

Volume 15

Number 129

Afghanistan - II

Lead: For more than a century after 1800 the region known today as Afghanistan was the field upon which Britain and Russia played a great game of diplomatic and military conquest.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Historians literally used to call the ‘Great Game’ although recent scholarship has described the competition as more of a myth. There is little doubt that Russia was seeking to expand its influence and power in central Asia and that brought it into

conflict with Britain, only recently shorn of its thirteen colonies in North America and seeking to strengthen its holdings in India and South Central Asia.

In many ways Britain saw Afghanistan as a buffer state protecting what it considered to be its far more valuable imperial holdings to the south and east in what is now India and Pakistan. They thought this required a sympathetic and pliable government in Kabul and Kandahar. Britain made a number of serious errors during the 19th century which left a legacy of broken promises, betrayals and resentment which color Afghan attitudes toward international engagement to this day.

After the death of the Great Shah, Ahmed the Great in 1772, his Durrani descendants and their tribal allies struggled to keep the empire he had created together, reaching out to the British to fend off Russian influence and Uzbek military pressure from the north. By 1826 power in Afghanistan had been consolidated by this tribal alliance under Dost Muhammad Khan, but the British were conflicted. Their ally, the Sikh governor of Lahore, in present day Pakistan, wished to expand his power into Afghanistan and that would require another installing another weaker Afghan ruler.

In 1837 The British Governor-

General General of India, Lord Auckland, dispatched Captain Alexander Burnes to Kabul supposedly to improve trade relations, but really to collect intelligence on Dost Muhammad. Burnes quickly perceived that the Khan was a far stronger ruler, but who was also willing to make concessions in exchange for British help. The Russians had their own diplomat, Paul Vitkovich, on the scene in Kabul, but the Khan clearly preferred a British rather than a Russian connection. Next time: Mistake tumbling upon mistake.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

Abreu, Sean. "Afghanistan's Warrior Culture." 12/21/2009. http://ancient-military-history.suite101.com/article/cfm/afghanistans_warrior_culture.

Afghanistans's Website, "Afghanistan's History." www.afghanistans.com/information/History/Default.htm.

Bacon, Elizabeth E. "History of Hazara Community." <http://boozers.fortunecity.com/jerusalem/47/History/history.html>.

Collins, Bruce. "Fighting the Afghans in the 19th Century." *History Today*, vol 51(12) December 2001.

Dupree, Louis. *Afghanistan*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978.

Encyclopedia of the Middle East, "Ulema." <http://mideastweb.org/Middle-East-Encyclopedia/ulema.htm>.

Gulzad, Zalmay A. *External Influences and the Development of the Afghan State in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1994.

Hopkins, R.D. *The Making of Modern Afghanistan..* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Library of Congress. *Country Profile: Afghanistan*. Federal Research Division, August, 2008. <http://memory.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Afghanistan.pdf>

Copyright by Dan Roberts Enterprises, Inc.