



# ARMY VII. IN AFGHANISTAN FROM 1919

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## ARMY

### vii. In Afghanistan from 1919

Prior to 1919 the Afghan army consisted of two elements: tribal levies to supplement the regular army (*gawmī* recruitment: a tribe had to provide a definite quota of recruits), drafted to the colors under the *hašt-nafarī* system. Technically, one man in every eight was chosen by village *ḵīrḡa* or *majlis* to serve for two years. (V. Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan*, Stanford, 1969, p. 140; H. Smith et. al., *Area Handbook for Afghanistan*, 4th ed., Washington, 1973, pp. 391-98; L. Dupree, "Afghan and British Military Tactics in the First Anglo-Afghan War," *The Army Quarterly and Defence Journal* 107/2, 1977, pp. 214-21; H. Kakar, *Government and Society in Afghanistan, The Reign of Amir 'Abd al-Rahman Khan*, Austin, 1979, pp. 98, 112.)

*Reforms and Revolts: 1919-1929.* Amānallāh Khan (1919-1929) succeeded his assassinated father (Ḥabīballāh I, 1901-1919), and launched the month-long Third Anglo-Afghan War in May 1919. The Afghans had some initial successes in the Thal sector, but the fighting ground to a stalemate until the RAF escalated the war by dropping a few bombs on Kabul and Jalālābād. After lengthy diplomatic negotiations the Afghans gained the right to conduct their own foreign affairs.



Tribal revolts against the center, common throughout Afghan history, marred Amānallāh's modernist reform attempts. Using Turkish advisers, he unsuccessfully tried to create a nationalist-oriented army, still based on the loosely-functioning *haš-nafari*. (*Handbook of the Afghan Army*, Delhi, 4th ed., 1927; L. Dupree, *Afghanistan*, Princeton, 1980, pp. 447-52.) Some Afghan officers attended Saint Cyr in France.

Amānallāh also sought assistance from the Soviet Union, which helped establish an air branch in 1924 with DH-4 aircraft, 11 Russian pilots and a number of mechanics. The young king purchased military vehicles from Italy, and both Italian and German instructors appeared on the scene. In 1926, 14 pilots and mechanics were trained in Italy, and a Junker tri-motor was added to the air fleet. (L. Adamec, *Afghanistan's Foreign Affairs to the Mid-Twentieth Century*, Tucson, 1974, pp. 106-109.) But, without a strong military base of power and faced with mounting opposition to his reform programs, Amānallāh was overthrown by a non-Pushtun (Paštūn), the Tajik folk-hero known as *Bača Saqqāo* (son-of-a-water carrier), who ruled as Ḥabīballāh II from January to October 1929.

*Nāder Shah (1929-1933)*. A distant cousin of Amānallāh, Moḥammad Nāder Khan (hero of the Thal front in the Third Anglo-Afghan War and former Commander-in-Chief of the Army) gained the throne from Ḥabīballāh II, with the help of tribal elements from both British India and Afghanistan. Faced with the task of rebuilding the Afghan army, Nāder Shah relied mainly on Turkish advisers and British material assistance. Among his military reforms: conscripts were limited to two years' active duty and six years in the reserves; volunteers could enlist for life; medical, educational, and pay practices improved, and sports were encouraged. These reforms refer only to the urban garrisons, however, and few amenities existed for draftees stationed in the countryside (*Notes on the Afghan Army*, New Delhi, 1936, revised eds. 1939 and 1941, p. 14).

*The avuncular period (1933-1953)*. After the assassination of Nāder Shah, surviving brothers ruled as prime ministers until 1953. Under Moḥammad Hāšem (1933-46), military reforms continued, but the army evolved into an instrument of internal security, rather than national defense.

Local military academies (reopened by Nāder Shah in 1932; first established in 1904 by Ḥabīballāh I) trained a Pushtun-dominated officer corps although many officers again went abroad for advanced training to France, Germany,



Italy, England, and British India.

Afghanistan remained neutral in both World Wars I and II, but Afghan tribesmen did fight with Pakistanis against the Indians in the First Kashmir War (1947-48). (L. Dupree, *Afghanistan*, Princeton, 1980, pp. 477-98.)

