

LYTTON AND THE PESHAWAR CONFERENCE

by

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Master of Arts

Youngstown State University, 1971

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

History

Program

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August, 1971

ABSTRACT

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It is no secret that men make history. While the great man theory has been discredited, few historians can ignore the impact of an individual upon immediate events. Robert Lytton, the principal character in this paper, was by no stretch of the imagination a great man. He was a rather average individual with no outstanding attributes. In 1876, when he was appointed Viceroy of India, he was a forty-four year old career diplomat without a reputation. By means of an unsought appointment, however, he was placed in a position to control events of important consequence.

In the second half of the nineteenth century the main source of British concern regarding India's security was the threat posed by the steady advance of Russia in Central Asia. Since Afghanistan separated British India from the Russian Empire, relations with its ruler became a vital concern for English statesmen. In 1873, after almost forty years of diplomatic controversy, London and St. Petersburg reached an agreement which recognized that Afghanistan was in Britain's sphere of influence. Despite this

understanding, in 1874, following Disraeli's rise to power, British foreign policy regarding Afghanistan became more aggressive and dogmatic. To increase Britain's influence in Afghanistan, Lytton was sent to India with instructions to gain for Britain the right to station military officers inside Afghanistan's borders. Lytton's efforts to achieve this by negotiation culminated in the conference at Peshawar in the early spring of 1877. Unfortunately for both parties the Peshawar proceedings collapsed. Largely because of Lytton's inability to appreciate the Afghan position and his inflexible and suspicious nature, it proved to be the final effort to increase Britain's influence by peaceful means. From that time on Lytton used increasingly forceful methods to achieve his aims; one year later Britain invaded Afghanistan.

The major documentation for this study was drawn from the Parliamentary Papers, which fortunately include an impressive collection of letters, notes and minutes pertaining to Anglo-Afghan diplomatic relations.

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concerning the security of India's northwest frontier, and the character of the principals involved all contributed to the ultimate collapse of the negotiations. The failure at Peshawar played a major role in the subsequent British decision to take direct action in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, a state long recognized by Britain as independent and sovereign. In order to understand the conference at Peshawar and the consequences of its miscarriage it is necessary to consider the background of Anglo-Afghan relations and the events leading to this last attempt to avoid direct confrontation.

Anglo-Afghan diplomacy was shaped by two principal relationships: that existing between the British Home Government and the Government of India; and the confrontation

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 1877 representatives of Her Majesty, Queen Victoria's Government and Sher Ali, the Amir of Afghanistan met at Peshawar in the Punjab to attempt to reach an agreement concerning the outstanding differences separating the two governments. The meetings ended in failure. The atmosphere of mutual misunderstanding, frustration and suspicion which surrounded the talks, British apprehensions created by thirty-five years of controversy concerning the security of India's northwest frontier, and the character of the principals involved all contributed to the ultimate collapse of the negotiations. The failure at Peshawar played a major role in the subsequent British decision to take direct action in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, a state long recognized by Britain as independent and sovereign. In order to understand the conference at Peshawar and the consequences of its miscarriage it is necessary to consider the background of Anglo-Afghan relations and the events leading to this last attempt to avoid direct confrontation.

Anglo-Afghan diplomacy was shaped by two principal relationships: that existing between the British Home Government and the Government of India; and the confrontation

between two different schools of thought regarding England's attitude toward Afghanistan. These two combined in the person of the Viceroy, Robert Lytton, whose association with the Amir symbolized the larger cultural clash.

Almost from its inception the Government of India had maintained its own diplomatic relations with neighboring states. Nevertheless, India's external interests were determined to a great degree by the cabinet in London. This body, while extremely remote from India in geography and in many instances in understanding as well, not only fixed the broad outlines of India's foreign policy, but also exercised considerable control over diplomatic details. As the nineteenth century progressed and Britain's international role expanded, India's interests became increasingly involved in British imperial considerations. Afghan relations in particular became an integral part of imperial policy. The constantly expanding Russian Empire in Central Asia imposed an ever-increasing pressure on the British Government to establish firmly India's security. For this reason Indian policy came more and more to be dictated by imperial considerations, and the Afghan problem was submerged in the larger Central Asian question.

In this larger context, the period from 1874 to 1878 was of critical importance in Anglo-Afghan affairs. In 1874 Disraeli's Conservative Party assumed the direction of Britain's government. Its coming to power occasioned a complete reversal in British India's foreign policy. The former

policy, commonly referred to by its supporters and opponents alike as "masterly inactivity," which had been dedicated to non-intervention in the internal affairs of Afghanistan as long as friendly relations were maintained, came under assault. Accused of allowing Afghan relations to deteriorate, it was replaced by a more direct and forceful program known as the "forward policy." It was designed to establish permanent British influence in Afghanistan, thereby thwarting Russian designs. The Peshawar Conference was the principal effort of that new policy to achieve its ends peacefully. Its failure led its supporters to more extreme measures.

In most of the more comprehensive studies dealing with the diplomatic relations between Afghanistan and Britain the conference at Peshawar is mentioned only briefly. Because it miscarried and because its failure did not immediately cause an outbreak of hostilities, the details of the negotiations have been largely ignored. Nevertheless, a closer inquiry into those details may be useful. In the reports of the nine official meetings which occurred between January 30 and February 19, 1877, the reasons for the conference's failure are exposed. More importantly, the results of thirty-five years of Anglo-Afghan diplomacy pass before the reader's eyes. He is exposed to the many intangible and often uncontrollable circumstances surrounding diplomatic negotiations. Finally, in a broader and more general context, a study centering on the conference at

Peshawar presents a fine example of a diplomacy of conciliation backed by force, a style that was the ideal of that nineteenth-century phenomenon, British Imperialism.

INDIA-AFGHAN RELATIONS, 1809-1873

India, during the nineteenth century and for as long as Britain controlled her, was considered the jewel of the Empire. She was England's single most important possession and, indeed, "it was only by taking over this vast sub-continent that Britain decisively launched herself upon the imperial course."¹ The economic consequences of this conquest were decisive for both countries. The rape of Bengal provided Britain with a substantial share of the excess capital needed to launch its industrial revolution.² Later India was incorporated into a regional system of exchange, and by 1876 English exports, mainly textiles, iron, and steel, amounted to some £22.5 million while at the same time Great Britain imported almost £10 million of raw Indian cotton.³

Besides its increasingly valuable economic assets, India's position, strategically situated between the Levant and the Far East, was also an important factor in establishing

¹John Strachey, The End of Empire (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), p. 55.

²Ibid., p. 55.

³Maurice and Maya Zinkin, Britain and India, Requiem for Empire (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1964), p. 61

CHAPTER II

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and fostering England's supremacy.⁴ It was from this base that British trade and influence were to permeate that wide area. While a large part of Britain's imperial considerations were directed toward protecting and maintaining the sea routes to India, they were no less concerned with the security of India itself. And as the nineteenth century progressed its defense became England's greatest burden. Promoting that burden was fear, initially of France, then in the second half of the century, of the constantly expanding Russian Empire in Central Asia.

Geographically the area of greatest concern for British foreign and colonial offices and the Government of India was India's northwest frontier. Separating India from the Near East and Central Asia was a vast, mountainous and ethnically mixed region.⁵ It stretched from the Hindu Kush range in the north to the Arabian Sea in the south. Included in that wide area were the territories of the Amir of Kabul, Afghanistan. Because of its strategic location astride the classical invasion route into northern India, diplomatic relations with its ruler became the most important consideration of the Government of India's foreign policy.

⁴Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, Africa and the Victorians (New York: St. Martins Press, Anchor Books, 1968), p. 11.

⁵See Map, Appendix.

Attention was first focused on this region by the threat of a French invasion. Startled by the French occupation of Egypt in 1798 and further unsettled by Napoleon's proposed Franco-Russian expedition and the Franco-Persian rapprochement, the East India Company consolidated its holdings and began to survey the lands to the northwest.⁶ In 1809, as a result of the company's activity, a treaty was signed with the Amir of Afghanistan. In it each party agreed to "eternal friendship," and pledged "in no manner to interfere in each other's country."⁷ This compact, the beginning of Anglo-Afghan diplomatic relations, reveals that even at their inception it was regarded as desirable to maintain a friendly and independent Afghanistan as a buffer zone and to remain aloof from its internal affairs.

After the Napoleonic wars, Russian interests supplanted French influence in Persia and the Ottoman Empire. Despite conflicting interpretations as to the threat of Russian activities British suspicion continued to grow.⁸ By the 1830's British sensitivity to Russian influence had become acute. In 1837 Persia, encouraged by Russian agents, laid seige to the city of Herat, an important post on the

⁶Vartan Gregorian, The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964), p. 92.

⁷Ibid.

⁸For conflicting opinions on early Russian activities see D. P. Singhal, India and Afghanistan 1876-1907, A Study in Diplomatic Relations (Melbourne: University of Queensland Press, 1963), p. 5.

Persian-Afghan frontier. Lord Palmerston, then at the foreign office, immediately lodged complaints at St. Petersburg denouncing Russian activity in Persia and Afghanistan as a threat to India.⁹ As a result of these diplomatic protests, Russia disclaimed any political motives in the internal affairs of either country.

In order to counter any future threat to India's security a more workable policy than the 1809 agreement had to be implemented. As usually happens in such instances, a controversy developed over the proper course of action to pursue. Palmerston, almost never subtle in his handling of foreign affairs and convinced of the inevitable meeting of the British and Russian frontiers in Central Asia, adopted a "forward line" policy, directed at increasing British influence in Afghanistan.¹⁰ Other officials, however, disagreed with this policy and argued for a "stationary" program. They believed that the people who were overly concerned regarding a Russian invasion of India disregarded the great physical difficulties inherent in any advance,¹¹ and further insisted that any defensive measures taken by Britain regarding trans-Indus territory simply would be too expensive for Indian taxpayers and would entail increased administrative commitments.¹²

⁹Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Gregorian, p. 96.

¹²Ibid.

Despite the Russian abdication, the British government, hardened by its failure to protect India by fixing a balance of power among the states on the northwest frontier, decided in 1838 to use military force to establish a pro-British regime in Kabul. Lord Auckland, the Governor-General of India and the man held responsible for the consequences of this policy, summed up the British attitude by stating:

The welfare of our possessions in the East require that we should have on our western frontier an ally who is interested in resisting aggression, and establishing tranquillity, in the place of chiefs ranging themselves in subservience to a hostile power, and seeking to promote schemes of conquest and aggrandizement.¹³

Implementing these sentiments, however, led to the First Afghan War.¹⁴ This disastrous conflict resulted in the complete disruption of Anglo-Afghan relations and engendered a rabid anti-European prejudice among the Afghan people.¹⁵ It was also instrumental in popularizing non-intervention in Afghan affairs among British statesmen.

The period from 1842 until 1854 was "one of sudden quiescence on either side, without offence, but without goodwill or intercourse."¹⁶ Then, in the spring of 1854,

¹³Declaration of the Rt. Hon. The Governor-General of India, 1 Oct., 1838, cited in W. K. Fraser-Tyttler, Afghanistan (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 110.

¹⁴For a study of the conflict and the events that precipitated it see J. A. Morris, The First Afghan War 1838-1842 (Cambridge: The University Press, 1967).

¹⁵Gregorian, p. 118-124.

¹⁶Dalhousie's description cited in Singhal, p. 6.

as the situation in Europe deteriorated, Lord Dalhousie, the Governor-General of India, attempted to restore friendly diplomatic relations with Afghanistan and either to make it "an effectual barrier against Russian aggression or . . . encourage and induce the Afghan tribes to make common cause . . . against an enemy whose success would be fatal to the common interests of both Afghan and British power."¹⁷

His efforts led to the signing of a treaty between the two countries in March of 1855. It pledged perpetual peace and friendship, contained a promise on behalf of the East India Company never to interfere in the Amir's territory, and pledged the Amir, Dost Mahommed Khan, "to be the friend of the friends, and the enemy of the enemies of the Honourable East India Company."¹⁸ Although this agreement did little more than reopen diplomatic relations, Dalhousie was content. He had never been convinced of the existence of an immediate threat to India, and he pointed out that the treaty "entangles the Government . . . in no reciprocity, while it builds up . . . a barrier against aggression from beyond"¹⁹

Later in 1855 Dost Mahommed seized Herat, and when Persia recaptured it in October of the following year, Britain, which regarded this principality as an important

¹⁷Lord Dalhousie's minute of 14 March 1854, cited in Fraser-Tyttler, p. 122123.

¹⁸Treaty reproduced in Singhal, p. 194.

¹⁹Memoranda A No. 19 p. 12, cited in Ibid., p. 6.

element in India's defense, declared war.²⁰ Despite the conflict's short duration (a peace with Persia was signed in Paris in March of 1857), it provided Britain an excellent opportunity to evidence its friendship.²¹ In January, 1857, a new agreement was drawn up which served to supplement the treaty of 1855. The new arrangement provided for the exchange of Vakeel's (native agents) and granted the Amir a subsidy of one lakh of rupees (£10,000) a month during the remainder of the war.²² This last was conditional on Dost Mahommed's agreeing that

British officers, . . . shall be deputed, at the pleasure of the British Government, to Cabool, or Candahar, or Balkh, or wherever an Afghan army be assembled to act against the Persians. It will be their duty to see generally that the subsidy granted to the Ameer be devoted to the military purposes to which it is given, and to keep their own Government informed of all affairs.²³

These officers would be withdrawn when the subsidy ended.

During the negotiations John Lawrence and H. B. Edwards, the British representatives, tried to persuade Dost Mahommed to receive a European officer at Kabul.²⁴ The Amir's counselors, however, advised him to reject this

²⁰Report of Secret Committee to the Government of India, 22 March 1856, cited in Fraser-Tyttler, p. 123.

²¹See J. F. Standish, "The Persian War of 1856-1857," Middle East Studies, Oct., 1966.

²²Treaty reproduced in Singhal, p. 194-195.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Aruther Swinson, Northwest Frontier: People and Events 1839-1947 (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), p. 113.

request and urged him to demand assurances that Britain would never again send envoys to his capital. This demand in turn was rejected and the Amir's ambassador was told:

The Government of India has no intention of sending and no wish to send a representative to the Court of Cabul; but it should be pointed out to him [the Amir] that this Government could not in prudence bind itself never to depute a representative to the Ameer, for if the Russians or other powers should be represented by envoys at Cabul, the interests of the British Government would plainly suffer injury if no envoy were present on its behalf.²⁵

Nevertheless, in deference to the Amir's wishes, no British officers were dispatched to Kabul, though a party did proceed to Kandahar.²⁶

Following the Sepoy Mutiny, John Lawrence was appointed Governor-General. A veteran of the Indian service, particularly experienced in the problems of the north-west frontier, he was a firm proponent of nonintervention. However, at the very beginning of his term, events occurred in Afghanistan which destroyed much of the goodwill which had been nurtured by this policy, events which further increased Afghan suspicions of Britain's intentions and reliability.

In 1863 the aged Amir died. In his will he named his third son, Sher Ali, as his successor. This act plunged Afghanistan into civil war, and a long, bitter

²⁵Memorials of Sir Herbert Edwards, I, 242, cited in H. H. Dowell (ed.), The Cambridge History of the British Empire, Vol. V: The Indian Empire (Cambridge: The University Press, 1932), p. 405.

²⁶Fraser-Tyttler, p. 124.

five-year struggle for power ensued. The Government of India's reaction to these events was one of complete neutrality and noninterference. This policy was supported in Lawrence's mind by his low opinion of Afghans in general and his mistrust of Sher Ali. Lawrence wrote:

He has considerable defects; there can be no doubt that he has alienated most of the influential chiefs. His conduct towards his brother, Afzal Khan, whom he treacherously imprisoned after the most solemn promises and oaths of full security, shows that no faith can be placed in him.²⁷

With this attitude the Viceroy turned a deaf ear to repeated requests for aid from the desperate Sher Ali, only replying with wishes for his success. To the Home Government Lawrence explained that he would recognize only the de facto ruler and then only if he remained friendly.²⁸ In assuming this position the Governor-General was also following the advice of the former Amir, that if the English truly intended to be friends with the Afghans they must "beware of meddling with their internecine quarrels."²⁹

If the only concern of Lawrence's policy had remained Indian-Afghan relations neutrality would probably have been acceptable. However, this question soon became entangled in the larger and more controversial Central Asian problem. As the civil war raged in Afghanistan,

²⁷Swinson, p. 140-141.

²⁸Message to Secretary of State, Sept. 3, 1867, Memoranda A No. 19, cited in Singhal, p. 8.

²⁹Singhal, p. 8.

