



Research Article

Colonial Ambitions and Afghan Sovereignty: Analyzing the First Anglo-Afghan War

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In the 19th century, Russia and the United Kingdom fought one other diplomatically in an attempt to gain more influence in southern Asia. The Russians called it a "shadow tournament," but the British invented the phrase "Great Game." The ascent to prominence of Amir Dost Muhammad Khan was seen by the British as a danger to their interests in India. It was claimed that by using Amir, Russia was intruding on India's borders. Russia's ambitions for regional expansion coincided with the British invasion of Afghanistan. The British redirected their attention to Afghanistan as a result of this development. The British persevered even after they were unable to persuade Amir Dost Muhammad Khan to sign a treaty that would have ended Russian control. Russia continued to communicate with the Amir of Kabul during this time. Consequently, in 1839 the British launched an invasion of Afghanistan, which restored Shah Shuja to his former position. A long-lasting and deadly power battle between the Sadozais and the Barakzais, two sections of the Durrani tribe, took place in Afghanistan in the early 1800s. Dost Mohammad Khan was named the new Emir of Kabul after the Barakzais won the civil war. However, in the midst of the internal strife, Ranjit Singh, the ruler of the Sikh kingdom, took control of Peshawar. This led to a huge and irreversible conflict of interest between Afghanistan and the Sikh state. In addition to identifying the crucial person who made the choice that ultimately sparked hostilities, the essay aims to make clear how these factors interacted and contributed to the start of the conflict. This invasion was a major blow to the British, and it was a turning moment in modern history because it was the first time the Afghans and the British had faced off, which ultimately led to the British's defeat. For its inquiry and study, this article uses a descriptive research approach and technique.

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Introduction

Afghanistan's unique geographic position and wide variety of ethnic groups have shaped its history. It is situated where three distinct geographic and cultural regions, the Indian subcontinent, Central Asia, and the Middle East converge. Afghanistan has served as a buffer state in a geopolitical context or as a middleman between rival regional powers (Farhang, 2010). According to renowned anthropographer Louis Dupree, Afghanistan has long been used as a stopover country by armies traveling to other places. Afghanistan's difficult physical location is made more difficult by the country's diverse ethnic population, which has been shaped by its closeness to three different regional civilizations (Forbes, 1892). The intricate internal topography of the region is a result of the Hindu Kush Mountain range's growth towards the southwest. The northern region's Turkistan Plains are described as a semi-desert flood basin that is home to a wide variety of plants and animals. These plains are bordered by the Amu Darya River, sometimes referred to as the Oxus River. Afghanistan's northern neighbors are

Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan (Ghobar, 2014). All three nations are nearby (Kakakhil, 2009). The dry Iranian Plateau extends as far as the city of Herat into the western and southern parts of Afghanistan. This region's terrain shows a consistent westward slope, although the Farsiwan people are comparable to their Persian, or more precisely, Iranian, counterparts. Situated south of Kandahar, the Registan Desert is mostly made up of sand dunes. This desert is crossed by the Helmand, Arghandab, and Tarnak River systems, which get their water from the annual meeting of the snow. The Baloch community in southern Afghanistan maintains strong ties with neighboring countries. The Sulaiman Mountain Range marks the eastern boundary of the Iranian plains. This plateau is physically separated from the Indian subcontinent by the Indus River. This region's geography is made up of steep mountains and deep valleys that were created by tectonic faults and seismic activity. Both the eastern and southeast borders of Afghanistan are home to an equal number of Pashtuns. Few mountain routes are principally used in this area for the movement of people and

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products, the most important being the Khojak and Bolan routes to the southeast and the Khyber Pass to the east (Hanifi, 2004). In 1747, Afghanistan gained political independence. The founder of this group was Sadozai Ahmad Shah Durrani, the chief of the related Pashtun tribes. Instability within the confederacy was being caused by the ongoing internal warfare. By the early 1800s, the protracted war between various tribes had utterly destroyed Afghanistan, rendering it defenseless and ultimately leading to the loss of its vital Indian provinces. After a protracted and bloody period of internal conflict, Dost Mohammad and his Barakzai dynasty were able to firmly consolidate their rule over Afghanistan by 1826. Throughout this century, Afghanistan's administrative structure grew deeply entwined with the colonial ambitions of Russia and Britain.

Methodology

In this paper, we employed both conventional and scientific sources to collect material that was considered essential and relevant to this research. The article adopts a descriptive and explanatory style, primarily focusing on the reasons of the first Anglo-Afghan War. It does so through seven succinct yet relevant introductions and conclusions. This factor has been a vital element of the research technique.

