CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND SUPER POWER
CONTEST IN SOUTH WEST ASIA

This chapter presents a detailed analysis of Super Powers' power contest or rivalry in South West Asia until the conclusion of the second world war with special reference to Afghanistan. Before analysing the historical background, it is necessary to ascertain the geopolitical setting and strategic significance of the region called South-West Asia in order to assess the level of involvement of Super Powers.

The region, South-West Asia comprises over a dozen countries -- Afghanistan, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Jordan, Oman, Lebanon, Syria, Muscat, Kuwait, Turkey, Qatar, North Yemen and South Yemen. However, the London based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), in its annual publication Strategic Survey includes mainly India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran under the title South-

West Asia.² In his recent book on South-West Asia, Zalmay Khalilzad has also concentrated mainly on these countries.³ The delimitation question of South-West Asia is not very important in the context of the present study. For the purpose of the present study, the major focus would be on the historical analysis of development in Turkey, Iran, Indian subcontinent and with special reference to Afghanistan in the wake of great power rivalry.

Strategic Significance of Southwest Asia

The concept of strategic significance has undergone change in the current international affairs. The current emphasis has shifted from an ex post facto historical approach towards a future predictable analysis.⁴ The key emphasis is on purely military considerations in the original approach to strategy has now been shifted to the broader concepts of "national security" and "international security".

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4. For details see, Michael Banks, "The Evolution of International Relations Theory", in Michael Banks, (ed), Conflict in World Society (Sussex, 1984), pp. 3-21.
Strategy has become an integral component of foreign policy. It has emerged as a blend of military and political policy spheres. Strategic analysis is policy oriented and provides substantial input into the process of policy formulations at the highest levels. Undoubtedly, the analysis of national security entails the fields of strategic studies, and foreign policy and constitutes an integral part of both. J. Baylis and others have opined: "If anything, they reflect differences of emphasis rather than differences in subject matter".5 The term "strategy" acquires added significance by providing an option for action aimed at the maximization of own values including interests or own positions based on an indepth assessment of all potential gains and losses as well as the identification of hostile action - which is also called threat perception. This concept of threat perception includes the whole threat spectrum. Thus the concept of "strategic significance" which is derivative of the term "strategy" is prone to be closely linked to perception.6

Raymond Aron states that the concept of strategic significance is viewed historically in the same light as strategy, that is, in terms of military superiority and the ability to wage war. Broadly speaking, there are three main determinants of strategic significance. In the first place, strategic significance is linked to the sum total of a country's capabilities. As Lerche and Said have observed: "It is the general strategic role played by a state in world politics that raises issues of capability in the first place".

Besides, the role perception of the state in the global and regional context is another determinant. "A second manifestation of the impact of the state's international strategic position upon capability is derived from its interpretation of the position it occupies in the world." Thirdly, the perception of other states in the international political system is also important because this perception determines the strategic significance of a

9. Ibid., p. 68.
country. As Padleford and Lincoln have opined: "The relations of states are partly the interaction of the way the people and leaders of one state view the world situation and respond to it, as contrasted with the ways other people and leaders view the same situation and factors". This is in essence the geopolitical thinking based on perceptions of the geographical space in the context of national outlook about the world order. The power and politics is thus viewed in the geographical patterning.

The strategic significance of a country is dependent upon its own national power and capabilities with those of other states which "indicates a relative power relationship and influences the strategic significance of that country". Therefore, the strategic significance of a country is determined by its own potential capabilities.

The perception based role of states in the international political system, at the global or regional levels which are linked to strategic significance, are not always in agreement with their capabilities. Thus the relative power positions of such countries still depend on the

perception of other states in the international system,\textsuperscript{12} which is also the result of inter-state interdependence and competition. Thus, it is evident that the strategic significance of Southwest Asia has played a potent role in the past in determining the policies of contemporary great powers towards this region. The Ottoman Empire, Afghanistan, Iran, Russia\textsuperscript{13} and British power in the Indian subcontinent were the major powers that determined the political shape of Southwest Asia. Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan share long borders with the present Soviet Union. Prior to the partition of the Indian subcontinent, in August 1947, the British India shared borders with Iran and Afghanistan. Thus the historical analysis of the present chapter, to begin with, starts from the brief assessment of: (i) Rise of Russia as an Asian power; (ii) Ottoman Empire; (iii) British rule in India.

(i) \textbf{Rise of Russia as an Asian Power}

The emergence of Russia as a modern state dates back to the early years of ninth century as a result of "the first large scale organization to work on the territory of the present day Soviet Union was the work of the Norman


\textsuperscript{13} Prior to 1925, Soviet Union was known as Russia, hence we will use "Russia" before that period in this chapter.
warrior traders (also known as Vikings), intertwined with local Slavic and Finnish elements". The subsequent period saw the expansion of Russia in Europe and by the middle of sixteenth century, Russian expansion in Asia had also started, especially in 1552 when Ivan Grezny conquered the Central Asian country of Kazan. By the middle of eighteenth century, Russia had expanded its territory bordering with Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan thus establishing itself as a power to reckon with in the near and Far East.

(ii) Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire of Turkey had emerged as a force to reckon with during eleventh century and the subsequent years, witnessed the sway of Ottoman power over most part of the Middle East and the Balkan regions. Probably, as Ottoman Empire emerged as a major power more as a result of becoming the Islamic Darul-Khilafa (home of Muslim rule). Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Palestine and other countries of the Middle East formed the territories of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire posed a threat to both Russian and British empires. However, the decline of Ottoman Empire which gradually started in the latter part of the nineteenth

century and following its defeat during the First World War, most of its territories in Southwest Asia came under the British mandate which provided further impetus to the Anglo-Russian rivalry.

(iii) British rule in India

The advent of British rule in India though started after 1857 when the last Mughal ruler was defeated, yet the beginning had commenced in 1600 when East India Company was established at Calcutta. The British who had come to India as traders gradually started establishing their rule by winning the coastal areas and the battle of Plassey in 1747 resulted in the assertion of rule in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta presidencies.

The decline of Sikh empire and its subsequent merger into the British India by the middle of the nineteenth century had brought the latter's share direct frontiers with Afghanistan and Iran. The resultant impact was that the British Government after consolidating its hold over India wanted to check the growing Russian influence around British India. Both Russians and the British vied with each other for winning new spheres of influence especially in Afghanistan and Iran.
Since the main focus of the present study is on Afghanistan, an indepth analysis of great power rivalry in Afghanistan along with the analysis of contemporary developments in other countries of the Southwest Asia is presented here.

**Afghanistan: Early Phase**

Though Afghanistan's emergence as a modern political state was envisaged only possibly in 1747 yet it is an ancient country.

The anthropological excavations undertaken in the early decades of the present century in Afghanistan revealed that Palaeolithic man probably lived in the caves of northern Afghanistan as long as 50,000 years ago. According to Louis Dupree, "Post-World War II excavations in South-Central Afghanistan point to intimate relationships with the Indus Valley civilization fourth - second millennia B.C."\(^{16}\)

Reference to Afghanistan recur in the ancient Vedic literature and subsequent travelogues of foreign travellers. The reference to Afghanistan as Avagana occurs in Varaha Mihira's *Bhrita Sanhita*. This view has been supported by A. Foucher, a noted French scholar.\(^{17}\) The works of

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Al Beiruni and Hsuen Tsang also mention about Afghanistan.

The advent of Islam during the seventh century in Afghanistan proved instrumental in overhauling the entire culture and civilization of Afghanistan. Islam which brought about an overall change in the social, cultural and historical development of Afghanistan also forged new religious and cultural bonds -- bonds that to a certain extent overrode the prevalent ethnic diversities. (See Map 2)

The advent of Islam in Afghanistan was followed by the conquest of Arabs who reached Western Afghanistan during the seventh century. The Muslim conquest brought Afghanistan within a greater political entity, stimulated trade in the region and preserved the country's geographic importance as a crossroads between India, Central Asia and the Mediterranean world.

For about two centuries the local dynasties ruled over Afghanistan -- Tahirids (820-70), and the Samanids (874-999). The closing years of the tenth century witnessed Afghanistan conquered by Sabuk-tagin who was succeeded by

his son, Mahmud Ghaznavi who ruled over Afghanistan till 1157 A.D. The Ghaznavi's empire extended over Kabul, Balkh, Badakhshan, Persian Khorasan and some parts of India. Following the collapse of Ghaznavi rule, the central authority in Afghanistan gave way to feudalism and regionalism. The Mongol invasion brought economic disaster for Afghanistan during the thirteenth century. During the fourteenth century Afghanistan was conquered by Taimurlane and the early decades of the sixteenth century witnessed the establishment of Mughal rule in Kabul by Babur, a descendant of Timur, in 1504.

Following the death of Babur which led to the decline of Mughal rule in Afghanistan, Afghan tribes again vied for establishing their paramountcy in Afghanistan. During this period, Afghanistan was divided "between the empires of Persia and Mughal India, the eastern tribes being under Mughal rule." The Afghan nationalism found its early seedlings during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries under the inspiration of Roshanya movement and Khushal Khan Khattak (1613-89) who inspired the Afghan tribes to "defend their independence and strive for

22. Gregorian, n.20, p.15.
23. Molesworth, n.21, p.4.
political unity". 24

The geo-political situation in the region underwent a substantial change in the early period of eighteenth century when the southern Afghan tribes led by Ghilzais to rise in revolt against Persia and establish their short-lived kingdom. However Afghan rule over Persia was eliminated by the then Persian King, Nadir Shah whose assassination in 1747 provided an opportunity to the Abdalis under the leadership of Ahmad Khan Abdali to declare the independence of Afghanistan. During the same year, Ahmad Shah Abdali was made the King of Afghanistan. The succeeding pages present an analysis of Afghan foreign policy since its emergence as an independent modern state in 1747 till the conclusion of the Second World War with special reference to contemporary great powers. Adamec has divided the period between 1747 till the end of Second World War into the following four phases:

(a) The Expansionist Period (1747 to 1800)
(b) The Period of Foreign Conflict (1800 to 1880)
(c) The Period of Defensive Isolationism (1980 to 1919)
(d) Period of Defensive Neutralism (1919 till the end of Second World War) (25).

24. Gregorian, n. 20, p. 43.
The above classification envisaged by Adamec is retained for the purpose of present study.

(a) The Expansionist Period: 1747 to 1800

Ahmad Shah Abdali after assuming the power, consolidated his position and took measures to strengthen his empire. In this direction, he led eight expeditions into India. In their first expedition launched in 1747, however, the Afghan forces had to retreat across the Indus. In his subsequent expeditions, the Afghan King was able to incorporate Punjab, Kashmir and Multan into his empire. At the time of his death in 1773, the Afghan empire of Ahmad Shah Abdali extended from the Atrek river to the Indus and from Tibet to the Arabian Sea. Timur Shah succeeded after the death of his father in 1773 as the new ruler of Afghanistan. Two decades of Timur Shah's rule over Afghanistan witnessed no major change in Afghan domestic and external policies but continuation of the legacy.

