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**AFGHANISTAN**

## THE LATE AMEER OF AFGHANISTAN – ABDUR RAHMAN KHAN – OCT 1901

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Abdur Rahman Khan (between 1830 to 1844 – October 1, 1901) was Emir of Afghanistan from 1880 to 1901. He was the third son of Mohammad Afzal Khan, and grandson of Dost Mohammad Khan. Abdur Rahman Khan was considered a strong ruler who re-established the writ of the Afghan government after the disarray that followed the second Anglo-Afghan war. He became known as The Iron Amir after defeating a number of rebellions by various tribes who were led by his relatives.

Before his death in Herat, on June 9, 1863, Dost Mohammad Khan had nominated as his successor Sher Ali Khan, his third son, passing over the two elder brothers, Afzal Khan and Azam Khan. At first, the new Amir was quietly recognized. But after a few months Afzal Khan raised an insurrection in the north of the country, where he had been governing when his father died. This began a fierce contest for power between Dost Mohammad's sons, which lasted for nearly five years.

In this war, Abdur Rahman became distinguished for ability and daring energy. Although his father, Afzal Khan, who had none of these qualities, came to terms with the Amir Sher Ali, the son's behavior in the northern province soon excited the Amir's suspicion, and Abdur Rahman, when he was summoned to Kabul, fled across the Oxus into Bukhara. Sher Ali threw Afzal Khan into prison, and a serious revolt followed in southern Afghanistan.

The Amir had scarcely suppressed it by winning a desperate battle when Abdur Rahman's reappearance in the north was a signal for a mutiny of the troops stationed in those parts and a gathering of armed bands to his standard. After some delay and desultory fighting, he and his uncle, Azam Khan, occupied Kabul (March 1866). The Amir Sher Ali marched up against them from Kandahar; but in the battle that ensued at Sheikhabad on May 10, he was deserted by a large body of his troops, and after his signal defeat Abdur Rahman released his father, Afzul Khan, from prison in Ghazni, and installed him upon the throne as Amir of Afghanistan.

Notwithstanding the new Amir's incapacity, and some jealousy between the real leaders, Abdur Rahman and his uncle, they again routed Sher Ali's forces, and occupied Kandahar in 1867. When Afzal Khan died at the end of the year, Azam Khan became the new ruler, with Abdur Rahman as his governor in the northern province. But towards the end of 1868 Sher Ali's return, and a general rising in his favour, resulted in Abdur Rahman and Azam Khan's defeat at Tinah Khan on January 3, 1869. Both sought refuge in Persia, whence Abdur Rahman placed himself under Russian protection at Samarkand. Azam died in Persia in October 1869.

Abdur Rahman lived in exile in Tashkent, then part of Russian Turkestan, for eleven years, until the 1879 death of Sher Ali, who had retired from Kabul when the British armies entered Afghanistan. The Russian governor-general at Tashkent sent for Abdur Rahman, and pressed him to try his fortunes once more across the Oxus. In March 1880, a report reached India that Abdur Rahman was in northern Afghanistan; and the governor-general, Lord Lytton, opened communications with him to the effect that the British government were prepared to withdraw their troops, and to recognize Abdur Rahman as Amir of Afghanistan, with the exception of Kandahar and some districts adjacent to it. After some negotiations, an interview took place between him and Lepel Griffin, the diplomatic representative at Kabul of the Indian government. Griffin described Abdur Rahman as a man of middle height, with an exceedingly intelligent face and frank and courteous manners, shrewd and able in conversation on the business in hand.

At the durbar on July 22, 1880, Abdur Rahman was officially recognized as Amir, granted assistance in arms and money, and promised, in case of unprovoked foreign aggression, such further aid as might be necessary to repel it, provided that he align his foreign policy with the

British. The British evacuation of Afghanistan was settled on the terms proposed, and in 1881, the British troops also handed over Kandahar to the new Amir.

However, Ayub Khan, one of Sher Ali Khan's sons, marched upon that city from Herat, defeated Abdur Rahman's troops, and occupied the place in July 1880. This serious reverse roused the Amir, who had not at first displayed much activity. He led a force from Kabul, met Ayub's army close to Kandahar, and the complete victory which he there won forced Ayub Khan to fly into Persia. From that time Abdur Rahman was fairly seated on the throne at Kabul, and in the course of the next few years he consolidated his dominion over all Afghanistan, suppressing insurrections by a sharp and relentless use of his despotic authority. The powerful Ghilzai tribe revolted against the severity of his measures several times. In that same year, Ayub Khan made a fruitless inroad from Persia. In 1888, the Amir's cousin, Ishak Khan, rebelled against him in the north; but these two enterprises came to nothing.

In 1885, at the moment when the Amir was in conference with the British viceroy, Lord Dufferin, in India, the news came of a skirmish between Russian and Afghan troops at Panjdeh, over a disputed point in the demarcation of the northwestern frontier of Afghanistan. Abdur Rahman's attitude at this critical juncture is a good example of his political sagacity. To one who had been a man of war from his youth, who had won and lost many fights, the rout of a detachment and the forcible seizure of some debatable frontier lands was an untoward incident; but it was not a sufficient reason for calling upon the British, although they had guaranteed his territory's integrity, to vindicate his rights by hostilities which would certainly bring upon him a Russian invasion from the north, and would compel his British allies to throw an army into Afghanistan from the southeast.[citation needed] He also published his autobiography in 1885, which served more as an advice guide for princes than anything else.

