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Herat: The Key to India, The Individual Fears and Plans that Shaped the Defense of India During the Great Game

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Herat: The Key to India

The Individual Fears and Plans that Shaped the Defense of India During the Great Game

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Defended April 6, 2018

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Key Individuals in Order of Appearance

Eldred Pottinger	Explorer, Agent in Herat	1811-43
Sir Henry Fane	Commander in Chief of India	1837
William Elphinstone	British Diplomat	1809
Shah Shuja	Emir of Afghanistan	1803-09, 1839-42
Lord Ellenborough	Lord Privy Seal, Governor General	1828-42, 1842-44
G. de Lacy Evans	British Author	1829
Alexander Burnes	Explorer	1805-41
Charles Trevelyan	British Civil Servant	1831
Arthur Conolly	Explorer	1807-42
John McNeill	Minister of Tehran	1836-44
Lord Auckland	Governor General	1836-42
Lord Palmerston	Foreign Secretary, Prime Minister	1830-41, 1855-58
John Hobhouse	President of the Board of Control	1835-41
D'Arcy Todd	Agent at Herat	1839-41
William Macnaghten	Political Secretary, Envoy at Kabul	1837-41
Fyz Mahomed Khan	Wazir of Herat	1841
Justin Sheil	Minister of Tehran	1844-54
Earl of Malmesbury	Foreign Secretary	1852
Muhammad Yusaf	Emir of Herat	1855
Lord Canning	Governor General	1856-62
Charles Wood	Secretary of State for India	1859-66

Henry Rawlinson	Minister of Tehran	1859-60
Peter Lumsden	Military Officer	1847-93
James Long	Author	1865
Charles MacGregor	General, Intelligence Department Head	1884
Ronald Thomson	Minister of Tehran	1879
Marquis of Salisbury	Foreign Secretary	1878-80
Augustus Loftus	Diplomat at St. Petersburg	1871-79
George Bruce Malleson	Russophobe Author	1878-85
Charles Thomas Marvin	Russophobe Author	1878-85
Armin Vambery	Russophobe Author and Explorer	1871-85
Captain F. Beaufort	Military Analyst	1885
A.C. Yate	Afghan Boundary Commission	1887-93

*This list includes only the most prominent, recurring individuals in this thesis and the positions that they held at the time of their respective conflicts.

Map of Persia, Afghanistan and Baluchistan



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¹ D. Appleton & Co., *Persia, Afghanistan, and Baluchistan*, 1891, 1:60, David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~260912~5523088:Persia,-33?sort=pub_list_no_initialsort%2Cpub_date%2Cpub_list_no%2Cseries_no&qvq=q:afghanistan;sort:pub_list_no_initialsort%2Cpub_date%2Cpub_list_no%2Cseries_no;lc:RUMSEY~8~1&mi=2&trs=411#, Accessed 22 March 2018.

Introduction

In 1837, Eldred Pottinger entered Herat, the historic defensive oasis city in the Khorasan region of present day Afghanistan.² Hoping to merely observe the oncoming Persian siege, Pottinger became enthralled with the city's defense.³ Pottinger's defense contributed to the growing British advocacy for influence in Central Asia, demonstrating the growing British involvement in the Great Game with Russia. For a further sixty years of the Great Game, the British government intervened to prevent Herat from falling under the influence of Persia and Russia, manifested in the Anglo-Persian War, Crimean War, and Panjdeh Crisis.⁴ Herat held a position of prominence in British policy and they were not willing to tolerate any foreign interference in what they viewed to be the limit of the Indian Empire's sphere of influence. Herat's sixty-year presence as a crucial city in the Great Game demonstrates its perceived importance to some in the British government, but it is not immediately evident why the city was considered to be crucial to India's defense.

Throughout Herat's perceived importance to individuals in Central Asia, justification for British interference often emphasized Herat's strategic potential. As G. J. Alder stated, Herat "dominates the easiest approach to Afghanistan from the west by way of the well-beaten road between Mashad and Kandahar."⁵ Herat was slightly removed from the only wide valley between two large mountain ranges in Asia, creating a clear pathway from northern to southern Asia.⁶ It's geographical prominence in Central Asia demonstrates its potential as a bulwark to

² Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia* (New York, NY: Kodansha, 1994), 175.

³ *Ibid*, 176.

⁴ *Ibid*, 289, 425.

⁵ G. J. Alder, "The Key to India? Britain and the Herat Problem 1830-1863: Part I," *Middle Eastern Studies* 10, no. 2 (1974): 186.

⁶ U.S. Army Map Service, *Afghanistan*, 1:4, (Washington D.C.: Army Map Service, 1941).

prevent further Russian expansion, but did not make sense as a British military stronghold for the Empire, whose nearest territories were over 500 miles away in the 1840s.⁷ Even with the growth in India's territory throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, setting up a military base at Herat would have placed it 1,400 miles away from the nearest British military base in India.⁸ Given the strategic deficiencies of Herat as an effective military bulwark for India, it is odd that the city's potential contained such ardent advocates.

The British government clearly did not want Herat to fall into the hands of another empire, utilizing aggressive foreign policies to defend the city, even when such policies were unpopular in Britain and India. Russian expansion into Central Asia was a constant threat against Britain's Indian Empire, but the British government's specific interference in Herat's affairs stands out. Herat is the only city in Central Asia that the British government was willing to go to tremendous lengths to keep within their sphere of influence. Other cities, such as Khiva, Bukhara, and even Kabul were merely flashpoints of conflict and interest over the course of the Great Game. Despite being a constant setting of the Great Game in today's histories of the conflict, such as Peter Hopkirk's, *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia*, no historian has questioned why some members of the British government advocated for British intervention in Herat. Hopkirk describes Herat as, "crucial," the "outermost bastion" of India's defense, and "India's ancient strategic gateway," yet he does not elaborate upon why he claims that Herat was crucial to India's defense.⁹ This thesis seeks to illuminate why British officials went to tremendous lengths to advocate for Herat's importance in Central Asia, expanding upon

⁷ G. J. Alder, "The Key to India? Britain and the Herat Problem, 1830-1863: Part II," *Middle Eastern Studies* 10, no. 3 (1974): 300.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Hopkirk, *The Great Game*, 187, 287, 352.

its portrayal as a key location in the Great Game. For sixty years, Herat appeared to be crucial to India's defense, but why had the British government been so determined to keep Persian and Russian influence out of Herat?

The British government's obsession with Herat begged the questions: Why did British officials consider the city of Herat to be crucial to protecting India from Persian and Russian intrigue, despite being hundreds of miles away? Was the city crucial to India's defense, or merely touted by overreacting individuals? Was the city even considered important, due to its disappearance from government publications from 1860-1879? This led to further questions: Had Herat been a traditional invasion route into India for prior empires? Did the British government attach a certain prestige to Herat? Was Herat ever a uniformly agreed upon key to India's defense? Additionally, the British fear of Russian influence in Herat led to questions on Britain's diplomatic relationship with Russia, given their experiences in the Crimean War. These questions have largely been ignored by historians, who prefer to analyze British influence in Herat rather than question Britain's reasons for projecting their influence.

Historiographic Review

There are only two sources, C. P. W. Gammell's *The Pearl of Khorasan: A History of Herat*, published in 2016, and G. J. Alder's two-part series of articles titled, "The Key to India? Britain and the Herat Problem, 1830-1863," published in 1974, that directly discuss Herat and suggest why the British government was interested in the city. Gammell, examining the British government's involvement in the city in his fourth and fifth chapters, justifies Herat's importance through vague claims such as, "Herat sits on the easiest approach to Afghanistan from the west"

and “Herat was the fertile plain in which their armies would rest.”¹⁰ Gammell’s only other analysis of the British government’s intentions was a vague statement that the British government should not have focused on Herat.¹¹ However, he claims that “if the Great Game were to have a capital city, it would surely be Herat,” justifying its prominence in Great Game history.¹² Gammell stipulates that Herat occupies a central place in the history of many great empires, especially for the British government during the Great Game. However, he does not adequately address why the British government attributed so much importance to the city, simply viewing them as another empire involved in the turbulent history of Herat. He either assumes that his audience, as scholars of the region, already know why Herat was significant or he has carried over the traditional nineteenth century assumptions of Herat’s importance into his writing. He assumes that Herat was a desirable military post for each empire, but does not seek to further illuminate the city’s importance. Answering why the British government fixated upon the city elaborates upon Gammell’s account, expanding upon the British government’s actions in the city to explain why British officials felt obligated to assert their influence in Herat.

G. J. Alder goes into more depth, claiming that Herat was an unattainable dream of the British Empire, as Herat was never strong enough to be an independent state and annexing Herat was equally impossible.¹³ Alder briefly alludes that Herat was thought to be important due to Arthur Conolly’s reconnaissance and was subsequently “extended to its limits” by Russophobe authors.¹⁴ Otherwise he does not analyze why the British government and Russophobe authors

¹⁰ C.P.W. Gammell, *The Pearl of Khorasan: A History of Herat* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Ltd., 2016), 182–83.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 245.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Alder, “The Key to India II,” 300–303.

¹⁴ Alder, “The Key to India I,” 188.

Alder, “The Key to India II,” 300.

expressed interest in the city. Alder claims that Herat should never have been the goal of the British Empire and suggests that Herat was never the key to India, as there were no coordinated policies towards attaining the city.¹⁵ However, there are an immense amounts of government documents that focus on Herat from 1830-1859 and 1879-1893 that challenge Alder's claims. Alder stipulates that Herat was important to the British Empire, thinking it was the lynchpin to protecting India in Central Asia. However, he does not analyze why the British government and Russophobe authors set Herat as a goal; he only examines why the British government should never have focused upon the city. Alder failed to analyze why Herat was important to some in the Empire, possibly because he too accepted nineteenth century assumptions of Herat's importance.

Gammell and Alder do not address why Herat was significant to the British Empire and fail to include the concentration of government documents proclaiming the city's importance and analyze Britain's continued involvement in the city. While both offer in depth accounts of activities in and around Herat, neither explains why British officials advocated for intervention in the city to influence Herat's foreign policy, and viewed it to be crucial to the defense of India. Additionally, Gammell and Alder's limited focus from 1838-1863, while addressing the British government's actions to keep a Russian-backed Persia from taking the city, ignore the Russophobe books and government documents expressing fear of a direct Russian invasion in 1885 and the subsequent hostilities leading up to the 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention. Gammell and Alder use Dost Muhammad's 1863 invasion of Herat, which unified Afghanistan, as the end of Herat's strategic significance to the British Empire.¹⁶ Alder admits that this solution was only

¹⁵ Alder, "The Key to India II," 307.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 299.

momentary, as the British government continued to issue warnings to Persia not to interfere as Afghanistan splintered apart again.¹⁷ He even states, “so far as Britain was concerned, 1863 was not the end of the Herat story at all,” yet he does not explain why the British government continued to intervene in Herat’s affairs, using the British government’s continued interest to prove his argument that the Herat problem was unsolvable.¹⁸ Surprisingly little has been written about why the British government and subsequent Russophobe authors attributed importance to Herat, necessitating an analysis of their individual intentions when advocating for extending British influence to the city.

Sources Used

This thesis relies on declassified British government correspondences, memorandums, and reports, explorers accounts, and Russophobe books and articles to illustrate individual fears of Russian expansion and the ensuing need to create plans for India’s defense. The declassified documents originate from the British National Archives in Kew and the Asian and African Studies Department at the British Library in London. The correspondences are multi-page, bound documents republished by the British government into an organized, chronological document containing the unabridged written conversations between British officials. The memorandums and reports are shorter in length, grouped amongst series of reports from Central Asian conflicts, and republished and bound by the British government. These documents illustrated British governmental opinions from London and Calcutta to Central Asian men on the ground, tracing their fears and advocacy for Herat’s defense. Explorers accounts and Russophobe books were

¹⁷ Ibid, 300.

¹⁸ Ibid.

used to further emphasize the importance of individual's fears of Russian expansion, evident through Evans, Conolly, Malleson, Marvin, and Vambery. The goal of using primary communications, reports, and books was to illuminate British reasoning for the attributed importance to Herat, illustrating individual viewpoints to demonstrate their reasons behind advocating for British interference in Herati affairs.

Key Themes

The man on the ground in Central Asia was crucial to advocating for Herat's importance to the British Empire. It was largely the opinions of men stationed in Tehran or Herat that observed the Persian and Russian threats and proclaimed Herat's importance. These men subsequently created Britain's policies towards Herat, using their fear to develop elaborate plans for the city's defense and India's subsequent security. Their education consisted of building character, and "placed service before self-advancement," possibly explaining why British interests appeared as their top priority when planning for India's defense.¹⁹ Their education also emphasized Latin and Greek, possibly explaining their obsession with justifying British rule on the commercial and historic experiences of previous great empires that occupied Herat.²⁰ These men also experienced deeply ingrained fears of Russia, with those serving from 1830-1850 witnessing Russia's rise in international politics and those serving from 1850-1880 witnessing the Crimean War and resulting Russophobia.²¹ These individual's actions and subsequent fear

¹⁹ T.G. Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind: The Making of British Foreign Policy, 1865-1914* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 10.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

when placed in Central Asian positions would have a lasting influence on British foreign policy in Herat.

British advocacy for interference in Herat stems from individual government officials and men on the ground's fear that a lack of British influence and intervention in Herat would lead to the loss of India. British authors and officials, such as Pottinger, McNeill, Todd, Palmerston, Hobhouse, Sheil, Malmesbury, Malleson and MacGregor were all deeply fearful that Persian or Russian aggression towards Herat would inevitably lead to an invasion of India, furnishing the hostile empire with the resources and reprieve needed to continue their campaign. Fear drove men on the ground to take drastic action, ignoring indecision from their superiors, publishing false claims of the city's growing importance, and shifting attention from a mere Persian threat to a combined Persian and Russian threat. Fear not only drove action, lies, and exaggerations, but contributed to the creation of grand plans to defend India as men on the ground attempted to convince their superiors that intervention in Herat was necessary to prevent a catastrophe to India.

Based on their fears of an invasion of India, British officials created fanciful master plans to defend the subcontinent, nearly always including Herat as the crucial outer bulwark. Whether their plans called for direct British garrisons in Herat or for bolstering the current Herati government with weapons and funds, British men on the ground were constantly seeking a military solution to Central Asian defense. In this way, Herat was the center of a grand fantasy for these British officials, viewing it to be the savior of India. However, these persuasive master plans rarely convinced their indecisive superiors. Creating master plans for India's defense helped men on the ground portray their perceptions of Herat's significance to British foreign affairs, which helped to position Herat as one of the many keys to India.

British officials' desire to create master plans for India's defense often emphasized Herat's location as the key to India. They believed that Herat, through historical justification, was the opportune city to commence an Indian invasion, which would doubtlessly reoccur without British action in the city. The notion of a key to India was a fluid and evolving concept, with many cities and regions claiming the title through the nineteenth century. Some even believed that Herat was only the "key to Afghanistan" with the key to India being in the Kandahar region.²² The notion of a key to India was heavily reliant on British fears and policies, which fluctuated from aggressive forward policies to passive policies of masterly inactivity. Forward policies were characterized by aggressive British intervention to seize territory and assert influence to prevent threats to their Indian Empire. Policies of masterly inactivity arose out of disillusionment with the expense of forward policies, emphasizing observation, consolidation, and negotiation to establish British influence; although military assertion was occasionally approved. To further justify Herat's value to the British Empire, officials and authors throughout the nineteenth century touted the region's commercial benefits and necessity.

Initially an added bonus to British interference in Herat, economic arguments shifted at the end of the forward policy to justify the expense of future forward policies. From Conolly's initial reconnaissance of Herat, it was clear that Britain had economic motivations when examining the importance of the city. During the forward policies, economic arguments for Herat's potential were merely added bonuses for British intervention in the city. However, the expense of forward policies necessitated economic justification for future forward policies. This was evident through general fears in the 1880s that British nonintervention in the city would exclude Britain from lucrative trading opportunities in Central Asia. To validate their claims of

²² Alder, "The Key to India II," 305.

Herat's lucrative resources, many British officials and authors turned to historical precedents, exalting Herat's past as a prominent city in Central Asia.

Historical precedents were used by British officials to explain why Britain needed to seize Herat for its strategic and economic potential. British officers gave great weight to the experiences of Rome and Greece as models of conquest and civilization, as demonstrated through Arthur Conolly's need to justify his conduct to a Prince in Astrabad, stating "I referred him to the days of Alexander the Great, when it was thought no shame to be gallant as well as warlike," to justify British morals to the Prince.²³ Other British explorers and advocates for intervention in Herat called upon the past empires who had controlled the city, stating that this demanded similar actions from Britain.²⁴ This justification continued through the decline of Herat's importance to the empire, remaining a popular persuasive tactic for men on the ground to justify Herat's prominence in their plans for India's defense.

Thesis

This thesis proceeds chronologically, beginning in 1801 and concluding the analysis in 1885. Chapter One argues that Britain's realization of the northwest frontier's vulnerability and the prospect of a Russian invasion of India contributed to the advocacy for a series of defensive buffer states. Herat emerged as a significant location for historic, economic, and strategic reasons because of Conolly's reconnaissance of the region. However, the overall lack of a perceived threat from Russia led to calls for only an Afghan buffer state to secure India. Chapter Two

²³ Arthur Conolly, *Journey to the North of India: Overland from England, through Russia, Persia, and Affghaunistaun* (London: Richard Bentley, 1838), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044019915651>, 175.

²⁴ G.B. Malleson, *Herat: The Granary and Garden of Central Asia* (London: W.H. Allen & Co., 1880), 19.

argues that individuals' fear of the Persian invasion of Herat contributed to the subsequent forward policy, despite the indecision of their superiors. This was further demonstrated through D'Arcy Todd's obsession with Herat and his subsequent fearful and deceitful advocacy to implement his fanciful master plans. However, despite Todd's advocacy, indecisiveness, individual arrogance, and military blunders contributed to the collapse of the forward policy. Chapter Three builds upon the lessons of Chapter Two, demonstrating the individuals' continued fear and advocacy of Herat's importance through Justin Sheil, and the attempts to maintain British international prominence, this time manifested through the Crimean and Anglo-Persian Wars. These pivotal wars contributed to dampening British enthusiasm for forward policies in Herat, diminishing the number of threats that would have created fears and master plans. Chapter Four argues that the return of a Russian threat through expansionism led to fears and novel master plans leading up to the Panjdeh Crisis, including an alliance with Persia to reestablish British influence in Herat. This was further manifested through Russophobe authors' attempts to reinstate the now unpopular forward policy through persuasions steeped in economic and historical reasoning. However, while this threat led to a resurgence of fear, it did not lead to a forward policy, as government officials were not fully convinced of its necessity.

This thesis seeks to investigate how fear-driven individual viewpoints and plans for the defense of India contributed to Herat's significance to Britain during the Great Game. Neither Gammell nor Alder elaborate upon the individual fears and resulting master plans that attempted to guide British policy in Herat, content with Herat being an important military location throughout the Great Game. Herat's importance stems from the British men on the ground in Central Asia who viewed it as crucial to India's defense. Guided by their fear of losing India, British officials in Central Asia touted the economic and historical potential of Herat to justify

extending British influence to the city, centering Herat in their fanciful master plans for the region's defense and security from Persian and Russian aggression. This thesis will contextualize British imperial actions in Herat during the nineteenth century, helping future historians understand why some British officials attributed great importance to a relatively small city in Central Asia, demonstrating its position as an unrealistic, idealized goal that individuals in the British government naively thought would secure the Indian Empire.