Russian expansion in Central Asia quickened. By 1864 that empire had extended its frontier to the boundaries of Khokand, Bukhara and Khiva. In 1864 Tashkent was occupied, and by 1868 Samarkand had been annexed and Turkistan created. In the face of Afghan instability and the renewed advance of the Russian Empire, British politicians and Indian experts became sharply divided over what measures, if any, should be taken to counter the threat. Between London and St. Petersburg a renewed diplomatic activity resumed, with Britain demanding explanations. In reply the Russian Government pointed out the similarity between its activity in Central Asia and England's actions in India,³⁰ and claimed that frontier security and commercial relations required the exercise of a certain ascendancy over the semicivilized Turkoman tribes.³¹

Along with the increased diplomatic activity, there was a propagation in anti-Russian sentiments. The most effective proponent of Russophobia and a more dynamic policy in Central Asia was Sir Henry Rawlinson. A professional soldier, diplomat and pamphleteer, Rawlinson would gain his greatest fame for his prodigious efforts in archaeology. In 1865, however, with a series of articles

³⁰Dodwell, p. 408.

³¹Great Britain, Foreign Office, British Foreign and State Papers, 1867-68, Vol. LVIII, "Russia: Circulaire de Prince Gortchakoff aux Agents Diplomatique de la Russie, Relativement a la Position de la Russie dans l'Asie Centrale, Novembre, 1864," p. 835-839.

in the Quarterly Review, he launched a vigorous campaign designed to promote a more active policy against Russian expansion. In his opinion Afghanistan was a vital part of Britain's Indian defenses. In a speech delivered to Parliament, he argued that the imminent occupation of Bokhara would give Russia a pretext for interfering in Afghan affairs; he challenged:

with this prospect before us, are we justified in maintaining what has been sarcastically . . . called Sir John Lawrence's policy of masterly inactivity? Are we justified in allowing Russia to work her way to Kabul unopposed and there to establish herself as a friendly power, prepared to protect the Afghans against the English?³²

If Afghanistan was to be a British supervised barrier against Russia, then British aid must be extended to Sher Ali and a British envoy sent to his court.³³ Although Rawlinson's opinions had little effect on the Government of India, their impact on the rank and file of the Conservative party was impressive. Nine years later his work would bear fruit.

Simultaneous with Rawlinson's activities in Britain, Edward Bartle Frere was advocating a forward policy in India. Arriving in Bombay at the tender age of nineteen, he had worked his way up through the ranks from assistant revenue commissioner to the Commissioner of Sind. A progressive and practical man, Frere was a bitter foe of bureaucratic interference from above. In his opinion India

³²Swinson, p. 143.

³³Gregorian, p. 107.

must be governed in India, not in England.³⁴ Furthermore, he believed that the essence of empire was a pervading influence rather than a system of administration;³⁵ he firmly opposed Dalhousie's policy of annexations. His opinions regarding Indian foreign policy were no less a curious mixture of the idealistic and the pragmatic. According to him, "a civilized and a comparatively uncivilized power cannot exist side by side--as two European nations can--unless the uncivilized power distinctly recognizes that it is the weaker of the two, . . ."³⁶ Frere regarded Afghanistan as a member of the latter category and was chagrined at the lack of a firm policy in dealing with it. For him masterly inactivity was a half-way measure, "a middle course between friendship and hostility."³⁷ In a letter to a friend he wrote:

What is most wanted up there [northwest frontier] seems to me to be that we should lay down to ourselves and tell our agents on the frontier and elsewhere what our policy, if we have one, is to be. It may be very convenient to say we will be guided by circumstances; but that is not the sort of policy that wins friends and deters enemies; we cannot pretend that it will be a matter of indifference to us what happens when Dost Mohamed dies--whether the best Afghan takes the reins, or a puppet in Russian, French or Persian leading-strings. As a matter of fact Afghan politics cannot be a matter of indifference to us and, I cannot see why we should

³⁴ John Martineau, The Life and Correspondence of Sir Bartle Frere, Vol. I. (London: John Murray, 1895), p. 394.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 70.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 350.

not honestly say so, to both Afghans and Russians--tell them we do not want to interfere more than we can help, but that we mean to see and hear all we can, and not to allow other people to meddle more than we do ourselves; and deal openly with the Russians, giving them credit for being actuated by no worse motive than we ourselves, viz a national interest in the affairs of such near neighbors.³⁸

Elaborating on the Russian menace he wrote:

I do not look on the Russian advance into Central Asia as any evil, and I know the time must come when the limit of our legitimate influence will touch the limits of theirs. But I should like it to be, if possible, far from our own frontier, and that we should meantime, by extending our common and honourable influence, unite our neighbors as closely as possible to us in interest and feeling.³⁹

Frere was not alone in his disapproval of Lawrence's strict and passive policy of de facto recognition. Sir Henry Yule, a distinguished Orientalist and one of the members of the Council of India, wrote:

The present system of watching events, without making any preparation for them, the plan of saying, "Good morning Sir, How do you do?" to each successive leader who gets to the top must disgust all enterprising men, and prolong indefinitely the ill will which that nation already entertains towards us.⁴⁰

The defenders of masterly inactivity rallied against these charges by arguing that increased interference in Afghanistan would be self-defeating. In their opinion it would only engender "irritation, defiance, and hatred in the minds of the Afghans, without in the least strengthening

³⁸Frere to Sir George Clark, April 17, 1859, cited in *Ibid.*, p. 240.

³⁹Frere to Lord Canning, December 1, 1860, cited in *Ibid.*, p. 241.

⁴⁰Memoranda A No. 19, cited in Singhal, p. 8.

[Britain's] power either for attack or defense."⁴¹ In addition, many non-interventionists were highly suspicious of Afghan integrity and considered increased involvement detrimental to better relations. Sir Charles Wood, an Indian official, accused the Afghans of being faithless and fickle.⁴² Citing British occupation of Peshawar and Cashmir, both former Afghan possessions, as a reason why truly friendly relations would be impossible, Lord Lawrence added that the people of Afghanistan "would not really be friendly toward us . . . [and insisted] they would in the event of temptation fall away from us whatever their engagements to the contrary."⁴³ Finally, most of the supporters of masterly inactivity were convinced that Anglo-Russian differences could be settled only in London and St. Petersburg, and not in India.

To the demand that a British officer replace the native agent in Kabul the Viceroy turned a deaf ear. He explained that:

native agents can efficiently perform all the duties which we require; and that in some important particulars, and under such circumstances as those under consideration, they are to be preferred to British officers. My belief is that Major W. Lumsden and the officers with the mission at Kandahar in 1857 were in great physical danger, and that so it usually will be with agents similarly situated, especially in times of commotion. Nay, more, I am persuaded that they were

⁴¹John Lawrence as cited in Gregorian, p. 105.

⁴²Martineau, p. 482.

⁴³Lawrence to Frere, cited in Ibid., p. 488-489.

utterly helpless, and in a condition of practical imprisonment. They could have done more at Peshawar than they were able to do at Kandahar. A native would not be in personal danger in such case, and he could make friends and acquire influence and information in a manner impossible with a European.⁴⁴

This opinion became one of the hallmarks of the non-interventionist position and in the course of events proved to be tragically correct.

However, as the Russian advance continued and he was increasingly subjected to requests for a more definite understanding from Sher Ali, Lawrence began to have doubts about the lengths to which masterly inactivity had been carried. Easing his stand somewhat, he seriously entertained the idea of supplying Sher Ali with money and arms and assuring the Amir that Britain would protect Afghanistan from outside aggression as long as his fidelity could be depended upon.⁴⁵ Lawrence also realized that it was absolutely imperative for England to arrive at a definite understanding with Russia. On the eve of his departure he wrote that there must be

a clear understanding with the Court of St. Petersburg as to its projects and designs in Central Asia, and that it might be given to understand in firm and courteous language that it cannot be permitted to interfere in the affairs of Afghanistan or in those of any state which lies contiguous to our frontier.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Memoranda A No. 19, cited in Singhal, p. 9.

⁴⁵A. W. Ward and G. P. Gooch, The Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy, 1783-1919, Vol. III 1866-1919 (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1923), p. 74.

⁴⁶J. A. R. Marriott, England Since Waterloo (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1929), p. 467.

Before Lawrence could meet with Sher Ali, however, he was replaced by Lord Mayo. The new Viceroy, while an advocate of non-interference in Afghan internal affairs, nevertheless believed in re-establishing contact with Sher Ali. Within ten weeks of his assuming office he met with the Amir at Umballa. Sher Ali, insecure because of the continued Russian advance and the lack of British aid and recognition during the civil war, also favored a closer and more formal arrangement with the Government of India. He desired a British promise to acknowledge only himself and his descendants as friends and a pledge of British support in the event of a Russian invasion. Although Mayo refused to accede to the request for de jure recognition with its implications of possible entanglement in Afghan internal affairs, and was unable to grant a formal alliance, his personal graciousness effectively countered the disagreeableness of the refusal and made a profound impression on the impulsive and emotional Amir. When Sher Ali departed he was disappointed but not bitter. "If it pleases God," he wrote, "as long as I am alive, or as long as my government exists, the foundations of friendship and goodwill between this and the powerful British Government will not be weakened."⁴⁷

In the period between the 1864 conference at Umballa and the next meeting in 1873 several important events

⁴⁷Letter dated 3 April 1869 from Sher Ali to Viceroy, cited in Fraser-Tyttler, p. 132.

occurred which had a profound effect on subsequent Anglo-Afghan diplomatic relations. After prolonged negotiations carried out between London and St. Petersburg, Russia in 1873 agreed to recognize the Oxus River as the northern boundary of Afghanistan. In reply to direct British warnings, the Russian Government reaffirmed its assurances that Afghanistan was beyond the Russian sphere of political action and pledged that under no circumstances would it interfere in that state's internal affairs. Despite his being informed of the results of these negotiations Sher Ali remained uneasy.⁴⁸ It was this continued anxiety which convinced many Indian officials that Sher Ali was merely using the imaginary threat of a Russian invasion to gain better terms from the British Government.⁴⁹ Although this Machiavellian maneuver was never proved and the allegation appears to have had little substance, it nonetheless had a great effect upon British thinking. At the same time as the Anglo-Russian negotiations, the Government of India had been invited to arbitrate a border dispute between Persia and Afghanistan. In 1872 it had advised dividing the disputed Seistan territory between the two countries, using the Helmund River as the boundary. Both countries protested and the Seistan decision remained a major source of Afghan

⁴⁸G. J. Alder, British India's Northern Frontier, 1865-1895 (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1964), p. 180-181.

⁴⁹Singhal, p. 11.

hostility and mistrust.⁵⁰

In the spring of 1873 the Russian annexation of the small Central Asian principality of Khiva caused Sher Ali to agree to a new meeting with the India Government. Not convinced by Anglo-Russian agreements and frightened by the prospects of having to face a Russian advance without definite British support, he desired a formal alliance. Unfortunately for the Amir and the future of Anglo-Afghan relations, Lord Mayo had been assassinated. Because of his emotional nature, Sher Ali required "careful and patient handling and above all the personal touch."⁵¹ Lord Mayo had possessed the Amir's confidence. Without him chances for a reconciliation lessened considerably, but the British Government failed to recognize the difference.

At Simla the Amir's envoy, Syud Noor Mohammed Shah, pressed the New Viceroy, Lord Northbrook, for a definite statement of support; insisting that "the interests of the Afghan and English Governments were identical and that the border of Afghanistan was in truth the border of India."⁵²

He added:

The rapid advances made by the Russians in Central Asia had aroused the gravest apprehensions in the minds of the peoples of Afghanistan. Whatever specific assurances the Russians may give, and however often these may be repeated, the people of Afghanistan can place no confidence in them, and will never rest satisfied

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 10.

⁵¹Fraser-Tyttler, p. 132.

⁵²Marriott, p. 467.

unless they are assured of the aid of the British Government.⁵³

Northbrook, a cautious but fair and intelligent individual, recognized the importance of the Afghan statement. After some consideration he wired the Home Government recommending a more vigorous course of action. He advised, "if he unreservedly accepts and acts on our advice in all external relations we will help him with arms, money and troops if necessary to repel unprovoked invasion. We to be the judge of the necessity."⁵⁴

This appeal was disregarded by the Home Government. In a most undiplomatic move the Duke of Argyll, then Secretary for India and a disciple of Lawrence's teachings, instructed the Viceroy: "Cabinet thinks you should inform the Amir that we do not share his alarm and consider there is no cause for it. You may assure him we shall maintain our settled policy in favor of Afghanistan, if he abides by our advice in external matters."⁵⁵ This message, although well intentioned, effectively ended the Simla conference. Once more, it is an excellent example of the difficulty and

⁵³Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1873, "Memorandum of Conversation between Syud Noor and Lord Northbrook, July 12, 1873," p. 112.

⁵⁴Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1873, "Telegram Northbrook to Argyll, July 24, 1873," p. 482.

⁵⁵Ibid., "Telegram Argyll to Northbrook, July 26, 1873," p. 482.

danger involved in the process whereby the final decisions were made in London, frequently by men with little appreciation of the delicate nature of Afghan diplomacy, who made no effort to understand either the imaginary or real problems confronting the Amir. Mistakes, however, were by no means restricted to London; Northbrook himself further complicated future relations by apparently disregarding the Duke of Argyll's telegram and extending some promises of aid under certain conditions.⁵⁶ He also offered the Amir an immediate gift of money and arms.⁵⁷ Finally, as the conference closed he wrote a contradictory note to Sher Ali recommending that any discussion of the British Government's policy in the event of an invasion of Afghanistan should be "postponed to a more suitable opportunity."⁵⁸

What it all amounted to was the refusal on Britain's part to enter into a formal alliance with Afghanistan, while continuing to offer vague promises of aid subject to certain conditions. By this policy Britain would reap the benefits of a buffer state without having any formal responsibility in the event of unforeseen circumstances.

⁵⁶Alder, p. 181.

⁵⁷Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1882, Vol. XLVII (Accounts and Papers, Vol.), Cmnd. 118, "Return of the amount of Money and Arms given by Government of India to Ameers of Afghanistan since the time of Dost Mohammed," pp. 449-50.

⁵⁸Memoranda A No. 19, p. 54, cited in Singhal, p. 12.

It was this unreasonable vagueness and unwillingness to trust Sher Ali that led to his disillusionment. Greatly disappointed and bitter at his rejection, he immediately began to increase his correspondence with the Russians, and commented that British friendship had proved to be nothing but "a word written of ice."⁵⁹ Furthermore, he became convinced of Britain's insincerity:

The English look to nothing but their own self interests and bide their time. Whosoever's side they see strongest for the time they turn to him as their friend. I will not waste precious life in entertaining false hopes from the English and will enter into friendships with other governments.⁶⁰

Finally, to evidence these sentiments he refused to accept Northbrook's gift of ten lakhs of rupees and hesitated before accepting munitions.

These attitudes and actions on the Amir's part further strengthened the impression among Indian officials that he was trying to play Russia off against England for his own advantage. They also heightened the controversy over a "forward policy." Frere continued to champion more positive measures. "Our policy hitherto," he insisted, "has been not only stationary and normally--though I think very imperfectly--defensive; it has also been purely negative."⁶¹ Almost alone among English officials Frere recognized that

⁵⁹H. C. Rawlinson, England and Russia in the East, p. 238, cited in Gregorian, p. 113.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Letter from Frere to Sir John Kaye, 12 June 1874, cited in Martineau, I, p. 491.

the root of Britain's problem with Afghanistan was the fact that few advocates of either policy "appreciated the danger to be guarded against."⁶² In his view the danger was not so much from an actual Russian invasion but rather from an extension of Russian influence which could be used to stir up certain "restless elements" among the Indian population.⁶³

Nevertheless, if few men understood how to repair the worsening relations with Afghanistan, many recognized that British management of Sher Ali had been not only ineffectual but unjust. Lord Napier, a veteran of the India service, summed it up aptly:

First we stood aloof in his struggles for life and empire Then when Sher Ali had subdued his enemies, he came forward to meet us with an alliance, but we were willing only to form an imperfect alliance. He was willing to trust us provided that we would trust him, but we felt that we could not bind ourselves to unreserved support of a power whose ideas of right and wrong were so different from ours. His friendly feelings, however, were not entirely alienated by that experience of us; he abstained from any action towards Sistan at our desire, and he believed that the mediation which we pressed on him would have ended by the restoration of the portion of Sistan that Persia had occupied in the days of trouble.

And not only Sher Ali but the whole Afghan people believed that we should restore to them what they had lost.

When they found that we had allowed Persia to obstruct and ill treat our arbitrator and to retain much of her encroachments, they looked upon us as a weak and treacherous people who, under the guise of friendship had spoiled them in favor of Persia.⁶⁴

⁶²Ibid., p. 495.

⁶³Ibid., p. 496.

⁶⁴Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1878, "Memorandum of Lord Napier of Magdala, 30 May 1878," p. 225-26.

While the relations between Kabul and Calcutta continued to deteriorate, there was a revival of militant Anglo-Russian rivalry. In Russia an extremely vocal minority headed by General Dimitri Miliutin advocated assuming a more aggressive policy in Central Asia, a plan which included an invasion of India.⁶⁵ Although this group was never taken seriously in St. Petersburg, many Russian officials who did not believe in an Indian invasion tried to exploit it for diplomatic purposes by giving it a wide publicity.⁶⁶ This latter group agreed with General I. N. Skoblev that "the stronger Russia was in Central Asia, the weaker England would be in India, and the weaker England was in India the more accommodating she would be in Europe."⁶⁷ This same outlook was later articulated in the confidential instructions to Baron de Staal, Russian Minister to London, on his appointment in 1884. Although written after the Peshawar Conference and the Second Afghan War, they remain an excellent example of the mistrust which existed between the two countries.