The closing years of the eighteenth century witnessed the rise of powerful France which evinced interest in the


27. Sultan Mohammad Khan, *Tarikh-i-Afghanistan* (n.d.) p. 27.
countries of Southwest and central Asia. The British, whose power in India had been in ascendency since the establishment of the East India Company in the beginning of the seventeenth century, were also planning to augment their political power and expand their trade and commerce in and beyond Afghanistan. This period also "witnessed the beginning of that interesting epoch when the diplomatic rivalries of the European powers became evident on the chess-board of Central Asia." 28

Zaman Shah (1793-99) who succeeded Timur Shah as the King of Afghanistan continued the policy of his grandfather. The external threats to Afghanistan during this period had increased. The rising Sikh power in Punjab and the growing power and expansion of the British in India and Russian plans to assert its sovereignty over Herat portended threat to Afghanistan. According to Vartan Gregorian, "Afghanistan thus entered the nineteenth century a politically disunited... State." 29

(b) The Period of Foreign Conflict, 1800-1880

The onset of the nineteenth century resulted into an era of foreign conflicts for Afghanistan. During the

first decade of the nineteenth century, the British signed with the Sikh ruler of Punjab, Maharaja Ranjit Singh on 25 April 1809 treaty under which the British acquired a right of passage for their army through the Sikh territories in case of foreign aggression and the Sikhs undertook to help the British in their task of defence. 30 This treaty was motivated by two factors. In the first place, of the growing possibility of a French invasion of India in 1808 and secondly to check the growing Sikh powers to secure the British power in India.

During this period, the British were facing threat to their power locally from Marathas and the Sikhs. In the scheme of their defence strategy, the British made friendly gestures to the then Afghan ruler, Shah Shuja and a British mission under Mountstuart Elphinstone left for Kabul on 13 October 1808. 31 The Elphinstone Mission tried to raise the issue of French and Russian threat to Afghanistan as well as India and wanted Shah Shuja to contract an alliance but were reluctant to help the Afghan King in his internal challenge which threatened his throne. 32 However the

30. For full text of the treaty see, C.U. Aitchison, A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and the Neighbouring countries (Calcutta, 1909), vol. VIII, p. 44.

31. Bilgrami, n. 28, p. 35.

Afghans were shrewd enough to discover the British designs and regarded "an alliance for the purpose of repelling one enemy was imperfect and that true friendship between the two states could only be maintained by identifying their interests in all cases". 33

Despite the differing approaches, the British India and Afghanistan signed a treaty in June 1809 at Peshawar in terms of which Afghanistan undertook to prevent the passage through Afghanistan of French and Persian troops on their way to India and the British Government pledged to pay the Afghans for their services against the Confederacy. Besides Afghanistan was to exclude all Frenchmen from its territory. 34 However, following the defeat of Shah Shuja by Shah Mahmud, the treaty became almost a dead letter.

Afghanistan, because of its borders with Russia and Persia 35 had assumed immense strategic importance in British defence strategy with regard to consolidation and protection of British rule in India. The Russians had

33. Ibid.

34. For text of the Treaty, see Aitchison, no. 30, vol. XIII, pp. 53-55.

35. The name Persia is used for Iran here because the official use of name "Iran" was started only in 1937. Hence prior to that reference is made to Persia in the present study.
started showing interest in Persia during this period. Besides, the growing French power was also deemed as a threat by the British. Consequently the British signed two treaties in 1809 and 1814 with Persia. Under the terms of the Anglo-Persian treaty of 1809, Persia agreed "not to permit any European force whatever to pass through Persia either towards India or towards the ports of that country". Persia also promised to afford a force for the protection of British dominions in case of attack from Afghanistan or any other country. The British Government in return agreed to "afford to the Shah (Persian King) a force, or in lieu of it a subsidy, with warlike ammunition such as guns, muskets etc." Similarly the Anglo-Persian treaty of 1814 envisaged for a Persian attack against Afghanistan in the event Afghans invaded India.

On the other hand, Russia had gained considerable diplomatic, political and economic gains in the region by virtue of two treaties -- the Treaty of Turkmanchai signed with the Ottoman Empire in 1829. Under the terms of the Treaty of Turkmanchai, Persia surrendered its all territories west

36. For text of treaty of 1809, see Aitchison, n. 30, vol. XIII (Calcutta, 1933), pp. 53-55.
37. Ibid.
38. For text of Anglo-Persian Treaty of 1814, see ibid., p. 54. Also see J.C. Hyreitz, Diplomacy in the Near and Middle-East: A Documentary Survey 1535-1914 (New York, 1956), vol. I, pp. 86-88.
of the Caspian Sea to Russia. These developments proved instrumental in changing British strategy towards Iran as well as Afghanistan. It regarded any Persian encroachment or gain at the expense of Afghanistan as tantamount to an extension of Russia's political and economic gains to the doorstep of India. 39

Lord Ellenborough, the then top ranking British official had opined that Russia could enter India via Afghanistan. He further added, "Russian commerce would be utilized to prepare the way for Russian armies in Afghanistan". 40 Thus the Russian factor became a major determinant of British policies towards Afghanistan and Persia. Lord Palmerston, the then British Foreign Secretary was of the view that "a pro-British power in Afghanistan could influence affairs in Persia in which Russia was deeply interested". 41

The British Governor-General in India, Lord Auckland, was advised by London to conclude political or commercial


agreements with Afghanistan:

The time has arrived when it will be right for you to interfere, decidedly in the affairs of Afghanistan. Such an interference would doubtless be requisite either to prevent the extension of Persian dominion in that quarter or to raise a timely barrier against impending encroachments of Russian influence. (42)

Consequently Lord Auckland sent his emissary, Alexander Burns to Kabul in November 1836 with the objective of securing political and commercial advantages without conceding any strategic concessions to Afghanistan.

The First Anglo-Afghan War

Realizing that the British were not going to get the desired concessions from the Afghan ruler, Amir Dost Muhammed, they tried to cultivate Shah Shuja who was then living in exile in India with the promise to restore him his throne. Efforts were also made to enlist the support of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab. During that period, Persia was planning to invade Herat. However, in November 1838, the British foiled Persian attempts to invade Herat and forced the latter to accept a hands-off policy in regard to Herat. (43) Subsequently the British also concluded

42. Ibid., p. 603.

a treaty with Shah Kamraw, the ruler of Herat in August 1839, thus making Herat an exclusive British sphere of influence. This move seemed to be the part of overall British policy of bringing Afghanistan under British sphere of influence in the wake of growing Russian influence in the neighbouring countries of Central Asia. The Russians, who had gained considerable economic stakes in Central Asia between 1758 and 1858, considered a pro-British or English-dominated Afghanistan a serious threat to their interests in the region. Thus both British and Russians were apprehensive of each other over Afghanistan.

However, when they failed to woo Amir Dost Mohd. Khan who insisted on the recovery of the Sikh-occupied Afghan territory, the British signed a tripartite treaty - British-Sikh-Shah Shuja in June of 1838 by which the dethroned Shah Shuja was to be installed as Afghan King and in return Shah Shuja would forgo Afghan right on Sikh-occupied territory and follow British advice in foreign relations. For detail, see, Asghar H. Bilgrami, n.28, pp. 60-62.

In the meanwhile in October 1838, the then Governor-General of India Lord Auckland issued a "Manifesto"
accusing the Afghan ruler Dost Muhammad of taking measures prejudicial to the security and peace of Indian frontiers. It was also planned to install Shah Shuja as the ruler of Afghanistan with the help of British army. In November 1838, the British army launched expedition against Amir Dost Mohammad and in August 1839, Shah Shuja entered Kabul following the surrender of the Dost Mohammad.

However, the people of Afghanistan despite their internal differences could not tolerate the alien presence on their land. Consequently a countrywide revolt by the Afghans resulted in the annihilation of a British force of 4500 men and supporting army of 12,000 and the murder of Shah Shuja.

Despite this massive defeat, the British forces again entered Afghanistan in the autumn of 1842 but were defeated again. As a consequence of the British failure, Amir Dost Mohammad regained his throne in 1848. Bilgrami has opined that the British defeat in the first Anglo-Afghan war "served as a good lesson to the British empire

45. Smith, n. 41, p. 591.


47. For details see, Kaye, n. 43, vol.II, pp. 218-246.
builders not to meddle in the affairs of the far-off lands and taught them to follow a policy of non-entanglement and non-interference". However, the British never learnt its lesson but repeated the same mistake by launching second and third war against Afghanistan as analysed in the succeeding pages.

Second Anglo-Afghan War

Until the death of Amir Dost Mohammad in 1863, the British followed a policy of non-intervention in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. There followed a period of internal dissensions in Afghanistan after the death of Amir Dost Mohammad. However, between 1869 and 1872, the British and the Afghans forged closer relations. Following the second Anglo-Sikh war of 1847, India and Afghanistan had become neighbours. In 1869, the then Afghan Amir, Sher Ali Khan paid a visit to India which resulted in the signing of Anglo-Afghan agreement under which the British declared their intention not to interfere in Afghan internal affairs and also undertook to support Afghanistan's independence.49


However the British Government was alarmed over the growing Russian advances in the Central Asian countries bordering Afghanistan. In 1864, Russians gained control over Khiva and Khokand, Capturida Tashkent in 1865 and annexed Samarkhand in 1869 and then got Bukhara. These Russian advances were deemed as a serious threat to British power in India. A section of the British policy makers argued in favour of establishing a permanent British mission in Kabul and made clear to all that a pro-British and peaceful Afghanistan was of immense significance to British interests in India and the East.50

Until the beginning of 1874, London favoured a policy of non-intervention in Afghanistan. In February 1874, Benjamin Disraeli's government came to power in London and Lord Salisbury was appointed as the new Secretary of State for India. The new government followed a "forward policy"51 which meant that Britain could not preserve its interests in India while pursuing a non-interventionist policy in Afghanistan and demanded the establishment of a permanent


British mission in Kabul. However the then Afghan ruler, Sher Ali Khan was opposed to the appointment of a British mission in Kabul and argued that the "fanaticism of his people at the time would impose too great a responsibility upon her in protecting a British agent in Afghanistan".  

This provided an excuse for the British to invade Afghanistan which resulted in the outbreak of the second Anglo-Afghan war. Afghan forces were defeated and Amir Sher Ali Khan who left for Mazari-Sharief to seek assistance from the Russians or the Amir of Bukhara died on the way on 21 February 1879.  

Consequently the British imposed the Treaty of Gandamak signed in May 1879 by Amir Yakub Khan, the new British-installed ruler of Afghanistan. Under the Treaty of Gandamak, Afghan ruler agreed to the appointment of a British envoy in Kabul and to follow the advice of the British in the conduct of Afghan foreign relations. Sir Louis Cavagnari who took over as British envoy in Kabul was murdered in September 1879 which led to the British withdrawal.

54. Ibid., p. 22.
55. For the Treaty of Gandamak, see Aitchison, no. 30, vol. XI, pp. 344-347.
reprisals. These events led to the abdication of Amir Yakub Khan and in 1880, Amir Abdur Rahman, the nephew of Amir Sher Ali Khan took over as the new ruler of Afghanistan.