Chapter One

Growing Fears and Master Plans:

The Concept of an Afghan Buffer State, 1801-1834

As Britain languished in the wealth of India, they grew desperate to ensure the defense of the subcontinent, looking to find security in the vulnerable northwest frontier. The northwest frontier was important to the British Empire because it was viewed to be the only possible invasion point into India, making it a necessity to protect British commercial interests. From 1801-1834, Britain realized the growing threat of a Russian invasion of India, becoming increasingly fearful and looking to establish a system of buffer states to gain strategic defense. As they searched for a military stronghold through the northwest frontier, toying with the idea of a forward policy, Herat emerged as a bastion to India's defense. Herat was mostly viewed to be important for strategic reasons, but its economic and historic potential was also considered when observing the lack of British influence in the region. To secure the frontier, government officials, authors, and explorers toyed with the idea of creating an indirectly ruled buffer state between India and Russia. This came amidst growing threats from the various empires in Central Asia, initially France, but later Russia and Persia, adding to British fears. British fear drove their expansion into the northwest frontier, seeking strategic, defensive reasons to conquer more territory. The British government's fear of a Russian threat encouraged the creation of plans to defend India in the northwest frontier, revealing the importance of Herat as a military, economic, and historic city in the emerging idea of an Afghan buffer state.

The northwest frontier was especially important to British India because it was the only frontier from which British politicians argued that India could be invaded by a legitimate enemy. Sir Henry Fane, the Commander-in-Chief of India in 1837, stated that the other frontiers were

more defensible: the east was defended by the often flooded Brahmaputra river and the Burmese were not considered “potentially formidable enemies,” the south was defended through the British controlled sea, the southeast was defended through a lack of harbors, and the southwest was defended by the British harbors of Ceylon and Trincomalee.²⁵ This left the northwest, which Fane believed to be the weakest defensible border, despite its defensible capacity.²⁶ The southern half of the northwest frontier contained the Thar, or Great Indian Desert, which was a strong enough natural barrier to discourage invaders.²⁷ The northern half of the northwest frontier was a 120 mile border from Ferozpur to Ruar, where an army would naturally funnel into India. By having a natural chokepoint, British India was defensible from foreign invaders in the northwest. Therefore, Fane adamantly argued against the further annexation of territory to India beyond this 120 mile border, stating whomever convinced the government of India to occupy the Punjab and Indus frontier would be “an enemy to his country.”²⁸ Further expansion would create a border on the Indus, placing the numerous Punjab rivers behind a British defending force and ruining Britain’s geographical defensive advantage from Ferozpur to Ruar.²⁹ While this chokepoint was naturally defensible, the Government of India was not satisfied, desiring further expansion and better defensive frontiers to protect India.

Forward policies drove British expansion into the northwest frontier as Government officials sought security for India. The concept of a forward policy, in which Britain would attack or influence the governments of states on the northwest frontier has its origins around

²⁵ M.E. Yapp, *Strategies of British India: Britain, Iran and Afghanistan 1798-1850* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1980), 193.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 194.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 194–95.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

1801. It was argued that only this policy could provide security to British India, yet it was “explicitly forbidden by the East India Company Directors, by the British Government, and by Act of Parliament; British India could go to war only if it were attacked or in imminent danger of attack.”³⁰ This prevented the government of India from taking an offensive strategy and forcing them to project their influence through treaties. Initially, this bore itself through negotiations with Afghanistan to prevent a Persian or French threat to British India. In 1809, Elphinstone, a notable British diplomat, created the Anglo-Afghan Treaty by convincing Afghanistan’s Shah Shuja that resisting a French invasion was mutually beneficial.³¹ This stated that Britain and Afghanistan would have perpetual friendship as long as Britain financially supported Afghanistan in the case of a French or Persian invasion and Afghanistan forbid French diplomats from the country.³² This treaty failed when Shah Shuja was forced to flee Afghanistan in 1810, contributing to British interest in the regions located between British India and Afghanistan.³³ While Sindh was considered as a buffer state, Minto, the Governor General of India, preferred diplomacy with Ranjit Singh, the leader of Punjab.³⁴ The Treaty of Amritsar solidified the friendship between the British government and Singh, making Lahore, in Punjab, the new buffer state of the northwest of India.³⁵ Attempting to solidify the defense of the subcontinent, India’s quest for buffer states continued for twenty years.

From 1810-1830, the government of India expanded upon their buffer states with the gradual appearance of military bases, all while searching for the key location to defend India.

³⁰ Ibid, 159.

³¹ Ibid, 163.

³² Ibid, 161–64.

³³ Ibid, 164.

³⁴ Ibid, 165, 170.

³⁵ Ibid, 170.

British military bases gradually expanded from their locations west of Delhi in Karnal and Meerut, towards Ferozpur and the northwest frontier.³⁶ Due to its defensive position, Ferozpur was chosen as a base as early as 1823.³⁷ Ferozpur was even called by William Murray, “the key to India,” much like Herat would later come to be known.³⁸ However, this description may not have been meaningful, as the phrase “key to India” was “as plentiful as fallen leaves” and was commonly used by officers seeking promotion.³⁹ By searching for the key to India, British officers appeared to have a desire to find pivotal locations and create a master plan to safeguard the Indian Empire, a theme that continued for the next century. While the phrase was common, there was no agreed upon key to India, despite the constant debates. However, the search for the key would continue to draw British thought and resources towards the northwest frontier, seeking a better defensive strategy. While attempting to find a defensive frontier near the Indus river, the British government would seek historical and commercial justification to add to their reasons for military expansion.

As would later be evident with Herat, the British attached historical and commercial prestige to the frontier, hoping that it would benefit their empire. Lord Harding, demonstrating his classical education, stated “the very name of the Indus is associated with ancient recollections, which render it difficult to suppress the desire to make that magnificent river the boundary of the British empire.”⁴⁰ Lord Harding, like many British officials, figured that Britain’s seizure of historically significant locations equated their empire with other great empires, feeding the British ego that they were on the proper path of conquest. In further

³⁶ Ibid, 192.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid, 192–93.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 199.

attempts to exert their influence, British officers provided commercial justification for the expansion of the frontier. In a brief letter from the Secret Committee to the Governor General in 1830, there was an ambitious idea to expand British trade to Central Asia by using parts of the Indus to trade with Kabul, undermining the sale of Russian goods.⁴¹ While historical reasoning fed officer's egos and commercial opportunities encouraged the expansion of trade, the military threat of Russia in Central Asia further expanded the northwest frontier into Afghanistan.

Russian expansion into Central Asia gradually inspired British responses to combat Russian influence in the region. Initially, fear of Russian expansion was a minority opinion and quickly disregarded.⁴² British policy began to shift when Ellenborough asserted that Russian ambitions included the Turkestan Khanates of Khiva and Bukhara, contributing to a fear of Russian expansionism.⁴³ Ellenborough's claim was based off Colonel G. de Lacy Evans's 1829 book, *On the Practicality of a Russian Invasion of India*. Evans's book argues that Russia was a threat in Central Asia, but not in the immediate future. Evans emphasizes a quote from the Russian Colonel Muravief, stating that the conquest of Khiva "would become the point of reunion for all the commerce of Asia, and would shake to the centre of India, the enormous commercial superiority of the dominators of the sea."⁴⁴ Evans included this quote both in the text and on the title page.⁴⁵ This quote, while clearly showing the dangerous possibility of India's commerce being disrupted, also carries the deeper meaning of Muravief's statement that this

⁴¹ Ibid, 201.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ George de Lacy Evans, *On the Practicability of an Invasion of British India; and the Commercial and Financial Prospects and Resources of the Empire* (London: J. M. Richardson, 1829), <http://archive.org/details/onpracticabilit01evangoog>, Title Page.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

would “fulfill the brilliant project of Peter the Great.”⁴⁶ This Czar allegedly made it his dying wish for Russia to conquer India, which gradually became enshrined in Russian expansionist identity.⁴⁷ Despite Evan’s apparent concern for Russian ambitions, he admits that Russian exports are too reliant upon British buyers to provoke a war.⁴⁸ However, in the case of a Russian attack, Evans believed that Kabul would be crucial to protecting the empire, stating it “has always been considered as the gate of India.”⁴⁹ With Kabul being crucial to Indian defense, Evans proposes using Afghanistan as a buffer state against Russian aggression.⁵⁰ This is the first argument to use Afghanistan as a buffer, a policy fueled by fears of Russian expansionism that would last for decades.

The British government’s susceptibility to succumb to their fears is perfectly encapsulated by Evans’s quote, “it has often been remarked that the English are more inclined than any other nation to view the dark side of the prospect—to fear every thing and to hope for nothing.”⁵¹ Evans is the first of numerous authors, agents, and explorers that fear the loss of British influence in Central Asia. The fear of losing influence in Central Asia was not a universal opinion, as some Indian and British government officials did not believe there to be any legitimate threats, but it was important. The fact that later explorers, officials, and authors, including Todd, Palmerston, Hobhouse, Malleon, and others desired to protect India through forward policies into Afghanistan, demonstrates their fear that Russian expansion would be detrimental to British influence in Central Asia. Their fears drove their desire to create plans to

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Hopkirk, *The Great Game*, 20.

⁴⁸ Evans, *Invasion of British India*, iii, iv, xlvi.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 61.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 27, 36, 101.

⁵¹ Ibid, xi.

defend India, no matter the cost or the feasibility of the invasion. Evans's quote perfectly encapsulates how British officials feared attacks on their empire, but his conciliatory tone demonstrates that Britain should not exclusively examine the dark side of the prospect. Later explorers often failed to realize the difficulties Russia would face when marching on India. While admitting to the possibility of a Russian invasion in Central Asia, Evans does not claim that Russia will invade India in their initial attack. Instead, his account is cautionary, seeking to draw attention to Russian ambitions and warning of the possibility of a Russian threat that could challenge British authority. Evans admits that a Russian invasion is unlikely, so an Afghan buffer is the only necessary defensive precaution. Evans, unlike later authors, was not an alarmist, he was merely seeking to warn British policy makers of a new threat.

Through Evans's claims, Ellenborough devised a new British policy for Central Asia, specifically focusing on Herat as the key city. Evans's call for an Afghan buffer to resist Russian influence is likely why Ellenborough began giving subsidies to rulers in Central Asia, as Ellenborough was a fan of Evans's book.⁵² Additionally, it is likely why he sought to undermine Russian trade dominance by introducing British goods to the markets.⁵³ Like Evans, Ellenborough was not overly concerned with the possibility of a Russian invasion. He considered them too weak to unite the tribes of Central Asia against British India.⁵⁴ However, in preparing for all scenarios, Ellenborough believed that a potential Russian threat would materialize in the city of Herat, stating "the danger, and it was a very distant one, was that Russia would advance to Herat, and link with the wild tribes of Central Asia."⁵⁵ This is the first time a British official

⁵² Yapp, *Strategies of British India*, 202.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

expressed the importance of Herat, foreshadowing the significance Afghanistan would play when seeking a buffer for India. Ellenborough's and Evans's speculations opened the door to additional concerns over the Russian threat to Herat, as other authors voiced their opinions and Arthur Conolly embarked on his crucial exploration of the region, solidifying Herat as the key city in the Great Game.

Evans's and Ellenborough's speculations fueled further concerns over the security of India against Russian and Persian threats. The explorer, Alexander Burnes, agreed with the need for an Afghan buffer state, but also desired the Sindh and Punjab provinces for additional defense.⁵⁶ In 1831, Trevelyan claimed that Russia "was a vast armed camp and India her natural prey."⁵⁷ He thought that Russia would directly threaten Khiva and Herat, and advocated for the defense of both cities.⁵⁸ His commitment to defend Herat was echoed by Arthur Conolly in his two volume account of his travels from Russia to India, titled, *Journey to the North of India, Overland from England, through Russia, Persia, and Affghanistan*. Like Evans and Ellenborough, Conolly does not appear to be overly concerned with the threat from Russia. Conolly admits to the possibility of Russian expansionism in Central Asia, stating that "it would not greatly astonish" him to hear of Russian encroachment towards the banks of the Oxus river.⁵⁹ However, he questions whether Russia could permanently sustain themselves in the region, stating that "their communications [via the Caspian sea] would be uncertain, and it is difficult to

⁵⁶ Ibid, 209.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Arthur Conolly, *Journey to the North of India, Overland from England, through Russia, Persia, and Affghaunistaun*, Vol. 2 (London: Richard Bentley, 1834), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044019816636>, 145–49.

imagine of what use such an insulated and distant post [Khiva] would be to them.”⁶⁰ Unlike Burnes and Trevelyan, Conolly admits to the unlikelihood of a permanent Russian threat. Instead, Conolly expressed the novel fear that Russia would conquer the region through Persian influence, stating that, in regards to the Russian threat, “it behooves us, at least, in the interim, to guard against injuries that may result to us from our rival’s ambitions in the east.”⁶¹ This fear would prove justified, as Persian manipulation through Russia would appear in 1837. Conolly not only offered one of many opinions on the Russian threat, he was also the first Englishman to visit Herat while examining the strategic importance of the city against Russian expansion.

Herat’s placement in Conolly’s two volumes demonstrates its importance to his journey and thoughts on the city’s importance. Herat is the ultimate goal of volume one, with Conolly arriving in the city in the final pages of the book. Subsequently, volume two begins with Conolly’s time in Herat, before continuing his journey to India. Herat appears to have been the logical halfway point for Conolly, both in his journey and in his books. By starting in Russia and ending in India, Herat would have been a clear halfway point for Conolly to recuperate and prepare for the rest of his travels. Conolly may have stopped in Herat intentionally, realizing the city’s strategic importance as a place to rest and resupply for potential invaders of India. Conolly’s description and analysis of Herat demonstrate that he was not just exploring the region, but analyzing its ability to be strategically important to an occupying empire.

Conolly examined Herat’s economic capabilities, describing the region’s numerous resources and commodities, suggesting that tribal challenges had depressed the otherwise

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid, 161–62.

lucrative economy. Conolly's first comment about Herat, beyond a passing mention, discusses Herat's economic potential. Conolly describes the carpets, assafotidea, lead, cast-iron, saffron, pistachios, and various dyes that originate from the city and the hills surrounding it.⁶² As Conolly continued towards Herat, he described "well-watered fields and gardens, crowded upon each other," which must have been a stark contrast to the deserts that he had traveled through.⁶³ Conolly's observations of Herat are the first examination of the city being important for reasons other than military strategy. As an explorer of the region, Conolly had an obligation to observe and report on every detail of importance in Central Asia, but his position as a lieutenant suggests that he may have been strategically examining these resources and their potential to assist an occupying empire. This fits with Lord Ellenborough's policy, advocating for trade with the region as a means of exerting British influence. While Conolly's initial impressions were favorable, he soon clarified his claims. Despite the generally prosperous fields and gardens surrounding Herat, Conolly clarified that much of the Khorasan region, "has been rendered desert by the turbulence of chieftains and by the inroads of the Toorkmuns."⁶⁴ However, he believed that Herat could be prosperous if these "evils" were corrected, suggesting that a powerful empire could reap the additional benefits of the region.⁶⁵ The racist assumption that the Toorkmuns were responsible for ruining the region was a common theme that would be repeated through the century. Overall, Conolly's subtle economic analysis of the region, given Ellenborough's strategy and the placement of the city in between each volume, suggests that the

⁶² Ibid, 294.

⁶³ Ibid, 326.

⁶⁴ Conolly, *Journey to the North of India*, Vol. 2, 1–2.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

British government may have been interested in more than the military significance of western Afghanistan.

While Conolly examines the economic potential of Herat, his central focus is the military potential of the city, describing its fortifications and prominence on routes to India. Conolly describes the city as a “well fortified town” and that the “outside wall is thickly built upon a solid mound formed by the earth of a wet ditch, which, filled by springs within itself, goes entirely round the city.”⁶⁶ These descriptions demonstrate the attention Conolly paid to the fortifications of Herat. Herat’s geographic position also carried weight in Conolly’s analysis of its strategic importance. Previously, Evans speculated that a Russian invasion through Afghanistan would use the difficult route from Herat through Kabul. However, when discussing the road from Herat to Kabul, Conolly stated, “we know that it has been travelled by armies of horse, but guns cannot be drawn over the steeps” and he questioned “whether it could at any season be taken, except, by the lightest troops of a European army.”⁶⁷ Conolly’s intelligence emphasizes that the road is nearly impassable compared to “the great road from Herat to Candahar” which was open year round.⁶⁸ Conolly’s emphasis on the ease of the road from Herat to Kandahar likely increased the British government’s fear of the potential to invade India. These fears were further increased when it became evident to Conolly that British influence in Central Asia was virtually nonexistent compared to Russian influence.

Conolly’s interaction’s with Herati officials revealed the ingrained fear of Russian power in Central Asia. Upon arriving in Herat, Conolly had dinner with influential members of its

⁶⁶ Ibid, 2–3.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 52–53, 55.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 55.

government, including Abbas Khan, Shumshoodden Khan, and Attar Bashee.⁶⁹ He was surprised to learn that “neither my countrymen, nor the people of any other European nation, were considered of importance” to these leaders.⁷⁰ They thought Russia was the dominant power in Europe, inferring that the Czar’s title of “Supreme Emperor,” meant that he dictated orders to other European countries.⁷¹ These leaders not only believed in Russian might, but feared their apparent discipline. Herati leaders told horrific tales of Russian soldiers being disciplined to the point that they cannibalized and trampled their fellows to fulfill their orders and seize any fort in Central Asia.⁷² Conolly believed that these stories demonstrated Herati leader’s admiration for and fear of Russia, helping Russia to be viewed as the dominant power in the region.⁷³ Russian dominance may have damaged Conolly’s perception of British might, likely damaging to Conolly’s ego, further demonstrating why he sought deterrents for Russian influence and opportunities for British influence. Conolly’s mission demonstrated the weakness of the British Empire’s influence in Central Asia, likely impairing their perception as the successors to Rome. Even Conolly seemed to contemplate Italian dominance while in Herat, describing the one hundred and forty steps to the top of a minaret, the view of which was “so varied and beautiful that I can fancy nothing like it, except, perhaps, in Italy.”⁷⁴ Conolly’s view of the ancient beauty and historical importance of Herat demonstrates the growing British theme of seeking historical justification for their rule. Considering the lack of British influence in Central Asia, Conolly analyzed the possibility of a Russian threat to India.

⁶⁹ Conolly, *Journey to the North of India*, 344–45.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 345.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, 345–46.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Conolly, *Journey to the North of India*, Vol. 2, 20.

In the appendix of his book, Conolly draws on his knowledge of the economic, military, and historical potential of the city, given the lack of British influence, to explain the possible threat of a Russian invasion through Herat. Conolly described two different viewpoints as to the Russian invasion, those who believed Russia could invade India before Britain had the opportunity to organize, and those who thought that a Russian invasion was impossible due to government instability and poverty.⁷⁵ Conolly states that his goal was to “hold a moderate course between these two extreme opinions,” but that he will not shy away from unlikely scenarios, as they deserve consideration.⁷⁶ Conolly does not think that the Russian invasion could occur immediately, but does express fears that an increase in Russian commerce and military bases in Central Asia would signify a growing threat.⁷⁷ Economically and militarily, Conolly is adamant that the route through Herat to Kandahar remains “practicable for a European Army” and that “Herat could be made a place of considerable strength” with ready supplies from the surrounding valley.⁷⁸ While Conolly admits that the Russian army could easily travel through Afghanistan and that this threat should not be disregarded, he admits that the current threat is mild, stating:

In speculating upon the chances of an overland invasion, we generally flatter ourselves that half our enemies would die of hard labour, bad diet, change of climate, and inclement weather, before they reached the Indus; and, in truth, unless the Russians do considerably ameliorate the condition both of their commissariat and medical staff, we may reasonably calculate upon a great mortality among them before they exchange shots with us.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Ibid, 303–4.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 304.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 321-3.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 329.

Despite Conolly's observance of a lack of British influence in Central Asia and the potential of Herat to aid an enemy invader, Conolly emulates Evans, realizing the current unlikely nature of a Russian threat to India.

