



SHAPING NATIONAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITIES: BORDERS OF AFGHANISTAN AND RUSSIAN TUR- KESTAN IN THE 19TH CENTURY

Shokhruz SHARIPOV

National University of Uzbekistan, Institute of History of the Academy of
Sciences of Uzbekistan, Tashkent-Uzbekistan, E-mail: Shohruz@i.ua

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1460-2902>

DOI: <https://doi.org/>

Makale Türü	Araştırma - Research	Article Type
Geliş Tarihi	1 Ekim - October 2025	Received
Kabul Tarihi	17 Aralık - December 2025	Acceptance
Yayın Tarihi	31 Aralık - December 2025	Publication
Sayfa Aralığı	214 - 236	Pages Range

Shokhruz Sh DOI: <https://doi.org/aripov>, “Shaping National and Ethnic Identi-
ties: Borders of Afghanistan and Russian Turkestan in the 19th Century”, *Academic
Literature the Journal of Social Sciences Researches (AKALID)*, Volume: 3,
Number: 3, December 2025, p. 214-236.

Abstract

The 19th century marked a pivotal period in the formation of national and ethnic identities along the borderlands of Afghanistan and Russian Turkestan. The geopolitical rivalry between the British and Russian Empires, known as the Great Game, led to the establishment of new borders that not only served political interests but also profoundly impacted the cultural, ethnic, and social landscapes of the region. These borders created distinct national identities and reinforced divisions among ethnic groups such as Pashtuns, Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Turkmen, reshaping their historical relationships. This article explores the role of borders in shaping local identities through migration, trade, governance, and cultural exchange. It examines how borders imposed by external powers influenced tribal structures, local governance, and inter-ethnic dynamics, ultimately solidifying notions of nationhood and cultural distinctiveness. The study highlights the dual nature of these borders as both barriers and zones of interaction, contributing to evolving concepts of identity in Afghanistan and Central Asia. The findings provide a historical perspective on how 19th-century border-making practices continue to shape contemporary identity politics in the region.

Keywords: Turkestan, Afghanistan, Russian, Ethnic Identity, National Identity.

Introduction

The nineteenth century represents a critical juncture in the historical development of Central Asia, characterized by imperial competition, territorial reconfiguration, and profound socio-political change. The establishment of borders between Afghanistan and Russian Turkestan was a central outcome of this period, emerging largely from the geopolitical rivalry between the Russian and British empires, commonly referred to as the “*Great Game*.” These borders were not neutral or purely administrative constructs; rather, they were instrumental in reshaping political authority, social organization, and the formation of national and ethnic identities across the region. Prior to the imposition of imperial boundaries, Central Asia was defined by fluid frontiers, overlapping sovereignties, and interconnected networks of trade, migration, and cultural exchange. Ethnic communities such as Uzbeks, Tajiks, Turkmen, Pashtuns, and Kyrgyz maintained complex patterns of interaction that transcended fixed territorial limits. The nineteenth-century border-making process disrupted these long-standing relationships by imposing rigid political divisions that often ignored local realities and historical continuities. The demarcation of the Afghan-Russian Turkestan frontier institutionalized new forms of governance and categorization, compelling populations to negotiate their identities within the frameworks of imperial administration and emerging state structures. In this context, ethnic and national identities became increasingly politicized, shaped not only by local traditions but also by external power interests, administrative practices, and territorial definitions. Borders thus functioned as mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, redefining concepts of belonging, loyalty, and political affiliation. This article explores the role of nineteenth-century border formation between Afghanistan and Russian Turkestan in the construction and transformation of national and ethnic identities. By examining imperial policies, diplomatic agreements, and local responses, it argues that borders were active agents in historical change, influencing identity formation and contributing to the enduring political and cultural dynamics of Central Asia.

1. Borders Of Afghanistan And Russian Turkestan In The 19th Century

As we know, the present-day state of Afghanistan, which is directly the “*successor*” of Afghanistan, first appeared on the map of Asia in 1747. The state structures that existed earlier in this region are not directly related to the current Afghanistan from a statehood perspective¹. In scholarly literature, the Afghan state that existed between 1747 and 1818 is known as the “*Durrani Empire*” – a name derived from the ruling dynasty². Interestingly, the rulers of this dynasty pursued an aggressive expansionist policy during their reign: they annexed regions such as Khorasan and Herat,

¹ Ganda Singh. Ahmad Shah Durrani: father of modern Afghanistan. Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1959. 457 p.

² Рейснер И. М. Развитие феодализма и образование государства у афганцев. М.: издательство Академии наук СССР, 1954. 416 с.

the area known as Afghan Turkestan, Punjab, and even parts of Kashmir³ – even though the geographical center of this state was initially the city of Kandahar and its surrounding areas⁴. Thus, by the end of the 18th century, Afghanistan encompassed a territory even larger than present-day Afghanistan. However, in the 19th century and beyond, some of the lands that were once part of Afghanistan remained outside its borders.

Additionally, during the second half of the 18th century, a trend emerged in Afghanistan's foreign policy characterized by territorial expansion and the annexation of new lands. This trend continued into the 19th century, but it was now carried out by a different Afghan dynasty. It was during this period, in the second half of the 18th century, that one of the first borders of Afghanistan, which remains to this day, was established – namely, its border with Iran. Despite the aggressive expansionist policies of the Durrani Empire, it turned out to be a weak state structure, which collapsed in the early decades of the 19th century. During this time, Afghanistan entered a short-lived "feudal fragmentation" period. However, a new dynasty – the Barakzoy dynasty – succeeded in not only ending this political fragmentation but also in expanding the country's territory, either through conquest or peaceful annexation. As a result, by the end of the 19th century, Afghanistan had established its national borders, which have largely remained unchanged to this day.

At the end of the 19th century, the borders of Afghanistan were artificially drawn by external powers – primarily the British Empire. This process led to the division of the natural territories of many ethnic groups in the region. This particularly affected major ethnic groups such as the Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks, leading to a number of issues regarding the preservation of their national identity and their place within the state structure. These divisions created significant challenges in terms of maintaining cohesion among Afghanistan's diverse ethnic groups and ensuring their representation in the state's governance⁵. For example, in the work of Ewan, the political situation of Afghanistan in the 19th century and the role of ethnic groups within the state structure is described as follows: "During the reign of Abdur Rahman Khan (1880–1901), the current borders of Afghanistan were established. He sought to consolidate central authority by uniting various ethnic groups, including Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks. However, this process was often carried out through violence and coercion, leading to heightened ethnic tensions." This highlights the complex and often violent nature of the state-building process in Afghanistan, where the effort to unify diverse ethnic groups under a single national identity contributed

³ История Афганистана с древнейших времен до наших дней / Отв. ред. Ю. В. Ганковский. М.: Мысль, 1982. 128-130 с.

