11]

> Probably a territorial delimitation between the dependents of two such powers as England and Russia was never before discussed in such an irregular manner, or formulated in such loose and unintelligible language . . .
>
> We find the definition [in the 1873 arrangement] to be so ambiguous and contradictory as to be almost incomprehensible . . .
>
> The attempt to limit Afghanistan was a most arbitrary and at the same time a most short-sighted proceeding.

His conclusion was that

> The only safe ruling that can be drawn from the so-called arrangement of 1873 is that Russia, having conceded the main question of the Afghan right to Badakhshan and Wakhan, is bound to accept the established frontiers as the line of demarcation which limits the dependencies of Bokhara, or the territory of independent land, to the south.

Rawlinson's lack of realism was as surprising as his effective self-condemnation. It was unlikely in the extreme that Russia would respond positively to any unilateral naming of fresh boundaries or that she would be 'bound to accept' any revision of the 1873 Agreement. Gorchakov's original acceptance of the line of the Amu Darya had been extremely grudging and had been expressly an 'act of courtesy' rather than recognition of an established fact. In Russian eyes, it had involved major concessions, and it was unthinkable that they would accept any further retrogression.

Meanwhile, the Indian government duly rebuked Abdur Rahman for his occupation of Shignan and Roshan, and told him to withdraw.[12] Not surprisingly, a strong Russian protest also followed.[13] Initially, this took the form of a note from the Russian Foreign Ministry asserting that Shignan and Roshan 'had always enjoyed an independent existence and had never ceased to be administered by native rulers'. It alleged an infringement of the 1873 Agreement and called on the British government to 'induce the Emir of Kabul to withdraw as soon as possible from Shignan and Roshan the lieutenant of the Afghan garrison in that principality, and to renounce for ever all interference in its affairs'. In response, Granville hedged, stating that while the Emir considered Shignan and Roshan to be part of Badakhshan, which was formally declared in 1872–73 to belong to Afghanistan, 'the information in the possession of the Indian government was not sufficient to enable them to pronounce a decided opinion on the subject'.[14] The British government would however be 'happy to consider the question in concert with the Russian government and to send a Commissioner to make an investigation on the spot, jointly with a Russian and Afghan Commissioner'. Giers replied by insisting that any investigation must be preceded by a total Afghan withdrawal and the restoration of the *status quo ante*, and that 'it could not be instructed to examine the pretensions of the Emir of Afghanistan, but must define its task to tracing on the spot the boundary line agreed upon in 1872–73, as well as to the study of the partial modifications which might be made to it in the common interest of the contracting powers, without trenching on the principles on which the delimitation was based'.[15] As Curzon later remarked, there were two interesting points about this reply: one was that it was hardly necessary to 'trace upon the spot' a frontier which lay along a river, about which there could be no doubt, while the reference to 'partial modifications' probably indicated that the Russians were themselves aware that the situation was not one-sided, in the light of Bokhara's earlier activity in Darwaz.[16] The exchange then rested with Granville's observation that an investigation was needed to determine whether the *status quo* *ante* had in any way been breached.[17] At that point the official correspondence ceased and the Merv crisis diverted attention away from the issue. The Indian government's suggestions that that there should be a demarcation of the upper frontier were rejected by London both in 1884 and following the Panjdeh crisis in 1885, despite continuing unrest in the region and the ever-present danger that it might lead to conflict between Afghanistan and Bokhara, or worse.[18] London's consistent view was that the delimitation of the western frontier should take precedence and that nothing should be done that might damage its prospects. When that demarcation had been completed, the Indian government again returned to the charge and Morier, the Ambassador in St Petersburg, was instructed to sound the Russians out.[19] However relations with them over European issues were at that point delicate, and Morier decided to defer his approach. By the time that he was prepared to act, in March 1886,[20] Abdur Rahman had changed his mind. Having lost Panjdeh, his conviction was that he would be likely to lose his territories upstream should there be any further demarcation, and it was therefore decided that no further negotiation should be proposed.[21] With Bokhara and Afghanistan both claiming territories on the 'wrong' side of the Amu Darya, the situation remained pregnant with the risk of conflict.

14 Confrontation in the Pamirs

Although the Indian government's efforts to have its northern frontier settled had been frustrated, the government in London raised no objections to its continuing to send expeditions to the Pamirs and the upper reaches of the Amu Darya. The expectation was that sooner or later a settlement would have to be reached, and the experience of the Boundary Commission to the west had demonstrated the importance of prior investigation and survey. There were also continuing reports and rumours of Russian parties in the region, and it seemed desirable not to allow them a free hand. In 1881 and 1882, the explorers Dr Regel and Kossiakov had appeared in Darwaz and Shignan, and in 1883, what was known as the Great Pamirs Expedition under Captain Patiata had surveyed large tracts of the Pamirs, and had been followed in 1884–85 by an expedition under Grumm-Grzhimailo.[1] In 1885, in deference to Abdur Rahman's changed attitude, the Boundary Commission abandoned plans to proceed to the upper river and returned to India through Kabul. Dufferin, however, who favoured a proactive policy, had already launched two initiatives designed to assess the situation in Badakhshan and the Pamirs, to the east of the point where the Boundary Commission had finished its work. Their aim would be to survey the passes over the Pamirs and the Hindu Kush, and to determine the nature and extent of Afghan and Chinese rule. A political officer, Ney Elias, was sent to Yarkand and the Pamirs,[2] and an expedition under Colonel Lockhart to explore further the passes through the Hindu Kush.[3]

Elias was an experienced traveller, described, with justification, as 'one of the greatest English travellers'.[4] Personally, he was a loner, unassuming and uninterested in fame or advancement, but meticulous, dedicated and professional. In the 1860s he had made several journeys within China and had surveyed the new course of the Yellow River. In 1872 he had crossed the Gobi Desert, travelling some 2,500 miles to the Russian frontier and eventually to Moscow. He then took part in a mission from Burma to western China, and in 1876 was employed by the Indian government as joint commissioner in Ladakh, with responsibility for reporting on Kashgar affairs. In 1880 he travelled to Yarkand and Kashgar, to gauge Russian influence and activity there, together with prospects for British commerce. He found the Chinese obstructive, the commercial prospects meagre, and the Russians dominant, both commercially and politically. His instructions for the 1885 journey were to try again to establish a relationship with the Chinese authorities, create opportunities for trade and secure agreement to the posting of a permanent agent in Kashgar. In all this he was once more unsuccessful, primarily because the government in Peking was obstructive and the authorities in Turkestan accordingly reluctant to deal with him. He therefore turned to his other task,

> to ascertain, as nearly as possible, the recognised boundaries between . . . Wakhan and Shignan and the Russian and Chinese possessions on or near the upper waters of the Oxus. . . . You will of course endeavour to gain the goodwill of the rulers and people wherever you may go, and to discover their feelings towards the Amir.[5]

The first Englishman to cross the Pamirs, Elias marched for some 600 miles from Yarkand to Ishkashim, and then on through Badakhshan, surveying as he went. He confirmed that there was a substantial area of unclaimed land between Chinese- and Afghan-administered territory, and, putting his finger on the issue that was to dominate Anglo-Russian relations in Central Asia over the next decade, warned of the possibility that the Russians might take advantage of it to gain access to the passes leading to Chitral. There was, he found, a local consensus that the Aksu downstream from Aktash formed the frontier between Chinese territory and Afghan Shignan, and he recommended that Abdur Rahman should be encouraged to establish garrisoned outposts across to it. Otherwise, it would be difficult to prove that the territory was his, the Russian contention being that:

> the extent of country between the most southern portion of the province of Ferghana and the pass mentioned above [the Baroghil] lies in the Pamirs and belongs to no-one . . . This belt of no-man's land must probably, sooner or later, be included in Russia's dominions, which will then be in immediate contact with the range forming the water-parting from the Indus.[6]

Elias's recommendation was strengthened by the fact that he found among the Kirghiz inhabitants of the region 'leanings towards the Afghans'.[7] Its weakness, of course, was that the Russians would hardly be willing to accept it, particularly given the 1873 Agreement. In Shignan and Roshan, moreover, where Elias found sketchy Afghan administrations, he discovered that Afghan rule was deeply unpopular, partly on account of ethnic animosities and partly because the Tajiks and Turkmen there regarded themselves as conquered peoples. He reckoned that they would in all probability prefer to have the Russians in charge.[8]

Elias also reached the confluence of the Panjah and Murghab rivers, where he found that the volume of the Panjah was much bigger than that of the Murghab, suggesting that it was after all the main confluence of the Amu Darya. Altogether, despite ill health, he managed to explore some forty passes and to cover some 3,000 miles before returning to India via Chitral late in 1886. He could have done even more had he not believed, mistakenly, that officers from Ridgeway's Commission were following in his footsteps for the purpose of making a comprehensive survey.

At the same time, Lockhart's party travelled to the Hindu Kush from the south 'to determine to what extent India is vulnerable through the Hindu Kush range between the Kilik Pass and Kafiristan'. In all, the party consisted of no less than 300 men, a number that the local economy could barely support. In the summer of 1885, they travelled through Gilgit to Chitral, where Lockhart concluded an agreement of dubious value with the Mehtar, Aman-ul-Mulk, reached the Dora Pass and Kafiristan, and then wintered back in Gilgit. The next year, he set out through Hunza, crossed the Kilik Pass to the Tagdumbash and Little Pamirs, and returned through Badakhshan, the Dora Pass and Chitral. He had considerable difficulty negotiating his passage through Hunza and also nearly came to grief on the Kilik Pass, where the party's supplies ran out two days before they reached an Afghan outpost in the Wakhan. He then found that Abdur Rahman had revoked his earlier permission for the party to enter Afghanistan, and the Governor of Badakhshan insisted on their withdrawal. Lockhart's findings differed from those of Gordon and Biddulph: he found the Baroghil Pass easy enough, but reckoned that the routes leading southwards from it would be impassable for troops in any numbers. His conclusion was that no invasion on any scale was practicable over the region he had surveyed.[9] In winter, the routes were blocked by snow, in summer by raging torrents, leaving only limited periods in spring and autumn when access was possible:

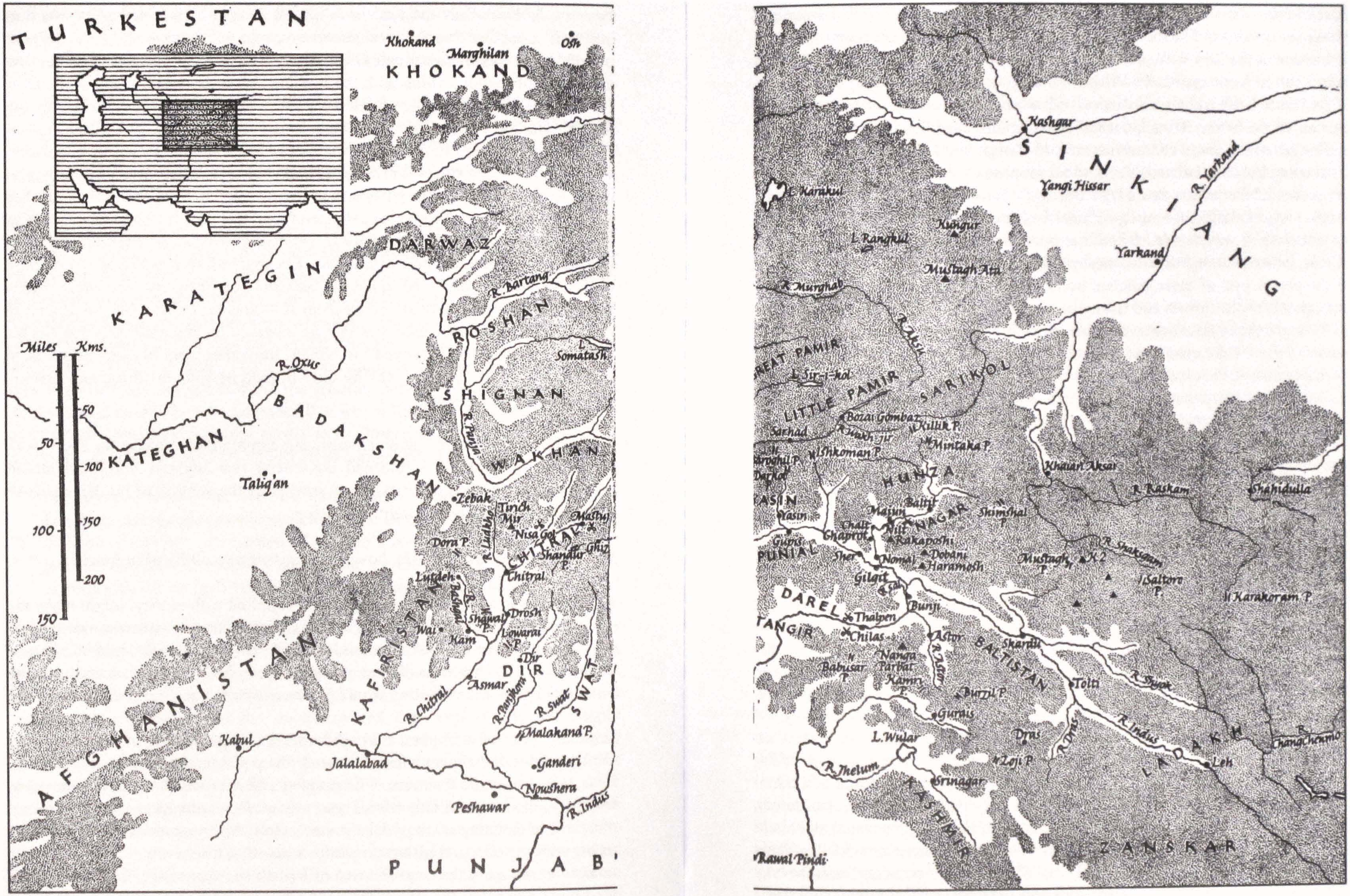
> I went up believing that an enterprising commander might make short work of the difficulties. I returned convinced that without unlimited labour resources the feat of crossing an army over the section of the Hindu Kush visited by myself was an impossibility.

What he also had to conclude, however, was that a small Russian force,

> if encouraged by local chiefs and well supplied with money, might make the region here considered a focus for mischief of all sorts, whence independent tribes all along the Peshawar border could easily be incited to raid into British territory. The presence of even a handful of any hostile European troops on the south of the water-parting would produce infinite mischief throughout India.

Lockhart returned to secure a knighthood, the appointment of Quartermaster General of the Indian army and ultimately the position of Commander-in-Chief. Elias, who had made the more wide-ranging and purposeful journey, returned to obscurity, and achieved only a brief notoriety when he refused to accept the award of a CIE, 'a damning mark of faint praise'. Only thirty copies of his confidential report were printed, and he left no public account of his travels.

