CONCLUSION

The consolidation of British power in India posed a serious threat to the security and integrity of Afghanistan. The imperial tide swept over practically the whole of Asia by the beginning of the twentieth century. Afghanistan was one of the very few countries of Asia which managed to escape colonial domination. It was subjected to two full-scale British invasions in the nineteenth century. The people of Afghanistan fought bravely for their independence and compelled the arrogant British rulers of India to be cautious in their dealings with the brave Pathans.

The Afghans managed to escape the unhappy fate of most Asian peoples because of the happy combination of their own bravery and the geographical configuration of their country. By 1907 the two Imperial Powers - Britain and Russia - had reached the limits of their expansion and the Anglo-Russian Convention signalled the end of the most acute phase of imperial rivalry concerning Afghanistan. The people of Afghanistan, however, paid a price for safeguarding their independence: territorial encroachments by the expansionist British imperial power.

The First World War started a chain of events affecting the foundations of Imperial rule in Asia. The financial and manpower demands of the War weakened the British
imperial structure in Asia. The flight of many Indian revolutionaries to Afghanistan, Amir Amanullah's awareness of the intimate link between the Indian liberation movement and Afghanistan's struggle against British imperialism, the awakening of the peoples in other parts of Asia - China, Persia and the former Ottoman Empire - these were major turning-points in the anti-colonial movement gathering momentum immediately after the First World War.

The second decade of the 20th century witnessed extensive European designs on Afghanistan. With the outbreak of the First World War, the Germans tried their best to bring Afghanistan on their side. They wanted to send the Afghan army and the Pathan tribesmen to attack the plains of India. Their objective was to divert the flow of British manpower from the war theatre in Europe. Amir Habibullah was fully aware of these motives in dragging Afghanistan into the World War. He told the British agent in Kabul, Hafiz Saifulullah Khan, that his neutrality enabled the British to concentrate all their manpower on the main theatre of conflict in Europe. When the Ottoman Turks entered the war and sided with Germany, the German designs received powerful support. Armed with a declaration of jihad against Britain, it was easier for the Turks to incite the religious leaders of Afghanistan and the frontier tribes. The British realized the seriousness of the Turkish involvement in the World War.
from their imperial perspective. This alignment would have been a direct threat to British rule in India. The British made every possible effort to keep Afghanistan neutral. While informing Amir Habibullah that Turkey had entered the war on the German side, Lord Hardinge assured him that the war was not a religious crusade, that the religious places of Muslims were safe, and that the Russians had also given assurances to this effect.

The Germans had already hosted an Indian Revolutionary Centre at Berlin. Through this prominent centre, Raja Mahendra Pratap and Maulavi Barakatullah encouraged the German Foreign Office to send a Mission to Afghanistan, consisting of Germans, Turks and members of the Indian revolutionary group. The idea was approved by the German Foreign Office and a mission left for Afghanistan. The mission encouraged the Amir of Afghanistan to join hands with the Central Powers; in return, the Afghans were to get their territory lost to the British in the 19th century. The Indian revolutionaries, in their eagerness to hasten the independence of their country, even went to the extent of accepting the Amir as the ruler of independent India.

The Afghans, who were under the influence of the mullahs, wanted to join the Turks against Britain. The Afghan nationalists, led by Mahmud Tarzi, also wanted the Amir to join the war. He considered the world war as a golden opportunity to make Afghanistan completely independent. But
the Amir knew that his country could not challenge the British Empire. The Germans were giving promises of financial and military support from the Central Powers. The Amir, however, knew that the Germans could not make their way to Afghanistan to assist him in invading India. It was physically impossible for the Germans to render any tangible military support to Afghanistan. Iran was under the British and Russian control. The German envoy after a brief stay in Kabul left Afghanistan in disgust.

The Indian revolutionaries, with the help of high ranking Afghans like Sardar Nasrullah Khan, Prince Amanullah and Mahmud Tarzi, on the one hand, and frontier Pathan leaders, within Afghanistan and independent British territory, on the other, tried to bring an end to British rule in India, and to secure Afghanistan's independence. The Indian revolutionaries in Afghanistan were led by Raja Mahendra Pratap, Maulvi Barakatullah and Maulavi Obeidullah. The Afghans fully supported the establishment of the Indian Government in exile. Sardar Nasrullah Khan congratulated Raja Mahendra Pratap on his appointment as life President of this government.

