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ANGLO-AFGHAN RELATIONS
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ANGLO-AFGHAN RELATIONS, a survey from the earliest times to the death of the last Bārakzay ruler in 1357 Š./1978.

A brief encounter in Fatehpur Sīkri in the summer of 993/1585 illustrates two abiding themes of British involvement in India and Afghanistan. John Newbery, Ralph Fitch, and William Leedes had a letter from Queen Elizabeth to the Mughal emperor Akbar mentioning their "intention to introduce the trade of merchandise of all nations whatsoever they can." Akbar was then preparing to lead an army to Kabul to re-assert his authority and we do not know for certain whether the English visitors met him face to face. Kabul had been the springboard for his grandfather Bābor's successful invasion of India in 932/1526, and Akbar had good reason to believe that he who held India must not let Kabul fall into the hands of a hostile power. Here already, 400 years ago, we see trade as the driving force of the British, and we see anxiety about Kabul motivating the actions of an emperor of India. Out of that brief encounter in 993/1585 was born the East India Company, chartered by Queen Elizabeth in 1600 (see R. Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations* . . ., Everyman edition, III; Rowse, *The Expansion of Elizabethan England*, pp. 212-15; E. Edwardes, *Ralph Fitch, Elizabethan in theIndies*, pp. 19-20, 73-77).

The East India Company was not long past its bicentenary when the British marched into Delhi in 1218/1803 and took under their protection the blind and powerless Shah ʿAllām II, last but one of the Mughal emperors descended from Bābor. From that moment it became inevitable that the British in India, having beaten back most of the Indian aspirants to the power abdicated by the

Mughals, would have to look to the frontiers so recently breached by Nāder Shah of Persia in 1551/1739 and by Aḥmad Shah Dorrānī of Afghanistan in eight successful expeditions between 1160/1747 and 1180/1767. While those invaders were about their business in the north, the British had been preoccupied with the consolidation of their own positions and with the defeat of their French commercial and political rivals elsewhere in India. Now they found themselves supreme, save for the final reckoning with the Mahrathas under Holkar (see A. B. Keith, *Constitutional History of India*, London, 1936, pp. 113-15; W. A. J. Archbold, *Cambridge History of the BritishEmpire* IV, Cambridge, 1929, chap. 28).

A few years after the British arrived in Delhi the imperial ambitions of Napoleon Bonaparte provoked a flurry of diplomatic activity, made all the more urgent by Napoleon's alliance with Russia in 1807. In 1224/1809 the British made treaties with four northwestern neighbors of India: with Shah Šoǰāʿ of Kabul, Ranjit Singh of Lahore, the amirs of Sind, and (provisionally) with Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shah of Persia (see Anglo-Iranian Relations). The three treaties negotiated by British envoys from India (with Kabul, Lahore, and Sind) were in accordance with instructions sent from the Secret Committee of the Court of Directors of the East India Company. They were addressed to the Governor-General, Lord Minto, on 2 March 1808. These required him to take measures to prevent a hostile army from crossing the Indus, and to that end to cultivate "the favourable opinion and co-operation not only of all states and countries to the eastward of the Indus but also of the Afghan Government and even of the Tartar tribes to the eastward of the Caspian." Of the four countries courted by Britain in 1224/1809 two were destined to be incorporated into the British Indian Empire (Sind in 1259/1843, Punjab in 1265/1849). A third, Persia, remained independent but weak and vulnerable to foreign pressures (mainly British and Russian) throughout the 13th/19th century. The fourth, Afghanistan, eventually consented to play the part of a buffer state between the British in India and the Russians in Central Asia, but only after two violent collisions (1254-58/1838-42 and 1296-98/1879-81). In 1224/1809 the British had yet to learn by hard experience that the Afghans, whatever their internal quarrels, could not easily be subjugated and kept under control.

In Moḥarram, 1224/February, 1809 the British made their first and fateful contact with an Afghan government. In that month Mountstuart Elphinstone arrived in Peshawar to negotiate with Shah Šoǰāʿ, grandson of Aḥmad Shah Dorrānī. Peshawar was his winter capital, and apart from it there was not

much left of Aḥmad Shah's empire. Elphinstone's object was to persuade Shah Šoǰāʿ to join with the Governor-General in keeping French and Persian invaders at bay. At that time the fancied threat from French influence at the Persian court was the more worrying and more immediate than the Franco-Russian alliance. Elphinstone secured his treaty. The king of Kabul and "the servants of the heavenly throne" would prevent the passage of French and Persian forces through their country into India. The British would pay for this assistance "to the extent of their ability." And whether the Franco-Persian confederacy continued or not, there would be friendship and union between Britain and Kabul for ever. ". . . The veil of separation shall be lifted up from between them, and they shall in no manner interfere in each other's countries" (for the diplomatic negotiations of 1809 see J. A. Norris, *The First Afghan War*, Cambridge, 1967, pp. 10-14, and the more detailed account of R. D. Choksey, *Mountstuart Elphinstone,The Indian Years 1796-1827*, Bombay, 1971, pp. 90-130).