For the moment, that was the end of British surveys of the Karakorams and the Hindu Kush. To the north, the next signs of activity took the form of the appearance in May 1889 of a team of three Frenchmen, headed by the explorer Gabriel Bonvalot, who had managed to cross the Pamirs from Russian territory to India, although their experiences in extreme conditions caused them to arrive


TURKESTAN
Khokand
Marghilan
Osh
KHOKAND
DARWAZ
KARATEGIN
R. Bartang
ROSHAN
L. Somatash
Miles
Kms.
50
100
150
50
100
150
200
R. Oxus
SHIGNAN
BADAKSHAN
R. Panja
KATEGHAN
WAKHAN
Taliq'an
Zebak
Tirich Mir
Nisa Gol
Mastuj
Dora P.
R. Ludkho
CHITRAL
Shandur P.
Ghizr
Chitral
Lutdeh
Bashgal
Shawal
Drosh
Wai
Kam
Lowarai P.
Dir
KAFIRISTAN
AFGHANISTAN
Asmar
DIR
SWAT
R. Chitral
R. Panjkora
R. Swat
Malakand P.
Kabul
Jalalabad
Ganderi
Nowshera
Peshawar
R. Indus
PUNJAB
Kashgar
SINKIANG
R. Yarkand
L. Karakul
Yangi Hissar
Kungur
L. Rangkul
Yarkand
Mustagh Ata
R. Murghab
R. Aksu
GREAT PAMIR
L. Sir-i-kol
SARIKOL
LITTLE PAMIR
Bozai Gombaz
Wakh-jir
Killik P.
Sarhad
Mintaka P.
Baroghil P.
Darkot
Ishkoman P.
HUNZA
Khaian Aksai
R. Raskam
Shahidulla
YASIN
Yasin
Baltit
Majun
NAGAR
Shimshal P.
Chalt
Chaprot
Nilt
Rakaposhi
Gupis
PUNIAL
Sher
Nomal
Dobani
Haramosh
Mustagh P.
K2
R. Shaksgam
Saltoro P.
Gilgit
Sai
Bunji
Karakoram P.
DAREL
Thalpen
TANGIR
Chilas
Astor
BALTISTAN
Skardu
Nanga Parbat
Babusar P.
R. Astor
Kamri P.
Burzil P.
Tolti
R. Shyok
Gurais
L. Wular
Dras
R. Dras
R. Indus
LADAKH
Changchenmo
Leh
R. Jhelum
Zoji P.
Srinagar
KASHMIR
ZANSKAR
Rawal Pindi

Map 8 The Western Himalayas and Pamirs

Source: *Where Men and Mountains Meet and The Gilgit Game*, by kind permission of John Murray exhausted and destitute, lucky indeed to have escaped with their lives. Their misfortunes were, for Dufferin, 'excellent news',[10] but there was a more sinister development the following year, when a Captain Gromchevsky and a party of Cossacks arrived in Hunza, where it was reported that an agreement had been reached with the Mir, Safdar Ali, that a military post should be set up at Baltit to train a Hunza force against the British.[11] The appearance of a Russian officer south of the Hindu Kush and his association with a tribal chief who, to every appearance, was no friend of the British, caused considerable concern – the more so when Safdar Ali sent a force southwards towards Gilgit and Hunza raids on caravans proceeding between Leh and Yarkand recommenced. All this called into question the nature of the passes east of the Baroghil, as well as raising the spectre of a Russian appropriation of a wedge of unclaimed territory between Sinkiang and the Karakorams. It was decided that the area should be explored, and a young army officer, Francis Younghusband, was accordingly deputed to make a further survey of the passes east of those reached by Lockhart, and to find the route or routes through which the raiders and Gromchevsky had come.[12]

Younghusband later achieved fame, or at least notoriety, as the insubordinate leader of the 1904 expedition to Lhasa, as well as for his spiritual beliefs, which were inspired by his experiences in the mountains. At the outset, however, he was one of the many young officers in the Indian army who chafed at the protocol and boredom of regimental life and tried to find a more challenging occupation. While on leave in 1886, he travelled through Manchuria and, on arrival in Peking, it was suggested to him that he might return overland to India. He jumped at the chance and spent seven months on a 1,200 mile journey through the Gobi Desert and Sinkiang, culminating in a hair-raising crossing of the Mustagh Pass into Baltistan.[13] His exploit was warmly received in India and he was promptly sent back to England to address the Royal Geographical Society, which awarded him its Gold Medal. Returning to India, before long he was called to Simla and given his orders. With a small party, including a Gurkha escort, he travelled in the summer of 1889 over the Karakorams to Shahidulla and secured the cooperation of the local Kirghiz in finding and exploring the passes. Crossing wild and desolate country, he reached the Saltoro Pass, which he found blocked by glaciers, and the Shimshal Pass to the east of Hunza, which appeared relatively easy. Turning back in order to explore further passes, he learnt that Gromchevsky had returned to the field, and the two men met at a spot known as Khaian Absai on the Raksam River, the first Great Game rivals to do so.[14] The two men got along famously, exchanged invitations to dinner and discussed the affairs of Central Asia over vodka and brandy. Two days later they parted on the best of terms, but Younghusband apparently then suggested to the Kirghiz that they should steer Gromchevsky eastwards in the direction of Tibet, where he would be likely to encounter 'extreme hardship and loss'.[15] The ploy worked: Gromchevsky and his Cossack escort lost their ponies and baggage, suffered extensive frostbite and barely made it back to Shahidulla. Gromchevsky apparently never suspected Younghusband's perfidy and, when the two men met again in Yarkand the following year, the meeting was once again more than amicable.

Following further expeditions to other passes, Younghusband marched back to India through Hunza, where he met Safdar Ali, by whom he was less than impressed. While this completed his programme of exploration, the greater problem remained; namely the gap between Afghan and Chinese territory in the Pamirs. It was significant that Gromchevsky's map, which Younghusband had seen, showed as Russian an area, marked in red, extending south to the Hunza passes between Chinese and Afghan territory.[16] Following Elias's survey, it had been suggested to Abdur Rahman that he should quietly establish his rule up to the Chinese border.[17] Conversely, it seemed to make sense to encourage the Chinese to consolidate their territory as far as the Afghan limits. For this, it would be necessary to determine what these limits were and to persuade the Chinese to make the necessary claims, backed by effective occupation. In June 1890, therefore, Younghusband was again sent north of the mountains. With him went George Macartney, who was to be left in Kashgar as the British representative and, ultimately, Consul.[18]

Starting by exploring the eastern Pamirs, the two men marched by way of Tashkurghan and the Nezatash Pass to Aktash and the Alichur Pamir, and penetrated as far as Somatash, where Younghusband saw what he believed to be a Chinese inscription.[19] He then went on to Rang Kul and Kara Kul before returning to Kashgar for the winter. There he negotiated with the Chinese authorities, trying to persuade them to send armed parties to the Pamirs to establish occupation. His belief was that he had been successful,[20] but it was almost inevitable that the Russians should have come to know what he was doing, if only on account of Petrovsky's extensive sources of information in Kashgar. It is possible, indeed, that the Taotai, the Chinese governor, personally informed him of the negotiations. However they came by the information, the Russians' response was quick and effective. Following conferences between Vannovsky and Vrevsky, the Governor-General of Turkestan, two missions were sent to the Pamirs in 1891 in order to anticipate the Chinese and 'declare the country to be their own territory'.[21] It emerged that, by no means for the first time, the Foreign Ministry had no knowledge of the War Ministry was intending,[22] and the latter's annexation plans, when they became a matter of international discord, greatly worried the Foreign Ministry. Staal in London reflected their concern: with an eye to the European scene, they wished nothing to be done which might 'increase the number of Russian adversaries and . . . encourage the formation of the Quadruple Alliance, directed against Russia and France'.[23]

On the ground, a party under Colonel Yanov went to the Little Pamir and another to Somatash and the Alai. Enquiries in St Petersburg elicited the information that they were merely shooting parties in search of big game, and they were even called *Okhotmichaia Komanda*, the 'sporting squad', their members being spoken of as 'gallant sportsmen'.[24] When a Chinese general arrived at Somatash, ostensibly to establish the Chinese claim, he came face to face with them, and what should have been a confrontation turned into an amicable meeting, following which the general withdrew without registering any claim. Younghusband himself learnt of the Russian moves just as he was returning to India and decided to go exhausted and destitute, lucky indeed to have escaped with their lives. Their misfortunes were, for Dufferin, 'excellent news',[10] but there was a more sinister development the following year, when a Captain Gromchevsky and a party of Cossacks arrived in Hunza, where it was reported that an agreement had been reached with the Mir, Safdar Ali, that a military post should be set up at Baltit to train a Hunza force against the British.[11] The appearance of a Russian officer south of the Hindu Kush and his association with a tribal chief who, to every appearance, was no friend of the British, caused considerable concern – the more so when Safdar Ali sent a force southwards towards Gilgit and Hunza raids on caravans proceeding between Leh and Yarkand recommenced. All this called into question the nature of the passes east of the Baroghil, as well as raising the spectre of a Russian appropriation of a wedge of unclaimed territory between Sinkiang and the Karakorams. It was decided that the area should be explored, and a young army officer, Francis Younghusband, was accordingly deputed to make a further survey of the passes east of those reached by Lockhart, and to find the route or routes through which the raiders and Gromchevsky had come.[12]

Younghusband later achieved fame, or at least notoriety, as the insubordinate leader of the 1904 expedition to Lhasa, as well as for his spiritual beliefs, which were inspired by his experiences in the mountains. At the outset, however, he was one of the many young officers in the Indian army who chafed at the protocol and boredom of regimental life and tried to find a more challenging occupation. While on leave in 1886, he travelled through Manchuria and, on arrival in Peking, it was suggested to him that he might return overland to India. He jumped at the chance and spent seven months on a 1,200 mile journey through the Gobi Desert and Sinkiang, culminating in a hair-raising crossing of the Mustagh Pass into Baltistan.[13] His exploit was warmly received in India and he was promptly sent back to England to address the Royal Geographical Society, which awarded him its Gold Medal. Returning to India, before long he was called to Simla and given his orders. With a small party, including a Gurkha escort, he travelled in the summer of 1889 over the Karakorams to Shahidulla and secured the cooperation of the local Kirghiz in finding and exploring the passes. Crossing wild and desolate country, he reached the Saltoro Pass, which he found blocked by glaciers, and the Shimshal Pass to the east of Hunza, which appeared relatively easy. Turning back in order to explore further passes, he learnt that Gromchevsky had returned to the field, and the two men met at a spot known as Khaian Absai on the Raksam River, the first Great Game rivals to do so.[14] The two men got along famously, exchanged invitations to dinner and discussed the affairs of Central Asia over vodka and brandy. Two days later they parted on the best of terms, but Younghusband apparently then suggested to the Kirghiz that they should steer Gromchevsky eastwards in the direction of Tibet, where he would be likely to encounter 'extreme hardship and loss'.[15] The ploy worked: Gromchevsky and his Cossack escort lost their ponies and baggage, suffered extensive frostbite and barely made it back to Shahidulla. Gromchevsky apparently never suspected Younghusband's perfidy and, when the two men met again in Yarkand the following year, the meeting was once again more than amicable.

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> he was instructed to escort me from Russian territory back to Chinese territory . . . He very much disliked having to perform such a duty, for I was a military officer and he was a military officer, and this was a duty usually performed by police officers; we had, moreover, met before on very friendly terms, and he had been in hopes that I should have already have left Bozai Gumbaz, and saved him from the necessity of carrying it out.[26]

Younghusband replied that he did not consider that he was on Russian territory and that in any case he was returning to India, and asked what would happen if he refused to comply. Yanov's response was that he would have to use force. Younghusband accepted that, having no soldiers with him, he had no choice but to submit, but insisted that he would do so under protest and would report the whole matter to his government. Meanwhile Davison had been arrested by the other Russian party at Somatash and taken to Marghilan as a prisoner, but was later released. Both men were put on their honour to return to Sinkiang, and not to return to India by any of a number of named passes.

Younghusband promptly sent a messenger back to Gilgit with a report of what had happened, but himself stayed near the Kilik Pass until Davison joined him and a small force arrived to escort him back. The first reports of the incident reaching London from India suggested that he might have been killed by the Russians in the Pamirs,[27] but the true facts, when they became known, aroused scarcely less anger. In India, Roberts promptly mobilised a division at Quetta with a view to 'going for the Russians'.[28] In London, the Russians' 'outrageously aggressive and lawless' moves were seen as intolerable: not only had they 'insulted' two British officers, but they had violated territory which they had earlier recognised as Afghan and they had sent a party into the unstable tribal areas south of the Hindu Kush, where they had no business whatever.[29] In the process, they had totally frustrated the attempts, which Younghusband had been sent to bring to fruition, to present a solid Afghan/Chinese barrier to their further advance.

At the same time, their claim that the Pamirs were Russian territory, which rested on the contention that the region had historically been subject to the Khan of Kokand and that sovereignty had passed to them when the province of Ferghana had been established, was examined in the India Office.[30] After all the available accounts of the annexation of Kokand, including, critically, the provinces into which it had been divided for revenue purposes, had been examined, the conclusion was reached that

> in all these works there is not one word to be found indicating a suspicion that Kokand had ever exercised, or claimed to exercise, any control whatever over the Pamirs, nor that Russia, through its annexation of Kokand, had inherited any such claim; and, apart from these negative inferences, much of the language quoted is positively inconsistent and incompatible with the existence of such a belief . . . The claim can only be treated as a fiction of very recent origin.

Henry Howard, the British chargé in St Petersburg, was promptly instructed to deliver a strong protest.[31] He was to point out that he had earlier been assured by Giers that the expedition was purely of a sporting nature, to 'shoot big game for rifle practice and to report on the action of the Chinese and Afghans in these areas'. Instead, they had moved into territory which was partly Chinese and partly Afghan, had crossed the Hindu Kush into a state under British protection and had expelled a British officer from Wakhan, which was a territory recognised under the 1873 Agreement as belonging to Afghanistan. Unfortunately for the British case, the Indian government then realised that Bozai Gumbaz in fact lay beyond Afghan territory, well within the no man's land that had so concerned the British and Indian governments.[32] The Russian response was sharp and contentious.[33] It started by asserting that it was the Afghans, with British collusion, who had first violated the 1873 Agreement by occupying Shignan and Roshan, which had previously been independent states. So far as Younghusband was concerned, Bozai Gumbaz was not, on Russian maps, in Wakhan, and he had previously entered Russian territory without authorisation near Kara Kul, and would have been arrested there had the local administration known of his presence earlier. Orally, the Russians tempered their Note by admitting that Yanov might have been inadvertently on Wakhan territory, and, if so, he regretted it.[34] There was always a risk of crossing into foreign territory in areas where there had been no delimitation, and it was unfortunate that no delimitation had taken place.

A response was left until Morier returned to St Petersburg in November, but he then went down with influenza and it was not until the end of the year that he was able to renew the protest. He was instructed by Salisbury to point out to the Russians that Yanov's act was one of 'lawless violence'.[35] Bozai Gumbaz might have been Afghan or Chinese, but there was no evidence whatever of Russian title, nor could any be assumed. Morier then proceeded to make the most of an exceedingly weak hand. The Russians were in possession of the field, much of which, it was clear, was beyond Afghan or Chinese limits, while Britain herself had no claims or pretensions there, and the introduction of a military presence was, *pace* Roberts, out of the question. The main point which he put to Giers was that the map produced by Yanov had shown Russian territory stretching to passes leading

> directly across the Hindu Kush into the Indian Empire. The Hindu Kush and its continuation the Mustag Mountains were the natural rampart of our Indian citadel. We had no wish to extend our dominions beyond them, but the northern slopes of that range formed, as it were, the glacis of the fortress, and to suppose that we should allow a powerful and rival nation to effect a lodgement on this glacis and that in the free and easy manner contemplated by Colonel Yanov was not a wise proceeding. . . . Any serious attempts in this direction would necessarily lead to very great trouble and were of a gravity which could not well be surpassed.[36]

Morier went on to pour scorn on the fiction of a 'sporting excursion', and pointed out that what had occurred was 'in direct contradiction to the axiom of policy laid down by Prince Gortchakov's 1876 communication to Lord Derby,[37] which, while giving up the theory of a neutral zone, laid down that the two powers should avoid coming into contact with each other'. He insisted that an immediate apology was required: otherwise the question would 'assume very grave international proportions'. At the same time, efforts were made to induce the Chinese to register claims to what Younghusband had suggested was Chinese territory.[38] To have had the Chinese in the reckoning would have been a considerable embarrassment to the Russians, and the Tsar was said to have been much irked by the attempt. However, they proved a broken reed: they made no response for some nine months, and then urged that the Pamirs should be neutralised, or put into Russian hands, since they themselves had no interest in them. Nor was Abdur Rahman, who was similarly approached, any more obliging, relations with him being at the time at a low ebb.[39]

Morier was less than optimistic that Giers would manage to produce a reasonable response, and in this he was fully justified. The response[40] when it came, was 'crude, unfriendly and inconceivably fatuous', with a 'character of arrogance, superficiality, contempt for facts and offensive self-assertion which we might expect to meet in a missive of the Tsar to the Amir of Bokhara, but strangely out of place in a note to the Representative of the Queen of the United Kingdom and the Empress of India'. It did little more than recapitulate the arguments in the previous Russian note and contained no hint at all of a retraction or apology. In giving it, the Russians had, in Morier's words, 'officially rendered themselves parties to wanton breaches of international and public law'. He immediately sent Giers a personal note, sixteen pages long, in which he expressed his grave disappointment (he was, he wrote, 'attristé, affligé, abasourdi'), criticised the Russian reply in detail and ended by saying that it all left him with 'une impression qui me fait désesperer d'arriver à une solution favourable et qui ouvre des perspectives de danger. Que Dieu veuille que nous réussissions à les écarter'.[41] In his report to

London, Morier concluded that Giers, who he had no doubt genuinely wanted to disavow Yanov, had come out second best in a confrontation with the minister of war, the latter being supported by the Tsar, 'who seems more self-willed and overbearing than ever'.[42] The officials on whom Giers relied were chauvinistic and untrustworthy, while he himself was 'visibly declining in mental power and the note of senility is beginning to pronounce itself'. More to the point, Morier enlisted the help of a close contact, M. Vyshnegradski, the Minister of Finance, to whom he voiced the most pessimistic prospects – of a break in official relations, of reprisals and of the possibility of war if the issue was not resolved. Even if the worst was not to happen, the effect on Russia's financial position, if the facts were to be published, would be grave.[43]

Whether or not M. Vyshnegradski was instrumental, the outcome, within a very few days, was a Russian climb-down. It is very probable that the Tsar overruled the Ministry of War out of a realisation that the vicissitudes under which Russia was labouring at the time – famine, internal unrest and a weak economy – precluded an all-out conflict with Britain. When Morier met Giers early in February, the latter revealed that instructions had already been sent to Staal in London to admit that Yanov's actions had been illegal and to express regret.[44] Staal duly had a meeting with Salisbury, but omitted to read or pass across a formal note. Salisbury's comment was that he had 'the peculiarity of never finishing a sentence, which makes him an admirable channel for an awkward apology'.[45] Indeed, reporting to Giers, Staal was explicit that he had deliberately avoided expressing himself in the sense of a disavowal of Yanov or an admission of the illegality of his action, since he did not wish to make any premature concession before being sure what measures the British government had in mind in order to settle the question.[46] Morier was, therefore, far from satisfied: Staal had 'minimised M. Giers' minimum' and it was essential that the Russians should make a categorical declaration, for parliamentary and public record. He proceeded to obtain Giers's agreement to a form of words, that 'they condemned the action of their officer as illegal and declared it regrettable' so that, diplomatically, the issue was closed.[47] In real terms, however, this was far from being the case. The Tsar made the significant gesture of presenting Yanov with a gold ring, while the Ministry of War made plans for a new military incursion into the Pamirs the approaching summer. Staal was soon to be referring to 'the deliberations which have taken place on the question of the Pamirs and the decisions taken in concert with the Ministry of War with the aim of extending our domination to the whole of the region of these high plateaus of Central Asia'.[48]

15 The Consolidation of Dardistan

In the course of the Sikh wars, which were to end with the British annexation of the Punjab in 1846, Gulab Singh, the Rajah of Jammu, was recognised under the Treaty of Amritsar as the Maharaja of Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh.[1] Unusually, he was not obliged to have a British Resident at his court, and, while he was promised assistance against any aggression, there was no provision for the control of his external relations. Over several years, he tried, with varying degrees of success, to establish his authority among the petty states of Dardistan to his north and west, but it was left to his successor, Ranbir Singh, to take Gilgit in 1860 and to go on to extend his rule over Ponial and Yasin. An attack on Hunza and Nagar in 1863 failed, but by the end of the decade the two states had proffered their allegiance to Kashmir.

