

# **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**

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### **Introduction**

Afghanistan is situated in the region between South Asia and Central Asia. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, British India and the Russian empire extended their territories and reached this region from the south and the north, respectively. In the 1860s and 1870s, Russia annexed the domain of the Khoqand Khanate, and the Bukhara Emirate and the Khiva Khanate became Russian protectorates. As the result of a series of military conquests, Russia now shared borders with Afghanistan, and the British considered Russia a great threat to their control of India. Therefore, preventing the Russians from penetrating the British Indian territory became the most significant political task for British Indian authorities in the late nineteenth century. The political struggle between British India and the Russian Empire in inner Asia including Afghanistan became known as the Great Game.

This paper focuses on the period just after the outbreak of the Second Anglo-Afghan War, which began in 1878 and ended in 1881. According to a large number of previous studies, Afghanistan was fixed as a buffer state between Russia and British India as a result of the war and the Gandamak Treaty, which was concluded between Amīr Ya‘qūb Khān and the British on 26 May 1879, substantially as proof of the surrender of the Afghan side.<sup>1</sup> In this treaty, the Amīr of Kabul, a previous ruler of Afghanistan, not only ceded various territories but also handed over diplomatic rights to the British. In short, Afghanistan was virtually a British protectorate until 1919. It is also well known that Afghanistan later became a major political battlefield between the US and the Soviet Union during the Cold War era in the latter half of the twentieth century. This meant that Afghanistan would again be considered a buffer state between two countries.

As a result, matters of geopolitical importance concerning Afghanistan have often been discussed between regional powers (for example, Britain, Russia, the US, and the USSR) within the framework of the buffer state concept. While there has been a tendency for studies on the political history of Afghanistan to focus on regional power politics, the internal politics and dynamics of the country have been largely ignored, particularly regarding the period I examine here. Thus, the main objective of this study is to shed some light on the country’s internal political affairs through a re-examination of the political circumstances surrounding the Second

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<sup>1</sup> For further details on the Second Anglo-Afghan War and its aftermath, see Azmat Hayat Khan 2005; Davies 1932; Hassan Kakar 2006.

Anglo-Afghan War. The diplomatic relations between Britain, Russia, and Afghanistan have been studied in some depth. However, there has been much less attention paid to the policies that have been designed and implemented regarding Afghanistan's internal matters. Accordingly, it has become difficult to gauge the impact of various British policies on the internal political situation. Most previous studies have mentioned that the British had little interest in the internal matters of Afghanistan and did not interfere in internal political struggles. For that reason, it was said that the Amīr of Kabul had succeeded in the centralisation of Afghanistan. However, it is questionable whether the centralisation of Afghanistan was achieved during the late nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century, bearing in mind the political history of the country until now.<sup>2</sup>

Research has recently begun to analyse a series of efforts of Amīr 'Abd al-Rahmān Khān to centralise the political institutions of Afghanistan. But two important studies came to contrasting conclusions concerning the reign of the Amir. Amin Tarzi focused much attention on the centralization of the judicial system, which, up until that point, had been led by regional tribal societies<sup>3</sup>. The Amir tried to introduce a unified judicial court based on the Hanafī fiqh, similar to that of the Ottoman dynasty<sup>4</sup>. Amin Tarzi also discussed in detail the introduction of the Hanafī as a formal fiqh and referred to his reign as an important historical era for the national integration of Afghanistan. The other scholar, Shah Mahmoud Hanifī focused on the historical discourse of Afghanistan itself.<sup>5</sup> He expressed his opinion that the fundamental principles of the national unity of Afghanistan had been created by British "colonial knowledge" through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Additionally, he stated that Afghanistan was unified by using this "colonial knowledge" as a tool for centralisation during the reign of Amir 'Abd al-Rahman Khan. In other words, while Amin Tarzi assessed the Amir's reign positively as a process of the national integration, Shah Mahmoud Hanifī concluded that the Amir had played a decisive role in Afghanistan falling under the colonial system, evaluating his reign negatively. At any rate, there is no doubt that the reign of the Amir was one of the most significant historical turning points in Afghanistan, not only with regard to its centralisation, but also the national identity of its citizens.