Within a few months of signing the Treaty Shah Šoǰāʿ lost the throne to his stepbrother Maḥmūd. But this was by no means the end of his relationship with the British, who later granted him a pension. They, for their part, had a breathing space in India. The Governor-General was urged to reduce his military expenses "within the narrowest bounds that may be consistent with the public security and interests" (Dispatch of 29 June 1810 in India Office Records Board's Drafts III, first series). But the British were never still. When they were not advancing against an enemy or defending themselves against ambitious princes they were busily reconnoitering. During the next two decades Russia replaced France as Britain's imperial rival in Asia. Russian pressure on the Ottoman Empire and Persia made the British more and more apprehensive. The Russian Empire in Asia steadily expanded between the Black Sea and the Caspian as well as eastward and southward across the Central Asian steppes. But in the years immediately after the battle of Waterloo the Russians still had a thousand miles between them and the Afghans. It was the success of the Russians against the Ottoman Empire and Persia that alarmed the British government. The Treaties of Torkamāṇčāy (1243/1828) and Adrianople (1245/1829) significantly increased Russian power across one of the lines of communication between Britain and India. With an impotent Ottoman Empire behind them and a subservient Persia before them, how could the Russians fail to reach the Indus? While remaining friends in Europe, Britain and Russia entered on a deadly competition in Asia. As heirs to the defensive strategy of Akbar, the British knew the supreme importance of

Kabul, and for as long as they remained in India they were mindful of it and prepared to risk much to prevent Russia from establishing herself in Afghanistan (see Norris, op. cit., pp. 18-31).

The Afghans looked up from their fratricidal quarrels to find that their new neighbors in India were taking altogether too solicitous a view of Afghanistan's welfare. What they could not know at the time was that the British, always intent upon developing trade as a political instrument, hoped to forestall the Russians in Central Asia by using the Indus and routes across Afghanistan to make themselves the principal suppliers of manufactured goods to the khanates. This policy was formulated by Wellington's administration in 1829 and communicated to the Governor-General in 1830 (see primary sources listed in Norris, op. cit., pp. 458-59).

In the event the Indus proved too fickle a river for the commerce envisaged by Lord Ellenborough (Wellington's President of the Board of Control). Alexander Burnes is remembered less for his *Travelsinto Bokhara* (1834), with commercial enterprise in mind, than for his political activities in Kabul at the court of Dōst Moḥammad Khan, who by then had established himself as first among the Bārakzay princes. The Sadōzay, of whom Šoǰāʿ was one, had for the time being been ousted. Burnes's activities can be seen to have their origin in orders given by the government in London (Ellenborough's Dispatch of 12 January 1830, quoted in Norris, op. cit., pp. 36-42). Ostensibly, Burnes was taking a present of horses to Ranjit Singh by boat to Lahore. In fact he was surveying the Indus and beginning that reconnaissance which led the British into Afghanistan in 1255/1839. On his travels Burnes met Ranjit Singh and the Governor-General, the exiled Shah Šoǰāʿ and Dōst Moḥammad Khan himself. He pressed on to Bokhara, but failed to secure an audience with Bahādor Khan. Dōst Moḥammad was the prince who had impressed him most, and Kabul was the place that he remembered with most affection. In an ideal world the British would have made an ally of Dōst Moḥammad, but they could not at the same time be the ally of Ranjit Singh of Lahore. It is true that Kabul was more important to the British in strategic terms, but Ranjit Singh's power at the time was too great to be disregarded. From Dōst Moḥammad's point of view, an alliance with the British against the Sikhs would allow him to recover Peshawar and perhaps other parts of the empire lost since Aḥmad Shah's death in 1186/1772. But the British were not yet prepared to do battle with the Sikhs. Dōst Moḥammad was seen as the man most likely to unite a strong Afghanistan and create a bulwark against the Russian advance, and this was