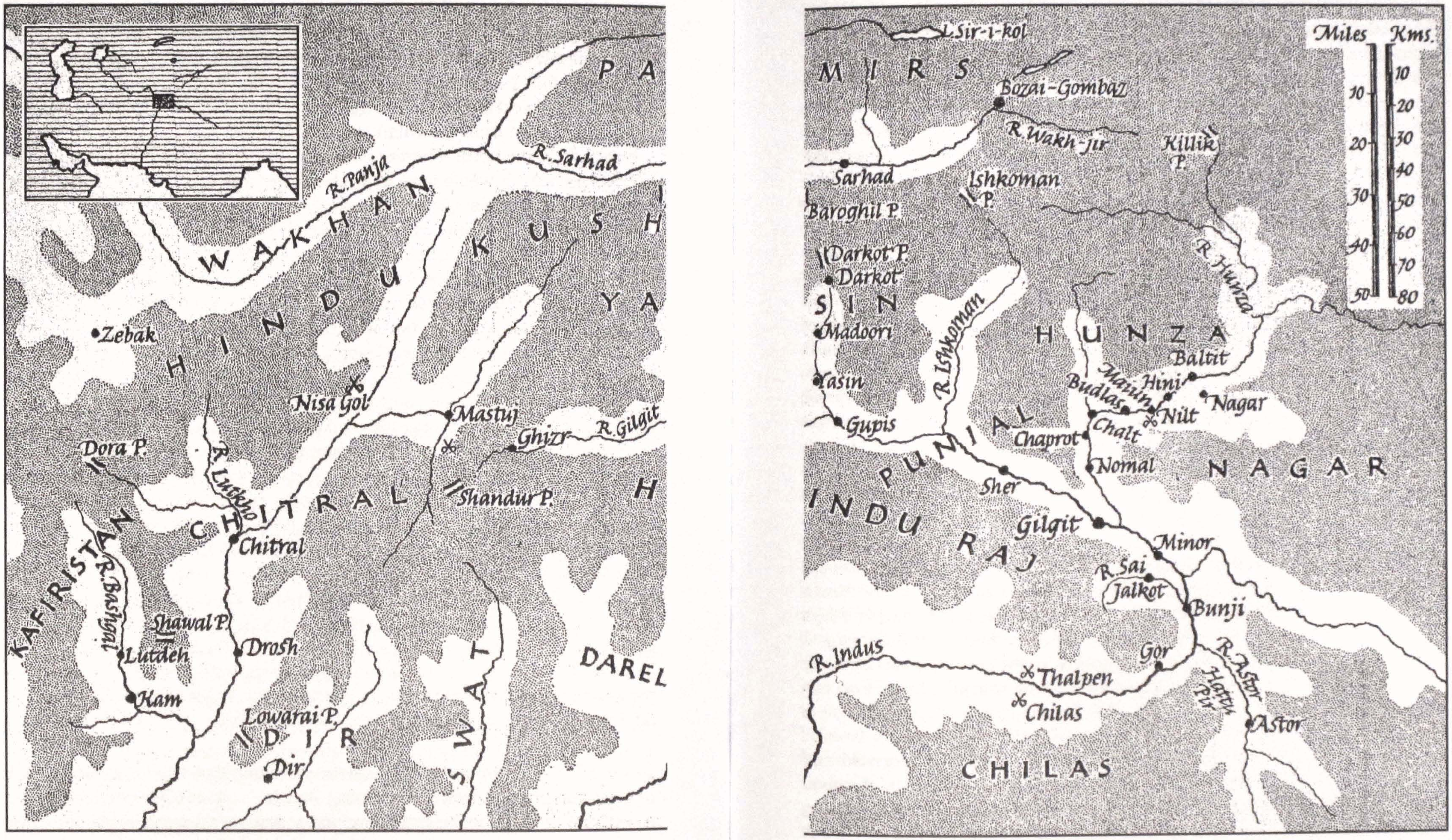
There was considerable vacillation over British policy towards Kashmir and Dardistan. The region was quite exceptionally difficult of access and its climate was extreme. Both the people and their chiefs were volatile and recalcitrant. The Kashmir administration and its forces were corrupt and incompetent, and any reliance on them was risky. Views about the vulnerability of the region from the north and its importance for the defence of British India tended to alter as geographical knowledge became more reliable and complete. During Lawrence's Viceroyalty, little or nothing was done to interfere with the Maharaja's activities, and it was only under Mayo that it began to be reckoned that in response to the looming Russian presence to the north, it would be wise to ensure that British influence across Dardistan was such as to anticipate any hostile influence or subversion. The main problem was ignorance: few Europeans had travelled in the region, and in 1870 Mayo started by sending two 'Pundits', the 'Havildar' and 'I. K.', to survey the land.[2] The same year, George Hayward, who had earlier gone with Shaw to Kashgar, proceeded to travel unofficially to Yasin and Gilgit, and brought back accounts of atrocities perpetrated in the former state by Kashmiri forces. Unwisely, he allowed his report to find its way into the Indian press, and it may have been at Kashmiri instigation that, when later in 1870 he returned to Yasin, he was mysteriously murdered.[3] Mayo concluded that action had to be taken, but was dubious about Ranbir Singh's reliability, and it seemed undesirable that he should be permitted to extend his influence further into Dardistan, where, moreover, it was likely that he would come into conflict with the redoubtable chief of Chitral, Aman-ul-Mulk. Nothing was done, therefore, until Northbrook took over as viceroy and had before him the findings of the members of Forsyth's second mission to Kashgar, who, as we have seen, had reported that there were several passes to Gilgit and Chitral which could be easily crossed by invaders from the north. Northbrook's conclusion was that Mayo's policy of restricting Kashmir would have to be abandoned and that it would be necessary to extend the Maharaja's control as far as possible into Dardistan.[4] In 1876, as a first step, he sent Biddulph, who had assisted in exploring the Hindu Kush passes, to Hunza and Yasin, with instructions to establish friendly relations with the Dard tribes, to review the passes from the southern side and to gather intelligence on the region. Biddulph began by finding his way through the gorges to Hunza, where he had a difficult meeting with the then Mir, Ghazan Khan. His recommendations were that the fort at Chaprot, which commanded the entrance to the Hunza valley, should be garrisoned, and that both Hunza and its neighbour Nagar should be claimed as British territory. He then went on to investigate the passes and found it necessary to change his mind about their accessibility. His conclusion, with which the Lockhart mission was later to agree, was that they could only be crossed by very small numbers of troops. Given the unreliability of the Dard tribes, the problem was one of possible subversion, rather than invasion. In Yasin, Biddulph found the chief, Pahlwan Bahadur, no more friendly or dependable than Ghazan Khan. His overall recommendation was that Britain should extend her political control over Dardistan, initially by posting an agent at Gilgit.[5]

Lytton, who had now taken over from Northbrook, accepted this recommendation, taking the view that British power needed not only to be extended to the line of the Hindu Kush, but even beyond: at the very least the line of the passes should be held. A consequence of Lytton's show-down with Sher Ali was also his perception that a 'forward policy' in Dardistan was needed as a curb to possible Afghan infiltration. It was, in Lytton's view, necessary

> to prevent, at any cost, the establishment within this outlying country of the political preponderance of any other Power. . . . It would be suicidal, in our present uncertain and menaced position, to leave to the mercy of chance, in the hands of any weak chief surrounded by powerful and aggressive neighbours, that strip of territory containing the Baroghil and Ishkumman passes.[6]

Meeting the Maharaja in November 1876, Lytton persuaded him, with some difficulty, to accept what was proposed. With assistance in the form of money and arms, with the appointment of a Resident at his court and an agent at Gilgit, the new policy was launched.[7]

Biddulph, who was appointed British Agent at Gilgit in 1876, one of the remotest posts in British India, soon found himself in an impossible situation. Communications with Srinagar were at best unreliable and for six months of the


PA
R. Sarhad
R. Panja
WAKHAN
HINDU KUSH
YA
Zebak
Nisa Gol
Mastuj
Ghizr
R. Gilgit
Dora P.
R. Lutkho
CHITRAL
Shandur P.
H
Chitral
KAFIRISTAN
R. Bashgal
Shawal P.
Lutdeh
Drosh
DAREL
Kam
Lowarai P.
DIR
Dir
SWAT
L. Sir-i-kol
MIRS
Bozai-Gombaz
R. Wakh-jir
Killik P.
Miles
Kms.
10
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70
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Sarhad
Ishkoman P.
Baroghil P.
Darkot P.
Darkot
SIN
Madoori
R. Ishkoman
R. Hunza
HUNZA
Baltit
Hini
Nagar
Yasin
Budlas
Maiun
Nilt
Gupis
PUNIAL
Chaprot
Chalt
Nomal
NAGAR
Sher
INDU RAJ
Gilgit
Minor
R. Sai
Jalkot
Bunji
R. Indus
Gor
R. Astor
Hattu Pir
Thalpen
Chilas
Astor
CHILAS

Map 9 Dardistan and the Hindu Kush

Source: *Where Men and Mountains Meet and The Gilgit Game*, by kind permission of John Murray

year they were non-existent. There was no telegraph, and the 230-mile track crossed two passes and was frequently swept away by landslips. He was continually harassed and frustrated by the Kashmiris, who were both incompetent and ill-disposed, and he failed to come to terms with the tribal chiefs. He regarded Aman-ul-Mulk in Chitral as patently not to be trusted, but believed that Pahlwan Bahadur in Yasin to be dependable, and events proved him wrong in both cases. In 1880 insurrection broke out, and Pahlwan advanced to within 20 miles of Gilgit. Since it was late in the year, reinforcements could not be sent from Kashmir and Biddulph looked set to endure a siege over the winter. Fortunately, however, for reasons which no one understood, Aman-ul-Mulk decided to intervene and attacked Yasin. Gilgit was saved, but its vulnerability was clear: Biddulph was recalled and the Agency closed.[8]

Over most of the next decade, Dardistan was left virtually to its own devices. The Dards by and large kept their independence and Kashmiri intervention was muted. Then came the evidence of growing Russian activity in the Pamirs and, with it, the conviction that the region could no longer be ignored. The catalyst was a report by Mortimer Durand, the Indian Foreign Secretary, who in 1887 recommended that the whole of the tribal territory to India's north-west should be consolidated as a barrier to possible Russian encroachments.[9] The Gilgit Agency should be reopened and relations with the tribes restored, so that British troops could operate securely up to, and if necessary beyond, the Hindu Kush. Developments within Dardistan itself also contributed to a new sense of urgency. Early in 1888 a joint Hunza-Nagar attack was made on the fort at Chaprot and the garrison was driven out. When Kashmiri reinforcements were sent to Gilgit, transport arrangements broke down and the force there came to the brink of starvation. Then came Gromchevsky's mission to Hunza, accompanied by a revival of Chinese interest in that state, which had historic links with Kashgar.[10] Dufferin's conclusion was that, since Kashgar might at any time be taken over by the Russians, it was imperative that the Chinese, as well as the Russians, should be kept north of the Hindu Kush. Mortimer Durand's younger brother, Algernon Durand, was accordingly sent to examine the situation on the ground and to work out a scheme to secure Gilgit and the country up to the Hindu Kush from the risk of penetration by Russian or Chinese forces.[11] He proceeded to take a thoroughly alarmist view of the prospects:

> There is absolutely nothing to stop a Russian officer with a thousand Cossacks from reaching Astor in ten days after crossing the passes of the Hindu Kush and from watering his horses in the Woolar Lake [in Kashmir] four days later . . . Think what the effect would have been when the Maharaja and his Court, the Resident, and any Europeans in the country came tumbling out of Kashmir, flying from a Russian force, the strength of which no one could tell.[12]

His recommendation was that the Gilgit Agency should be reopened and manned by a British-officered Kashmiri force, that local levies should be organised in Chitral, that the Dard chiefs should be subsidised, and that communications in the region should be opened up with roads and telegraph.[13] The report was accepted by Dufferin's successor, Lansdowne, who was optimistic about its effects:

> We shall have the Upper Hindu Kush well watched, and the countries to the south of it closed against interference from China and Russia and Afghanistan, and we will get some useful information from the districts beyond. We shall be protected against any *coup de main* from the northward and we may eventually succeed in establishing our influence in Kafiristan also. We shall thereby have provided for a really important part of our frontier defence, and at small cost to ourselves.[14]

In 1889 Algernon Durand was sent to Gilgit as British Agent, where his first preoccupation was with Hunza and Nagar, which he visited in the summer of that year. While both chiefs accepted the increased subsidies on offer, he was particularly distrustful of Safdar Ali, and returned convinced that he would have to be subdued. This conviction was strengthened when it was discovered that the latter had sent an envoy to Kashgar and Osh, where he had met Vrevsky and received gifts of arms and ammunition.[15] Before Durand could move, however, the road from Kashmir had to be put into better shape and his forces had to be mustered and trained. The problem of getting supplies through to Gilgit sufficient to last the winter was acute, and more lives were lost on the road than in the campaign that followed. By November 1891, however, Durand was ready, and the expulsion of Younghusband from Wakhan proved to be of timely assistance in consolidating political support. The Indian government's view was that this had given 'an entirely new aspect to the case', and that there was a distinct risk of a Russian force arriving in Hunza if pre-emptive action was not taken.[16] The chiefs of Hunza and Nagar were told that roads had to be driven northwards through their territories for reasons of strategic necessity, and that if they did not submit, they would be attacked. Both returned defiant replies, and Safdar Ali's appears to have been unprintable.[17] Advancing, therefore, from Chalt with a force of some thousand men, Durand came to a halt before the fortress of Nilt. He himself was wounded and the fortress was only taken when a small party managed to reach the main gate under heavy fire, laid a charge and blew it in. The Dards then retreated to prepared defences on the far side of a precipitous ravine which it seemed impossible either to assault or to circumvent. For three weeks the advance was stalled, until eventually a small British and Gurkha force managed to scale a 2,000-foot cliff and put the defenders to flight. On 22 December an advance party reached the capital to find that Safdar Ali had fled to Sinkiang. A garrison was installed and a half-brother of Safdar Ali appointed Mir, and there was thereafter no hint of disloyalty on the part of either Hunza or Nagar. It is impossible to say whether, as Younghusband, who was sent to Hunza as political officer, believed, the submission of the two states could have been achieved without resorting to force: at all events it was later discovered by another officer, Lieutenant Cockerill, who was sent on a further reconnaissance of the Hunza frontier, that the geography was such that 'we have no reason to fear another Russian advance through the passes'.[18]

With Hunza and Nagar pacified, fresh efforts were made to improve the road to Gilgit and to ensure that the Agency enjoyed a reliable supply system. This was just as well, since trouble now arose in both Chitral and Chilas. In Chitral, with Aman-ul-Mulk's death in 1892, a three-way struggle for the succession broke out between two of his sons, Nizam-ul Mulk and Afzal-ul-Mulk, and their uncle, Sher Afzal, who appeared to have Afghan support. Afzal-ul-Mulk seized power and proceeded to kill all of his family who might pose a threat, but was then himself murdered by Sher Afzal, who suddenly arrived on the scene. Durand then intervened to install Nizam, who had survived by fleeing to Gilgit, and a mission was sent to Chitral to support him. In Chilas, which commanded the supply line to

Gilgit, a revolt broke out at the same time and Durand had to send another force to deal with it. Then in March 1893 the garrison which had been left there was attacked and a third of it either killed or wounded, and it was only relieved after heavy fighting. Durand's unauthorised moves to deal with the two simultaneous crises aroused considerable controversy within both the Indian government and the India Office, but tension eased when he managed to restore a measure of calm in both states and an agreement was reached with Abdur Rahman which appeared to put an end to his intrigues in Chitral.[19]

At the beginning of 1895, however, a fresh crisis arose with the murder of the universally unpopular Nizam-ul-Milk by another brother, Amir-ul-Mulk, who declared himself Mehtar and asked for British support. As the British agent in Chitral, Lieutenant Gurdon, was clearly at risk, a force of five hundred men, commanded by Surgeon-Major Robertson, was sent to rescue him. Arriving in Chitral, they occupied the Mehtar's fortress, where they were soon besieged by a combined force led by Sher Afzal, who had reappeared from Afghanistan, and Umra Khan, the ruler of Jandul. The siege lasted for forty-eight days, while two forces, one from Gilgit and the other, consisting of a whole division, from Nowshera, struggled in desperate conditions to come to its relief. During the siege, one tower of the fortress was set on fire, and a mine which was being dug under it was discovered just in time. It was fortunate that the Gilgit force, after prodigious efforts to move guns over the Shandur Pass in deep snow, managed to arrive not long before Robertson would have been compelled to surrender.[20]

This left the problem of what to do about Chitral. Robertson had appointed as Mehtar yet another member of the Chitrali ruling family, but he was only a boy and would need support. Also the Russians were now in close proximity and the danger was perceived that if Chitral was left as a political and military vacuum, they might well seize the opportunity to move in. Indeed a later British visitor to the Pamirs, Captain Ralph Cobbold, was told by a Russian officer that there were 'very complete plans' to invade the state if the British were to withdraw.[21] If they were to do so, they would threaten the flank of any British force which tried to oppose a main offensive through Kabul and the Khyber Pass, and they would be able to promote unrest and instability more widely among the Dards. Nor could it be ruled out that Abdur Rahman would once again try to foment trouble if he were given the chance.