Consequently, the central task of this paper is to re-examine the details of the internal situation in Afghanistan in the late nineteenth century. To determine the state of Afghanistan's internal affairs, I analyse a series of Persian correspondence exchanged between persons of influence in Afghanistan and the British Indian authority, as well as a number of confidential British documents.

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<sup>2</sup> For a long time, most of the studies in this field have stated that Afghanistan became a unitary state during this period. See Barfield 2010: 159-163.

<sup>3</sup> Tarzi 2003.

<sup>4</sup> A book entitled "Sarrishtah-yi Islāmīyat Rūm" was published in both Persian and Pashto, which was referred to as Afghānī in it, by the order of the Amīr. The book was written as the word of the Amīr himself to all his subjects in Afghanistan and dealt with the situation of the Ottoman dynasty at that time. See SI. Therefore, it seems that the Amīr considered the Ottoman dynasty as his model for consolidating Afghanistan on the basis of Islamic doctrine.

<sup>5</sup> Hanifi 2011.

## **The Second Anglo-Afghan War and the Divide and Rule Policy of Britain**

A direct cause of the Second Anglo-Afghan war, which broke out in November 1878, was the acceptance of a tsarist Russian delegation to Kabul. The news of this development was immediately reported by the Indian Muslim representative of British subjects in Kabul to the British government.<sup>6</sup> This was followed by the conclusion of a peace treaty between Amīr Sher ‘Alī Khān and Russia, and the subsequent rejection of the British delegation to Kabul.<sup>7</sup> In fact, a draft of the peace treaty and a series of friendly correspondences between the Amīr and the Russian authorities in Turkestan were discovered later, when British forces occupied Kabul. Amīr Sher ‘Alī Khān was evacuated to Mazār-i Sharīf, a central city in northern Afghanistan near to the area under the Russian sphere of influence, having asked for the support of the Russian Turkestan authorities. Amīr Sher ‘Alī Khān and the Governor General of Russian Turkestan, Konstantin Petrovich Von Kaufman (in position 1867-1882), had exchanged letters from March 1870 onwards, and the Russians at the beginning had promised to give him their full support if a foreign power invaded Afghanistan. However, Amīr Sher ‘Alī Khān did not receive this promised aid and died at Mazār-i Sharīf. General Kaufman wrote to Sher ‘Alī as follows:

I have written to you a letter to the effect that the Emperor, on account of your troubles, had communicated with the British Government, and that the Russian Ambassador at London had obtained a promise from the British Ministers to the effect that they would not injure the independence of Afghanistan. Perhaps you sent your letter before you got mine. Now I have heard that you have appointed your son Muhammad Yakub as your Regent, and have come out of Cabul with some troops. I have received an order from the Emperor to the effect that it is impossible to assist you with troops now. I hope you will be fortunate. It all depends on the decree of God. Believe me, that the friendship which I made with you will be perpetual.

[L/PS/18/A38, Letter from General Von Kaufmann to Shere Ali, dated 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1879]

Soon after the outbreak of the war, the British army occupied Kabul and other areas and signed the Gandamak Treaty with Amir Ya‘qūb Khān, who became the new Amīr after the flight of Sher ‘Alī Khān to the north. This treaty made Afghanistan a protectorate of Britain. Under this treaty, some of the eastern Afghan territories including the Khyber Pass, Kurram, and Swat (which are now part of present-day Pakistan) were ceded to the British, and Britain obtained the right to station her representatives in Kabul and other vital regions inside Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup> At this time, the Britain tried to integrate the whole of Afghanistan under the rule of Amīr Ya‘qūb Khān, who was often seen as a puppet of the British.

However, having been imprisoned (after a civil war over the amīrship, in which he was

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<sup>6</sup> Political Inventories Urdu, Persian (List of Inventories) File No. 18.