⁴ Массон В. М., Ромодин В. А. История Афганистана. Т. 2. Афганистан в Новое время. М.: Наука, 1965. С.95-96

⁵ Martin Ewans. Afghanistan: A Short History of Its People and Politics Harper Collins Publishers Inc. United of America. 2002. p. 9

to long-term social and political challenges⁶. In 1893, the border line (Durand Line) drawn as part of the agreement between the British colonizers and Afghan Amir Abdur Rahman Khan caused the most harm to the Pashtun ethnic group. This line artificially divided the historically unified Pashtun tribes between two states – Afghanistan and British India (*present-day Pakistan*). Furthermore, Ewans also discusses the establishment of the Durand Line and its consequences for the Pashtun people: "In 1893, the Durand Line was established between British India and Afghanistan, dividing the Pashtun tribes between the two states. This division negatively impacted the Pashtuns' national identity and territorial claims, contributing to instability in the region." The division of the Pashtuns along this border disrupted their unity and had lasting effects on their sense of national identity, leading to ongoing territorial disputes and contributing to regional instability⁷.

The Pashtuns, who had maintained a strong unity through their language, customs, and tribal system, had lived for centuries in a single ethnic space. After being divided by the border, this ethnic group found itself within the territories of two sovereign states, which led to differences in their spiritual, social, and political approaches. While Afghanistan considered the Pashtun nation as a people foundational to the state, India (later Pakistan) sought to subordinate them to central authority. As a result, throughout the 20th century, these regions witnessed multiple instances of political dissent, uprisings, and demands for autonomy. This division had a profound impact on the Pashtuns' sense of identity and their relationship with the state structures they were now part of, fueling conflicts and struggles for greater independence or recognition within both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In India, due to concerns over the Pashtuns' "spirit of independence," the tribal uprisings in Waziristan, and the Panjdeh incident between the Russians and the Afghans, there was growing public opinion that a border line needed to be established to prevent tribal unrest from spilling over into India and to stop the Russian advance. To address this issue, commissions were set up to oversee the process. The first of these was the Afghanistan Border Commission of 1885, led by A.C. Yate, which was tasked with demarcating the territory between the Hari Rud and Amu Darya rivers. This effort reflected the growing concerns of the British colonial administration about the stability of the region and the need to establish clear boundaries to manage potential threats from both the Pashtun tribes and Russian expansion. The establishment of these borders was part of the broader context of the Great Game, where imperial powers sought to secure their influence in Central Asia and South Asia⁸. Although this movement aimed to prevent Russia's entry into Afghanistan, the most serious concern was the rumors about Russian geodesists venturing into the Pamir

⁶ Martin Ewans. *Afghanistan: A Short History of Its People and Politics* Harper Collins Publishers Inc. United of America. 2002. p. 74

⁷ Martin Ewans. *Afghanistan: A Short History of Its People and Politics* Harper Collins Publishers Inc. United of America. 2002. p. 78

⁸ Jennifer Siegel, *Endgame*, p. 7.

Mountains, despite several warnings from Britain. There is no doubt that "these 'geodesists' were undoubtedly intent on occupying the region for the Tsar," as a small skirmish occurred when they clashed with British officers. This tension reflected the broader geopolitical struggle between the British and Russian empires during the so-called Great Game, where both powers sought to secure their influence in Central Asia. The incident in the Pamir Mountains was one of the many flashpoints in this ongoing rivalry, where even seemingly minor border disputes could escalate into broader conflicts⁹. At this point, it can be said that if Britain had not been so firm in its responses to Russia, the possibility of Afghanistan falling under the control of the Russian Empire would not have been out of the question. In fact, the underlying essence of this conflict lies at the heart of the Anglo-Russian rivalry, known as the Great Game. The British feared Russia's southern expansion, while the Russians had their eyes set on the fertile lands of Central Asia. To counter this situation, various commissions were sent between 1885 and 1896 to define Afghanistan's borders. The earlier commissions mainly dealt with the northern and western territories, such as the mountains to the north of Herat. The borders that are currently the subject of disputes were not part of these areas, but by examining the letters written by the members of these commissions, much can be understood about the situation. For example, let's consider the letters of C.E. Yate, who participated in the 1885 Afghanistan Border Commission. Yate and his colleagues wrote with a sense of relief about living in the cool, temperate climate near the mountains around Herat, while they noted that the Russians were suffering in the scorching heat of the desert and dying from disease: "While we are enjoying life in a climate where the thermometer rarely exceeds 75 degrees, they are suffering in the heat... the soldiers in our hospital are almost nonexistent." This excerpt highlights not only the differences in the physical and environmental challenges faced by the British and Russian forces but also reflects the larger geopolitical tensions between the two empires during this period. The British saw their influence and control over Central Asia as vital to their imperial interests, while the Russians were determined to expand southward, making Afghanistan a critical focal point in this struggle¹⁰. Nevertheless, in Yate's letters, there is a palpable sense of suspicion, as he frequently refers to new rumors about the movements of the Cossacks. Additionally, Yate provides a rather colorful portrayal of the Afghans: "The people of Kabul are armed with all sorts of weapons, often displaying knives that are half their own length"¹¹. As Abdur Rahman Khan observed that Britain was asserting control over the lands to the west of the Khyber Pass, he proposed convening a conference to clearly define the border regions between British India and Afghanistan. The rationale for this proposal is subject to different interpretations, but it becomes evident that Abdur Rahman was not speaking on behalf of the tribal border regions; rather, his proposal stemmed from his inability to control these tribes and his conflicting feelings toward them. In reality, he was aiming to strengthen

⁹ Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan*, p. 106.

¹⁰ C.E. Yate, *Northern Afghanistan*, pp. 21-22.

¹¹ C.E. Yate, *Northern Afghanistan*, pp. 22.

his control over his own territories. To facilitate this, the British government appointed Sir Mortimer Durand, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to negotiate a border agreement with the Amir. Durand arrived in Kabul during the winter of 1893 and established three commissions to define the border: the Baluchistan-Afghanistan Commission, the Asmar Commission, and the Waziristan Commission. These groups were tasked with finalizing the terms of the agreement, which would later be named after Durand. In British sources, this work is regarded as a significant success. Durand's activities related to the Durand Line were described as "the greatest of his services to India," and he left India "with the highest honor and esteem." The Durand Line agreement marked a crucial moment in the history of Afghanistan's borders, formalizing a boundary that has remained contentious to this day. It was a product of British geopolitical strategy, which sought to secure their interests in the region while simultaneously asserting control over Afghanistan's territory. However, the border it established was seen as artificial by many, particularly among the Pashtun population, and it has been a source of ongoing tension ever since¹². The Afghans, on the other hand, accepted this agreement with anger and resentment. Abdur Rahman Khan's people never forgave him for it, as they considered these lands to be rightfully Afghanistan's. There is no single source that agrees on the events that led to the signing of the Durand Agreement, particularly regarding how Abdur Rahman was willing to cede his own lands. Sir Percy Sykes, Durand's biographer, describes the relationship between the two men as initially firm but based on mutual respect. Understanding the relationship between these two prominent figures helps clarify the circumstances under which the agreement was reached. Durand himself first expressed his views on the need to demarcate the border between Afghanistan and British India in January 1884, as noted in his diaries. He was particularly concerned about Russia's favorable position in the region: "They are not facing any obstacles other than geographical difficulties – a large nation is absorbing weak tribes... whereas we, in contrast, are a handful of foreigners controlling two hundred and fifty million Asians... our position, at least initially, seems weak and artificial." Durand's concern reflected the broader geopolitical struggle of the time. Britain was deeply invested in containing Russian expansion into Central Asia, which was perceived as a threat to British interests in India. The demarcation of the border between Afghanistan and British India thus became not only a practical necessity but also a strategic move in the context of the Great Game. However, this act of border establishment created lasting resentment in Afghanistan, particularly among the Pashtun tribes, who found themselves divided by the Durand Line¹³. Nevertheless, Durand was in favor of openly addressing the issue; he spoke somewhat warmly about the Afghans or at least expressed a desire to resolve matters in an honest and sincere manner. His approach suggested that, despite the geopolitical pressures and strategic motivations

¹² R.C.T. "The Right Hon. Sir Mortimer Durand, A Biography by Sir Percy Sykes." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*. 2. (1927): 343-346.