Given his experience, Conolly advocated for minimal interference in Afghanistan, but warned of how the threat from Russia could escalate in the future. Conolly believed that allying with Afghanistan to form an effective buffer state was enough to stave off Russian influence and establish British influence in Central Asia. However, he warned that "if the Persian monarch takes Herat...he will march further eastward" and "the road to India would be greatly opened for the Russians."⁸⁰ Conolly's admission of the threat from Persia reflects the rising British fear that, given Herat's apparent importance, Persia may also be a threat to British security. This prediction would prove accurate when Persia, with Russian counsel, laid siege to Herat in 1837, shifting British public opinion away from a passive strategy to a defensive forward policy. The rising threat of Persia would push Britain to take action in Herat, beginning an era of fearful British foreign policy in Central Asia.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 339.

Chapter Two

A Herat-Centered Forward Policy:

Growing Fears, Indecision, and Arrogance, 1837-1848

The Emergence of a Herat-Centered Forward Policy

Fear was a common theme among British explorers, agents, and diplomats working in Central Asia. Whether out of a sense of national pride or personal ambition, diplomats such as McNeill and explorers such as Pottinger were fearful of a Persian invasion of Herat, thinking that it could eliminate British influence in the region. In response to their fear, they created aggressive master plans to ensure the defense of India, calling for military interference necessitated by the economic, historic, and strategic potential promised by Herat. However, this advocacy fell on reluctant ears in both Calcutta and London, as Lord Auckland, the Governor General of India, and Lord Palmerston, the Foreign Secretary in London, were slow to act based on the limited information provided by their men on the ground. Their indecision, while logical, prevented the master plans of these officials from succeeding and led to disorganized and ambiguous Central Asian policies. The decision to enact a forward policy to defend India and project British influence in Herat arose out of fear based advocacy perpetrated by the British Central Asian officials who took the city's foreign affairs upon themselves, but their opinions and suggestions as to the city's importance were largely dismissed by their skeptical and indecisive superiors.

In the late summer of 1837, Eldred Pottinger, a spy from the British Bombay artillery, entered the city of Herat disguised as an Indian holy man with dreams of adventure.⁸¹ Little did Pottinger know that his assistance in the defense of the city against the Persian and Russian

⁸¹Gammell, *The Pearl of Khorasan*, 195.

Empires would be another chapter in the Great Game, keeping him there for nearly ten months.⁸² As John William Kaye, the only historian with access to Pottinger's journal before it was lost in a fire, wrote, Pottinger's "'activity was unflinching,'" and "'he was always on the ramparts; always ready to assist with his counsels...and to inspire with his animating presence new heart into the Afghan soldiery.'"⁸³ Pottinger actively participated in the defense of the city, even grabbing one of their leaders, Yar Mohammed, and "dragging him forward to the breach" in the walls to inspire the Heratis.⁸⁴ This prevented a renewed Persian assault, led by Simonich, a Russian officer, from seizing the city.⁸⁵ As the siege progressed, Sir John McNeill went to negotiate with the Persian army, attempting to persuade them to lift the siege upon Herat.⁸⁶ Ultimately, the British government sent a task force to the Persian Gulf, threatening war with Persia unless they lifted the siege.⁸⁷ They also confronted the Russian Foreign Minister, Nesselrode, to remove Simonich from the siege.⁸⁸ The British government seemed unusually invested in the destiny of Herat, willing to start a war with Persia to maintain their interests; this was only the first example of British intervention in the city's foreign affairs, yet the contention between interference and neutrality was complicated, and Pottinger's defense did not signify a unified British policy towards the city.

Pottinger's defense of Herat demonstrated his and McNeill's commitment to a forward policy, but this decision was not sanctioned by London or India. McNeill, the British minister of Tehran, was instructed to negotiate a detente between the Shah of Persia and the government of

⁸² Ibid, 197-198.

⁸³ Hopkirk, *The Great Game*, 179.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 182.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 180.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 184.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Herat during the siege, but was instructed to act with caution, as Persia was still considered to be a valuable buffer state for the Indian Empire.⁸⁹ McNeill did not know how to accomplish this assignment, largely because of “the failure of Palmerston and Auckland to give him full backing.”⁹⁰ Further complicating the negotiations were the presence of Russian officers at the siege. The complicated nature of having to maintain strong relations with Persia and Russia while maintaining the independence of Herat left Palmerston and Auckland unsure as to how to proceed, forcing McNeill to act without guidance. Adding to his disquiet was his fear that Herat was soon to become a launch-pad for an invasion of India. McNeill claimed to have seen letters written with hostile intent circulating from Simonich and the leaders of Persia and Afghanistan, and believed that they stated “an unequivocal intimation of an intention to attack the English in India.”⁹¹ Consequently, McNeill decided to take matters into his own hands, traveling to Herat without permission to negotiate a Persian withdrawal from the city.⁹² While McNeill was willing to advocate for defending Herat, Palmerston and Auckland’s indecision disregarded McNeill’s possible solutions to the siege. McNeill’s fear based plan to defend Herat was the beginning of a pattern of advocacy from men on the ground in Central Asia which was subsequently ignored by their indecisive superiors in London and India.

Indecision was detrimental to British policy, forcing deployed British agents to make decisions on the spot. These agents were increasingly fearful of an invasion of India through Herat and their fear drove their desire for policies and actions to protect British interests.

Indecision largely occurred because government officials, such as Auckland and Palmerston, felt

⁸⁹ Yapp, *Strategies of British India*, 134, 136–37.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 143.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 145.

⁹² *Ibid*.

as if they did not have enough information to determine whether Herat was truly in danger or even strategically important. Their indecision was logical, even if it frustrated agents on the ground. With only one man's limited opinion, it was difficult for policy making government officials to risk an unpopular or detrimental policy decision. Inaction left field agents unsatisfied, feeling as if they were the only officials who understood the gravity of the situation. They were left to interpret an event by themselves, oblivious of the national policy decisions that may be occurring in London or India. This isolated the men on the spot, leaving them absorbed in their fears that the government did not realize the inevitability of an invasion of India through Herat. While some government officials were working on a solution to India's defense, Lord Auckland was merely too anxious, possibly because his fear of choosing the wrong policy decision for the region prevented him from making a decision.

Lord Auckland and Lord Palmerston's indecision delayed any action taken to assist McNeill during the siege; their ultimate decision that forward defense would secure India began after the threat to British interests had disappeared. Lord Auckland became Governor-General of India in March, 1836, and preferred a policy of "gradual commercial penetration" into Afghanistan, to "preserve peace" and "cultivate commerce."⁹³ These policies conflicted with McNeill's advocacy for British interference in Herat, leaving Auckland unsure of how to proceed. Initially, Auckland felt that he did not have enough information from McNeill to act, but decided on a defensive forward policy upon hearing that Russia was not only assisting in the siege of Herat, but also marching on Khiva, a strategic city in Central Asia.⁹⁴ Palmerston, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in Britain, was equally indecisive, but gradually came to

⁹³ Ibid, 221.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 250.

the conclusion that the fall of Herat would mean the “collapse of British influence in Afghanistan.”⁹⁵ Fear was growing among members of the cabinet, such as Hobhouse, who stated that “at all risks, save Herat.”⁹⁶ However, by the time Auckland, Palmerston, and the Cabinet realized that Herat must be saved, the Persian threat had dissipated. Thanks to Pottinger and McNeill’s efforts, with some help from a task force sent to the Persian Gulf and threats to the Russian foreign minister, Herat was no longer at risk of invasion. However, a now decisive cabinet privately urged Auckland “to go on and even establish a garrison at Herat,” believing that it would create an effective buffer state in Afghanistan to prevent Persian and Russian incursions.⁹⁷ Enacting this forward policy began the First Anglo-Afghan War, as Britain sought to replace the leader of Afghanistan, Dost Mohammad Khan, with Shah Shuja. While the war was focused on establishing Shuja’s influence in Kabul and Kandahar, it also established British agents in Herat to monitor the city.

Pottinger, remaining in the city after the Persian withdrawal, operated as the first British agent in Herat. He took it upon himself to manage the foreign affairs of the city and raise taxes for the leaders, demonstrating the personal ambition that contributed to explorers’ portrayal of Herat’s importance.⁹⁸ Despite successfully defending the city, he thought that, if “only a few hundred men seconded the attempts of the storming party on the day of the grand assault, [Herat] must inevitably have fallen.”⁹⁹ Consequently, Pottinger was worried that Herat was still vulnerable to invasion. When D’Arcy Todd took over as the agent of Herat, Pottinger was

⁹⁵ Ibid, 274, 277.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 283.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 286, 289.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 362.

⁹⁹ Summaries of Official Secret Despatches from India and Persia Relating to Afghanistan, 1838-1841, Mss Eur F231/29, Asian and African Studies, British Library, London, United Kingdom, 4.

reassigned, mapping the Hazareh country between Herat and Kabul and reporting his conclusions of Herat's continued importance to the empire.¹⁰⁰ In the report of his journey, Pottinger stated that "the occupation of these countries, under every view is an absolute necessity."¹⁰¹ To convince his superiors of the importance of Herat, Pottinger drew on the strategic benefits of the region.

Pottinger believed that Herat offered a more defensible frontier than what currently existed. He stated it would connect the flanks of the current boundaries, linking Balkh and Herat into a frontier of 400 miles, as opposed to the current line of defense from "Bameean, Cabool and Candahar, to Herat" which was over 700 miles and ran through difficult, barren country.¹⁰² He believed that, by limiting a possible Russian invasion to two points, Balkh and Herat, the enemy would have to bring their supplies over vast tracts of desert, without the ability to stop and resupply. This prevented a Russian army from resting in Herat or Balkh and proceeding to invade India.¹⁰³ In theory, Pottinger's argument was logical and possible for the British Empire, but he was influenced by the current British position in Afghanistan in 1840. Influence or occupation of Afghanistan was possible when Pottinger wrote his report, as the First Anglo-Afghan War was proceeding successfully and there were even thoughts of annexing Afghanistan into the Indian Empire.¹⁰⁴ However, annexation would have stretched the British supply lines hundreds of miles from their bases near Ferozpur to defend Herat, which was unrealistic. Pottinger was desperate to enact a plan that could defend India. Herat's continued vulnerability and importance was Pottinger's key argument to convince his superiors, Auckland and

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 28.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Yapp, *Strategies of British India*, 333.

Palmerston, to interfere in the city's foreign affairs. Pottinger strengthened his argument by advocating for the economic benefits of the valley.

Pottinger offers the first economic argument to take Herat, but his motives were partially selfish. He believed that the area was “fertile, rich in metals and minerals; is the grand mercantile route to Central Asia from India and Persia” and promises to “aid the Affghan treasury most materially.”¹⁰⁵ This is the first declaration of an economic reasoning for occupying Herat, which could have been contemplated by Conolly, but was never truly considered to be more important than military defense. Pottinger would have been the decisive authority on Herat, having spent over two years in and around the city. Therefore, it is possible that he truly believed there to be a strong economic argument for taking the city and region. However, he may have been trying to maintain his relevance. Pottinger was young and ambitious, which was why he undertook the dangerous self-assigned exploration of Central Asia, hoping for advancement.¹⁰⁶ It is possible that he was using an economic argument to both further his career and incentivize Britain to occupy the region or annex it into the domains of Shah Shuja. However, Pottinger's ambitious plans were what led to his downfall in Herat, and the rise of yet another ambitious Englishman, D'Arcy Todd, the strongest advocate for British interference.

Todd's Obsession with a Herat-Centered Forward Policy

D'Arcy Todd perfectly emulated the fear among British Central Asian representatives that Herat would fall under the influence of a hostile foreign power. Todd was obsessed with the defensive potential of Herat since his first visit to the city, and his obsession grew as he became

¹⁰⁵ Summaries of Official Secret Despatches, 1838-1841, 28.

¹⁰⁶ Hopkirk, *The Great Game*, 175.

the first official Agent of Herat. Despite Todd's advocacy for the city's strategic importance, his government largely ignored his calls to action, making him increasingly desperate to draw attention to his cause. Todd made grand statements and even attempted to deceive his superiors with reassuring statements of Herat's condition. Todd's fearful and deceitful advocacy illuminates the extent to which the allure of Herat's strategic, economic, and historical potential ensnared the fears of British officials in Central Asia and convinced them to advocate for the continuance of British influence in the region.

The British Government appointed Todd as the Agent of Herat, believing he would take a more moderate approach to the city's affairs. Macnaghten, the political secretary of the British Government in Calcutta, wanted to remove Pottinger and disliked appointing Alexander Burnes because both favored annexing the Khorasan region into Shah Shuja's Afghanistan.¹⁰⁷ Todd was one of the few men left to promote with any experience in the region. Todd had successfully risen to be McNeill's Military Secretary, giving him traveling experience through Central Asia.¹⁰⁸ He had even traveled through and analyzed Herat's defenses, as demonstrated from his report in 1838.¹⁰⁹ Todd was described as "likeable, solid, practical, and reliable," yet he was also ambitious and would emulate Pottinger when designing master plans for the defense of India, with Herat standing front and center.¹¹⁰ Todd's ambitious plans began with his first analysis of Herat's defensive capabilities.

Todd accepted that he was not the first to analyze Herat's defenses, yet he still believed that his efforts would contribute to analyzing the city's strategic potential. Todd sketched the

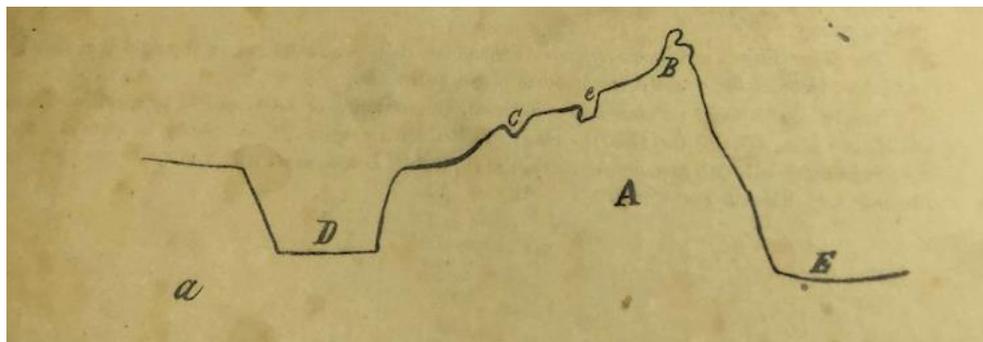
¹⁰⁷ Yapp, *Strategies of British India*, 363–64.

¹⁰⁸ Yapp, 364.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

outer works of the defenses, describing the system of artificial mounds that form a circle of defense around the city (a. A.), the walls (B.), the trenches cut into the mounds (c. C.), the ditch (D.), and the town (E.).¹¹¹



Todd's sketch of Herat's Defenses.¹¹²

Todd's sketch of the defenses was meant to capture the defensive capabilities of the city, but the sketch leaves much to be desired. It is nearly impossible to tell that this sketch is supposed to be the defenses of the city, especially given that Todd places the town at a level below that of the trenches around the city, which is unlikely. However, this crude drawing may illuminate Todd's view of the formidable nature of the defenses. The stretch from D to E is ominous, appearing as an incredibly steep mountain for an invader to overcome. Todd may have been glorifying the city's defenses, believing that they offered a significant obstacle to any enemies. He even states that the citadel was in a strong position and "might be held for some days, even weeks, after the fall of the town."¹¹³ He also believes that it would be "very difficult if not impossible to breach [the defenses] with artillery" and a foreign army would need "25 or 30 thousand men to invest

¹¹¹ Selections from the Travels and Journals Preserved in the Bombay Secretariat, March-September 1838, IOR/R/20/G/226, Item 7, ed. George W. Forrest, Asian and African Studies, British Library, London, United Kingdom, 22.

¹¹² Ibid, 21.

¹¹³ Summaries of Official Secret Despatches, 1838-1841, 22.

[the city] effectually.”¹¹⁴ Todd admits that the damage from 1837 was an issue and a garrison of 10,000 men was needed to defend the city, but he believed that a sufficient amount of guns and ammunition would make “the capture of Herat even with European troops...a tedious and difficult enterprize.”¹¹⁵ Todd’s initial report of the city lauded its defensive capabilities, yet other publications demonstrate that his claims may have been exaggerated.

Despite Todd’s claim of Herat’s near impenetrability, subsequent government reports and Pottinger’s account of the siege demonstrate the opposite. In a report from the 1890s, while the Afghan Boundary Commission was surveying Herat, they reported that the citadel was “not expected to last long after the town itself has been taken.”¹¹⁶ This report also mentions that one of the walls of the city is only two and a half feet thick at the base and nine inches at the top, making it “everywhere penetrable by the shells of modern field guns.”¹¹⁷ While these descriptions came fifty years after Todd’s and may have been reflecting the influence of modern weaponry, Herat’s defenses were still arguably inadequate during Todd’s time. During the siege of Herat in 1837, Pottinger describes how a “three-gun battery destroyed one of the towers of the citadel,” with the purpose of terrifying the leader “into a surrender by knocking the bricks about his ears.”¹¹⁸ While the Persians were not able to take the citadel, this still demonstrates their ability to wreak havoc to it and the defenses of Herat, calling into question Todd’s claim of impenetrability. Furthermore, Persia probably would have taken the city if they had committed more men to the grand assault.¹¹⁹ Given Herat’s weak defenses and the near shortcomings of its

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 22.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*.

¹¹⁶ *Gazetteer of Afghanistan Part 3: Herat, 1910-1912*, WO 287/32, The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom, 107.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 106.

¹¹⁸ *Selections from the Travels and Journals*, 1838, 99.

¹¹⁹ *Summaries of Official Secret Despatches, 1838-1841*, 4.

army, it is unlikely that Todd's claim of impregnability was accurate. As the British agent at Herat, Todd did not amend his claims of Herat's defensive importance and even found economic and historical justification for British influence in the city.

In 1839, Todd described Herat as an economic and historical bastion in Central Asia. Todd, in a particularly illustrative letter to Macnaghten, now Envoy and Minister at Shah Shooja's court in Kabul, stated:

The value of Herat, in a political and commercial view, has not been overrated by the numerous writers who have treated on the subject; nor has its importance been disregarded by the various conquerors of Central Asia, who have successively held it as one of their most valuable acquisitions, or made it the seat of their empire. The position of Herat, situated in a rich and fertile valley, and forming a natural entrepot for the trade of Persia, Bokhara, Cashmere, and India, caused it, in very early ages, to rise from obscurity, and to become at length in opulence and importance, the great emporium of Asia.¹²⁰

Todd glorifies Herat as a natural location for a powerful empire, stating the obvious economic benefits and historical significance of the city. He emphasized, "it has arrested the progress of successive conquerors, and has seldom been captured without making a gallant and protracted resistance," to demonstrate Herat's ability to prevent the further expansion of empires.¹²¹ Todd appeared to be moving beyond the notion of a buffer, suggesting that Herat could be a chokepoint, funneling Britain's enemies into one defendable, strategic location. However, he ignored prior empires, such as Alexander the Great, Mahmud of Ghazni, Muhammad Ghori, Genghis Khan, and Timur, who overcame the defenses of Herat and used it as a base to invade India.¹²² Todd glorified Herat, not examining any evidence that contradicted his views of the

¹²⁰ Ibid, 3.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Malleon, *Herat*, 19.

city's importance. He continued to disregard Herat's disadvantages when discussing the fallout of the Persian siege.

Todd explained the decrepitude of Herat after the Persian siege, but explained that these flaws could be easily remedied by British intervention. Todd explained the dismal amounts of manufacturing, with "scarcely a single artificer or workman in the place" and the rest of the city virtually uninhabited.¹²³ Militarily, Herat was also in a poor state. The defenses were described as "contemptible," and "defective in almost every respect" with no repairs since the siege.¹²⁴ Todd stated "there is nothing to prevent a few hundred resolute men making themselves masters of the place by a sudden attack."¹²⁵ Despite the poor state of its defenses, Todd lauded Herat as the key to India, stating that occupation "as an advanced military post, is essential to our interests" and that "the possession of such an amount of influence as would place its resources wholly and directly under our control" was worth the price of taking the city."¹²⁶ Todd admitted that British dominion over Herat was not necessary, but he did believe it was within Britain's interests "to repair its resources, and to consolidate its power, keeping at the same time, the direction of the one, and control of the other, on our own hands."¹²⁷ Todd claimed that Herat's poor condition should not be a deterrent from its essential use as a strategic position for the empire. However, his claims of Herat's defensive potential all relied on British intervention to restore commerce and defensive capabilities, as Herat was currently in no position to withhold an invading army.