As against this, Chitral was remote and had hitherto had to be approached by means of the long and extremely difficult line of communication through Kashmir and Gilgit and over the Shandur Pass. It was a precarious enough business to support Gilgit along this route, and it would hardly be feasible to maintain a political and military presence in Chitral if this were to be its only means of access. Now, however, there was an alternative. Ney Elias had been among the first to recommend that the security of Chitral should be ensured by using the route from Nowshera over the Malakand Pass and through Swat and Dir, but the dangers posed by the Afghans and the tribes along it had hitherto put it out of consideration. The larger of the two relieving forces had, however, used it successfully and the Indian government considered it feasible to develop it as a military road providing much more direct access from the Punjab. While Gilgit was now reasonably secure, Chitral was strategically the more important, and at the same time the more exposed. The military advice was clear:

> If the Chitral bastion is evacuated, the approaches to India from Jalalabad to Jammu are uncovered . . . The true support of this bastion is the line of communication with its base at Nowshera via Dir. The line via Gilgit and Kashmir is exposed and undoubtedly false.[22]

In London, however, Lord Rosebery's Liberal government disagreed, partly on grounds of expense and because access still lay through potentially hostile tribal territory, but more importantly because they did not believe that the Russians could realistically force their way into Chitral in the face of the inevitable tribal opposition, even if they wished to do so.[23] In July 1895 the decision was taken not to hold Chitral, but the Liberal government then fell and Lord Salisbury returned at the head of a Conservative administration. The decision was reversed, and Chitral was absorbed into the North-West Frontier Province. With this, Dardistan was effectively secured as a British preserve.

16 The Pamirs Settlement

In May 1892, a sizable force, probably some 750 strong, and again under Colonel Yanov, was despatched to the Pamirs and soon came into contact with Afghan troops. The Chinese and Afghans had earlier met near Somatash and, although they had started by cooperating, in the middle of the year an armed clash took place between them, forcing the Chinese to withdraw. A small Afghan force was therefore left to face the Russians alone and was wiped out when it refused to retire. The Russians then ranged southwards, demolished a Chinese fort at Aktash and left a small contingent to winter at what was called the Pamirski Poste, at the junction of the Murghab and Ak-Baital rivers. A new military road was also constructed from Osh to the Alai. It was clear that another 'Panjdeh' was taking place: the Russians were systematically extending their presence across the region and eliminating any opposition. While Staal had earlier tried to argue that the expedition was aimed at the Chinese, whose activities in the Pamirs had, he alleged, caused the Russians serious embarrassment,[1] this cut no ice with Salisbury, who expressed his deep concern at the likelihood of a clash with the Afghans.[2] Staal's personal view was that it was 'both costly and purposeless' for the Russian military to try to establish themselves on the Hindu Kush, so as to be able to threaten India whenever that might appear desirable. There was nothing to be gained by prematurely alerting the British, who, having been forewarned, would be stupid to 'hand over the key to their house'. There would be no problem in 'sweeping up the country' at any future time if circumstances were to require it.[3]

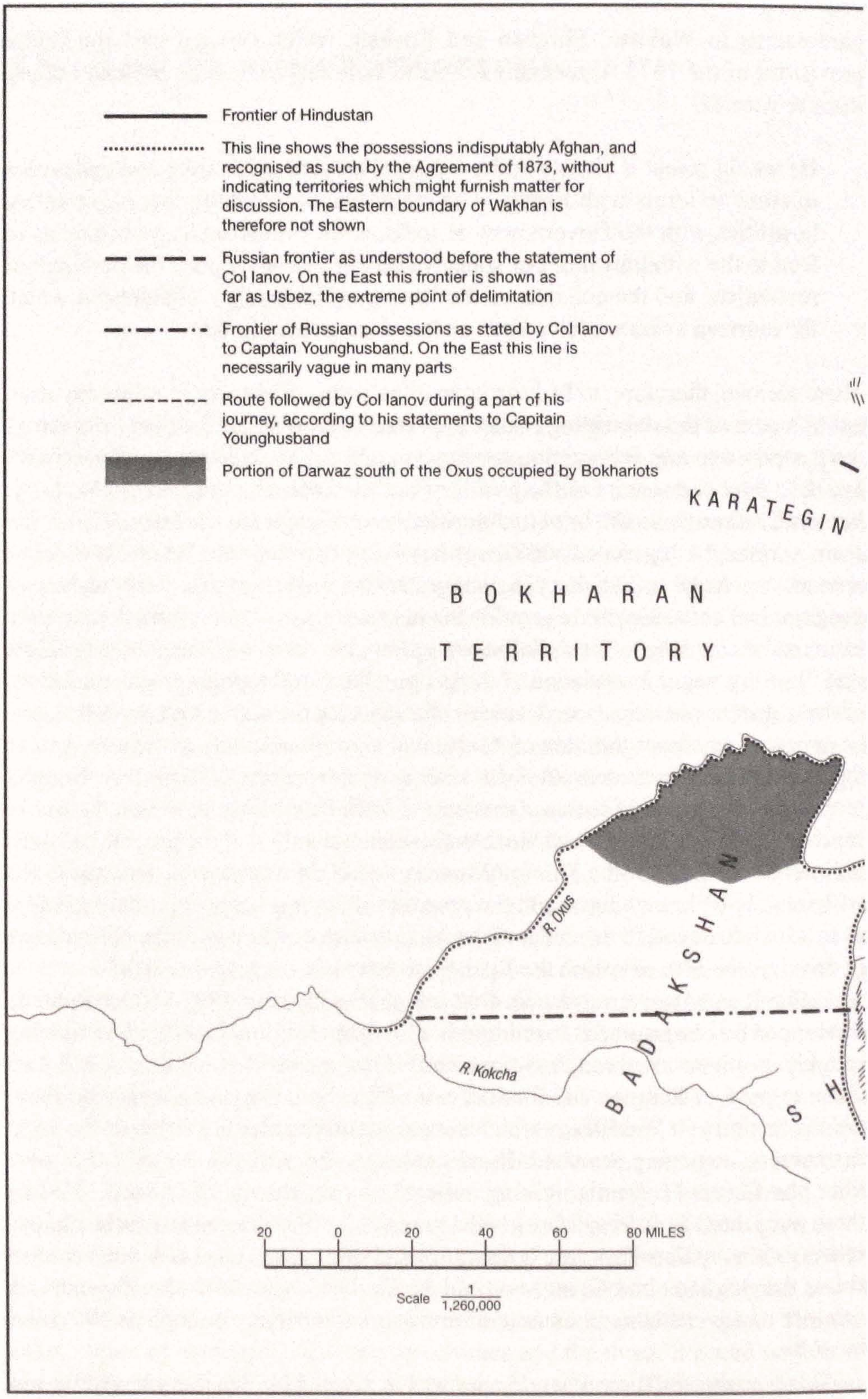
While the earlier confrontation between Yanov and Younghusband had attracted relatively little attention outside government circles in Britain, this time the public reaction to the sometimes exaggerated reports of the Russian moves was vocal and intense. The British government were once more in a bind. There seemed to be two possible means of resolving the issue, the 'neutralisation' of the region or the delimitation of a frontier. Neutralisation appeared unrealistic, despite its apparent advocacy by the Chinese, if only because it was impossible to imagine how it could be arranged and enforced in such a remote and unpopulated region. The only other means of containing the Russian advance and the threat it posed was, as on the western frontier, to negotiate a delimitation agreement. There were, however, a number of difficulties about this. It would inevitably give the Russians a large part of the territory they claimed, while there was also the problem of the Afghan possessions in Wakhan, Shignan and Roshan, which transgressed the literal provisions of the 1873 Agreement. If Abdur Rahman were to be pressed to cede these territories,

> He would resent it bitterly and not improbably throw us over and endeavour to come to terms with Russia. The result would inevitably be, if not actual hostilities with the Government of India, at all events such an attitude as to lead to the withdrawal of our subsidy and our moral support, the outbreak of revolution, and the collapse of the 'strong and friendly' Afghanistan which for fourteen years we have been endeavouring to build up.[4]

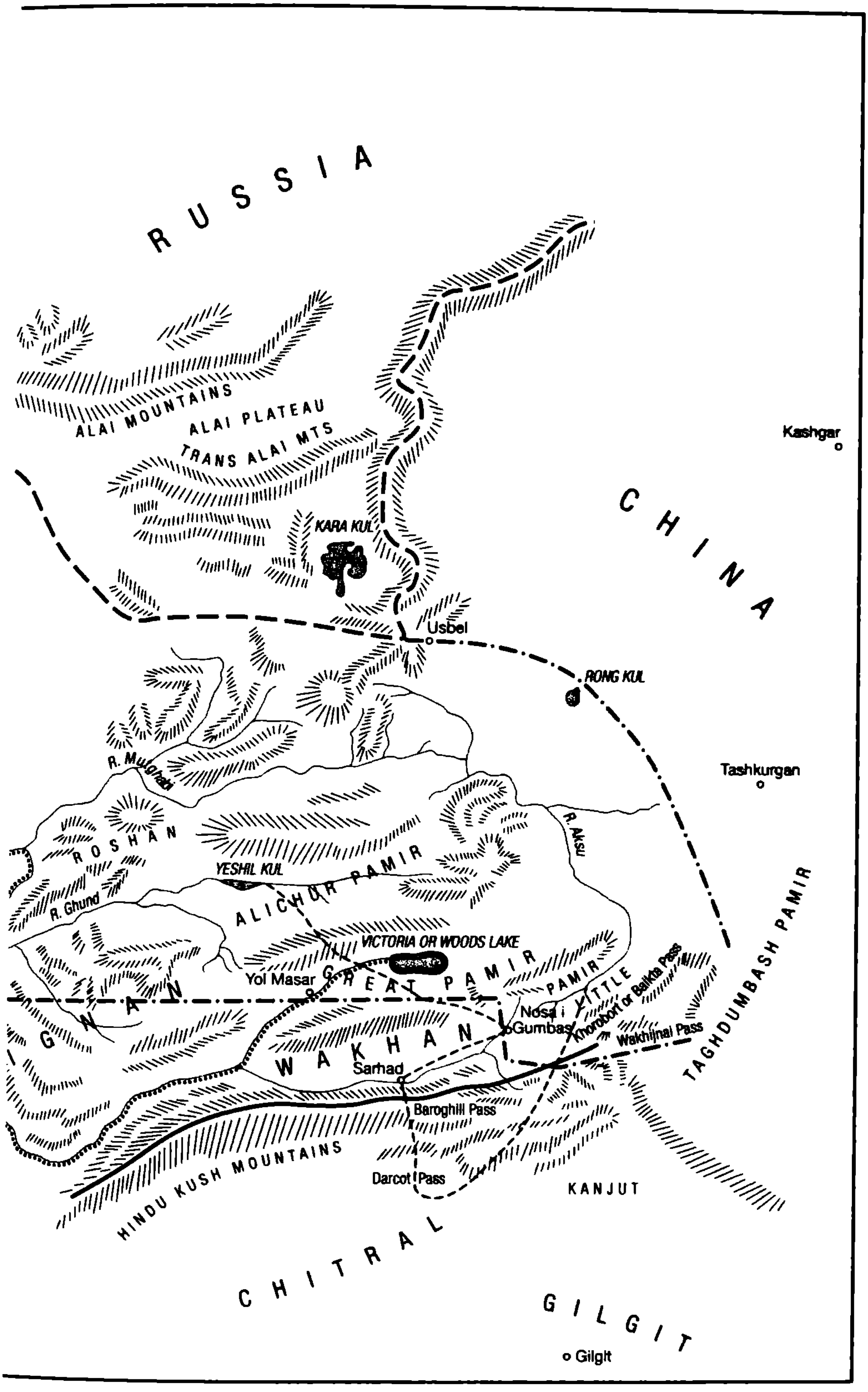
There seemed, therefore, to be little hope of enlisting Afghan support for any deal, but in any case the overriding reality appeared to be that the Russian 'war party' were opposed to any delimitation, seeing it as a brake on their territorial ambitions and their intended seizure of the passes of the Hindu Kush. The Foreign Ministry, however, although in 1892 not in a position to challenge the Ministry of War, did seem to favour a negotiated settlement involving delimitation. When Staal delivered his 'apology' to Salisbury, he suggested the formation of a joint 'technical-geographical commission' to provide the necessary preparation for a delimitation exercise.[5] According to Staal, Salisbury agreed that there was indeed the problem that 'the very vague knowledge of the geographical and topographical conditions of these distant countries posed serious obstacles for the success of any talks', and he appeared to accept the idea of a technical commission with a remit to resolve them.[6] Both Salisbury and, after the change of government, Rosebery, formally proposed the creation of such a commission.[7] In St Petersburg, however, the hawks for the moment held sway and Staal had to admit in July that the project had been 'adjourned'.[8] The best the Foreign Ministry could do was to look forward to the withdrawal of Yanov's force and the prospect of having 'eight full months before us in which to attend to the end and the means of proceeding with the commission of enquiry, the idea of which the British minister has suggested to us'.[9]

Difficulties however remained. One was that in October 1892, Abdur Rahman announced that he proposed to relinquish all Afghan territory east of a line running roughly north-south through Somatash.[10] This meant that while he still laid claim to parts of Shignan and Roshan east of the Amu Darya, he would be abandoning territory in Wakhan to which he was entitled under the terms of the 1873 Agreement, exposing several critical passes in the process. Around the same time, the Chinese were also giving indications of a change of attitude.[11] While there were those in Peking who wished to maintain the Chinese territorial claims, others saw no national interest in doing so, and there was a clear risk that between them, the Afghans and Chinese would be likely to present to the Russians, in advance of any settlement, an area of unoccupied territory as much as 100 miles in width.

This was the situation when Morier was instructed by Rosebery to do his best to complete the 1885 delimitation.[12] The deal he proposed to the Russians was that Afghanistan should retain Shignan and the Russians Darwaz, and that Roshan


Frontier of Hindustan
This line shows the possessions indisputably Afghan, and recognised as such by the Agreement of 1873, without indicating territories which might furnish matter for discussion. The Eastern boundary of Wakhan is therefore not shown
Russian frontier as understood before the statement of Col Ianov. On the East this frontier is shown as far as Usbez, the extreme point of delimitation
Frontier of Russian possessions as stated by Col Ianov to Captain Younghusband. On the East this line is necessarily vague in many parts
Route followed by Col Ianov during a part of his journey, according to his statements to Capitain Younghusband
Portion of Darwaz south of the Oxus occupied by Bokhariots
KARATEGIN
BOKHARAN
TERRITORY
R. Oxus
BADAKSHAN
R. Kokcha
SH
20
0
20
40
60
80 MILES
Scale 1/1,260,000

Map 10 The Northern Frontier Dispute
Source: National Archives


RUSSIA
ALAI MOUNTAINS
ALAI PLATEAU
TRANS ALAI MTS
KARA KUL
Kashgar
CHINA
Usbel
RONG KUL
Tashkurgan
R. Mughab
ROSHAN
R. Aksu
YESHIL KUL
ALICHUR PAMIR
R. Ghund
VICTORIA OR WOODS LAKE
GREAT PAMIR
Yol Masar
SHIGNAN
PAMIR
LITTLE
Khorobort or Baikta Pass
Nosa i Gumbas
Wakhijnai Pass
TAGHDUMBASH PAMIR
WAKHAN
Sarhad
Baroghill Pass
HINDU KUSH MOUNTAINS
Darcot Pass
KANJUT
CHITRAL
GILGIT
Gilgit

should be given up in exchange for an extension of Wakhan as far as the mountain chain to the north of Lake Victoria. No reply being received, he reiterated his proposal in December, laying emphasis on the retention by Britain of a sphere of influence on the northern slopes of the Hindu Kush. He found the Russian Foreign Ministry still to be apparently genuine in wanting to see the issue resolved, and it seems that this time they were able to make their influence felt. Further meetings were held with the Ministry of War, and in March 1893, demands for yet another military expedition to the Pamirs were apparently rejected and a negotiating position was worked out.[13] The same month Staal put this to the Foreign Office,[14] where there was dismay when it proved to consist of demands not only for the Afghan abandonment of those parts of Shignan and Roshan which were on the right bank of the Amu Darya, but that the line should follow the Sarhad feeder at the head of the river, rather than the feeder to the north running from Lake Victoria. If the former demand was conceded, the Russians would reach the southern bend of the river at Ishkashim and both Chitral and Badakhshan would be exposed, while a Sarhad frontier would run uncomfortably close to the Chitral and Yasin passes, and give the Russians the opportunity to threaten Hunza to the east.