Objectives

- Explain the causes of the first Anglo-Afghan war.
- Clarify the reasons behind the first Anglo-Afghan war.

Questions:

- Why did the first Anglo-Afghan war occur?
- What was the cause of the first Anglo-Afghan war?

Causes and events

The British attempt to strengthen their position on the Afghanistan border in order to prevent a potential Russian invasion of India was the main cause of the first Anglo-Afghan War. At that time, Dost Muhammad was the ruler of Afghanistan. He overcame many obstacles even after ascending to the Afghan throne in 1826. Peshawar is essentially backed under the leadership of Ranjit Singh. The former Afghan leader Shah Shuja found sanctuary with Ranjit Singh and was attempting to recapture his empire with the help of the Sikhs and the English (Havelock, 1840). Furthermore, the main cause of security problems close to the Amur border was the regular uprisings spearheaded by rival Afghan commanders. During that time, tensions between Russia and Britain over the "Eastern Question" led to the European Union turning its political maneuvering towards Afghanistan. (Hopkirk, 1994) After Britain intervened to block Russia's progress into Turkey, Russia turned its attention and stepped up its pressure on Persia and Afghanistan. It was seen by the British as a threat to their empire in India. When Lord Palmerston became Britain's foreign minister in 1830, he was eager to stop Russia from moving further east. He suggested taking a tough stance in order to accomplish this (Johnson, 2006). Lord Auckland was chosen expressly to carry out this scheme in 1836. Furthermore, he designated McNeil as ambassador to Persia in order to apply pressure on that country to impede Russia's advancement. Dost Muhammad asked the English in May 1836 for assistance in regaining Peshawar from Ranjit Singh. Auckland, though, rejected his request. In an attempt to build amicable relations with the country, he dispatched Captain Alexander Burnes to Afghanistan in September 1836 to try and broker a peace agreement with the Amir. A Russian ambassador arrived at the Amir's court at the same time. At first, Dost Muhammad seemed to favor the English and greeted Alexander Burnes with great

warmth. The English announced that they would try to stop Ranjit Singh from going into Afghanistan. They asked the Amir to pledge he would have no political ties to any foreign country in return. In an effort to retake Peshawar from the Sikhs, the Amir made a request for aid from the English (Morris, 1878). It is challenging for the two sides to come to an agreement as a result. Subsequently, the Amir attempted to put pressure on the English by expressing his preference for the Russian delegation. In the meantime, Persia captured Herat in 1837 with Russian assistance. In April 1838, Alexander Burnes departed Afghanistan after realizing his objective had not been met. Subsequently, the British used diplomacy to successfully influence Russia and Persia. Despite having persuaded Lord Auckland to dispatch a naval squadron to the Persian Gulf, McNeil left Persia. Auckland gave a suitable response. Persia was under pressure from the British administration to end the siege of Herat as soon as feasible. Fearing for its security, Persia lifted the siege in September 1838 (Morris, 1878). In reaction to diplomatic pressure from the United Kingdom, Russia withdrew its diplomats from Afghanistan and Persia. Everything seemed to have been temporarily sorted out. Not only did we not need to go to war with Afghanistan, but there was no reason to try to work out a negotiated settlement with Dost Muhammad.

Tripartite struggle

However, Auckland takes a different tack. He became determined to remove Dost Muhammad and appoint his nominee, Shah Shuja, to lead the Afghan government going forward. He supervised the tripartite agreement reached by the English, Ranjit Singh, and Shah Shuja in June 1838. After that, decisions were made to: 1. All of Ranjit Singh's land in Afghanistan, including Peshawar, would remain his property. 2. Ranjit Singh would get two lakh rupees and post 5,000 men in Peshawar in return for Shah Shuja's assistance. 3. Ranjit Singh and Shah Shuja will not oppose Sind. 4. Shah Shuja would not associate with any foreign country without authorization from the English and Ranjit Singh. Ranjit Singh and the English will install Shah Shuja as the new ruler of Afghanistan in accordance with the previously agreed agreements. Still, the British were mostly to blame for this war (Morris, 1878). The English accused Dost Muhammad of several crimes to justify their war against him. All of those charges, though, were false. Neither Dost Muhammad nor the English had taken any action to stop Ranjit Singh when the Persians besieged Herat (Lal, 1846). Thus, there was no justification for striking Afghanistan. Auckland was well-aware of its objectives. William wanted to overthrow the hostile Amir and replace him with a kind leader in Ladia in order to secure the English dominion's northwest frontier. Consequently, the British began attacking Afghanistan in 1839.