¹²³ Summaries of Official Secret Despatches, 1838-1841, 4.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 11.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

Todd was confident that his advocacy for Herat would be acknowledged by the government of India, even offering policy decisions for the Empire to consider. Todd suggested either annexing Herat “to the dominions of our ally, Shah Shooja ool Moolk,” or strengthening and consolidating the government in Herat.”¹²⁸ Todd, like Pottinger and Burnes, had finally considered the possibility of Afghan annexation, possibly frustrating the government officials who had appointed him for his initially moderate policy outlook. However, he viewed annexation to be a riskier strategy, possibly due to Shah Shuja’s recent installment, instead favoring interference in Herat’s government. Todd’s favored approach was to have “a small body of organized and disciplined troops, under British officers, at Herat, [which] would enable the government to effect a consolidation of its power and resources....[securing] to the British Government a solid and lasting influence.”¹²⁹ He proposed that at least 2,400 infantry and 500 cavalry be sent to the city with at least two dozen officers.¹³⁰ With British troops securing Herat, Todd believed that British influence would be secure, adding an obstacle to the expansion of other empires along the roads of Central Asia. This would prevent an invader from proceeding along the roads through Afghanistan, which British “experience has proved....to be practicable,” from Kandahar to India.¹³¹ Todd’s report concludes that “Herat is too valuable a post to be neglected.”¹³² Todd’s fear of the unimpeded advance of a hostile force through Herat drove his desire to create policies to defend the city. Not content with the newly constructed Afghan buffer state during the First Anglo-Afghan war, Todd felt it necessary to find a way to further ensure

¹²⁸ Ibid, 12

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 13.

¹³¹ Ibid, 14.

¹³² Ibid.

India's security. However, Todd had a difficult time convincing his superiors that his plans for Herat's defense were important.

As months passed with little to no direction from Lord Auckland as to how to approach the foreign affairs of Herat, Todd, in letters to Macnaghten, became increasingly fearful that nobody realized Herat's crucial position in preserving British influence. Possibly to draw attention to his cause, Todd began to overinflate Herat's importance to Britain. Despite the siege of 1837-1838 being a conflict between Persia and Herat, with only half a dozen Russian and British officers present, Todd stated:

The interests of Great Britain were so closely connected with the late siege of Herat, that the contest was in reality not so much between Mahomed Shah and Shah Kamran, as between two great European powers, for the possession of a post which was coveted alike by both, and therefore, to induce the besieged to prolong their resistance, Her Britannic Majesty's representative exerted himself to give them confidence, and by his active interference in their behalf, led them naturally to hope that we should remunerate them for the ruin which this protracted resistance brought upon their country.¹³³

It is significant that Todd believes the defense of Herat was a power struggle between Britain and Russia, as it demonstrates his opinion of the city's use to prevent the spread of Russian influence. However, this view was flawed, as European officers played only a small part in the siege, and the Indian government, under Lord Auckland, was extremely reluctant to interfere in the city's defense until after the siege had concluded. Additionally, the English officers at the siege were not operating with their government's permission, as Pottinger was not given orders to protect Herat, originally wishing to only observe the siege, and McNeill did not receive confirmation that he could travel to Herat to broker a peace agreement. The siege of Herat was not a European power struggle and Todd's commitment to this argument demonstrates his increasing fear that Herat's strategic importance would not be acknowledged.

¹³³ Ibid, 2.

The Fall of a Herat-Centered Forward Policy

Despite Todd's continual advocacy for further British influence in Herat, Auckland's indecisiveness and the policy's costliness prevented the establishment of a cohesive British strategy. This came as Todd's power in Herat was challenged by the Herati leader, Fyz Mahomed Khan, in an attempt to profit from Todd's obsession with the city. Todd's arrogance when refusing to negotiate with Fyz Mahomed Khan perfectly encapsulates Britain's belief that their authority could not be challenged by those within their sphere of influence. As Todd was ousted from Herat, indecisiveness dominated British foreign policy as orders to seize Herat were superseded by newly elected government officials and by the humiliating withdrawal from east Afghanistan. The British withdrawal from Kabul effectively ended the forward policy, killing thousands of British soldiers and civilians. The indecisiveness, arrogance and military blunders of British officials prevented the effective extension of British influence to Herat, and contributed to the collapse of the forward policy both in the Khorasan region and east Afghanistan.

Possibly to anticipate his superior's objections to interfering in Herat, Todd sought to allay any concerns over the disadvantages of the current state of the city, writing of the renewed commercial, agricultural, and defensive capabilities. Todd decried that industry had returned to the city, with Bazaars being crowded, the population approaching half of what it was in prosperous times, with frequent caravans carrying goods.¹³⁴ He analyzed the agricultural production of the valley, explaining that refugees were moving back and "one half of the whole of culturable land of the valley [had] been sown" with "reason to hope that an abundant crop will

¹³⁴ Ibid, 3.

be gathered.”¹³⁵ Additionally, Todd explained that the walls had been repaired since the invasion, contributing to his view that Herat was “in a condition to stand a siege, and to offer a serious obstacle to any invading army.”¹³⁶ Todd sought to prove that Herat was once again becoming prosperous and would be a both a stable and strong bulwark for India. It is not clear to what extent Macnaghten passed Todd’s reports on to Lord Auckland, but even Lord Auckland may have been momentarily convinced of the city’s importance before rejecting Todd’s plans.

Lord Auckland acknowledged Herat to be valuable to the defense of India, but his fear of commitment and finances, along with the war in east Afghanistan, proved to him that Herat was both unattainable and undesirable. Auckland admitted that he could “see all the benefit we should gain if we could have an easy and secure possession of Herat,” seeming to agree with Todd.¹³⁷ However, Auckland knew that attaining Herat was unrealistic, stating on 18 August, 1841, “the expense would be nearly intolerable: the hazard of maintaining troops at so distant and isolated a post would be excessive; our position there would entangle us in many new and growing struggles and difficulties; and the great object of preserving Herat from foreign occupation can, I believe be effected without recourse to a remedy so violent and perilous.”¹³⁸ Additionally, British involvement in east Afghanistan during the war may had already solved the government’s concerns for defense. The British military had been occupying Kabul for nearly two years, dealing with the difficulties of propping up Shah Shuja’s domain.¹³⁹ By supporting Shah Shuja, the Indian government gained influence over the Kabul and Kandahar regions of east Afghanistan, helping them to guard the roads and passes into India. By establishing an

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 6.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Hopkirk, *The Great Game*, 200, 260.

Afghan buffer state, Herat became unnecessary and would only have been an added burden for Auckland and the Indian government.

As Herat became irrelevant to Lord Auckland, Herati leaders subsequently challenged Todd's authority, interacting with Persian messengers and making demands of the Indian government. In the first few months of 1841, Moosa Beg, a Persian messenger, arrived in Herat.¹⁴⁰ While Todd did not initially think Moosa Beg was in the city on official business, he became increasingly suspicious, suspecting that Moosa Beg was the "bearer of proposals of friendship and alliance" with Herat.¹⁴¹ Todd's suspicions of Herati-Persian collusion increased as Fyz Mahomed Khan, the Wazir of Herat, embarked for Persia with nearly fifty followers, allegedly bringing presents for Persian leaders.¹⁴² Todd looked upon this as a breach of understanding between Herat and Britain, especially due to the "suspicious fact of its having been devised and executed with the most careful secrecy."¹⁴³ Furthermore, Fyz Mahomed Khan, frustrated with British interference in Herat, bypassed Yar Mahomed Khan's authority and made six demands of Todd if he wanted to retain British influence in the region. He demanded: first, that he would receive immunity from the British Empire, second, that his debts would be paid, third, that he would be given a large monthly allowance, fourth, that he would receive a promise from Britain not to entangle Herat in a foreign war, fifth, that the fortifications be repaired at British expense, sixth, that Herat be loaned additional money to retake the surrounding regions from Persia and subsidize Herati troops.¹⁴⁴ These demands were unacceptable for Todd, whether

¹⁴⁰ Selections from the Travels and Journals, 1838, 79.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 85.

for racial, orientalist, or even prideful reasons, but they were particularly insightful on the current state of Herat and its government.

Fyz Mahomed Khan's six demands demonstrated that Herat's government was divisive and willing to exploit British interference and that Todd exaggerated Herat's preparedness for an invasion. The first three demands, including immunity, payment of the Wazir's debts, and a large monthly allowance demonstrated the complexity of Herat's government. Rather than Yar Mohammad Khan being the sole leader, the Wazir appeared to have taken over the governance of the city. Fyz Mahomed Khan's defiance revealed that he not only desired power, but that he could exploit Britain's interest in Herat's affairs. Rather than submit to British influence, Khan was determined to seize from Todd the city's diplomacy with Persia. The fourth, fifth, and sixth demands demonstrated that the Wazir did not think Herat was prepared to face a foreign invader. Previously, Todd had written to his superiors that agriculture was flourishing, that the fortifications of the city had been repaired, and Herat was ready to resist further invasions. However, these claims were all either false, desperate statements, or exaggerated versions of the truth. The Wazir's demand to wait until the current harvest before Britain entangled them in a foreign war demonstrated that he was worried about Herat's agricultural production and did not think the city could sustain itself otherwise. Additionally, the Wazir's demand for Britain to repair Herat's defenses illustrates both that the fortifications were never fully repaired and that it was not a crucial use of Herat's funds at the time. Finally, the Wazir's demand for British loans to retake the surrounding regions from Persia illustrates that he did not feel confident with Herat's situation in Central Asia. The Wazir offered to give "what [Todd] deemed equivalent" to the six demands, but Todd was not interested in fostering a relationship between the two

governments.¹⁴⁵ While these demands were fair, considering Britain had interfered in the city's foreign affairs for nearly four years, and could have made a counter offer, Todd was still not willing to acknowledge them.

Todd's refusal to accept the Wazir's offer perfectly encapsulates British arrogance, as his pride had removed British influence from the city, yet he continued to demand that his government interfere. Todd expected the loyalty and subservience of the Heratis, who he believed to be under his control. When the Wazir submitted his demands to Todd, Todd's refusal to acknowledge them demonstrates his shock that a non-European government would dare to challenge Britain's authority. Despite having an opportunity to negotiate the demands and maintain British influence in Herat, Todd arrogantly decided to leave the city, stating "that our relations with Herat are broken off and that I see no prospect of their re-establishment by negotiation."¹⁴⁶ Todd considered this to be insubordination, breaking the understanding between Herat and Britain and making it "valueless."¹⁴⁷ Todd's arrogance prevented him from negotiating a permanent British influence in Herat, yet he continued to proclaim the city's importance. He emphasized that the British Government should forcibly intervene in Herat, and that "the only satisfactory mode of giving this was by admitting a brigade of British troops with artillery into the citadel of Herat and the immediate deputation of the Wazir's son to Girishk to accompany the troops to Herat."¹⁴⁸ Todd was still convinced that Herat needed to be held by a British army, and his suggestion that the Wazir's son should accompany the troops may not have been for the purposes of cooperation, but as an incentive for the Wazir to accept British dominance while his

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 84.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 85.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

son was held hostage. However, Todd's advocacy fell on deaf ears. Lord Auckland preferred humiliating Todd rather than acting and the British military were currently dealing with much larger problems as they were humiliatingly chased out of eastern Afghanistan.

Lord Auckland, despite orders from those higher up, continued to delay making a decision concerning Herat, yet fatal circumstances would bury the question of Herat's importance. Todd left Herat, fearing of retaliation from the Heratis for his refusal to accept their demands, even requesting British troops to be sent to escort him.¹⁴⁹ Auckland commented that Todd "had damaged Britain's reputation and jeopardized the hopes of peace in Afghanistan," clearly quick to criticize, yet slow to act.¹⁵⁰ Lord Auckland believed that Todd's fearful policies and reckless negotiating had ruined the scope of British policy in Central Asia. Perhaps Auckland was merely looking for somebody to blame and a convenient way of diverting attention from his indecisiveness. Lord Auckland insisted against annexing Herat, believing that an Afghan buffer state was immensely unprofitable for Britain.¹⁵¹ Contrastingly, in London, Hobhouse and Palmerston advocated for the annexation of Herat into Shah Shuja's domains to prevent a Russian threat to the region, even ordering Lord Auckland to take Herat before June, 1842.¹⁵² However, the next sixth months would prove catastrophic for any hopes of continuing the forward policy.

Through elections and military disasters, the advocates for the forward policy would not survive the year. The day that Auckland received his orders to take Herat, the Whigs in London, including Hobhouse and Palmerston, were defeated, bringing the conservative Tory party to

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 84.

¹⁵⁰ Yapp, *Strategies of British India*, 374.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 343, 366.

¹⁵² Ibid, 375.

power.¹⁵³ The Tories agreed with Auckland that Herat would be too great a financial burden to pursue.¹⁵⁴ In Afghanistan, the situation continued to deteriorate, with the British military's occupation of Kabul becoming more tenuous by the day. Britain's hold of Kabul would disintegrate as Alexander Burnes was killed by a mob in November, the British forces were besieged through December, and Macnaghten and 16,000 British and Indian troops, families, and house workers were killed attempting to escape through the snow packed passes back to India in January.¹⁵⁵ Even Conolly and Pottinger would not survive the year, with Conolly dying at the hands of the Emir of Bukhara and Pottinger dying of fever.¹⁵⁶ Within a year, the strongest advocates of a Herat-centered forward policy had either lost power in London or been killed retreating from Afghanistan.

Under new leadership, Britain's foreign policy in Central Asia would denounce the forward policy, replacing it with a policy of masterly inactivity and internal consolidation. In India, Lord Ellenborough replaced Lord Auckland as Governor General and immediately decided to distance himself from the indecisive policies of the previous administration.¹⁵⁷ His first statement was that "the buffer state policy was to be abandoned," refocusing British attention back to the Lahore region.¹⁵⁸ The Tories agreed, stating that the Afghan strategy was "the most absurd and insane project that was ever undertaken in the wantonness of power."¹⁵⁹ For the next six years, Britain preferred diplomacy with Persia, negotiating Herat's sovereignty

¹⁵³ Ibid, 376.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Hopkirk, *The Great Game*, 241, 256, 267.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 278–79.

¹⁵⁷ Yapp, *Strategies of British India*, 430.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 430, 436.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 451.

and limiting British influence to the Indus river.¹⁶⁰ This led to a series of small wars to consolidate British rule, resulting in the annexation of Sindh in 1843 and Punjab in 1848.¹⁶¹ One of these wars, the First Anglo-Sikh War, claimed D'Arcy Todd's life, who had never again received an individual appointment and had been forced to return to his unit.¹⁶² The British and Indian governments abandoned the allure of Afghanistan and Herat, and even the Whigs, still in opposition in 1848, were "content to let sleeping dogs lie" in regard to the Russian threat.¹⁶³ However, as the British unified and consolidated their territories in India, British agents and officials felt renewed, fear-driven pressure to exert their influence in Herat to fend off the ever-present threat of Persian and Russian expansionism.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 458.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 477, 568.

¹⁶² R.H. Vetch, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, s.v. "Todd, Elliott D'Arcy," 23 September 2004, accessed 5 February 2018, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.colorado.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.001/odnb-9780198614128-e-27488>.

¹⁶³ Yapp, *Strategies of British India*, 571.

Chapter Three

The Rise and Fall of Herat's Importance:

Vague Threats, War, and Disillusionment, 1851-1878

The twenty-seven-year span from 1851-1878 presented the extremes of British policies in Herat, from two wars seeking to damage the prestige of Russia and Persia to British disinterest in the future state of Herat's affairs. Lieutenant Colonel Justin Sheil demonstrated the continuance of fears and plans to defend India via Herat, adamantly seeking to justify the city's importance to his superiors. Sheil contributed to the shift in how Britain perceived threats to Herat, advocating that a direct Russian threat, rather than the threat of a Persian puppet state, now menaced the city. However, Sheil's advocacy concluded in 1853, possibly due to the beginning of the Crimean War. The Crimean War served as an opportunity for Britain to damage Russian prestige, subsequently diminishing their perception as a threat. The ensuing Anglo-Persian War served similar purposes, although it was not perceived to be as effective in damaging Persian prestige. Regardless, without Britain's two imperial rivals in Central Asia threatening Herat's sovereignty, the individual fears and master plans for the city's defense lay dormant, awaiting further Russian expansion.

Reviving Herat's Significance to Britain

Lieutenant Colonel Justin Sheil expressed his own fears of Persian aggression towards Herat, seeking receptive ears amongst his superiors to convince them to invigorate British influence in the city. Due to previous foreign policy disasters, Sheil had a difficult time convincing his superiors that the city was important, as Palmerston, usually favoring ambitious foreign policies, currently viewed the city to be unnecessary for India's future defense. To draw attention to his cause, Sheil introduced the first threat of a Russian invasion of Herat and the

danger of a combined Persian and Russian attack. Rather than fearing Persian invasions with Russian support, Sheil emphasized that Russia now posed a direct threat to Herat and could not only influence Persian troops, but contribute to their strength. Sheil's fear sustains the theme of British Central Asian officials who viewed Herat to be crucial to Britain's sphere of influence. However, Sheil only ever received authorization to issue vague threats to prevent Persian aggression. Sheil's efforts highlight the importance of the individual in Central Asia, as Sheil was one of the few men convinced of Herat's significance, which had diminished without Palmerston's zeal to defend the city. The British fear of losing influence in Herat was localized through Justin Sheil, who projected his fear to his government, hoping that they would realize the crucial nature of the city and the imminent threat to India from Russia and Persia.

Lieutenant Colonel Justin Sheil succeeded Sir John McNeill as Minister of Tehran and was tasked with mediating the sovereignty of Herat between Lord Palmerston in the Foreign Office and the Persian government. Despite being in opposition and the growing unpopularity of his aggressive foreign policies, Palmerston continued to advocate for British influence in Central Asia.¹⁶⁴ In July 1851, Sheil reported to Palmerston that he continued to inform the Persian government that Britain "would allow of no interference with [Herat] and that any demonstration of Sultan Moran Meerza in that direction would be followed by evil consequences."¹⁶⁵ Sheil took authority into his own hands, further threatening "that the Prince would be warned that on no

¹⁶⁴ David Steele, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, s.v. "Temple, Henry John, Third Viscount Palmerston (1784–1865), Prime Minister," 23 September 2004, accessed 24 February 2018, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/colorado.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-27112>.

¹⁶⁵Correspondence Relative to the Engagement with Persia Respecting Herat, 1851-3, IOR/L/PS/20/A7/2/3, National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom, 2.

pretence whatever was he to send any troops towards Herat.”¹⁶⁶ However, without Palmerston’s direct authorization, Sheil was forced to issue vague warnings, such as in a letter to the Ameer Nizam stating, “any deviation on the part of the Prince from the above course [staying away from Herat], be the pretext that what it may, would have an influence over the relations subsisting between England and Persia.”¹⁶⁷ Like McNeill before him, Sheil was willing to take matters into his own hands to ensure the independence of Herat. Sheil’s correspondence demonstrates the continued importance of Herat to the British government, but Sheil’s threat demonstrates his personal conviction that British influence must be maintained in Herat. Sheil thought Herat was crucial, desperately using what little authority he had to try and stave off Persian aggression. Sheil was afraid that, if Persia were to take the city, they would be difficult to dislodge.¹⁶⁸ Despite not having the time to authorize Sheil’s threats, Palmerston still agreed that Herat was important and approved of Sheil’s work to prevent Persian influence in the city.¹⁶⁹ However, the disastrous First Anglo-Afghan War had changed British foreign policy in the northwest frontier, and Palmerston was no longer willing to zealously defend British influence in Herat.

