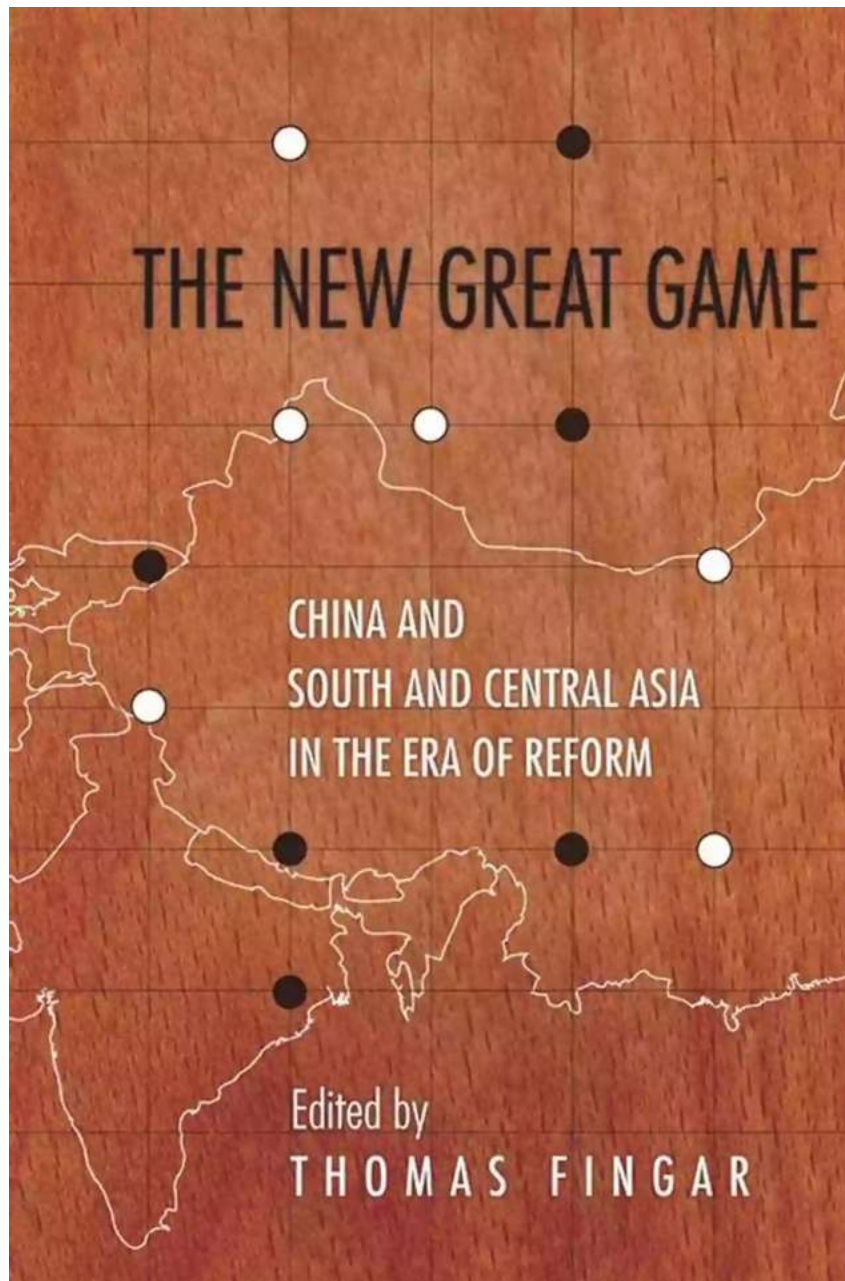


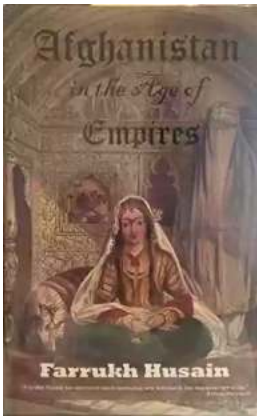
# **The Great Game for South and Central Asia: Unveiling the Strategic Jostle for Power**

For centuries, South and Central Asia have been the theater of power rivalry, political intrigue, and strategic maneuvers. Historically known as "The Great Game," this ongoing power struggle between regional and global powers has shaped the destiny of nations and influenced geopolitical dynamics in this strategically significant part of the world.



