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The Siege of Herat: 1837-1838

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THE SIEGE OF HERAT
1837--1838

by

John Carl Nelson
B.A., University of Minnesota, 1964

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of
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for the Degree
Master of Arts

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This thesis submitted by John Carl Nelson in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts at St. Cloud State University is hereby approved by the final evaluation committee.

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A condition of economic exhaustion and political anarchy prevailed in Iran by 1800. The great empires of the 1600's had collapsed and in the wars that followed the prosperity of the area was destroyed. The city of Herat was a microcosm of the general conditions. After 1797 the Kajar dynasty tried to restore the Persian empire to its former limits but their efforts met with only limited success and Herat remained their goal in the east. Afghanistan was torn apart by tribal tensions in 1818 and Herat became more vulnerable. The Russian empire achieved a position of dominance in Western Asia after 1828. The British felt that this was a threat to their own empire in India and tried to erect a buffer to guard against Russian influence. They saw Persian efforts to take Herat in the 1830's as an extension of Russian influence and a threat to India.

After 1835 Russia encouraged Persia to take Herat. The Russians perhaps hoped to provoke a break between Britain and Persia thus displacing British influence which had been growing. The Persian army laid siege to Herat in 1837 but its efforts to take the city were ineffective. The Russian ambassador to Persia sent agents into Afghanistan to arrange a coalition of states against Herat. The British saw this as a direct intrusion into their buffer area and when Kabul sided with Persia the British decided to send an army into Afghanistan. The Persians failed to take Herat but the British still considered it necessary to occupy Afghanistan. Their occupying army was destroyed in 1842 but since the Persian and Russian threat had abated no further action was necessary.

Each of the parties involved failed in their immediate objectives but as a result the relations in this area were defined until 1906. Persia and Afghanistan lost the freedom to act independently. Russia's dominant position in Persia was maintained but the British could not be excluded. Afghanistan was firmly made part of the Indian imperial system and the city of Herat became its outermost limit.
INTRODUCTION

Mohammed Shah Kajar, ruler of Persia, was determined to possess the Afghan city of Herat; a city long known as the "Key to India." On June 23, 1837 he marched out of Tehran towards Herat, 650 miles to the east. After two earlier frustrated attempts to take the city, he did not intend to fail again.

Count Ivan Simonich, the Russian Minister to Persia, had encouraged the expedition from the beginning and had made promises of Russian aid. On the other hand, the British Minister to Persia, Sir John McNeill, had consistently pointed out the difficulties and had made clear the official British disapproval of the whole affair. At the last minute, the Shah had doubts of Russian support in case of real British opposition but Count Simonich was able to reassure him and he marched.

The events that unfolded during the next few years as a consequence of the Shah's decision determined the pattern of relations in this part of the world for the rest of the nineteenth century. The interests of Britain and Russia came into sharp conflict for the first time and limits were set to the power of each that were not to be exceeded. The affair also made clear that Persia, Afghanistan, and the other states of the area were no longer in control of their own destinies, but were becoming pawns in a power struggle between outside powers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>HERAT AND THE FORMATION OF PERSIA AND AFGHANISTAN 1500--1800</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>PERSIA 1800--1830, THE RESTORATION</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>AFGHANISTAN 1800--1830, THE COLLAPSE</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>RUSSIAN AND BRITISH INTERESTS IN WESTERN ASIA</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>THE IMMEDIATE BACKGROUND 1830--1834</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FORWARD POLICY</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>WEAKENING OF THE RUSSIAN POSITION</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>INTRIGUES IN AFGHANISTAN 1834--1837</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>DETERMINATION IN PERSIA 1834--1837</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>THE SIEGE OF HERAT</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>THE BRITISH RESPONSE</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF MAPS AND CHARTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Map or Chart</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  WESTERN ASIA IN THE 1690'S</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  WESTERN ASIA IN THE 1790'S</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  THE PERSIAN EMPIRE, EARLY 19TH CENTURY</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  THE AFGHAN DYNASTIES</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  AFGHANISTAN, EARLY 19TH CENTURY</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6  WARS IN IRAN, 1830-1834</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7  PERSIAN CAMPAIGNS, 1836-1838</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8  HERAT AT THE TIME OF THE SIEGE</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9  THE BRITISH RESPONSE, DECEMBER 1838 - NOVEMBER 1839</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 WESTERN ASIA IN THE 1840'S</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