Divergent opinions have been expressed regarding Lord Auckland's policy. His supporters argue that "Auckland had no choice in the matter," "Shah Shura had a better moral claim than Dost Muhammad on the throne of Afghanistan," and also that "the British government was responsible for this policy of Auckland." The majority of historians, however, disagree with the reasoning behind the claims made by advocates of Auckland. Most of them have been extremely critical of his methodology. They contend that because Dost Muhammad was a capable and well-liked leader, he had a greater moral claim to the Afghan throne than Shah Shuja had. Auckland might decide not to attack Afghanistan after the Persians raised the siege of Herat. As an independent state unto himself, Dost Muhammad could not be forced to follow the British's desired route outside of it, as they lacked moral power. Moreover, there was no tactical reason for the combat (Lal, 1846). The English army had prepared for attack, but they had not considered the distance, the weather, or

the terrain. Experts such as Elphinstone, Sir Charles Metcalfe, Lord Wellesley, and others had all prophesied that the mission would fail. Innes' book claims that "it was the most egregious mistake made in the history of the British in India." The struggle had no moral foundation. Feeling sorry for Dost Muhammad, Mr. Macnaughten requested Auckland treat him with dignity when he was transferred to India as a prisoner. As a result, the English did not need to strike Afghanistan (Lal, 1846).

Revolt at Kabul

In order to achieve dominance over Afghanistan, it was necessary to deploy a military contingent referred to as the "Army of the Indus". The assembly of the item took place in Ferozpur during the month of November in the year 1838. Sir John Keane assumed leadership. Mr. Macnaughten served as Shah Shuja's primary advisor, while Alexander Burnes acted as his envoy. Two military forces initiated an attack on Afghanistan; one successfully arrived at Kandhar, while the other traversed the strategically significant Khyber Pass, a vital route linking Afghanistan to Kabul. Initially, the English emerged triumphant (Osmani, 2019). In July 1839, they seized control of Ghazni, and in April, they captured Kandhar. In August, Dost Muhammad departed from Kabul, and Shah Shuja subsequently arrived in the capital. Upon surrendering to the English in November, Dost Muhammad was apprehended and subsequently transported to Calcutta as a captive. The mission seemed to have been completely successful. However, it quickly became clear that Shah Shuja's control relied heavily on the assistance of the English. These findings indicate that there were six regiments of English soldiers stationed in Kabul during that period. Colonel Elphinstone took control of the army, while General Nott and Colonel Sale remained in Afghanistan. The remaining soldiers of the English army departed for India. However, the Afghans were overwhelmed by Shah Shuja's influence and the rebellions. Several influential reasons influenced this uprising. Shah Shuja administered Afghanistan with the assistance of the English (Hopkirk, 1994). This incident caused significant humiliation among the Afghan population (Morris, 1878). The presence of the English military in Afghanistan was the primary source of inflation. Afghans across all income brackets are facing escalating financial hardship due to increasing expenses for essential goods and services. Afghan ladies captivated the English, serving as the catalyst for the Afghans to engage in a battle against the English in defense of their nation's dignity. An insurrection occurred in Kabul during November 1841. Alexander Burnes was a prominent Englishman who died. The English did not immediately intervene to halt it. Consequently, the uprising gained significant momentum, and Akbar Khan, the son of Dost Muhammad, took control. Kabul was subjected to a military blockade by Khan Akbar. On December 11, Mr. Macnaughten was compelled to sign a contract with the Afghans against his will due to pressure. Dost Muhammad and Shah Shuja will be released, stipends will be provided to all Afghan prisoners, and the English will promptly withdraw from Afghanistan (Ryan, 2010). Although the stipulations of the treaty deprived the English of their humanity, they were left with no alternative at this juncture. Nevertheless, Macnaughten's endeavor to divide the Afghans made the agreement unattainable. Consequently, the Afghans lost faith in the English. Macnaughten was killed on December 23 while meeting with Akbar Khan to negotiate the parameters

of a new treaty. General Elphinstone relinquished his optimism. On January 1, 1842, he gave his approval to a new pact. By signing this treaty, the English consented to supplementary conditions in addition to those specified in the prior agreement. The Afghans were provided with a sum of fourteen lakh rupees, along with their existing financial reserves, weapons, and gunpowder, by the English (Morris, 1878).