¹³ Sir Mortimer Durand, as cited in Sir Percy Sykes, *The Right Honourable Sir Mortimer Durand*. London: Cassell and Company, LTD, 1926, p. 149.

behind the border negotiations, he aimed to engage with the Afghan leadership in a way that acknowledged their concerns¹⁴. Regarding Russia, Durand proposed that the British Indian government "clearly define" Afghanistan's borders and "acknowledge the extension of Russian influence up to this border." However, Durand's initial opinion of Abdur Rahman Khan was far from positive. He described the Amir as a "problematic and unsatisfactory ally... widely disliked across the country. His cruelty is horrendous... especially in his extreme jealousy toward us." Durand even went so far as to say, "I would not regret seeing him expelled from the country"¹⁵. Nevertheless, in 1893, they met to reach an agreement that would satisfy both Afghan and British interests. The document signed on November 12, 1893, is known as the Durand Agreement, and it remains one of the most controversial documents in the history of British imperial activity in the region. The Durand Agreement established the Durand Line as the border between Afghanistan and British India, formalizing a boundary that divided various ethnic groups, particularly the Pashtuns, across two territories. While the British sought to secure their interests in the region and limit Russian influence, the Afghans, led by Abdur Rahman Khan, were forced to accept the agreement under significant pressure. The treaty, although signed, was met with lasting resentment from Afghanistan, as it was viewed by many as an imposition and a violation of Afghanistan's sovereignty. The agreement would continue to be a source of contention for generations, contributing to ongoing political and territorial disputes that persist to this day.

The first clause of the agreement quickly became problematic, as the boundary line was "not based on any natural, topographical, ethnographic, or political principles," but rather was a hastily drawn line with little regard for how it would affect the lives of the region's inhabitants. This lack of consideration for the local population and the cultural, ethnic, and geographic realities of the area made the Durand Line especially contentious¹⁶. This line is declared legal, although it later implied the transfer of seven regions, including Balochistan, the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, to the British Empire. These seven "semi-autonomous agencies" - Bajaur, Khyber, Kurram, Mohmand, Orakzai, South Waziristan, and North Waziristan - had been inhabited by tribes that had, for many years, been under nominal Afghan rule. As noted by A.S. Ghaus, this agreement "demands the annexation of territories and peoples, who, although considered part of the Afghan homeland and nation since ancient times, were arbitrarily incorporated into British India"¹⁷. Thus, imposing sudden restrictions on the free movement of

¹⁴ Sir Mortimer Durand, as cited in Sir Percy Sykes, *The Right Honourable Sir Mortimer Durand*. London: Cassell and Company, LTD, 1926, p. 135

¹⁵ Sir Mortimer Durand, as cited in Sir Percy Sykes, *The Right Honourable Sir Mortimer Durand*. London: Cassell and Company, LTD, 1926, p. 198.

¹⁶ M.H. Kakar, *A Political and Diplomatic History of Afghanistan 1863-1901*, Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2006, pp. 186-187.

¹⁷ Abdul Samad Ghaus, *The Fall of Afghanistan: An Insider's Account*, Washington: Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, 1988, p. 15.

these tribes, essentially declaring that their headquarters had suddenly become part of another country's territory, caused a serious problem. Moreover, it was a widely held view that these tribes were not willing to submit to Amir's relatively soft rule; now, imagining that these tribes would suddenly be subordinate to Queen Victoria, the ruler of British India, seemed utterly illogical. Despite these tribes' historical heritage, Durand did not regard them with respect. In his view, their resistance was merely explained by the fact that "they realized this agreement was an interference with their plundering habits, and they feared that it would ultimately result in their subjugation." He told the Amir that their opposition was related to their anger over being made subject and forced to pay taxes, completely bypassing the issue of the lack of consideration for these tribes in the border delimitation. However, in practice, this created an even larger problem: this agreement formed a set of territories within the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), which was under British sovereignty, but remained outside the colonial administrative framework of the Raj (British India). It was precisely on this issue that disputes arose between Durand and the Amir over which strategically significant territories belonged to whom¹⁸. The most significant geographical element of the Durand Line was that it facilitated the existence of the Wakhan Corridor – the boundary between Afghanistan and China. The Wakhan Corridor, which was almost defenseless and only ten miles wide at its narrowest point, was created to prevent direct communication between Russian and British territories. The Amir was nearly indifferent to acquiring this territory and, in practice, felt that governing this remote and isolated area would be very difficult for him. However, Durand was firm on this matter. Despite Amir's heartfelt plea regarding Waziristan, he lost the very territory he had long desired. After they had agreed on certain areas, Durand presented a second condition as outlined in the map attached to the agreement. According to this condition, the British government would completely relinquish any claims over Afghanistan, and a strict principle of non-interference would be enforced for both parties. This was perhaps overly optimistic, as by the early 20th century, the British had already violated this provision. The most controversial aspect of the agreement was the financial side. Queen Victoria, the Empress of India, expressed her sincere intentions to the Amir, pledging her support for the formation of a strong and independent Afghanistan. To this end, the British would not only refrain from opposing the purchase and import of military arms by His Majesty, but they would also provide certain assistance in this regard. This "assistance" effectively meant adding six lakh rupees (600,000 rupees) annually to the already excessively high salary of the Amir – which was essentially no different from offering a bribe. The artificial demarcation of borders did not only negatively affect the Pashtuns, but also other ethnic groups, particularly the Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks. While each ethnic group lived within its historical territories, there was no centralized national state structure. In a political system based on tribal governance, each

¹⁸ Sir Percy Sykes, *The Right Honourable Sir Mortimer Durand: A Biography*, London: Cassell and Company, 1929, p. 214.

ethnic group tried to protect its own interests, which often led to intensifying internal conflicts within the state¹⁹.

The desire of ethnic groups for self-recognition and their demands to have a voice in state politics led to the intensification of the national issue. While the Pashtuns saw themselves as the primary nation-building people, the Tajiks and Hazaras began to demand their place as well. This resulted in continuous political instability, internal conflicts, and, in some cases, ethnic-based armed clashes in Afghanistan²⁰.