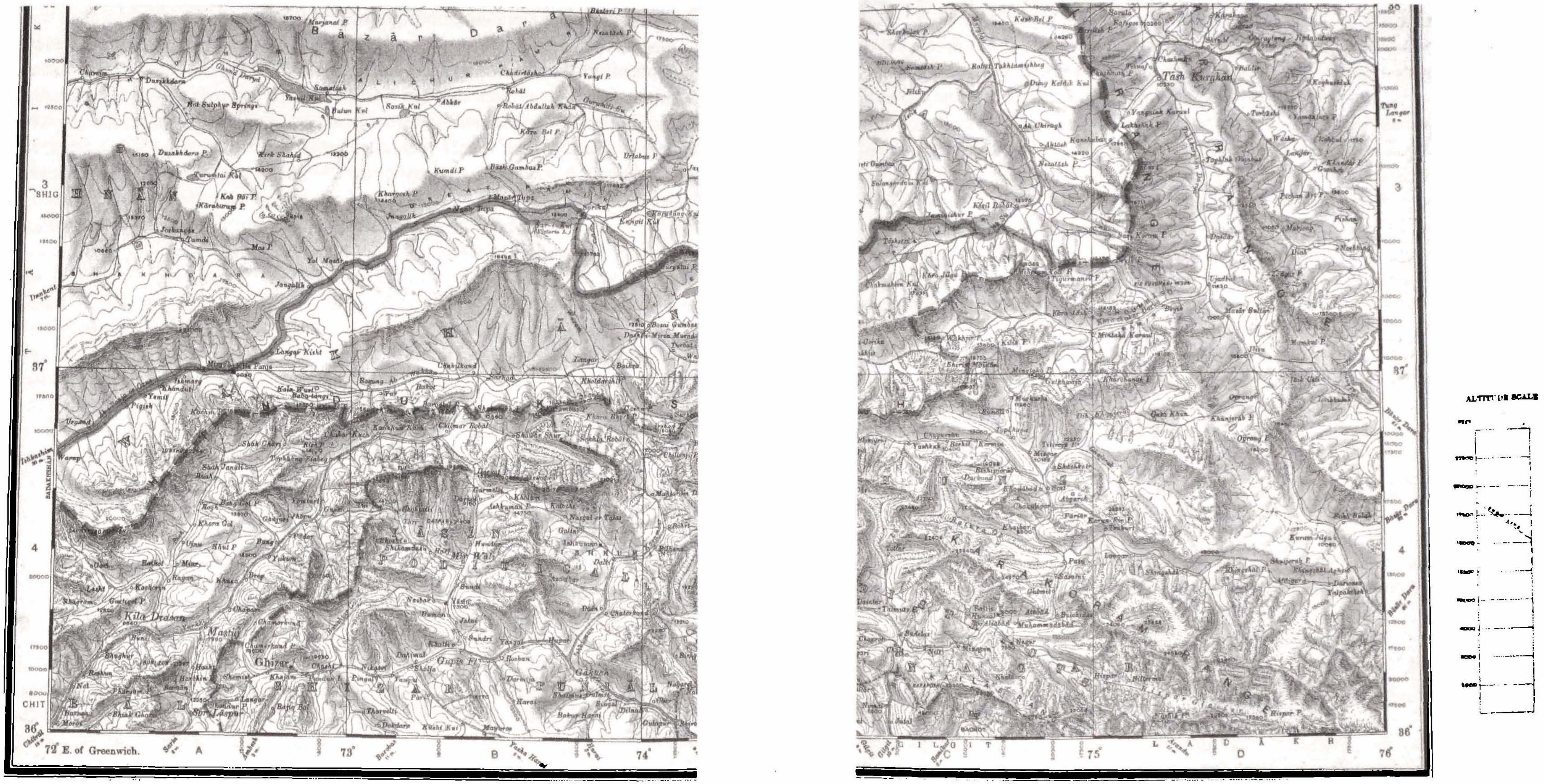
It was now the turn of the British to review their position.[15] Rosebery was inclined to insist that Abdur Rahman's claims to Roshan and Shignan should be upheld and that the line to Lake Victoria should be maintained, and continued eastwards to the Chinese frontier. In this, he was supported by Lansdowne, the viceroy, who adhered to the traditional Indian view that the Russians must at all costs be kept at a distance from the passes of the Hindu Kush.[16] In April 1893 a reply was delivered to Staal to this effect, much to the consternation of his Foreign Ministry, who expected an explosion not just from the War Ministry, but from the Tsar himself.[17] A few weeks later, the Russians responded with a straight reiteration of their previous proposals and deadlock ensued.[18] 'If these offers are rejected', wrote Kapnist at the Foreign Ministry, 'our only option will be action. I hope and believe this will not be war, but action is always dangerous'.[19] At the same time, the Chinese were showing unwonted belligerence and insisting on a Russian withdrawal as a preliminary to negotiation, and both the Chinese and the Russians were reinforcing their forces in the region. By July, Rosebery's view was that if the impasse continued, the Russians would simply advance to the Hindu Kush and present everyone with a *fait accompli*.[20]

However diplomacy did then begin to work, eased on the one hand by indications that Abdur Rahman might be persuaded to give up his transriverine territories,[21] and, on the other, by hints from the Russian Foreign Ministry that if this concession were made, they would respond positively elsewhere.[22] While Lansdowne was willing to defend the Emir's territories if he were assured of full support from London,[23] the view taken there was that Shignan and Roshan were not worth a war: the priority should be to keep the Russians at a distance from the Hindu Kush, particularly if the frontier could be extended to the east.[24] The importance of the passes was emphasised both by the events taking place in Chitral at the time and by further reconnaissances by Younghusband and Cockerill, who both concluded that Russia would enjoy practically year-round access to Chitral, particularly by the Dora and the Baroghil.[25]

The atmosphere of relative optimism did not, however, last. By the summer of 1893, the military were once again dominant in St Petersburg, with the result that a demand was transmitted that the frontier should run south from Lake Victoria to the Hindu Kush, incorporating Bozai Gumbaz.[26] This was quite unacceptable: Staal was himself clear that it was not negotiable,[27] while Rosebery warned him that it would entail 'the certainty of conflict with possibly the gravest consequences'.[28] Lansdowne was no less firm, and urged that the Russians should be warned that their demands would lead to a break in diplomatic relations 'and possibly a declaration of war'.[29]

It was at this point that Mortimer Durand, the Indian Foreign Secretary, went to Kabul to negotiate with Abdur Rahman what was to be called the 'Durand Line', the frontier between Afghanistan and British India.[30] The Indian government had for some while been anxious to determine this frontier, in the hope (which was not to be realised) of putting an end to the unrest which had been endemic to India's north-west frontier. It was now clear that if Shignan and Roshan were to be abandoned, it was urgently necessary to bring the Emir into line. Durand's chances of achieving this objective appeared slim in the extreme, but by means of what must have been some astute diplomacy, he managed to secure Abdur Rahman's acceptance not only of the loss of Shignan and Roshan but also of a reversal of his earlier intention to evacuate part of Wakhan. At the cost of considerable concessions on the main frontier, the Emir was prevailed upon to hold a strip of Wakhan, the so-called 'Wakhan Corridor', south of the Amu Darya and stretching across to Chinese territory (Appendix 6). This enabled the British negotiators to present a confident front in their contacts with the Russians, while in St Petersburg the balance of power once again shifted to the Foreign Ministry. Little happened for some while, with both Giers and Morier seriously ill, and it was not until December that the expected Russian reply arrived.[31] This accepted the Lake Victoria feeder as the frontier line, together with the concept that it should continue from there in a roughly easterly direction. Following detailed exchanges, agreement in principle was finally reached in March 1895 (Appendix 7).

To fill out the agreement, several issues remained to be resolved. One was the need to ensure that no gap remained between Afghan and Chinese territory. This problem had already been eased to some extent when the Chinese had in 1889 asserted their claims up to the Karakorams, so that there was now no gap between Kashgaria and Kashmir.[32] But no frontier agreement had been reached between the Russians and the Chinese, and there was some concern when, after much diplomatic activity, negotiations between them were abandoned in the spring of 1894. However the Russians undertook not to send troops east of the Sarikol range, an undertaking which in the event they observed.[33] Also, when the delimitation took place later in 1895, the British team found that the Chinese had established themselves close to the east of that range and were well aware of what the British and Russians were doing.[34] No problems therefore arose, although



Map 11 Wakhan and the Northern Frontier

Source: Royal Geographical Society

all of a century was to pass before a Sino-Russian agreement was concluded covering the western portion of their common frontier. It would also have been advantageous if agreements had been concluded between the Afghans and the Chinese, and between the latter and British India, but it was not until 1963 that the Chinese signed treaties with Pakistan and Afghanistan which for the first time entailed Chinese recognition of the Wakhan Corridor. Again, however, no problems arose in the intervening period.

Also critical was the question of the arrangements governing the Wakhan Corridor itself. For what it was worth, the Indian government had achieved its aim of preventing the Russians from securing access to the Hindu Kush passes, although at its narrowest, the Corridor was a mere ten miles wide, no further then a man could ride in half a day. While the Indian government had no wish whatever to send troops across the passes into Afghan territory, this was something about which the Russian Ministry of War was distinctly nervous. The initial Russian proposal was that Britain should undertake to move no troops north of the mountains, while they themselves would move no troops south of the Murghab.[35] In the course of the negotiations, however, the Russians abandoned this concept of demilitarised zones and it was agreed instead that that each government would abstain from exerting any 'political influence or control' on the other side of the frontier, and that the British would neither annex the territory belonging to the Emir nor establish any military posts or forts in it. This provision was duly written into the treaty.

Formal delimitation of the frontier had also to be secured, not an easy task in such a remote region. However in July 1895, a joint British and Russian Commission met at Lake Victoria and managed to carry out the 90-mile delimitation successfully.[36] They were helped by the fact that the results of their respective triangulations coincided almost precisely, which was quite an achievement, as the Russians had had to carry theirs from St Petersburg and the British up from India. Since the Indian survey was based ultimately on Greenwich, and Greenwich and St Petersburg had earlier been aligned, in theory the matching should have been exact. In the event, the difference was so small as not to register on any scale of mapping applicable to the region.[37] However, almost inevitably, there turned out to be a 'wide discrepancy between the topography as it actually is, and as it was supposed to be when the convention was drawn up'.[38] Tracing the line of frontier in accordance with the agreed protocol was therefore not straightforward, particularly since the adjustments which had to be made consistently favoured the Russians. A final difficulty involved the Baiyik Pass, which joined the Little Pamir and the Tagdumbash Pamir. The Russian military dug their heels in over the possession of this, to the extent that it was thought that it might have been their final effort to prevent a successful delimitation. More probably, they may have wished at least to preserve the option of by-passing the delimited line and occupying the Tagdumbash Pamir, which would give them easier access to the Hunza passes. The issue was resolved in the Russians' favour, it being the view of the British Commissioner, which coincided with those of Cockerill and Younghusband, that the concession was unimportant, if only because the Hunza passes would be impassable for any but a very small military force.[39] The final marker was erected just in time to enable the British Commission to return to India before winter set in, and they crossed the Darkot Pass just ahead of the first heavy snows.

The final problem was to ensure the respective evacuations of Shignan, Roshan and Darwaz. Although the Afghans announced a full evacuation on June 1894, they were still there later in the year when, contrary to undertakings, the Russians moved troops into Shignan and a clash with an Afghan force took place. It was not for almost another two years that a complete disengagement seems to have been achieved. Nor could prompt assurances of a Bokharan withdrawal from Darwaz be obtained, and effective Afghan control of this territory was for a long time lacking.[40] In his dealings with the Indian government, Abdur Rahman made the most of his concessions, as well as of the trouble and cost of administering the Wakhan Corridor, and it was not until 1897 that, with the grant of a substantial annual subsidy, the issue was put to rest.[41]

17 Epilogue

Writing after the completion of the Pamirs delimitation, Thomas Holdich, the chief British surveyor, waxed lyrical:

> Amidst the voiceless waste of a vast white wilderness 20,000 feet above the sea, absolutely inaccessible to man and within the ken of no living creature but the Pamir eagles – there the three great empires actually meet. It is a fitting trijunction. No god of Hindu mythology ever occupied a more stupendous throne.[1]

In fact he was wrong. Quite deliberately, British statesmen and negotiators had made sure that the three empires did not meet, there or anywhere else. At the bounds of the Russian empire in Central Asia and throughout their length stood not British territory, but Persia and Afghanistan. It was no accident that the Pamirs agreement referred to a frontier between 'spheres of influence' rather than countries, even if the Khanate of Bokhara was, on the Russian side, hardly deserving of any term looser than 'sphere of subjection'. It was Afghanistan on which the British relied as the final 'buffer' which was to secure India's frontier with Central Asia.

For both powers, the line of frontier was less than satisfactory. For the Russians, it fell short of the 'natural' frontier which they had coveted: they did not hold Badakhshan, nor did they command the passes. In theory, a hostile army bent on offensive operations could be deployed without hindrance on the northern side of the mountain barrier. From the British point of view, its western portion, between Persia and the Amu Darya, was wholly 'unscientific', in that it bore little or no relation to any topographical or ethnic divide. It ran through a largely featureless region and Turkmen, Uzbeks and Tajiks were to be found on both sides of it. At its eastern end, although keeping British and Russian territory apart, the gap was wafer thin, narrower than British ministers had earlier considered acceptable.[2] The frontier's other defect was that it entailed a dependence on an Afghanistan which could not be relied upon indefinitely. While Abdur Rahman was likely to remain a firm enough ally as long as he lived, his presumed successor, Habibullah, appeared to be of a different stamp. When he did come to the throne in 1901, he promptly renounced the British subsidy and declared that he would conduct his own relations with foreign powers, including the Russians.

Many observers therefore believed that it would be only a matter of time before the Russians would resume their southerly advance, and that there was no guarantee that they would not breach the frontier whenever they had a mind to do so. Ridgeway, however, was proved right: while the frontier would clearly have had no value if a crisis had arisen involving the two powers elsewhere in the world, it was never in itself the cause of such a crisis. As things turned out, it was to be the limit of Tsarist Russia's advances in Central Asia and was the point at which the Indian frontier was secured. It was, nevertheless, a close run thing. As late as 1898, the Russians were still thinking in terms of a possible invasion of India. A plan drawn up by a Captain Lebedev of the Imperial Grenadier Guards in that year was followed by preparations in Turkestan and Transcaspia for the occupation of Herat and attempts by Russia to establish direct relations between St Petersburg and Kabul, although this was not an unreasonable ambition given that their frontiers were now contiguous along their length.[3] By the early twentieth century, however, sentiment in St Petersburg was beginning to change, and the Tsar was receiving advice that it would be unwise to take advantage of the British embroilment in the Boer War to cause trouble for her in Asia or elsewhere.[4] For the British, the Boer War was proving unnerving and the feeling was growing that Britain was becoming globally over-extended. Germany was growing stronger and the balance of power in Europe was becoming uncertain. For Russia, a moment of truth came in February 1904, when the Japanese attacked Port Arthur and brought about its capitulation, and followed this with the capture of Mukden. Then ensued the Revolution of 1905, when demonstrators were killed outside the Winter Palace in St Petersburg. The war in Manchuria went from bad to worse and in May of that year a Russian fleet was virtually annihilated by the Japanese. Russian sentiment, too, was that the country was overstretched and needed to reduce its international commitments wherever possible.

By 1905, therefore, the first steps had been taken towards a rapprochement between Britain and Russia, and these were developed when the Liberal government came to office late in that year. In March 1906, the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, suggested the negotiation of a formal agreement. Talks began in September 1906 and the Anglo-Russian Convention was signed in August 1907.[5] It consisted of three separate agreements covering Persia, Afghanistan and Tibet. Although Persia had not featured as a potential *casus belli* for several decades, Britain had become nervous of successful Russian political, commercial and financial inroads there, which they feared might presage a Russian presence on the Persian Gulf or Seistan. Under the Convention, the country was divided into spheres of influence, the Russian to the north and the British to the south, with a no man's land in between. In Afghanistan (without Habibullah having any say at all in the matter) Russia reiterated that the country was outside her sphere of influence, while Britain undertook not to change its political status. In Tibet, both countries undertook to refrain from any interference and to recognise Chinese sovereignty.