HERAT AND THE FORMATION OF PERSIA AND AFGHANISTAN

1500--1800

Herat had withstood many sieges during its troubled history and had fallen to many conquerors. In the early fifteenth century it was the capital of a wide empire ruled by the son of Tamerlane, but his successors allowed this empire to dwindle until in 1506 Herat fell to the Uzbegs, fresh invaders from Central Asia. Four years later the Uzbegs were pushed aside by Shah Ismail Safavi, the founder of a revitalized Persian empire, and Herat, along with the cities of Mashad, Merv, and Kandahar, became one of the Governor-Generalships of the eastern Safavid province of Khorasan.¹

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were times of great empires in Western Asia. Safavid Persia coexisted with the Mogul empire of India, the Uzbeg Khanate of Bukhara, the Ottoman empire, and the emerging empire of Russia. There were fluctuations in the borders between them, and occasionally bitter wars, but on the whole these empires gave a good measure of stability to Western Asia for 200 years. The collapse of this stability in the mid-eighteenth century opened the way to the intervention of outside powers in the area.

MAP 1

WESTERN ASIA IN THE 1690'S
Safavid Persia reached its peak in power and prosperity under Shah Abbas (1586-1628). Abbas' conquests and reforms gave the empire a hundred years of peace but there also began a process of internal decay. As the Safavid empire declined, its control over the border areas weakened. A revolt of the Ghilzai tribe at Kandahar in 1709 culminated in their sack of Isfahan, the Safavid capital, and the deposition of the Safavii dynasty. Chaos ensued as Afghans, Turks, and Russians descended upon the land. Persia was occupied and partitioned.

One of the Safavid generals, Nadir Kuli, was able to provide the leadership that the last Safavid Shahs had lacked. In 1729 he led an army that by 1735 delivered central Persia from the invaders and in that year he proclaimed himself Shah. After careful preparation he next conducted a great campaign in the east. From 1737 to 1740 he marched to Kandahar, Delhi, and Bukhara, crushing the Ghilzais and dealing the Mogul and Uzbeg empires crippling blows from which they never recovered. The assassination of Nadir in 1747 however, was the signal for renewed anarchy.

The destruction of Safavid Persia allowed tribal forces there to gain control and in the process a lasting division of Persia was created. While Nadir's heirs clung precariously to Mashad, the Zand and Kajar tribes battled for control of the western provinces and the Durrani tribe


3Lockhart, The Fall of the Safavi Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia, pp. 89-297.

gained possession of the east. The land was devastated. Khorasan especially became a battlefield; there were invasions from both east and west as well as Uzbeg raids from the north. Within forty years following 1719, Herat changed hands five times and was under siege for a total of 24 months.

The Zand tribe gained a brief ascendency in the west under Karim Khan, but after his death in 1778 the tribe fell apart in bitter civil wars. Aga Mohammed Khan took advantage of this situation to lead his Kajar tribe to victory and although he was assassinated in 1797 he left a fairly stable throne in Persia to his successor. In the east after Nadir's assassination, Ahmad Shah of the Durrani tribe gained control of Khorasan, including Herat, but his main effort was against India where he brought the entire Indus river basin under Afghan rule.

The end result was that by 1800 what had been a relatively stable situation in which great empires coexisted was replaced by a highly unstable composition of tribal states. The Kajar rulers of Persia considered themselves the successors of the Safavids, and consciously tried to restore the outward appearance of that empire, but their efforts were to be less than successful. The Afghan dominion lacked this

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MAP 2

WESTERN ASIA IN THE 1790'S
tradition to fall back on since it encompassed the border areas of three
empires. The Mogul empire had vanished in all but name. The Uzbek
Khanate had broken up. The Ottoman empire had lost control of many out-
lying areas. Russia, however, had grown strong and its power was being
increasingly felt in the neighboring areas.