Great historical lessons have taught us that we cannot count on the friendship of England, and that she can strike at us by means of continental alliances while we cannot reach her anywhere. No great nation can accept such a position. In order to escape from it the Emperor . . . ordered our expansion in Central Asia, leading us to occupy today in Turkistan and the Turkistan steppes a military position strong enough to

⁶⁵Gregorian, p. 109.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 110.

⁶⁷Ibid.

keep England in check by the threat of intervention in India.⁶⁸

The wide publicity given to supposed Russian invasion plans had a great impact in England where there already existed a ready audience of Russophobes. The common people, remembering 1854, had a healthy distrust of Russia; and a large section of politicians who might not have been prejudiced were, nonetheless, intimidated because they understood all too well that Russian foreign policy was not subject to the restrictions imposed by a representative form of government.⁶⁹ Viewed against the steady advance of Russia in Central Asia, the Eastern crisis of 1875 and later the Russo-Turkish war, such plans appeared to be in fact the policy of the Imperial Russian Government. And considering this background it is little wonder that the proponents of a forward policy also found a willing audience.

The immediate effect of the renaissance of Anglo-Russian rivalry was its aid in the overthrow, in February, 1874, of Gladstone's Liberal majority by Disraeli and the Conservatives.⁷⁰ By this change of government Salisbury replaced Argyll at the India office. With the Conservatives directing foreign policy, influenced so considerably by the writings of Frere and Rawlinson, there was little doubt that

⁶⁸A. Meyendorff, *Correspondence Diplomatique du Baron de Staal*, I, 26, cited in Dodwell, p. 408.

⁶⁹Gregorian, p. 110.

⁷⁰K. W. B. Middleton, *Britain and Russia* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1948), p. 61.

a more aggressive policy would be implemented. Both Salisbury and Disraeli were determined to re-establish and increase British influence in Afghanistan. The only question was to what extent they would develop it.

By the winter of 1874 Salisbury had become concerned over what he felt was an unacceptable and potentially dangerous situation in Afghan affairs. He wrote to the Prime Minister:

I am getting uneasy as to our lack of information from Afghanistan. . . . I told you of the anxiety I felt on this subject several months ago. I propose therefore to instruct Northbrook formally to take measures for placing a resident either at Herat or Candahar. Cabul is too fanatical to be quite safe.⁷¹

A few weeks later in a dispatch to Northbrook, Salisbury explained his fear of inactivity. "I have no fear of our being tempted to move troops into Afghanistan unless further onward steps of Russia should drive people here into a panic but the more inactive we are now, the more we increase the danger of that panic."⁷² This fear, of doing nothing, of waiting on developments daily, worked to increase the impatience of the cabinet and intensified its desire to be the master of events instead of their servant.

Beginning in January, 1875, Salisbury gradually began to increase the pressure on Northbrook to initiate a more vigorous policy toward the Amir. Explaining that the

⁷¹Lady Gwendolen Cecil, The Life of Robert Marquis of Salisbury (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1921), II, p. 71.

⁷²Ibid., p. 73.

Home Government had been seriously hindered by the lack of information, Salisbury emphasized the lack of a British agent in Afghanistan, a friendly country. He believed that a native agent, then the vehicle of communication between the Viceroy and the Amir, was not likely to possess sufficient insight into the policy of western nations to collect necessary information.⁷³ This made it imperative to establish British agents in Afghanistan as soon as possible. Salisbury wrote:

I have therefore to instruct you to take measures with as much expedition as the circumstances of the case permit, for procuring the assent of the Ameer to the establishment of a British agency at Herat. When this is accomplished it may be desirable to take a similar step with respect to Cabul, as I am sensible to the difficulties which are interposed by the fanatic violence of the people.⁷⁴

To justify such a course of action the Secretary of State for India used the standard argument for the forward policy's position. He referred to the previous meetings with the Amir at Umballa in 1869 and Simla in 1873, insisting that on these occasions Sher Ali had expressed agreement on this matter. In addition he claimed that a refusal on the part of the Amir would be a certain indication of his disloyalty.⁷⁵

⁷³Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1875, "Salisbury to Northbrook, 22 January 1875," p. 502.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 503.

⁷⁵Ibid.

In response to these instructions and the concepts upon which they were predicated, Northbrook warned his superior that in his judgment the time and circumstances were unsuitable for undertaking any initiative in these matters, and further asserted that there was nothing in the Government of India's records to indicate that "the Ameer had ever expressed the readiness to agree to the presence of a British agent at Herat."⁷⁶ After meeting with the Commissioner of the Peshawar District, Sir Richard Pollock, the Secretary to the Punjab Government, T. H. Thornton, and C. Gridlestone, who had been present at the Umballa conference, Northbrook informed Salisbury that these officers were also against pressing Sher Ali on this issue.⁷⁷ All agreed that the Amir was unwilling to receive any British mission. Moreover, this viewpoint was corroborated by the opinions of several native agents who had served at Kabul, by the Afghan envoy's specific appeal during the Simla meeting that such a request should not be presented to the Amir, and by the Amir's recent act prohibiting certain British officers from returning to India via Afghanistan.⁷⁸

In order to correct the cabinet's misconception and present the actual situation for its consideration,

⁷⁶Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1875, "Northbrook to Salisbury, 7 June 1875," p. 503.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 504.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 506.

Northbrook related that the note written in March, 1869, stating that the Amir had been prepared to accept a European agent at Kandahar, Herat or Balkh and upon which the British Government was resting much of its argument, was not based directly upon the Amir's comments.⁷⁹ The Viceroy explained:

No admission on the part of the Ameer of his readiness to receive (European) British agents in Afghanistan is to be found in any document that passed between the Government of India and the Ameer. The subject was not mentioned at the official interviews between Noor Mahomed Shah and the Foreign Secretary on the 1st and 3rd of April 1869 when the question of the mission of native agents alone was discussed. It was not alluded to by Lord Mayo in his conference with the Ameer; nor was the future establishment of British agents in Afghanistan reported to the Secretary of State as one of the results of the Umballa conference.⁸⁰

To clear up this question, the Viceroy explained that the only possible basis for the Government's position lay in a few pages of private correspondence between frontier officers and the Amir's trusted minister and regular envoy, Syud Noor Mahomed Shah.⁸¹ Information of this sort was ordinarily extremely suspect. To base such an important move in foreign policy upon it was downright dangerous. Chances were excellent that the information supplied had been misinterpreted; acting upon it could lead to serious difficulties and completely rupture the already strained relations.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 505.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Ibid.

In closing, Northbrook agreed that while events in Turkistan made the positioning of a British agent at Herat desirable, to press for it at that time would certainly lead to a rebuff, which might appreciably weaken British negotiations with Russia at a later date.⁸² Equally important, he called Salisbury's attention to the danger involved in judging any of Sher Ali's motives by European standards, pointing out the weakness of the Amir's position and the deep anti-British prejudice of the Afghan people.⁸³ Finally, evidencing his cautious nature, Northbrook agreed to take advantage of the first opportunity to discuss with the Amir the question of a British agent, but in the meantime, he counseled a waiting policy.⁸⁴

Salisbury's reply took exception with every one of Northbrook's objections. The Viceroy's concerns, which might be understandable under ordinary circumstances, were now not acceptable. Russia's continued advance and its effect on an unstable and increasingly hostile Amir had completely altered the situation. Regarding Sher Ali's disinclination to accept British officers in his territory as proof of his continued refusal, Salisbury assured Northbrook that the Amir was unable to judge events properly in Central Asia and that it was imperative to establish,

⁸²Ibid., p. 507.

⁸³Ibid., p. 506.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 507.

as quickly as possible, a mission in his country to explain the dangerous implications of Russian imperialism.⁸⁵ While the Secretary of State for India acknowledged that there was little fear among the cabinet of an official Russian violation of Afghan territory, he emphasized that all too often the Russian Government was unable to restrain its frontier officials and these might provoke an incident.⁸⁶ To counter such contingencies Salisbury ordered Northbrook "without delay . . . to find some occasion for sending a mission to Cabul and to press the reception of this mission very earnestly upon the Amir."⁸⁷ This mission was to express the friendly attitude of the British Government, but at the same time "press upon the Amir the risk he would run if he should impede the course of action which the British Government think necessary for securing his independence."⁸⁸ Such a dogmatic attitude was further illustrated in a letter from Salisbury to Disraeli:

It is of great importance--I quite admit it--not to irritate the Ameer. I do not propose to send a mission to Afghanistan against the Ameer's wishes: but I propose to tell the Government of India to make the

⁸⁵Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1875, "Salisbury to Northbrook, 19 November 1875," p. 523.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 522.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 523.

⁸⁸Ibid.

Ameer with it. . . . I feel sure it can be done. The Ameer is genuinely frightened of the Russians.⁸⁹

This haughtiness represented nothing more than a complete unwillingness to accept the facts of a disagreeable situation. In response to Afghan requests for a definite treaty, Britain could only offer friendship on condition and promise protection with reservations.

Rather than comply and press the Amir on the question of resident British agents against his better judgment, Northbrook, pleading personal problems, resigned in November, 1875. In a final official dispatch to the Government in London Northbrook warned Salisbury:

The Ameer's not unnatural dread of our interference in his internal affairs, . . . combined perhaps, with the conviction that if ever a struggle for the independence of Afghanistan should come we must in our own interest help him, may have induced him to assume a colder attitude toward us than we should desire. But we have no reason to believe he has any desire to prefer the friendship of other powers. We are convinced that a patient adherence to the policy adopted towards Afghanistan by Lord Canning, Lord Lawrence and Lord Mayo, which it has been our earnest endeavour to maintain, presents the greatest promise of the eventual establishment of our relations with the Ameer on a satisfactory footing; and we depreciate, as involving serious danger to the peace of Afghanistan and to the interests of the British Empire in India, the execution under present circumstances, of the instructions conveyed in your Lordship's dispatch.⁹⁰

⁸⁹Salisbury to Disraeli, Confidential India Office, October 31, 1875, cited in W. F. Monypenny and G. E. Buckle, The Life of Benjamin Disraeli (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1929), V, p. 434.

⁹⁰Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1876, "Northbrook to Salisbury, 28 January 1876," p. 529.

It was a final call for masterly inactivity, and it went unheeded.

For Disraeli, Northbrook's resignation, although deemed unfortunate,⁹¹ came as no surprise. As early as June he had written to Salisbury: "My own impression is that somehow or other Northbrook's reign will soon terminate, and you and I must look out for the right man."⁹² However, finding a successor for Northbrook was not an easy task. Salisbury, understanding the difficulty of the new Viceroy's position and noting especially the need for tact on his part in any future negotiations, mentioned that Disraeli's first choice, Lord Powis, lacked experience and furthermore, had "no trace of practical ability."⁹³ Disraeli disagreed. He wanted Powis because although inexperienced he was an "exceptionally able and well read man of sound judgment and tact."⁹⁴ Despite Disraeli's recommendation, Powis declined the appointment, as did the second and third choices. Sir John Manners and Lord Carnarvon. Finally, at wit's end and as a last resort, Disraeli acted on a suggestion from Rawlinson and proposed Robert Bulwer-Lytton, current British Minister at Lisbon and the son of an old friend. With Salisbury concurring the Prime Minister wired Lisbon:

⁹¹Disraeli to Salisbury, 15 October 1875, cited in Monypenny and Buckle, V, p. 433.

⁹²Disraeli to Salisbury, 8 June 1875, cited in Ibid.

⁹³Salisbury to Disraeli, 31 October 1875, cited in Ibid., p. 434.

⁹⁴Monypenny and Buckle, V, p. 435.

My Dear Lytton--Lord Northbrook has resigned the Viceroyalty of India--for purely domestic reasons--and will return to England in the Spring.

If you be willing, I will submit your name to the Queen as his successor. The critical state of affairs in Central Asia demands a statesman, and I believe if you will accept this high post you will have an opportunity, not only of serving your country but of obtaining an enduring fame.⁹⁵

Thus to the sirens' call to service and glory, Robert Lytton stepped onto history's stage.

Sir Edward Bulwer, then editor of the New Monthly Magazine. Later young Lytton attended Harrow and briefly the University of Bonn. However, his formal education ended in 1852, when at the age of eighteen he accepted an offer from his uncle, Sir Henry Bulwer, Minister to the United States, to join him in Washington. For the next twenty-two years Lytton was constantly engaged in the diplomatic service. Outside his work, his interest, like that of many men in that age of letters, turned to literary endeavours. And although he developed no distinctive skill (his works closely followed Tennyson's, too closely at times) he did possess an easy natural talent. He was a friend of Dickens, corresponded regularly with the Brownings and gained a substantial recognition in literary circles. In 1874 Lytton had accepted what he thought would be his last official diplomatic position, that of Minister to Lisbon, and was there quietly contemplating his retirement when the message arrived offering

⁹⁵Disraeli to Lytton, 23 November 1875, cited in Lady Betty Balfour, The History of Lord Lytton's Indian Administration 1876-1880 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1899), p. 2.

CHAPTER III

LYTTON AND THE FORWARD POLICY;

1874-1877

Robert Lytton was born in 1831, the son of Sir Edward Bulwer, then editor of the New Monthly Magazine. Later young Lytton attended Harrow and briefly the University of Bonn. However, his formal education ended in 1852, when at the age of eighteen he accepted an offer from his uncle, Sir Henry Bulwer, Minister to the United States, to join him in Washington. For the next twenty-two years Lytton was constantly engaged in the diplomatic service. Outside his work, his interest, like that of many men in that age of letters, turned to literary endeavours. And although he developed no distinctive skill (his works closely followed Tennyson's, too closely at times) he did possess an easy natural talent. He was a friend of Dickens, corresponded regularly with the Brownings and gained a substantial recognition in literary circles. In 1874 Lytton had accepted what he thought would be his last official diplomatic position, that of Minister to Lisbon, and was there quietly contemplating his retirement when the message arrived offering him the Viceroyship of India.⁹⁶

Shy and retiring in society, Robert Lytton was quite expansive and gregarious with close friends. Traditionally

⁹⁶Balfour, p. 1.

he has been lauded for being free from racial prejudice,⁹⁷ but many of his letters and actions in India give the lie to this. He could be both clever and industrious, but many of Lytton's actions disturbed people and he was given to recklessness, a disposition which, in India, would upset his cabinet and in the end his own plans for a peaceful settlement with Afghanistan. Disraeli later wrote: "We wanted a man of ambition, imagination, some vanity and much will--and we have got him."⁹⁸ Unfortunately Lytton embodied just those characteristics which were to prove fatal for anyone engaged in delicate negotiations, especially those with such a headstrong, frightened and unstable ruler as Sher Ali. Some of Lytton's habits, like smoking between the courses of a meal, while harmless in themselves, nonetheless shocked society.⁹⁹ In a more serious vein he was outspoken and quite often flashed an impatience which was mistaken for disapproval. "No man could have been less

⁹⁷The idea that Lytton was free from racial prejudice is mentioned in The Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. XII (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921-22), p. 390. According to that article, "No Viceroy has been more entirely exempt from race-prejudice than Lytton. . . ." This idea is further amplified by Robert Blake in Disraeli (New York: St. Martins Press, 1967), p. 657. He states, ". . . he was commendably free from any racial prejudice, . . ." Both statements disregard his well-known suspicion towards all Indians and fail to note the many statements by Lytton referring to British superiority. See Balfour, The History of Lord Lytton's Indian Administration, p. 43.

⁹⁸Disraeli to Salisbury, 1 April 1877, cited in Monypenny and Buckle, II, p. 390.

⁹⁹Swinson, p. 146.

adapted to Indian society by innate taste or acquired habit. With all his intelligence Lytton was unable to accommodate himself to conventions, . . ."¹⁰⁰ All these traits considered, Lytton presents a fascinating picture to us, very often brilliant, but a person curiously unbalanced in judgment.

By the time Lytton reached London the Indian policy had already been prepared. His task was to execute it. This is revealed by a remark made by Sir Alfred C. Lyall, Lytton's Foreign Secretary, that the Viceroy had come to India "more as a government official than as an oriental ruler."¹⁰¹ This fact somewhat explains why Lytton, with no experience in administering a foreign policy and no knowledge of Indian affairs, was chosen for the assignment. His close association with Rawlinson and his complete agreement with the forward policy were quite enough to recommend him to the Conservative Government.

The instructions Lytton carried to India formed the basis of the forward policy. They reveal better than any other source the British Government's expectations and its ideas on the plan's implementation. The dispatch began by emphasizing the importance of the relations with the trans-frontier States and pointed out that "Her Majesty's Government [could] not view without anxiety the present

¹⁰⁰ Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. XII, p. 390.