important to the British. His bitter quarrel with Ranjit Singh, however, stood in the way. It meant that if he could not get help from the British he might be tempted to look elsewhere, to Persia, perhaps, or Russia. In time he gave the British an excuse to intervene by receiving an agent from the Russian Minister in Tehran, who brought presents, promises, and a letter from Tsar Nicholas. The British remembered their pensioner, Shah Šoǰāʿ, who could be plausibly presented to the world as a legitimate ruler unjustly deposed from the throne of his illustrious grandfather. They therefore allied themselves with him and Ranjit Singh in 1254/1838. The result of their gamble was the first Anglo-Afghan War (q.v.): the restoration of Shah Šoǰāʿ; capture and exile of Dōst Moḥammad; uprising led by Akbar Khan, a son of Dōst Moḥammad; disastrous withdrawal and massacre of the Kabul garrison; return of an army of retribution which did its work and left Afghanistan in 1258/1842; return to Kabul of Dōst Moḥammad and a period of “sullen quiescence” in Anglo-Afghan relations (see Norris, op. cit.).

Relations began to improve from 1271/1855 onwards, and on 30 Jomādā I 1273/26 January 1857 the definitive Treaty of Peshawar restored them to such good effect, from both points of view, that Dōst Moḥammad deliberately refrained from intervening during the Indian Mutiny and the British acquiesced in his conquest of Herat in 1279/1863. Dōst Moḥammad died in 1279/1863, the ruler of a country at last more or less united. His family was destined to rule Afghanistan for most of the next 115 years. But immediately after his death quarrels among his sons disrupted the hard-won unity. The ultimately successful son, Šēr ʿAlī, conferred with the Viceroy on a visit to India in 1285/1869, when the treaty with Dōst Moḥammad was re-affirmed. There was no new treaty, even though Central Asian khanates were falling one by one before the steady Russian advance.

Indeed 1285/1868 was the year of Bokhara’s submission to the status of vassal of the Russian emperor. In the circumstances it is not very remarkable that advocates of the forward policy in British India became more influential in the seventies. Under their influence Afghanistan was pressed to receive observers in Herat (always regarded as the strategic hinge of an advance through Afghan territory) and a mission in Kabul. Šēr ʿAlī just as persistently declined to receive them. He might have succeeded in fending off the British if he had not delayed his reply to them in 1295/1878, when a Russian diplomatic mission arrived in Kabul. The message to which the British wanted a reply invited him once again to receive a British mission as well. By Šawwāl/October a new

message reached him in the form of an ultimatum, and a British military force was set in motion.

Šēr ʿAlī died early in 1296/1879. His son and successor, Yaʿqūb Khan, feeling betrayed by the Russians, entered into the Treaty of Gandamak, which gave the British all they had asked and Šēr ʿAlī had refused, i.e., British control of Afghanistan's foreign relations, a permanent British envoy in Kabul and a military presence in the passes leading into India. In return Yaʿqūb was to receive an annual subsidy.

The British envoy, Sir Louis Cavagnari, took up residence in Kabul, but he suffered the same fate as Sir William Macnaghten and Sir Alexander Burnes a generation earlier. He and his entire staff and escort were massacred on 16 Ramażān 1296/3 September 1879. The war that had been interrupted by the Treaty of Gandamak resumed, and the British occupied Kabul and deposed Yaʿqūb (see Second Anglo-Afghan war). They knew better than to stay; they welcomed another of Dōst Moḥammad's grandsons, ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān, when he arrived to claim the throne in 1297/1880. By then a new government in London had repudiated its predecessor's forward policy. The British force returned to its bases in India in 1298/1881, leaving ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān to preserve the neutrality of Afghanistan under his tough personal rule. In an exchange of letters, not a treaty, he had accepted British supervision of his country's foreign relations and Britain's continued control of the passes into India, all in return for a subsidy. This unpromising arrangement endured for the remaining 20 years of ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān's life, in spite of the stresses and strains induced by the Russian advance that caused the Panǰdeh incident in 1302/1885 and in spite of controversies about Afghanistan's frontiers.

On 3 Jomādā I 1311/12 November 1893 the ruler of Afghanistan and the Indian Foreign Secretary, Sir Mortimer Durand, came to an agreement about the "frontier of Afghanistan on the side of India." The Durand Line, as it came to be known, has long since settled into the status of an international boundary, but to this day Afghans are inclined to speak of it as the creation of unequal treaties. The British, for their part, had made sure (and made sure again in 1337/1919) that they had the signature of the Afghan government on documents accepting the Durand Line as a frontier.