<sup>7</sup> Regarding the contents of the treaty between Sher ‘Alī Khān and Russia, see Russian Correspondence with Kabul in L/PS/18/A38.

<sup>8</sup> Regarding the Gandamak Treaty, see AW: 117-118; ST1: 218–219.

defeated) for many years with his father, Amīr Sher ‘Alī Khān, Amīr Ya‘qūb could not sustain political stability. He was incapable of being a successful ruler during the destabilization of the war. Therefore, the British found it necessary to station a large number of forces in Kabul and in other main cities to maintain law and order. Because the presence of the British army was extended, local hostility against the Amīr and the British, who were garrisoned in Kabul, quickly intensified and spread. Although the British had stated from the beginning that they planned to retreat from Afghanistan soon after securing order, they now felt that they had to reconsider a new scheme for keeping Afghanistan within their sphere of influence. In Kabul, there was an attack on the British Embassy by opponents of the puppet government and the British forces, and it had become apparent that the new Amīr and the British army were in peril because of the rise of distrust and enmity against them. Consequently, the Amīr fled from his palace with a few attendants to the British forces’ camp and asked for asylum in the British Indian territory to receive a pension from the Indian government. He expressed his decision to abdicate from the amīrship of Afghanistan.<sup>9</sup>

As the political situation worsened for British India, they were forced to drastically change their policy. They now realised that the number of hostile tribes in the country made it difficult for the government to be administered by any single ruler. Thus, they reached the following decision that the disintegration of Afghanistan could not be avoided in order to stabilize the situation:

It must not be forgotten that the absorption of the Afghan principalities into one kingdom under Dost Muhammad, and again, after an interval, under Shere Ali, represented only a temporary, and to some degree an accidental, phase of their recent political history. (abbreviation)···We are of opinion, therefore, that the question of the resuscitation of the fallen kingdom of the Barakzais cannot now be entertained, and that we must accept the separation of its constituent provinces as our basis for the political reconstitution of Afghanistan.

[L/PS/20/Memo8: Narrative of Events in Afghanistan from August 1878-December 1880, and connected correspondence, India Office, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1880]

In short, Lord Lytton, who had been viceroy of India during the war, decided to divide Afghanistan into a number of segments and to entrust those territories, apart from the southern region of Afghanistan centred on Kandahar, to pro-British persons.<sup>10</sup> The Kandahar area was regarded as a strategically important tract for safeguarding India from outside threats, and the British Indian authority, having divided Afghanistan, continued to occupy the Kandahar area for a while. Although it was desirable for Britain to withdraw the army from all parts of Afghanistan as soon as possible, she had also been searching for an appropriate indigenous future ruler of Kandahar. As a result, Sardār Sher ‘Ali Khān, a son of the former rulers of the royal family, was selected as the hereditary ruler of Kandahar. His government steadily increased in prosperity under

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<sup>9</sup> Regarding the reign of Amir Ya‘qūb Khān, see L/PS/20/Memo8; ST1: 214-254; AW: 116-133.

<sup>10</sup> See British Government records concerning the policy of disintegration of Afghanistan and the situation of each area in detail in L/PS/20/Memo5.

the British protectorate. However, as he could only exercise his influence under the support of the occupation forces, it was obvious that he was a puppet ruler of the British:

The Viceroy informed the Secretary of State that he considered it was necessary to give the Sirdar [Sher 'Alī Khān] confidential but precise assurance that if he behaved well, Kandahar would be placed under his hereditary Government, supported by us.