¹⁰¹ Ward and Gooch, p. 81.

unsatisfactory condition of those relations."¹⁰² Specifically pertaining to Afghanistan, "the increasing weakness and uncertainty of British influence . . . [constituted] a prospective peril."¹⁰³ Lytton was instructed to find some reason for sending a temporary mission to Kabul to overcome the Amir's reluctance to accept a permanent British mission.¹⁰⁴ In this regard the Viceroy was reminded that his ultimate objective was to secure Sher Ali's confidence.¹⁰⁵ With respect to the continued advance of Russia in Central Asia Lytton was warned that

Her Majesty's Government could not view with complete indifference the probable influence of that situation upon the uncertain character of an oriental chief whose ill defined dominions are thus brought within a steadily narrowing circle between the conflicting pressures of two great military empires.¹⁰⁶

It was readily acknowledged that after contact was re-established, Lytton would be faced with certain Afghan conditions relating to the establishment of British agents in Afghanistan. Judging by past experiences these demands would probably be for a fixed subsidy, recognition of Sher Ali's son, Abdullh Jan, as heir to the throne, and

¹⁰² Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1876, "Salisbury to Lytton, 28 February 1876," p. 530.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 531.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

an "explicit pledge, by treaty or otherwise, of material support in case of foreign aggression."¹⁰⁷ The first request might be easily met; and the second also, with the slight stipulation that

Her Majesty's Government do not desire to renounce their traditional policy of abstention from all unnecessary interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. But the frank recognition of a de facto order in the succession established by a de facto Government to the throne of a foreign State does not, . . . imply or necessitate any intervention in the internal affairs of that State.¹⁰⁸

With regards to the last demand the British Government hesitated. Salisbury realized that "with or without any such assurances [of support] England would be impelled by her own interests to assist His Highness in repelling the invasion of his territory by a foreign power."¹⁰⁹ Noting Sher Ali's resentment over the ambiguousness of previous British declarations of support and his growing doubt of Britain's sincerity in this matter, however, Salisbury instructed Lytton that

Her Majesty's Government are, therefore, prepared to sanction and support any more definite declaration which may, in your judgment, secure to their unaltered policy the advantages of which it has been hitherto deprived by an apparent doubt of its sincerity. But they must reserve to themselves entire freedom of judgment as to the character of circumstances involving the obligation of material support to the Amir, and it must be distinctly understood that only in some

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 532.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

clear case of unprovoked aggression would such an obligation arise.¹¹⁰

However, in return for such a qualified offer of support, Salisbury insisted that the British Government could not "secure the integrity of the Amir's dominions unless [he was] willing to afford them every reasonable facility for such precautionary measures as they may deem necessary."¹¹¹ These measures included undisputed access to Afghanistan's frontier positions for British officers and an "adequate means of confidentially conferring with the Amir upon all matters as to which the proposed declaration would recognize a community of interests."¹¹² In other terms Salisbury demanded the right to establish British agents at Herat and Kandahar and to have a permanent British resident at Kabul. To the Secretary of State for India and the cabinet these stipulations appeared reasonable in that after "fair allowance for the condition of the country and the character of the population, territories ultimately dependent upon British power for their defense must not be closed to those of the Queen's officers . . . duly authorized to enter them."¹¹³ Since there was little, if any, precedent for a friendly government refusing to accept a British representative, Salisbury and

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 533.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

others became determined to force it upon the Amir and warned that "if the language or the demeanour of the Amir be such as to promise no satisfactory results of the negotiations [then] His Highness should be distinctly reminded that he is isolating himself at his peril from [Britain's] friendship and protection."¹¹⁴ The difficulty arose when the British Government refused to recognize the anti-European prejudice of the Afghan people as a legitimate reason for Sher Ali's continued refusal to concede these points.

With the exception of this mild threat the instructions were not devoid of consideration for the Amir's position. Nor did they imply any distrust of Sher Ali. In general, while recognizing the decline of British influence, they exhibited the genuine desire of the British Government to secure Sher Ali's trust. Finally, the instructions laid down a clear plan of action, and simultaneously allowed Lytton considerable freedom in its execution.¹¹⁵ Given time and a compromising attitude on Lytton's part, they had an excellent chance to be successfully fulfilled. However, the Amir's inability to comply with British conditions and Lytton's impatience combined to destroy any chance for improved relations.

The importance with which these instructions were regarded is evidenced by the special handling they received.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 531.

¹¹⁵Singhal, p. 16.

Instead of being sent by post, which would have meant they would have been received in Calcutta three weeks before Northbrook left his position, they were given to Lytton in London.¹¹⁶ In addition, instead of their being addressed to the Governor-General in Council as was usually the case, they were addressed only to the Governor-General.¹¹⁷ Lytton, in fact, received permission from the India Office to withhold them from his council as long as he desired.¹¹⁸

"Under the Constitution of India no action could be taken by the Governor-General on an order from London until it had been communicated to his council in the manner prescribed by law."¹¹⁹ By carrying his orders to India with him, Lytton effectively escaped this constitutional restriction and sidestepped any possible resistance from Indian officials on his council who might be faithful to masterly inactivity.

Equally important, the dispatch of February 28, 1876, was not officially replied to until May 10, 1877. During this year-long absence of official communication concerning Anglo-Afghan relations, communications were carried on by means of semi-official letters. This questionable procedure did not pass unnoticed. Sir William Muir, a member of the council, complained that "the omission to make official reports relating to Afghan affairs from the time of

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 15.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 16.

¹¹⁸ Balfour, p. 31.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

Lord Lytton's arrival in April, 1876, until May 10, 1877, is without precedent, and did seriously prejudice the rights of members of the Government."¹²⁰

With his instructions in hand and having taken steps to avoid any difficulty in initiating the forward policy, Lytton departed for India, arriving there in the spring of 1876. On April 12 in Calcutta, he formally relieved Northbrook and set to work at once on implementing his instructions. After discussing the matter with his cabinet, it was agreed to send a letter by native messenger announcing to Sher Ali the Queen's new title, Lytton's appointment, and the desire to dispatch a British envoy to meet with him on matters of mutual interest. It was left to the Amir to designate time and place.¹²¹

By the first of June Lytton had the Amir's reply. In it Sher Ali refused to receive a British officer on the grounds that he could not guarantee his safety, that if such a mission failed the split between the two countries would widen, and that to receive a British envoy would make it impossible to refuse a similar request from the Russians.¹²² The Amir further made known that he was quite

¹²⁰ Political and Secret Dispatches and Enclosures to India, Vol. 6, p. 152, cited in Singhal, p. 16.

¹²¹ Balfour, p. 53-54.

¹²² Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1876, "The Amir Sher Ali to Viceroy, 1 June 1876," p. 174.

satisfied with the existing friendly relations and desired no change.¹²³

Lytton refused to accept Sher Ali's rejection. While waiting for the Amir's answer, the Viceroy had received unofficial reports of questionable authenticity concerning Sher Ali's anti-British attitude.¹²⁴ Despite its dubious value this news stimulated Lytton's suspicions and increased his sense of frustration. In a private letter to Salisbury the Viceroy deplored the Amir's apparent disregard for the British Government and complained that since, compared with Russia, Britain appeared the lesser evil, Sher Ali showed little fear of offending it.¹²⁵ With an injured pride and a firm conviction of Britain's moral and material superiority Lytton met with the council in June, 1876, to decide on the official reaction to the Amir's note.

Using this important occasion to reveal his instructions from the India Office, Lytton launched an attack on the policy of masterly inactivity. He accused it of being nonproductive and, besides, of wasting time.¹²⁶ Afraid that the increasing Russian influence at Sher Ali's court would encourage him someday to cooperate with Russia

¹²³Ibid.

¹²⁴Singhal, p. 17.

¹²⁵Balfour, p. 60.

¹²⁶Lytton's minute of June, 1876, cited in Balfour, p. 65.

in an attack on India,¹²⁷ Lytton charged that Britain's position was unacceptable.

Our own position, as regards Sher Ali seems, at the present moment, to be this--that whilst His Highness is in no way bound to help us against Russia, we are under an admitted obligation to help him against her; that he is practically free to negotiate with Russia whenever he pleases; and that we are practically unable to negotiate with him. Such a position is not only undignified; it is, in our present circumstances, positively dangerous.¹²⁸

In this remarkable passage Lytton managed to reverse that actual situation, for by the terms of the treaty of 1855 Afghanistan was obliged to be a "friend of the friends and an enemy of the enemies" of Britain, while there was no reciprocal obligation on England's part. Evidently what disturbed Lytton was Britain's apparent diplomatic impotence: that it would be forced, out of self-interest, to aid Afghanistan without being able to force the Amir to grant it special advantages in his domain for doing so. This, combined with the Viceroy's knowledge of the disparity in strength between the two countries, only increased his bitterness, sense of frustration and determination to force the issue.

In a second letter to Sher Ali, Lytton took a firmer yet still conciliatory stance. After explaining Britain's desire to strengthen the bonds of friendship between the two governments, the Viceroy warned the Amir that if he continued to refuse to receive a diplomatic

¹²⁷Ibid., p. 68.

¹²⁸Ibid., p. 71.

mission Lytton would be forced to "regard Afghanistan as a State which has voluntarily isolated itself from the alliance and support of the British Government."¹²⁹ Although in issuing this threat the Viceroy was following his instructions from Salisbury almost to the letter, there was a significant deviation. In the order it had been explained that "if the language and demeanor of the Ameer be such as to promise no satisfactory result of negotiations thus opened, His Highness should be distinctly reminded that he is isolating himself at his own risk from Britain's friendship and protection."¹³⁰ Since at this point in Lytton's diplomatic endeavors no negotiations had been initiated, he was premature with his threat. In addition he failed to reveal the contents of this letter to Salisbury until it was too late for the Secretary of State for India to do anything but give his hesitant approval.¹³¹ Lytton's intentions in this secrecy are difficult to determine. It might be an early indication of Lytton's desire to have a freer hand in dealing with Sher Ali than would be accorded him if he maintained a complete and continuing correspondence with the Home Government, or it might simply have been an oversight. Nevertheless, purposeful or accidental, it

¹²⁹Memoranda A No. 19, p. 70, cited in Singhal, p. 17.

¹³⁰Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1876, "Instructions to Lytton, 28 February 1876," p. 531.

¹³¹Singhal, p. 17.

remains a prime example of the Viceroy's increasing impatience.

On the third of September the Government of India received Sher Ali's response. In a cordial note he again refused to receive a British mission but suggested that if Lytton continued to desire a meeting, the Viceroy might either receive an Afghan envoy or recall the native agent, Atta Mahommed Khan, who knew the Amir's wishes and could discuss his grievances.¹³² Rejecting the Amir's first suggestion as beneath the dignity of the British Government (to receive an envoy of a government which refuses to receive its representative) Lytton accepted the alternative proposal, and summoned Atta Mahommed Khan to Simla. There, on the 7th and 10th of October, the native agent met with the Viceroy and his advisors. He explained that Sher Ali had lost most of his faith in the English Government because of its unwillingness in 1869 to agree to a more formal alliance. Moreover, while Britain wanted to send political officers into his territory, it was unwilling to offer anything definite in return.¹³³ Elaborating on the deputing of English agents into Afghanistan, Atta Mahommed Khan revealed that Sher Ali was not so much afraid of their being murdered as that they might interfere with the exercise of

¹³²Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1876, "Sher Ali to Lytton, 3 September 1876," p. 179.

¹³³Balfour, p. 82.

his authority.¹³⁴ In a private discussion at Simla with Captain Grey, a frontier officer, the native agent mentioned the most important matters which concerned the Amir and his advisors:

1. That no Englishmen should reside in Afghanistan, at any rate at Kabul.
2. That the British Government should agree to recognize and support the declared heir, Abdullah Jan, and should disclaim connection with Mahomed Yakub or any pretender.
3. That we should agree to support the Amir with troops and money against all external aggression.
4. That we should grant them some permanent subsidy.
5. That the British Government should refrain from internal interference in Afghanistan.
6. That we should enter into an offensive and defensive alliance, equally binding to both parties.¹³⁵

Lytton, under the pressure of a rapidly deteriorating situation in the Near East, his patience wilting in the Indian heat, quickly agreed to give Sher Ali a treaty of alliance, support him materially in case of an unprovoked attack by a foreign state, and recognize his son, Abdullah Jan, as heir. The Viceroy also consented to discuss terms involving a yearly subsidy.¹³⁶ But in return he demanded that Sher Ali refrain from entering into external relations without British knowledge and especially abstain from communicating with Russia, allow British agents access to Herat and other frontier positions inside Afghanistan, and permit an Anglo Afghan commission to determine and demarcate Afghan

¹³⁴Ibid., p. 83.

¹³⁵Ibid.

¹³⁶Ibid., p. 84.

boundaries.¹³⁷ Finally, Lytton proposed that he would not press the Amir on the question of a permanent British resident at Kabul if Sher Ali would consent to establish an envoy at the Viceroy's court and agree to receive special missions when requested.¹³⁸

In addition to these conditions, and over the protests of Sir Lewis Pelly, the principal British plenipotentiary, Lytton insisted that the acceptance of British agents in Afghanistan was a pre-condition to the opening of any talks.¹³⁹ If Sher Ali objected there was no need for him to depute an emissary. The Viceroy, in addition, made it clear to Atta Mahomed Khan that "if the Amir does not desire to come to a speedy understanding with us Russia does and she desires it at his expense."¹⁴⁰ It is obvious that although Lytton thought he had gone to great lengths to meet the Amir's demands and to assure him of England's interest and friendship, he did not go far enough. In his great impatience and growing suspicion of Sher Ali, the Viceroy forgot that his principal objective was to restore the Amir's confidence in the British Government. This could only be accomplished by compromise, and Lytton's insistence on

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 85.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Singhal, p. 19.

¹⁴⁰ Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1876, "Aid Memoire for Atta Mohammed Khan," p. 181.

pre-conditions contradicted any private sympathy and concern he might have harbored for Sher Ali.

After concluding the discussions with the native agent, but before departing from Simla, Lytton and his advisors drafted the proposed treaty and a set of instructions governing Sir Lewis Pelly's conduct during the negotiations. Naturally these documents closely parallel the proposals which had been sent to Kabul for Sher Ali's consideration. They also provide an accurate insight into Lytton's attitude prior to the Peshawar Conference and clearly reveal Frere's influence. Early in March, 1876, Frere had made several suggestions pertaining to any future meeting with the Amir. He had insisted that whoever was appointed envoy must be invested with full authority, and had emphasized that a "frank and full" explanation of English views was absolutely necessary.¹⁴¹ Sher Ali "should clearly realize our view of his position as a weaker power between two enormously strong ones, an earthen vessel between two iron pots; that for our own sakes we should infinitely prefer an independent and voluntary alliance to any share in his kingdom."¹⁴² Being the experienced Indian official that he was, Frere recommended making allowances for the Amir's problems and not pressing him too hard on the matter of a meeting. However, he believed that if Sher Ali refused to improve his

¹⁴¹Frere to Salisbury, 3 March 1876, cited in Martineau, II, p. 147.

¹⁴²Ibid., p. 148.

relations with Britain, it should be taken to mean that a hostile (Russian) influence had been successful in estranging the two countries.¹⁴³

Following the spirit if not the letter of these views, Pelly's instructions and the treaty he carried were a combination of conciliation and firmness. He was informed that the principal objectives of the treaty were "to provide for the external security of Afghanistan," and "to insure the internal tranquillity of that State in a manner conducive to British interests."¹⁴⁴ This latter aim was a bold indication that despite Britain's desire to remain aloof from Afghanistan's internal affairs, those affairs had become a major concern under the pressure of a continuing Russian advance in Central Asia. This was the basic contradiction of the British position. The Russian Central Asian advance embarrassed the British Government. It was committed out of self interest to defend Afghanistan against Russian aggression, covert or overt, but it had also agreed not to interfere in Afghan internal affairs.¹⁴⁵

The orders continued by emphasizing the British Government's good intentions. The British Envoy was distinctly instructed to "abstain from putting forward any

¹⁴³Ibid., p. 147.

¹⁴⁴Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd, 2190, 1876, "Instructions, Thorton to Pelly, 17 October 1876," p. 561.