(c) The Period of Defensive Isolationism (1880-1919)

When Amir Abdur Rahman took over as the new ruler of Afghanistan in 1880, "Anglo-Afghan relations were burdened with the legacy of two wars, the loss of life and property and the ill will and distrust that resulted". 56 In his first foreign policy pronouncement, Amir Abdur Rahman informed the then Chief British political officer in Afghanistan:

"... As long as your empire and that of Russia exist, my countrymen, the tribes of Afghanistan should live quietly in ease and peace; and that these two states should find us true and faithful... and we hope of your friendship that, sympathizing with and assisting the people of Afghanistan, you will place them under the honourable protection of the two powers...." (57)

In the wake of acute, Anglo-Russian rivalry, the Afghan Amir wanted Afghanistan to pursue an independent foreign policy by maintaining friendly relations with British India


57. National Archives of India (NAI, New Delhi), Foreign and Political Department, Secret F., Nos. 243-250, June 1880, no. 244 A.
as well as Russia. However, the British were reluctant to concede the Afghan demand. Lepel Gyiffin, while assuring the Afghan Amir about the British intention not to interfere in the internal affairs of Afghanistan wrote: "... your Highness can have no political relations with any foreign power except with the British Government..." 58 This analysis makes it discernible that the British Government occupies the internal independence of Afghanistan while continuing its control over the foreign affairs of Afghanistan. However, Amir Abdur Rahman wanted to pursue an independent policy both domestically and externally.

Ludwig W. Adamec has divided the foreign policy of Abdur Rahman into three categories: (i) assertion of national independence; (ii) insistence on isolationism, and (iii) promotion of a balance of power. 59 The succeeding pages analyse these aspects.

(i) **Assertion of National Independence:**

Amir Abdur Rahman always regarded himself as an independent ruler of an independent Afghanistan. In the light of the fact that British exercise of control over Afghanistan's foreign relations, the Amir insisted that,

58. Ibid., nos. 143-144, August 1905, no. 143.

59. Adamec, n. 56, p. 17.
after seeking the advice of the British Indian Government, he could take an independent decision on any issue at hand. 60 The Amir wrote to the then Chief British agent in Kahl, Lepel Griffin in 1880, "I desire nothing in lieu of services rendered nor do I demand favours in exchange for duties performed. But I have my claims on the desire of the Afghan nation". 61

In a royal proclamation issued in 1887, he appealed to the Afghans's sense of honour, national dignity and patriotism, drawing their attention to the Anglo-Russian threat: "The country of Afghanistan is a mere spot under the compass of two infidels... it is closely besieged; yet although imprisoned men are always thinking of their release, you are indifferent to your bonds". 62 Amir Abdur Rahman united Afghanistan and retained powers and authority to himself. He also equipped his army with modern weapons.

(iii) Policy of Continued Isolationism

Afghanistan followed on consistent policy of isolationism during the reign of Amir Abdur Rahman. Because of

60. NAI, no. 46, nos. 34-40, August 1889, no. 34.
61. Ibid., nos. 256-280, July 1880, no. 261, p. 8.
the British control over Afghan foreign policy, Afghanistan was isolated from Persia and Russia and left the door for political relations open only to Britain. Even while dealing with the British, the Afghan Amir exercised and asserted his independence to decide the important issues. For example, in October 1881, the British Viceroy suggested the name of Mir Hashim Khan as the British envoy but the Amir insisted on the appointment of Afzal Khan, which was to be approved by the British. 63

As a part of the policy of isolationism, the Afghan Amir also refused to allow the British troops and officers to visit the strategic areas in Afghanistan. In 1884, when the Russians had reached Merv, the British tried to influence the Amir for the construction of rail links for the defence of Afghanistan but the Amir while appreciating the British suggestions refused to oblige. He protested to the planned extension of the British railroads to Chaman as "leading to no good". 64

The Amir even refused the induction of modern technology into Afghanistan mainly because he feared that it would lead to the penetration of foreign influence. 65 He was also

63. NAI, n. 46, nos. 213-239, August 1882, KWI, p.4.
64. Ibid., nos. 475-488, June 1892, no. 475.
65. Adamec, n. 56, p. 23.
opposed to the stationing of British troops or advisers in Afghanistan; during 1887-88 when the Amir was faced with Ghilzai rebellion and revolt of Ishaq Khan, he proclaimed that the British were waiting at the border for his call to come to his help. In fact, he did not invite the British army. His purpose was only to warn his enemies and that he would best permit the use of foreign troops in his country only when his possession of Afghanistan was seriously threatened.66

The independent thinking of Amir Abdur Rahman was noticed by the British. Lord Dufferin wrote to the Amir in 1886: "... your mind is constantly occupied by the idea of asserting your independence of all control in internal affairs, that you see interference in every British action."67

(iii) Promotion of Balance of Power

During the reign of Amir Abdur Rahman, the geopolitical situation in the neighbourhood of Afghanistan had assumed significant dimensions. Anglo-Russian rivalry was at its zenith. Both great powers were increasing and expanding the sphere of influence over the Islamic countries - Afghanistan, Persia and Ottoman Empire.

66. NAI, n. 46, nos. 76-83, August 1899, no. 81A, pp. 6-7.

67. Ibid., no. 573-577, August 1892, no. 575, p. 5.
Under these circumstances, Amir wanted Afghanistan to pursue a "middle course" policy of forging closer relations with neighbouring Islamic countries without annoying the either of the two great powers in the neighbourhood. According to Adamec: "Abdur Rahman's relations with the more or less independent Muslim populations of the East were influenced by Pan-Islamic considerations." 68

According to Amir Abdur Rahman, the Russian policy was essentially that "rightly or wrongly, friendly or unfriendly, with peace or war, the Islamic kingdoms should be washed away from the face of the Asiatic continent". 69

Amir Abdur Rahman was perhaps also convinced that the Russians were determined to annex Persia, Turkey and Afghanistan by hook or crook. There were two possible ways of doing so. In the first place, Russians could directly befriend these countries and then draw them to its orbit or on the other hand provoke these countries against Britain and eventually reach an understanding with the British in crushing them and thus divide the booty. 70

70. Ibid., p. 260.
The Afghan Amir also recounted in his memoires that the Russians were planning to attack India: "Russia expects that an attack on India would be accompanied by a general uprising in that country, followed by a quick Russian victory, since Britain, as a sea power, was no match for Russia on land". 71 In the wake of such geo-political compulsions, Amir Abdur Rahman proposed the establishment of an Islamic alliance of Turkey, Persia and Afghanistan which could "separate the two great empires neither allowing Russia nor England to take any part of our dominions". 72

The Amir was convinced about the nefarious designs of both great powers and added that no single power could usurp Afghanistan without invoking the hostility of the other. He felt that although "these neighbours are a cause of much anxiety to Afghanistan yet as they are pulling against each other, they are no less an advantage and protections for Afghanistan than a danger (and indeed) a great deal of safety of the Afghan Government depends upon the fact that neither of these two neighbours can bear to allow the other to annex an inch of Afghan territory". 73

71. Ibid., p. 272.
72. Ibid., p. 266.
73. Ibid., p. 171.
Thus Amir Abdur Rahman kept Afghanistan politically intact by pursuing a policy of strict neutrality by warding off the internal interference by either great power. He also maintained the balance of power to the advantage of Afghanistan.

The Durand Line agreement signed between Amir Abdur Rahman and the British India in 1893 is analysed in the succeeding pages because of its recurring references in subsequent years. Soviet occupation of Afghan territory of Punjdeh which posed a great security dilemma is not discussed.

Following the death of Amir Abdur Rahman in October 1901, his son, Habibullah succeeded as new Amir of Afghanistan during the same month. Amir Habibullah was faced with a critical foreign political challenge because both Russia and Britain desired a change in the political status quo of Afghanistan. The Russians wanted to have direct relations with the new Afghan Amir but the British were opposed to such a move and wanted to retain their hold over the conduct of Afghan foreign affairs.

The British Indian Government while sending the condolence message to the new Amir over the demise of late

74. Adamec, n. 56, p. 9.
Amir Abdur Rahman hinted that a mission would be required to meet the new Amir to confirm the previous Anglo-Afghan agreements. Britain also informed Russia that there prevailed a status quo even after the death of Amir Abdur Rahman. However, Amir Habibullah in his reply on 31 October 1901, while ignoring the British hint, promised that he would honour the agreements made by his late father with the British Indian Government "so long as the illustrious British Government firmly adheres to them".

However, the Russians wanted a change in the status quo. Even prior to the death of Abdur Rahman, the Russians had expressed such a desire. On 1 February 1899, a Russian publication novoe vremya contained a hint in this regard:

Russia, whose frontiers run more than 2000 versts with that of Afghanistan, cannot settle the most simple, but unavoidable, frontier question through her relations with the power of their neighbouring state. For this purpose, we have to communicate with London, and London with Simla, and from Simla attempts begin to enter into negotiations with Kabul, which can easily lead to no result, as the Amir already for some time, and on every possible occasion, shows that he is not a vassal of England...(78)

75. Ibid.
76. Ibid., no. 106-108, May 1899, no. 108
77. NAI, n. Nos. 1-129, November 1901, Nos. 9, 22, 36.
78. Ibid., nos. 8-48, December 1901, no. 37.
It further suggested the stationing of representatives of both Russia and Britain in Kabul - a move which could help in removing the British distrust of a Russian invasion of India. In this regard, M. Lesar, Secretary at the Russian Embassy in London informed the British Government on 6 February 1900:

Russo-Afghan relations have been defined by the Agreement of 1872 and 1873, which Russia regards as still being in effect and as placing Afghanistan entirely outside her sphere of actions. Although Russia's obligations only bind her to refrain from political action, she has, except in the case of transient deviation from the correct standard of diplomatic action, consented in the past, from a feeling of friendly interest toward Great Britain, to forego even non-political relations... the moment would accordingly appear to have come which a definite step should be taken in the regularization of these relations...(79)

Thus it is evident from these pronouncements that Russia had predetermined to have direct relations with Kabul even prior to the taking over by Habibullah as the new Amir of Afghanistan.

There ensued a series of diplomatic negotiations between Russia and England in which London wanted to know Russian intentions of having direct relations with Kabul with a view to ascertain if a mutually satisfactory solution

79. Ibid., no. 145-147, May 1900, Note No. 147, Encl. 1, pp. 55.
could be found. On 29 January 1902, the British envoy in St. Petersburg conveyed a verbal declaration of his Government to the Russians that Britain did not wish to contend that "there was no farce in the Russian arguments for direct communications on matters of local detail, but that as having charge of Afghan foreign relations, they held that arrangements for the purpose could only be made with their consent".80 Ludwig W. Adamec feels that now it was left to Russia to formulate proposals as to the change of the status quo and to give guarantees that any relations would remain of a non-political character.81 However on 19 December 1902, the Novoe Vremya, a Soviet publication, carried a statement of the Russian foreign office which stated:

In regard to relations to Afghanistan, it must be remarked that this matter we made no request to the London Cabinet, but that we merely intimated our decision to enter into direct relations with Afghanistan in consequence of altered circumstances. No farther explanations have taken place on this subject. (82)

Both Britain and Russia stuck to their respective positions which created an impasse. In the meanwhile Russians initiated diplomatic offences resulting in a series of incidents. In September 1902, the Afghan officials noticed

80. Quoted in Ademec, n. 56, p. 33.
81. Ibid.
82. NAI, n. 46, nos. 145-147, May 1900, no. 147, Encl. 1, p. 59.
removal of boundary pillars at Meshed by the Russians. The Russian Government, however, expressed its willingness to reinstall the boundary pillars by a joint Russo-Afghan Commission but Amir Habibullah declined the Russian suggestion. The Afghan Amir, at that juncture, asked for the British advice and the latter offered to send a representative. However the Russians rejected the idea of dealing with the British representative and went ahead with the task of restoring some of the pillars themselves. In the meantime Meshed area was hit by a famine and some Russians were reportedly selling wheat at cheap rates to the Afghans in the famine hit areas. Thus on the one pretext or the other, the Russians got an opportunity to deal and negotiate with local Afghan officials in Meshed and Surat.