The Convention did not put a total end to regional tensions between the two powers: one reckoning is that, but for the onset of the First World War, it would have been very likely to break down.[6] Whatever the continuing tensions and suspicions, however, the Convention did consolidate the territorial settlement of 1895, and both created a degree of mutual confidence which was earlier lacking. The frontier itself has remained unchanged, although both Imperial Russia and British India have vanished into history. The Soviet decision to breach it in 1979 was a major misjudgement and contributed materially to the fall of the Soviet Union itself. The frontier now divides Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and China from Iran, Afghanistan and the Indian subcontinent. The region remains unstable and a major focus of international involvement and concern, and it would be a bold man who would predict that the frontier will survive intact over the second century of its existence.

Appendix 1

The Gorchakov Memorandum of 1864

(Circular.) **St Petersburg: November 21, 1864**

The Russian newspapers have given an account of the last military operations executed by a detachment of our troops in the regions of Central Asia with remarkable success and important results. It was to be foreseen that these events would the more attract the attention of the foreign public that their scene was laid in scarcely known countries.

Our august Master has commanded me to state to you briefly, but with clearness and precision, the position in which we find ourselves in Central Asia, the interests which inspire us in those countries, and the end which we have in view.

The position of Russia in Central Asia is that of all civilised States which are brought into contact with half-savage nomad populations, possessing no fixed social organisation.

In such cases it always happens that the more civilised State is found, in the interest of the security of its frontier and its commercial relations, to exercise a certain ascendancy over those whom their turbulent and unsettled character make most undesirable neighbours. First, there are raids and acts of pillage to be put down. To put a stop to them, the tribes on the frontier have to be reduced to a state of more or less perfect submission. This result once attained, these tribes take to more peaceful habits, but are in their turn exposed to the attacks of the more distant tribes.

The State is bound to defend them against these depredations, and to punish those who commit them. Hence the necessity of distant, costly, and periodically recurring expeditions against an enemy whom his social organisation makes it impossible to seize. If, the robbers once punished, the expedition is withdrawn, the lesson is soon forgotten; its withdrawal is put down to weakness. It is a peculiarity of Asiatics to respect nothing but visible and palpable force; the moral force of reason and of the interests of civilisation has as yet no hold upon them. The work has then always to be done over again from the beginning.

In order to put a stop to this state of permanent disorder, fortified posts are established in the midst of these hostile tribes, and an influence is brought to bear upon them which reduces them by degrees to a state of more or less forced submission. But soon beyond this second line other still more distant tribes come in their turn to threaten the same dangers and necessitate the same measures of repression. The State thus finds itself forced to choose one of two alternatives, either to give up this endless labour and to abandon its frontier to perpetual disturbance, rendering all prosperity, all security, all civilisation an impossibility, or, on the other hand, to plunge deeper and deeper into barbarous countries, where the difficulties and expenses increase with every step in advance.

Such has been the fate of every country which has found itself in a similar position. The United States of America, France in Algeria, Holland in her Colonies, England in India – all have been irresistibly forced, less by ambition than by imperious necessity, into this onward march, where the greatest difficulty is to know when to stop.

Such, too, have been the reasons which have led the Imperial Government to take up at first a position resting on one side on the Syr-Daria, on the other on the Lake Issyk-Kaul, and to strengthen these two lines by advanced forts, which, little by little, have crept on into the heart of those distant regions, without however succeeding in establishing on the other side of our frontiers that tranquillity which is indispensable for their security.

The explanation of this unsettled state of things is to be found, first, in the fact that, between the extreme points of this double line, there is an immense unoccupied space, where all attempts at colonisation or caravan trade are paralysed by the inroads of the robber tribes; and, in the second place, in the perpetual fluctuations of the political condition of those countries, where Turkistan and Khokand, sometimes united, sometimes at variance, always at war, either with one another or with Bokhara, presented no chance of settled relations or of any regular transactions whatever.

The Imperial Government thus found itself, in spite of all its efforts, in the dilemma we have above alluded to, that is to say, compelled either to permit the continuance of a state of permanent disorder, paralysing to all security and progress, or to condemn itself to costly and distant expeditions, leading to no practical result, and with the work always to be done anew; or, lastly, to enter upon the undefined path of conquest and annexation which has given to England the Empire of India, by attempting the subjugation by armed force, one after another, of the small independent States whose habits of pillage and turbulence and whose perpetual revolts leave their neighbours neither peace nor repose.

Neither of these alternative courses was in accordance with the object of our august Master's policy, which consists, not in extending beyond all reasonable bounds the regions under his sceptre, but in giving a solid basis to his rule, in guaranteeing their security, and in developing their social organisation, their commerce, their well-being, and their civilisation.

Our task was, therefore, to discover a system adapted to the attainment of this three-fold object.

The following principles have, in consequence, been laid down:-

1. It has been judged to be indispensable that our two fortified frontier lines – one extending from China to the Lake Issyk-Kaul, the other from the Sea of

Aral along the Syr-Daria – should be united by fortified points, so that all our posts should be in a position of mutual support, leaving no gap through which the nomad tribes might make with impunity their inroads and depredations.

2. It was essential that the line of our advanced forts thus completed should be situated in a country fertile enough, not only to insure their supplies, but also to facilitate the regular colonisation, which alone can prepare a future of stability and prosperity for the occupied country, by gaining over the neighbouring populations to civilised life.
3, And, lastly, it was urgent to lay down this line definitively, so as to escape the danger of being carried away, as is almost inevitable, by a series of repressive measures and reprisals, into an unlimited extension of territory.

To attain this end a system had to be established, which should depend not only on reason, which may be elastic, but on geographical and political conditions, which are fixed and permanent.

This system was suggested to us by a very simple fact, the result of long experience, namely, that the nomad tribes, which can neither be seized nor punished, nor effectually kept in order, are our most inconvenient neighbours; while, on the other hand, agricultural and commercial populations attached to the soil, and possessing a more advanced social organisation, offer us every chance of gaining neighbours with whom there is a possibility of entering into relations.

Consequently, our frontier line ought to swallow up the former, and stop short at the limit of the latter.

These three principles supply a clear, natural, and logical explanation of our last military operations in Central Asia. In fact, our original frontier line, extending along the Syr-Daria to Fort Perovsky on one side, and on the other to the Lake Issyk-Kaul, had the drawback of being almost on the verge of the desert. It was broken by a wide gap between the two extreme points: it did not offer sufficient resources to our troops, and left unsettled tribes over the border, with which any settled arrangement became impossible.

In spite of our unwillingness to extend our frontier, these motives had been powerful enough to induce the Imperial Government to establish this line between Lake Issyk-Kaul and the Syr-Daria, by fortifying the town of Tchemkend, lately occupied by us. By the adoption of this line we obtain a double result. In the first place, the country it takes in is fertile, well wooded, and watered by numerous watercourses; it is partly inhabited by various Kirghiz tribes, which have already accepted our rule; it consequently offers favourable conditions for colonisation and the supply of provisions to our garrisons. In the second place, it puts us in the immediate neighbourhood of the agricultural and commercial populations of Khokand. We find ourselves in presence of a more solid and compact, less unsettled, and better organised social state; fixing for us with geographical precision the limit up to which we are bound to advance, and at which we must halt, because, while on the one hand any further extension of our rule, meeting, as it would, no longer with unstable communities, such as the nomad tribes, but with more regularly constituted States, would entail considerable exertions, and would draw us on from annexation to annexation with unforeseen complications; on the other, with such States for our future neighbours, their backward civilisation, and the instability of their political condition, do not shut us out from the hope that the day may come when regular relations may, to the advantage of both parties, take the place of the permanent troubles which have up to the present moment paralysed all progress in those countries.

Such, sir, are the interests which inspire the policy of our august Master in Central Asia: such is the object, by his Imperial Majesty's orders, of the action of his Cabinet.

You are requested to take these arguments as your guide in any explanations you may give to the Government to which you are accredited, in case questions are asked or you may see credence given to erroneous ideas as to our action in these distant parts.

It is needless for me to lay stress upon the interests which Russia evidently has not to increase her territory, and, above all, to avoid raising complications on her frontiers, which can but delay and paralyse her domestic development.

The programme which I have just traced is in accordance with these views.

Very frequently of late years the civilisation of these countries, which are her neighbours on the continent of Asia, has been assigned to Russia as her special mission.

No agent has been found more apt for the progress of civilisation than commercial relations. Their development requires everywhere order and stability; but in Asia it demands a complete transformation of the habits of the people. The first thing to be taught to the populations of Asia is that they will gain more in favouring and protecting the caravan trade than in robbing them. These elementary ideas can only be accepted by the public where one exists; that is to say, where there is some organised form of society and a Government to direct and represent it.

We are accomplishing the first part of our task in carrying our frontier to the limit where the indispensable conditions are to be found.

The second we shall accomplish in making every effort henceforward to prove to our neighbouring States, by a system of firmness in the repression of their misdeeds, combined with moderation and justice in the use of our strength, and respect for their independence, that Russia is not their enemy, that she entertains towards them no ideas of conquest, and that peaceful and commercial relations with her are more profitable than disorder, pillage, reprisals, and a permanent state of war.

The Imperial Cabinet, in assuming this task, takes as its guide the interests of Russia. But it believes that, at the same time, it is promoting the interests of humanity and civilisation. It has a right to expect that the line of conduct it pursues and the principles which guide it will meet with a just and candid appreciation.

(Signed) Gorchakov.

Appendix 2

The Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1873

1. Earl Granville to Lord A. Loftus

Foreign Office, October 17, 1872

My Lord,

Her Majesty's Government have not yet received from the Cabinet of St. Petersburg communication of the Report which General Kaufman was long since instructed to draw up on the countries south of the Oxus which are claimed by the Ruler of Afghanistan as his hereditary possessions.

Her Majesty's Government have awaited this communication in full confidence that impartial inquiries instituted by that distinguished officer would confirm the views they themselves take of this matter, and so enable the two Governments come to a prompt and definitive decision on the question that has been so long in discussion between them.

But as the expected communication has not reached them, and as they consider it of importance both for the maintenance of peace and tranquillity in Central Asia, and for removing all causes of misunderstanding between the Imperial Government and themselves, I will no longer delay making known through your Excellency the conclusion at which Her Majesty's Government have arrived after carefully weighing all the evidence before them.

In the opinion, then, of Her Majesty's Government the right of the Ameer of Kabul (Shere Ali) to the possession of the territories up to the Oxus as far down as Khoja Saleh is fully established, and they believe, and have so stated to him through the Indian Government, that he would have a right to defend these territories if invaded. On the other hand, Her Majesty's authorities in India have declared their determination to remonstrate strongly with the Ameer should he evince any disposition to overstep these limits to his kingdom.

Hitherto the Ameer has proved most amenable to the advice offered to him by the Indian Government, and has cordially accepted the peaceful policy which they have recommended him to adopt, because the Indian Government have been able to accompany their advice with an assurance that the territorial integrity of Afghanistan would in like manner be respected by those Powers beyond his frontiers which are amenable to the influence of Russia. The policy thus happily inaugurated has produced the most beneficial results in the establishment of peace in the countries where it has long been unknown.

Her Majesty's Government believe that it is now in the power of the Russian Government, by an explicit recognition of the right of the Ameer of Cabul to these territories which he now claims, which Bokhara herself admits to be his, and which all evidence as yet produced shows to be in his actual and effectual possession, to assist the British Government in perpetuating, as far as it is in human power to do so, the peace and prosperity of those regions, and in removing for ever by such means all cause of uneasiness and jealousy between England and Russia in regard to their respective policies in Asia.

For Your Excellency's more complete information I state the territories and boundaries which Her Majesty's Government consider as fully belonging to the Ameer of Cabul, viz:-

(1) Badakhshan, with its dependent district Wakhan from the Sarikal (Wood's Lake) on the east to the junction of the Kokcha River with the Oxus (or Panjah), forming the northern boundary of this Afghan province throughout its entire extent.
(2) Afghan Turkestan, comprising the districts of Kunduz, Khulm and Balkh, the northern boundary of which would be the line of the Oxus from the junction of the Kotchka River to the post of Khoja Saleh, inclusive, on the high road from Bokhara to Balkh. Nothing to be claimed by the Afghan Ameer on the left bank of the Oxus below Khoja Saleh.
(3) The internal districts of Aksha, Seripool, Maimana, Shibberjan, and Andkoi, the latter of which would be the extreme Afghan frontier possession to the north-west, the desert beyond belonging to independent tribes of Turkomans.
(4) The western Afghan frontier between the dependencies of Herat and those of the Persian province of Khorassan is well known and need not here be defined.

Your Excellency will give a copy of this despatch to the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs.

I am, &c.
(Signed) Granville.

2. Prince Gorchakov to Count Brunnow

St Petersburg. 31 January 1873.

Lord Loftus has communicated to me the response of Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State to our despatch on Central Asia, dated 19 January.

I attach below a copy of this document.

We see with satisfaction that the English Cabinet continues to pursue in these parts the same object as ourselves, that of ensuring peace and, as far as possible, tranquillity.

The divergence which existed between our views was with regard to the frontiers assigned to the dominions of Shere Ali.

The English cabinet includes within them Badakhshan and Wakhan, which, according to our views, enjoyed a certain independence. Considering the difficulty experienced in establishing the facts in all their details in those distant parts, considering the greater facilities which the British Government possesses for collecting precise data, and, above all, considering our wish not to give to this question of detail greater importance than is due to it, we do not refuse to accept the boundary line laid down by England.

We are the more inclined to this act of courtesy as the English Government engages to use all its influence with Shere Ali in order to induce him to maintain a peaceful attitude as well as to insist on his giving up all measures of aggression or further conquest. This influence is indisputable. It is based not only on the material and moral ascendancy of England, but also on the subsidies for which Shere Ali is indebted to her. Such being the case, we see in this assurance a real guarantee for the maintenance of peace.

Would Your Excellency please convey this declaration to Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State and give him a copy of this despatch.

Lord Granville will see in it, we are convinced, a new proof of the importance that our august Master attaches to creating and consolidating the best relations with the government of Her Majesty Queen Victoria.

Receive etc.
Gortchakov

Appendix 3

The Gorchakov Memorandum of 1875

St Petersburg, 5 April 1875

Several years ago, Russia found herself obliged to take military measures to establish order and peace on the Kirghiz steppes. These measures have consequently put her in the position of having to make considerable territorial acquisitions. Since then, the British public has attributed to us plans of conquest directed against Britain, and menacing the peace of British possessions in India.

These erroneous commentaries on our political designs in Central Asia could have led, in our friendly relations with England, to causes of strain which the Imperial Cabinet was concerned to avoid.

It was for this purpose that the Circular of 31 November 1864 was addressed to our Legations abroad.

This document was of a purely confidential nature. It was not published until 1865, after the British government had learnt about it from one of its overseas Legations. This fact and the precise nature of our declarations excluded the possibility of any interpretation implying a contractual obligation by Russia towards Europe or any particular Power. The Imperial government's thoughts were precisely expressed; they set out the principles which had guided, up to that point, our policy in Central Asia, and declared spontaneously the ultimate aim that the orders of His Majesty the Emperor had laid down for his Cabinet's activities in these countries.

In stating the motives which had caused us not to cross the line traced from Chimkent to Issiz-Kul, the circular signaled, at the same time, as the basis of the whole arrangement, the need to draw our frontiers at the precise point at which fixed populations begin, offering elements of a stable social organism with which it would be possible for us to establish normal relations.

It was necessary to create and develop these relations, on the one hand civilising by colonisation the nomadic tribes encircled by the new line of our frontiers and, on the other, attracting, through the security of transactions and reciprocal advantage, the people of Kokand, with whom this new line put us in contact, and establishing commercial and peaceful relations. This was the twin aim towards which, from that moment, all our efforts have been directed.

Unfortunately the incessantly recurring difficulties which result from contact between a regularly constituted Power and half-savage neighbours soon forced us to go beyond the limits which we had voluntarily traced.

Obliged to defend ourselves against the continual aggression of the neighbouring countries and to chastise an enemy whose social organisation rendered elusive, we had soon to conclude that in order to consolidate our new territorial acquisitions, we had above all to establish beyond our frontiers the peace which was indispensable for our security.

The cause of this instability resided, first, in the proximity of tribes whose nomadic and turbulent customs paralysed all colonisation and all caravan commerce; then, in the perpetual fluctuations of the political situation of these countries, where Tashkent and Kokand, sometimes united, sometimes separated, always at war, either between themselves or with Bokhara, offered no opportunity of permanent relations or of any sort of normal dealings.

The Imperial Government was therefore faced unwillingly with the alternative of allowing a state of permanent disorder to persist, which paralysed all security and all progress, or of seeking to subdue by force of arms the small independent States whose pillaging customs and permanent dissensions left their neighbours neither truce nor repose.

It is thus that having crossed the desert which separated us from Turkistan, our soldiers, masters of Tashkent, found themselves faced with the army of the Emir of Bokhara.

The conduct of that chief was not slow in provoking a conflict, the consequences of which, exceeding the immediate expectations of the Imperial Cabinet, led our troops to Samarkand, which submitted without a fight.

From the beginning of this complication we had frankly indicated to the British Cabinet the danger to which the Emir was necessarily exposing himself if he launched himself into a conflict which we had done nothing to provoke.