Herat was a microcosm of conditions in Iran at this time. Geographically, Iran was a land of contrasts. High mountains gave way
to flat plains and fertile river valleys existed next to sterile deserts.
Mountains and deserts restricted travel and communications to certain
well-defined routes. The most important one ran from the west through
Tabriz, Mashad, Herat, and Kandahar to India. This route was an impor-
tant artery of trade since ancient times and the only way from east to
west that was practical for large armies with heavy artillery. Major
cities along the way had great strategic value. Herat was especially
important since it was also a crossroads for routes going north to
Bukhara and Central Asia. It functioned as the chief point of trade and
communications for all Khorasan and beyond.

The city of Herat was situated in a fertile river valley with
mountains on the north and east, and deserts to the west and south.
Although it had a population of 100,000 and was the second largest city
in Iran in 1800, its former prosperity was gone. Ruined suburbs sur-
rrounded the city and large areas within the walls lay abandoned. The

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8 Iran will be used to refer to this geographical area. Persia
and Afghanistan will refer only to the Political units.

9 Gavin Hambly, "An Introduction to the Economic Organization of
Early Qajar Iran," Iran, II (1964), 79.
walls themselves were neglected and many sections had collapsed. In the countryside, irrigation works were in disrepair and although two crops were harvested a year, the produce was barely sufficient for local needs. The peasants of the district and most of the city dwellers were Persian in both language and tradition but numerous Turkish and Afghan nomad tribes lived in the surrounding mountains and deserts, and they dominated the settled population.¹⁰

Two fundamental problems in Iran at this time were drastic de-population and the collapse of the urban economy. There are no hard statistics but the population of Iran seems to have declined by as much as half during the eighteenth century. European visitors were particularly struck by the desolate aspects of the cities and the ruined suburbs that surrounded them. One reason for this was the continual wars of the period. Almost every district was devastated at least once, some many times. The second important reason was the withering away of the trans-continental trade that had nourished Iranian cities since ancient times. Trade routes had shifted to the sea and the interior cities sank to little more than centers for local production and marketing.¹¹

As a result of this economic situation, governments could no longer draw enough wealth from the cities to sustain themselves and the


tribal elements emerged in a dominant position. According to some estimates, the nomads comprised at least half the population in 1800. 12 The tribal leaders owed their positions to tribal custom, not to the state, and the state was forced to rely on their independent military forces. The greatest problem the Kajar and Durrani rulers faced was how to bring the tribes under their control. 13 The early Kajars followed a policy of divide and rule with some success but the Durranis faced more difficult problems and were less successful.

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CHAPTER 2

PERSIA 1800--1830

THE RESTORATION

Persia had a long tradition as a great empire ruled by a King of Kings and the next task of the early Kajar rulers, having restored internal security, was to recover the border areas and restore the empire to the preceding Safavid limits. Aga Mohammed Khan, founder of the Kajar dynasty, had begun by invading Georgia and Khorasan and Persian efforts continued to be directed towards these two areas.

The first moves of his successor, Fath Ali Shah, were in the east. In 1799 he advanced to Mashad but stopped there when he learned that the Afghan ruler, Zaman Shah, had marched to Herat. In 1802 the Persians were in Mashad again where they consolidated their hold and three years later they attacked Herat. Internal troubles in Afghanistan prevented aid from reaching the Afghan governor there, and after a Persian victory at Ghurian, he ceded that border fortress to Persia and agreed to pay tribute for Herat. Persia was prevented from following up this success however, because war had broken out with Russia.