In the wake of these developments, the British Indian Government got alarmed and thought that a permanent British representative should be stationed at Surat. However, this idea was shelved for the time being because the then Viceroy, Lord Curzon cautioned the

33. Ibid., nos.40-183, February 1904, Encl.1, no.147.
British against such a move since it would frighten the Amir who might resent Russian pressure just as much as he did British.

As a follow up of these developments, the British impressed upon the Afghan Amir the need for the revision of Anglo-Afghan agreements signed earlier on the plea that those agreements were concluded with the late Amir Abdur Rahman as person, subject to renegotiation with every successor. However, Amir Habibullah asserted that there was no need to renegotiate those agreements. Following prolonged discussions, the Amir finally agreed to accept a British mission in this regard at Kabul.

Consequently, a British mission headed by Louis W. Dane reached Kabul on 12 December 1904 to renegotiate the Anglo-Afghan agreements in force during the reign of late Amir Abdur Rahman. It came to be known as Dane Mission. The negotiations between the British officials lasted until the end of March 1905. The main issue around which the discussions veered was the nature of Anglo-Afghan agreements.

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84. Ibid., no.83-162, August 1903, no.155, Notes.
85. Adamec, n.56, p.10.
Agreement of 1880 and its revision. The major British objective was both to get the Agreement of 1880 renewed with favourable modifications and resolve the vexing question of Russo-Afghan relations. However, Amir Habibullah's main objective was to remain independent and not to serve as a mere pawn on the chess board of Indian military defence. Consequently, both the sides exchanged drafts of the proposed treaty. The copy of the British draft treaty was given by Dane to the Afghan Amir who objected to the word "Siyasi" as a translation for "political" for his foreign relations. This shows that the Amir was conscious of not accepting any provision in the proposed treaty which could undermine the Afghan national interests.

The prolonged series of negotiations resulted in the conclusion of what became to be known as Habibullah-Dane Treaty of 21 March 1905. The Amir Habibullah was recognised by the British as the "Independent King of the State of Afghanistan and its Dependencies" and he was to be addressed as "His Majesty". The treaty reaffirmed the annual subsidy granted in 1893, allowing the Amir to collect £400,000 in undrawn subsidy payments and Afghanistan's

86. NAI, Foreign Section F, no. 34-136, January 1905, no. 125 Notes.
88. Ibid.
right to import arms without restrictions was also reiterated. The Amir was very cautious about British strategic manoeuvres. He declined to accord trade concessions to the British in Afghanistan as well as introduction of railways in his country. Under the new treaty though the British failed to obtain the right to set up a diplomatic mission in Kabul yet they retained control of Afghanistan's foreign relations and considered the treaty as a renewal of the Durand Agreement.

The Russians expressed apprehensions about the Anglo-Afghan agreement lest the British would be seeking to alter the then existing pattern of Indo-Afghan relations by annexing or occupying Afghan territory. In this regard, the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Layardowne, with a view to allay Russian misgivings, assured the Russian Ambassador in London, Count Benckendorff, that Britain would not interfere in the internal affairs of Afghanistan and maintain


90. Ibid., also see, Mohammed Afghanistan: The Mohammed Zai Period (Kabul: 1959), p. 148.

status quo. The British on their part sought a similar assurance from the Russian Government for maintaining status quo in their policy towards Afghanistan and regarding the latter "as wholly outside the sphere of their influence". After having secured such an assurance from St. Petersburg, the British were willing to allow the Russians to have interchange of communications with Afghan frontier officials on non-political matters of local nature. However, the Russians refused to give a formal assurance in this regard. However, Russians expressed satisfaction over it.

Towards the Anglo-Russian Rapproachment (1907)

The Habibullah-Dane agreement was concluded at a time when Russia was entangled in hostilities with Japan. Russia was defeated at the hands of Japan. The renewal of Anglo-Japanese Treaty of 1902 in 1905 made the Russians hesitant towards the British with regard to Afghanistan. For Russia, the treaty envisaged implications from Afghan policy of the British Indian Government, and was, therefore, directed


93. Ibid.

94. Landowne to Hardinge, 8 March 1905, Ibid., p. 521.

95. Ibid.
against it. The Russians feared that the British Government entertained some designs on the Russian possessions of Central Asia and "special Russian interests" in Persia. In October 1905, the Russian Foreign Minister, Count Lamendorff appraised the British Ambassador of the adverse effect caused in Russia about the Anglo-Japanese treaty.

The year 1905 had brought in changes in the domestic political scenario both in Britain and Russia. The set up of government in Russia with Alexander Izvalski as new Foreign Minister, sought friendly rather than competitive relationship with Britain. During the same year the liberals came to power in London. The increasing influence of Germany had brought Britain and France close to each other under the immutable law of balance of power. In the wake of Russia's close relations with France and French-British entente Russia also made efforts to forge close ties with London. Consequently in May 1906 both countries started negotiations which lasted until August 1907, with the main purpose of resolving differences and forge cooperation on

96. Ibid., pp. 203-207.
97. Ibid.
98. Ibid., pp. 203-204, Enclosure in No. 193.
mutually agreed terms. Consequently on 31 August 1907 Britain and Russia signed an agreement which came to be known as Anglo-Russian convention of 1907. It comprised three agreements on Persia, Afghanistan and Tibet. The part pertaining to Afghanistan 100 was on the whole more favourable to Britain.

The Russians conceded that Afghanistan was out of their sphere of influence and agreed to conduct their political relations with Afghanistan through the intermediary of the British Government.101 The Russians gained only in terms of local questions of a non-political nature which could be settled directly by the Afghan and Russian officials.

The British Government on its part declared its adherence to the provisions of the Anglo-Afghan treaty of 1905 and also declared not to interfere in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. In other words, British control over the conduct of Afghan foreign policy was conceded in the convention.


However the Anglo-Russian convention of 1907 came as a shock to Amir Habibullah and to the people of Afghanistan. According to Vartan Gregorian perhaps "no single event gave as much impetus to the growth of Afghan nationalism as the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907".102 The fifth article of the convention provided that it would come into force only after the British Government had obtained the consent of the Amir of Afghanistan and notified the same to the Government of Russia. Though the conventions required the approval of the Afghan Amir yet he was not consulted by the British in this regard. The Afghan Government feared that the convention posed a threat to Afghan independence.103 Amir Habibullah was determined to keep Afghanistan completely independent and to that end he wanted to refrain from having any closer relations with either of the two great powers. Thus the Amir of Afghanistan expressed his reluctance to adhere to the Anglo-Russian Convention.

The British Indian Government offered several explanations that the convention would have in no way even a slight

102. Gregorian, n. 20, p. 211.

effect on Afghan independence but all this failed to appease or allay the misgivings of Afghan Government. 104

During Amir Habibullah's visit to India in 1908, the then Viceroy Lord Minto tried to convince the Amir: "I can not but think that Your Majesty will regard the conclusion of the convention with lively convention". 105 The Afghan Amir while acknowledging the receipt of Minto's message, promised that he would soon send his reply. After keeping the British government in suspense for about a year, Amir Habibullah in his fifty-four page reply stated that the convention destroyed the independence of Afghanistan. It further added that "if they (the British) act in contravention of the principle laid down by them in the past, they will have to show a better principle to their own Government and to ours". 106 However, Afghanistan never signed the convention.

Seeing that there was no change in Afghan attitude on Anglo-Russian convention of 1907, the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey and the Soviet counterpart, A.P. Isvalsky, agreed in late 1908 that consent of the Afghan Amir was not necessary. Consequently, the British Government

104. NAI, For , nos. 111, 14 August 1908
105. Ibid., no. 94-128, October 1908, no. 98.
106. Ibid., no. 99.
declared that "as the Amir had raised no objection to Article-3, and was not prohibiting communication between his frontier officials and those of Russia, we saw no reason why the convention should continue to work well, for the Amir was, in practice, acting upon it." 107 Despite these differences the Anglo-Afghan relations remained normal in the years preceding the outbreak of First World War. The cautious and independent nature of foreign policy pursued by Amir Habibullah deterred both Britain and Russia from exerting any sort of pressure on Afghanistan.

On the homefront, Amir further consolidated his position by initiating reforms and projects of modernization. The international developments occurring during that period had considerable impact in Kabul. Turkey's war with Italy and Balkan wars "politcized Afghans and taught them the lesson of unity and Islamic solidarity". 108 Nationalists like Mahmud Tarzi played a notable role in this regard. Tarzi's Siraj-al-Akhbar, a prominent newspaper, interpreted world affairs from a pan-Islamic and Afghan perspective. 109

107. Ibid., E. Grey to A. Nicolson, 13 October 1908, nos. 51-65, December 1908, no. 61
108. Adamec, n. 56, p. 15.
109. Ibid.
The outbreak of the First World War in the summer of 1914 forced both Britain and Russia not to force the convention of 1907 on Afghanistan. On 7 August 1914, Lord Hardinge informed Amir Habibullah about the outbreak of war in Europe between Russia, France and Britain on one side and Germany and Austria on the other and the Amir was urged to remain neutral. The Afghan Amir promptly replied pledging his continued adherence to the Anglo-Afghan treaty obligations and declared his determination to maintain neutrality in the war.

Following the Turkey joining the war, the British became apprehensive about the possibilities of misgivings between Britain and Afghanistan in the wake of Britain's war with the Ottoman Empire. Consequently on 5 November 1915 Lord Hardinge informed Amir Habibullah that "owing to the ill-advised, unprovoked and deliberate action of an Ottoman Government, war has broken out between Great Britain and Turkey".

111. Habibullah to Hardinge, 19 August 1914.
112. Ibid., pp. 540-42. India Office (London), Ps Papers 4741, (1914), Memo No. 173.
The British could not afford to disbelieve Amir Habibullah's commitment to the policy of strict neutrality during the war period. On 5 November 1915, the Viceroy of India in his report sent to London observed: "The attitude of the Amir continues to be most satisfactory.... he is one of the few statesmen in the East, and his conduct has really of all praise".\textsuperscript{113} During 1915 and early 1916, the Germans thrice endeavoured to woo Amir Habibullah to sign a treaty with Germany.\textsuperscript{114} But the Amir refused to respond to German overtures and reiterated his adherence to the principles of strict neutrality.