¹⁴⁵Gregorian, p. 110.

unreasonable demands,"¹⁴⁶ and further ordered to assure the Afghan representative that "this Government does not desire to impose on the Ameer burdens which His Highness is demonstrably unable to sustain. Its object is not to weaken but strengthen his hand."¹⁴⁷ In return for British aid and protection, however, Pelly was to make explicit Britain's expectations regarding the Amir's future actions. The Viceroy insisted that Afghanistan's foreign policy be conducted with reference to the British Government's judgment.¹⁴⁸ Lytton also demanded that Sher Ali change his attitude, which apparently recently had become increasingly anti-British.¹⁴⁹ He must do something to curb the independent nature of the tribes in the Khyber Pass.¹⁵⁰ Above all, the Amir must understand that British aid in money, arms and--if circumstances demanded it--men, was conditional on his encouraging and maintaining "free, frequent and friendly intercourse with the British Government and all its subjects."¹⁵¹ In closing, the instructions reminded Pelly that he was to keep the Viceroy informed at all times and that he

¹⁴⁶ Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1876, "Instructions to Pelly, 17 October 1876," p. 561.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 562.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 563.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

was to use cypher code when communicating with him.¹⁵²

In addition to these instructions Pelly was given a draft treaty, consisting of fourteen articles and seven secret agreements. These latter, however, merely explained in more definite terminology certain aspects of the principal fourteen articles and in no way were as ominous as their secrecy might seem to indicate. After announcing the British Government's agreement to respect the territories of Sher Ali, his heirs and successors, and pledging perpetual peace between the two States, the treaty promised British protection for Afghanistan in the event of foreign aggression, only insisting that "His Highness shall have restrained from all provocation of aggression on or interference with the States and territories beyond his present frontier. . . ." ¹⁵³ Article Four further insisted that the Amir agree to "conduct his relations with foreign States in harmony with the policy of the British Government." ¹⁵⁴ Other articles provided for secure trade; construction of a telegraph line to speed communication; on Sher Ali's aiding them in ending the slave trade, a standard British insistence, including his pledge "to prohibit the practice of kidnapping or seizing human beings within his dominions

¹⁵²Ibid.

¹⁵³Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1876, "Proposed Treaty," p. 564.

¹⁵⁴Ibid.

for the purpose of selling them into bondage;"¹⁵⁵ and a British commitment to acknowledge any successor Sher Ali might choose.¹⁵⁶ However, the most important articles included in the main section were those which dealt with the establishment of British agents in Afghanistan. Article Five stated that:

for the better protection of the Afghan frontier, it is hereby agreed that the British Government shall, on its part, depute accredited British Agents to reside at Herat and such other places in Afghanistan as may be mutually determined by the High Contracting Powers; and that the ruler of Afghanistan, on his part depute an agent to reside at the court, of the Viceroy and Governor-General of India . . .¹⁵⁷

Article Six continued by stating that the Amir guaranteed "the personal safety and honorable treatment of British agents whilst on Afghan soil and the British Government, on its part, understands that such agents shall in no way interfere with the internal administration of Afghanistan."¹⁵⁸ Despite this claim, Lytton and the other advocates of the forward policy understood no such thing. It was quite impossible for them to make non-interference, the basis of masterly inactivity, any part of their program. This was made evident three articles later when Article Ten proposed that while the agents would generally abstain from such actions, they would intervene if asked by the Amir to prevent

¹⁵⁵Ibid.

¹⁵⁶Ibid.

¹⁵⁷Ibid.

¹⁵⁸Ibid.

civil war, or, rather ambiguously, "to protect the peaceful interests which this treaty is established to promote."¹⁵⁹ Not satisfied by this contradiction, Article Ten was further qualified by the sixth secret article which stipulated that aid to the Amir regarding internal disturbances must be preceded by "timely information" and insisted that "the British Government shall be the sole judge of the manner, time and expediency of furnishing such assistance."¹⁶⁰ By these four articles Britain would have gained the right to intervene whenever it desired and yet remain detached from any direct obligation to the Amir for the internal stability of his state.

Continued reading of the proposed treaty does little to enhance the image of either Lytton or the British Government, except of course to illustrate their skill in drafting a treaty. Quite subtly Lytton managed to keep alive issues that he had insisted were no longer important. In Article Three of the secret section, which referred to and elaborated Articles Five and Six in the main section, it stated that, "unless and until otherwise mutually arranged between the two Governments a native agent only need reside at Cabul."¹⁶¹ By means of this futuristic clause Lytton continued to evidence a hope for the establishment of a permanent British agent at Sher Ali's court--an objective he persisted in

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 565.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

publicly rejecting. This article further indicated "that, whenever in the opinion of the Viceroy of India, it may be necessary to communicate direct with the Ameer on matters of an important and confidential character, a special British Envoy shall be deputed on a temporary mission to the court of the Ameer."¹⁶²

Two other articles in the secret section are important. Article One stated that the words "invaded by a foreign enemy" used in Article Three of the main section would "be held to include European as well as Asiatic enemies."¹⁶³ This was the closest the treaty came to any reference to the threat posed by Russian expansion, ostensibly the reason for increasing Britain's influence in Afghanistan and extending support to its Amir. The final secret article was concerned with the money to be paid to Sher Ali on the faithful performance of the treaty. Lytton was willing to be generous. He would pay twenty lakhs of rupees immediately upon ratification and twelve lakhs annually; this in addition to any other aid.¹⁶⁴

If the treaty's wording was frank and firm and if its general nature was optimistic and conciliatory, the promise upon which it and the instructions had been based was entirely false. The British Government had convinced itself that circumstances had made it not only necessary but

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

also propitious to extend and formalize its influence in Afghanistan, and that it would be able to do so merely by granting the Amir's previous requests. Pelly was therefore instructed to inform the Afghan Envoy that the British Government was "prepared to contract with the Ameer of Cabul a definite and practical alliance on the terms desired by His Highness in 1869 and 1873, . . ." ¹⁶⁵ The flaw in this proposal, however, was that by 1876 Sher Ali had become so disillusioned that he no longer desired either a closer or more formal agreement with the English Government. He was satisfied with existing relations. This amounted to a complete reversal of diplomatic positions. Now, Lytton tried to make Sher Ali want something that he no longer desired, but with this additional handicap. In order to get a more definite alliance the Amir must agree to a stipulation that he had previously refused to discuss even when most desirous to achieve such an agreement: i. e., the right for Britain to station British agents at Herat or other frontier positions inside Afghanistan. Blinded by their own concept of the situation and all too aware of Britain's superior strength, the advocates of the forward policy refused to bargain with Afghanistan. It was this unshakeable belief in the correctness of their viewpoint which was responsible for the future failure at Peshawar.

¹⁶⁵Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1876, "Instructions to Pelly, 17 October 1876," p. 561.

Following the departure of Atta Mohamed Khan, Lytton inspected the northwest frontier and then proceeded to Jacobabad. There on December 8, 1876, he consummated a lengthy period of diplomatic negotiations with the Khan of Khelat by signing a treaty which substantially increased British influence in Baluchistan, a state situated on Afghanistan's southern border. By the terms of this agreement Britain secured the right to station troops at its pleasure in the Khanate and obtained the Khan's pledge to oppose the enemies of the British Government.¹⁶⁶ Immediately Lytton garrisoned the city of Quettah, anticipating that it would soon become an important intelligence center. Then, in a letter to Major Sandaman, the officer primarily responsible for the success of the negotiations, the Viceroy explained that the next important objective was to extend Britain's influence "quietly, peacefully, but, if possible, rapidly from Quettah in the direction of Kandahar," in Afghanistan.¹⁶⁷ After signing the Treaty of Jacobabad, Lytton retired to Delhi to prepare for the ceremony during which the Queen would receive her new title, Empress of India, and to wait for a reply from Sher Ali.

The first news from Kabul was not encouraging. Atta Mohamed Khan had discussed the British proposals with Sher Ali, his principal minister, Syud Noor Mohamed Shah, and the

¹⁶⁶Balfour, p. 105.

¹⁶⁷Lytton to Major Sandaman, 9 December, 1876, cited in Balfour, p. 104.

remainder of the Amir's advisors, and reported on November 23 that although no definite decision had yet been reached, the prevailing attitude in the Durbar or council was that it would be impossible for the Government of Afghanistan to allow British officers in its territory. Furthermore, "the contemplation of such an arrangement," according to Atta Mohamed Khan, "filled them with apprehension."¹⁶⁸ And well it might; English arrogance in Kabul prior to the disaster in the winter of 1841 and the rapacious conduct of the retaliatory invasion in 1842 had engendered a violent anti-British prejudice among the Afghan people.¹⁶⁹ During the years of masterly inactivity this attitude had been strengthened by the British policy of using punitive expeditions to retaliate against raiding border tribes.¹⁷⁰ Considering this background, Sher Ali and his Sidars were naturally suspicious of any British pledge concerned with improving the relations between the two Governments. Instead the Amir and his council were convinced that the sole object of the renewed British diplomatic activity was to limit Afghanistan's independence.¹⁷¹ Consequently, despite Atta Mohamed Khan's efforts, in the first week in December

¹⁶⁸ Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1876, "Private letter from Atta Mohamed Khan, 23 November 1876," p. 566.

¹⁶⁹ Gregorian, p. 118.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 124.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 120.

Sher Ali's advisors voted to reject once again Lytton's proposals. The native agent, however, refused to accept this ruling. He effectively countered by arguing that in a situation of such obvious and critical importance, only the Amir should make the final decision.¹⁷² In the days that followed Sher Ali was slowly convinced that it was in his best interests to accede to Lytton's demand to station British officers in his territory; after considerable discussion, the Durbar was also persuaded to extend its approval. However, it did so only on the conditions that the laws and customs of Afghanistan be used in any cases of injury to a British officer stationed on its territory, that the British Government should assume the sole responsibility for preventing the arrival of a Russian mission at Kabul and that "the duties of all British officers on the border should be fully defined (limited). They should not secretly or openly interfere with internal civil and military affairs of Afghanistan."¹⁷³ By these measures it is readily evident that the Amir's council was determined that if Lytton succeeded in extending British influence into Afghanistan, he was going to have to do so without their aid.

¹⁷²Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1876, "Letter from Atta Mohamed Khan to Commissioner Peshawar District, 5 December 1876," p. 566.

¹⁷³Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1876, "Sher Ali to Commissioner of Peshawar District, 21 December 1876," p. 568.

On December 21, 1876, in a letter to the Commissioner of the Peshawar District, Sher Ali notified the British Government of his decision to accept Lytton's pre-condition and to depute his chief minister, Syud Noor Mohammed Shah, to Peshawar to discuss closer diplomatic relations. The Amir observed:

Even now, in my opinion, the residence of British officers on the border would not at all be advantageous to the (two) Governments. However, as the British Government insist on this question every day, I have proposed, but merely to strengthen (my) friendship with the British Government. . . . The Sadr-ī-azim and Mir Akhor Ahmed Khan should go with the British native agent at Cabul to British territory; and after making representations as to the views (of the Cabul Government) settle the questions and some important conditions, and then agree to the residence of British officers on the border.¹⁷⁴

Three days later Atta Khan informed his government that due to the illness of the Afghan envoy they would not be able to leave Kabul until December 31.¹⁷⁵ Meanwhile at Peshawar, Pelly, the principal plenipotentiary, waited, armed with the treaty he expected would insure India's security and by so doing prove the worth of the forward policy.

¹⁷⁴Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1876, "Letter of Atta Khan to Commissioner of Peshawar District, 21 December 1876," p. 567.

¹⁷⁵Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1876, "Atta Khan to Peshawar, 25 December 1876," p. 568.

CHAPTER IV

THE PESHAWAR CONFERENCE

Peshawar, the principal city of India's trans-Indus territory, is located at the threshold of the Khyber Pass. In 1877 it was a major military post and because of its strategic location served throughout the history of British India as the focal point for launching invasions of Afghanistan. It was to this outpost of Britain's imperial might that the Afghan delegation travelled, arriving on January 27, 1877, after having taken four weeks to cross the great pass.

On hand to greet Syud Noor and his party were Sir Lewis Pelly and the chief sanitary inspector of the Peshawar district, Dr. Bellew. The latter, an experienced and respected frontier official fluent in Persian had been chosen to act as Pelly's interpreter during the forthcoming proceedings. Sir Lewis Pelly, at fifty-three years of age, was a veteran of thirty-six years on the India service and an experienced diplomat. In 1841 he had been appointed to the Bombay army and had risen from lieutenant in 1843 to colonel in 1871. In the course of his duties he had been an agent at Zanzibar and briefly held a diplomatic post at Mosul on the Persian Gulf. From 1852 until 1856 he had served under the legendary frontier officer, John Jacob, in

the Sind.¹⁷⁶ During the course of his service Pelly had become a good friend of Syud Noor and it was expected that this personal relationship would serve to smooth the course of the negotiations.

The day after the Afghan representation arrived, Dr. Bellew called on Syud Noor Mohamed Shah and was received in a most friendly manner. After an inquiry concerning Pelly's health and a few other social amenities the Afghan envoy directed his conversation to the issues which had brought him to Peshawar and expounded on Sher Ali's current feelings. The envoy complained about English duplicity, that the British Government was always promising one thing and then acting otherwise. Because of this Sher Ali had developed "a deep-rooted mistrust of the good faith and sincerity of the British Government."¹⁷⁷ For the most part these suspicions had been aroused by the continual pressure from the Government of India to be allowed to establish British officers in Afghanistan at the same time it was disclaiming any intent to interfere in its internal affairs.

Syud Noor then proceeded to list specific acts which had confirmed his master's fear. He explained that relations had been satisfactory until Lord Northbrook's term

¹⁷⁶"Sir Lewis Pelly," The Dictionary of National Biography, XV, p. 720-22.

¹⁷⁷Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1877, "Memorandum of Dr. Bellew C. S. I. Peshawar District, 28 January 1877," p. 568.

as Viceroy, but from that time on had deteriorated. Northbrook had interfered in Afghan internal affairs by writing a letter to the Amir on the behalf of Yakub Khan who was then in prison in Kabul, asking Sher Ali to send him back to Herat, and stating that if he were reinstated there "the friendship between the Ameer and the British Government would remain intact."¹⁷⁸ This interference had been resented by the Amir and since he did not send Yakub Khan back to Herat, he considered the friendship between the two Governments as no longer imperforate.¹⁷⁹ In another instance of English meddling, Northbrook had sent presents directly to one of Sher Ali's provincial governors without asking permission to do so. According to Syud Noor, this act had alarmed the entire Durbar (native council) which viewed it as a threat to its authority.¹⁸⁰ Finally, the Afghan representative complained that English interference had nearly cost him his life. A letter from Captain Grey had been shown to the Durbar which referred to Syud Noor's asquiescence in the establishment of British officers at Kabul when he had been at Simla in 1873.¹⁸¹ Immediately Syud Noor had been accused of favoring the British Government in this design, and although nothing serious developed from this

¹⁷⁸Ibid.

¹⁷⁹Ibid.

¹⁸⁰Ibid., p. 569.

¹⁸¹Ibid.

incident it is probably the major reason Syud Noor has been portrayed as particularly anti-British in his attitude. This fact has been considered one of the principal reasons for the failure of the Peshawar Conference.¹⁸² However, it is exceedingly doubtful if there was any official in the Afghan Government who was not decidedly anti-British. In any case, Syud Noor was an excellent choice for envoy. He had a long record of dealing with the British and was a friend of numerous British officials, among them his opposite at Peshawar, Pelly.

During the talk Syud Noor maintained a very serious countenance and "spoke with a marked earnestness and gravity."¹⁸³ Recognizing the importance of his mission, he told Bellew that this was the final opportunity for a settlement and that if it failed only God knew the future.¹⁸⁴ With this statement Bellew prepared to take his leave, but before departing he extended an invitation from Pelly for the Afghan envoy to be his guest for the evening's entertainment in the 51st Regiment Rooms.¹⁸⁵

At twelve o'clock on January 30, 1877, the Peshawar Conference formally opened. On hand for the first meeting

¹⁸²See Fraser-Tyttler, p. 140.

¹⁸³Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1877, "Memorandum of Dr. Bellew, 28 January 1877," p. 569.

¹⁸⁴Ibid.