Russia had begun to move south of the Caucasus mountains in the late eighteenth century. Georgia was first made a protectorate and in

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1 Elphinstone, Caubul, pp. 596-97; Robert G. Watson, A History of Persia from the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century to the Year 1858 (London: Smith and Elder, 1866), pp. 156-57.
MAP 3

THE PERSIAN EMPIRE, EARLY 19TH CENTURY

- - - - Persian border after 1828
- - - - Persian border under the Safavids
⊕ Persian Provinces
Russian Provinces
〈1813〉 Dates of acquisition by Russia
Independent States
Afghan Provinces (independent after 1818)
1801 was annexed to the Russian empire. But Georgia had once belonged to Persia and in fact it was Aga Mohammed Khan's invasion of their land in 1795 that finally led the Georgians to submit to Russia for protection. War was brought on by Russian encroachment on the Persian vassal khanates of northern Azerbaijan. Initial Russian successes were offset by the need to divert troops and supplies to wars with Turkey and France but by 1813 the Persians had had enough. Fath Ali Shah recognized the Tsar's rule in Georgia and ceded the disputed Khanates as well.

During this war Persia first became involved in European diplomacy. Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 and the Afghan Zaman Shah's repeated wars in the Punjab aroused British fears for their possessions in India. Persia was seen by Britain as a potential check on both these threats and a mission was sent to Persia from India in 1801. But when Zaman Shah was deposed and Britain made peace with Napoleon, these feelers were not followed through. The French on the other hand saw a way to get at both Britain and Russia through Persia. In 1807 Persia signed a treaty with France and welcomed a French military mission. When Napoleon made peace with Russia later that year however, the French pulled out and British interest in Persia revived. Britain signed a treaty with Persia in 1812 and reaffirmed it in 1814, and this treaty

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lasted up to the siege of Herat.\textsuperscript{5} The chief provisions of this treaty were that:

1) Persia would oppose any European army that attempted to invade India by way of Central Asia.
3) The defensive articles (4 & 6) would apply only in cases where the outside power was the aggressor (the only difference between the 1812 and 1814 treaties, this article was added to give the British a loophole).
4) Britain would aid Persia with either troops from India or a yearly subsidy in the event Persia became involved in a war with any European power.
6) This aid would be given even if Britain was at peace with the European power.
7) Persia would attack Afghanistan if the latter was at war with Britain.
8) Britain would not interfere in any war between Persia and Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{6}

Persia's activities in the east had been curtailed while fighting Russia. The occasion of a major revolt by tribal chiefs in Khorasan in 1811 was used by the Afghans to retake Ghurian and stop paying tribute for Herat. Other revolts followed the unsuccessful war with Russia and it was not until 1816 that another effort could be made to advance the eastern frontiers. In that year the governor of Mashad advanced on Herat but this time the Afghans were able to send a substantial army from their capitol of Kabul to the scene. There was a battle in which both sides claimed victory but the Persians did not get Herat.\textsuperscript{7}

During the 1820's Persia was occupied with war along the Turkish border, and more seriously, a second war with Russia. Persia was


dissatisfied with the settlement of 1813 in the Caucasus and in 1826, after the initial outbreak of fighting, a massive Persian invasion threw back the Russian forces. Russia recovered swiftly however, and in the following year defeated the Persians in battle and captured Tabriz.  

During the war, Persia had appealed to the British for aid under the terms of the 1814 treaty. Britain however, trying to reach an accommodation with Russia, chose to see Persia as the aggressor and refused to extend any aid. Defeated in 1828, Persia ceded further territory and agreed to pay an indemnity to Russia. The British then negotiated a release from their obligation to aid the Persians in return for a sum of money that Persia desperately needed to pay the first installment of the Russian indemnity.

During the first few years of the reign of Fath Ali Shah, the prospects for a Persian restoration had seemed rather good. In fact, when order was restored the economy began to recover and the population began to grow again. These conditions were most apparent around the new capital, Tehran, and in the northwestern province of Azerbaijan. In other areas however, recovery had barely begun. The south suffered from oppression and neglect and Khorasan was still racked by wars and rebellions. Militarily, restoration was even less successful. Efforts to regain the Caucasus ended with crushing defeats at the hands of the

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Russians. Even in the east where there was less opposition, the Kajars could make little headway. But far from giving up, after 1828 the Kajars would try even harder to recover the east to make up for what was lost forever in the west.
CHAPTER 3

AFGHANISTAN 1800--1830

THE COLLAPSE

In 1793 Zaman Shah, a grandson of Ahmad Shah Currani, won a brief war of succession to become ruler of Afghanistan. The support of Painda Khan, chief of the Barakzai branch of the Currani tribe, was decisive in his victory. In the next fifty years, the brothers of Zaman Shah and the sons of Painda Khan were to dominate the affairs of Afghanistan. The Durrani tribe was very large with several branches and numerous clans. ¹ Ahmad Shah and his successors belonged to the Sadozai clan, but other clans, such as the Mohammedzai of Painda Khan, were larger and more powerful and this situation caused many problems.