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the wake of Turkey's defeat in the First World War, the advent of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917 and the defeat of Axis Powers in the war had changed the international political scenario. The maintenance of strict neutrality by Afghanistan during the war period and rejection of German overtures by Amir Habibullah had made the British Government in India and London think how to reward Amir's loyalty. Amir Habibullah wanted his country's independence recognized by Britain including Afghanistan's freedom of maintaining political

\textsuperscript{113.} Indian Office, n. 112, Memo. A 173a.

\textsuperscript{114.} For details see Adanee, n. 56, pp. 28-40.
relations with other countries. Lord Chelmsford, the
Viceroy of India, wrote to London, asserting that "the
services of the Amir have been immense, and when the time
comes to reward them, we must be generous".115

According to Lord Chelmsford, the Afghan Amir could
ask for the following concessions from Britain: (1) complete
political freedom; (ii) territorial aggrandizement; (iii)
money, and (iv) representation in England."116 On 2 February
1919, Amir Habibullah wrote to the Indian Viceroy that his
country be represented at the Peace Conference because
Afghanistan was an independent country and had remained
neutral during the war. The Amir further stipulated that
if the Viceroy could bring a signed certificate of Afghan
independence from the Conference he would be satisfied;
otherwise an Afghan representative must be allowed to attend
the conference to obtain one.117 The Viceroy's Council was
willing to provide some concessions to Afghanistan. However,
Denys Brag, a member of Viceroy's Council remarked:

.....Our control of Afghanistan's foreign relations
has been so long a fundamental principle of our
Afghan policy that it requires an effort of
mind to conceive of our willingly consenting to

115. NAI. For Sec. F. Nos. 705-806, October 1920,
no. 705, Notes.

116. Ibid.

117. Ibid.
any diminution of it. Possibly it may prove essential that it should continue to dominate our policy. But the present is so different from the past, and the future seems likely to be so much more different still, that the time has come for us to scrutinize our traditional policy anew.\(^{(118)}\)

Thus Bray confided that Britain should not alleviate its control over Afghan foreign relations and recommended the conclusion of a definite treaty between Afghanistan and the British India.

However, Viceroy's mood of "being generous" to Amir Habibullah was not shared by London which advised the Viceroy to stave off the Amir, telling him that participation at the Peace Conference was open only to belligerents, and that international guarantees would be no good to Afghanistan, even if they could be secured since they might lead to interference by other nations.\(^{(119)}\)

(d) The Period of Defensive Neutralism (1919 to the End of Second World War)

Following the assassination of Amir Habibullah on 20 February 1919, Amanullah succeeded the throne of

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118. Ibid., no. 706, Notes.
119. NAI, For. Sec. F. Nos. 705-806, October 1920, no. 70s, Notes.
Afghanistan on 21 February 1919. After assuming the power, the first thing Amir Amanullah did was that he wrote a letter on 3 March 1919 to the British Viceroy in India, informing the latter of his father's death, reiterated his Government's policy:

.... Our independent and free Government of Afghanistan considers itself ready and prepared at every time and season to conclude, with due regard to every consideration of the requirements of friendship and the like, such arrangements and treaties with the mighty Government of England as may be useful and serviceable in the way of commercial gains and advantages to our Government and yours. (120)

Again on 13 April 1919, Amir Amanullah announced in a durbar:

.... I have declared myself and my country entirely free, autonomous and independent, both internally and externally. My country will hereafter be as independent a state as the other states and powers of the world are. No foreign power will be allowed to have a hair's breadth of right to interfere internally as externally. With the affairs of Afghanistan, and if any ever does I am ready to cut its throat with this sword. (121)

The Viceroy of India in his reply to the Afghan Amir remained noncommittal and only thanked the latter for informing that

120. NAI, For Prom B, nos. 92-101, September 1919, no. 98.
121. Ibid. For Sec. F. Nos. 705-806, October 1920, no. 720.
he had become the Amir of Afghanistan. Amir Amanullah was proclaimed as King of Afghanistan in March 1919. However, the British Government maintained complete silence to Amanullah's demand for recognition of his accession to the throne. The British silence conveyed an impression that Amanullah's rise to power was not favourably viewed by London. 122

**Third Anglo-Afghan War**

The proclamation of Amir Amanullah as the King of Afghanistan was facilitated through a firman envisaging that he was proclaimed as a King by the people and that he accepted on condition that "(i) Afghanistan should be internally and externally free; (ii) the people should unite with him to avenge the assassination of Habibullah, and (iii) the people should be free and no one be oppressed and government should be by law". 123

The dawn of the May month in 1919 marked the crossing of Indo-Afghan boundary by the regular Afghan forces. On 11 May 1919, Saleh Muhammad Khan, the Commander-in-Chief,


123. NAI, For Sec. B. Nos. 18-191, September 1919, no. 121.
moved to the eastern border, and reached at Dakka on 3 May 1919 along with two companies of infantry "for the ostensible purpose of inspecting the border". In a couple of days, Muhammad Nadir Khan arrived in Khast in Paktya with regular Afghan troops and Abdul Kuddus Khan proceeded to Kandahar in the South.

The firman issued by King Amanullah, which had begun to circulate among the tribesmen living on both sides of the Indo-Afghan border, inter alia stated in part:

I send this order to all subjects of the Eastern circles who are Sayyids, Shaikhs, Mullahs, Khausas Motabars and tell you that there is a great unrest in India. Hindus and Mohammedans have almost all remained faithfull...but it is a pity that they have been rewarded by cruelty and all kinds of injustices in connection with their religion, their honour and their modesty.

The firman further stated that the uprising occurring in India also affected Afghanistan, therefore Saleh Muhammad

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125. NAI, For Sec. F. nos.1-235, July 1919, no.1.

126. NAI, For. Sec. F. nos.1-200 B, August 1919, Appendix to Notes.

127. During that period, the Khilafat Movement was launched in India which called upon the British Government that Indian Muslims could cooperate with the British during the war of the latter if it did not launch war against Turkey, the seat of Khilafat.
was deputed with full power for the protection of Afghanistan's boundaries. On May 4, 1919, the Afghan troops cut the water supply to Landi Kotal and the British forces retaliated by closing the Khyber Pass. Two days later the Afghan forces in the region were increased and they occupied Tor Trappar and Spina Suka.

The Afghans then moved three regiments from Jalalabad to Mohamand country, and Nadir Khan arrived at Khost with troops and several thousand tribesmen, most of them Ghilzays.

The British retaliated on 7 May 1919 by despatching a column to Landi Kotal and another to Parachinar. A cavalry brigade was sent on 7 May to Shangai on the Malagari Road. In the beginning the hostilities were confined to the eastern front and the British registered some successes but the tribal armies and the forces of Nadir Khan then opened up a new front and the British offensive moves were stopped. The British sent feelers to the Afghan king for ending the hostilities on 24 May 1919, King Amanullah responded to the British peace overtures and the British Government gladly accepted,

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128. NAI, For. Sec. F. Nos. 1-200 B. August 1919, Appendix to notes.


130. Ibid.

131. Ibid.
he end of hostilities in the wake of rapidly deteriorating situation in the North-West Frontier.

Series of negotiations between the two countries led to the conclusions of the Anglo-Afghan Treaty on 8 August 1919 at Rawalpindi under which Afghanistan was recognized as a fully sovereign country. Amanullah paid a price for Afghan independence however, he was forced to recognize the Durand Line.

Afghan-Russian Entente

When King Amanullah had assumed the reigns of power in Afghanistan, the latter's confrontation with Britain was underway. Consequently Amanullah's foreign policy followed three distinct paths - establishment of diplomatic relations with Russia, normalization of relations with Britain and forging solidarity with the Muslim world.

On 7 April 1919, King Amanullah despatched two letters to Moscow: one letter sent in the name of Mahmud Tarzi, named as Foreign Minister of Afghanistan informed the "Great President of the Russian Republic (Lenin)" of the

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133. Gregorian, no.20., p.231.
enthronement of the benevolent Amir Amanullah Khan."\textsuperscript{134}
The second letter, a personal note from Amanullah to Lenin, stressed the fact that Afghanistan was free and independent, and pointed out that the Afghan "psychology had always contained in it ideas of equality, humanity and liberty:"\textsuperscript{135}

Lenin in his reply letter sent on 27 May 1919, congratulated the Amir and the people of Afghanistan for their heroic defence of liberty and accepting the proposal to establish relations with Russia.\textsuperscript{136}

In April 1919, an "Afghan Mission" headed by Maulvi Barakatullah arrived in Moscow. However, Maulvi Barakatullah, disowning any official status or relationship with Afghan Government, declared that he was neither a communist or socialist but an Asian nationalist interested in ousting the British from India.\textsuperscript{137}

In early June 1919, an Afghan mission led by Muhammad Wali Khan was cordially received in Tashkent and Russia granted permission to Afghanistan

\textsuperscript{134}. For full text of the letter, see 

\textsuperscript{135}. Ibid.

\textsuperscript{136}. \textit{The Times} (London) 13 June 1919.

to open an Afghan Consulate there. While opening the Consulate, the Afghan Envoy, Muhammad Aslam Khan, said: "We who have risen against the tyrannical British, and made friends with the Russian Soviet, have not done so merely to liberate ourselves and the oppressed Muhammadans of India alone. We strive for the salvation of Muhammadans all over the world". The Afghan objective of establishing diplomatic relations with Russia was to make its northern borders secure and "to be able to conclude an alliance with the Soviets in case of a renewed outbreak of the Anglo-Afghan war".

The Afghan Mission headed by Muhammad Wali Khan reached Moscow on 16 October 1919 and welcomed by Narimanov, the representative of the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs and Sultan Galiev, the representative of the Revolutionary Council of the neo-Soviet Republics. In his welcome address Narimanov while referring to the visit of the mission as the "first Ambassador" of Afghanistan, further added that the "historic event proves that imperialism which aims at the enslavement and humiliation of large and small nations

138. NAI, February 1920, nos. 177-171, no. 137.
139. Adamec, no. 25, p. 53.
has been given a death blow." Sultan Galiev went even further and frankly stated that Soviet Russia would render assistance to Afghanistan.

On 19 October 1919, the Afghan Envoy was received personally by Lenin who expressed the pleasures of his government at the presence of the Afghan Ambassador in the Capital of Soviet Russia. On this occasion the Afghan Ambassador handed to Lenin a letter from the Amir of Afghanistan and personally stressed the importance of military assistance to Afghanistan. Lenin in his reply to Amir's letter, on 27 November 1919, wrote that Afghanistan was "the only independent Muslim State in the world, and the fate sends the Afghan people the great historic task of uniting about itself all enslaved Mohammedan peoples and leading them on the road to freedom and independence".

The desire of both Kabul and Moscow to normalize relations led to negotiations in Moscow in this regard.