Upon reaching this arrangement, the English forces were authorized to move from Kabul to Jalalabad. The Afghans guaranteed the English that their voyage would be safe. Consequently, a total of sixteen thousand individuals departed Kabul, having been deprived of all their possessions, including their weaponry and societal standing. They encountered repeated assaults by the Afghans during their route. Except for one hundred and twenty ailing troops who were handed over to Akbar Khan, every surviving English soldier perished in battle. As stated by Dutta and Sarkar, the retreat rapidly transformed into a disorganized retreat, ultimately leading to a slaughter. On January 13, 1842, the sole individual who journeyed to Jalalabad was Dr. Brydon, with the purpose of informing others about the calamity. General Nott effectively protected Kandhar, while Colonel Sale triumphantly defended Jalalabad. Upon India's arrival in Auckland, it was profoundly disturbed upon learning of this tragic event. Colonel Pollock immediately assigned his soldiers to tasks. Prior to Pollock's arrival in Jalalabad, Auckland was recalled and Lord Ellenborough was appointed as the governor-general of India. He commenced his employment on February 28, 1842. Nevertheless, upon seeing their deficiencies in various domains, he commanded the English forces to withdraw from Afghanistan (Ryan, 2010). However, General Nott and Colonel Pollock ignored his orders for a period of time. Their primary objective was to regain popularity and respect in the English-speaking world. Colonel Pollock accompanied General Sale on a trip to Jalalabad. The engagement in close proximity to Kandahar proved to be pivotal for the Afghan army. Subsequently, Pollock traveled to Kabul and emerged victorious over Akbar Khan in close proximity to the Khurd Pass. The English seized control of Kabul on September 15, 1842. General Nott captured Ghazni as well. That contributed to the development and enhancement of the prestige of the English language in Afghanistan. The primary marketplace in Kabul was almost entirely devastated by the shelling. Upon their arrival, the British troops assumed command over the entrances of the temple of Somnath, which had been previously plundered by Mahmud Ghazni from India. Lord Ellenborough praised the conduct of the English military in a boisterous manner, while also highlighting the mistakes made by Lord Auckland (Johnson, 2006). He further stated that whoever managed to earn the confidence of the Afghan population would be recognized as an Amir.

Outcome

The British gained nothing from the Anglo-Afghan war, nevertheless. Their primary goal was to appoint a friendly ruler to the Afghan monarchy. They tried, but could not make it work. After being freed from English captivity, Dost Muhammad traveled to Afghanistan and successfully reclaimed his empire; (Lal, 1846) regrettably; Shah Shuja was slain by the Afghans. There he ruled until 1863. That's why the person in charge of Afghanistan before the war continued to serve in that capacity after it ended. Moreover, following the war, the English's relationship with the Amir did not alter. Dost Muhammad was allowed to continue its operations under British rule. This clearly shows that the British lost almost 20,000 soldiers and 1.5 million rupees throughout the war, while they

gained nothing at all. No failure in history, according to Kaye, has been as widespread as this one (Lal, 1846).

Conclusion

This study looks at the geopolitical circumstances in the early 1800s that led to a conflict between Afghanistan and Britain over opposing colonial objectives. For the first time in modern history, Afghanistan's complicated topography and internal politics have been squarely opposed by rival geopolitical aims from the surrounding regions. Most individuals are aware of the First Anglo-Afghan War's history. The predicament arose from Britain's strategic imperative to protect the northwest gates of the British-Indian Empire from potential invasion by Russian and Persian armies. To counter these concerns, Lord Auckland, the British Governor-General, chose to place Afghanistan under British-Indian protection. Exiled pro-British Sadozai Shah Shuja effectively assumed the role of Barakzai Dost Mohammad after the British 'Army of the Indus' invaded Afghanistan in 1839. Despite the war's early triumphs, Major-General William Elphinstone and his political advisor Sir William Macnaghten are primarily noted for their mishandling of the Kabul Garrison. Thus, Afghan tribesmen destroyed 12,000 people and 4,500 military between January 6 and January 13, 1842. This essay examines Britain's response to a significant tactical setback that contributed to the conclusion of their initial campaign in Afghanistan. The British military's collapse damaged their interests in India and altered the balance of power in the area. British strategists had a dilemma in determining how to respond to the circumstances while keeping in mind that they still had British soldiers and captives in Afghanistan and that they still needed to protect British-India's northwest frontier.

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