The Amir's declaration of neutrality in the First World War was made in spite of strong pressures, domestic as well as foreign, in favour of a strong anti-British posture. His neutrality was considered to be a pro-British policy; it discredited him in the eyes of his own people. Eventually it led to his assassination. He was succeeded, after a short
interval, by Amir Amanullah. Meanwhile the Russian Revolution in 1917 gave a new dimension to the Afghan struggle for independence. The Proclamation of the new Bolshevik Government, in which it declared its support to all those peoples in the East who were under British Imperialism, was widely circulated and appreciated. The British Indian Government considered this a greater threat than the military designs of the old Tsarist regime. Propagation of subversive ideas was more dangerous than old-fashioned military plans of a crumbling empire. The British rulers of India took a serious note of the serious threat posed to their imperial structure in Asia.

Amir Amanullah was anti-British and was recognised as the leader of nationalist forces in Afghanistan. On the very first day of his reign, i.e. 28 February 1919, he declared that Afghanistan should be free in her domestic and foreign affairs. The Amir was encouraged to take this stand because of the political unrest in the Punjab and in the rest of India as well as the military complications facing the British Empire. In a letter of 3 March 1919, he informed the Viceroy of his accession to the throne of independent Afghanistan. The British Indian Government acknowledged this letter after a delay of 42 days and deliberately ignored the assertion of Afghanistan's independence.

The British were afraid that a free Afghanistan would act as a bridge for Soviet influence threatening British rule
in India. Meanwhile, on 27 March 1919, Soviet Russia recognised Afghanistan's independence and letters were exchanged between Lenin and Amir Amanullah. An Afghan delegation led by Mohammad Wali Khan left for Soviet Russia in order to establish neighbourly relations between the two countries.

Anglo-Afghan relations deteriorated steadily and on 7 May 1919, the Third Anglo-Afghan War broke out between Afghanistan and British India. Though the war was between two unequal powers, the Afghans were supported by local population and the Pathans of the North West Frontier. The Afghans could manage to defeat the British army in the Kurram Valley and this was the main reason that the British stopped their advance in the Torkham area where they were successful. Though the British had an upper hand in the Chaman and Chitral areas, they were equally keen to have a settlement. The Amir realized his extreme vulnerability vis-a-vis the British Air Force, by which his own citadel in the heart of Kabul was bombarded. Both the parties wanted to end the war. A ceasefire was, therefore, quietly accepted.

The successive conflicts with Afghanistan made the British authorities in India aware of the need for a strategically impregnable frontier, which, in their view, could be established only at the cost of Afghan territory. After the First Anglo-Afghan War, the British military circles in India suggested the establishment of a frontier, which would enable the British to have an upper hand in their struggle with
Afghanistan. The occupation of Kandahar, with a railway to the Helmand, was suggested after the Second Anglo-Afghan War as essential to a 'scientific' frontier. During the Third Anglo-Afghan War, the British military authorities regarded the occupation of the Jalalabad Valley as a desirable objective. But in both the cases the home government was reluctant to sanction the order, as in both places the British would have faced hostile tribes.

While declining to sanction the occupation of territories which would have created acute administrative problems, the home government favoured the adoption of a strategic frontier providing the British the maximum offensive capabilities. The most important frontier where the British wanted rectification was within the Khaiber and New Chaman areas. Their importance was due to the fact that both these places had rail links and, with a British rail terminus in the region, the British could control the plains leading to Jalalabad and Kandahar. At no other point beyond Landi Kotal was it physically possible to form a rail head. It was suggested that Dakka was the best place to be used as a rail terminus.

In the Chaman area, the frontier lay closer to Khawaja Amran hills. It had little space to concentrate a rail-head out of the striking distance of the enemy. Thus, the railhead was within artillery range from Afghanistan.
The British reached the conclusion that New Chaman with a rail-head was the proper place for their operation.

The capture of Boldak fort in Afghanistan was considered essential for making a strategically possible frontier in the Kandahar zone.

The British position from a strategical point of view was much more weaker in the southern front than in the other two zones. The Khost region had given the Afghans an upper hand and they could strike in the northern, southern and eastern directions. Nadir Khan had benefited from this position in the Third Anglo-Afghan War and had successfully captured the Thal and Wana regions.

After the conclusion of the Third Anglo-Afghan War, the British wanted to impose their own terms on Afghanistan and to modify the frontier in accordance with their military requirements. Since the Afghans in the southern front were successful and managed to drive away British troops from their posts, the British could not impose their terms to provide for a strategically impregnable frontier.

The British Chief delegate at the Rawalpindi Conference, Hamilton Grant, succeeded in obtaining territorial concessions in the Khyber region. According to Article IV of the Rawalpindi Peace Treaty, the Torkham boundary between the two countries was to be demarcated with the Torkham area to be brought under British control. Grant had used the
threat of a complete breakdown of negotiations in order to obtain the concessions which the Afghan delegation had no authority to make.