¹⁸⁵Ibid.

were Pelly, envoy extraordinary; his aid, Bellew; and Atta Mohamed Khan, the native agent from Kabul. Representing Sher Ali was Syud Noor Mohammed Shah; his aid, Mir Akhor Ahmen Khan; and Munshi Muhammed Bagir, a secretary. The negotiations began with Pelly discussing two letters which had previously been sent to Lytton from the Amir, the first deputing Syud Noor to make the Amir's wishes known and the second explaining why he would be unable to attend the ceremony in honor of the Queen's new title at Delhi.¹⁸⁶ Immediately the Afghan envoy took exception. He pointed out that in the letter deputing him to Peshawar there was no mention of any wishes on Sher Ali's part. The message merely stated that Syud Noor would "make known the state of Affairs."¹⁸⁷ Moreover, he claimed that since the desire for a meeting had originated with the British Government, it was its responsibility to make its wishes known.¹⁸⁸

Failing to place the responsibility for the conference on the Afghan Government, Pelly attempted to show that the only reason Lytton desired to renew communications with Sher Ali had been to make known his assumption of the Viceroyship and announce the Queen's new title. He added that such an occasion could also be used to remove any

¹⁸⁶ Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1877, "Minutes of first meeting at Peshawar, 30 January 1877," p. 571.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

misapprehensions which might exist between the two Governments.¹⁸⁹ Not to be outfoxed, the Afghan envoy interjected "with some energy and warmth."¹⁹⁰ He desired to know, were the misapprehensions strictly Afghan or did they exist in both Governments? Further, he asked for details. What were these fears and when did they begin, before or after Lytton's arrival?¹⁹¹ In Syud Noor's mind, since there had been no communication, no misunderstanding could have occurred.¹⁹²

Having been balked in the attempt to make the negotiations solely Sher Ali's responsibility and exasperated by Syud Noor's astute use of detail to destroy this generality, Pelly admitted that indeed Lytton did think that some misapprehensions existed; this conference, which had been agreed to by Sher Ali, was to clear them up. Continuing, Pelly went right to the center of the British argument by stating the most significant British proposal:

The Viceroy has concluded from a perusal of the letter sent to His Excellency by his agent at Cabul, with the cognizance of the Ameer, and from the fact of the Ameer's Envoy having come to Peshawar, that the Ameer had accepted the sine qua non condition that British officers may reside on the frontiers of Afghanistan for the purpose of watching exterior events and of informing their own Government as well as that of the Ameer of the state of affairs beyond his frontiers. The acceptance of the principle, that British officers

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

may reside in Afghanistan is absolutely necessary as a preliminary to the commencement of negotiations. This point being granted, other details can be discussed and settled hereafter.¹⁹³

More than once during this presentation the Afghan envoy tried to interrupt and to defer the discussion of this point to a later period of the conference. But Pelly refused to be budged. The native agent's letter of December 21 and Syud Noor's presence was understood by the British Government, he explained, to indicate clearly Sher Ali's acceptance of this principle.¹⁹⁴ Pelly further pointed out that he possessed no discretionary powers regarding this point; that the Viceroy's instructions were "categorical as to the admission of principle that British officers should be permitted to reside permanently on the frontiers of Afghanistan,"¹⁹⁵ and until he was clearly assured that Sher Ali accepted this condition he could not commence the negotiations.¹⁹⁶ However, Pelly tried to soften this position somewhat by emphasizing that he was anxious to discuss any or all matters thoroughly so that there would be no misunderstanding. He further assured Syud Noor that the Viceroy had no wish nor intention to embarrass the Amir.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 572.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

To this statement Syud Noor turned a deaf ear and returned to a discussion of the misapprehensions. He asked Pelly to inform him what they were so he would be prepared to discuss them. Pelly, in return, promised to review his instructions and inform the Kabul envoy at the next meeting; in the meantime Pelly insisted he was "bound by the exact words of the Viceroy's letter."¹⁹⁸ At this point Mir Akher interrupted the proceedings. He had fallen asleep twice during the meeting and now begged permission to proceed to say his prayers. With this the meeting adjourned until the next day. While the envoys were in the process of leaving the room Syud Noor mentioned that he wanted to make a statement, as a private individual and in no way an official sense.

Your Government is a powerful and great one; ours is a small and weak one; we have long been on terms of friendship, and the Ameer now clings to the skirt of the British Government, and till his hand be cut off he will not relax hold of it.

Whatever be the issue of our negotiations, personally I shall always entertain the sentiments of brotherhood with you (Sir Lewis Pelly) in remembrance of your kindness to me at Bushir, which I have often mentioned in Durbar. However this business may be decided, our wish is only for friendship with the British Government.¹⁹⁹

It is clear from the first meeting that while Syud Noor was a capable negotiator and could not easily be trapped into being held as the petitioning party, the Afghan position was difficult if not impossible to defend.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

Naturally Syud Noor realized that by his very attendance, Sher Ali proved his acquiescence in British demands. The British assumed as much too, and therefore saw no point in discussing the obvious. To the Afghan representatives, however, negotiations were negotiations no matter the pre-conditions. Apparently impatience or carelessness on Pelly's part had caused him to disregard this viewpoint and to press from the outset for a verbal acknowledgement from the Afghan delegation. This was a subtle method of forcing the Afghans to recognize that the negotiations were a lie, that Afghanistan in reality had no choice. It must either agree to England's wishes and then accept what gifts Britain was willing to extend or accept the consequences.

The second official meeting took place on February 1, 1877, with the same individuals present. Pelly opened the proceedings by attempting to clarify the question of misapprehensions, and in doing so referred to the Viceroy's letter of October 11, 1876, and to the aide memoire sent via the native agent for Sher Ali. Pelly admitted that the misapprehension was on Lytton's part, and that the object of the aide memoire had been to "relieve his (the Ameer's) mind from many apprehensions as to my (the Viceroy's) intentions, which appear to have been caused by circumstances previous to my (the Viceroy's) assumption of the Government of India and by a policy His Highness had considered neither

hot nor cold."²⁰⁰ Pertaining to this passage Syud Noor interjected and asked Pelly to specify the Amir's worries, for in his mind Sher Ali had none. At the same time Syud Noor apologized for his insistence on this point and expressed concern that it would not cause unnecessary trouble.²⁰¹ Recovered from his previous embarrassment, Pelly replied: "By no means. We shall never arrive at a really satisfactory understanding concerning the future until we have thoroughly understood and cleared up the past."²⁰² Continuing, Pelly attempted to explain the apprehensions by linking them with the previous conferences at Umballa in 1869, Simla in 1873 and the communication received through the native agent at Kabul in May, 1873. He read an extract of a note written during the meeting between Lord Mayo and Sher Ali on March 29, 1869, in which Sher Ali had referred to the relationship between the British Government and his father, Dost Mohamed, as "dry friendship and one sided."²⁰³ According to this note Sher Ali had

declared that it was his earnest wish that the Government of India should recognize and acknowledge, not only himself, but his lineal successors in blood. This phrase repeated several times, with great earnestness and emphasis. He explained again and again and at some

²⁰⁰ Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1877, "Minutes of second meeting at Peshawar, 1 February 1877," p. 573.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

length that to acknowledge the ruler, pro tem and de facto was to invite competition for the throne and excite the hopes of all sorts of candidates; that if the British Government would recognize him and his dynasty, there was nothing he would not do in order to evidence his gratitude and to comply with the wishes of the India Government, in any particular, and support them with his means and life, it being understood that the slightest failure on his part or his descendents should vitiate all engagements. at once.²⁰⁴

After hearing this Syud Noor requested translations of the documents Pelly had referred to and asked that further discussions on this question be deferred until he had an opportunity to study them. These talks he emphasized must proceed "link by link" if confusion was to be avoided.²⁰⁵ On this note the meeting ended.

On the morning of the third the translations were sent to the Afghan envoy, but in the afternoon when Pelly arrived at the conference room he was informed that Syud Noor would make his reply on Monday and that he would be unable to discuss any other topics until the translations were replied to.²⁰⁶ However, Syud Noor expressed a desire to meet with Pelly privately if it was not an inconvenience. Pelly agreed. When the Afghan envoy arrived the two emissaries agreed to renew the negotiations on Monday, February 5, at noon. Syud Noor then asked Pelly to relate his "respectful

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1877, "Minutes of Meeting, 3 February 1877," p. 573.

compliments" to Lytton on his reception. "His happiness," he said, "was perfect . . . but its endurance would depend upon the way in which he should depart from Sir Lewis Pelly after the negotiations."²⁰⁷ Countering in a friendly manner Pelly assured his friend of the Viceroy's amiable intentions and emphasized that it would depend upon Sher Ali whether the envoy's departure would be as happy as he desired.²⁰⁸ Temporarily at a loss Syud Noor exclaimed, "No, it depends on you;" and then idealistically added, "In truth it depends neither on you nor the Ameer but on justice."²⁰⁹ With this remark the informal meeting ended.

On Monday Syud Noor began by admitting that the Amir's anxiety had existed prior to Lytton's arrival, but he stressed the idea that he did not consider the present Viceroy distinct from his predecessor.²¹⁰ He argued that Lytton would accept all previous arrangements with Kabul and that his successors would do the same. The envoy then asked Pelly if in the future any Viceroy would claim not to be bound by a former treaty.²¹¹ When Pelly tried to complicate his answer by making references to former agreements,

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1877, "Minutes of meeting, 5 February 1877," p. 573.

²¹¹ Ibid.

Syud Noor said he would discuss those arrangements later but at the present all he desired was a straight yes or no reply. Cautiously Pelly answered that he would reply in the manner he thought appropriate and voiced his belief that Sher Ali's repeated requests for a more specific treaty confirmed the Amir's dissatisfaction with the old agreement.²¹² He continued by emphasizing that Sher Ali had had two months to deliberate and that the Viceroy expected a definite answer to the proposal of an offensive and defensive alliance. To this Syud Noor inquired if all the other treaties had been annulled. Pelly countered by informing his opposite that he had no power to annul any treaty but had been instructed "merely to propose to revise and supplement the Treaty of 1855."²¹³

Tiring of this line, Syud Noor repeated the allegation that if any anxiety existed in Sher Ali's mind it had been created by previous British transgressions and that the current opinion in Kabul was identical with that in the time of Lawrence.²¹⁴ Returning to the principal part of the British proposal Pelly then inquired if this meant that Sher Ali had declined to accept the demand for the stationing of agents in his territory and he cautioned Syud Noor for a careful reply, because without such an agreement he

²¹²Ibid.

²¹³Ibid.

²¹⁴Ibid.

would be unable to open negotiations for a new alliance.²¹⁵
The Afghan envoy then agreed to discuss the question of
resident British officers.

Pelly attempted to clarify the situation by explain-
ing very briefly that the reason Lytton had insisted that
the Afghan acceptance of this demand be a sine qua non to
the opening of the conference was that the Viceroy formally
could not take upon himself the responsibility for aiding
the Amir unless Sher Ali would allow him the means to observe
events occurring beyond Afghanistan's borders.²¹⁶ In reply
Syud Noor promised to explain the basis of Afghan reluctance
by referring to the Umballa conference in 1869. He urged
Pelly to listen. Slowly and with great attention to detail
the envoy began a lengthy lecture designed to discredit and
repudiate the British view of past events. He began by
informing the British envoy that contrary to any British in-
formation the meeting between Sher Ali and Lord Mayo took
place at Lahore and not Umballa and then charged that the
English records of the Amir's conversations were incorrect.
Syud Noor continued by repudiating the British contention
that Sher Ali had attended the meeting for any other purpose
than to example his friendship and

in order that it might be known to everybody that at
the time of the revolution in Afghanistan the British
Government did not ask after my welfare, but that I

²¹⁵Ibid.

²¹⁶Ibid., p. 574.

Sher Ali at the first opportunity came down that in accordance with former friendship and past agreement and correspondence, I might show that I was constant and firm."²¹⁷

It was plain, the Afghan envoy insisted, that not only had the British Government desired the interview but that it had made whatever requests had been advanced. The Amir merely replied.

At this point Pelly interrupted. Obviously there was a difference between the Afghan and the English records of the Umballa proceedings. However, he could only depend on the records on which he had been instructed.²¹⁸ Nevertheless, Syud Noor refused to be blocked by this rationalization and claimed, "Whatever I have said, or may say, in these meetings, I will produce support of the authority of your own Government for you!"²¹⁹ Continuing, he explained that Lord Mayo had expressed a wish for a private interview with the Amir. This information had been passed by Captain Grey to himself and with Sher Ali's approval this meeting took place. Syud Noor then challenged Pelly:

Therefore I now ask you, according to your own records of that meeting, and not according to my account of it . . . what did Lord Mayo say in reply to the Ameer, to produce an anxiety in the mind of the Ameer on his return to his own country? What was the result of that meeting that the Viceroy should now wish to remove anxiety from the mind of the Ameer?²²⁰

²¹⁷Ibid.

²¹⁸Ibid.

²¹⁹Ibid.

²²⁰Ibid.

Pelly answered that Sher Ali had been upset because Lord Mayo had refused his request for a more formal alliance. Syud Noor again refused to accept Pelly's answer and referred to a paper sent to Sher Ali after the Umballa meeting. He demanded that it be used to settle the difference and insisted that Sher Ali had returned from the conference without a trace of anxiety.²²¹ With this statement it was mutually agreed to adjourn until the following day, at which time the Afghan envoy promised to try to produce the paper in question.

The next day Syud Noor produced a copy of the letter in question, but Pelly begged off by informing the envoy that he was waiting for an answer to a telegram he had sent to Lytton the previous evening. Pelly did suggest, however, that if the Amir had not been anxious after Umballa it was improbable that he would have dispatched Syud Noor himself to Simla for the conference which ensued upon his request.²²² Syud Noor declined to discuss this point and the remainder of the proceedings were taken up with friendly and unofficial conversation. However, when the meeting adjourned Syud Noor explained that he had not intended by any previous statement to indicate either an acceptance or rejection of the demand for Afghan acceptance of resident British agents. He asked

²²¹Ibid.

²²²Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1877, "Minutes of meeting, 6 February 1877," p. 575.

to have two or three days in which to state the Amir's position; then he would give a definite reply to that proposal.

By the conclusion of the fourth meeting several significant facts became apparent. First, the Afghan envoy had succeeded in throwing the burden of proof concerning Sher Ali's desire for a new arrangement on the British Government. Second, he had so far effectively countered every British attempt to do so. Pelly's questions and answers had been extremely general and evidenced an implicit desire to avoid discussion. Syud Noor's statements, however, effectively sidetracked the negotiations by paying strict attention to details and by so doing plainly indicated that even if Afghanistan was going to be forced to accept Britain's demands, in the process it would reveal the lies upon which those demands were based. So far in the talks Syud Noor had proven himself the superior negotiator, for he had kept Pelly on the defensive and in the process initiated a discussion of the proposal which his very presence indicated had already been grudgingly accepted.

Following the adjournment of the meeting on February 6, Syud Noor returned to his quarters to work. During the evening, however, he suffered a recurrence of his illness; the strain of writing dispatches and the negotiations had taken their toll. This illness, apparently the result of a chronic stricture of the urethra, had been a source of discomfort and danger for many years. Its recurrence at this

time provided future authors with another excuse for the failure at Peshawar.²²³ However, by the next afternoon the envoy was well enough to receive another visit from Bellew. During the subsequent conversation Syud Noor explained a plan of procedure which he thought would bring the best results. He repeated his request to be heard for two days without interruption. In the course of these two meetings he proposed to review Sher Ali's problems, beginning with the 1857 agreement signed by Lawrence and Dost Mohamed and concluding with a discussion of the Conference at Simla in 1873. He then proposed that Pelly take three or four days to consider what had been said and then to state the British Government's demands. At that time the envoy promised to give a final statement which would conclude the business.²²⁴ Syud Noor took this occasion to re-emphasize the importance of the negotiations and cautioned Bellew that the British Government should not try to impose a burden on the Government of Afghanistan which it would not be able to bear. Bellew, just to be sure, inquired what that burden might be and was informed that it was the residence of British officers inside the Amir's territory.²²⁵ Elaborating on

²²³Fraser-Tyttler, p. 140.

²²⁴Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1877, "Extract of private interview between Dr. Bellew and Syud Noor, 7 February 1877," p. 576.

²²⁵Ibid.

this issue, Syud Noor hastened to reiterate the objections of the Afghan people and the difficulty Sher Ali would have in protecting the agents. When he expressed doubt as to their usefulness without the Amir's aid, Bellew rejoined that it had been understood "that the Ameer in accepting this condition . . . if he did accept the condition, did so with the conviction that it was to his own advantage, and was prepared to protect them and assist them as friends of himself and his Government."²²⁶ Nor would Bellew listen when the envoy explained that the Afghan people mistrusted the British agents and feared they would write derogatory reports concerning them, which in the future would be used as the basis for England assuming the complete control of Afghan affairs.²²⁷ Dr. Bellew must have been shocked to hear an Afghan accuse the British Government of harboring such devious intentions, but he did his best to assure Syud Noor that it was the British Government's sincerest wish to see Sher Ali and his dynasty secure in Kabul and to be his ally. To reassure the doctor, Syud Noor reaffirmed the Government of Afghanistan's appreciation of Britain's friendship by reminding him that it was aware where its interests lay.

We know who rescued Herat from the Persians and gave it to the late Ameer. . . . We know who assisted Turkey against Russia in the Crimea, and we know who is the friend of Turkey in Servian revolt.²²⁸

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

On this note the interview ended.

Pelly having agreed to the Afghan procedural proposal, the next formal meeting began on the 8th with Syud Noor discussing the 1873 conference at Simla. He emphasized that Sher Ali had not petitioned for such a meeting and supported this assertion by referring to the letter of October 12, 1873, in which the British Government had asked permission to send a British officer to Kabul to explain the correspondence between Russia and Britain concerning Afghanistan's northern border and to convey the final decision of the Seistan arbitration.²²⁹ This British request had been refused, but it was for these reasons and these alone that Syud Noor had been sent to meet Lord Northbrook. At Simla, Northbrook had given reassurances to Syud Noor regarding the absence of future Russian aggression. These assurances, however, had not convinced the Kabul envoy, for the Viceroy had mentioned that in the event of an incident Britain would probably assist Afghanistan but left the nature and extent of such aid very vague.²³⁰ At this point in his presentation Syud Noor again became ill and was forced to request an adjournment.

Two days later he was sufficiently recovered to continue his summary. He recalled his interview with

²²⁹Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmd. 2190, 1877, "Minutes of meeting, 8 February 1877," p. 577.

²³⁰Ibid.