*Dā'ūd Khan: Period I (1953-1963)*. In 1963, Lt. General Moḥammad Dā'ūd seized power from his uncle Shah Maḥmūd (1946-53). Dā'ūd consciously began to create a national army, and raise the standards of the military. Dā'ūd's government promulgated a new Conscription Law in 1954, which spelled out the rights and obligations of the *ǰālbī* (conscripts) in great detail. All young men between 22-28 years of age were to serve for two years (exceptions were teachers, doctors, religious leaders, and certain tribesmen). Draftees would serve in either the army, air force, police (in the cities), gendarmerie (established in 1942 to maintain order outside the cities), or Labor Corps (*qowā-ye kār*) which constructed selected infrastructure projects. (G. Dyer, "Afghanistan," in J. Keegan, ed., *World Armies*, New York, 1979, pp. 1-9; L. Dupree, *Afghanistan*, pp. 499-558.)

In spite of this ideal situation presented in the Conscription Law, much corruption existed, and many young men paid baksheesh to escape the draft.

Women could not be drafted, but after 1959, they could volunteer to serve in non-combat branches. (L. Dupree, "The Burqa Comes off," *American Universities Field Staff Reports. South Asia Series 3/2*, 1959; N. H. Dupree, *Revolutionary Rhetoric and Afghan Women*, Afghanistan Council, Asia Society of N.Y., Occasional Paper no. 23, 1981.)

Failing to obtain military assistance from the USA, Dā'ūd's government welcomed offers of economic and military aid from the USSR. In April 1956, Afghanistan contracted for \$25 million to buy arms from the USSR, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, and East Germany. By 1978 the figure had reached at least \$400,000,000, by conservative estimates (H. S. Bradsher, *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union*, Durham, N. C., 1983, pp. 27-28).

The Soviets also agreed to modernize military airfields near Šīndand, Mazār-e-Šarīf, and Begrām. Soviet loans were to be paid in barter—or US dollars.

By 1967, the Afghan military was almost totally dependent on the USSR and its satellites for equipment, spare parts, and logistics. Selected officers attended advanced courses in Turkey, France, India, and the USA. A few officers



received training in both the USSR and the USA. (L. Dupree, *Afghanistan*, pp. 522-26; L. Poullada, "Afghanistan and the United States: The Crucial Years," *Middle East Journal* 35, 1981, pp. 178-90.)

*Constitutional experiment (1963-1973)*. The closing of the Durand Line from 1961-63 led to the resignation of Dā'ūd, and an unsuccessful experiment in constitutional monarchy, under the reluctant leadership of King Moḥammad Zāher (1933-73). During this period the government used the army to suppress renewed regional, tribal, and urban demonstrations. (L. Dupree, "Constitutional Development and Cultural Change," *AUFS, South Asian Series* IX, no. 1, pts. I, II, III, IV, VIII, Hanover, N. H., 1965; R. Newell, *The Politics of Afghanistan*, Ithaca, 1972; L. Dupree, *Afghanistan*, pp. 559-666.)

*Dā'ūd II (1973-1978)*. The decade of inaction on the part of the Western-trained cabinet members and the over-reaction of parliament in its investigative role were partly responsible for the July 1973 virtually bloodless coup d'état by nationalist and leftist officers led by Dā'ūd. But the second tenure of Dā'ūd came to a bloody, abrupt end when the *same* leftist-cum-nationalist officers, dissatisfied by Dā'ūd's betrayal of their revolutionary ideals, led an uprising in April, 1978. (L. Dupree, "Red Flag over the Hindu Kush," *AUFS, Asia*, nos. 44, 45, 1979; nos. 23, 27-29, 1980; "Afghanistan 1980," no. 37, 1980; J. Collins, "The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan: Methods, Motives and Ramifications," *Naval War College Review* 33, 1980, pp. 53-62.

The army created by Dā'ūd had destroyed him, and in April, 1978, the following patterns existed:

*Numbers*. About 100,000 in army; 10,000 in air force; 30,000 police and gendarme; 30,000 Labor Corps. Plus 150,000 army reserves; 12,000 air force reserves; possible 200,000 armed tribesmen.