Although Palmerston had approved of Sheil’s methods, seventeen days later he felt obligated to clarify his approval and prevent Sheil from acting rashly, confidentially admitting that Herat was no longer crucial to India’s security. Palmerston, in a particularly illuminating paragraph, stated:

With reference to your several despatches in which you allude to the supposed designs of Persia upon Herat, I have to state to you, confidentially, that the possession of Scinde, of the Punjab, and of Peshawur, by Great Britain, has in some degree diminished the

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 4.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 5.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

importance of which was formerly attached to the question of Herat; and although Her Majesty's government would not be indifferent to the occupation of that city and its territory by the Persians, the British government would not deem it necessary now to make the same exertions to prevent such an occupation which were made in the years 1837 and 1838.¹⁷⁰

This is a marked reversal for Palmerston and his usually ambitious foreign policies. His emphasis on the British possession of Sindh, Punjab and Peshawar reveal that the annexation policies enacted after the Anglo-Afghan War, (a return to the pre-1838 Indus River defense policy), were again considered sufficient to protect the Indian Empire. While Palmerston insisted that Persian occupation of the city would be against British interests, he was not willing to repeat the British government's 1838 actions of sending an envoy to Herat and a task force to the Persian Gulf to dissuade Persia from taking the city. Despite the possibility of a Persian controlled Herat being a puppet for Russian influence in the region, Palmerston no longer believed that an aggressive policy towards Herat was necessary, believing the frontier was now stronger and more able to repel an attack.¹⁷¹ Prudently, Palmerston ordered Sheil to prevent Persia from taking Herat, but only through vague threats, as he did not want Sheil to "make any specific threat which Her Majesty's government might not be disposed afterwards to carry into execution."¹⁷² Given these orders, Sheil continued to issue vague threats to Persia, hoping to maintain Herat's independence.

Sheil's threats became increasingly vague, unwilling to commit Britain to any specific action to defend Herat's sovereignty. Sheil reminded Sedr Azim, in Persia, that interference in Herat would not be tolerated by the British government, stating "I beg His Majesty to remember the declaration, often repeated, of the late King of Persia, that he never would have marched

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 6.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 7.

¹⁷² Ibid.

against Herat, had he known more distinctly that the expedition opposed the views and wishes of the British government.”¹⁷³ Sheil continued his vague threat, stating that “should a design so contrary to the views of Her Majesty’s government be persisted in, the Persian government must attribute to itself such consequences as ensue, whatever those consequences may be.”¹⁷⁴ Sheil did not substantiate how Britain would retaliate if Persia were to take the city, instead relying on Persian regret and undefined consequences to prevent Persian aggression. As Sheil became confident that Persian ambitions were diminished through his vague threats, he became increasingly worried about Russian ambitions in Herat.

Possibly to draw more attention to Herat’s fading importance, Sheil offered the first argument of direct Russian imperial expansion towards Herat, stating that Russia would be the new threat in the region. Initially, Sheil thought the Russian minister’s disinterest in Herat would result in little Russian intervention in the city’s independence.¹⁷⁵ However, as Russia expanded their empire further south into Central Asia, Sheil became concerned. Sheil, seeking more receptive ears in the Earl of Malmesbury, the newly appointed conservative to the Foreign Office, wrote a particularly lengthy letter explaining the potential threat from Russia.¹⁷⁶ Sheil challenged Palmerston’s letter dismissing Herat, stating that, “the advance of the frontier, have, it may be averred, diminished or destroyed the importance of Herat and rendered its possession a question of indifference...[but] it ought not to be forgotten that the antagonist parties have at the

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, 19.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 13.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 10–11.

¹⁷⁶ Steele, “Temple, Henry John.”

David Steele, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. “Harris, James Howard, Third Earl of Malmesbury (1807–1889), Politician,” 23 September 2004, accessed 27 February 2018, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.colorado.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.001/odnb-9780198614128-e-12395>.

same time approximated, and that the facilities and means of demonstration and aggression have increased.”¹⁷⁷ Essentially, Sheil believed that the expansion of both the British and Russian Empires into Central Asia threatened the sovereignty of Herat and British influence in the region, necessitating continued British intervention. As Russia increased their influence in Rasht and Asterabad, two Persian cities, Sheil believed “that in a few years the Russian consul in Herat would be the dominant authority.”¹⁷⁸ Sheil’s assertion is the first time a British authority expressed specific concerns of direct Russian expansion towards Herat, rather than fears of indirect Russian influence through a Persian puppet state. Sheil was genuinely concerned about the Russian threat, stating “it seems deserving of consideration, whether it is not easier for Russia to place a large force in Affghanistan, than it is for England to send forces commensurate with the army to which rumour will exalt the number of the invaders.”¹⁷⁹ Not only was Sheil concerned with Britain’s lack of military strength and influence in Central Asia compared to Russia, he was also concerned that Russia could more effectively manipulate Persia.

Sheil believed that a combined Russian and Persian threat to India would be detrimental to British policy, calling upon similar historic, economic, and strategic arguments as did his predecessors in Central Asia, to stress why Herat should be essential to Indian defense. With Russian encroachment nearing Tehran, in addition to their power to threaten and bribe, Sheil believed that Russia could soon control Persia.¹⁸⁰ Even though the Persian army was “miserable,” Sheil believed that they could be a formidable force of 50,000 soldiers if led by Russian officers and assisted by 30,000 Russian soldiers.¹⁸¹ Additionally, Britain’s ability to

¹⁷⁷ Engagement with Persia Respecting Herat, 1851-3, 23.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

defend India would be further damaged by Russian and Persian occupation of Herat because “a great prestige is attached to its possession; magazines of food can be easily established in security; it becomes a base for military operations; and it can be easily converted into a most secure place of refuge for a retreating army.”¹⁸² Sheil is not only touting the benefits of Herat, but possibly even seeking to justify that a Herat policy would not lead to a traumatizing retreat, as in 1842. With Herat, Sheil believed that the combined army could soon march towards the Indus, causing “alarm, agitation, panic, and depreciation of public securities” in England, and would be very expensive to repel.¹⁸³ Sheil, obsessed with his view of Herat’s importance, proclaimed that the only reason he “troubled your Lordship at much length” was because he had “an earnest opinion of the importance of preventing Persia from maintaining herself in the permanent occupation of Herat.”¹⁸⁴ Sheil, like his Central Asian predecessors Conolly and Todd, was determined to assert British influence in Herat’s foreign policy, even when directly instructed that Herat was no longer of great significance to the empire. Herat was the crux of Sheil’s master plan for Indian defense, and as Todd briefly convinced Auckland of the city’s importance, Sheil was able to convince Malmesbury.

Like Palmerston, Malmesbury was not concerned with a solely Persian threat, but a combined Russian and Persian threat did pique his interest. Malmesbury stated “that if the question of Herat was limited merely to Persian supremacy in that town, the British government would not apprehend from such a state of things any possible danger to British interests in India.”¹⁸⁵ However, the combined threat caught Malmesbury’s attention and he stated,

¹⁸² Ibid, 24.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 23.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 24.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

“difficulties and dangers of a far more serious character than might be apprehended from the mere occupation of Herat by Persia” were present, despite Russia’s seemingly innocent ambitions.¹⁸⁶ Malmesbury ordered Sheil to resist Persian ambitions of annexing Herat, convinced that Persian occupation would inevitably lead to a Persian and Russian invasion of India.¹⁸⁷ With Malmesbury convinced, Sheil had finally persuaded his superiors of Herat’s importance; it had merely taken a Russian, rather than Persian, threat to do so. As there were no specific threats from Russia that Sheil referenced, he may have been using the overall fear of Russia to exploit Malmesbury and achieve British interference in Herat. To bolster British influence in Herat, Sheil revived the argument of annexing Herat into Afghanistan, now ruled by Dost Muhammad, and continued to order the Persian government not to interfere in Herat’s independence.¹⁸⁸ He even cajoled Sedr Azim to not “send troops to the Herat territory without the knowledge and concurrence of the British Government.”¹⁸⁹ However, Persia was not willing to acquiesce to all of Sheil’s demands and engaged in empty promises to reassure Sheil of the city’s security.

The Persian government, under the Shah, repeatedly professed their disinterest in Herat despite growing evidence that they were advancing their troops and territory towards the city. In a letter from the Shah to Seyd Mahomed Khan, the leader of Herat, the Shah stated that “the ministers of the Persian Government at no time have had, or will have, any idea of taking possession of, or annexing, or governing, Herat, or of claiming the subjugation of the people of Herat.”¹⁹⁰ Persia published a statement in 1853 that they would not send troops to Herat unless it

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 28.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 39.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 36.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 37.

was invaded by another power, and even then their troops would never enter the city.¹⁹¹ However, the Earl of Malmesbury continued to receive reports that Persian troops were influencing Herati affairs. This was compounded by Persian claims to annex Herat, as reported in the *Persian Gazette*, causing Sheil's outrage that Sedr Azim still claimed that any evidence of Persian interference in Herat was "incorrect and unfounded."¹⁹² Sheil was now convinced that the "assurances so frequently given by the Persian Government [had] been utterly disregarded, and that the territory of Herat, ... is henceforth to be considered an integral portion of the Persian monarchy."¹⁹³ The increasingly apparent Persian aggression towards Herat worried Sheil, who replicated his predecessors in his advocacy for the city's importance. However, despite growing outrage at Persia's empty promises, concerns of Persian aggression are not present in the archives from 1853-55. This may be due to the start of the Crimean War, which overshadowed small Central Asian disputes, dominating British foreign policy for over two years in a multi-theatre war against Russia.

Crisis Points: Maintaining Herat's Sovereignty Amidst Global and Regional Conflicts

From 1853-57, the British government forcefully defended their international position in the Crimean War, and defended their Central Asian influence in the Anglo-Persian War. The Crimean War led to the resurgence of Palmerstonian aggression, using the war as an excuse to damage Russia's prestige. At the end of the war, the Persian aggression and occupation of Herat further enraged Palmerston, who proceeded to reassert British influence in the city. Palmerston's

¹⁹¹ Engagement. Respecting Herat, 25 January 1853, FO 93/75/10, The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom, 53.

¹⁹² Engagement with Persia Respecting Herat, 1851-3, 15, 25.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 27.

efforts to eliminate both of Britain's rivals in Central Asia demonstrate his continued investment in Herat and the possible influence of Sheil's warnings on British foreign policy. However, the results of these two conflicts, diminished Russian power and Persian nonaggression, did not lead to the security that the British government was hoping to achieve. British fears and Palmerston's desire to maintain British dominance over Russia and Persia led to two wars whose purpose was to prolong British international preeminence and to diminish British foreign policy fears through aggressive master plans.

The Crimean War saw the British, French and Ottoman Empires fight to prevent Russian supremacy in the Black Sea. In 1853, Britain and Russia were the two great strategic world powers, with each controlling vast amounts of land.¹⁹⁴ The scope and complexities of the Crimean War are beyond the narrow focus of this thesis, but it is notable that fighting did not extend to Central Asia, even though there was fighting in the Baltic Sea, Ottoman Empire, Caucasus Mountains, and the Pacific.¹⁹⁵ General Duhamel in Russia proposed an invasion of Central Asia to force Britain to send troops to defend India, which involved attacking Herat, but these plans were discarded, possibly because Russia was already struggling to support its troops through its vast empire.¹⁹⁶ From the British perspective, Palmerston, who was pivotal to the war effort and elected Prime Minister in 1855, did not seek conflict in Central Asia, possibly because he viewed India to be defensible without Herat.¹⁹⁷ However, Palmerston did admit that he sought to weaken the Russian Empire, restoring "the balance of power in Europe by dealing a blow to

¹⁹⁴ Andrew Lambert, *The Crimean War: British Grand Strategy Against Russia, 1853-56* (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 1990), 37.

¹⁹⁵ Andrew Rath, *The Crimean War in Imperial Context, 1854-56* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1.

¹⁹⁶ Hopkirk, *The Great Game*, 284–85.

¹⁹⁷ Rath, *The Crimean War in Imperial Context*, 4.

an over-mighty Russia.”¹⁹⁸ He viewed this strategy to be “security against future aggression,” possibly acting upon his previous fears of a Russian threat to Herat.¹⁹⁹ In 1856 the Russians, not having the technological acumen to fend off Britain and France, admitted defeat.²⁰⁰ This significantly damaged Russia’s international prestige, crushing their agrarian economy which was already struggling to industrialize.²⁰¹ The Crimean War set the stage for numerous Russian economic and political reforms while bolstering British confidence in their imperial abilities. With Russia neutralized, attention returned to the Persian threat to Herat, which was becoming increasingly problematic to British influence in the city.

As the Crimean War drew to a close, Britain refocused its attention on Herat, which was continuing to devolve into political turmoil caused by Persian scheming. In 1855, Herat faced a rebellion as the Afghan, Shahzada Muhammad Yusaf, staged a coup and took control of the city.²⁰² Due to limited information, the British government was not sure whether Persia had “openly marched on Herat” to place Muhammad Yusaf in power, or whether it had occurred under Persian influence.²⁰³ Regardless, they now considered Herat to be “Persia’s, to do with as she pleases.”²⁰⁴ This fear was largely unfounded, as the new British Minister at Tehran, Murray, advocated that Yusaf was not a Persian puppet; this became evident when Yusaf declared to be in favor of Britain instead of Persia, hoisting the Union Jack above Herat and requesting British

¹⁹⁸ Lambert, *The Crimean War: British Grand Strategy against Russia*, 120, 310; Martin McCauley and Peter Waldron, *The Emergence of the Modern Russian State, 1855-81* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1988), 1.

¹⁹⁹ Lambert, *The Crimean War: British Grand Strategy against Russia*, 342.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 350.

²⁰¹ McCauley and Waldron, *The Emergence of the Modern Russian State*, 1.

²⁰² India. Epitome of Correspondence Regarding Our Relations with Afghanistan and Herat, 1855-9, IOR/V/27/270/11, Asian and African Studies, British Library, London, United Kingdom, 21.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

aid.²⁰⁵ Disliking the idea of British interference, the Heratis deposed Yusaf.²⁰⁶ Amidst this political chaos, Persia sought to gain, seizing the city on 25 October 1856.²⁰⁷ Despite Palmerston's prior insistence that Herat was no longer crucial to India's defense, he viewed the Persian occupation as an act of war.

Persian occupation of Herat was likely anticipated by the British government, who had observed Persia flirting with Russian schemes during the Crimean War and suspected Persian interference in Herat's political turmoil. While they never sent troops to Central Asia, the Russian government did view Herat to be "crucial to India's defence" during the Crimean War and encouraged Persia to attack the city, thinking it would draw British troops to defend India.²⁰⁸ However, Britain had ordered Persia to remain strictly neutral during the Crimean War.²⁰⁹ Overtime, Persia decided to break their neutrality and seize Herat, possibly due to the political turmoil of the city, yet their ultimate decision occurred seven months after the war had concluded and did not benefit Russia.²¹⁰ In part, the Persian government was finally moved to action because they thought that Britain was no longer concerned over Herat's sovereignty.²¹¹ This was contrary to Sheil's vague threats that were supposed to adamantly discourage Persian aggression towards the city. It was only in confidential letters that it was apparent that the British government no longer viewed Herat as crucial to India's defense. This begs the question of whether Persia attacked based on access to British intelligence or rumors of disinterest in the

²⁰⁵ Ibid, 36–37; Gazetteer of Afghanistan, 1910-1912, 103.

²⁰⁶ Epitome of Correspondence Regarding Our Relations with Afghanistan and Herat, 1855-9, 46–47.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 63.

²⁰⁸ Hopkirk, *The Great Game*, 287.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid, 287-8.

²¹¹ Ibid, 287.

city, or based on the current tumultuous political state of Herat. Given the timing of the attack, both circumstances likely contributed to their decision. The Persian government could have seen, through British inaction and possibly Sheil's use of unspecified threats, that Britain was not invested in Herat and may have considered Britain to be too war-weary to bother defending the city. Peter Hopkirk, author of *The Great Game*, argues that this attack "caught the British by surprise," despite warnings from Dost Mohammad Khan.²¹² However, it can be concluded that the British government was not surprised by this attack, as they had years of intelligence detailing Persian aggression towards Herat. Faced with a Persian occupation, the British government knew exactly how to reassert British influence through force, even when shying away from a forward policy.

Britain's willingness to declare war on Persia, despite the risk of unpopularity and the Governor-General's lack of enthusiasm reveals the continued importance of Herat to Palmerston and other individuals in the British government. The Governor-General of India, Lord Canning, "was strongly opposed to forward policies" in Herat because they were too financially exhausting and dangerous to British troops travelling through Afghanistan.²¹³ However, Palmerston, possibly due to the Crimean War, had reverted to his advocacy for aggressive British foreign policies and was determined for Britain to reassert their influence in Herat. He realized that another war would be unpopular and it would be difficult to obtain Parliamentary approval, as they were in recess.²¹⁴ Therefore, he manipulated the situation to prevent a British declaration of war, resulting in a solely Indian declaration of war against Persia.²¹⁵ The exclusive object of

²¹² Ibid, 288.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 289.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

the war was to force a Persian withdrawal from Herat. To achieve this, a limited Indian task force attacked Persian cities along the Persian Gulf until the Shah capitulated and withdrew his troops from Herat.²¹⁶ Determined to prevent future Persian aggression towards Herat, the Indian government drafted a particularly specific treaty to end the war, hoping to eliminate a Persian threat to Herat for the foreseeable future.

The close of the Anglo-Persian War and the subsequent treaty that was forced on Persia demonstrates the British desire to repress Persian influence in the city. In the 1857 Treaty of Paris, Article V and VI directly addressed Persian claims to Herat. They stated that Persia must withdraw all troops from the city and they must “relinquish all claims to sovereignty over the territory and city of Herat” and “never to demand from the Chiefs of Herat, or of the countries of Affghanistan, any marks of obedience, such as the coinage, or ‘khotbeh,’ or tribute.”²¹⁷ The British government clearly sought a final written solution to the question of Herat’s sovereignty, hoping to solve the problem of Persian aggression towards Herat. However, much like Persia’s empty promises before the Crimean War, Persia would continue to disregard their agreements outlined in the treaty and exert some influence in Herat, further distressing the new British officials working in Persia.

British government officials remained invested in Herat’s foreign affairs for two years following the Anglo-Persian War, but their interest diminished as they were reminded of the expense that accompanied action in the city. In 1859, Charles Wood, the Secretary of State for India sent a letter to Henry Rawlinson, the new “envoy-extraordinary at the court of Persia”

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ “Persia. Treaty of Peace between Her Majesty the Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and His Majesty the Shah of Persia,” London, 4 March 1857, From ProQuest, <https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1857-033779?accountid=14503>, Accessed 2 February 2018, 2.

explaining how to shape future policy decisions in Herat.²¹⁸ Wood flaunted Britain's investment in the city, stating that "the independence of Herat has long occupied the serious attention of her majesty's government," and that "the recent war with Persia was undertaken" to stop Persian encroachment.²¹⁹ However, he proceeded to question whether British interference and the Treaty of Paris would have lasting significance, as he was concerned that the Governor of Herat, Sultan Ahmad Khan, was too dependent on the Shah and practically indistinct from Persian Governors.²²⁰ Additionally, he renewed concerns of a Russian threat, worried about Russian officers sent to Herat for "scientific purposes."²²¹ To further exert British influence, he wanted Rawlinson to visit Herat, reestablish strong ties with the city, and ensure that the city remained independent.²²² Even after two wars and decades of meddling in Herat's affairs, the British and Indian governments did not believe that they had lasting influence in Herat. However, reestablishing strong ties with Herat came with a financial commitment that the British government was not willing to pay and this visit never occurred. The brief resurgence of a forward policy to defend British influence in Herat had revived the conservative's economically minded arguments of 1841, proclaiming that Herat was too expensive and unattainable of a dream for the empire.

