

Will Britain's 'Great Game' bring new world war?

by Mark Burdman

The Great Game: On Secret Service in High Asia

by Peter Hopkirk

John Murray, London, 1990

562 page, with index, hardbound, £19.95

Peter Hopkirk's *The Great Game* was completed in January 1990 and published months before the eruption of the current Iraq crisis. That makes it all the more interesting to read now. With Hopkirk's narratives of the Central Asian Great Game in mind, the reader gets the eerie sensation that the United States is now hooked into a script that was authored in London well over a century ago. Think of the comment made by the London *Sunday Telegraph's* chief editorial writer, neo-imperialist Peregrine Worsthorne, on Sept. 2: "In the old days, the British Empire faced many Saddam Husseins. A gunboat and a brigade of troops sufficed to deal with them. . . . These local tyrants usually ended their days in exile on a large heap of empty gin bottles. Happy days. Coping with Saddam Hussein, however, requires several American divisions and a vast assortment of the most advanced weaponry." Hopkirk is not quite the cynic that Worsthorne is, but one can easily conjure up the "many Saddam Husseins" among his cast of characters—and get a flavor for how the British treated them.

The main geographical area for Hopkirk's story is not what is today called the Middle East or Near East, but Central Asia, comprising Afghanistan, Iran (formerly Persia), northern India, Pakistan, Tibet, and Soviet Central Asia. The shift of geography makes the book all the more topical at this moment. As each day passes in the Gulf crisis, it is becoming

more and more obvious that the combat with Iraq is a prelude to a much bigger adventure, vis-à-vis what are today the Soviet Central Asian republics. As the Israel-based Soviet analyst Mikhail Agursky wrote in the *Jerusalem Post* Sept. 13, "Some American experts would very much like to see Soviet Central Asia removed from Russian control." Agursky said this possibility should be "dreaded," since it would unleash "new fundamentalist and nationalist" upheavals, and, "in such a situation, who can tell where the new ayatollah would appear: in Baghdad or Teheran, Samarkand or Bokhara?"

Indeed. Without doubt, dreams are proliferating these days, in the London social-club set that Worsthorne frequents. The dreams include the idea of an Anglo-American-sponsored "independent Turkestan" including parts of the Soviet Union and China; NATO extending its "out-of-area" purview to Soviet Central Asia; and a new "domino theory," in which Iraq's fall is only the prelude to snatching back the Central Asian republics "lost" in the 19th-century Great Game. It is all part of the "new world order" that's the stuff of Margaret Thatcher's dreams—and of most of the rest of the world's nightmares.

So, Hopkirk's last words are worth remembering: "For more than a century now the vast Russian empire [in Central Asia] has served as a monument to the Czarist heroes of the Great Game. How much longer it will continue to do so, in view of the violent turmoil threatening the Soviet Union, is impossible to forecast."

Should what he calls the "forward school" of British foreign policy thinking continue to dominate London in the coming weeks, the world could soon be on a short fuse toward a third world war, for reasons we shall discuss later on. The reader of Hopkirk's book receives some clues about what that mentality is like.

The real Great Game

Two things must be said in Hopkirk's favor. One is that he is well informed, evidently having placed himself in the shoes of those he is writing about, and in the tradition of such top British intelligence operatives as Sir Fitzroy Maclean, whose book *Eastern Approaches*, about his travels through Central Asia, was one of the inspirations for Hopkirk's book. The second is that he is a talented writer, and writes history in the manner a good spy-thriller writer would do. He has written three books on this region, which are all quite entertaining, as well as informative in a casual way. But this is both the lure and the trap in Hopkirk's newest book. It tends to romanticize and glorify activities of the British that are more often than not—as in the cases of British massacres of Afghans and Tibetans—quite revolting. The unwritten assumption in the "Great Game," as Hopkirk defines it, is the sanctity of the British Empire in India, as something to fight and die for. Many of the heroes are the sepoy, gurkhas, and others who courageously fought and died for the Crown. But there is little regret expressed for the Indians who had to live under British rule.