[L/PS/20/Memo8: Narrative of Events in Afghanistan from August 1878-December 1880, and connected correspondence, India Office, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1880]

While Kabul and Kandahar were under the strong influence of the British, the western part of the country was under the direct control of a son of the late Amīr Sher 'Alī, Sardār Ayūb Khān. This meant that the Herat area was independent and could possibly become a major threat to the occupation forces in Kandahar. However, according to British intelligence sources, at the time of the early phase of the war, the British had presumed that the power of Herat would automatically weaken because of the lack of effective governance of its leader Ayūb Khān.<sup>11</sup> In reality, the British Indian officials had repeatedly discussed the political affairs of the Herat, assumed several possible future scenarios, and prepared a number of options for the future. They seriously considered the options of ceding Herat to Persia, creating a separate state outside the influence of the Amir of Kabul, and annexing the area as a British territory:

As regards Herat and Seistan, Lord Lytton's Government accepted in principle what was understood to be the policy of the Government at home, viz., that Persia should be allowed to occupy them upon suitable conditions, and upon this assumption they proposed to subordinate the remainder of Afghanistan directly or indirectly to distinct Native Governments at Kabul and Kandahar.

[L/PS/20/Memo8: Narrative of Events in Afghanistan from August 1878-December 1880, and connected correspondence, India Office, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1880]

Ultimately, this option was rejected because of the financial and military responsibilities of the rule being too great. The idea of handing Herat to Persia was also rejected, particularly in light of the potential for conflict with Russia that might ensue. Britain had already fought many bloody and costly conflicts with Russia in a number of struggles regarding colonies, and there was much political rivalry and public hostility between the two countries. The British also feared that if Herat was ceded to Persia, then it would be incorporated into the Russian sphere of influence. For those reasons, it was thought necessary to protect Herat from both Russia and Persia. The British were left with two options regarding Herat. One was to leave Ayūb Khān as its legitimate ruler, and the other was to install another ruler. However, for the meantime, Ayūb Khān remained in power, although the British considered that his rule might be short lived.

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<sup>11</sup> For more information about the situation of Herat and Ayūb Khān at that time, see AW: 110-160.

### **The Selection of Sardār ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Khān as the New Amīr of Kabul**

So far as the northern area, so-called Afghan Turkistan, was concerned, the British did not intend to directly intervene.<sup>12</sup> However, in trying to find someone to take over as the Amīr of Kabul, the British discovered Sardār ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Khān, who had been active in the northern area of the country. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Khān’s father had a stronghold in the northern part of the country and had been a major rival of his brother, Sher ‘Alī over the amīrship. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Khān, who had lived in Samarqand receiving a Russian pension for several decades,<sup>13</sup> was now installed by the British as the Amīr of Kabul.

As mentioned before, during the war, numerous insurgencies had occurred throughout the country. In Ghazni, located in southeast Afghanistan between Kabul and Kandahar, a group of rebels under the leadership of Mullā Mushk-i ‘Ālam had mobilized opposition forces against the British and their collaborators. The group was called the National Party, and it made strong demands for the imminent withdrawal of occupation forces.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, a large number of people launched an attack on the Kabul authorities and the British.

The basic political principles, which were based on the existing conditions of the British Indian government for her profit, are as follows:

The situation can only with advantage be discussed with reference to the definite policy which has now been sanctioned by the Government of India, which may conveniently be summarized here:-

First. The Government has no intention of permanently annexing Afghanistan, or of retaining under its control any other portions of the country than may be necessary for the defence and security of its own frontier.

Second. Ameer Yakub Khan, who has been proved to have been unmindful of the obligations imposed upon him by the Treaty of Gandamak, will not, under any circumstances, be permitted to return to Afghanistan.

Third. The policy of the disintegration of Afghanistan has been definitely accepted, and Kandahar, and probably Herat, will be permanently severed from Northern Afghanistan.

Fourthly. The Chief whom the Government have determined to accept for the Ameerhip of Kabul and Turkistan is Sirdar Abdul Rahman Khan, if only he shows himself animated by friendly, and not hostile, sentiments towards the British Government.

Fifthly, The evacuation of Northern Afghanistan by British troops is to be carried out at as early a date as may be possible, having due regard to the desirability of making such arrangements for the administration of the country as will not necessitate its speedy reoccupation.

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<sup>12</sup> See L/PS/20/Memo8; ST1; Political Dep. (List of Inventories) File No. 333.

<sup>13</sup> More about the ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Khān in exile in Russian territory, see LA: 42-162.