Northbrook which had occurred on July 12, 1873. At that meeting the Viceroy had stressed the importance of Afghanistan as a buffer zone, urged that it should be strong and independent and had done his best to assure Syud Noor that because of Russian pledges to the British Government there was no need for increased English aid.²³¹ With these facts in mind Syud Noor claimed that when the Simla Conference ended Sher Ali had been satisfied and that he had held no fear for the future. The envoy explained that Sher Ali's fear rested on other issues than the results of the previous conferences. He then began a discussion of the Yakub Khan affair, but before going into detail in any length he again became fatigued and the meeting ended.

At the next meeting, on February 12, Syud Noor continued where he had left off, adding to the Yakub Khan incident the question of the gifts which the British Government had sent to the Mir of Wakhan and the British decision regarding the Seistan dispute. After elaborating on these examples of British interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs, the envoy turned to the issue of British officers being stationed in his country. In arguing against the acceptance of such a measure Syud Noor emphasized the standard reason for such a refusal, the Afghan people's traditional fear of foreigners. It was impossible, he

²³¹Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1877, "Minutes of Meeting, 10 February 1877," p. 579.

declared, to reassure them. In addition, there was no way of preventing the enemies of Sher Ali from murdering the agents and thereby causing a serious breach in the diplomatic relations between the two Governments.²³² Finally, in a clever move, Syud Noor referred to earlier British statements and asked:

In the first day's conference, in the outset of the conversation you proposed to remove any anxiety in the mind of the Ameer. Now will this remove the anxiety from the mind of the Ameer, or will it raise a fresh anxiety, not only in the mind of the Ameer but in the minds of all the people of Afghanistan?²³³

With this question Syud Noor ended his presentation of Sher Ali's position and called on Pelly as the representative of "the great civilized English Government" to weigh what he had said and then, in several days, reply.²³⁴

Three days later Pelly presented the British Government's answer. He began by stating that Syud Noor's review had confirmed his conviction that there had been a great need for renewed talks between the two governments, and stressed the Viceroy's desire to avoid interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs while at the same time

²³²Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1877, "Minutes of meeting, 12 February 1877," p. 582.

²³³Ibid.

²³⁴Ibid.

attempting to avert any future meddling by others.²³⁵ Directing his remarks to Sher Ali's loss of confidence, Pelly disregarded Syud Noor's explanations and explained that Lytton was convinced that the difficulty had been caused by the late British Government's unwillingness to enter into a more definite agreement.²³⁶ Another cause of this demise in friendship had been the lack of frequent and confidential communications between Kabul and Calcutta.²³⁷ Turning to the question of Sher Ali's grievances, Pelly pointed out that Syud Noor's description showed that they had existed for many years. Sir Lewis then claimed that these resentments could have been prevented by a better knowledge of the Amir's attitude and explained Lytton's position that had an "intelligent British officer been in direct communication with the Ameer many of the alleged causes of His Highness's grievances and consequent resentments could not have taken place."²³⁸

The British envoy then proceeded to review the political situation in Central Asia and pointed out Afghanistan's exposed position. Pelly related that Lytton was most willing to support Sher Ali against any threat from

²³⁵Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1877, "Minutes of meeting, 15 February 1877," p. 583.

²³⁶Ibid.

²³⁷Ibid.

²³⁸Ibid.

external aggression and in so doing would refrain from making any demands not "plainly necessary" to enable him to fulfill Britain's obligations.²³⁹ Throughout his presentation Pelly went to great lengths to explain Lytton's desire to spare Sher Ali any embarrassment and assured Syud Noor that whatever the results of the present talks, Britain would continue to abide by the Treaty of 1855. Pelly, however, by way of emphasizing Sher Ali's isolated condition, reminded the Afghan envoy that the third Article of that agreement did not bind the British Government in any manner to support the Amir.²⁴⁰ Finally, he stressed that it was the Amir's decision either to accept or reject the English Government's friendly overtures. On this note the meeting ended. The next one was scheduled for February 19 and, as in agreement with his plan, Syud Noor promised to give a definite answer to the British demands.

By this point in the negotiations both envoys had presented their governments' positions. Syud Noor in three meetings had explained that the Amir's fears, contrary to British belief, were not based on the rejection of his requests for a closer agreement with the British Government. The proof of this lay in the fact that the British Government had been the responsible party in calling the conferences at Umballa in 1869 and Simla in 1873--Sher Ali had

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 584.

merely obliged. Instead, the Amir was upset over what he considered examples of British interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs. The British demand for the right to station officers in his territory was viewed as another instance of British intrusion. Despite Britain's knowledge of the fears of the Afghan people and their government's inability to protect the agents, the British Government continued to press this point; simultaneously it claimed that it wanted to restore the Amir's confidence and reduce his anxiety. These two desires contradicted each other.

Sir Lewis Pelly's reply acknowledged the validity of Syud Noor's argument and ignored any reference to the previous meetings. Instead, Pelly chose to declare that Sher Ali's admitted anxiety was reason enough for the present conference and in itself was an excellent argument for the establishment of direct communications with the Amir. However, and significantly, at this point the British envoy, by implication, included the stationing of a British officer at Kabul with the stationing of other officers on Afghanistan's frontier posts; this the British Government had never considered. The main reason for stationing officers inside Afghanistan had been to gather information from beyond its border, not to provide for better communication with Kabul. In refuting Syud Noor's argument Pelly perhaps unintentionally had combined demand for a permanent British mission at Kabul with the stationing of officers in other areas of Afghanistan. In another attempt to sweeten the obviously

bitter pill, he tried to convince the Afghan envoy that despite assurances from the former British Governments, Afghanistan was still threatened by a possible Russian invasion. Furthermore, this danger was so pressing that it alone should be enough to convince the Amir of the need for British support. Then came the rub; Sher Ali could only acquire such assistance by acceding to the posting of British officers in his territory. Then, to further emphasize Afghanistan's isolation, Pelly reminded the Afghan representatives that the 1855 agreement was non-reciprocal as it applied to Britain and he concluded by placing the complete responsibility for the success or failure of the conference and renewed Anglo-Afghan diplomatic relations in the hands of the Government of Afghanistan.

The next meeting, which proved to be the last official gathering of the Peshawar Conference, took place four days later on February 19, 1877. It was a Monday and all the members of both delegations were on hand. As usual Syud Noor opened his comments by avoiding the central issue. Instead he began by claiming that in Sher Ali's opinion the object of the meetings at Peshawar was to insure that the "usual friendship should remain on the former footing,"²⁴¹ and he expressed his confidence that the British Government would "never in any manner interfere in such manner as to

²⁴¹ Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1877, "Minutes of meeting, 19 February 1877," p. 585.

cause anxiety in the mind of the Ameer, or his successor or to shake the independence of Afghanistan."²⁴² By way of reply to Pelly's warning concerning Afghanistan's dangerous position, Syud Noor indicated that such a danger had been diminished by Anglo-Russian agreements and by the pledges of Lord Mayo and the Russian General Kaufmann.²⁴³ The Afghan envoy expressed the Government of Afghanistan's complete confidence in these arrangements. With these remarks concluded, Syud Noor then turned to the main question, the present British demands. He accused the British Government of knowing the real reasons for Sher Ali's fears and insinuated that Britain should not push forward any new causes for his anxiety.²⁴⁴ There were two types of danger, he explained, internal and external; the latter was not pressing and the former would only be enhanced by the presence of British officers.²⁴⁵ Syud Noor then categorically refused to discuss a new treaty and the establishment of a British agent at Kabul. He called Pelly's attention to the treaty of 1857:

In as much as the condition of Afghanistan was thoroughly well known to Lord Lawrence, he bound himself, in the 7th article of that Treaty, that the British Government might maintain an agent at Cabul on the part of the English Government, but he was not to be an Englishman. The Government of

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 587.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

Afghanistan will never in any manner consent to acknowledge the abrogation of this article.²⁴⁶

Apparently Syud Noor had been led by Pelly's argument at the last meeting to understand that a British officer in Kabul was a part of the plan to station officers inside Afghanistan, and since this was out of the question the rest of the British proposals must be rejected.

At this point however, Pelly interrupted. His patience by this time had worn out, and he was unprepared for the apparent rejection of Lytton's pre-condition. He declared that since Sher Ali had declined to accept that condition it was outside his instructions to discuss any other matters.²⁴⁷ Frustrated by the course the proceedings had taken and obviously angered by the rejection, he asked Syud Noor why, if the Amir put so much stock in always adhering to a treaty, he had continually refused to accept a temporary mission and had closed his border to British subjects and trade. He also bitterly reminded Syud Noor that the events of the last three years effectively gave lie to any Russian assurances of goodwill.²⁴⁸ Syud Noor interjected the suggestion that Pelly send the comments made by the Afghan delegation to Lytton for any final decision. Pelly agreed to this but added that

In the meantime the commencement of negotiations must be postponed, and I feel bound to tell the Envoy, that

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

in my opinion, there is no probability of the British Government agreeing to negotiate on any basis other than that to which my powers have already been confined; and I fear that the Ameer has missed an opportunity, which may never recur, of greatly strengthening his position.²⁴⁹

Nevertheless, even though the formal meetings had been temporarily suspended pending a reply from Lytton, correspondence continued between the two envoys. On February 27, Pelly, in a note to Syud Noor, complained that news had been received which told that a holy war against the British Government was being preached by Sher Ali and that a Russian agent had been received at Kabul.²⁵⁰ In a cordial answer Syud Noor indicated that the reports of the holy war were merely rumors emanating from unknown sources among the common people and that they had no validity. He also informed Pelly that the Russian agent was actually only a messenger and a native at that.²⁵¹

During this waiting period Syud Noor's health continued to deteriorate. On the 27th he had solicited medical aid and had been placed under the care of a civil surgeon. However, on March 9 at the envoy's request the doctor

²⁴⁹Ibid., p. 588.

²⁵⁰Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2191, 1877, "Letter, Pelly to Syud Noor, 27 February 1877," p. 651.

²⁵¹Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2191, 1877, "Letter, Syud Noor to Pelly, 3 March 1877," p. 653.

discontinued his visits.²⁵² At last Lytton's answer arrived. However, due to Syud Noor's worsening condition, Pelly was unable to arrange a meeting and he was forced to rely on letters to carry on the negotiations. In his letter to Syud Noor, Pelly explained that Lytton had the opinion that the Afghan envoy's statements fell into two groups; the first dealt with past events and the second related to the present.²⁵³ Regarding the first part Lytton expressed his regrets concerning the incidents that had upset the Amir but assured the Afghan envoy that they had not been "occasioned by any deliberate or intentional or even conscious disregard of the Ameer's feelings."²⁵⁴ Once more he was sure they could have been prevented by the presence of a British officer at Kabul. But since the British Government had no intention of pressing this upon the Amir, Lytton considered it a waste of time to dwell on the first part at any length.

With respect to the second part of Syud Noor's statements, Lytton complained that he had been unable to understand what the envoy was trying to achieve. In his own interpretation the Viceroy believed that what Syud Noor

²⁵²Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1877, "Letter, Pelly to Sher Ali, 30 March 1877," p. 596.

²⁵³Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1877, "Letter, Pelly to Syud Noor, 15 March 1877," p. 588.

²⁵⁴Ibid.

had tried to explain was that Sher Ali was dissatisfied with the relations between the two governments up to the present. The Amir was equally dissatisfied with the current British proposals forwarded to improve those relations, but at the same time he had no counter-proposals.²⁵⁵ If this interpretation was correct there was no basis for negotiations. Lytton then warned the Afghan envoy that consequent upon the unconditional rejection of the British proposals

the British Government shall have no choice but to regard His Highness the Ameer Sher Ali of Cabul henceforth as a neighbor with whom its relations are neither satisfactory nor susceptible of improvement.²⁵⁶

Despite this threat, at this point Lytton wanted the conference to be a success; moreover, he was no fool. After a close review of Syud Noor's arguments and Pelly's replies, Lytton realized that Pelly had confused two separate issues, that of a permanent British officer of Kabul which was not part of the proposed treaty and the pre-condition which allowed Britain to post officers inside Afghanistan on its frontiers. Lytton complained that Syud Noor had directed the majority of his comments toward the impossibility of receiving a European agent at Kabul and had ignored the reception of officers in other sections of the Amir's dominions.²⁵⁷ The Viceroy, pleading confusion, then asked for a

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 589.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

clarification on exactly what had been rejected, the residence of British officers on Afghanistan's frontier, which was the pre-condition to the opening of negotiations, or a refusal to re-open the question (which the British Government never pressed) of a British agent at Kabul.²⁵⁸ At this point Pelly interjected. He had been ordered to request a prompt and definite answer from Syud Noor; either Sher Ali desired a closer alliance with the British Government or he did not; if he did the Amir must be prepared to accept Lytton's pre-condition as part of that agreement.²⁵⁹ Pelly insisted that the Government of India had assumed since the Amir had appointed an envoy that he had already accepted the condition implied by that appointment:

if, however, as would seem to be the case, the Ameer, influenced by circumstances or considerations still unknown to the Viceroy, has completely changed his mind since he entered upon the negotiations . . . the very last thing desired or attempted by the British Government would be to pin His Highness pedantically to the fulfillment of an understanding from which he now wishes to withdraw, or the adoption of an arrangement which he does not regard with satisfaction.²⁶⁰

In reply to this letter a messenger from Syud Noor arrived at Pelly's quarters five days later and explained that the envoy was too ill to attend a regular meeting but that he would be willing to meet with Pelly to comment on Lytton's dispatch. Pelly, however, was exasperated by the

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

apparent contradiction and was convinced that Syud Noor was only stalling for time. He flatly refused to listen to anything other than an answer to the Viceroy's question and when the messenger informed him that he had no instructions to any questions Pelly dismissed him.²⁶¹ Six days later Syud Noor was dead²⁶² and along with him the Peshawar Conference.

During the final period of the envoy's illness the Government of India had received information indicating that a replacement for the failing Syud Noor was on his way to Peshawar and was instructed to accept Lytton's demands.²⁶³ Yet, in spite of this knowledge, or perhaps because of it, upon the death of the Afghan envoy, Lytton decided to end the conference. He wired Pelly on the 30th to:

close conference immediately, on the ground that basis on which we agreed to negotiate has not been acknowledged by Ameer; that Mir Akhor not being authorized to negotiate on that basis, nor you on any other, conference is terminated ipso facto: and that you will leave Peshawar on a stated day. The date of it you will fix yourself, but it should be as early as conveniently

²⁶¹Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1877, "Memorandum, 20 March 1877," p. 594.

²⁶²Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1877, "Telegram, Pelly to Lytton, 30 March 1877," p. 595.

²⁶³Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1877, "Lytton to Salisbury, 10 May 1877," p. 545.

possible, in order to show we are in earnest and avoid further entanglements.²⁶⁴

By the end of March Lytton's impatience had got the best of him. After the experiences of his quick success at Jacobabad and the impressive and exhilarating ceremony at Delhi he had not been prepared for Sher Ali's rejection, especially following such lengthy and awkward proceedings as had taken place at Peshawar. The Viceroy's suspicions of Sher Ali appeared vindicated by the protracted and barren debates; he like Pelly assumed that the Amir was only playing for time.²⁶⁵ His frustration over the thought of Britain's imperial interests being thwarted by so insignificant a power encouraged his irrational conclusions. In a moment of poignant despair he wrote:

I believe that our Northwest frontier presents at this moment a spectacle unique in the world; at least I know of no other spot where after 25 years of peaceful occupation, a great civilized power has obtained so little influence over its semi-savage neighbors, and acquired so little knowledge of them that the country within a day's ride of its most important garrison is an absolute terra incognita, and that there is absolutely no security for British life a mile or two beyond that border.²⁶⁶

In this frame of mind frustration quickly metamorphosed into

²⁶⁴Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1877, "Telegram, Lytton to Pelly, 30 March 1877," p. 596.

²⁶⁵Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1877, "Lytton to Salisbury, 10 May 1877," p. 543.

²⁶⁶Minute by Lytton, 22 April 1877, cited in Fraser-Tyttler, p. 185.

bitterness, and Lytton became determined to force Sher Ali (now referred to as that "savage with a touch of insanity")²⁶⁷ either to be an ally on Britain's terms or be considered a potential enemy. Less than a month after the close of the conference he admitted to the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab that, "My present object is to weaken and embarrass the position of the Amir by all the indirect means in my power."²⁶⁸ These attitudes had been growing in Lytton's mind since the previous autumn. At that time he had written that:

if he [Sher Ali] does not promptly prove himself our loyal friend we shall be obliged to regard him as our enemy and treat him accordingly. A tool in the hand of Russia I will never allow him to become. Such a tool it would be my duty to break before it could be used.²⁶⁹

It is quite apparent that for some time Lytton had viewed Anglo-Afghan diplomatic relations as essentially a problem of personality and had come to differentiate between Afghanistan and its ruler. Following Peshawar this tendency became more pronounced. In a dispatch to Salisbury Lytton even reported that the Afghan population in no way shared the anti-British prejudice exhibited by the Amir and insisted that "relations with the people of Afghanistan are as

²⁶⁷Fraser-Tyttler, p. 132.

²⁶⁸Lytton to Sir Robert Egerton, 23 April 1877, cited in Alder, p. 117.