140. The Times (London), 28 October 1919.
141. Ibid.
142. Ibid.
143. Harish Kapur, n. 15, p. 221.
145. Ibid.
Afghan-Soviet Differences Over Bukhara

The negotiations regarding the normalization of relations between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union suffered a setback in the autumn of 1920 because of the rising differences between the two countries over the future of Bukhara. Prior to 1917, Bukhara was a protectorate of Russian Empire. In 1868, the Amir of Bukhara had acknowledged the sovereignty of the Russian Tsar and ceded to him the right to represent Bukhara with other powers.146

Following the advent of Bolshevik revolution in Russia, the Russian leaders had made various declarations recognizing the secession of all states which had declared themselves independent from the central government in Moscow. However, the new Bolshevik Government at the same time was awaiting a suitable opportunity to incorporate these states into Soviet Russia. The state of Bukhara was given tremendous, revolutionary importance. The Soviet journal Zhizn Natsionalnostei wrote: "Bukhara represents a very important place for the development of revolution in Central Asia. Either..."

146. For background details see Joshua Kurmitz, Dawn Over Samarkhand; The Rebutt of Central Asia (New York, 1955).
it will become the vanguard for a number of Central Asian and Indian revolutionary movements."147 Afghanistan also showed interest in Bukhara. King Amanullah in his pursuit of pan-Islamic policy, felt that he had a special responsibility to protect the interests of Islamic world. A Russian scholar, J.R. Reysner wrote: "The ruler of Afghanistan appears in the role of supreme protector of all Moslems, and was equally interested in the result of Greco-Turkish war, in the rising of Egypt and in the fate of Bukhara".148 Bukhara, besides being a Muslim country, was also of strategic importance for Afghanistan. According to Fraser-Tytler, Amanullah had dreams of a Central Asian confederacy under his own leadership of which neighbouring Bukhara would constitute an important part".149

Most of the trade of Bukhara was conducted through Afghanistan. This flow of trade entitled Kabul to charge transit duties which, according to Reysner, constituted an important part of the revenue of Afghanistan in 1920.150

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147. Zhizn Natsionalnostei (Moscow), no. 6 (14) 23 February 1919, cited in Harish Kapur, n. 15, p. 223.
Thus in the wake of the conflicting nature of interests of Afghanistan and Russia, it was natural that any effort on the part of either of them to undermine the existing status of Bukhara would have been instrumental in straining their mutual relations.

In March 1918, when Kalesov, Chairman of the Turkistan Soviet Government, had moved with his troops to the capital of Bukhara, the Amir of Bukhara was openly assisted by Afghan volunteers, who undoubtedly played an important role in defeating the Soviet troops. It was also reported that Afghan regular troops had crossed the frontier and for a few weeks had effectively occupied Merv and Eastern Bukhara. Thus encouraged by this development, Kabul made efforts to establish even closer relations with the Amir of Bukhara, and to assist him in every possible way in order to make him strong enough to stop any further attack from Soviet territory. One of the first steps taken in this direction was the exchange of ambassadors by the two countries and making of public declarations of eternal friendship by the King of Afghanistan and Amir of Bukhara.


While Afghanistan was helping Bukhara to strengthen it, the Russians were making attempts to launch another offensive against Bukhara. In August 1920, the Russian troops moved into Bukhara. The troops of the Amir of Bukhara gave a tough fight which lasted for over a week but finally on 2 September 1920, the Red Army managed to capture the capital of Bukhara. The Amir of Bukhara fled to Afghanistan and a Soviet government was established in Bukharan capital. On 15 September 1920, the new government of Bukhara, sent through the Russian envoy in Kabul, a cable to the Afghan Government requesting an exchange of diplomatic representatives between two countries and announcing firm intention to develop close relations between Bukhara and Afghanistan. 154

However, Afghanistan continued rendering support to the oppositional elements in Bukhara to undermine the interests of pro-Russian elements. The Afghan activities came to the notice of Russians and on 21 September 1920 Moscow instructed its Ambassador in Kabul to hand over to the Afghan Government a strong note, containing a number of charges against Afghanistan and demanding an inquiry into

the activities of the Afghan representative in Bukhara and the immediate withdrawal of the Afghan troops.155

The future of Bukhara was an important issue during the negotiations between Afghanistan and Soviet Russia for concluding a friendship treaty between the two countries.

Afghan-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, 1921

On 13 September 1920, Afghanistan and Soviet Russia signed a Treaty at Kabul which was ratified by Moscow on 28 February 1921 and by Kabul in August 1921.156 The concessions made by Kabul were envisaged in Article II and IV of the Treaty. Article II provided that both countries would refrain from entering into any military or political agreement with a third party "that may be against the interests of the other".157 Such an article was more favourable to the Russians than to the Afghans. By obtaining the inclusion of such a provision in the treaty, Moscow had been successful in forestalling in the area any military or political alliance which could have adverse effects on the

155. Ibid., p. 225.


157. Ibid., p. 96.
Central Asian borders of Soviet Russia. The Article IV, which permitted the opening of Russian Consulates in Afghanistan, was also to the advantage of Russia because it provided an access to the Russians to the areas which were of immense strategic significance to the British for the defence of India. Under Article VI, Afghanistan acquired free and untaxed transit through Russian territory of all goods whether purchased in Russia or abroad. Under article VIII, "the actual independence and freedom of Bukhara and Khiva, whatever form of government may be in existence there", was recognized. This provision was a concession to the Afghans and greatly enhanced Amanullah's position as a champion of Islamic solidarity. A supplementary article added to the treaty provided that within a year of the coming into force of the treaty a subsidy would be given by Russia to the extent of one million roubles in gold or silver coin or bullion. It also provided for construction of a telegraph line from Kushka through Herat and Kandhar to Kabul and place technical and other specialists at the disposal of the Afghan Government. According to

158. Ibid., p. 97.
159. Ibid.
a news item published in London based *The Times*. Russia was also to establish a powerful radio station at Kabul and to supply engineers to improve Afghanistan's communications.¹⁶²

Viewed from Afghan perspective, the treaty marked a significant move towards Afghanistan's independence in international relations, "and was calculated to strengthen the hands of the Afghan Government in future dealings with Great Britain".¹⁶³ For Moscow it marked a further stage in the recognition of Soviet power and prestige in Central Asia and provided it new opportunities for offensive and defensive action against Great Britain.

The Afghan-Soviet entente aroused British suspicions because only a couple of years back Britain had complete control over Afghan foreign relations and now Kabul had proclaimed its independence. Besides the increasing Soviet influence in Afghanistan also alarmed the British. The British Government had become fearful and it voiced its concern in a note of March 1921 to Moscow - that the major objective of Soviet policy in the region was to

overthrow British rule in India.\footnote{British Command Papers, no. 1869 (London, 1921), p. 7.} King Amanullah, on his part, was apprehensive of both Great Britain and the Soviet Union. He did not trust either. Thus he forged closer cooperation and friendship with Islamic countries. In March 1921, Afghanistan concluded a treaty of friendship with Turkey which affirmed Turkish independence and recognised Afghanistan "as an independent in the most real and complete sense of the word".\footnote{For text of the Treaty see, Arnold J. Toynbee, \textit{Survey of International Affairs, 1925} (London, 1927), pp. 385-387.} In June 1921, Afghanistan concluded a Treaty of Friendship and Neutrality with Iran.\footnote{For text of the Treaty, see \textit{League of Nations, Treaty Series}, XXXIII, pp. 295-301.} Thus by concluding a Treaty with Iran, King Amanullah not only greatly strengthened Afghanistan's diplomatic position in the Middle East but also in the entire Islamic community.

Though Afghanistan had concluded a friendship treaty with Moscow\footnote{British Command Papers, no. 1869 (London, 1921), p. 7.} King Amanullah was equally apprehensive of Soviet designs. The British had tended to regard Amanullah as a Soviet "Trojan Horse" but according to M.N. Roy, the Afghans made it clear that they had no intention of allowing any Soviet force to enter their territory and use it as a
base of operations against India, nor did they desire to participate in such an operation.167

However, King Amanullah's primary concern was to steer Afghanistan by pursuing independent foreign policy without compromising the freedom and territorial integrity of Afghanistan in the presence of powerful Soviet Union and British India on its borders. He also followed the traditional policy of seeking a balance of power in the region. He signed a treaty with Britain on 22 November 1921. The treaty provided for the establishment of legations in London and Kabul, and granted tax exemptions on materials destined to help modernize the country.168 One major feature of the treaty was Afghanistan's agreement to keep the Soviet Consulate out of eastern Afghanistan.169

The year 1922 witnessed the recrudescence of complications between Moscow and Kabul over Bukhara where the nationalists had again raised the banner of revolt against Moscow. The Russians, with a view to utilize the influence of Enver Pasha, a former Turkish leader who had escaped to

168. See, Collection of Treaties, n. 132.
169. Ibid.
Russia after First World War, sent him to Bukhara to fight the nationalists. On the contrary, Enver Pasha joined hands with the Bukharan nationalists and managed to control important centres of Bukhara by May 1922. King Amanullah, being encouraged by these developments, took the step of concentrating his armed forces on the northern borders and at the same time entered into correspondence with Enver Pasha. 170

However, the Soviet Government of Bukhara, having discovered Afghan complicity in the affairs, sent a formal note on 11 July 1922 to the Afghan Foreign Ministry demanding the immediate withdrawal of Afghan troops and to stop support "rebels" in Bukhara, extradition of all rebel leaders in Afghanistan to Soviet Russia and an assurance from the Afghan Government that Enver Pasha and his supporters would not be allowed to enter the Afghan territory. 171

However, the Afghan government kept mum, and consequently the Afghan Ambassador to Bukhara was made to leave that country. Moscow also expressed its displeasure to Kabul

170. Fraser-Tytler, n. 149, p. 203.
over these developments. Some Soviet leaders began to consider Amanullah as a puppet of the British and demanded the cancellation of the annual subsidy that Soviet Russia had been giving to Afghanistan under the Treaty of 1921. Following the death of Enver Pasha in August 1922 and consolidation of power by Soviet Government in Bukhara, made King Amanullah to forsake his desire of consolidating Afghan power in Central Asia. In the meantime, the developments in the southern frontiers had also been taking dramatic turns. The Afghan King consequently focussed his attention on the Indo-Afghan border.

In the North-Western frontier province, the British followed the "forward policy" with a view to exert their administrative control in the region. King Amanullah saw the British move as a slow advance towards Afghanistan. In early 1923 he visited the Pakhtoon majority areas on the Afghan side and came to the conclusion that British policy was dangerous for Afghanistan as well as for the tribes living in the area. The British reluctance to abandon

172. Ibid., p. 235.
174. Fraser-Tytler, no. 149, p. 272.
the forward policy led to the revolt by the people in the North Western Frontier Provinces (NWFP). Moscow tried to exploit the situation to its own advantage. The Russian envoy in Kabul, Raskalmikov, was alleged to have recommended to Soviet authorities in Tashkent on 17 February 1923 that the Afghan-British crisis be aggravated by the distribution of arms and money to the various tribal groups. The British government in an ultimatum sent to Moscow, demanded among other things, the recall of communist agents from India and the withdrawal of Raskolimikov from Kabul. Though Moscow recalled its envoy from Kabul yet the relations between Kabul and London remained estranged. In December 1923, the British Government sent an ultimatum to Kabul demanding the cessation of all Afghan supplies to the "rebels" in the NWFP area and severance of relations between Kabul and Moscow. The Soviet Russia denounced the British move and at the time warned Kabul that the expulsion of Soviet Ambassador from Kabul would in fact mean the end of an "Independent Afghan state".

