



THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH-RUSSIAN RIVALRY IN AFGHANISTAN AT THE END OF THE 19TH CENTURY - THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY

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Abstract

This scientific work analyzes the historical process of political, military, and diplomatic rivalry between Great Britain and the Russian Empire within the framework of the Great Game that took place in the territory of Afghanistan in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The study extensively covers the causes of this rivalry, its main stages, and its impact on Afghanistan's internal and external policies. Additionally, the work scientifically reveals Afghanistan's geographical and strategic importance and its role as a buffer state between the two great empires.

Keywords: Great Game, Afghanistan, Great Britain, Russian Empire, Durand Line Agreement, Anglo-Russian Convention, geopolitics.

Introduction

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the territory of Afghanistan became one of the most important geopolitical arenas within the framework of the Great Game. During this period, the confrontation between Great Britain and the Russian Empire was aimed at controlling the routes to India, expanding influence in Central Asia, and occupying strategic territories. Geographically, Afghanistan served as a buffer zone between these two powers. Especially in the second half of the 19th century, the advance of Russian troops towards Turkestan caused serious concern among British politicians, as these movements were seen as a threat to the security of India. For this reason, the British sought to strengthen their influence in Afghanistan and tried to exercise political control through local rulers. During this period, Afghanistan's geographical location gained special importance because it was situated between British India, a British colony, and the newly conquered territories of Russia in Central Asia. For this reason, both empires sought to bring Afghanistan into their sphere of influence and viewed it



as a strategic "buffer state." This directly affected the country's internal politics, governance, and foreign relations. The relevance of this topic lies in the fact that the Anglo-Russian rivalry played a significant role not only in Afghanistan's history but also in shaping the political map of the entire Central Asian region. Especially the events at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century — the resolution of border issues, diplomatic agreements, and military clashes — are of great importance for understanding today's geopolitical processes. The purpose of this work is to scientifically analyze the historical essence of the Anglo-Russian rivalry in Afghanistan at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, its causes and consequences, main stages, and its impact on the country's development. Additionally, the study highlights the role of this rivalry in the system of international relations and its influence on Afghanistan's formation as an independent state.

By the end of the 19th century, Abdur Rahman Khan, who came to power in Afghanistan, was forced to establish close relations with the British. Ascending the throne in 1880, this ruler tried to maintain internal stability and strengthen the state by pursuing a balanced foreign policy. He agreed to limit Afghanistan's independence in foreign policy in exchange for financial aid and military support from the British. Particularly, the signing of the Durand Line Agreement in 1893 was an important outcome of the Anglo-Russian rivalry. This agreement clearly defined the borders between Afghanistan and British India, and at the same time, the main directions of Afghan foreign policy began to be controlled by the British. Meanwhile, the Russian Empire was actively expanding in Central Asia, bringing regions such as Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bukhara under its influence. The campaigns carried out between 1860 and 1880 brought Russia closer to the borders of Afghanistan, creating a strategic threat to the British. Especially the Panjdeh Incident in 1885 brought the two empires very close to war. In this incident, Russian troops invaded Afghan territory and occupied the Panjdeh region. As a result, the British tried to resolve the issue diplomatically, preventing war, but this event further increased Afghanistan's strategic importance. At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, the Anglo-Russian rivalry was not limited to military clashes but also continued through diplomatic negotiations. The signing of the Anglo-Russian Convention in 1907 somewhat balanced the competition between the two states. According to this agreement, Afghanistan was placed under British influence, while Russia undertook not to interfere politically in this region. This strengthened Afghanistan's international



status but further limited its independence in foreign policy. At the same time, the territories of Iran and Tibet were also divided into spheres of influence. By the early 20th century, changes also occurred in Afghanistan's internal political life. During the reign of Habibullah Khan (1901–1919), the country experienced a relatively peaceful and stable period. He adhered to agreements made with the British and maintained cautious diplomatic relations with Russia. During this period, Afghanistan tried to maintain a neutral position in foreign policy, officially declaring neutrality during the First World War. Nevertheless, the British sought to keep Afghanistan within their sphere of influence, while Russia focused on strengthening its positions in Central Asia.

The Anglo-Russian rivalry had a significant impact on Afghanistan's political, economic, and social development. As a result of this rivalry, the country tried to become a strongly centralized state internally, but its independence in foreign policy remained limited. Afghan rulers were forced to maintain a balance between the two empires, which increased caution in their political decisions. At the same time, during this period, the country's territorial borders were clearly defined, and the process of forming the modern Afghan state was completed. Overall, at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Afghanistan was at the center of the strategic struggle between the British and Russian empires, and its territory became the main stage for geopolitical games. This rivalry not only determined the balance of power between the two empires but also deeply influenced Afghanistan's subsequent historical development. As a result, the country lived under external pressures for a long time and was forced to choose complex diplomatic paths to preserve its independence.

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