*Units and Equipment*. Three army corps headquarters existed: Kabul (Central Forces); Gardēz; Qandahār. Three armored divisions (500 T-54/55 and T-62 medium tanks; 200 T-34s; 40 PT-76 light tanks and BMP MICV, 400 BTR-40/50/60/152 armored personnel carriers. Anti-tank missiles included AT-3 Sappers and AT-1 Snappers.

Artillery units were armed with 900 guns of 76 mm, 100 mm, 122 mm (D-20 and D-30 howitzers), 152 mm (BM-21 rocket launchers); plus 100 120 mm mortars. Also present were 50 132 mm multiple rocket launchers, and the



following anti-aircraft weapons: 350 37mm, 57 mm, 85 mm, 100 mm and ZSU-23-4-SP guns, as well as some SAM-7s.

The air force had 30 IL-28 attack bombers, 50 MiG-17s, 40 MiG-21, 24 Su-7s; 22 transport planes (for paratroopers), 30 helicopters (mainly M-8s). Antiaircraft units included 3 battalions with 48 SA-2 missiles and two battalions with 37 mm, 85 mm, and 100 mm guns. Three battalions of radar units rounded out the military organization. (Dyer, "Afghanistan;" S. Manual, ed., *Russian Military Power*, New York, 1982, pp. 40-49.)

Currently (August, 1984), the Afghan army has destroyed itself, and has dropped from about 110,000 to 20-30,000. Only repeated sweeps by military police on the urban population have been able to keep the army up to that level. Most military personnel on active duty in April, 1978 have deserted to fight with the *mojāhedīn* or fled to Pakistan. The Soviet army, which entered Afghanistan in December, 1979, now numbers approximately 120,000, and an almost equal number of *mojāhedīn* control the countryside (L. Dupree, "Afghanistan 1982: Still no solution," *Asian Survey* 23/2, 1983, pp. 133-42; L. Dupree, "Afghanistan 1983: and still no solution," *Asian Survey* 24/2, 1984, pp. 229-39; J. Fullerton, *The Soviet Occupation of Afghanistan*, Hong Kong, 1983).

The Soviets have re-discovered what the British discovered in the late 19th-early 20th centuries: that the Afghanistan are among the world's finest guerrilla fighters.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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In addition to the titles given in text, one might find useful to consult the military journals published in Afghanistan during the 20th century.

The most important collections include: *Da urdū majalla* (monthly). Founded in 1300 Š./1921 under the title *Majmū'a-ye 'askarīya*, later changed into *Mojmū'a-ye ordū-ye afgān* (1309 Š./1930), and finally *Da ordū majalla*.

Publisher: Ministry of National Defence, Kabul. Languages: Paštō and Darī. *Da*



*ḥarbī pōhantūn maǰalla* (monthly). Founded in 1343 Š./1964.

Publisher: Military College, Kabul. *Da zīrmē maǰalla* (quarterly). Founded in 1337 Š./1958.

Publisher: Ministry of National Defence. Languages: Paštō and Darī.

Afghan army ranks are summarized in [Table 11](#).

*Sources*: The table is an attempt to synthesize the abundant but sometimes contradictory information included in three articles from H. Rahiō and M. Anwār eds., *Paštō čāpī āṭār*, Kabul, 1357 Š./1978:

M. H. Kākaṛ, “Paštō aw daftar pa dwō wrūstayō pēṛayō kē,” pp. 33-50;

F. Rabī, “Pa šalama pēṛay kē da paštō ‘askarī eṣṭelāḥāt,” pp. 64-75;

M. S. Rāzeqī Naṛīwāl, “Pa nūnasama pēṛay kē da paštō da ‘askarī eṣṭelāḥātō tāriḳča aw tsēṛana,” pp. 183-203.

See also: L. W. Adamec, *First Supplement to the Who’s Who of Afghanistan*, Graz, 1979 (p. 53); H. K. Kakar, *Government and Society in Afghanistan. The Reign of Amir Abd al-Rahman*, Austin, 1979 (p. 99); M. N. Neghat Sa’idī and N. Abdullaev, *Farhang-e moḳtaṣar-e eṣṭelāḥāt-e taḳnikī rūsī ba darī*, Kabul, 1360 Š./1981 (p. 162); S. Sana, *La terminologie militaire turque dans l’armée afghane*, Ms., 1975.