## **The Roots of the Great Game**

The Great Game finds its roots in the 19th century, when the British and Russian empires vied for influence and control over the region's vast territories, untapped resources, and strategic trade routes. It was a complex chessboard where the two powers sought to expand their empires, secure buffer zones, and safeguard their interests.



## Afghanistan in the Age of Empires: the Great Game for South and Central Asia

by Otto von Corvin([Print Replica] Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.3 out of 5

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With renewed interest and shifting alliances, the 21st century has witnessed a resurgence of the Great Game. Global powers, such as the United States, China, and increasingly Russia, have joined the race for power in this region, driven by economic, security, and geopolitical incentives.

### Strategic Importance of South and Central Asia

South and Central Asia comprise a vast region spanning from the eastern shores of the Mediterranean to the western borders of China. It encompasses countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and many others.

This region holds immense strategic importance due to its abundant natural resources, including oil, gas, minerals, and rare earth elements. Furthermore, it serves as a crucial hub linking Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, making it a vital transportation and trade route.

The ongoing war in Afghanistan, the rise of international terrorism, and the geopolitical tensions between key players have further intensified the contest for

power in the region.

## **Key Players and Their Interests**

### **1. United States**

The United States has been a major player in the Great Game, particularly after the 9/11 attacks. Its primary goals include ensuring regional stability, combating terrorism, and protecting its economic interests. By maintaining military bases in Afghanistan and forging alliances with countries like India, the US seeks to counterbalance the growing influence of Russia and China.

### **2. China**

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has elevated its strategic ambitions in South and Central Asia. It aims to enhance connectivity, promote economic cooperation, and expand its geopolitical influence. With substantial investments in infrastructure projects across the region, China seeks to secure access to resources and create a trade corridor linking it to Europe.

### **3. Russia**

Russia has long-standing historical, cultural, and economic ties with countries in the region. It views Central Asia as its traditional sphere of influence. By maintaining military bases in the region and leveraging energy resources, Russia seeks to safeguard its strategic interests, counter Western influence, and prevent the spillover of instability from neighboring Afghanistan.

### **4. India**

India, as a rising regional power, seeks to establish its dominance in South Asia and counter the strategic encirclement by China. It aims to ensure stability in the region, secure its borders, and enhance economic cooperation. India's

engagement in Afghanistan has focused on development projects and capacity-building to foster goodwill and counter Pakistani influence.

## **The Battlegrounds: Afghanistan and Pakistan**

Afghanistan and Pakistan have become the main battleground for the Great Game, owing to their geopolitical and geostrategic significance. With a history of instability, terrorism, and ethnic tensions, these countries are crucial in determining the balance of power in the region.

The United States' presence in Afghanistan, aimed at combating terrorism and preventing the resurgence of extremist groups such as the Taliban, has been met with resistance from Russia, which fears a spillover of instability into neighboring Central Asia.

Pakistan, with its complex relationship with the US, has also become a focal point in the Great Game. Its geographical location and nuclear capabilities make it an important player for regional powers seeking to secure influence. China's investments in Pakistan's infrastructure, such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), further solidify its interests in the region.

## **Implications and Future Prospects**

The Great Game for South and Central Asia will continue to shape the geopolitical landscape of the region and impact global powers' interests. The quest for resources, counterterrorism efforts, and efforts to create strategic spheres of influence will remain key drivers of the power struggle.

South and Central Asia's significance in global trade, energy security, and regional stability guarantees sustained attention from major powers seeking to safeguard their interests. However, the challenge lies in striking a delicate

balance between cooperation and competition to prevent tensions from escalating into conflicts.

The strategic jostle for power in this region demands a nuanced and holistic approach to address the complex issues at hand. Dialogue, cooperation, and respect for the sovereignty of nations will be key to achieving a stable and prosperous South and Central Asia.

## The Great Game Continues

As the Great Game unfolds, we witness the ever-evolving dynamics of power politics in South and Central Asia. The strategic stakes remain high, and the competition between global players intensifies.