The border established by the British Empire served not only as a geographical boundary but also as a tool of political strategy. Internal conflicts among the ethnic groups within Afghanistan were often exploited by external powers for political manipulation. The division between these groups weakened national identity and complicated the formation of an independent state structure²¹.

On October 15, 1901, A.E. Snesev wrote in the *Razvedchik* journal: "...In the near future, a different fate awaited the Pamirs; located at the crossroads of the interests of Asia's three great powers - Russia, China, and England - and bordering Afghanistan, this empty and wild land drew attention due to the historical context of the nearly century-long struggle for dominance in Asia between Russia and England. The local population referred to it as 'the highest and poorest place on Earth.' Today, the Pamirs have become one of the most intriguing issues of our time..." After Russia established a protectorate over the Emirate of Bukhara in 1868, prolonged and complex negotiations began between Russia and Britain to demarcate the border between Bukhara (within the Russian sphere of influence) and Afghanistan (within the British sphere of influence). An agreement was reached only at the end of 1872 or early 1873 and was formalized through an exchange of notes between the Russian and British foreign ministries. The parties agreed to define the boundary between Bukhara and Afghanistan along the Amu Darya, the Panj River, and through the Pamirs from Lake Zorkul to the Khwaja-Salih post in the Pamirs, where the Amu Darya makes a sharp turn to the northwest. The district of Andkhoy was recognized as the last Afghan-held territory on the left bank of the Amu Darya; beyond it lay lands described as "belonging to independent Turkmen tribes." However, the agreements reached were consistently violated. The Amir of Bukhara continued to maintain control over the Darwaz region on the left bank of the Panj River. In 1883, with British support, the Afghans occupied the right bank of the Panj in the Pamirs. At the same time, British diplomats and military officers began to increase their activity in Northern Kashmir. In 1872–1873, bilateral negotiations were held between Britain and Russia,

¹⁹ Khan, Amina, and Christian Wagner. "The Changing Character of the Durand Line." *Strategic Studies*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2013, pp. 19–32. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48527611>. Accessed 9 Apr. 2025.

²⁰ Khan, Muhammad Fahim & Ali, Sajid & Khan, Hashmat. (2021). *Ethnic Conflict and the Political Instability in Afghanistan*. 4. P. 421.

²¹ J.R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England: Two Courses of Lectures*. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1883, p. XIX.

resulting in an agreement known as the First Afghan Boundary Agreement. According to this agreement, the border between Afghanistan and the Russian Empire in Central Asia was drawn along the Amu Darya River: the northern bank was recognized as belonging to Russia, while the southern bank was acknowledged as part of Afghan Turkestan, which had previously been annexed by Afghanistan²². It was during this period that the Afghan Amir, Sher Ali Khan, deployed his troops into the Badakhshan region, removed the local ruler from power, and established his own control over the territory²³.

However, even after the signing of the First Afghan Boundary Agreement, the borders between Afghanistan and the nomadic Turkmen tribes remained undefined. It was only in the early 1880s, after the Russian Empire had established its military and political control over the areas inhabited by these tribes, that the need for demarcation in this region arose. In 1885, Britain and Russia signed the final document on the Second Afghan Boundary Agreement. This agreement defined the border line in the northwestern part of Afghanistan-south of the region inhabited by the Turkmen population. According to the Second Boundary Agreement, the lands inhabited by the Turkmen remained under Russian control, while the Zulfagar Pass was allocated to Afghanistan²⁴. The author emphasizes that during the process of delineating both Afghan boundaries, the Afghan side did not participate-neither in the topographic surveys nor in the diplomatic negotiations. The fate of Afghanistan's northern border was determined entirely in London and St. Petersburg, through the involvement of European diplomats, military officials, and topographers. On March 18, 1885, near Kushka, Russian troops under the command of Colonel Komarov defeated the Afghan forces. Following the defeat, the British officers who had been leading the Afghans fled to the Russian camp, fearing retaliation from the Afghan troops²⁵. On March 26, Komarov reported to the Minister of War with the following message: "The insolence of the Afghans compelled me to launch an assault on March 18 against their fortified positions on both banks of the Kushka River, in order to preserve the honor and dignity of Russia... The Afghan forces were directed by British officers who, although they did not participate in the battle themselves, sought our protection following their defeat. However, the convoy sent to escort them failed to catch up with them... The Afghans fought with courage, determination, and bravery²⁶...». Despite its defeat, Britain continued to test Russia's patience by sending a

²² Афганское разграничение. Переговоры между Россией и Великобританией 1872–1885 гг. СПб.: типография А. С. Суворина, 1886. С.9

²³ Арунова М. Р., Лалетин Ю. П. Очерки средневековой и новой истории Афганистана М.: издательство РУ ДН, 2010. С.226

²⁴ Сборник договоров России с другими государствами. 1856–1917 / под ред. Е. А. Адамова. М.: Госполитиздат, 1952. С.264–266

²⁵ Горный М. Походъ на афганцев и бой на Кушкѣ (1885 г.). Воспоминание бывшего рядового Андрея Боландина. — М.: Е. И. Коновалова, 1901. — С.80

²⁶ Горный М. Походъ на афганцев и бой на Кушкѣ (1885 г.). Воспоминание бывшего рядового Андрея Боландина. — М.: Е. И. Коновалова, 1901. — С.102

large force under Captain Younghusband into the Pamirs. He seized control of Kanjut, restored the fortress of Shahidulla-Khoja, and pushed the borders northward—once again violating previous agreements with Russia²⁷.

Thus, between 1892 and 1895, in a series of border conflicts involving the Afghans, the Russian Pamir Detachment - under the command of Colonel Ionov, Lieutenant Colonel Yudenich, and Captains Skersky and Serebryakov - established final Russian control over the Pamirs. This effectively concluded the conquest of Central Asia and the formal demarcation of Russia's southern border in the region. In 1895, a treaty was concluded between Russia and Great Britain through an exchange of notes, dividing the Pamir territories from Lake Zorkul eastward to the Chinese frontier²⁸. Russia's southern border was primarily drawn along the parallel of Lake Zorkul. The British government undertook the obligation to leave the territory stretching from this border to the Hindu Kush range - namely, the famous Wakhan Corridor - under the control of the Afghan Emirate, refraining from annexing it to British India or constructing any military installations there. The arrangement established by the 1872–1873 agreements - that the right bank of the Panj River would belong to the Emirate of Bukhara and the left bank to Afghanistan - was once again reaffirmed. The borders between the Russian Empire (and the Emirate of Bukhara) and Afghanistan, as defined in the Russo-British agreements of 1872–1873, 1885, and 1895, remained unchanged until 1917²⁹. In the spring of 1896, the results of the delimitation and demarcation of the border between Russia and Afghanistan in the Pamirs were officially ratified in both Russia and Great Britain³⁰. The new Russian territories in the region—specifically, the Issyk-Kul district (later Przhevalsk) of Semirechye Province and the Osh district of Fergana Province, which were part of the Turkestan General-Governorship (1867–1886), and later part of Turkestan Oblast—now bordered directly with Xinjiang. In 1885, border demarcation work was carried out between Russia, Afghanistan, and China in the Pamir region. As a result, Russia was granted the right to maintain military garrisons in the Western Pamirs, specifically in the mountainous Badakhshan region³¹.