There is also a basic fallacy of composition: The *real* Great Game is not just a British versus Russian fight for turf in Central Asia, not just that fight immortalized in Kipling's poem "Kim": "Now I shall go far and far into the North, playing the Great Game."

As current events show, there is a bigger Great Game, whereby the British utilize developments in and around the "soft underbelly" of Europe to prevent the emergence of a progressive industrial-capitalist civilization in Eurasia, in part by inducing, or strengthening, an imperial reaction-formation inside Russia to Britain's imperial games. The coming-into-being of a German-French-Russian industrial capitalist alliance on the Eurasian continent has been the recurrent threat to the British Empire, ever since the creation of the United States of America. Hopkirk's sin of omission is to leave this larger issue out entirely.

So, it all makes for a good movie-script, but it trivializes history.

For example, he peddles the mythology, common in British writings, that the root of the threat to Central Asia lay in the alleged secret deathbed testament of Peter the Great, calling on Russia to achieve domination over India and Constantinople, as key to ruling the world. Hopkirk doesn't say what the nascent British Empire of the 17th and early 18th century was *really* worried about, namely the philosophical, scientific, and political influence of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz in Petrine Russia. To this day, the British are petrified by the possibility that that influence will re-emerge. Certainly, in the 1890s, which was one of the historical peaks of the Central Asian Great Game, the heyday of the likes of Lord Curzon and Francis Younghusband, the profound British *global fear* was that an alliance would form between the France of Gabriel Hanotaux, an industrializing Germany,

and the Russia of Count Sergei Witte. And what was feared in Witte is not what Hopkirk claims in a passing reference, that Witte wanted to control Asian resources as a means of controlling Europe, but that Witte wanted to establish an alliance with the industrial-capitalist powers of Europe, to further industrialize Russia.

There is only the barest hint of this in the last couple of chapters, where Hopkirk points out that Britain and Russia resolved their Great Game in 1907, in order to join forces against Germany. But, in fact, it is probable that the chief "game players," sharing an imperial-romantic worldview, were in some way in a symbiotic alliance against Christian-republican civilization. Sir Francis Younghusband is particularly interesting, since he became a proponent of creating a one-world religion through his famous 1930s "World Congress of Faiths." In content, his ideas were no different from such Russian "Third Rome" theological philosophers as Nikolai Berdyaev. From the Russian side, there is the Tibetan-origin intriguer Badmayev, who had ties with the occultist New Age circles in the West.

Hence, it is disappointing that Hopkirk never discusses Theosophy, since if anything embodies an Anglo-Russian convergence in and around India, it is the movement created by Russia's Madame Blavatsky, England's Annie Besant, and others. Truly, the Theosophical New Age movement is a Great Game against Judeo-Christian Western civilization!

What Moscow knows

Today again, the British are possessed by the fear of a continental "Eurasian" axis that would eliminate the basis of their neo-imperialist ambitions. This is the true strategic background for the Gulf crisis, which has been orchestrated at every critical point by British intelligence or its assets.

Hopkirk's *The Great Game* is eminently worthwhile to read, side by side, with the fascinating July 1990 issue of the Soviet Foreign Ministry's *International Affairs*. It is clear from a careful reading, that leading personalities in Moscow today view the "Great Game" in the broader strategic sense that we have indicated above.

For one, there is an article by Igor Malashenko, a senior consultant to the Central Committee, on the "Eurasian Heartland," in which he warns of new war dangers arising from an Anglo-American policy, dating from geopolitician Lord Mackinder, that no one power or coalition of powers ever be allowed to be dominant on the "Eurasian land mass." Malashenko focuses on the theory of the "Eurasian Rim," whereby the areas peripheral to Russia are targeted for destabilization, as a means of containing Russia and/or Russia's alliance with other great powers in the Eurasian area. (It is curious, by the way, that Hopkirk never mentions Mackinder once.)