²¹⁸ Epitome of Correspondence Regarding Our Relations with Afghanistan and Herat, 1855-9, 105-6.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

Abandoning Herat: Seeking a Diplomatic Solution to Central Asia

As British hostilities against Russia and Persia drew to a close, arguments advocating for Herat's abandonment in favor of a better defensive position reappeared. Lumsden, Edwardes and Lawrence's reports illustrated the growing disillusionment with Herat, as it was too expensive and isolated a post to maintain. Additionally, the threats from Persia faded, as Persia realized that interference in Herat was not worth the resulting consequences. Even with the rebound of a Russian threat, the British government preferred negotiated responses over direct action. The fear that had driven prior foreign policy had largely been quelled. The Crimean War and Anglo-Persian War had defeated Britain's two most powerful rivals in Central Asia and the resulting lack of pressure from a foreign regime threatening to invade India dampened British enthusiasm to zealously defend British influence in Herat. The absence of an Indian invasion threat through Herat led to a British foreign policy of masterly inactivity; the lack of individual champions of Herat's importance eliminated it from the master plans for the region's defense.

In 1859, Officers Lumsden, Edwardes and Lawrence each published reports advocating that Britain should extricate itself from Herati affairs. They stated that the "British government should cease from its efforts to secure by diplomacy the independence of Herat and withdrawing from all political interference in Afghanistan, should limit its defensive operation to its own frontier," calling the independence of Herat an "unattainable chimera."²²³ They admitted that Britain's inaction may contribute to Persian dominance in the region and may even "abandon the field to Russian diplomacy and gold."²²⁴ However, he stated that the British government now accepted that Herat's independence was impossible, and it was considered preferable to fight an

²²³ Memoranda Relating to Afghanistan, 1859, IOR/L/PS/20/MEMO5/1, Asian and African Studies, British Library, London, United Kingdom, 2.

²²⁴ *Ibid*, 6.

eventual war with Russia in Europe, rather than in Central Asia.²²⁵ Major Lumsden heavily criticized British action in Central Asia, stating, “of all schemes that England has ever undertaken, none have cost her proportionately more, or have been altogether unsuccessful, as our attempts at establishing an independent state in Herat.”²²⁶ He believed that continuing the policy would be “an error.”²²⁷ While likely an exaggeration, Lumsden may be reflecting the British frustration with continual interference in Herat, sometimes through expensive wars, that never secured permanent British influence in the city. Lumsden questioned whether Herat should hold any importance, as it could not stave off Persian attacks without British help and it was “mere self-deception to suppose that it can ever present the slightest obstacle to a Russian invasion of India,” especially given the impracticality of stationing a British garrison hundreds of miles from India.²²⁸ Lumsden was convinced that Herat was an impossible defensive position for the empire, preferring a more realistic buffer.

Lumsden admitted that Herat held historic and geographic importance, but did not think that British interference in the city was practical. He accepted that the route through Herat was feasible for an invading army, even briefly acknowledging the historical precedents of Napoleon, who allegedly contemplated the route, and Alexander the Great’s possession of the city before his invasion attempt of India.²²⁹ However, he does not use these historical precedents to advocate for the possession of Herat. Instead, he thinks that a current British replication of prior empire’s strategies would be impractical, as it involved “squandering our resources” and relying on

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid, 9.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid, 10.

²²⁹ Ibid, 10–11.

“doubtful friendships of distant native governments” to maintain a Herati line of defense.²³⁰ He instead advocated for using the Hindu Kush mountains as a defensive barrier for India, which was particularly attractive since the outer provinces of Peshawar, Kohat, and Sindh had already been conquered by the Indian government.²³¹ Overall, Lumsden’s report resuscitated the previous defensive ideals of the first few decades of the nineteenth century and the years following the First Anglo-Afghan War. With this defensive strategy, Lumsden believed that Britain already had “the keys of India in our own pockets” and were in “a position to lock the doors in the face of all enemies, white or black.”²³² Despite two decades of Central Asian agents working to convince their government that Herat was the key to India, some British government officials were still not convinced that it was a crucial defensive buffer to secure the subcontinent and were willing to abandon it. Lumsden’s view that Britain already had all the keys to India, and that Herat was not one worth carrying, is reflective of British policy regarding Herat for a further twenty years.

As Britain and Persia grew disinterested in Herat, Britain was willing to hand the security of the city to the Afghans. While Britain became disengaged from Herati affairs, Persia abandoned their goal of attaining the city, never resurfacing as a threat to Herat after 1859. The Anglo-Persian War demonstrated to Persia that they “could not intrude upon the ever expanding domains of [their] imperial rivals” and they instead began to focus on expanding into the Sistan region south of Khorasan, which Britain did not view as a threat.²³³ The Anglo-Persian War demonstrated to Britain that, despite their growing disillusionment with Herat, they still needed

²³⁰ Ibid, 11.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Firoozeh Kahani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804-1946* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 33.

to keep the city in the hands of a friendly power. Lumsden viewed Britain's only ally in Central Asia to be Afghanistan, as they were "the only country free of the Russian taint."²³⁴ Afghanistan was beginning to look like a malleable ally that could defend the subcontinent, rather than Herat, which was contentious and distant. Gradually, British foreign policy was beginning to accept that a failure to hold Herat was not detrimental to British influence, as long as it was paired with a rise in British influence in Kabul.²³⁵ Canning advocated that Afghanistan as a whole, not Herat, was more important for defending India.²³⁶ This is why Dost Muhammad's annexation of Herat in 1863 did not bother British officials, as they had finally accepted the annexation arguments that British explorers and agents in Herat had been proclaiming for decades.²³⁷ As Britain grew disinterested in direct interference in Central Asia, the Russian threat gradually returned.

In the aftermath of the Crimean War, the Russian government sought to rebuild their international prestige through territorial expansions, which were largely ignored by an isolationist Britain.²³⁸ Fifteen years after the war, the Russian government had regained their international prestige by significantly expanding their empire towards British possessions in Asia.²³⁹ Most of the territorial gains occurred from 1860-1880 in the Turkestan region of Central Asia, including the cities of Khiva and Bukhara.²⁴⁰ Previously, a Russian controlled Khiva had

²³⁴ Abstract of Despatches and Memoranda on Asiatic Politics and European Diplomacy in the Countries between India and Russia, and Especially in Afghanistan; and as to the Establishment of a British Agent at Herat to Watch the Progress of Events on the Perso-Afghan Frontier and in Other Parts of Central Asia; and Further as to the Continuance of the Subsidy to Dost Muhammad, July 1859, IOR/L/PS/18/C3, Asian and African Studies, British Library, London, United Kingdom, 9.

²³⁵ Ibid, 7.

²³⁶ Alder, "The Key to India II," 306.

²³⁷ Ibid, 300.

²³⁸ Hopkirk, *The Great Game*, 301.

²³⁹ McCauley and Waldron, *The Emergence of the Modern Russian State*, 50–51.

²⁴⁰ Ibid, 53.

been viewed as detrimental to British influence in Central Asia, yet when Russia finally occupied the city, British officials did not publish any concerns. Despite Russia's rebounding influence, Britain gradually drifted into a period of isolation during the 1860s, "aggravated" by foreign policy failures.²⁴¹ Influenced by Palmerston's forward policies, some British government leaders were still suspicious of Russian activities, but overall "there was a broad consensus among British diplomats as to Russia's actual or potential weaknesses," because of the country's poor economy.²⁴² The British government's drift towards isolationism discouraged them for military endeavors against Russia, preferring diplomatic solutions to any conflicts that arose.

When conflict between Britain and Russia was deliberated during the 1860s and 1870s, British authors and diplomats preferred peaceful, negotiated solutions. This was reflected in James Long's *Russia, Central Asia, and British India*, which argued that due to the enormous human and economic cost of fighting the Crimean War, Britain should accept Russia as their neighbor in Central Asia.²⁴³ He argued that it was not worth trying to prevent Russian expansion in Central Asia, as Russia was too diplomatically skilled and would use their recent territorial gains to find "the weak points in our India armour" and "do immense mischief."²⁴⁴ Despite analyzing British and Russian spheres of influence in Central Asia, Long never mentioned Herat, demonstrating the city's lack of significance during this time. Long perfectly embodies the 1860s and 1870s masterly inactivity school of thought, which preferred avoiding conflict and settling disputes diplomatically. This was demonstrated through Clarendon's attempts in 1869 to

²⁴¹ Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind*, 23.

²⁴² *Ibid*, 45.

²⁴³ James Long, *Russia, Central Asia and British India* (London: Trübner and Co., 1865), <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/5CgEd2>, 20–21.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 26.

establish a neutral buffer zone in Central Asia, even if it did not succeed.²⁴⁵ As the British government attempted diplomatic solutions to Central Asian disputes, the Russian government continued to prioritize their own expansion and international reputation. In the 1870s, the Russian government decided to disregard the conditions placed upon them from the 1856 Treaty of Paris that ended the Crimean War, and signed treaties with Germany and Austria for defense.²⁴⁶ This led to an influx of “public passions into foreign policy” in Britain, contributing to the rise of “idiotic Russophobia,” which would challenge a peaceful settlement with St. Petersburg while encouraging British military action in Central Asia.²⁴⁷

Gammell and Alder, Herat’s leading historians, argue that Dost Muhammad’s annexation was largely the end of Herat’s importance to the British Empire, but their conclusion is premature.²⁴⁸ Further Russian expansion led to renewed concerns over Herat’s sovereignty, causing the British government to reconsider an alliance with Persia. Additionally, Herat would play a pivotal role in the Panjdeh Crisis, as Britain and Russia nearly came to war over the sovereignty of the city. Through the individual contributions and fears of Russophobe authors and ardent government supporters, Herat retained a glimmer of importance through the 1880s and into the 1890s, refusing to quietly fade into obscurity.

²⁴⁵ Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind*, 76.

²⁴⁶ McCauley and Waldron, *The Emergence of the Modern Russian State*, 165–66.

²⁴⁷ Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind*, 98, 108–9.

²⁴⁸ Alder, “The Key to India II,” 300.

Chapter Four

The Panjdeh Crisis

Manipulation, Russophobia, and Realism, 1879-1885

Decades of Great Game imperial rivalry came to a climax as Russian expansion extended to the oasis of Panjdeh, only slightly north of Herat. Viewing Panjdeh as their next conquest, the Russian General, Komarov, declared that all Afghan troops currently defending the city must withdraw.²⁴⁹ Ultimately, Afghan troops refused to acknowledge Russia's demands, a battle ensued, and Komarov took the city.²⁵⁰ The Russian Empire's proximity to Herat terrified British officials and Russophobe authors. With Russia threatening their sphere of influence, Gladstone, the Prime Minister, "obtained an 11 million vote of credit from excited MPs of both parties, the largest such sum since the Crimean War," and subsequent war announcements were prepared by the Foreign Office.²⁵¹ Memorandums on the defensive capabilities of Herat were written and two British army corps were mobilized to defend Herat while engineer officers were sent to survey the city's defenses.²⁵² As the Royal Navy positioned its fleet around the Russian Empire and the Viceroy prepared a further 25,000 troops to be stationed at Quetta, in northwest India, the British ambassador in St. Petersburg warned the Russian government "that any further advances towards Herat would definitely mean war."²⁵³

It appeared that war was inevitable. Even American newspapers, such as the New York Times, published the headlines, "England and Russia to Fight."²⁵⁴ Sir Charles MacGregor, a

²⁴⁹ Hopkirk, *The Great Game*, 428.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid, 429.

²⁵² Ibid, 426–27.

²⁵³ Ibid, 429.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

Russophobe general in India, wrote that “our miserable government” was finally observing Russophobe warnings and was going to take military action to defend British influence in Herat.²⁵⁵ When it seemed inevitable that a final, catastrophic war with Russia was about to occur, Britain, Afghanistan, and Russia all stood down and the incident was settled peacefully. Nikolai Giers, the Russian Foreign Minister, realized that Britain was willing, even with a liberal government, to go to war to defend Herat and Lord Granville, the British Foreign Secretary, realized that Russia was unwilling to fight, given Britain’s determination to defend the city.²⁵⁶ Even the leader of Afghanistan, Emir Abdur Rahman, was uninterested in pursuing action to reclaim his city.²⁵⁷ Instead, Britain and Russia decided to let the Afghan Boundary Commission, which was supposed to have defined the Afghan buffer between the two empires years previously, continue to define the boundaries of Afghanistan.²⁵⁸ The escalation to the Panjdeh Crisis was filled with British fears, expressed through a novel plan to ally with Persia, the emergence of Russophobe authors advocating for Palmerstonian forward policies, and a mix of Russophobe and measured responses from British governmental officials and generals.

Britain’s Attempted Manipulation of Persia

After two decades of British indifference to Afghanistan’s interference in Herat, Russian encroachment on the city led to Herat’s reemergence in British foreign policy. Seeking a new approach to secure British influence in the region, Ronald Thomson, a British diplomat in Tehran, and the Marquis of Salisbury, the British Foreign Secretary, commenced work on a

²⁵⁵ Ibid, 427.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, 431–32.

²⁵⁷ Ibid, 431.

²⁵⁸ Ibid, 432.

proposal that would ally Britain and Persia by ceding Herat to Persia. While unsuccessful, the radical British demands of Persia reflect the increasing fear of Russian expansion and the desire for further British influence in Herat. The attempted negotiations with Persia were only the start of fearful British rhetoric aimed at forestalling Russian expansion towards Herat. Fear of Russia, which had been dormant since the Crimean War, rebounded as British policy makers desperately sought a solution to prevent a military conflict in Central Asia.

Ronald Thomson, a British diplomat in Tehran, and the Marquis of Salisbury, the British Foreign Secretary, concocted a novel master plan of using Persia to stop Russian expansion towards Herat. Thomson and Salisbury wrote this proposal from 1879 through the first few months of 1880 and it was favorably regarded by the Shah and the Persian Minister of Foreign Affairs. Thomson wanted to disregard the restrictions in the 1856 Treaty of Paris preventing Persia from occupying Herat, advocating that it had “become expedient that Her Majesty the Queen should so far waive the obligations undertaken therein by His Majesty the Shah as to admit present occupation of the city and territory of Herat in Afghanistan.”²⁵⁹ While Britain may not have been keen about a Persian occupation of the city, their fears of Russian expansion had forced them to ally with a previous foe. Thomson’s draft of the potential shift in British policy, consisting of eight articles, illuminate his fearful motivations in giving Herat to Persia.²⁶⁰ Thomson stated that the purpose of this plan was to defend the Indian Empire by permitting a Persian occupation of Herat, which “would have the effect of securing [Persian] good-will, would increase the influence of England in this country, and might also go far to loosen the hold

²⁵⁹ Correspondence Respecting the Negotiations for the Occupation of Herat by Persia, 1879-80, IOR/L/PS/18/C28, Rare Books Collection, British Library, London, United Kingdom, 52.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

of Russia on Persia, and weaken the preponderating influence which she now exercises.”²⁶¹

Unlike his predecessors, McNeill and Sheil, Thomson’s master plan to use indirect rule to build a Persian buffer state against Russian encroachment demonstrates his diminishing fear of Persia compared to the rising Russian threat.

Thomson’s master plan included eight articles designed to increase British influence in Herat and Persia. Article I waived the 1857 treaty, allowing Persia to occupy and administer the ancestrally important city of Herat while giving Britain a voice in the city’s management.²⁶² Article II established a British envoy and troops in Herat for the first time since D’Arcy Todd’s outing thirty-eight years previously.²⁶³ Articles III and IV called for British officers to accompany and train Persian troops while reserving the right for British troops to assume the defense of Herat if necessary, all while rebuilding the fortifications of the city.²⁶⁴ Article V alluded to the Russian threat, stating that all foreigners, except the British, were not allowed inside Herat.²⁶⁵ Articles VI, VII, and VIII gave Britain the power to draw Persian boundaries near Herat, forced Persia to complete a telegraph or rail line from Herat to Kandahar, allowed Britain to levy taxes on Herat, and allowed Britain to build roads through Persia for trade purposes.²⁶⁶ Thomson’s proposal demonstrates Britain’s desire for personnel in Herat, their skepticism that a Persian army could resist any invaders given the current condition of Herat, and their fear of Russian influence in the city. It also reveals Britain’s attempt to create a Persian buffer state against Russian expansion while subsequently increasing their trade opportunities.

²⁶¹ Ibid, 77.

²⁶² Ibid, 52;

Hopkirk, *The Great Game*, 289.

²⁶³ Negotiations for the Occupation of Herat by Persia, 1879-80, 52.

²⁶⁴ Ibid, 52-53.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, 53.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

To increase Persia's position as a British buffer state, Thomson revised the sixth and seventh articles, which required Persia to prevent the Russian occupation of Merv, a city only 270 miles north of Herat.²⁶⁷ Furthermore, it required Persia to "do all she possibly can to check the advance of Russia in the Turkoman country, to object strenuously to the passage of Russian troops through any territory belonging to or claimed by her and to afford no assistance of any kind to any military expedition advancing eastwards from the Caspian."²⁶⁸ These demands demonstrate Thomson's fear that Russian expansion was inevitable in Central Asia, but that Persian interference could limit further expansion.²⁶⁹ Thomson's proposal illustrates the appeal of indirect rule for the British Empire as a useful tool to manage their fear of Russian expansion while limiting the risk to the empire. All that remained was Persian ratification of the proposal.

Over the next few months, to Thomson's incredulity, Persia grew disillusioned with the proposal. It appears that the Shah signed the initial draft of articles, and stated that he would help to resist Russian Encroachment in Central Asia.²⁷⁰ However, during negotiations, Thomson's removal of the incentive allowing a Persian advance into Sistan and Persian official's frustration with the requirements to resist Russian advances, caused Persia to withdraw their support.²⁷¹ In typical British arrogance, Thomson was dumbfounded at Persia's rejection. He ignored that the treaty heavily favored Britain's interests at the expense of Persia. Instead, he speculated that the Persian government sought further concessions or complete control of Herat. He even accused them of seeking Russian council through M. Zenoviev, a Russian agent in the Persian Court.²⁷²

²⁶⁷ Ibid, 78.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 54.

²⁷¹ Ibid, 82.

²⁷² Ibid, 85–86.

It was simpler for Thomson to blame Russia for the Persian refusal rather than to admit to his own failure of diplomacy. Thomson's desire to prevent further Russian expansion in Central Asia is illustrative of the growing fear of Russian encroachment towards Herat and the resurgence of plans to defend India during the 1880s.

The Russophobe Desire for a Forward Policy

In Europe, British government officials were growing increasingly fearful of Russian expansionism and prestige in Central Asia, contributing to the rise of Russophobia. Russophobia was an "intrusion of public passions into foreign policy-making" and proved to be "more than a short-term irritant; it had implications for the future course of policy."²⁷³ Loftus, a British diplomat in St. Petersburg, was one of the first ardent Russophobes. Despite initially favoring Russian and British cooperation in Central Asia, Loftus's experiences in Russia proved to him that, "no reliance can be placed in the Russian government" and Britain should act "independently" in Central Asia.²⁷⁴ As T. G. Otte argued, the deep seated fear of Russian encroachment prevented negotiations between the two governments, as demonstrated by the "idiotic Russophobia" that prevented Britain from effectively negotiating with Russia during the Russo-Turkish War.²⁷⁵ However, fearful Russophobia was not the only reaction to Russian expansionism. Fear and "a general wariness of Russia did not mean that British diplomats regarded the rising Anglo-Russian antagonism as irrevocable."²⁷⁶ This was embodied by Thomson and Salisbury when drafting the Anglo-Persian agreement over the sovereignty of

²⁷³ Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind*, 108.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 97.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 108–9.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 126.