The explanation given by our Ambassador in London satisfied Lord Clarendon, the Foreign Secretary, who declared to him that the rapid advances of Russian troops had provoked neither surprise nor alarm on the part of the British Government, but that this feeling of security was far from being shared by the British public, or by that of India; that to calm this fever, which could put in peril the good relationship currently existing between Russia and Britain, it was to be wished that between the Russian and British possessions there should be a neutral territory, in order to avoid the shock which direct contact between the two great Powers meeting in the centre of Asia would cause.

These propositions of Lord Clarendon corresponded so well with the views of the Imperial Government that it was impossible not to receive them favourably. Consequently, orders were given to Count Brunow to embark on confidential discussions on the subject with the British government.

After these exchanges, profiting from the stay of the Imperial Secretary at Baden-Baden, Lord Clarendon, who was then at Wiesbaden, asked for a meeting with him, with the object of arriving, through an exchange of ideas, at the best means for maintaining, between Russia and Britain, good relations conforming to their mutual interests in Central Asia. The town of Heidelburg was chosen as their meeting place.

This meeting resulted in an agreement based on the maintenance, between Russia and Great Britain, of an intermediate zone, designed to separate their possessions in Asia.

Within this context, it was understood that Afghanistan would form an independent State, which would remain beyond Russian influence.

In the meantime, we asked the British Government that the territorial extent of Afghanistan should be determined within the boundaries of the Khanates of Herat, Kabul and Kandahar actually in the possession of the Emir Sher Ali Khan.

Lord Clarendon later tried to extend these limits with the aim of better defining the boundaries of Afghanistan, until then badly determined in the north through the absence of clearly marked out frontiers.

In order to make up for this lack of precision, Lord Clarendon expressed the wish to settle on an imaginary line which would extend the frontiers of Afghanistan to the left bank of the Oxus.

This geographic line did not correspond to the large areas to which we had agreed to apply this principle: it stretched notably beyond Afghan territory proper and far exceeded the limits recognised by us.

In consequence, instructions were given to our Ambassador to decline Lord Clarendon's proposition.

Baron Brunow duly registered this refusal, delivering to the Foreign Secretary an extract from a letter dated 26 August 1869, in which His Highness Prince Gortchakov had set out this refusal.

This negative response put an end to the confidential exchanges between our Ambassador and Lord Clarendon on the subject of the neutral zone.

Having been definitively closed in London, this question was taken up again in St Petersburg in 1869 during the stay of Mr Forsyth, an Indian Government official, who was authorised by the Viceroy, Lord Mayo, to go to St Petersburg in order to exchange ideas on questions of interest to the two governments.

The considerations which served as the point of departure of Mr Forsyth's confidential exchanges with the Imperial Government can be summarised as follows:

1. The two Governments were animated by the same desire to prevent, so far as they were able, all the misunderstandings which might arise from the lack of political organisation of the independent States, known geographically under the collective names of Afghanistan and Turkestan.
2. It was understood that up to now both Britain and Russia had undertaken military expeditions in one or another part of Asia, and had added new territories to their possessions, this activity having been dictated only by force of local circumstances and the impossibility of acting otherwise.
3. As things stood, since the Russian and British frontiers in Central Asia could not be considered as immutable, an international arrangement on this point would be ineffective; the best way to arrive at a satisfactory result would

therefore be to try to establish, so far as possible, some general bases of political equilibrium for the countries which separated the Russian and British possessions in Central Asia.

In consequence of which it was agreed:

1. That the territories actually in the effective possession of Sher Ali Khan should be considered as forming the limits of Afghanistan.
2. That this Emir would not seek to exercise any influence nor any involvement beyond these limits, and that the British Government would make every effort to discourage him from any act of aggression.
3. That on its side, the Imperial Government would use all its influence to prevent the Emir of Bokhara from making any attack on Afghan territory.

These principles received the full adherence of the Cabinet in London and the Governor General of India.

In the month of May 1870, Her Majesty's Ambassador at St. Petersburg sent the Imperial Government a despatch from Lord Mayo which, basing itself on the agreement reached between the two Powers, purported to fix, from then on, the limits of Sher Ali Khan's possessions, basing itself on the information gathered on this subject by the Indian Government.

The despatch however attributed to this information an interpretation which did not entirely correspond to the precise sense of the agreement reached as a consequence of the exchange of views between the Cabinets of London and St. Petersburg.

In fact, having stated that Sher Ali Khan's possessions to the north and north-west *seemed* to coincide *nearly exactly* with those of his father, Lord Mayo arrived at the conclusion that the limits of Dost Mohammed's kingdom could in general be adopted *as the limits destined to separate the Kingdom of Afghanistan from the other States of Central Asia* to the north and north west.

Now, at the time of the discussions with Mr Forsyth, it was agreed that the territories should be those which had formerly recognised the authority of Dost Mohammed and which *were still found today to be in the effective possession of Sher Ali Khan.*

This important nuance marked the difference between our point of view and that of Lord Mayo.

However, before coming to a definite view, the Imperial Government thought it necessary to acquire some positive information about these far off and imperfectly known countries.

The Governor-General of Turkestan was therefore charged with gathering all the information which could clarify the position and allow the Imperial Government to form a practical opinion in full knowledge of the facts.

The question which needed to be resolved had two aspects:

1. To determine the actual state of Sher Ali Khan's effective possessions;

2. To discover, on the basis of the status quo, the best delimitation, so as to respond to the aims of the discussion between the Imperial Government and that of Britain: that is to avoid, as much as possible, the causes of conflicts and mutual collisions between the neighbouring Khanates, and, consequently, to guarantee between them, so far as possible, the state of peace which the two governments would henceforth respectively endeavour to make respected by every means in their power.

It next resulted from the information furnished by General Kaufman:

1. That in the north, the Amu Darya constituted the normal frontier of Afghanistan, from its confluence with the Kotchka to the point of Khoja Saleh.
   To that extent our information accorded with the view of the British government.
2. To the north east, the information which we had collected assigned the confluence of this river with the Kotchka as the limit of the territories over which Sher Ali Khan exercised an incontestable effective sovereignty. Beyond this limit and notably in regard to Badakhshan and Wakhan, it had been impossible to recover any trace of such a sovereignty; the whole of the information presented, on the contrary, a number of signs which indicated that these territories were independent. Thus in the whole of the region there were no signs which, in Asia, accompany the exercise of sovereignty; that is to say, the presence of Afghan officers and employees to collect tax. Moreover the Chiefs of Badakhshan considered themselves, and have at all times been considered by their neighbours, as independent Chiefs.
3. As for Wakhan, this country remained, at least to this day, even further from the direct influence of the Chiefs of Afghanistan.
4. As for the recognised limits of Afghanistan to the north west, beginning from Khoja Saleh, our information equally indicated doubts about the effective possession by the Emir of Kabul to the towns of Akcha, Seripul, Maimana, Shiberghan and Andkhoi, which Britain proposed to include in the recognised boundaries of Afghanistan.

However, when these questions were still being studied, the Imperial Ministry of Foreign Affairs received a new despatch from Lord Granville which upheld the opinion given by Lord Mayo on the points under discussion.

In reply to this communication, the Imperial Cabinet proceeded to transmit to her Majesty's Government the information given by the Governor General of Turkestan, with the conclusions which appeared to follow from them.

After having indicated the points on which the opinion of the two governments differed, the Imperial Cabinet was particularly concerned to keep Badakhshan and Wakhan as independent States beyond the frontiers assigned to Sher Ali Khan.

It insisted more than ever on this point because as things stood, there existed no conflict between Badakhshan and its neighbours. Bokhara had no claim to this country. The two States were moreover too feeble, too absorbed by their internal affairs to seek any quarrels. Britain and Russia had thus only to take care to maintain this state of peace, both between the Khanates and between Afghanistan and Badakhshan. It would be wholly different the day that the Emir of Kabul extended his authority over Badakhshan and Wakhan. He would find himself in immediate contact with Kashgar, Kokand and Bokhara, from which he was hitherto separated by these two countries; and it would be much more difficult thereafter to avoid conflicts arising, be it from his ambition and feeling of power, or from the jealousy of his neighbours.

Such were the considerations which had led the Imperial Government to maintain its point of view so far as Wakhan and Badakhshan were concerned.

As for Afghanistan's limits in the north-west, although doubts existed about the Emir of Kabul's actual possession of the towns of Akcha, Seripul, Maimana, Shiberghan and Andkhoi, the Imperial Cabinet declared that it was disposed to admit their annexation to Afghan territory.

Despite these important concessions, the British government felt itself unable to agree to the combination proposed by us. This being the case, not wishing to delay any longer the settlement of this question, the Imperial Cabinet, in its despatch of 19 January 1873 agreed to the joining of Badakhshan and Wakhan to Afghan territory and also gave its full and entire agreement to the line of demarcation proposed in Lord Granville's despatch of 17 October 1872.

At this point the Khiva expedition was decided.

Continual brigandage, the imposition of charges on the Kirghiz under our rule, incitement of the nomads to revolt, the capture of our subjects and their enslavement; such were the deeds which over many years demanded the adoption of decisive measures against this Khanate. Nevertheless, we still retained the hope of establishing by peaceful means more normal relations with our turbulent neighbours.

More than once we had delivered moderate protests to the Khan, but they had remained without response or had been met by an arrogant rejection on his part.

After the failure of these repeated efforts, an expedition was decided upon.

Although, after the agreement reached between the Imperial Government and that of Great Britain concerning a neutral zone between the British and Russian possessions, the Khanate of Khiva remained entirely in our sphere of action, we thought we should make an act of courtesy in not adopting any decisive measure against Khiva before having informed Britain of it.

The Imperial Government had no intention whatever of conquering or annexing any part of Khivan territory. Its aim was, first, to chastise the Khan for the past; and then to create a state of affairs which safeguarded our subjects from the incursions and depredations of the Khivans and Turkmen, and made possible the development of commercial relations.

Formal instructions to this effect were given to the commander of the expedition.

These considerations were spontaneously brought to the notice of the British Government by Aide-de-Camp General Count Shuvalov, who was sent to London for the purpose.

However, when Khiva had been occupied and it was possible to discover the internal state of the country, it had to be realised that, even with the best will on the part of the Khan to conduct good neighbourly relations with us, he lacked the means to do this, since his influence over the Turkmen was practically nil and it often happened that he himself, as well as his subjects, had to acknowledge the ascendancy of these brigands of the steppes.

Therefore, after the departure of our expeditionary force, the same incursions would have infallibly recommenced; the Imperial Government would have been obliged to send another burdensome expedition to inflict a new punishment on the Turkmen, and, in this case, it would have been impossible to preserve the autonomy of Khiva.

That is why it was considered necessary to construct a fort on the right bank of the Amu Darya with a garrison sufficient to protect our frontiers against Turkmen attacks. It was also necessary to safeguard the communications of this fort and its garrison with Turkestan.

We were consequently obliged to join to our possessions the arid desert which stretched between this province and the newly constructed fort. However useless and onerous such a territorial acquisition was for us, it was inevitable, seeing that the Khan himself had realised and declared that he would only be able to fulfill his obligations towards us if he had a detachment and body of Russian troops in his vicinity. His wishes went further than this; he had strongly urged the presence of Russian troops in the town of Khiva itself.

Such were the results of the expedition against Khiva; they were imposed on us by a state of affairs which it was impossible to foresee and by requirements beyond our control.

We had every reason to suppose that the frank explanations of our Ambassador in London would remove all the apprehensions of the British Government.

Unfortunately we soon had to accept that the contrary was the case.

When the Peace Treaty concluded between General Kaufman and the Khan of Khiva was published, Lord Granville, in his despatch dated 7 January 1874, ordered the British Ambassador in St, Petersburg to draw the attention of the Imperial Government to the dangers which Russian progress in Central Asia could cause for the political equilibrium which the two countries had tried to establish by agreement in these regions.

Having stated that the British Government saw no practical point in examining too closely whether the clauses of the Peace Treaty concluded with Khiva conformed strictly with the assurances which Count Shuvalov had given, Lord Granville indicated to the Imperial Government the apprehensions aroused in Afghanistan by the widespread rumours of a Russian expedition against Merv and against the Turkmen tribes in that neighbourhood.

He foresaw that in such a case, it could easily happen that that the Turkmen would be forced to take refuge in the province of Badghis in Herat, and that it was then to be feared that that might lead the Russian authorities to demand that the Emir should prevent the Turkmen from committing aggression, or permit Russian forces to enter Afghan territory in order to punish hostile tribes.

Consequently, he expressed the firm hope that in that eventuality, the Imperial Government would seriously consider the dangers which might result from such an expedition and would acknowledge frankly, once and for all, that the independence of Afghanistan was considered of great importance for the well-being and security of British India and the peace of Asia.

However keen was the desire of the Imperial Government to accede to the wishes of the British Government, which accorded with its own attitude, it was impossible for it to defer completely to these friendly representations. They did not seem at all in accord with the spirit of the understanding which had previously been established between the two Cabinets. Their effect tended, on the one hand, to restrict the sphere of action which had been conceded to us in the programme set out by common accord between the two Cabinets, since Merv lay well beyond the recognised frontiers of Afghanistan; and, on the other, to diminish the value of the undertakings which followed for the British Government from the same accords, under the terms of which Britain undertook to use all its influence with Sher Ali Khan to lead him to preserve a friendly attitude.

In his despatch in reply of 21 January 1874, His Highness Prince Gortchakov reiterated the positive assurance that the Imperial Government still considered Afghanistan entirely outside its sphere of action. It added that if, on both sides, the two governments used their ascendancy over the states within the limits of their influence in order to prevent any aggression, there was every reason to hope that no collision would occur to disturb the peace of Central Asia. As for the danger which, in Lord Granville's opinion might result from an expedition against the Turkmen, the Chancellor declared that we had no intention of taking military measures against these tribes; that it depended entirely on them to preserve a good understanding with us, but that, if they committed acts of aggression and brigandage against us, we would have to chastise them. In that case, although the outcome indicated by Sher Ali Khan was improbable, the Emir of Kabul could contribute in diminishing its likelihood by making it completely clear in advance to the Turkmen that if they were to provoke strong measures through acts of depredation against us, they could not count on any assistance on his part.

This despatch closed the series of communications exchanged between the two governments on the affairs of Central Asia.

It is clear from reading these diplomatic documents that the misunderstanding which seems to exist between the British Government and ourselves has no foundation.

The Cabinet in London appears to derive, from the fact of our having on several occasions spontaneously and amicably communicated to them our views with respect to Central Asia, and particularly our firm resolve not to pursue a policy of conquest or annexation, a conviction that we have contracted definite engagements toward them in regard to this matter.

Owing to the fact that events have forced us against our will, to depart, to a certain extent, from our programme, they seem to conclude that the Imperial Cabinet has failed to observe their formal promises.

Lastly, in view of the successive steps which we have been forced to take in these countries, they infer that it is the right and duty of Britain to take on her side measures to restrain our action, paralyze our influence, and to secure herself against eventual aggression.

These conclusions are not in agreement either with the facts or the spirit and letter of the conventions established between the two governments.

It has always been understood that either party retains complete liberty of action and judgement of the measures needed for their respective security.

Since 1864, when we gave in our first circular the assurance of our firm intention not to extend our possessions in Asia beyond the limits of strict necessity, we have clearly and honestly indicated the eventualities in which the precarious state of these countries might cause us to intervene.

These necessities were so well understood by Lord Clarendon that in taking note of our unsolicited assurances, he replied that the British, with their experience in India, knew full well the impossibility for a government, having to establish its rule over barbarous countries, to fix the limits at which it could stop.

The same principles had guided our discussions with Mr Forsyth. He recognised in particular, *that as things stood, the Russian and English frontiers in Asia not being considered as incapable of alteration, an international agreement on that point would be ineffectual.*

But, apart from this freedom, reserved to the two governments in a spirit of practical wisdom, the following points have been established by common agreement:

1. That any antagonism between them in this region would be contrary to their mutual interests and to the civilising mission to which each are called in the sphere of their natural influence; that they would have every advantage in adopting a mutual agreement to maintain a state of peace between the Khans of Central Asia and not to permit the Khans' intrigues to conflict with the interests of the two great Empires.
2. That to this effect it was desirable to keep an intermediary zone between them, which would keep them from immediate contact.
3. That Afghanistan should constitute this intermediate zone, if its independence was safeguarded on both sides.
4. That the limits of this state would be recognised following the line agreed at the end of a long negotiation.
5. That the two governments would devote themselves reciprocally in their spheres of influence, Britain over the Afghan Emir, Russia over the Khans of Bokhara and Kokand, to preventing any aggression on the part of one of these chiefs against the independence and security of another.

Such were the precise bases of the accord established between the two governments.

The Imperial Government has not ceased for its part to keep them in view and conform to them in its acts.

In spite of the terms of this accord, which leaves us with full liberty of action over the whole of the territory situated between our frontiers and those of

Afghanistan, Kokand preserves its autonomy and owes a considerable increase in its prosperity to the good relations which it has with us. It would have been the same with Bokhara if the Emir had not allowed himself to become involved in aggressive acts. The need to restrict him and the wishes of the people have been the principal reasons which have obliged us to keep Samarkand.

