
THE REPRESENTATIONS OF THE “GREAT GAME” RELEVANCE IN THE WORKS OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING RESEARCHERS

Azizbek Tursunmetov,

Junior research fellow Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan

ABSTRACT: The article presents the viewpoints of English-speaking researchers on the relevance of the “Great Game.” Despite the nowadays popularity of views doubting this concept, the author considers that it is not easy to accept it totally, as well as the statements of key positions that held Central Asian representatives in Anglo-Russian antagonism.

KEYWORDS: “The Great Game,” Central Asia, Anglo-Russian relations, Afghanistan, Russian empire, K.P. Kaufman, Lord Lawrence.

INTRODUCTION

The “Great Game” or Anglo-Russian contradictions in the 19th century stemmed from mutual suspicions and reproaches of the Russian and British empires. There have been devoted many researches to this topic, especially in the 20th century. In this regard, it seems correct to present some popular interpretations and points of view of English-speaking researchers. According to the modern British researcher A. Morrison, the “Great Game” discourse in British literature has its flaws in that they are built around the Russian threat to British possessions, and not the differences of imperial rule, while works from the Russian space remained unclaimed [1. P.5-6]. A. Morrison himself considers the military threat to British India to be largely artificial. In terms of the real intentions of the Russian military and their capabilities against the large army in India. (Indian sepoy). The inconsistency of this concept is discussed in A. Morrison’s article “Beyond the 'Great Game': The Russian origins of the second Anglo-Afghan War”, using the example of the military and diplomatic forerunner of the second Anglo-Afghan War represented by Stoletov’s mission to Kabul in 1878 and the march of the Russian Dzhamsky detachment to the Afghan border.[2.P.704-708]. A. Morrison believes that unwittingly the main instigators of the Anglo-Russian border tensions on the one side Milyutin and Kaufman in their pursuit to set Sherali Khan’s government against the British presence in Afghanistan, on the other hand, the British government in India feared for the borderlands of Persia and Afghanistan.[3.P. 709, 712.] It is also worth noting that the British actually remained in the dark about the true plans of the Russian Empire regarding Afghanistan and India. At the same time, A. Morrison pointed out the omissions, primarily of English-speaking scientists, in studies on the “Great Game”, when Central Asian khanates and peoples are out of their focus, who played an important accompanying role, while remaining in the shadow. [4.P.10-11] In particular, the author believes that in the military-political circles of the Russian Empire they did not strive for conflict and if they planned to participate in

military operations, then only as defenders of the independence of Afghanistan, while the understanding of the British about the need to ensure the security of the borders of Afghanistan would work to the Russian advantage.[5.P.695] Another researcher D. Morgan in the monograph “Anglo-Russian rivalry in Central Asia” also discusses the artificiality of the “Great Game” phenomenon, perceiving it as a mutual misunderstanding, delusion and suspicion. For example commenting Russian publications of that time about the advance of Russian troops in Central Asia towards India, regarded it as a deliberate action designed to excite the British, while the author did not consider all this serious [6.P.175] He noted, as A. Morrison would later do, that the Russian threat was largely phantom, but it contributed to the British making hasty decisions that ended in the second Afghan war. In this regard, D. Morgan considered the 1867 memorandum of Lord Lawrence as the most effective instruction in British policy in Anglo-Russian relations in Central Asia [7. P.216] Some researchers of the second half of the 20th century are inclined to believe that the perception of Russian threats by the British politicians from the time of the “Great Game” was adequate. Among them, the monograph of L. Greaves “Persia and the defense of India”, which shows different points of view and positions of British officials about concerns on military operations of Russian troops, in particular regarding the Merv oasis in 1876-77. [8. P. 30-31.]

One of the most famous researchers of the “Great Game” P. Hopkirk, who in his monograph “The Great Game. The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia” stands on relevance of fears, expressed the idea that Russia, as it expanded in Asia, became an increasingly greater threat to India in the eyes of the British and considered the British concerns about the advance of Russian military detachments and missions to the borders of the Central Asian khanates justified.[9. P.17]

One of the least investigated issues like agency of Central Asian khanates and Afghanistan in Anglo-Russian tensions nonetheless represented. Although the mention of the khanates was presented from the perspective of purely as an object of “big politics”, nevertheless, some statements of the authors indicate that the interests of the khanates were not always ignored, for example, Russia tried to take into account the claims of the Bukhara Khanate in relation to Badakhshan and Darvaz .[10. P.192,128]. The Soviet historian G.A. Khidoyatov even writes about the broad political ambitions and actions of the Emir of Afghanistan, Sherali Khan, Emir Seyid Muzafar in context of Anglo-Russian antagonism [11. P.105-129]. A. Morrison believes that the main characters in the “Great Game” were the representatives of Central Asia, who used the vicissitudes of Anglo-Russian relations to their advantage, despite the fact that they were hostages of the two powers [12. P.734]. However, the last thesis seems overly optimistic, partly because Central Asians were not fully independent in their relations with the borderland states. For example, the emir of Bukhara Seid Muzafar was forced to inform and coordinate his actions in northern Afghanistan (in Char Viloyat) with captain G.A. Arendarenko, the representative and confidant of the Turkestan Governor-General K.P von Kaufman. [13. P.32-33]

Thus, on the one hand, the researchers’ objections about the artificiality of the concept “The Great Game” are completely convincing, even if we take into account the established British tradition of calling military and geopolitical clashes as a game. Since the military-political plans of the sides did not involve the real seizures of the territories of India or Central Asia and they did

not strive for open confrontation. On the other hand, the presence of opposing military doctrines (Lawrence/Rawlinson), as well as the presence of Russian military-political goals in other theaters, I believe, could not devalue the emerging confrontation between great powers in Afghanistan, especially each of the sides put pressure on each other in the form of dispatching diplomatic missions and military detachments. Different points of view both about the dependency of the Central Asian states, and the independent one, where the latter navigated and benefited in the labyrinths of Anglo-Russian relations, nevertheless acted as subjects of politics of the Great powers, so far as their actions (between Bukhara and Kabul) were largely a consequence of the tensions between British and Russian empires.

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