Herat, as they may have considered it to be an effective, indiscriminate way to prevent conflict between Britain and Russia. Some British officials even thought that limited Russian expansion in Central Asia, such as their annexation of Merv in 1884, was beneficial. Odo Russell, a British diplomat, believed that Russian influence in Central Asia was “unavoidable and unpreventable,” stating that it would stabilize the region, being “more a benefit to oriental humanity than a danger to British interests in India.”²⁷⁷ While Russophobia was not a majority opinion, it was still deeply influential through authors such as George Bruce Malleson, who sought to influence the government through popular opinion, using fears of Russian encroachment to justify his economic, historic, and scant defensive knowledge on Herat to advocate for British intervention.

Colonel George Bruce Malleson was the most outspoken and ardent Russophobe favoring British interference in Herat. Malleson had served as an officer in the East India Company since 1842, steadily rising through the ranks until his retirement in 1877 as an honorary major-general.²⁷⁸ After his retirement, Malleson focused on writing, much of which was meant to illuminate the history of Central Asia and the current Russian threat that Britain faced in the region.²⁷⁹ Malleson’s two books that examine the threat to Herat are, *Herat: the Granary and Garden of Central Asia*, published in 1880, and *The Russo-Afghan Question and the Invasion of India*, published in 1885. In both books, Malleson draws on historic and economic reasoning to justify why Herat was and continued to be strategically important in Central Asia. Malleson’s arguments were echoed by other prominent Russophobe authors, such as Marvin and Vambery, demonstrating the independent attempts to influence Central Asian

²⁷⁷ Ibid, 147.

²⁷⁸ E.M. Lloyd, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, s.v. “Malleson, George Bruce,” 23 September 2004, accessed 12 January 2018,

<https://doi.colorado.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/17886>.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

policy through a pervasive fear of losing India. These writings were intended to persuade the British public and government officials that British action in Central Asia was necessary for the security and prosperity of the empire.

Malleson used his writings to rally those in London who, like him, believed in aggressive Palmerstonian foreign policy and to persuade the new generation of British government officials of the severe Russian threat. Malleson, who served until 1877, believed in an aggressive foreign policy because he was one of many men who “owed their careers to, and had their foreign policy outlook shaped under, Lord Palmerston.”²⁸⁰ Following this generation were men called “‘high-Victorians,’ whose formative experience was the Crimean War, but who did not attain senior position in the diplomatic hierarchy until the 1870s.”²⁸¹ With the high-Victorians having the Crimean War as their formative experience, they had little respect for Russian capabilities, especially given the decade after the war in which Russia struggled with internal reforms and a loss of foreign prestige. Malleson may have been attempting to rally support from this new demographic of British officials. This was demonstrated through his statement that if Britain had acted when Russia took Panjdeh, a town only slightly north of Herat, with “firmness and resolution, prompt atonement would have been made,” but the lack of firmness and resolution under the current government ministers meant that Britain would soon yield to Russian demands.²⁸² To further convince the high-Victorians, Malleson sought to influence the general population of the need for British action in Herat.

²⁸⁰ Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind*, 21.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

²⁸² G.B. Malleson, *The Russo-Afghan Question and the Invasion of India* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1885), 116.

Rather than use his fear to convince his government and military superiors of the threat, Malleon used his position as a writer and former soldier to invoke fears in the general population. Malleon strove to rally public opinion to an aggressive foreign policy in Central Asia, hoping to use their fear to pressure the government into action. Malleon stated, in regard to *The Russo-Afghan Question*, “the form in which this little book is published will make it accessible to all classes” to further the “truth” of policies in Central Asia.²⁸³ He advocated that British officials’ “duty is, above all things to insist that the Ministers of England shall maintain, with respect to our Indian Empire, the old historical policy of England,” as failure would signal the loss of the Indian Empire via “infirmity of purpose and cowardice.”²⁸⁴ He is direct with his readers, stating that they should not “be blinded by oratorical platitudes, but to look facts sternly in the face” and they should embody the valor, energy, and skill of former Englishmen in regards to foreign affairs.²⁸⁵ To sway public opinion, Malleon not only relied on the fear of a Russian invasion of India, he drew upon the British anxiety of losing trade opportunities for the empire.

To convince the general population of Herat’s importance, Malleon described the bountiful natural resources in Herat available to a conquering empire, furthering his advocacy for British occupation. Charles Thomas Marvin’s book reinforced these claims, stating that British and Russian generals valued Herat for its resources, which “would feed an army of at least 100,000 men, and sustain them during the final advance upon India,” calling Herat a “great camping-ground” for empires.²⁸⁶ Vambery similarly believed that “Herat could easily be turned into a garden...whose manifold productions have awakened the envy of the neighboring

²⁸³ Ibid, 6.

²⁸⁴ Ibid, 6.

²⁸⁵ Ibid, 64.

²⁸⁶ Charles Thomas Marvin, *The Russians at the Gates of Herat* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1885), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015063022464>, 106.

powers.”²⁸⁷ Malleeson insisted that Herat’s location on key trade routes between India, Bukhara, and Persia would position the city to regain its prosperity if a “real and a powerful protector” such as Russia or Britain were to take the city.²⁸⁸ Malleeson believed that Herat had immense potential to be prosperous and wanted Britain, and not Russia, to gain Herat’s resources. Malleeson believed “the possession of the valleys of the Herirud and the Murghab [was] the possession of a gold mine” and that “in a few years Herat would prove the milch-cow of Northern India.”²⁸⁹ Malleeson advocated that “all the munitions of war are produced or can be manufactured” in Herat, and “the willow and poplar flourish, mines of lead and of iron abound...the salt-petre is there; the charcoal is there; the corn, the wine, and the oil are there; the horses are there; and in a very short time [Britain] could drill the hardy population into such a state of efficiency as would enable them to vie even with the Sikhs of the Panjab and the Pathans of the frontier.”²⁹⁰ Malleeson’s hyperbole demonstrates the extent to which he desperately wished to convince his readers of Herat’s bounty and the potential economic triumph that awaited Britain in Herat.

Despite Malleeson’s justification for taking the city, it is unclear where he obtained his list of Herat’s resources. Malleeson marvels at the abundance of Herat’s resources, repeating his extensive list two other times in his publications.²⁹¹ However, given Malleeson’s obsession with Conolly’s initial exploration of Herat, it is possible that Malleeson did not determine Herat’s bounty for himself, content with utilizing and expanding upon Conolly’s explanation of Herat’s resources. Regardless, Malleeson uses Herat’s supposed economic potential to incite fear that

²⁸⁷ H. Vambery, “Herat’s Importance,” *Science* 5, no. 122 (1885): 465.

²⁸⁸ Malleeson, *Herat*, 10, 13.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 14.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 20.

²⁹¹ *Ibid*, 88; Malleeson, *The Russo-Afghan Question*, 126.

Britain's inaction would exclude them from lucrative trading opportunities in Central Asia. He even expressed fear that Britain may lose their global trade advantage, as Herat had the potential to become a cheaper route to transfer goods from Asia to Europe instead of via the Suez Canal.²⁹² Given that expensive foreign policies had precluded Britain's prior attempts at exerting their influence in Central Asia, Malleson may have been seeking to convince the government that British influence in Herat could be economically viable. However, Malleson had to justify to his readers why Herat was not currently a prosperous city in Central Asia.

To justify Herat's recent economic stagnation, Malleson racistly assumed that Afghan rule was to blame. Malleson claimed that the various siege attempts "of the past eight hundred years has shown that long-continued and permanent misgovernment can alone neutralize the natural advantages possessed by Herat; and that, crushed as she may be by these, she possesses the elasticity which enables her to rebound at once when the pressure is removed."²⁹³ This is an arrogant analysis of the city, implying that the current government of Herat is incapable of effective rule, ignoring the decades of international interference and siege attempts that contributed to upheaval in the city. This also speaks to Malleson's inherent racism as he viewed the Afghans, who conquered Herat in 1717 from the Persian Empire, as being "rude and uncultivated boor[s]."²⁹⁴ While Malleson has no confidence in Afghan rule, he still believed that the resources of the valley had potential, especially given Herat's strategic location to prior empires seeking to conquer India.

Malleson and Vambéry emphasize the importance that prior empires attributed to Herat's strategic location for invading or defending India. Vambéry called upon Herat's "pre-Islamic"

²⁹² Malleson, *Herat*, 20, 68.

²⁹³ *Ibid*, 56.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 78.

history to justify the city's prominence, calling upon the proverb, "Khorasan is the mussel of the world, and Herat is its pearl."²⁹⁵ Malleson stated that "it was from Herat that Alexander the Great started for the Indus, Mahmud of Ghazni and Muhammad Ghori were possessors of Herat when they dashed upon India" and that "Chinghis Khan and Taimur both forced their way through the same portal" with Baber being the only exception.²⁹⁶ Vambery also observed these empires' conquests of Herat, adding Nadir Shah's possession of the city in 1731 to his list.²⁹⁷ Additionally, Malleson emphasized that "the Mogol rulers who preceded the British in the occupation of India always recognized the necessity of guarding in their own hands the key of that portal" as when the Mughal empire lost Herat, two invasions quickly followed.²⁹⁸ The fact that prior Central Asian empires used Herat to invade and defend India was enough justification to Malleson that "a Russian Herat... must ever be a standing menace to Hindustan."²⁹⁹

Malleson was incredibly fearful of a Russian invasion of Herat, thinking that it would mean "in one sentence—the loss of India."³⁰⁰ Malleson interpreted Herat as the sole defensive buffer for India, possibly drawing upon Conolly's analysis, and disregarded the other routes through Afghanistan, such as through Kabul, and the defensive barriers of the Hindu Kush Mountains and Indus River. Despite past debates discrediting Herat as the key to India, Malleson disagreed, reviving the forward policy argument that Herat was crucial to India's defense. He stated that "the English empire of Hindustan would resemble a tenanted mansion, the keys of the doors of which were held by robbers engaged in attempting to corrupt the servants of the

²⁹⁵ Vambery, "Herat's Importance," 465.

²⁹⁶ Malleson, *Herat*, 19.

²⁹⁷ Vambery, "Herat's Importance," 467.

²⁹⁸ Malleson, *The Russo-Afghan Question*, 16.

²⁹⁹ Malleson, *Herat*, 19.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 21.

basement.”³⁰¹ Malleeson asked, “could there be, I repeat, a position more impossible to be endured?” demonstrating his deep set fear that a Russian invasion of Herat was intolerable.³⁰² In part, this was due to modern exploration, discovering that the Paropamisus Mountains north of Herat were more easily navigable, allowing Russia to expediently besiege the city.³⁰³ Vambery further emphasized a need for British urgency, stating that a Russian occupation would “accordingly obtain such a firm foothold, that their dislodgement would be no easy task.”³⁰⁴ Vambery states that the only thing preventing Russia from seizing Herat and India was that it was not the “effeminate Brahmins” or “degenerate successors of Baber” that were controlling Central Asian politics, but the “active, highly educated, and powerful Briton.”³⁰⁵ Vambery’s fears of a Russian occupied Herat and his racist assumption that only British influence was keeping Russia at bay demonstrate the persuasive Russophobic opinion that Herat was needed for India’s defense. However, demonstrating why Herat was strategically and defensively crucial to India proved to be illusive.

Malleeson knew remarkably little about Herat’s defensive potential for India, hinging his analysis upon his limited knowledge of Herat’s location and defenses. He stated that through Herat alone “the valleys can be entered which lead to the only vulnerable part of India. Those valleys, running nearly north and south, are protected to the east by inaccessible ranges, to the west by impracticable desserts.”³⁰⁶ Marvin regurgitated Malleeson’s argument, verbatim, stating that only “the [Herat] valleys can be entered which lead to the vulnerable part of India.”³⁰⁷ While

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Ibid, 24.

³⁰³ Marvin, *The Russians at the Gates of Herat*, 104, 110–11.

³⁰⁴ Vambery, “Herat’s Importance,” 466–67.

³⁰⁵ Ibid, 467.

³⁰⁶ Malleeson, *Herat*, 86.

³⁰⁷ Marvin, *The Russians at the Gates of Herat*, 100.

accurate, these opinions ignore that an invading army would still have to traverse hostile Afghan territory, march over the passes of the Hindu Kush, and cross the Indus River, which at numerous times was considered a far superior defensive buffer for India. In terms of Herat's defenses, Malleeson's only description was that it was "surrounded by a thick mud wall from twelve to eighteen feet high, backed by a brick wall ten feet high and provided with thirty towers and five well-fortified gates."³⁰⁸ Vambery's only other insight was that Herat contained "fertility and climactic advantages," otherwise ignoring Herat's defensive capabilities.³⁰⁹ Marvin's only other contributions were that General Grodekoff, a Russian officer, stated that Herat could not withstand modern artillery fire, as it was too vulnerable to attacks from the surrounding hills.³¹⁰ These author's extremely limited analysis of Herat's defensive potential may be due to the lack of accessible information on the city's defenses, as these reports were either confidential correspondences or currently in production. Instead, Marvin trusted the opinions of British officials in Central Asia, such as Sir Charles MacGregor and Lord Napier of Magdala, believing that their claim of the "immense strategical importance of Herat," was enough to justify the city's value.³¹¹

Malleeson's economic, historic and strategic reasoning for Herat's importance to the British Empire was modeled after his own infatuation with prior aggressive British foreign policies in Herat, demonstrated through his patriotic perception of the decisions and experiences of Lord Palmerston and Eldred Pottinger. Malleeson's fanciful claims of these individuals' deeds are questionable when compared to these individuals' actions. Malleeson claims that, when Persia

³⁰⁸ Malleeson, *The Russo-Afghan Question*, 15.

³⁰⁹ Vambery, "Herat's Importance," 465.

³¹⁰ Marvin, *The Russians at the Gates of Herat*, 97.

³¹¹ *Ibid*, 97.

laid siege to Herat in 1837-8, that Palmerston “recognized at a glance all its significance, all its importance,” but Palmerston was actually indecisive when implementing a British response.³¹² Malleon also claimed that the Heratis viewed Pottinger as “the object of their trust, their veneration, their every hope,” during the siege, but the extent of their adoration is highly questionable.³¹³ Malleon continued, stating that Lord Palmerston acted patriotically when declaring war on Persia in 1856 to restore Herat to the Afghan people, but ignored the self-centered reasons that Britain sought to maintain the independence of Herat.³¹⁴ Malleon’s emphasis on the patriotism of Palmerston and Pottinger’s interference in Herat’s affairs demonstrates that Malleon sought aggressive British interference because of his veneration of the prior great men who had shaped British policy in Central Asia. Russophobia was not contained to authors and was evident amongst British generals such as Sir Charles MacGregor. However, Russophobia was not the only military response to Russian aggression approaching the Panjdeh crisis, as many responses were measured and calculated.

The Dichotomy of Government Approaches to Herat

The British government’s response to Russian expansion was either fearfully Russophobic or analytically realistic. Some advocates were convinced of the effectiveness of the forward policy, such as Major General C. M. MacGregor, who advocated for aggressive intervention in Herat to prevent a Russian occupation of the city. However, these were minority opinions. Other government reports favored the 1860s policy of masterly inactivity, such as Beaufort’s “Memorandum on Herat,” which was less passionate and more analytical, illustrating

³¹² Malleon, *The Russo-Afghan Question*, 19.

³¹³ *Ibid*, 24.

³¹⁴ *Ibid*, 29.

the strategic difficulty of preventing a Russian occupation. The dichotomy of these responses illustrate the range of British government approaches when dealing with the Russian threat, illustrating the continued fear of Russian expansion, but the inability to adopt a forward policy in the 1880s.

In 1884, Major General C. M. MacGregor demonstrated the Russophobia present in the British military, publishing a detailed report on the threat of a Russian invasion of Herat, adding specificity that was lacking in Malleston's writings. MacGregor was a career soldier, with over two decades of experience completing strategic and topographic analyses of Central Asia, specifically concerning reconnaissance in the northwest frontier.³¹⁵ MacGregor served as a brigadier general during the Second Anglo-Afghan War and became the head of the Indian Intelligence Department in 1884, focusing on preparing plans to quickly mobilize defense forces in the case of an emergency.³¹⁶ MacGregor was known for fearing a Russian invasion and harshly critiquing Indian defense policy, earning his reputation as a Russophobe.³¹⁷ His radical opinions were suppressed by the Indian government, but lauded by Russophobes such as Marvin.³¹⁸ As a Russophobe, MacGregor's minority opinion in the Indian government demonstrates that fear of a Russian invasion, while not necessarily a popular opinion, was still present among high ranking officials.

³¹⁵ S. P. Oliver, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, s.v. "Macgregor, Sir Charles Metcalfe (1840–1887), Army Officer, Explorer, and Military Strategist," 23 September 2004, accessed 1 March 2018, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.colorado.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.001/odnb-9780198614128-e-17518>.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

MacGregor's detailed analysis of Russia's ability to attack Herat, which was further analyzed by the War Office in London, advocated for direct British intervention in the city. MacGregor viewed Russia's "silent advance" through Central Asia as having nefarious intentions.³¹⁹ He believed, in the event of an invasion of India, Russian forces would split into four columns, the largest of which would seize Herat before the British government could respond. MacGregor believed that Russia had enough soldiers to invade India, totaling 76,000 infantry, 15,000 cavalry, and 239 guns.³²⁰ MacGregor believed that the Empire's best response, when considering annexation and occupation arguments, was to station troops in Herat.³²¹ He stated "we should thus hold the Herat valley with the full consent of the Afghans, and would be freed from all anxiety as to our relations with them," and should proceed to take control of the administration of Herat, developing its resources, increasing its revenues, and training local troops.³²² MacGregor's opinion was furthered by other Russophobes including Lord Napier of Magdala, who stated that "if we are timid, apathetic, and consenting, a few years will see [the Russians] in possession of a fortress [Herat], which in their hands, will be rendered impregnable and will command the road to India."³²³ These government Russophobes were convinced that controlling Herat would not only be beneficial strategically, but could also be justified and supported through increasing the revenue of Herat. However, Herat was a contentious topic among Indian military and government officials, and while some supported MacGregor's views on Herat's importance, others considered his concerns to be antiquated.

³¹⁹ Analysis of The Defence of India by Sir C.M. Macgregor, 1884, IOR/L/PS/20/G1, National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom, 2.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid, 30.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Russian Advances in Asia, 1884, IOR/L/PS/18/C69/9, Asian and African Studies, British Library, London, United Kingdom, 29.

The War Office analysis of MacGregor's report demonstrates that the British military questioned his conclusions. Barnes, one of the War Office analysts who read MacGregor's document, stated that the occupation of Herat by Russia may not be significant, as "there has been so much indecision and confusion of thought on the subject of the danger to be feared from Russia, that there may be some people inclined to question its validity."³²⁴ This may demonstrate the government's disinterest in Russia since the Crimean War, viewing them to be an inferior European power. It may also be intended to show that MacGregor's report was too aggressively Palmerstonian, no longer a popular opinion. Despite their criticism, the British government was still interested in maintaining their influence in Herat. While attempting restraint from aggressive policies, they continued to seek intelligence on Herat's ability to withstand a Russian siege.

While the British government was still fearful of Russian expansion, their approach towards the Panjdeh crisis was not as aggressive as during the forward policies. Captain F. Beaufort's report, "Memorandum on Herat with special reference to the chances of a coup-de-main being successful against it," provided the British government with the needed intelligence to determine Herat's present defensive capabilities. Beaufort sought to describe the walls of the city, yet he used Pottinger's estimates, which were nearly fifty years old.³²⁵ It is strange that Beaufort relied on outdated descriptions, especially given that Lumsden was currently stationed near Herat and could have provided more recent information.³²⁶ Beaufort believed that a Russian coup-de-main, or surprise attack, could be very successful against the city. He explains that Russia had more troops stationed near Herat, with 20,000 men in the region of Transcaspia, only

³²⁴ Analysis of The Defence of India, 1884, 29.

³²⁵ F. Beaufort, "Memorandum on Herat," 1885, WO 33/43, The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom.

³²⁶ Ibid.