<sup>14</sup> L/P/20/Memo5: Northern Afghanistan: Memoranda and Reports by Mr. Lepel Griffin, C.S.I., Chief Political Officer at Kabul, from 1<sup>st</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> April 1880, on state of Affairs in Northern Afghanistan.

[L/PS/20/Memo5: Northern Afghanistan: Memoranda and Reports by Mr. Lepel Griggin, C.S.I., Chief Political Officer at Kabul, from 1<sup>st</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> April 1880, on state of Affairs in Northern Afghanistan]

It appeared to be generally understood by the local people that the British did not intend to annex the country. However, the various claimants to the throne were reluctant to submit to British authority because they had already suffered for their adhesion to the British cause and considered that, as the British were soon to leave Afghanistan, their chances of standing well with the next ruler would be improved if they now abstained from declaring themselves to be on the British side.

At any rate, although the British had estimated that of all possible claimants to the throne of northern Afghanistan, there was no one who could be favourably compared with the ‘Abd al-Rahmān Khān, it seemed that there was no doubt that his nomination presented some dangers. Despite the risks, there was no possible course that could be followed in Afghanistan that would not be beset with difficulties. Therefore, the British began negotiations with ‘Abd al-Rahmān Khān and a large amount of correspondence was exchanged concerning how northern Afghanistan, including Kabul, would be ruled and the future relationship between him and the British.<sup>15</sup> According to British sources, there was no longer any doubt in April 1880 as to ‘Abd al-Rahmān’s success in Afghan Turkistan, and using a confidential agent, letters were delivered to him and his subordinate and responses were received.<sup>16</sup> On the whole, the tenor of these documents was not unfriendly to the British government and they showed a desire to come to some understanding.

Consequently, the British decided to entrust the amīrship to ‘Abd al-Rahmān. They discussed with him some issues that had arisen regarding the Indian government. First of all, there was the matter of the position of the ruler of Kabul in relation to foreign powers. As the British government admitted no right of interference by foreign powers in Afghanistan and because both Russia and Persia had pledged to abstain from all political interference with Afghanistan’s affairs, it was plain that the ruler in Kabul could have not political relations with any foreign power except the British. In addition, if any such foreign power should attempt to interfere in Afghanistan and if such interference should lead to unprovoked aggression by the ruler in Kabul, then the British government would be prepared to aid him, if necessary, to repel such actions, provided that he followed the advice of the British government in regard to his external relations. Second, with regard to limits of territory, the whole province of Kandahar had been placed under a separate ruler, with some tracts ceded to British India as a result of the Gandamak Treaty. Thus, the government was neither able to enter into any negotiations with ‘Abd al-Rahmān on these points, nor in respect to arrangements with regard to the North-West Frontier of India, which had been concluded with the ex-amīr, Ya‘qūb Khān. With these reservations, the British government were willing for ‘Abd al-Rahmān Khān to establish rule over Afghanistan including Herat, but the possession of which could not be guaranteed. However, the government were not likely to hinder any measures he

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<sup>15</sup> L/P/20/Memo5: Aide Memoire. Negotiations with Abdul Rahman Khan, 1880.

<sup>16</sup> Regarding the process of the negotiation between ‘Abd al-Rahmān Khān and the British, my discussion is based largely on L/PS/20/Memo8; L/PS/20/Memo5; ST1: 237-251.

might take to obtain possession of the area, giving him as complete and as extensive authority as had been exercised by any amīr of his family.

In addition, the British government wished not to interfere in the internal government of these territories, nor would they be required to admit English residents. However, for the convenience of regular friendly intercourse between the two states, it was suggested by the British that a Muslim agent of the British Indian government be stationed in Kabul. The British pressured ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Khān to decide whether he would accept the offer.<sup>17</sup> In fact, it had taken just four months between March and June 1880 for the process of the selection of the amīr. It is obvious that the British government pushed through the appointment the new amīr in an attempt to stabilize the country. Having resided in Russian territory for many years, the amīr’s loyalty was seen as suspect by some of the British policymakers. However, despite these apprehensions, the British could not find anyone else they considered suitable for the amīrship.