In October 1869, with the arrival of Douglas Forsyth, the representative of the Indian administration, in St. Petersburg, the negotiations, which had previously been

²⁷ Sir Francis Edward Younghusband. *The heart of a continent: a narrative of travels in Manchuria, across the Gobi Desert, through the Himalayas, the Pamirs, and Hunza, 1884 - 1894*. New York, Scribner. 1904.p 186

²⁸ Rastogi, R. S. "Indo-pamir and chitral relations 1895-1900." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 26 (1964): 189–96. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44140352>.

²⁹ Rastogi, R. S. "Indo-pamir and chitral relations 1895-1900." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 26 (1964): 189–96. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44140352>.

³⁰ Bijan Omrani, *The Durand Line: Analysis of the Legal Status of the Disputed Afghanistan-Pakistan Frontier*, 26 *U. Miami Int'l & Comp. L. Rev.* 75 (2018). P.102

³¹ Olufsen O (1904) *Through The Unknown Pamirs - The Second Danish Pamir Expedition, 1898-99*, Heinemann, London, p. 117:

suspended, were resumed³². He was granted permission by the Viceroy of India, Lord Mayo, to conduct negotiations with the Imperial Russian Government on matters related to Central Asia³³. As determined in the negotiations with Forsyth, the expansion of the territories of Russia and England had occurred more due to existing circumstances, and therefore, it could not be assumed that the borders of the two states would remain unchanged³⁴. For this reason, there was no practical value in an agreement that would completely prohibit the expansion of borders between these two countries³⁵. To ensure stability in Central Asia, it was concluded that the focus should be on establishing common political principles. As a result, the following agreement was reached between the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Douglas Forsyth: 1) The current territories of Amir Sherali Khan would be considered the border of Afghanistan; 2) The Afghan Amir should not extend his influence beyond this border, and the British government would attempt to prevent any aggressive actions on his part; 3) In turn, the Russian government would also use its influence to prevent the Amir of Bukhara from violating Afghan territories. The government of London and the Viceroy of India agreed to these terms, and in order to avoid disagreements in the application of the agreed principles, it was necessary to clearly define the borders of Amir Sherali Khan's territories. This task was assigned to the Governor-General of Turkestan, General-Adjutant von Kaufman, by the Imperial Government. Due to the complexity of the task, it required extensive research. Without waiting for the results of the research, the British government instructed its envoy to present its views on the borders of Afghan Amir's territories to the Imperial Government. These views were expressed in a letter sent by Lord Granville to Lord Loftus on October 17, 1872, as follows: 1) In the east, the region of Badakhshan and the adjacent Wakhan district, from Sarikul to the confluence of the Kokcha and Oxus (Panjob) rivers; 2) Afghan Turkestan – the districts of Kunduz, Khulm, and Balkh, with its northern border being the Oxus River, from the confluence of the Kokcha River to the Khoja Solih post. This region includes the main road from Bukhara to Balkh. The Afghan Amir has no claim to the left bank of the Oxus River below the Khoja Solih post; 3) Internal districts – Aqcha, Saripul, Maymana, Shibirgan, and Andkhoy; the latter district forms the northwestern border of Afghan territories, beyond which

³² Thornton, A. P. "Afghanistan in Anglo-Russian Diplomacy, 1869-1873." *The Cambridge Historical Journal*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1954, pp. 204–18. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3021077>. Accessed 8 Apr. 2025.

³³ Thornton, A. P. "Afghanistan in Anglo-Russian Diplomacy, 1869-1873." *The Cambridge Historical Journal*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1954, pp. 204–18. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3021077>. Accessed 8 Apr. 2025.

³⁴ Thornton, A. P. "Afghanistan in Anglo-Russian Diplomacy, 1869-1873." *The Cambridge Historical Journal*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1954, pp. 204–18. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3021077>. Accessed 8 Apr. 2025.

³⁵ Thornton, A. P. "Afghanistan in Anglo-Russian Diplomacy, 1869-1873." *The Cambridge Historical Journal*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1954, pp. 204–18. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3021077>. Accessed 8 Apr. 2025.

the steppe is inhabited by independent Turkmen tribes³⁶. Since the western border between the territories of Herat and Khorasan was already well known, it was stated that there was no need to define it. However, this information largely conflicted with the conclusions presented by General Kaufman, who believed that the Afghan Amir had no rights over Badakhshan and Wakhan. Due to these disagreements, Russia instructed its ambassador in London to approach the British government. After the British government presented new information, it was decided to accept the borders of Afghanistan proposed by Lord Granville in order to establish stable peace in Central Asia. In a letter from the State Chancellor to Count Brunnov on January 19 (31), 1873, the reasons for this decision were outlined as follows³⁷: It was emphasized that the British government had the ability to gather accurate information about distant territories, and that they did not want to overstate the significance of this specific issue. The desire to demonstrate goodwill towards England and the commitment of the British government to prevent any aggressive or expansionist actions by the Afghan Amir were also highlighted. This agreement between the two countries had a positive impact on the overall situation in Central Asia, and for the next ten years, no serious disagreements arose between Bukhara and Afghanistan.

The first disagreements on the Bukhara-Afghanistan border only occurred in 1883³⁸. As a result of the disputes with the heir ruler of Shugnan, Shah Yusuf Ali Khan, the Khan of Badakhshan seized his lands and sent him as a prisoner to Kabul. However, according to the 1872-1873 Russia-Britain agreement, Shugnan and Rushan were not to fall under the authority of the Afghan Amir's territories³⁹. For this reason, the Russian Imperial Government approached the British Government, suggesting the need to withdraw the representative of the Khan of Badakhshan and the Afghan garrison stationed in these two territories, Shugnan and Rushan. According to the instructions given by Lord Granville to the British ambassador, the Afghan Amir considered Shugnan and Rushan to be parts of his subordinate Badakhshan, while the Government of India did not have sufficient information to form a clear stance on this issue. However, the British Government indicated its willingness to discuss this matter with the Russian Imperial Government and to establish a joint commission consisting of representatives from England, Russia, and Afghanistan to conduct local investigations. The Russian government, in response to this proposal, found it necessary to first approach the Governor-General of Turkestan and, in the reply to

³⁶ Habberton, William. *Anglo-Russian Relations Concerning Afghanistan, 1837–1907* (U. of Illinois, 1937). P 23-30

³⁷ Gregory L. Bondarevsky..*The Great Game A Russian Perspective* ChristieBooks.East Sussex. 2002. P. 73

³⁸ Toriya , Masato (2014), "Afghanistan as a Buffer State between Regional Powers in the Late Nineteenth Century: an Analysis of Internal Politics Focusing on the Local Actors and the British Policy", in: So Yamane and Norihiro Naganawa (eds.), *Regional Routes, Regional Roots? Cross-Border Patterns of Human Mobility in Eurasia* , Sapporo: Slavic Research Center of Hokkaido University, pp. 49-61.