388 miles from Herat, as opposed to the 5,000 men that Britain had stationed at Quetta, 510 miles away.³²⁷ Given Britain's disadvantages and their scant confidence in the Ameer of Herat's ability to withstand a siege, Beaufort concluded that Herat would quickly fall to a Russian advance before British help could arrive.³²⁸ With few successful options available to defend Herat, it is not surprising that Britain resorted to threats of force to keep Russia confined to Panjdeh and ultimately decided that negotiation, rather than war, was a better solution.

The Panjdeh Crisis nearly brought Britain and Russia to war over the sovereignty of Herat. Britain's threats of force were successful and Russia agreed to confine their expansion to Panjdeh for the foreseeable future. The Panjdeh Crisis was the last major incident that sought to defend British interests in Herat from foreign powers. The peace that descended between the two empires did not cease hostilities; the British government and its officials on the Afghan Boundary Commission continued their war preparations, clearly not willing to trust Russia's agreement to stay out of Herat. However, the subsequent lack of conflict threatening Britain's sphere of influence led to Herat's gradual drift into obscurity. After decades of British interference in the city, it had finally lost its persuasive, fearful advocates that touted its importance to India's defense.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Ibid.

Conclusion

Herat: From Obsession to Obscurity

Fear of losing British influence in Herat through Russian and Persian expansion and the subsequent threat of a foreign invasion of India defined British Central Asian policy in the nineteenth century, leading to the periodic implementation of or disillusion with forward policies. Losing British influence in Central Asia was an ever-present fear of the British and Indian governments, but the reasons for this fear changed over time. British fears in Central Asia emerged in the early nineteenth century as Ellenborough, drawing upon Evan's writings, feared Russian advances towards Khiva and Bukhara, even though the lack of an immediate threat did not result in a forward policy. Conolly expressed the first fears of losing influence in Herat, due to Russian influence in Central Asia and Persia, but similarly did not think a forward policy was necessary. Pottinger and McNeill feared Persian and Russian aggression, which manifested in the Persian siege, contributing to the beginning of the 1838-41 forward policy. Todd maintained the fear of Persian and Russian aggression, expressing his fear by amplifying the significance of the Persian siege, lying to his superiors, and distrusting the Herati government, which contributed to the destruction of the forward policy in 1841. Sheil's fear of Persian intrigue to besiege Herat and the combined Russian and Persian threat to the city, contributed to Malmesbury's subsequent fears and demonstrated the persistence of fear during disillusionment with forward policies in the 1850s. Fears subsided after the Crimean and Anglo-Persian Wars, lying dormant without a significant threat to the region. Russian expansion in 1880 revived these fears, contributing to Thomson, Salisbury, MacGregor, and Russophobe authors' fears that a Russian invasion was inevitable without implementing some elements of a forward policy. The 1885 Panjdeh Crisis gradually diminished British fears of losing influence in Herat.

Responding to their various fears, British officials and men on the ground created elaborate, fanciful master plans to maintain British influence in Herat and defend India. The lack of an immediate threat in the early nineteenth century led to unambitious master plans as Evans, Burnes and Conolly sought an Afghan buffer state and Ellenborough sought gradual commercial penetration in the region. The onset of the 1837 Persian siege led to more ambitious plans, with Pottinger and McNeill defending Herat without orders from their indecisive superiors, and Pottinger fantasizing about a British buffer from Balkh to Herat. Todd had the most ambitious plans for Herat, including annexation, fantasizing about Herat's defensive strength and position, despite its poor condition. Hobhouse and Palmerston agreed with Todd's advocacy for annexing Herat into Afghanistan, but the ensuing end of the forward policy in 1841 and Ellenborough's disillusionment with Herat fantasies led to the abandonment of buffer states, focusing on the defensive potential of the Indus. Not content with the current master plans for India's defense, Sheil and Malmesbury revived annexation arguments in the 1850s to reestablish British influence in Herat. Palmerston hoped to solve concerns of Russian and Persian aggression towards Herat by force, attempting to crush Britain's opponents through the Crimean and Anglo-Persian Wars. Even as the brief forward policy that began with the Anglo-Persian war concluded, there were plans in 1859 to reestablish a British presence in Herat. British policy pivoted through advocates such as Lumsden, who favored limited frontier defense and isolationism without the presence of a major threat to Herat or India. Master plans pivoted again under policies of masterly inactivity, using Herat's annexation by Afghanistan and attempted negotiations with Russia to influence policies. Given the unpopularity of past forward policies, Thomson and Salisbury's 1879 master plan attempted to reestablish British agents, garrisons, and influence in Herat through a Persian buffer. Contrastingly, Russophobes such as Malleon and MacGregor advocated for the renewal

of forward policies through fanciful plans to influence the general population of the strategic, economic, and historic necessity of Herat. The variety of master plans to defend India and maintain British influence in Herat hinged upon the fears of their creators, whose contrasting advocacy over six decades of the city's importance or nonimportance prevented the formation of a unified plan. The creation of fanciful master plans to maintain British influence in Herat was resolved through the Panjdeh Crisis, as the lack of subsequent conflict limited the need for new plans.

The key to India was a fluid concept that never achieved universal recognition among British officials. Master plans for India's defense searched for strategic cities or regions that could provide absolute security for India, metaphorically calling them keys to India. Ferozpur was considered the first key to India, but was quickly replaced during the idealism of an Afghan buffer state as officials lauded the importance of Afghanistan as a gate to India. The 1838-41 forward policy solidified the perception of Herat as the key to India, with advocates, such as Todd, proclaiming the city's importance. As the importance of Herat varied during the rise and fall of the forward policy, the perception of Herat as the key to India evolved with it. By the end of the forward policy in 1859, Lumsden emphasized that Herat was no longer a key to India, as Britain already had the keys to India in the Hindu Kush and the Indus River. However, Herat resurged as the key to India due to Russian expansion in 1881, as Malleson believed that a Russian occupation of Herat would corrupt the integrity of the Indian Empire. The key to India metaphor retained importance as a persuasive tool and intriguing phrase to demonstrate British convictions of the perceived importance of Herat. However, despite explorers, authors, and officials' efforts, Herat never became the solely agreed upon key to India, as forward policies contributed to and withdrew importance from the city.

Economic themes for interfering in Herat also served as persuasive tools, initially being viewed as added bonuses to British intervention before becoming key justifications of Britain's ability to intervene in Herat's affairs without added expense. Upon initial British interest in the northwest, Lord Ellenborough used economic arguments to call for the expansion of British influence through trade. Conolly illustrated the commercial benefits of Herat, attributing importance to the valley's resources and justifying the current economic decline on racist assumptions of the Afghan leaders. Arguments for the economic benefits of British intervention continued through the 1838-41 forward policy as Auckland reiterated the call for commercial penetration, Pottinger listed the plentiful resources and trade routes of Herat, and Todd discussed the return of commerce to the city. Arguments from Auckland, the Tories, Lord Canning, Lumsden, and Long all illustrated the expense of intervention in Herat and contributed to the decline of forward policies, leading to a shift from the added benefits of Herat's resources to the economic feasibility of British intervention in Herat through these resources. To justify concerns of expense, Thomson's Anglo-Persian proposal emphasized Britain's ability to develop their trade with Persia. Malleson and other Russophobes claimed that Herat could be an exploitable, resource-filled garden to benefit Britain, possibly becoming the next lucrative trade route to Europe. Malleson even revived the racist assumptions of poor Herati leadership to justify why British interference would yield a different economic result. MacGregor too emphasized the goal of increasing Herat's revenue to pay for troops stationed in Herat. Commercial arguments were a persuasive tool and an ever-present theme, helping to justify reasons behind British master plans to interfere in Herat's affairs and allay British fears of losing influence in Central Asia.

Historic justification for British interference in Herat was a further tool to justify Herat's position in master plans for India's defense, adding legitimacy to fanciful plans through the

actions of prior empires. Historic arguments were incredibly significant to British officials and often recounted in the nineteenth century. Justifying initial interest in the northwest frontier, Lord Harding emphasized the historic importance of the Indus river to past civilizations. Conolly was the first to emphasize the historic significance of Herat, describing the city as comparable to the great sights of Italy. Todd was the first to use historic precedents to justify British action, stating that Herat's prominence on Central Asian trade routes had made it historically significant. In the 1850s, Sheil's emphasis on the historical significance of Herat helped to bolster his claim of the city's importance. However, historic justification was also used through Lumsden's arguments of failed attempts on India by Napoleon and Alexander the Great to delegitimize Herat. Russophobes, such as Malleson and Vambery revived the benefits of Herat's historical significance, emphasizing the prior empires that had invaded India through Herat. Their focus on the Mughal's loss of Herat and subsequent loss of India demonstrates the importance they attributed to historical precedents. Attempts to justify British interference in Herat through historic precedents served as a blueprint for fanciful master plans, justifying individual opinions of Herat's centrality to Indian defense.

Herat provides a useful lens through which to observe the politics of the Great Game. Fear ridden and innovative, government officials and men on the ground guided the enactment and rollback of forward policies. Their plans for the defense of Herat and the Indian Empire, rooted in commercial and historic justification, emphasized Herat's position as the key city in Central Asia. The importance of individual proclamations of Herat's centrality in the Great Game are largely forgotten by contemporary authors who focus instead on the broad imperial story, ignoring the fear and fanciful master plans that contributed to guiding the defense of India. Individual's fear of losing British influence in Herat led their attempts to justify the city's

importance, whether commercially, historically, or even with their limited strategic knowledge. The ebb and flow of British fears and master plans concerning the establishment of British influence in Herat is significant, demonstrating the individual's ability to influence British policy while adding to the apprehension of Persian and Russian expansionism. Without fears or novel master plans, the growing disillusionment with Herat shifted the city from its prominent position in foreign controversies to its insignificance and obscurity.

Echoing Malcolm Darling's thoughts in 1906 that the Indian Mutiny was viewed as a "phantom standing behind official chairs," Herat retained its perceived importance long after the conclusion of forward policies to defend the city.³²⁹ Strategically significant but not crucial to India's defense, its importance stemmed from the opinions of men on the ground who believed that the city's economic and historic prominence necessitated its importance to defending British India. While significant during the forward policies of 1838 and 1856, Herat gradually became a phantom, lessened in importance once its most ardent supporters had been killed and voted out of office. This phantom lingered, convincing ardent Palmerstonians of the necessity of British intervention in Herat, but was not favored in the second half of the nineteenth century, especially after dealing with the Persian and Russian threats in the 1850s. Herat maintained some prominence to those in the British Empire, but it was no longer the lynchpin for British defense. Instead, those who advocated for its continued importance, such as MacGregor, were shunned for their Russophobia. The phantom of Herat remained present in British minds for decades, even continuing after the Panjdeh Crisis, but advocates of the city's prominence slowly became a rarity.

³²⁹ Margaret MacMillan, *Women of the Raj: The Mothers, Wives, and Daughters of the British Empire in India* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 1988), 115.

The Panjdeh Crisis did not conclude British fears of losing influence in Herat, which continued to be influenced by the lingering phantom for decades. The British government remained hostile towards Russia through the 1890s, as Russia was thought to be biding their time before subsequent expansions.³³⁰ Central Asian policies continued to be characterized by “suspicion and mistrust” with Britain and Russia “disporting themselves ‘as jealous rivals.’”³³¹ Despite their hostility, “there was no appetite for a ‘forward policy,’” illustrating the diminishing desire to aggressively assert British influence in Herat.³³² The search for a key to India continued, now emphasizing the city of Farah.³³³ Commercial and historic justification also remained, with Lumsden (now convinced of Herat’s importance), seeking to justify British interference.³³⁴ It is also evident that fears of a Russian occupied Herat further contributed to planning the city’s defense by improving interior communications and bolstering towers to support modern artillery.³³⁵ British interests in Herat continued to linger after the Panjdeh Crisis, especially evident through A. C. Yate and his travels with the Afghan Boundary Commission.

Yate demonstrated both the continuance of planning for and justifying British interference in Central Asia while also demonstrating the growing disillusionment with Herat policies. Yate emphasized the commission’s continued plans to bolster Herat’s defenses against a

³³⁰ Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind*, 164, 185.

³³¹ *Ibid*, 282.

³³² *Ibid*, 205.

³³³ O.B. St. John, “Notes on That Portion of the Memorandum on ‘Afghanistan as a Theatre of War,’ Referring to the Herat Province and Its Military Capabilities,” (Simla: Government Central Branch Press, 1885), *Asian and African Studies*, British Library, London, United Kingdom, 1.

³³⁴ Note by Major-General P S Lumsden on the Aspect of Affairs at Herat and in Central Asia, 24 July 1885, IOR/L/PS/18/A68, *Asian and African Studies*, British Library, London, United Kingdom, 2–4.

³³⁵ *Gazetteer of Afghanistan*, 1910-12, 106, 108.

surprise Russian attack.³³⁶ He also continued the search for new keys to India's defense, creating a master plan of a 150 mile buffer through the desert near Sistan, which he believed to be "a truer and stronger barrier than the whole of the Herat garrison."³³⁷ Yate even maintained economic and historical justification, believing that his policy would cause Sistan to regain "the prosperity it enjoyed before the days of Taimur-Lung."³³⁸ Overall, Yate was not an ardent supporter of Herat's importance. Yate was not afraid of a Russian invasion of India, given Russia's geographical distance from India, the immense amount of troops needed for an invasion, and the lack of readily available supplies in Central Asia to support a Russian army.³³⁹ Yate even believed that Britain could "make a very good race for Herat with the Russians," clearly not sold on the inevitability of Russian influence and occupation.³⁴⁰ Yate's analyses demonstrates the growing disillusionment with perceived Russian threats and the ensuing lack of fear, but also the legacy of master plans, and economic and historic justification from men on the ground in Central Asia.

Improved relations between Britain and Russia quelled most of the remaining fears of a Russian invasion of Herat and India. Russia's disastrous defeat in the Russo-Japanese War and the resulting 1907 convention between Britain and Russia concluded "decades of tension between the two Powers in Central Asia."³⁴¹ The end of hostilities diminished Herat's lingering importance, further abating fears of Russian interference in the city. Apart from the occasional

³³⁶ A. C. Yate, *Travels with the Afghan Boundary Commission* (Edinburgh & London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1887), 431.

³³⁷ The Trans-Caspian Railway and the Power of Russia to Occupy Herat, 1891, WO 106/178, The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom, 8, 10.

³³⁸ *Ibid*, 10.

³³⁹ Yate, *Travels with the Afghan Boundary Commission*, 440.

³⁴⁰ The Trans-Caspian Railway and the Power of Russia to Occupy Herat, 1891, 6.

³⁴¹ Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind*, 314, 331.

evidence of fear, shown through the 1909 government publication, “Routes in Russian Central Asia, Section III, The Herat Line of Advance,” and the 1913 British telegrams documenting a rebellion in Herat, concern over British influence in Herat had finally drifted into obscurity.³⁴²

In 1952, when attempting to establish a British consulate in Herat, it was clear that Herat finally held no lasting importance to Great Game fears or master plans. Franklin, a British officer, stated “there are practically no industries established in Herat” and that “until communications develop, there is no real prospect of Herat becoming at all important.”³⁴³ The Russians were reported to be “strikingly inactive in this country,” demonstrating the continued lack of a Russian threat.³⁴⁴ British officials concluded that Herat was a “typical, neglected Central Asian township, interesting enough for visitors but probably a depressing place for the administrators isolated there.”³⁴⁵ Herat was no longer suitable for any British interference, and “there would be little (if any) practical value in a post there.”³⁴⁶ Herat’s unimportance to the remnants of the British Empire in 1952 illustrate that the lingering fears of Russian influence in Herat had disappeared.

While seeking to answer why Herat appeared important to the British Empire, this thesis has evolved into an analysis of fear-ridden individual’s master plans for the defense of India, analyzing individual contributions to British policies in Herat. However, this research has merely

³⁴²Routes in Russian Central Asia, Section III. The Herat Line of Advance Simla: Intelligence Branch, Division of Chief of Staff, 1909, IOR/L/PS/20/A102, Asian and African Studies, British Library, London, United Kingdom.;

1913 Afghanistan: Mutiny at Herat, 22 May 1913, IOR/L/PS/11/54, Asian and African Studies, British Library, London, United Kingdom.

³⁴³ Abandonment of Proposal to Open a British Consulate at Herat, 1952, FO 371/100962, The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

scratched the surface of the complex political scene between Britain and Russia. Further research analyzing British and Russian relations in Europe may illuminate why each empire sought to project their influence in Central Asia. Further analysis of the Crimean War, Russo-Turkish War, Russian expansion and influence in China, and Russian expansion in Central Asia would also illuminate Herat's relative importance during the Great Game. Subsequent research could also explain Russian motivations for expansion, including the extent that fulfilling Peter the Great's dying wish to conquer India guided expansionist Russian policy.

Additional research is also necessary to illuminate Herati, Persian and Afghan perspectives of Herat's importance. This thesis has contributed to the limited amount of history explaining Herati viewpoints, briefly illuminating Fyz Mohamad Khan's attempts to maintain Herat's sovereignty. However, more research is needed to illuminate additional Herati perspectives and opinions concerning British intervention in their city, such as the particularly intriguing story of Muhammad Yusaf's 1855 coup. Persian ambition to retake Herat is also a worthy research topic and could elaborate upon the complex historical justification behind their sieges of the city. Particularly little research has historicized the Anglo-Persian War, which could further illuminate the extent of Britain's motivations to protect Herat. This would also contribute to the complex discussion of Anglo-Persian relations, which was constantly shifting from alliance to hostility. Further research could also illuminate Herat's importance to the Afghans living in Kabul and Kandahar and their motivations behind seizing the city in the 1860s. Researching minority viewpoints would continue to illuminate other Great Game perspectives, breaking the euro-centric emphasis of the Great Game.

Further research could also illuminate the correlation between Great Game conclusions and geopolitical fears in Europe. In the early 1900s, fears of German intrigues in Asia emerged

as Germany threatened British interests in Europe and abroad. Lord Curzon, the current Viceroy, expressed fears that the Berlin-Constantinople-Baghdad Railway was a “dagger thrust toward India,” and Kaiser Wilhelm’s further remarks exacerbated this fear, stating “we should most assuredly want our armed men on a certain frontier not a very long way from India.”³⁴⁷

Researching the rise of fears of Germany could explain the growing disillusionment with fears of Russian expansionism, contributing to an analysis of the perceived German threat to non-European territories preceding World War I.

Finally, further research could also analyze public perceptions in Britain of the importance of Herat to the Great Game. Maud Diver’s, *The Hero of Herat*, emphasizes an orientalist view of British imperialism, emphasizing an apparent British civilizing mission when maintaining Herat’s sovereignty.³⁴⁸ This provides an interesting perspective into portrayals of Herat’s importance to the British Empire, leading to questions on the motivations of influencing public perception after the Great Game. This may also be informative of the shift in British culture and society from the 1830s-1890s, illuminating how public perception of Palmerston, men of empire, colonialism and orientalism influenced foreign policy over time.

The allure of Herat faded into obscurity, demonstrating the British Empire’s evolution from aggressive, expansionistic imperialism during the nineteenth century, to weary, acknowledged decolonization during the middle of the twentieth century. Analyzing Herat’s centrality in British imperial thought furthers the historical knowledge of imperial politics in Central Asia by giving a voice and an explanation to the debated importance of Herat, demonstrating the fear that characterized colonial rule of the British Empire. The fantasy that

³⁴⁷ Lawrence James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire* (New York: Macmillan, 1997), 343–44.

³⁴⁸ Maud Diver, *The Hero of Herat* (New York and London: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1913), 441.

men on the ground had concocted that touted Herat's importance faded with the lack of fear, becoming evident that their desire to obtain the city had been unrealistic, even during forward policies, as direct British influence could not rationally have been extended over 500 miles from Indian territory. The city that had occupied fervent interest for sixty years of the nineteenth century for its economic, historic, and strategic importance to defend India was now viewed to be completely irrelevant to the empire; a suitable end for a city whose importance was rooted in individual claims.

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