There is also a piece, in the form of a letter, titled "Foreign policy to meet national priorities," by Yuri Ilyin, Deputy Head of the Department of International Politics at the Higher

Party School, Moscow, which calls for the revival of the policies of "worldly-wise statesman" Count Sergei Witte, for rapid economic growth and war avoidance, anchored on Russia's "good and reliable partner," Germany. Ilyin attacked such balance-of-power approaches as the Congress of Vienna and the "Versailles system." He also praised Witte for having refused to "pull the chestnuts out of the fire" for the British before World War I, and called for "turning back to the traditional foreign policy values of Russia," based today on living in peace with "a united Germany."

From the German side, the conservative daily *Die Welt* returned the compliment, with a feature Sept. 18 promoting the emergence of a new Eurasian economic superpower, along a Berlin-to-Moscow axis, that would incorporate 800 million persons, and become the predominant economic power. With different nuances, such ideas have also been expressed in Paris and Rome.

It is such thinking that the British fear more than anything else. But that book still needs to be written.

Read Nehru to fathom the British Empire

by Marianna Wertz

Glimpses of World History

by Jawaharlal Nehru
Oxford University Press, New York, Delhi, 1989
992 pages, with index, hardbound, \$19.95

An Autobiography

by Jawaharlal Nehru
Oxford University Press, New York, Delhi, 1989
624 pages with index, hardbound, \$18.95;
paperbound \$9.95

The Discovery of India

by Jawaharlal Nehru
Oxford University Press, New York, Delhi, 1989
582 pages, with index, hardbound, \$18.95

In search of a fuller understanding of the non-violent method of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., I was led to the trilogy of Jawaharlal Nehru, written by India's first prime minister during his many prison terms prior to India's independence. The trilogy, comprising over 2,000 pages, was released in 1985 by the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, in a beautiful edition, bearing an introduction by Nehru's only child, Indira Gandhi, the assassinated prime minister of India. Oxford University Press in India issued these three books to commemorate his centenary on Nov. 14, 1989.

Mrs. Gandhi's Foreword, written in 1980, gives the reader a sense of the richness and beauty of the collection, and bears quoting from directly:

"My father's three books—*Glimpses of World History*, *An Autobiography* and *The Discovery of India*—have been my companions through life. It is difficult to be detached about them.

"Indeed *Glimpses* was written for me. It remains the best introduction to the story of man for young and growing people in India and all over the world. The *Autobiography* has been acclaimed as not merely the quest of one individual for freedom, but as an insight into the making of the mind of new India. . . . The *Discovery* delves deep into the sources of India's national personality. Together, these books have moulded a whole generation of Indians and inspired persons from many other countries."

Indira Gandhi, who was a personal friend of Lyndon LaRouche and Helga Zepp-LaRouche, was assassinated on Oct. 31, 1984. Her assassination, like Mahatma Gandhi's, Martin Luther King's, and John F. Kennedy's, was an attempt to stop the current of republican nation-builders from creating large industrial republics on this Earth.

The great value of these works lies in Nehru's clear understanding of *who that enemy is*, and his willingness, despite great hardship during his long years of imprisonment, to speak out harshly against his people's oppressors. If you want to understand the British Empire, read Nehru.

Since the United States is presently committed to fighting World War III on behalf of British oil interests, and President Bush is acting like a lapdog of Nanny Thatcher, it is imperative, for our national survival, that Americans take the blindfold off on just how evil the British Empire is. Naturally, we could turn to our own bloody history with the British. But India's liberation struggle, reaching success only half a century ago, has the benefit of including people like Winston Churchill, who exist in the memory of people living today. It was Churchill in January 1930, who said, "Sooner or later you will have to crush Gandhi and the Indian Congress and all they stand for." In December of that year he said, as Nehru quotes him: "The British nation has no intention whatever of relinquishing control of Indian life and progress . . . which, more than all our dominions and dependencies, constitutes the glory and strength of the British Empire."