It is crucial for policymakers, strategists, and global citizens to remain informed and engaged to understand the implications of this strategic jostle for power. Only through thoughtful analysis and informed discussions can we hope to navigate the complexities of the Great Game and contribute to a more peaceful and prosperous future for South and Central Asia.



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This book has a primary focus on the struggle for power of Shah Shuja UI Mulk paving the way for the first Afghan war. The book charts the rise and fall of Durrani rule in Afghanistan and what is now Pakistan. The Durrani empire had been the second largest Eighteenth Century Muslim empire after the Ottomans. The immediate beneficiary of Durrani decline were the Sikhs who grabbed most of the Punjab, the Peshawar valley and Kashmir. Over the course of the latter half of the nineteenth century Afghanistan had shrunk to its present modern boundaries. What is missing in many narratives is the Afghan perspective on events and so I cite the statements of Afghan participants as detailed by contemporary witnesses.

Uniquely I highlight the contribution of Afghan women to the armed struggle against those that sought to invade Afghan lands. I evaluate the mistreatment of Afghan women by foreign invaders, which has led to armed Afghan uprisings throughout Afghan history. The role Afghan Women played in combat as well as in poetry to inspire their men to fight is illustrated. For example, though the battle of Maiwand during the Second Anglo-Afghan war is well known for the charge by Malalai on horseback, no contemporary author has written about the first such charge by a burka clad woman against the British, during May 1842, to avenge her husband's death at the head of thousands of Afghans, which took place not far from Maiwand in Zemindawar, Helmand. Afghan women have been recorded as fighting in battles from the fall of Saddozai ruled city of Multan, Punjab fighting the Sikhs (Chapter 1) and at the fall of Ghazni in 1839 (Chapter 5).

The character of Sir William Hay Macnaghten is crucial to an understanding of the war. Macnaghten was a judge and I examine Macnaghten's behaviour in the light of his former judicial role. A Judge should be someone who can be held to his word. This was not the case with Macnaghten. After the victorious entry into

Kandahar, Macnaghten obtained a new treaty with Shuja allowing for a British resident at Kabul and 50 British officers to train a new army. Additionally at Ghazni in 1839, Nawab Jubbar Khan had offered a viable power sharing compromise with Dost Mahomed Khan as Shuja's Wazir, but Macnaghten rejected this. Macnaghten should have known about the merits of an amicable solution rather than pursuing the thorny path of adversarial conflict with unknown outcomes. Furthermore Macnaghten failed to adhere to the tripartite agreement terms that precluded contact between the British-Indian forces and Afghan civilians without Shuja's consent. When Shuja objected to fraternisation between Afghan women and the British soldiers, Shuja was foolishly ignored. Thereafter when the Kabul uprising occurred Macnaghten failed to adhere to his promises made to the Afghan resistance leaders and instead tried to make a more beneficial deal with Mohammed Akbar Khan. It was these decisions taken by Macnaghten that paved the way for war and disaster for British forces.

Chapter 1 covers the rise of the Sikhs under Ranjit Singh who gobbled up the former Durrani domains in the Punjab and details the plight of Shah Shuja as he escapes from Ranjit Singh. My ancestor was the custodian of the Koh-i-noor for Shah Shuja and the circumstances of the loss of this diamond to Runjeet Singh are detailed.

Chapter 2 further lifts the veil on the sexual exploitation of Afghan women belonging to Shuja's household by British officers in Ludhiana, which was a trend that continued with the later British occupation of Kabul. The Punjab Archives at Lahore include documents discussing the elopment of a Durrani princess with a British officer. Mullah Shakoor provides a detailed statement about this incident recording that "Our reputation and honor are in your keeping. If you take suitable notice of the present affair it will of course be an intimidation to others. If not our residence here will be extremely difficult.





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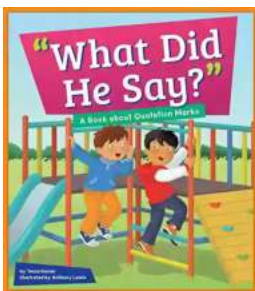
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