The British rulers of India reluctantly agreed at the Rawalpindi Peace Conference to recognise Afghanistan as an independent country. A letter to this effect was issued by the chief British delegate. The conclusion of a treaty of friendship was, however, postponed. The British imposed certain conditions to be fulfilled by the Afghan Government before such a treaty could be concluded. The Amir was to demonstrate his friendship by dismissing all hostile foreigners from his country; his foreign relations were to be exclusively with the British Indian Government; all Indian revolutionaries were to be expelled from Afghanistan; and the position of the British agent at Kabul was to be improved. Thus the British had imposed their stiff demands on Afghanistan as a precondition for the conclusion of a treaty of friendship. It was stipulated that the two parties would meet after a period of six months; the treaty would be concluded only if the Afghans met the British demands and did not instigate the tribes. These conditions were not fulfilled by the Afghans.

By the time the stipulated period of six months was over, the world situation underwent a radical change. There was an erosion of British influence in Asia as a result of
a series of developments in the region surrounding Afghanistan. Soviet Russia had stabilized its position; by April 1920 the counter-revolutionaries had been defeated. The policy declarations made by the Bolshevik regime had enhanced its influence in Persia and Afghanistan. These developments had an adverse impact on the British imperial structure in Asia. Moreover, the Indian national liberation movement had entered the Gandhian phase, further eroding British position. The khilafat movement and the Punjab disturbances resulted in a wave of anti-British sentiment. Gandhiji's support to this movement marked a turning point in the political history of India.

These developments influenced the British position towards Afghanistan. Although the Afghans had failed to act according to the British demands at the Rawalpindi Peace Conference, the British considered it prudent to discuss the matters once again with the Afghans. This changed attitude was due to the urgent British need to tide over the critical period of summer in which the British were apprehensive of tribal unrest. The British also wanted to re-establish contact with the Afghans in order to blunt their hostility. Thus a conference was held at Mussoorie which lasted for four months. The Conference was in the nature of a holding action to give the British Indian Government sufficient time to tide over its internal crisis. They succeeded in suppressing the non-cooperation movement in India. The
Hijrat movement, which was at its peak during the Mussoorie Conference, had collapsed by the middle of August. The British were in a strong position once again. It was now the turn of the Amir to request the despatch of a British delegation to Kabul.

The main British worry was the prospect of the conclusion of a treaty of friendship between Afghanistan and Bolshevik Russia. That the British took this new threat seriously is reflected in their cautious dealings with Afghanistan. Once Afghanistan had established friendly relations with the new regime in Russia, the British decided to contain Bolshevik influence from spreading into Afghanistan and from there to their Indian dominion. A Soviet delegation had already lengthy discussions with the Afghan Government in Kabul. The proposed treaty, which was still a closely guarded secret, was supposed to contain some anti-British provisions, such as Soviet financial assistance and the establishment of Russian Consulates in Eastern Afghanistan bordering British India. The British delegation led by Dobbs was sent to counter Russian influence and to consolidate British position in Afghanistan. The Secretary of State for India demanded disclosure of the treaty as a pre-condition for the conclusion of an Anglo-Afghan treaty. The British Indian Government, on the other hand, did not consider it a paramount necessity; they were confident that a treaty incorporating the main British demands could be signed
without insisting on the disclosure of the Soviet treaty. The negotiations for an Anglo-Afghan treaty covered a period of one year.

The British objective remained the same - to safeguard their Indian Empire by controlling events beyond its frontier; their tactics changed with the changing circumstances. They were obsessed about the North West Frontier of their Empire. It was this obsession which resulted in three Anglo-Afghan wars in less than a hundred years. It was only when they were beset with problems that they showed any consideration to the Afghan sensibilities.

Faced with its military weakness, Afghanistan relied on the bravery of its people and the sympathy of the Pathan tribes inhabiting its frontier with British India. Successive Amirs used their leverage over the frontier tribes to blunt British power in Afghanistan. The national liberation movement in India provided Amanullah an additional instrument to coerce the powerful British rulers of India. He extended support to the Indian nationalists, encouraged the establishment of a Provisional Government of India in exile in Kabul and gave material and moral support to the Indian revolutionaries who had migrated to his country. Thus the peoples of India and Afghanistan were brought together in their common struggle against British imperialism.

The British, however, quickly reasserted their authority. They made minor concessions and temporised for
more time to consolidate their position within India and in the neighbourhood of Afghanistan. The Indian revolutionaries suffered a setback, Amanullah was no more and the British dominion in Asia was still intact. The Russian Revolution, however, had been consolidated and the British Empire in Asia faced a more serious threat. It was necessary to make some concession to Afghanistan. The concession was finally made in the form of a treaty of friendship recognising the independence of Afghanistan.

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