³⁹ Robert Middleton. *The Russians in the Great Game*. Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit's Research Paper #2.2019 p.31

the British ambassador, emphasized that the commission's task should not be to investigate the Afghan Amir's claims over Shugnan and Rushan, but rather to demarcate the agreed-upon border between the two countries on the ground and consider minor adjustments in line with mutual interests. Moreover, the Russian government stressed that before sending the commission, the status quo ante—meaning the withdrawal of Afghan officials and garrisons from Shugnan and Rushan—should be implemented. The British Government agreed to apply the principles of border demarcation as agreed upon with the Russian Government, but stated that without conducting field research, it would not be possible to form a final opinion on whether the status quo ante conditions had been violated or not regarding Afghan jurisdiction. In the 19th century, Uzbeks residing in Afghanistan, particularly in the northern regions such as Balkh, Mazar-i-Sharif, Kunduz, Jowzjan, and Faryab, constituted a significant portion of the population. They had lived in these areas for centuries and played a crucial role in the historical, cultural, and economic development of Afghanistan. However, by the end of the 19th century, the centralization policies and the formation of state borders under external pressures led to the isolation of Uzbeks within Afghanistan's political system.

During the reign of Amir Abdurrahman Khan (1880–1901), a policy of forcibly relocating Pashtun tribes to the northern regions inhabited by Uzbeks was implemented as part of the state's centralization efforts. This process was a component of the political strategy known as "Pashtunization," which aimed to alter the demographic balance in regions inhabited by Uzbeks, Tajiks, and other non-Pashtun ethnic groups. As a result, Uzbeks began to lose their historical lands and social positions. This process not only led to socio-economic instability but also resulted in cultural assimilation. The open development of the Uzbek language and culture faced significant obstacles, while the central government promoted Pashtun language and culture above all else. The political representation of Uzbeks was nearly nonexistent—they were relegated to low-ranking positions in the state administration and were excluded from high-level decision-making processes. In 1750–1752, Ahmad Shah Durrani subdued the small Uzbek khanates in the northern part of the Hindu Kush Mountains—Balkh, Shibirgan, Andkhoy, Kunduz, and Maymana. Although many of the local rulers, who were from indigenous dynasties, continued to govern on a vassal basis, an Afghan governor was appointed to the city of Balkh. However, Ahmad Shah's authority over the Uzbek khanates on the left bank of the Amu Darya was not firmly established. An example of this is that in 1755, a powerful Afghan military force had to be sent to these territories to assert control⁴⁰.

By the end of the 18th century, the geopolitical situation in the region had significantly changed in comparison to the era of Ahmad Shah's rule. Neighboring states to the Durrani Empire had grown stronger. During the reign of Amir Shohmurod

⁴⁰ Массон В. М. История Афганистана : в 2 т. / Ромодин В. А. ; Ахрамович Р. Т., Ганковский О. В., Лившиц В. А.. — Москва : «Наука», 1965. — Т. 2. — С.100

(1785–1800), the political power of the Bukhara Emirate strengthened, and the emirate became more solidified both economically and militarily⁴¹. In 1790, Afghan King Timur Shah Durrani (1772–1793) organized a campaign to Balkh⁴². In 1790–1791, a war was fought between the Emir of Bukhara, Shohmurod, and Timur Shah Durrani over the former Bukhara territories on the left bank of the Amu Darya. In these Uzbek khanates, the authority of the Afghan king practically disappeared. No revenue from these lands reached the Durrani treasury. In fact, during Timur Shah Durrani's rule, he could not find anyone willing to accept the position of governor in these areas, which became a point of mockery for his enemies.⁴³ The large-scale campaigns of the Afghan kings to the north did not bring new territorial gains, nor did they establish real authority on the left bank of the Amu Darya. Although, according to the peace treaty signed with the Emir of Bukhara, Shohmurod, the border between the Durrani Empire and the Bukhara Emirate was officially recognized as the Amu Darya, this recognition remained largely symbolic⁴⁴. By the early 19th century, the authority of the Afghan governor in Balkh existed only in name. The Balkh Khanate and other small Uzbek khanates in Southern Turkestan completely broke free from Afghan rule and became fully independent⁴⁵. The British attempted to march to the north of the Hindu Kush, through Bamiyan, but they encountered strong resistance from the Uzbeks and Tajiks on the left bank of the Amu Darya, and this attempt ended in failure. Abandoning hopes of successful operations in the east and southeast, Dost Mohammad Khan shifted his focus to northern affairs. He launched a large military expedition with the aim of conquering the "Little Turkestan" region⁴⁶. In 1850, with the full support of the British, Dost Mohammad Khan subjugated Balkh⁴⁷. After that, the process of the Afghan emirs' forces gradually taking control of the left bank of the Amu Darya began, and this process continued for many years. The conquest was made easier by the political fragmentation and mutual hostility among the small Uzbek khanates on the left bank of the Amu Darya, although the local population fiercely resisted the invaders. Nevertheless, from this point onward, the small Uzbek khanates located on the left bank of the Amu Darya were successively occupied by the Afghan Amir's forces. For a long time, the main base of the Afghan emirs' northern rule was the garrisons in Balkh, Mazar-i-Sharif,

⁴¹ Массон В. М. История Афганистана : в 2 т. / Ромодин В. А. ; Ахрамович Р. Т., Ганковский О. В., Лившиц В. А.. — Москва : «Наука», 1965. — Т. 2. — С.143

⁴² Массон В. М. История Афганистана : в 2 т. / Ромодин В. А. ; Ахрамович Р. Т., Ганковский О. В., Лившиц В. А.. — Москва : «Наука», 1965. — Т. 2. — С.473

⁴³ Ганковский Ю. В. История Афганистана с древнейших времён до наших дней. — Москва : Мысль, 1982. — С.130

⁴⁴ Массон В. М. История Афганистана : в 2 т. / Ромодин В. А. ; Ахрамович Р. Т., Ганковский О. В., Лившиц В. А.. — Москва : «Наука», 1965. — Т. 2. — С.143

⁴⁵ Коргун В. Г. История Афганистана. XX век. — Москва : «Крафт+», 2004. — С.9

⁴⁶ Массон В. М. История Афганистана : в 2 т. / Ромодин В. А. ; Ахрамович Р. Т., Ганковский О. В., Лившиц В. А.. — Москва : «Наука», 1965. — Т. 2. — С.100

⁴⁷ Шохуморов А. Разделение Бадахшана и судьбы исмаилизма / Емельянова Н. М.. — Москва-Душанбе : ИВ РАН, 2008. — С.23

Akcha, and Toshkurgan. Internal governance remained in the hands of local Uzbek and Tajik representatives, and in many cases, their submission to the Afghan Amir was only at the level of vassalage. However, by the 1850s, a new province was added to Dost Mohammad Khan's domain, called "Afghan Turkestan," and he appointed his eldest son, Muhammad Afzal Khan, as the governor of the region⁴⁸.