175. For details, see, A.J. Toynbee, n.165, p.563.
177. Ibid., p.13.
179. Ibid., p.238.
King Amanullah, being a shrewd statesman, did not go by either British threats or Soviet advice. For him, the national interest was supreme. Sensing the gravity of the situation, he ordered the arrest of "rebels" who had sought asylum in Afghanistan. 180

While these developments were going on, there erupted a serious uprising within Afghanistan against the progressive policies of King Amanullah in March 1924, mainly engineered by conservative elements. 181 Moscow acted promptly by bombarding the rebel areas realizing that the dethronement of King Amanullah could bring the British back to the political scene of Afghanistan. This tactical move by Moscow was aimed at gaining long term Soviet gains in Afghanistan by winning the sympathies of King Amanullah.

With a view to seize this opportunity Moscow started negotiations for the construction of telegraph line, a radio station, roads between the two countries and the agreement in July, 1924 to commence talks at an early date for the conclusion for commercial treaty. 182 During 1925 both

181 Fraser-Tytler, n.149, pp.204-06.
countries again held negotiations to conclude a commercial agreement. The quantum of trade grew rapidly between the two countries in 1925-26. The frontiers dispute over the possession of an island on the Amu River, formerly owned by Bukhara annexed by Afghanistan, and again occupied by Soviet troops, was also settled by a diplomatic agreement on 28 February 1926. 183

Afghan-Soviet Treaty of Neutrality and Non-Aggression

On 31 August 1926, both Kabul and Moscow signed the Treaty of Neutrality and non-Agression. 184 Under the treaty, the two countries agreed to maintain neutrality in case either of them was involved in a military conflict with a third country. 185 It was also agreed not to take part in any alliance or agreements of a military or political character with another or several third powers which might be directed against the other contracting party. Both countries also agreed that they would abstain from interfering in the internal affairs of each other. 186 The treaty, on the whole, was more advantageous to the Soviet Union than to Afghanistan because the latter being a small country could neither match the Soviet military might nor could interfere into internal affairs.

183. Harish Kapur, n. 15, p.239.
184. For full text see L. Shapiro, no.156, pp.322-323.
185. Ibid., p.322.
186. Ibid.
On 28 November 1927, another agreement was signed between the two countries providing for the establishment of an outline between Kabul and Tashkent, linking the two countries by air.187

From December 1927 to July 1928, King Amanullah paid state visits to India, various countries in Europe and the Middle East. While in India, King Amanullah spoke of Islamic solidarity and in turn was hailed as the King of Islam.188 He then visited Egypt, Italy, France and Germany. During his visit to England, he was presented the collar of the Royal Victorian Order by King George. The visit was marked by visits to various places in England.189 During his visit to the Soviet Union, Amanullah delayed three days in Warsaw enroute, judiciously avoiding the May Day Celebrations in order to spare his hosts embarrassment and in order to mollify the British.190 Before his return to Afghanistan, the King also visited Turkey and Iran.

187 For full text see Ibid., pp.356-357.
188 *Muslim Outlook* (Lahore) 24 July, 1928.
189 Vartan Gregorian, n.20, p.257.
190 Ibid.
King Amanullah was greatly influenced by the progress made by Europe and he now recognized the enormity of the task of modernizing Afghanistan. His western ways and radical reforms were opposed by the orthodox forces in Afghanistan. His opponents said that the king "had turned against Allah and Islam". He reduced the autonomy of the tribes and the influence of the religious leaders, opposed polygamy and the veil, established schools for girls and extended the military draft to the whole country. Though these were progressive measures, yet Amanullah became very unpopular. The resultant impact was the outbreak of a British instigated revolt against King Amanullah in January which forced him to flee from Kabul to Kandahar. The leader of the rebellion was an illiterate Tajik bandit called Bacha-i-Saqau who proclaimed himself as the king.

This new development in Afghanistan divided the leadership in Moscow on the question of rendering support to Bacha-i-Saqao. According to Agabekov, a former officer of OGPU, the OGPU was in favour of aiding Bacha in the hope that he would carry out a radical revolution in

191. Dupree, no.16, p.450.
192 It means the "son of a water carrier".
194 The Russian name for the then secret service, predecessor of the present KGB.
Afghanistan and that through him, the country would gradually be Sovietized. Agabekov has further pointed out that the Commissariat of foreign affairs on the other hand, expressed the view that most of Bacha's supporter's were Taziks, Uzbaks, Turkman and other nationalities living in northern Afghanistan who were ethnically akin to people of Soviet Central Asia. This being the case, Bacha could probably adopt a hostile attitude towards Moscow. While Amanullah, being a Pashtun, was very popular among the Pushtuns who strongly resented British rule over their fellow tribesmen in India. Agerbekov further adds that the Soviet politburo took the advice of the Commissariat of foreign affairs and decided to assist Amanullah.

**Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan**

In view of the fluid situation in Afghanistan after Bacha-i-Saqao had proclaimed himself as the King of Afghanistan, Moscow decided to avail the situation to its own advantage. Moscow's decision to help Amanullah was further


196. Ibid., p.165.

197. Ibid.
strengthened by influence of the four Charki brothers - Ghulam Nabi, Ghulam Siddiq, Ghulam Jilani and Abdul Aziz, who had held important ministerial posts under King Amanullah. According to Agabekov, Ghulam Jilani one night met Soviet leader Stalin and Vitalii Primakov, the Soviet military attache in Kabul since 1927.198 Agabekov further adds that "It was decided to form an expeditionary force of red soldiers disguised as Afghans who would secretly cross the frontier and march against Kabul".199 The Soviets provided party airplanes as well as horsemen, especially equipped with machineguns.200 This Soviet army entered Afghanistan and after crossing the Amu River captured the town of Mazar-i-Sharif on 30 April, 1929. There occurred a fierce battle between the Russian army and the supporters of Bacha-i-Saqao near Khulm and after defeating the latter they marched toward Kabul. Ghulam Nabi was commanding these forces. In the meanwhile two Basmachi leaders also conducted raids inside Soviet Union from Afghanistan, though unsuccessful. The Soviet media claimed that these attacks were instigated either by Bacha or the British.201

198. Ibid., p.166
199 Ibid., pp.166-167.
200 India Office Library (London), LPS/10/1203.,p.135,1927
201 Admec, n.124, p.161.
While Ghulam Nabi's army was marching toward Kabul, word came that Amanullah had abdicated and fled to India. This created a panic in the Ghulam Nabi's army of which many had deserted. The Soviets promptly withdrew their troops, the last of them leaving in June 1929. Another reason for Soviet Union to abandon the Afghan invasion was that Moscow did not want to alarm the British at a time when it was hoping to restore diplomatic relations with the newly elected Labour Government in London. Thus by launching a well concerted attack on Afghanistan, Moscow had demonstrated that "like its Tsarist predecessor, it had ambitions regarding Afghanistan and was willing to use military force to back this up."  

Afghan Foreign Policy Under Nadir Khan (1929-1933) 

Following the defeat of Bacha-i-Saqao in October 1929, Nadir Shah became the King of Afghanistan. The new Afghan

203 Agabekov, n., p.168.
king pursued a cautious modernization programme at home and followed the traditional policy of neutrality. While giving the opening speech in the Afghan National Consultative Assembly, Nadir Shah said: "In my opinion the best and most useful policy that one can imagine for Afghanistan is a policy of neutrality. Afghanistan must always entertain good relations with its neighbours as well as all the friendly powers who are not opposed to the national interests of the country. Afghanistan must give its neighbours assurances of its friendly attitude while safeguarding the rights of reciprocity. Such a line of conduct is the best one for the interests of Afghanistan." 206

Nadir Shah was really faced with an uphill task which was to make Afghan neutrality a reality and to convince among others - Moscow and the Islamic world that he was not a tool of British imperialism. While refuting the charge that he had received British assistance in overthrowing Bacha, he said: "It was only through the exclusive help of the Almighty God, and thanks to the sacrifices of the people of Afghanistan, unassisted by any foreign power, that I took Kabul." 207

He adhered to a policy of non-involvement both in India and in Central Asia seeing in "positive neutralism"

206 Islah (Kabul) 8 July 1931
207 Ibid.
the best means of securing internal stability and external independence. In May 1930, Afghanistan confirmed the Anglo-Afghan Treaty of 1921 and the trade convention of 1923 which had envisaged a tacit understanding that no Soviet trade agencies were to be opened in the eastern provinces of the Afghan kingdom adjacent to India. At the same time Nadir Shah tried to put a stop to anti-British revolutionary activity in Afghanistan. He discouraged the activities of the Red Shirt movement and the Afridi and Mohamand tribal struggles on Indo-Afghan border by making them clear that the "whole frontier policy of the Afghan Government would be actuated by a desire for peace on both sides of the frontier and a spirit of true friendship towards His Majesty's Government". 208

King Nadir Shah also took steps to further normalize relations with the Soviet Union - While welcoming the enthronement of Nadir Shah, the Soviet Foreign Minister, Maxim Litvinov, said that Moscow intended to continue to be a good neighbour to Afghanistan and hoped to develop relations with it on the basis of existing agreements. 209 Afghanistan concluded a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union in 1931 which was in fact the reiteration of the Afghan-Soviet

208 Fraser Tytler, n.149. p.236.
treaty of 1926. The new treaty also gave Afghan commitment against the use of Afghan territory as a base for subversive activities against the Soviet Union. Following the combined blows of Red Russian Army in Central Asia and the suddenly effective Afghan border patrols, Basmachi activities were on the decline. In early 1931, Afghan tenacious forces drove Ibrahim Beg, the most of the Basmachi leaders, back over the border into the Soviet Union, where he was finally executed. The relations between Kabul and Moscow were further improved by the signing of a Soviet-Afghan agreement on the definition of aggression.

This entente in Afghan-Soviet relations was accompanied by an expansion of trade between the two countries. Between 1928 and 1932, Moscow gained a greater share of the Afghan market and goods from Herat and northern Afghanistan dominated the markets of Bukhara and Tashkent.

However, the policy of Nadir Shah regarding forging close relations with Moscow could in no way be interpreted that he was pro-Soviet. He was scrupulous in his adherence

211 On this Soviet-Afghan agreement, see Islah, 13 July 1933.
to traditional policy of neutrality. He did a sweeping dismissal of the Soviet advisors, pilots and engineers whom Amanullah had invited to help manage the country, while at the same time, he denied a Soviet request for establishing a commercial mission in Afghanistan. In place of the departing Soviet advisors, Afghanistan acquired the services of experts from Germany, Italy, Japan and India. Nadir Shah wanted as foreign advisors "only those who were unlikely to be supported by neighbouring armed forces in case of any disagreements".

Besides, Nadir Shah also made attempts to have cordial relations with Islamic countries, especially Turkey and Iran. He also took steps in forging relations with Italy, France, Germany, United States and Japan. The activities of the British and the Russians within Afghanistan were curtailed during Nadir Shah's reign.