²⁶⁹Lytton to C. Gridlestone, 27 August 1876, cited in Singhal, p. 14.

²⁷²Lytton Papers, 5182 p. 261, cited in Singhal, p. 23.

friendly as ever."²⁷⁰ Privately he noted that "between Afghanistan and the Amir there is a practical distinction. We can get along without Sher Ali, he cannot get on without us."²⁷¹ Later, when Britain invaded Afghanistan, it would do so to make war on Sher Ali, not his people.

However, while the failure at Peshawar had been a disappointment for Lytton, the conference's collapse provided him with an excuse for initiating a new and vigorous anti-Afghan policy. One of the first acts of that policy was the recall of the native agent from Kabul, a drastic and uncalled-for move that severed all official communication with the Amir. The extent of Lytton's haughty vindictiveness was further illustrated by his steadfast refusal to reopen negotiations unless the Amir accepted his condition in advance and "apologized for his breach of faith and recent bad conduct."²⁷² Finally, to complete the immediate results of the conference's miscarriage, Lytton initiated a military buildup along the northwest frontier, which had the dual benefit of serving as a defense against any possible Russian encroachment and simultaneously enabled him to execute an offensive against the Amir should circumstances warrant.

²⁷⁰Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmd. 2190, 1877, "Lytton to Salisbury, 10 May 1877," p. 545.

²⁷¹Lytton to Cavagnari, 19 May 1877, cited in Balfour p. 162.

²⁷²Lytton Papers, 5182 p. 261, cited in Singhal, p. 23.

While these events were taking place in India, the news of Lytton's diplomatic activity reached England and caused a mild sensation. The Times lashed out at what it considered Lytton's irresponsibility in pressing the Amir and called on the Government to end its aggressive actions.²⁷³ In the House of Commons a lively debate ensued in which the Liberals attacked the forward policy as unjustified. The Conservative Government, however, was able to weather the storm by pleading that such a course of action had been dictated by circumstances.²⁷⁴ In October Salisbury was able to extend Her Majesty's Government's "cordial approval" to Lytton and to praise him for his "high sense of patience and discrimination."²⁷⁵ In the same dispatch the Secretary for India advised Lytton not to reject any advances from Sher Ali provided they were based on Lytton's former conditions. However, he added that:

if on the other hand, he continues to maintain an attitude of isolation and scarcely veiled hostility, the British Government stands unpledged to any obligations and in any contingencies which may arise in Afghanistan, will be at liberty to adopt such measures for the protection and permanent tranquillity of the North-west frontier of Her Majesty's Indian Dominions as the circumstances of the moment may render expedient, without regard to the wishes of the Ameer Sher Ali, or the interests of his dynasty.²⁷⁶

²⁷³Editorial, The Times (London), April 16, 1877, p. 9.

²⁷⁴Singhal, p. 22.

²⁷⁵Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons & Command), 1878-79, Vol. LVI (Accounts and Papers, Vol. 15), Cmnd. 2190, 1877, "Salisbury to Lytton, 4 October 1877," p. 596.

²⁷⁶Ibid., p. 598.

This statement was a complete vindication of Lytton's activity and placed the blame for the situation squarely upon the shoulders of the Amir. Furthermore it clearly indicated that the British Government, despite its assertions to the contrary, was prepared to disregard Afghanistan's independence in favor of India's frontier security. On November 23, 1878, British forces invaded Afghanistan, deposed Sher Ali and, as part of the resulting settlement, established a permanent British Mission at Kabul.²⁷⁷ Lytton thereby achieved by force of arms what he had been unable to attain at the conference table, an independent Afghanistan under British suzerainty. This success, however, was short-lived, for the following September Lytton's designs were destroyed when mutinous Afghan troops rioted and massacred the British Mission. Lawrence's warnings were thus vindicated. The story of the Second Afghan War and the events that precipitated it are beyond the scope of this narrative. Nevertheless some final comments are necessary in order to place Lytton and the Peshawar Conference in the proper perspective regarding Anglo-Afghan diplomatic relations and British imperial history.

The Central Asian confrontation between Britain and Russia was one of the key considerations of nineteenth century British foreign policy. Writing in 1880 and referring to the British Government's reactions to the steady advance

²⁷⁷ For an excellent review of the events leading up to the actual invasion see Maurice Cowling, "Lytton, the Cabinet and the Russians," *The English Historical Review*, LXXI (January, 1961), pp. 68-96.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

On November 21, 1878, British forces invaded Afghanistan, dethroned Sher Ali and, as part of the resulting settlement, established a permanent British Mission at Kabul.²⁷⁷ Lytton thereby achieved by force of arms what he had been unable to attain at the conference table, an independent Afghanistan under British suzerainty. This success, however, was short-lived, for the following September Lytton's designs were destroyed when mutinous Afghan troops rioted and massacred the British Mission. Lawrence's warnings were thus vindicated. The story of the Second Afghan War and the events that precipitated it are beyond the scope of this narrative. Nevertheless some final comments are necessary in order to place Lytton and the Peshawar Conference in the proper perspective regarding Anglo-Afghan diplomatic relations and British imperial history.

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of Russia in Central Asia, Lord Stangford remarked: "We are constantly oscillating between utter neglect and raving panic."²⁷⁸ As may be discerned from this statement, two distinct and contradictory schools of thought developed concerning the Russian threat to India. The attitude toward Afghanistan was a major consideration of both schools. The first, referred to as masterly inactivity, made non-intervention in Afghanistan's internal affairs its hallmark. This approach was basically sound, but under the pressure exerted by the Russian advance and a corresponding wave of Russophobia, it was replaced by an aggressive forward policy. This plan, designed to increase British influence in Afghanistan, generated "more heat, more controversy, more bitterness than any other Indian policy in the nineteenth century."²⁷⁹

The problem of the forward policy, however, was that it had been based on contradictory assumptions. The British Government thought it possible to increase its influence in Afghanistan and yet continue to remain aloof from Afghan internal affairs. This proved impossible. However, given patience and appreciation of Afghan interests and most important, a compromising attitude on the part of the representatives of the British Government, a mutually satisfactory

²⁷⁸ John Adye, "The Military Position of Russia and England in Central Asia," The Edinburgh Review, CLI (January, 1880), p. 70.

²⁷⁹ Swinson, p. 127.

agreement might have been reached. Lytton's efforts, which culminated in the Peshawar Conference, were none of these. Previous writers have belabored the obvious facts, that Lytton was impatient, vain, reckless and arrogant, and used these character flaws to explain the fiasco at Peshawar. However, while these limitations contributed to his inflexibility they do not in themselves explain Lytton's failure.

It is important to remember that despite his suspicious and condescending nature, Lytton was not insincere in his desire for peace. But Lytton was a man of strong convictions and very much a man of his time. He believed in the natural superiority of Britain and was not prepared to modify these convictions for the benefit of a barbarous oriental despot. Moreover, he was in complete agreement with the Home government's concept of the situation in Central Asia. Eleven months in India did nothing to alter his view; if anything his experiences merely confirmed his previously formed convictions. He arrived in India totally ignorant of the intricacies of Indian civilization and without any appreciation for the difficulties inherent in Anglo-Afghan diplomatic relations. Noting with great satisfaction the great disparity in strength between Britain and Afghanistan, Lytton became convinced that compromise (which has the connotation of an agreement between equals) was hardly necessary. It was enough for Britain to be generous and grant the Amir's previous wishes for it to increase its influence in Afghanistan and effectively block any Russian threat to

India. At Peshawar, therefore, Lytton was only willing to negotiate after receiving an Afghan agreement to Britain's principal demand, the right to station British officers inside the Amir's territory. When this was refused, it only served to convince Lytton that his prejudices were correct and to harden his attitude. At this point Lytton's inflexibility made itself felt, for the Peshawar Conference marked a fault line in his administration. From 1876 until the proceedings at Peshawar failed, Lytton had been prepared to gain his ends by utilizing essentially peaceful methods. Peshawar was decisive in convincing him that stronger measures would be necessary. After that conference Lytton "was determined to drive the Ameer; never once did he seriously try to lead him."²⁸⁰ War was then only a matter of time.

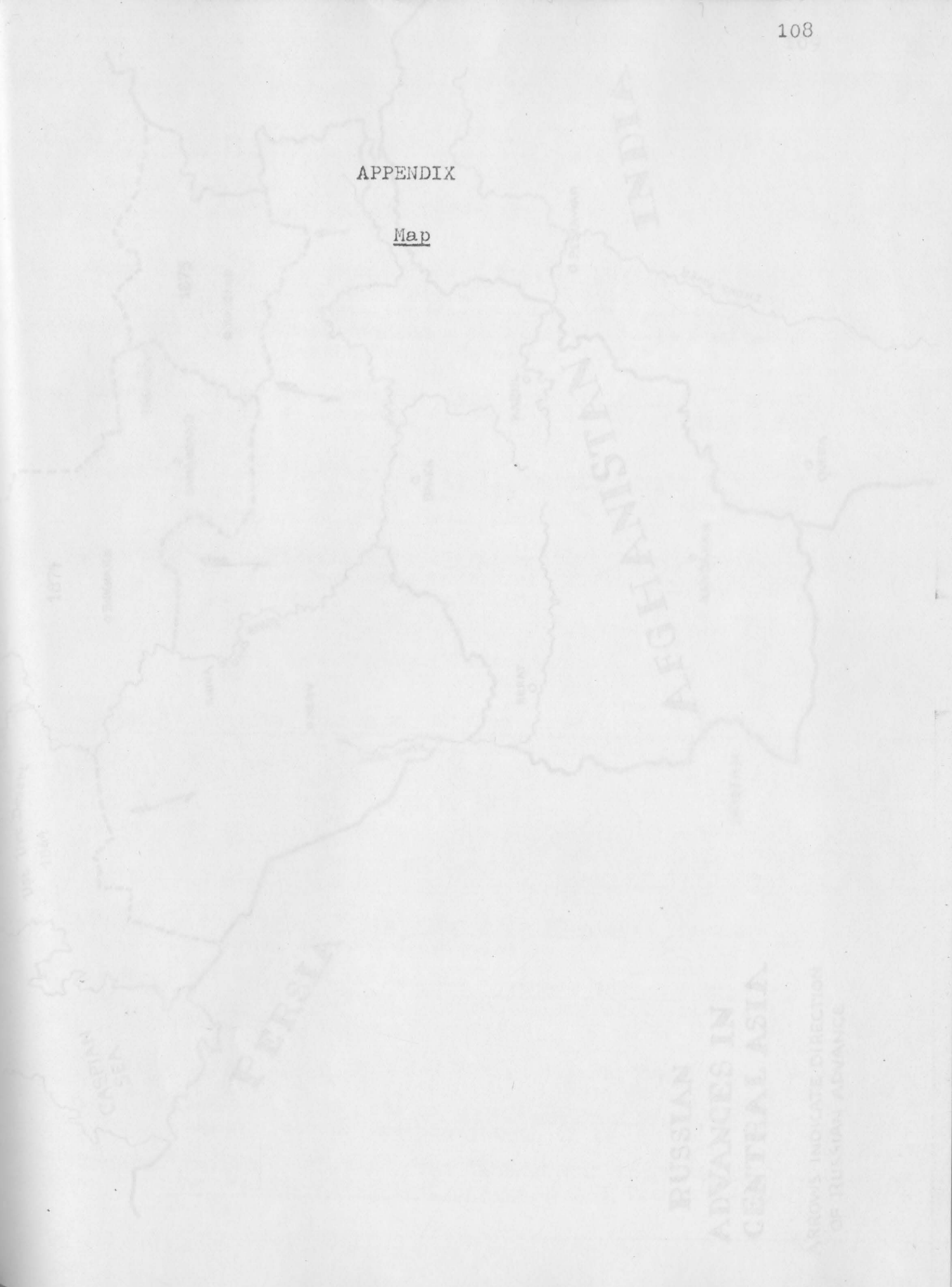
In the larger context of British imperial history, the forward policy as it was applied to Afghanistan during the late 1870's represents an early example of the shift that occurred in the dynamics of late Victorian imperialism; a change from security through the extension of influence to security based upon diplomacy and intervention. The failure at Peshawar in itself was an insignificant episode in the long and difficult history of Anglo-Afghan efforts to achieve a solution to the problem posed by Russian expansion. But,

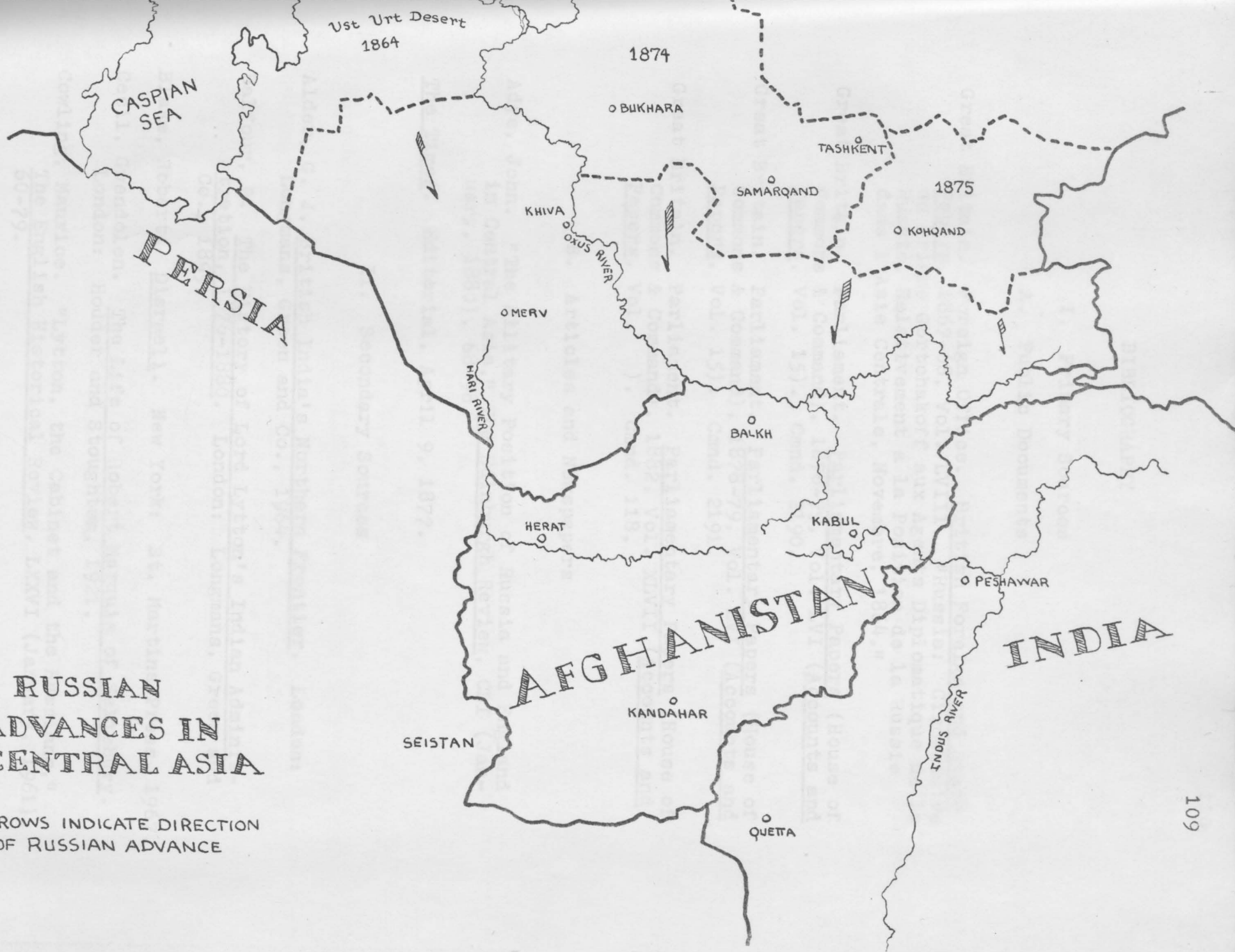
²⁸⁰ Bisheshar Prasad, The Foundations of India's Foreign Policy (Calcutta: Longmans, Green and Co., 1955), p. 84.

the ultimate failure of Britain, in this instance, to secure its aims by an extension of its influence helped to initiate a trend in imperial efforts which culminated thirty years later in the disastrous Boer War; a trend which, when all the excuses have been made for it, was in fact a substitution of might for right.

APPENDIX

Map





Ust Urt Desert
1864

1874

CASPIAN
SEA

○ BUKHARA

TASHKENT

1875

○ SAMARQAND

○ KOHQAND

○ KHIVA

OXUS RIVER

○ MERV

HARI RIVER

○ BALKH

○ HERAT

○ KABUL

○ PESHAWAR

AFGHANISTAN

INDIA

○ KANDAHAR

SEISTAN

INDUS RIVER

○ QUETTA

**RUSSIAN
ADVANCES IN
CENTRAL ASIA**

ARROWS INDICATE DIRECTION
OF RUSSIAN ADVANCE

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