‘Abd al-Raḥmān Khān was officially selected by the British government as the new amīr of Kabul and, at the same time, recognized as a legitimate ruler of the northern and eastern regions of Afghanistan. After long deliberations as to whether to accept the offer from Britain, he accepted the proposal that he assume the amīrship and work toward mutual understanding with the British authorities. As a result of this, he was invited to Kabul by the British:<sup>18</sup>

In those days, Amīr ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Khān was in Tashkent. The British official and officer had sought the best measure for entrusting Kabul and designating one of Sardārs of Afghans to rule Afghanistan. Therefore, they wrote an epistle which prompted Amīr ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Khān come to Kabul immediately. [AW : 131]

From that time, he sought to consolidate areas in which numerous small forces remained under his leadership. As mentioned above, with regard to western Afghanistan, the British had approved the amīr ruling this area, hoping that he could retrieve Herat by himself. However, in reality, Herat had been a virtually autonomous region under the rule of Sardār Ayūb Khān. The British government believed Kandahar would be an excellent example for northern Afghanistan to follow, and the autonomous Kandahar government existed with full British support.

Suddenly, however, the situation in Afghanistan changed because of the invasion of Kandahar by Sardār Ayūb Khān from Herat, which began with his defeating the British army in the southern area of the country. The fact that he was about to secure control of the region forced the British government to modify her future plans, and a new strategy to deal with the political difficulties was suggested. Under this plan, the northern and eastern regions of Afghanistan were to be transferred to ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Khān, and the western and southern regions to Ayūb Khān. However, Ayūb Khān had shown greater hostility towards the British, calling them infidels, and his followers were at the ready to expel foreign influences from the country. Although the British

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<sup>17</sup> LP/S/20/Memo8; Political Dep. (List of Inventories), File 332.

<sup>18</sup> L/PS/20/Memo5.

troops could possibly defeat Ayūb Khān's army and succeed in withdrawing to Herat, he remained in Herat until 1881. Finally, Ayūb Khān was expelled to Persia by 'Abd al-Raḥmān Khān, who successfully gained the support of the National Party in Ghazni, which a large number of religious personnel had joined, in exchange for high ranking posts in the government.<sup>19</sup>

### **Relations between the Amīr and British India Concerning Autonomous Tribal Principalities in Eastern Afghanistan**

With its unique features, eastern Afghanistan has been excluded from the analysis so far. In this part of the country, a large number of small Pashtun forces existed for a long time with virtual autonomous status. In addition, the British had already contacted these tribal people because of their proximity to the North-West Frontier of India (known as Yaghistān at that time) and eastern Afghanistan, some of which was ceded by the Gandamak Treaty and theoretically became an Indian domain.<sup>20</sup> In deciding to commence war against Amīr Sher 'Alī Khān, the British Government deliberately spread notification that it was trying to conciliate the sentiments of the people of Yaghistān, where the Pashtun formed the majority. It was obvious that the announcement was preventing them from cooperating with their fellow Afghans. The notification was written in both Urdu and Pashto, which were the area's lingua franca and the mother tongue of Pashtun, respectively.<sup>21</sup> In addition, the British started to exchange correspondence with local representatives in eastern Afghanistan. Britain had tried to interfere in local politics to make local leaders recognize their virtual sovereignty over them.

Kunār and La'lpūrah were comparatively powerful states in spite of the official recognition of 'Abd al-Raḥmān Khān as the new amīr. By entrusting him with the east as well as the north of the country, the British authorities had continued to act as if both states were under their protection. The British source referred to the importance of both states and their positions as follows:

When Muhammad Sadiq, Khan of Lalpura, who had been nominated by the ex-Amir as Chief, joined the opposition on the deportation of Muhammad Yakub Khan, a guarantee of his estates, jagirs, and allowances was made to his brother in the name of the British Government. On receiving this pledge, he at once elected for the Government side, and has been doing good service as Khan of Lalpura ever since.[abbreviation] Of a similar character is the guarantee of his ancestral and acquired estates and jagirs to Syud Mahmud, Badshah of Kunar[abbreviate] was assured by the Government of India of the continuance of his possessions. [abbreviate] Both the Chiefs of Kunar and Lalpura have consistently, relying on the word of the British Government, done good service [abbreviate] Their position, too, with

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<sup>19</sup> See LP/S/20/Memo8.