His interest lay in keeping powerful neighbours, whether friends or foes, outside his kingdom. He knew this to be the only policy that would be supported by the Afghan nation; and although for some time a rupture with Russia seemed imminent, while the Government of India made ready for that contingency, the Amir's reserved and circumspect tone in the consultations with him helped to turn the balance between peace and war, and substantially conduced towards a pacific solution. Abdur Rahman left on those who met him in India the impression of a clear-headed man of action, with great self-reliance and hardihood, not without indications of the implacable severity that too often marked his administration. His investment with the insignia of the highest grade of the Order of the Star of India appeared to give him much pleasure.

In the 1880s, the “Iron Emir” decided to strategically displace some members of different ethnic groups in order to bring better security. For example, he “uprooted troublesome Durrani and Ghilzai tribes and transported them to Uzbek and Tajik populated areas in the north, where they could spy on local Dari-speaking, non-Pashtun groups and act as a screen against further Russian encroachments on Afghan territory.” From the end of 1888, the Amir spent eighteen months in his northern provinces bordering upon the Oxus, where he was engaged in pacifying the country that had been disturbed by revolts, and in punishing with a heavy hand all who were known or suspected to have taken any part in rebellion.

In the late 1880s some Hazara tribes revolted against Abdur Rahman in favor of Sher Ali Khan. According to Syed Askar Mousavi, “thousands of Hazara men, women, and children were sold as slaves in the markets of Kabul and Qandahar, while numerous towers of human heads were made from the defeated rebels as a warning to others who might challenge the rule of the Amir.” During this period some Hazaras migrated to Quetta in Balochistan, while smaller number moved to Mashhed in northeastern Iran.

During the period 1895-1896 Abdur Rahman directed the invasion of Kafiristan and the forcible conversion of its indigenous peoples to Islam. The region was subsequently renamed Nuristan.

In 1895, the Amir found himself unable, by reason of ill-health, to accept an invitation from Queen Victoria to visit England; but his second son Nasrullah Khan went instead.

Abdur Rahman died on October 1, 1901, being succeeded by his son Habibullah Khan. He had defeated all enterprises by rivals against his throne; he had broken down the power of local chiefs, and tamed the refractory tribes; so that his orders were irresistible throughout the whole dominion. His government was a military despotism resting upon a well-appointed army; it was administered through officials absolutely subservient to an inflexible will and controlled by a widespread system of espionage; while the exercise of his personal authority was too often stained by acts of unnecessary cruelty.

He held open courts for the receipt of petitioners and the dispensation of justice; and in the disposal of business he was indefatigable. He succeeded in imposing an organized government upon the fiercest and most unruly population in Asia; he availed himself of European inventions for strengthening his armament, while he sternly set his face against all innovations which, like Railways and Telegraphs, might give Europeans a foothold within his country.

His adventurous life, his forcible character, the position of his state as a barrier between the Indian and the Russian empires, and the skill with which he held the balance in dealing with them, combined to make him a prominent figure in contemporary Asian politics and will mark his reign as an epoch in the history of Afghanistan. The Amir received an annual Subsidy from the British government of 1,850,000 rupees. He was allowed to import munitions of war.

In 1896, he adopted the title of Zia-ul-Millat-Wa-ud Din ("Light of the nation and religion"); and his zeal for the cause of Islam induced him to publish treatises on jihad. Today, his descendants can be found in many places outside of Afghanistan, such as in America, France, Germany, and even in Scandinavian countries such as Denmark and carry the surname of Ziyaee, which is itself a derivative of the King's title. His two eldest sons, Habibullah Khan and Nasrullah Khan, were born at Samarkand. His youngest son, Mahomed Omar Jan, was born in 1889 of an Afghan mother, connected by descent with the Barakzai family.

In 1893 Mortimer Durand negotiated with Abdur Rahman Khan, the Durand Line Treaty for the demarcation of the frontier between Afghanistan, the FATA, North-West Frontier Province and Baluchistan Provinces of Pakistan the successor state of British India. This line, the Durand Line, is named after Mortimer Durand and which still remains as an unrecognized boundary by the Government of Afghanistan.

In 1893, Mortimer Durand was deputed to Kabul by the government of British India for this purpose of settling an exchange of territory required by the demarcation of the boundary between northeastern Afghanistan and the Russian possessions, and in order to discuss with Amir Abdur Rahman Khan other pending questions. Abdur Rahman Khan showed his usual ability in diplomatic argument, his tenacity where his own views or claims were in debate, with a sure underlying insight into the real situation.

In the agreement, the relations between the British Indian and Afghan governments, as previously arranged, were confirmed; and an understanding was reached upon the important and difficult subject of the border line of Afghanistan on the east, towards India.

In the year 1893, during rule of Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, a Royal Commission for setting up of Boundary between Afghanistan and British Governed India was set up to negotiate terms with the British, for the agreeing to the Durand line, and the two parties camped at Parachinar, now part of FATA Pakistan, which is near Khost, Afghanistan. From the British side the camp was attended by Mortimer Durand and Sahibzada Abdul Qayyum, Political Agent Khyber. Afghanistan was represented by Sahibzada Abdul Latif and the Governor Sardar Shireendil Khan representing Amir Abdur Rahman Khan.

Afghan society has mixed feelings about his rule. Some remember him as a ruler who initiated many programs for modernization and effectively prevented the country from being occupied by Russia and Britain during the Great Game. On the other hand, some sectors of Afghanistan remember him as a domestically violent but geopolitically weak ruler in that he was brought to power by the British and declared war on Afghan minorities instead of fighting the British who were deciding Afghanistan's foreign policy for him.