Dost Mohammad Khan's aggressive foreign policy in the north led to conflicts with the Bukhara Emirate, which had previously been in a vassal status on the left bank of the Amu Darya. The authority of the Amir of Kabul over the city of Balkh was officially recognized for the first time by Britain, and this was documented in the Second Peshawar Treaty. In 1860, during the final years of his reign, the Emir of Bukhara, Nasrullah Khan, began a military campaign towards Southern Turkestan and even crossed the Amu Darya with his forces near the Kerki fortress. However, unexpectedly, he turned back and returned to Bukhara⁴⁹. According to the report of Russia's Consul General in Kashgar, N.F. Petrovsky, on January 26, 1847, a treaty was signed between the Emir of Bukhara, Nasrullah Khan (1827–1860), and the Afghan Amir, Dost Mohammad Khan (1834–1839 / 1842–1863), in which the Amu Darya was designated as the border between their states. During his trip to Afghanistan in 1878, Colonel N.I. Grodekov mentioned the following about the Balkh Khanate: "The Balkh Khanate, which also includes Mazar-i-Sharif, is now considered the main city of Afghan Turkestan, having been annexed 30 years ago. The last khan, Rustesh, was killed in Kabul by his nephew⁵⁰".

At the beginning of the 19th century, the Afghans lost control over Maymana, Andkhoy, and Shiberghan. Thus, for half a century, power in these areas remained in the hands of Uzbek nomadic aristocrats. It was only during the reign of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan (1819–1863) between 1849 and 1855 that the territories of the former Balkh Khanate—the lands between the Hindu Kush and the Amu Darya—were finally incorporated into the state of Afghanistan⁵¹.

At the end of the 19th century, against the backdrop of the growing power of the Russian Empire in Central Asia, Afghanistan's Uzbeks' cultural and economic ties with their relatives in Uzbekistan were increasingly restricted. The Durand Line and the Russia–Britain "Great Game" also divided the territories inhabited by Uzbeks, sharply limiting opportunities for maintaining national identity and mutual communication. As a result of such political and demographic pressures, Uzbeks were forced into internal migration, retreating from their historical homeland, or were compelled to submit to the central government. This, in turn, significantly restricted their social

⁴⁸ Шохуморов А. Разделение Бадахшана и судьбы исмаилизма / Емельянова Н. М.. — Москва-Душанбе : ИВ РАН, 2008. — С.23

⁴⁹ Иванов П. П. Очерки по истории Средней Азии (XVI-середина XIX в.).. — Москва : Изд-во восточной лит-ры, 1958. — С.93

⁵⁰ Гродек Н. И. Поездка ген. шт. полковника Гродекова из Самарканда через Герат в Афганистан (в 1878 году). — В: Сборник географических, топографических и статистических материалов по Азии : [рус. дореф.] // СПб. — 1883. — Вып. V

⁵¹ Ахмедов Б.А. История Балха (XVII - первая половина XVIII вв.). - Ташкент, 1982. —С.235

activities, cultural development, and political movements. The long-term effect of this situation is that, even today, Uzbeks in Afghanistan are unable to fully exercise their national rights. In the 19th century, while Uzbeks lived as a numerous and culturally rich ethnic group in northern Afghanistan, the central government's policy of Pashtunization and efforts to alter the ethnic balance led to a sharp weakening of their political and cultural status. This situation contributed to the deepening of the national issue, the intensification of ethnic conflicts, and the destabilization of internal stability within the state.

Indeed, one of the most tragic and long-lasting consequences in Afghan history came in the final decade of the 19th century, when the border between Afghanistan and British India was established. In November 1893, a treaty was signed between Afghan Amir Abdur Rahman Khan and British colonial administrator Sir Mortimer Durand, who was serving as the Secretary of State for India. According to this agreement, the area densely populated by Pashtun tribes was officially incorporated into British India under the designation "Independent Tribal Area." The new border between Afghanistan and British India became widely known as the Durand Line. Amir Abdur Rahman Khan was forced to accept this political step, as it was a condition for increased financial subsidies from the British government in exchange. The establishment of the Durand Line set the stage for a significant shift in the geopolitical landscape of the region, with long-term repercussions that still affect Afghanistan today. This artificial boundary divided ethnic groups, including the Pashtuns, and created lasting tensions between Afghanistan and its neighbors. Moreover, the impact of the Durand Line on Afghanistan's internal cohesion, national identity, and regional relationships continues to resonate, particularly with regard to the issues of tribal autonomy and cross-border kinship ties.

The creation of the Durand Line had a profound and lasting impact, particularly for the Pashtun tribes, as it resulted in many of them being split between Afghanistan and British India. Some Pashtun groups found themselves entirely outside Afghanistan's borders, while others were divided. The author notes that, deviating slightly from the main topic, the Afghan Amir supported anti-British uprisings in this region, possibly with the intent of bringing these territories back under his control. However, neither Abdur Rahman Khan, who had signed the Durand Line agreement, nor his successors were able to achieve this goal. After British India gained independence in 1947, the Independent Tribal Area passed into the hands of the newly-formed state of Pakistan. For decades, and even to this day, the Durand Line remains one of the most contentious and unresolved issues between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The division of the Pashtun tribes along this border has had far-reaching consequences for regional relations, with ongoing tensions regarding sovereignty, ethnic identity, and territorial integrity. The Durand Line effectively split ethnic groups that share deep cultural, linguistic, and familial ties, creating divisions that persist to this day. The border continues to be a symbol of conflict and disagreement, representing unresolved issues in the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and complicating

any efforts to establish a stable, cooperative relationship between the two nations⁵². Throughout the 20th century and beyond, all Afghan governments were compelled to internationally recognize the Durand Line as the official border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, in practice, they continued to hope for its eventual reintegration into Afghanistan. It is important to note in the context of this article that the border between Afghanistan and British India (later Pakistan) was established at the end of the 19th century as a result of a forced decision by the Afghan ruler, in the form of the Durand Line. Nevertheless, as a result of the agreement signed under the "Durand Line" framework, Amir Abdur Rahman Khan also gained certain territorial "bonuses" for Afghanistan. According to the agreement, Afghanistan was granted the formal right to claim the territory known today as Nuristan (then called Kafiristan, meaning "land of the infidels"). Until the end of the 19th century, this territory had remained independent. Finally, in the winter of 1895-1896, Afghan government forces conquered Nuristan. The local population was converted to Islam. Despite this, the region continued to remain one of Afghanistan's "remote and peripheral" areas throughout the 20th century. For instance, during the mid-1920s, the renowned Soviet scholar N.I. Vavilov, who was on a scientific expedition in Afghanistan, dedicated an entire chapter in his academic work to Nuristan, the peoples living there, and their economic practices. From his writings, it is evident that the central government's authority in Nuristan was extremely weak⁵³. Interestingly, almost a century later, in 1978, one of the first regions to declare a "jihad" against the Soviet-backed central government was precisely Nuristan⁵⁴. This situation also indicates that, even in the last quarter of the 20th century, the central government's influence in the region remained weak. Another significant event related to the delineation of Afghanistan's borders at the end of the 19th century was the 1895 border agreement between Great Britain and Russia regarding the Pamir region. According to this treaty, the larger part of the Pamir was retained within the Russian Empire and the vassal state of the Bukhara Emirate⁵⁵. According to this agreement, the Wakhan Corridor, which separates the territories of Afghanistan, China, British India, and the Russian Empire, was recognized as part of Afghanistan. Even today, this corridor remains within Afghanistan's borders. Thus, by the second half of the 18th century and throughout the 19th century, the borders of Afghanistan as they exist today were largely formed. These borders include: the border with British India (later Pakistan) – the "Durand Line"; the border with the Russian Empire along the

⁵² Белокреницкий В. Я. Афгано-пакистанская граница: история и современное значение вопроса // Территориальный вопрос в афро-азиатском мире. / Под ред. Д. В. Стрельцова. М.: Аспект Пресс, 2013. С. 229–250.