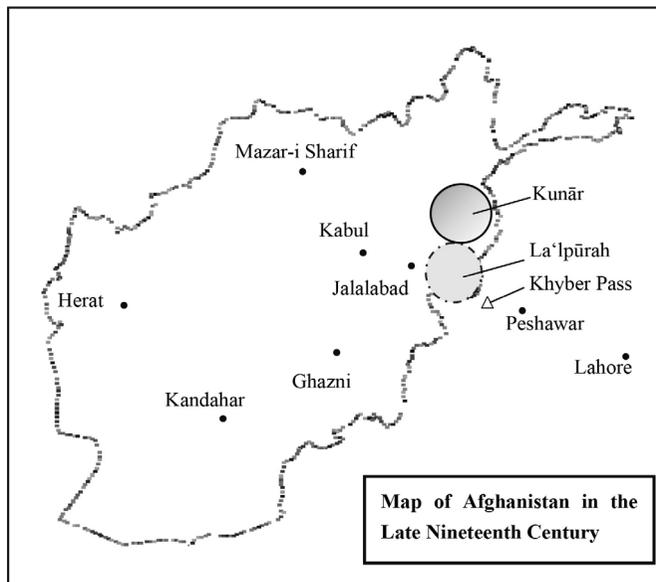
<sup>20</sup> Regarding the relationship between the British and Pashtun tribal communities from the second half of the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century, see Harun, 2007.

<sup>21</sup> In this notification, the British government consistently called the Amir as wālī of Kābul (governor of Kabul), not the Amīr of Afghanistan. See Political Inventories Urdu, Persian (List of Inventories), File 16.

reference to our line of communication, made it of the highest concern that those Chiefs should not only be neutral, but friendly.

[L/PS/20/Memo8: Narrative of Events in Afghanistan from August 1878-December 1880, and connected correspondence, India Office, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1880]

First of all, regarding the Khān of La‘lpūrah, the British confirmed his position earlier than they did that of the Amīr of Kabul and forced the Amīr to ensure the position later.<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, the Khān of La‘lpūrah had received a considerable subsidy from both the Amīr of Kabul and the British Indian government. Before the Second Anglo-Afghan War, the main source of income for La‘lpūrah had been the toll at the Khyber Pass. However, the Khyber Pass had been ceded to the British after the war and La‘lpūrah’s income had decreased sharply. Therefore, it was also confirmed from historical documents that the British had not only given subsidies but had also lent a great sum of money to La‘lpūrah.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the British had given protection to the rival brother of the Khān in the form of a large pension in India, to prevent him replacing the Khān, which would have been disadvantageous for British profit.<sup>24</sup> In fact, the Khān of La‘lpūrah had been very cooperative towards the British and had continuously exchanged letters with them regarding important political matters. For instance, after being summoned by Amīr ‘Abd al-Rahmān Khān to his Court in Kabul, the Khan of La‘lpūrah asked the British for point-by-point instructions about how to act.<sup>25</sup>



<sup>22</sup> Political Dep. (List of Inventories), File No. 325; Fida Yunas 2005: 90.

<sup>23</sup> Commissioner Office Peshawar, File No. 770.

<sup>24</sup> Commissioner Office Peshawar, File No. 669-A.

<sup>25</sup> Foreign Department (List of Inventories), File No. 6.

