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Autore	Kakar Mohammad Hassan
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Sommario/riassunto	This political and diplomatic history of late nineteenth-century Afghanistan and its major ethnic groups lays bare how the ground was laid for the emergence of Afghanistan as a nation-state as well as for the implementation of schemes of modernization. It describes how Amir Sher 'Ali Khan and, more fully, Amir 'Abd al-Rahman Khan for the first time consolidated the authority of the central government at the expense of the traditional autonomous local magnates, and thus managed to organize a centralized monarchical state and extend its direct rule throughout Afghanistan. They did so in the days of what has become known as The Great Game for the mastery of Central Asian states. Although The Great Game resulted in the reduction of Afghanistan in size, it also led to the clear demarcation of its boundaries in accordance with international agreements.