⁵³ Вавилов Н. И. Земледельческий Афганистан / избранные труды в 5 тт. Т. 1. М. – Л.: издательство Академии наук СССР, 1959. С. 119-139.

⁵⁴ Босин Ю. В. Афганистан: Полиэтническое общество и государственная власть в историческом контексте. М.: Издательство «Гуманитарий», Академия гуманитарных исследований, 2002. С.133

⁵⁵ Сборник договоров России с другими государствами. 1856–1917 / под ред. Е. А. Адамова. М.: Госполитиздат, 1952. С.284-286

Amu Darya (which later became the Soviet Union and is now the border with the Central Asian post-Soviet republics); the border with Iran (which was established during the Durrani dynasty invasions in the second half of the 18th century); and the border with China (through the Wakhan Corridor). In the 20th century, these borders were only clarified but not fundamentally altered. The second important conclusion is that during the second half of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century, the borders of Afghanistan were shaped by the active conquest and aggressive policies of the Durrani dynasty and later the first Amir of the Barakzai dynasty. In the second half of the 19th century, although the determination of Afghanistan's borders continued, this process mainly took place under the influence of external powers – primarily the British Empire and the Russian Empire. This is evident in various events such as the Afghan border agreements of 1872-1873 and 1884-1885, the 1893 agreement on the Durand Line, and the 1895 Pamir border agreement. In the 19th century, the borders of Afghanistan were defined by external powers due to the geopolitical rivalry between the British and Russian empires. In particular, the 1893 Durand Line agreement between the British and Afghan Amir Abdur Rahman Khan became the most important yet controversial border marker in Afghanistan's history. This line not only delineated the national territory but also created an artificial division among the local population, particularly among ethnic groups. This artificial boundary has significantly complicated the issue of national identity. For instance, the Pashtun people were divided by the Durand Line – one part remained within Afghanistan, while the other part was incorporated into British India (now Pakistan). As a result, one ethnic group became the dominant political force in one state, while the other part was marginalized in another state. This situation later fueled the rise of "Greater Pashtunistan" ideas, territorial claims, and international conflicts, particularly in the 20th century. The efforts to shape national identity often came into conflict with other ethnic groups, such as Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks, who sought political equality and cultural rights. This led to internal political instability in the multi-ethnic Afghan state. Moreover, the artificial separation of historical territories through borders intensified the desire of ethnic groups to stay loyal to their historical roots. This further complicated the process of national identification, as each ethnic group was forced to fight to preserve its historical and cultural heritage. External powers began to intervene in Afghanistan's politics, exploiting these ethnic divisions, and promoting their own interests through military, political, or economic pressures. As a result, the struggles for national unity and the construction of an independent state were repeatedly confronted with ongoing political instability, armed conflicts, and foreign interference. In conclusion, the artificial borders of Afghanistan, shaped under external pressure during the 19th century, led to a national identity crisis. This crisis became one of the main factors contributing to territorial disputes, internal ethnic conflicts, political instability, and prolonged social-economic crises in the country.

Conclusion

The nineteenth-century delineation of borders between Afghanistan and Russian Turkestan constituted a transformative process with lasting implications for the political, social, and cultural landscape of Central Asia. Far from being simple territorial demarcations, these borders emerged as products of imperial rivalry and strategic calculation, fundamentally altering patterns of governance, mobility, and interaction that had long characterized the region. As such, border-making became a critical mechanism through which external powers reshaped local realities.

The imposition of fixed boundaries disrupted pre-existing networks of trade, migration, and cultural exchange, dividing ethnically and culturally interconnected communities. In doing so, it contributed to the reconfiguration of ethnic and national identities, compelling populations to adapt to new political frameworks and administrative classifications. Identity formation increasingly became tied to territorial belonging and imperial governance, transforming fluid and locally grounded affiliations into more rigid and politicized forms.

This study demonstrates that the borders between Afghanistan and Russian Turkestan functioned not only as instruments of imperial control but also as active agents in the production of identity. Through administrative practices, legal categorizations, and spatial reorganization, these borders shaped perceptions of difference and belonging that continue to influence regional dynamics. Understanding the historical role of nineteenth-century border formation thus provides crucial insight into the enduring complexities of identity, statehood, and interethnic relations in Central Asia.

By situating border-making at the center of identity formation, this article contributes to broader debates in border studies, imperial history, and nationalism. It underscores the importance of historical context in analyzing contemporary political and ethnic configurations and highlights the lasting legacy of imperial interventions in shaping the modern boundaries and identities of the region.

References

1. Research Studies

Bondarevsky, Gregory L. *The Great Game: A Russian Perspective*. East Sussex: Christie-Books, 2002.

Ewans, Martin. *Afghanistan: A Short History of Its People and Politics*. New York: HarperCollins, 2002.

Ghaus, Abdul Samad. *The Fall of Afghanistan: An Insider's Account*. Washington, DC: Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, 1988.

Habberton, William. *Anglo-Russian Relations Concerning Afghanistan, 1837–1907*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1937.

Kakar, M. Hassan. *A Political and Diplomatic History of Afghanistan, 1863–1901*. Leiden: Brill, 2006.

Khan, Amina, and Christian Wagner. “The Changing Character of the Durand Line.” *Strategic Studies* 33, no. 2 (2013): 19–32.

Middleton, Robert. *The Russians in the Great Game*. Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit Research Paper no. 2, 2019.

Omrani, Bijan. “The Durand Line: Legal Status of the Disputed Afghanistan–Pakistan Frontier.” *University of Miami International and Comparative Law Review* 26 (2018): 75–132.

Seeley, J. R. *The Expansion of England: Two Courses of Lectures*. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1883.

Thornton, A. P. “Afghanistan in Anglo-Russian Diplomacy, 1869–1873.” *The Cambridge Historical Journal* 11, no. 2 (1954): 204–218.

Younghusband, Francis E. *The Heart of a Continent*. New York: Scribner, 1904.

2. Russian-Language Sources

Gankovskiy, Yu. V. *Istoriya Afganistana s drevneyshikh vremen do nashikh dney*. Moscow: Mysl', 1982.

Masson, V. M., and V. A. Romodin. *Istoriya Afganistana. Vol. 2: Afganistan v Novoye Vremya*. Moscow: Nauka, 1965.

Sbornik dogovorov Rossii s drugimi gosudarstvami, 1856–1917. Edited by E. A. Adamov. Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1952