Similarly, the Bādshāh of Kunār paid his respects and offered to perform any service for the British government, shortly after the arrival of the British forces in Jalalabad during the war.<sup>26</sup> The Bādshāh asked for recognition of his position by the British government and later tried to contact them as he considered their reply inadequate. According to the contents of the correspondence written in Persian, his requests were as follows.<sup>27</sup> First, in spite of the British government's recognition of his family's ancestral possessions, the assurance was in vague and general terms. He demanded explicit promises in this regard. Second, he hoped that he might be made independent of any ruler in Kabul and subordinate only to the British. The British had already debated carefully whether the Bādshāh would be given full support as the most influential person in the area adjacent to the Yaghistān frontier or whether he should be abandoned. The British wanted to withdraw their troops from Afghanistan as soon as possible and to reduce their responsibility.

According to ST2 and LA,<sup>28</sup> 'Abd al-Rahman Khan expressed his apprehension towards the situations in both Kunār and La'lpūrah:

And when the imperial party moved from capital Kabul towards Kandahar, Sayyad Muḥammad Kunārī and Akbar Khān Mohmand La'lpūra pulled their leg from the way of servive, and turned away from an attendance to the party of His Majesty. [ST2 : 15]

Because of their claim to virtual independence from the sovereignty of Kabul, they held the possibility of disintegrating the eastern part of Afghanistan and weakening the position of the Amīr of Kabul. The Amīr had frequently exchanged correspondence with the British during his reign, with regard to both foreign affairs and internal affairs. Although 'Abd al-Raḥmān Khān was formally recognized by the British to incorporate the small states in eastern Afghanistan, he had to negotiate with Britain about each matter. Thus, although the Amīr considered the Khān of La'lpūrah a great threat in the east and desired to punish the Khān with armed forces, the Khān was able to sustain his autonomous position thanks to a close relationship between La'lpūrah and the British Indian government. While La'lpūrah remained under the domain of the Amīr of Kabul, 'Abd al-Raḥmān Khān could not ignore the influence of the British in eastern Afghanistan.

## Conclusion

When we examine the political situation of Afghanistan as a buffer state, the role of indigenous actors should not be ignored, as the British during the Second Anglo-Afghan War repeatedly interfered in the internal politics of Afghanistan as well as in the country's foreign affairs. It was the British support of the selection of 'Abd al-Raḥmān Khān as Amīr that led him to

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<sup>26</sup> Relations of the Amir of Kabul with the Khan of Lalpura and the Badshah of Kunar, in Political Dep. (List of Inventories), File No. 325.

<sup>27</sup> Correspondence from Badshah of Kunar, Sayid Mahmud to Commissioner of Peshawar, written May 14, 1882 in Political Dep. (List of Inventories), File No. 325.

<sup>28</sup> In LA, 'Abd al-Raḥmān Khān called the Badshah of Kunār "foolish." See LA: 233-234.

take the British voice seriously in dealing with the internal politics. Thus, regarding eastern Afghanistan, his intention to consolidate and centralise the area moved forward slowly and remained unrealized. At the same time, it was obvious that the British could not help but change their policy regarding the ruling of the country, as in the examples of Herat and Kandahar, which they had decided to sever from the sovereignty of the Amir of Kabul. At any rate, although Amīr ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Khān partially succeeded in integrating the fragmented country into a centralised one, a large number of small states remained, particularly in eastern Afghanistan. Furthermore, the closeness of this area to Kabul made the Amīr apprehensive of the movement of Pashtun tribal forces during his reign. If the Amīr desired to attack these states, the British Indian government’s permission was vital. Consequently, to do so was outside the Amīr’s authority, particularly as the British had actively communicated with such local states to secure their interests and keep them under their sphere of influence. Although the Durand Line was drawn for the demarcation of the border between Afghanistan and British India in 1893,<sup>29</sup> this agreement worked only to a limited degree due to the intensely intimate ties between the British government and the Pashtun tribal forces in eastern Afghanistan.

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<sup>29</sup> For more about the contents of the Durand Line Agreement and the large number of political disputes between Afghanistan and British India (now Pakistan) concerning it, see Yunus 2005.

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