**post-Nadir Shah Period**

The Charkhi brothers especially Ghulam Nabi and other supporters of Amanullah were opposed to the regime of Nadir Shah. The execution of Ghulam Nabi in November 1932 ushered in a brief spell of political violence in Afghanistan which culminated in the assassination of


214 Ibid.


216 For details see, Vartan Gregorian, n.20, pp.335-33.
Nadir Shah himself on 8 November 1933. On the same day, Zahir Shah, the nineteen year old son of Nadir Shah, was proclaimed as the new king of Afghanistan. The young Zahir Shah was assisted by his paternal uncles Shah Mohammad Khan, Shah Wali Khan and Muhammad Hashim Khan, the latter being the Prime Minister and being in full control of Afghanistan's domestic and foreign policies. 217

King Zahir Shah in a speech in 1934, said that the general foreign policy aims of Afghanistan were "shaped by the desire of the king and his government for world peace so that Afghanistan could continue to combat its socio-economic retardation and catch up with progress." 218 The king laid emphasis on three points: his desire to maintain friendly relations with all countries; his hope to live in peace and friendship with neighbouring countries, and his intention not to raise political difficulties or obstacles for other governments, a policy he anticipated other Governments to adopt for Afghanistan. 219

Strict adherence to the traditional policy of neutrality remained the main hallmark of Afghan foreign policy during the post-Nadir Shah period. Kabul assured the Soviet

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217 Fraser-Tytler, n.149, p.243.
218 For full text of King Zahir Shah's speech, see Kabul Almanach, 1934-35 (Kabul:1937), p.67.
219 Ibid.
Government that the Basmachis and other emigre elements from Turkistan would not be allowed to launch anti-Soviet activities from its territory. At the same time, Afghanistan also assured the British government that it would prevent the “Indian rebels” and Afghan tribes along the Indian borders from indulging in acts hostile to British India.220

Afghanistan became the member of the League of Nations in 1934 and during the same year the Soviet Union also joined the League. In May, 1935, Kabul and Moscow signed an agreement on an anti-locust campaign and this agreement paved the way for mutual cooperation and a pretext for the convening of annual meetings.221 In 1936, Kabul renewed the Soviet-Afghan Mutual Pact of the 1931 which was extended up to 29 May, 1946.222 This was followed by a commercial agreement in May 1936 which envisaged transit facilities for Afghans through Soviet Union and a financial agreement between the Soviet Commissariat for External Commerce and the Bank-i-Milli.223 Kabul and Moscow also decided to close their respective consulates in Tashkent and Mazar-i-Sharif with an avowed objective of


222 For the text of the agreement, see Jane Degras (ed), Calendar of Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy (London:1948), p.152.

223 Islah (Kabul). 23 May, 1936.
limiting the scope of interference in each other's affairs. 224 This move was welcomed by Great Britain which had campaigned since 1921 against the establishment of Soviet consulates in the strategic regions of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan During the Second World War:

By the time the Second World war broke out in Europe with Japanese involvement in East Asia, Afghanistan had become heavily dependent on the financial and technical assistance of the Axis Powers, especially Germany, Italy and Japan. The best way for the Allies "to have ended the dominance of the Axis in this strategic country was for the United States and Great Britain themselves to have extended technical assistance and long term credits to the Afghan Kingdom but neither chose to do so". 225 However, the only alternative before Afghanistan was to turn to the Soviet Union instead of the Axis powers. But such a move was not keeping in tune with the Afghanistan's traditional policy of neutrality and it would have been highly unwelcome for the British as well. Afghanistan was opposed to both Russian and British influence in the country.

224 Ibid., 25 April 1938.
225 Gregorian, n.20, p.382
Thus when the Second World War broke out in the early 1939, it posed a big challenge to Afghanistan's foreign and economic policies. As Vartan Gregorian has aptly observed: "The possibility that Afghanistan's independence might be jeopardized or that the country might become a battleground of European diplomacy - even a theater of war - seemed very real". Consequently, King Zahir Shah, after consulting the Afghan Parliament, issued a decree on 6 September 1939, proclaiming the neutrality of Afghanistan. This proclamation was made with a view to keep Afghanistan away from the flames of Second World War and safeguard its independence.

The decree of neutrality restricted the activities of nationals of the belligerent powers; no propaganda activities were to be tolerated and the dissemination of news was restricted to official press releases by the governments of the belligerant nations, which were to be published in the Kabul daily Islah.

In the wake of the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact concluded in 1939, Moscow did not pressurise Kabul to sever its relations with the Axis powers until 1941.

226 Ibid., p.383
227 Salnāma-ye-Kabul (Kabul: 1940), pp.46-47.
228 Adamec. n.124, p.243.
And the being deeply involved in the war in Europe also
did not raise any eyebrow in this regard.

During 1939-41 period, Germany made frantic efforts
to woo Afghans, including the supporters of Amanullah, to
create troubles among the tribesmen of the NWFP to weaken
the position of the British but King Zahir Shah's government
refused to comply with German overtures and reiterated
its commitment to the policy of strict neutrality. 229

Fraser-Tytler, who during that period was a British envoy
to Kabul, described the situation as one in which "the
Afghans figuratively buttoned that coats and turned their
backs to the blast, crouching behind the frial shelter of
their international frontiers, and their proclaimed
neutrality ..., hoping that the whirlwind would pass them
by". 230

The events had taken decisive turn during the close
of 1941 and following the German invasion of the Soviet Union
the latter had joined the Allies. There were hundreds of
Axis power's nationals in Afghanistan during that period
and the changed war scenario was bound to give worries to
Kabul. Both Iran and Afghanistan were of strategic
significance for the Allies. The presence of Axis subjects
in Afghanistan was bound to attract the attention of the

229 Gregorian, n. 20, pp. 385-387.
Allies. In October 1941, Moscow and London sent similar notes to the Afghan government demanding the ouster of German and Italian citizens. This demand by the powerful neighbours of Afghanistan had created misapprehensions among the minds of many Afghans. Finally the Zahir Shah's government after consulting the Loya Jirga, decided to comply with the demand and at the same time reiterated Afghanistan's will and determination to preserve its strict neutrality, independence and territorial integrity.

Accordingly, Kabul was placed under strict surveillance and gasoline rationing was imposed in July 1941. During the same month, the Afghan border guards shot two German agents on their way to the camp of the "Fakir of Ifi" resulting in the death of one and other was wounded. While conveying his regrets to Germans over the incident, the then Afghan Prime Minister, Hashim Khan said that the Afghan Guards had mistaken the two German agents for Amanullah's son and the nephew of Ghulam Sidiq Khan. Following the British and Soviet invasion of Iran during the last week of August 1941, the Germans were trapped in Afghanistan. Both Moscow and London exerted pressure on Kabul for the expulsion of Axis nationals from Afghanistan. The German legation in Kabul was not satisfied with the British promise of safe passage for the

231 *The Times* (London) 21 October 1941
232 *Kabul Almanach 1941-42*, pp.280,85
233 Gregorian, n. 20, p.389.
Axis nationals trapped in Afghanistan. However, on 15 October 1941, Nagibullah Khan, the Director-General of the political department of the Afghan foreign ministry, explained Afghanistan's actions in yielding to Allied pressures as being prompted by his Government's desire for peace. The British propaganda and reports in the Indian Press continued reporting about the dangers inherent in the continued presence of Axis nationals in Afghanistan.

During this period of crisis, the Afghan government reiterated its policy of peace and neutrality and expressed surprise over the excess propaganda over the presence of Axis nationals in Afghanistan. By November, 1941, most of the Axis nationals had left Afghanistan. The Loya Jirga, which met during 5-6 November 1941 to approve the expulsion of the Germans and at the same time it confirmed Afghanistan's neutrality and as a warning issued a declaration that no further infringement of Afghanistan's sovereign rights and independence would be tolerated.

Following the departure of the Axis nationals from Afghanistan, there was no more further pressure from Great Britain or Soviet Union in this regard and perhaps both London and Moscow were satisfied with Afghanistan's steadfast commitment to the policy of strict neutrality.

235 Islah (Kabul), 18 October 1941.
236 Amis (Kabul) 8 November 1941.
Iran Crisis of 1946:

The conclusion of the Second World war in 1945 altered the global political scenario. The traditionally colonial powers like Germany, Italy and UK were on the decline and the Soviet Union and the United States emerged as the main contenders vying with each other to win new "spheres of influence" in the post-war period.

While the newly born Cold War was being brewed up between Washington and Moscow, there developed Iranian crisis in early March 1946 when Soviet troops marched into Iranian territory. As we have seen in the preceding pages, Iran had been subjected to Anglo-Russian rivalry for a long time. But during the period of Second World War, Iran was also subject to Soviet-American rivalry. The origins of the Iranian crisis of 1946 lay over the Soviet-US disagreement over partition of Iran between the Soviet Union and British forces in August 1941. This division was done to preclude a similar fate at the hands of the Nazis who were reportedly sympathetic to the then deposed King Reza Pahalvi of Iran. The Allied powers had, however, pledged to respect Iranian independence and territorial integrity by withdrawing their troops no later than six months after the defeat of the Axis; a

date which turned out to be 2 March 1946. During the war, Iran served as an important conduit for US land-based equipments to Moscow particularly as the northern sea route to Murmansk came under increasing pressure from the Germans.

Soon after the war was over, the British and American troops began to withdraw while Soviet forces not only remained there but also established a quasi-independent regime in Azerbaijan and "had an obvious interest in the potential oil riches of the region". Fearing that the Soviet Union would not withdraw its troops from Iranian soil, Tehran moved the Security Council in this regard. There were also reports that the Soviet Union was augmenting its troops in Iran.

In view of the grave situation, the matter came up before the Security Council on 25 March 1946. The Soviet Union tried to get the debate postponed but the United States opposed it. However, it was suddenly announced that on 4 April 1946 both by Tehran and Moscow the conclusion of an agreement calling for the withdrawal of Soviet troops in early May 1946. And by the year end the Soviet troops were completely withdrawn from Iranian

238. Ibid., p. 249.
240. New York Times, 5 April 1946
territory. It was later disclosed by US President Truman that the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Iran was facilitated because of the US ultimatum to Moscow to be backed up by the movement or threat of movement of US military forces to help Iran. Following the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Iran, the crisis was averted.

The foregoing analysis reveals the region of South West Asia had been a pawn in the game of rivalry between the great powers. The Anglo-Russian rivalry which lasted over fifteen decades had its impact on the countries of the region. However Iran and Afghanistan pursued the policies of strict neutrality despite the great power rivalry and thus managed to maintain their respective independence and territorial integrity. An in-depth analysis of developments in Afghanistan and its foreign policy for about two hundred years reveals that Afghanistan did not respond to great powers' overtures and maintained its independent posture in regional and international affairs. The Afghan rulers did not allow their country to fall an easy prey either to British manoeuvres or Soviet overtures. The strict adherence to the policy of neutrality and independent foreign policy helped Afghanistan maintain its independence and foreign policy. This traditional policy
was pursued by Afghanistan in the post-war period too, as is analysed in the succeeding chapters.