Ḥabīballāh succeeded ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān in Kabul in 1319/1901. His major achievement was to turn the personal agreements between his father and the British into a formal treaty between nations. The Anglo-Afghan Treaty of 14

Moḥarram 1323/21 March 1905 described him as an independent monarch, although he agreed to leave the conduct of his country's foreign relations in British hands. As a monarch Ḥabīballāh received a royal salute and was addressed as "Your Majesty" in a letter from King Edward VII when he visited India in 1324-25/1907.

By the Anglo-Russian Convention of 22 Raǰab 1325/31 August 1907, Afghanistan was declared to be outside Russia's sphere of influence, and Britain undertook to refrain from occupying or annexing Afghan territory or interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs. Ḥabīballāh intensely disliked the agreement which divided Persia into the British and Russian spheres of the agreement influence. He never signed it and the parties decided not to press the point. Far from guaranteeing Afghanistan's independence, the Convention as seen from Kabul appeared to threaten it. But Ḥabīballāh kept his head. Afghanistan remained neutral during the First World War, in spite of being wooed by the Central Powers, and he looked for his reward in 1918 in the form of recognition of full independence, including freedom from British control of his foreign relations. The British were grateful, but not yet that grateful, and although the Viceroy was ready to be generous the British government in London was not. Ḥabīballāh was assassinated in Jomādā I, 1338/February, 1919 and was succeeded by his son Amānallāh who made it his business to remove the last traces of foreign restraint on his country's independence. There was a short conflict with the British in India, known as the Third Anglo-Afghan War (q.v.). Neither side could claim military victory, but Afghanistan achieved a resounding diplomatic success in the form of a peace treaty which cancelled all previous treaties between the two countries and put an end to British control of Afghanistan's foreign affairs. Two years later Article III of a Treaty of Friendship and Commercial Relations (30 ʿAqrab 1300 Š./22 November 1921) enabled each to open a Legation in the other's capital. "A Minister from His Majesty the Amir of Afghanistan shall be received at the Royal Court of London like the Envoys of all other Powers." A Trade convention followed in 1302 Š./1923, and this and the 1921 Treaty were confirmed by Nāder Shah in 1309 Š./1930. (For the period between the death of Dōst Moḥammad and 1919 see V. Gregorian, *The Emergence ofModern Afghanistan*, Stanford, 1969, chaps. 4-9; L. W. Adamec, *Afghanistan 1900-1923: A Diplomatic History*, Berkeley, 1967, passim; and L. Dupree, *Afghanistan*, 3rd ed., Princeton, 1980, pp. 343-413 and Part IV. For a useful chronological table see G. Grassmuck et al., *Afghanistan, SomeNew Approaches*, Ann Arbor, 1969, pp., 260-338).

For as long as the British remained in India, however, traces of the old relationship lingered on. The Russians under new management since 1917 continued to press forward in Central Asia, where any hope that the khanates might resume their independence was soon extinguished. Resentment of the Durand Line had been a major factor in the events leading to the Third Anglo-Afghan War, and troubles along the frontier, long a feature of British rule in India, continued to exact a toll in soldiers' and tribesmen's lives. Wazīrestān was the scene of military operations as late as 1318 Š./1939.

When the Second World War came, Afghanistan decided to remain neutral. In fact it announced its decision at a moment when Nazi Germany appeared to be winning, and it reaffirmed its neutrality when German forces were deep inside the Soviet Union. The Germans were active in Afghanistan during the first two years of the war, but in 1320 Š./1941, in response to a request from Britain and the Soviet Union, most of them were asked to leave. Long experience of the British and Russians had taught the Afghans how to keep them at arm's length. Britain and the Soviet Union were strong enough and determined enough at the time to intervene if need be to enforce the expulsion. After the war, as Britain prepared to leave its empire in South Asia, Afghanistan served notice that it disowned the Durand Line. and that the people immediately beyond that line and as far as the Indus were Afghans with a right to self determination. The British re-affirmed the 1300 Š./1921 Treaty, and left the Afghans to continue the discussion with their neighbor Pakistan.

Since then the relations between Britain and Afghanistan have become more prosaic. Afghanistan was one of the founder members of the United Nations, and Britain was a developed country with an interest in helping Afghanistan to modernize itself. For a century or more, at great cost to the people of both countries, Britain's role in Afghanistan had been to keep the Russians at a distance. The Afghan people owed their independence not only to their own fierce passion for freedom but also, paradoxically, to Britain's vigilance against the Russians.

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For further bibliography see Afghanistan *x*, Political History.