But we have restored to him the town of Karchi and the Khanate of Shahrisabz. As for Khiva, after having chastised it and put an end to its acts of brigandage, we have nevertheless kept its autonomy. So far as Afghanistan is concerned, we have employed with success our influence over the Emir of Bokhara, so as to dissuade him from any aggression against Afghan territory, and we have refused to countenance the designs of Abdur Rahman Khan, nephew of the Emir of Afghanistan, against the peace of that country.

The efficacy of our action has been recognised by the British government.

The Imperial Cabinet is persuaded that if, on both sides, the two governments continue to tread this path, the end towards which they are working by common accord will be surely attained; the peace of Central Asia will be sheltered as far as possible from the vicissitudes that the savage state of these countries might cause to be feared; not only will all immediate contact and all impact between them be avoided, but also the conviction of their firm and loyal accord, removing from the spirit of the Khans the idea of an antagonism of which they can take advantage, will prevent the causes of troubles and conflicts; they will also be able, in full security, each to follow in their own sphere their civilising mission and the development of their mutual interests.

The Imperial Cabinet will always be disposed to devote its efforts to that end.

Appendix 4

The Western Frontier Protocol of 1885

10 September 1885

The Undersigned, the Marquis of Salisbury, Knight of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, Her Britannic Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, etc., and His Excellency M. George de Staal, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of His Majesty the Emperor of All the Russias at the Court of Her Britannic Majesty etc., have met together for the purpose of recording in the present Protocol the following agreement which has been arrived at between Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland and His Majesty the Emperor of All the Russias:-

1. It is agreed that the frontier of Afghanistan, between the Hari-Rud and the Oxus, shall be drawn as follows:-

The frontier will start from the Hari-Rud about 2 versts below the fort of Zulfikar and will follow the line marked in red on the Map No. 1 attached to the Protocol as far as the point K in such a manner as not to approach nearer than a distance of 3,000 English feet to the edge of the scarp of the western defile (including the crest marked L M N of the northern branch of that defile. From the point K the line will follow the crest of the heights bordering on the north the second defile, which it will cut a little to the west of the bifurcation at a distance of about 850 sajens from the point where the roads from Adam-Ulam, Kingrueli and Ak-Robat meet. The line will then continue to follow the crest of the heights as far as the point P marked on Map No. 2 attached to the Protocol. From thence it will run in a south-easterly direction nearly parallel to the Ak-Robat road, will pass between the salt lakes marked Q and R, which are to the south of Ak-Robat and to the north of Somna Karez, and leaving Somna Karez to the Afghans, will run to Islim, where the frontier will cross to the right bank of the Egri-Gueuk, leaving Islim outside Afghan territory. The line will then follow the crest of the hills which border the right bank of the Egri-Gueuk, and will leave Chemen-i-Bid outside the Afghan frontier. It will in like manner follow the crest of the hills which border the right bank of the Kushk as far as Hauzi Khan. From Hauzi Khan the frontier will follow an almost straight line to a point on the Murghab to the north of Maruchak, fixed so as to leave to Russia the lands cultivated by the Sariks, and their pastures.

Applying the same principle both to the Turkomans subject to Russia and the subjects of the Ameer of Afghanistan, the frontier will follow east of the Murghab a line north of the valley of the Kaisor, and west of the valley of the Sangalak (Ab-i-Andkhoi), and leaving Andkhoi to the east will run to Khoja Saleh on the Oxus.

The delimitation of the pastures belonging to the respective populations will be left to the Commission. In the event of their not arriving at an understanding, this delimitation will be settled by the two Cabinets on the basis of the Maps drawn up and signed by the Commissioners.

For the sake of greater clarity the principal points of the frontier-line are marked on the maps annexed to the present Protocol.

2. It is agreed that the Commissioners shall forthwith be appointed by the Governments of her Majesty the Queen of the United Kingdom and Ireland and His Majesty the Emperor of All the Russias, who shall proceed to examine and trace upon the spot the details of the Afghan frontier as fixed by the preceding Article. One Commissioner shall be appointed by her Majesty the Queen and one by His Majesty the Emperor. The escorts of the Commissioners are fixed at 100 men at most on either side, and no increase shall be made without an agreement between the Commissioners. The Commissioners shall meet at Zulfikar within two months from the date of the signature of the present Protocol, and shall at once proceed to trace the frontier in conformity with the preceding stipulations.

It is agreed that the delimitation shall begin at Zulfikar, and that, as soon as the Commissioners shall have met and commenced their labours, the neutralization of Pendjeh shall be limited to the district comprised between a line to the north running from Bend-i-Nadir and Maruchak. The Commissioners shall conclude their labours as quickly as possible.

3. It is agreed that in tracing this frontier, and in conforming as closely as possible to the description of this line in the present Protocol, as well as to the points marked on the Maps annexed thereto, the said Commissioners shall pay due attention to the localities, and to the necessities and well-being of the local populations.

4. As the work of delimitation proceeds, the respective parties shall be at liberty to establish posts on the frontier.

5. It is agreed that, when the said Commissioners shall have completed their labours, Maps shall be prepared and signed, and communicated by them to their respective Governments.

In witness thereof, the Undersigned, duly authorised to that effect, have signed the present Protocol, and have affixed thereto the seal of their arms.

Done at London, the 10th September, 1885.

Salisbury
Staal

Appendix 5

Col. Ridgeway's Report on the Western Frontier, 1887

Extract from Col. Ridgeway's Letter to Lord Salisbury, 27 July 1887.

According to the London Protocol of the 10th September 1885, the Valley of Panjdeh was ceded to Russia. It was at that time supposed by the British and Russian Governments that the Saryks were confined to that Valley, while, in fact, those people had extended their cultivation into the side valleys of the Kushk and Kashan, where they had opened canals and reclaimed a considerable amount of land. Their sheep, too, exclusively enjoyed the pastures between the Kushk and Murghab.

When the Joint Commissioners reached the district in question, and the true state of the case became known, the Russian Commissioner claimed that the Saryks should be left in possession of the lands. The letter of the London Protocol was, however, clearly opposed to this claim, and the Saryks were accordingly ousted.

When the joint Commission reached the Oxus it was established that, if literal effect were given to the agreement of 1873, the district of Kham-i-ab, and perhaps nearly the whole Khoja Salin district, would be severed from Afghanistan, and that, moreover, it would be necessary to divide between the inhabitants of those districts and the Uzbeg inhabitants of Afghan Turkistan the pastures and wells which are enjoyed in common by both. Such a division would have been a difficult matter, attended by considerable hardship to both parties.

It was after consideration of these facts that Her Majesty's Government authorised me to negotiate a settlement according to which the Amir should restore to the Sariks most of the lands of which they had been deprived between the Kuslim and Murghab, in exchange for the withdrawal of the Russian claims to all the districts at present in the possession of the Afghans on the Oxus, and to the wells and pastures necessary for the prosperity of the Uzbegs of Afghan Turkistan.

The settlement recorded in the enclosed Protocol is the result of the negotiations conducted on this basis. It will be seen that Russia has merely claimed the lands and canals necessary for her Sarik subjects, and that Kara Tappeh. Chabil Dukhter, Torghekh – the only possible sites for a Cantonment within the lands once occupied by the Sariks – have all been left within the Afghan frontier. (Subjoined was the following statement of Afghan losses and gains by this settlement.)

Table Appendix 5.1

	Restored by Afghans	*Conceded by* Russians	*Remarks*
No. of sq. miles of cultivation	6¼	26¼	
No. of sq. miles of waste	818½*	707¾	* of which only 14 culturable
No. of wells in waste	1	19	
Population	Nil	13,000	
Revenue	Nil	£1,400	

Note:– The point of frontier nearest to Herat in lands now restored by Afghans was, before the rectification, latitude 35 19′. The point nearest to Herat in some lands since the rectification is 35 9′; consequently, Russia is 11½ miles nearer Herat. There were no Russian outposts on the former frontier, and probably will be none on the new frontier, as the Russian troops have been withdrawn from Panjdeh and transferred to the Oxus in the direction of Khoja Saleh.

(Sd.) W. Ridgeway,
Colonel

Appendix 6

The 'Durand Agreement' of November 1893

1. Agreement signed at Kabul on the 12th November, 1893

Whereas the British Government has represented to His Highness the Amir that the Russian Government presses for the literal fulfilment of the Agreement of 1873 between Russia and England by which it was decided that the river Oxus should form the northern boundary of Afghanistan from Lake Victoria (Wood's Lake) or Sarikul on the east to the junction of the Kokcha with the Oxus, and whereas the British Government considers itself bound to abide by the terms of this Agreement, if the Russian Government equally abides by them, His Highness Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, G.C.S.I., Amir of Afghanistan and its Dependencies, wishing to show his friendship to the British Government and his readiness to accept their advice in matters affecting his relations with foreign powers, hereby agrees that he will evacuate all the districts held by him to the north of this portion of the Oxus on the clear understanding that all the districts lying to the south of this portion of the Oxus, and not now in his possession, be handed over to him in exchange. And Sir Henry Mortimer Durand, K.C.I.E., C.S.I., Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, hereby declares on the part of the British Government that the transfer to his Highness the Amir of the said districts lying to the south of the Oxus is an essential part of this transaction, and undertakes that arrangements will be made with the Russian Government to carry out the transfer of the said lands to the north and south of the Oxus.

(Signed) H. M. DURAND
Kabul
12th November, 1893.

(Signed) AMIR ABDUR RAHMAN KHAN
12th November, 1893 (2nd Jamadi-ul-awal 1311)

2. Letter from Sir Mortimer Durand, K.C.I.E., C.S.I., to His Highness the Emir of Afghanistan and ifs Dependencies, dated Kabul, the 11th November, 1893.

(After compliments) When your Highness came to the throne of Afghanistan, Sir Lepel Griffin was instructed to give on the assurance that, if any foreign power should attempt to interfere in Afghanistan and if such interference should lead to unprovoked aggression on the dominions of your Highness, in that event the British Government would be prepared to aid you to such extent and in such manner as might appear to the British Government necessary in repelling it, provided that your Highness followed unreservedly the advice of the British Government in regard to your external relations.

I have the honour to inform your Highness that this assurance remains in force, and that it is applicable with regard to any territory which may come into your possession in consequence of the agreement which you have made with me today in the matter of the Oxus frontier.

It is the desire of the British Government that such portion of the northern frontier of Afghanistan as has not yet been marked out should now be clearly defined; when this has been done, the whole of your Highness's frontier towards the side of Russia will be equally free from doubt and equally secure.

Appendix 7

The Pamirs Agreement of 1895

Agreement between the Governments of Great Britain and Russia with regard to the Spheres of Influence of the Two Countries in the Region of the Pamirs – London, March 11, 1895.

1. The Earl of Kimberley to M. de Staal.

Foreign Office, March 11, 1895.

Your Excellency,

As a result of the negotiations which have taken place between our two Governments in regard to the spheres of influence of Great Britain and Russia in the country to the east of Lake Victoria (Zor Koul), the following points have been agreed upon between us:-

1. The spheres of influence of Great Britain and Russia to the east of Lake Victoria (Zor Koul) shall be divided by a line which, starting from a point on that lake near to its eastern extremity, shall follow the crests of the mountain range running somewhat to the south of the latitude of the lake as far as the Bendersky and Orta-Bel Passes.

   From thence the line shall run along the same range while it remains to the south of the latitude of the said lake. On reaching that latitude it shall descend a spur of the range towards Kizil Rabat on the Aksu River, if that locality is found not to be north of the latitude of Lake Victoria, and from thence it shall he prolonged in an easterly direction so as to meet the Chinese frontier.

   If it should be found that Kizil Rabat is situated to the north of the latitude of Lake Victoria, the line of demarcation shall be drawn to the nearest convenient point on the Aksu River south of that latitude, and from thence prolonged as aforesaid.

2. The line shall be marked out, and its precise configuration shall be settled by a joint Commission of a purely technical character, with a military escort not exceeding that which is strictly necessary for its proper protection

   The Commission shall be composed of British and Russian Delegates, with the necessary technical assistance. Her Britannic Majesty's Government will arrange with the Ameer of Afghanistan as to the manner in which His Highness shall be represented on the Commission.

3. The Commission shall also be charged to report any facts which can be ascertained on the spot bearing on the situation of the Chinese frontier, with a view to enable the two Governments to come to an agreement with the Chinese Government as to the limits of Chinese territory in the vicinity of the line, in such manner as may be found most convenient.

4. Her Britannic Majesty's Government and the Government of His Majesty the Emperor of Russia engage to abstain from exercising any political influence or control, the former to the north, the latter to the south, of the above line of demarcation.

5. Her Britannic Majesty's Government engage that territory lying within the British sphere of influence between the Hindu Kush and the line running from the east end of Lake Victoria to the Chinese frontier shall form part of the territory of the Ameer of Afghanistan, that it shall not be annexed to Great Britain, and that no military posts or forts shall be established in it.

   The execution of this agreement is contingent upon the evacuation by the Ameer of Afghanistan of all the territories now occupied by His Highness on the right bank of the Panjah, and on the evacuation by the Ameer of Bokhara of the portion of Darwaz which lies to the south of the Oxus, in regard to which Her Britannic Majesty's Government and the Government of His Majesty the Emperor of Russia have agreed to use their influence respectively with the two Ameers.

I shall be obliged if, in acknowledging the receipt of this note, your Excellency will record officially the agreements which we have thus concluded in the name of our respective Governments.

I am, &c.
(Signed) Kimberley.

2. M. de Staal to the Earl of Kimberley (received March 11)

Londres le 27 Fevrier (11 March) 1895.

M. Le Comte, – J'ai eu l'honneur de recevoir la note que votre Excellence a bien voulu m'adresser en date de ce jour.

Cette communication énumere les dispositions de l'arrangement auquel ont abouti les négociations engagées entre le Gouvernement de l'Empereur, mon auguste Maître, et le Gouvernement de Sa Majesté Brittanique, au sujet de la délimitation des sphères d'influence de la Russie et de la Grande-Bretagne dans la région des Pamirs à l'est de Lac Zor-Koul (Victoria).

Etant dùment autorisé à constater l'acceptation par mon Gouvernement du dit arrangement je me fais un devoir d'en réproduire les termes ci-après, savoir:-

1. Les sphères d'influence de la Russie et de la Grande Bretagne à l'est du Lac Zor-Koul (Victoria) seront séparées par une ligne-frontière, laquelle, partant d'un point sur ce lac près de son extrémité orientale, suivra les crêtes de la chaine de montagnes qui s'étend an peu au sud du parallèle de ce lac jusqu'aux passes de Bender et d'Orta Bel. De là, la ligne-frontière suivra la dite chain de montagnes tant que celle-ci se trouve au sud du parallèle du lac mentioné. En touchant cette latitude la ligne-frontière descendra le contrefort de la chaine vers Kizil Rabat, situé sur la Rivière Aksu, si toutefois cette localité ne se trouve pas au nord du parallèle du Lac Victoria; de cet endroit la ligne-frontière se prolongera dans une direction orientale de manière à aboutir à la frontière Chinoise. S'il est constaté que Kizil Rabat est situé au nord du parallèle du Lac Victoria, la ligne de démarcation sera tracée jusqu'au point le plus proche et le plus approprié situé sur le fleuve Aksu au sud de la latitude indiquée et de la sera prolongée ainsi qu'il a été dit plus haut.

2. La ligne-frontière sera démarquée et sa configuration précise fixée par une Commission Mixte revêtue d'un charactère purement technique et protégée par une escorte militaire que ne dépassera pas le nombre strictement nécessaire pour sa sécurité. La Comission sera composée de Délégués Russes et Anglais, avec les assistants nécessaires pour la partie technique.

   Le Gouvernement de Sa Majesté Britannique s'accordora avec l'Amir d'Afghanistan sur la manière dont Son Altesse sera représentée dans la Commission.

3. La Commission sera également chargée de rapporter toutes les données qui pourraient etre recueillies sur place concernant la situation de la frontière Chinoise, dans le but de mettre les deux Gouvernements à même d'arriver à un accord de la manière qui sera jugée la plus convenable avec la Gouvernement Chinois, quant aux limites du territoire Chinols voisin de la ligne-frontière.

4. Le Gouvernement de Sa Majesté l'Empereur de Russie et le Gouvernement de Sa Majesté Britannique s'engagent à s'abstenir de l'exercice de tout contrôle ou influence politique, le premier au sud, la second au nord, de la dite ligne de démarcation.

5. Le Gouvernement de Sa Majesté Britannique s'engage à ce que le territoire compris dans la sphère d'influence Anglaise entre le Hindou-Kouch et la ligne partant de l'éxtrémité orientale du Lac Victoria et rejoignant la frontière Chinoise fasse partie des Etats de l'Amir d'Afghanistan, que ce territoire ne soit pas annexé à la Grand-Bretagne, et qu'il n'y sera établi ni postes militaires ni ouvrages fortifiés.

6. L'exécution du présent arrangement est subordonné à l'évacuation par l'Emir d'Afghanistan de tous les territoires occupés par Son Altesse sur la rive droite

du Piandj, et à l'évacuation par l'Emir de Bokhara de la partie du Derwaz située au midi de l'Oxus, les Gouvernements de Sa Majesté l'Empereur de Russie et de Sa Majesté Britannique étant d'accord pour employer à cet effet leur influence respective auprès des deux Emirs.

J'ai &c.
(Signé) Staal.

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