Zaman Shah was determined to restore the royal authority, which had eroded since the death of Ahmad Shah in 1773, and one of his chief projects was the reconquest of the Punjab. Secure control over Indian

¹The following table of the Durrani tribe is based on Ferrier, History of the Afghans, pp. 9-10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>branch</th>
<th>clans</th>
<th>families</th>
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<tr>
<td>Alikuzai</td>
<td>3 clans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alizai</td>
<td>3 clans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barakzai</td>
<td>Mohammedzai &amp; 5 others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isakzai</td>
<td>4 clans</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurzai</td>
<td>3 clans</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Populzai</td>
<td>Sadozai &amp; 5 others</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18
CHART 4

THE AFGHAN DYNASTIES
revenues would have made him more independent of the western tribes.\(^2\)

But Zaman was never able to accomplish his goals. If he marched in one direction there would be invasions or revolts from the opposite direction. He had to keep moving between the Punjab and Khorasan. Zaman also had to face continuing opposition from the great tribal chiefs. In 1799, after discovering a plot to depose him, he executed several tribal leaders, including Painda Khan. Painda Khan's oldest son, Fateh Khan, escaped and joined Zaman's brother, Mahmud, who had previously fled to Persia.\(^3\)

Mahmud had revolted unsuccessfully several times with Persian backing, but now with Fateh Khan's help he was able to defeat Zaman who was captured and blinded. Mahmud's position was insecure however. Persian invasions threatened, the tribes were discontented, and another brother of Zaman, Shuja-ul-Mulk, was in arms against him. In 1803 Shuja succeeded in toppling Mahmud after three years in power. But Shuja's rule was effective only in Kabul and Peshawar since Mahmud's brother Firuz held Herat, and Fateh Khan controlled the country around Kandahar. Mahmud escaped from the prison where he had been confined and in 1809 he and Fateh Khan defeated Shuja, who eventually fled to India where he was given a pension by the British, and Mahmud returned to power.

As Mahmud's right hand, Fateh Khan was given a free rein and he energetically suppressed rebellious tribes and provinces and in 1816 he

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\(^2\)The few Indian provinces Zaman did control produced the largest share of his revenue. Hari Ram Gupta, "Afghanistan at Shah Zaman's Accession 1793," Indian Historical Records Commission Proceedings, XVIII (1942), 130.

\(^3\)The summary of these Afghan wars up to 1809 is based chiefly on accounts in Elphinstone, Caubul, II, pp. 308-52; and Ferrier, History of the Afghans, pp. 108-86.
MAP 5

AFGHANISTAN, EARLY 19TH CENTURY

- - - - Dominions of Ahmad Shah
- - - - Dominions of Zaman Shah
\( <1818 > \) Dates of acquisition by Sikhs
- - - - Independent States (after 1818)

\[ \] British Residencies
\[ \] Persian Provinces
was given an opportunity to extend his power to Herat. Herat had been practically independent under Firuz-ed-Din, who was appointed governor in 1801 by his brother Mahmud. The revolts and upheavals at Kabul made this quasi-autonomy possible, but at the same time they prevented Kabul from aiding Herat against Persia. Firuz was obliged to acknowledge Persian sovereignty and pay tribute from 1805 to 1811. When the Persians marched on Herat again in 1816, Firuz appealed to Kabul for aid. Fateh Khan came to Herat with an army although the resulting battle with the Persians was indecisive. Fateh's supporters then seized control of Herat, deposing Firuz and all his officials. There was some plundering and Fateh's brother, Dost Mohammed Khan, even entered Firuz's Harem.

During his years in power Fateh Khan had made many enemies including Mahmud's son Kamran, and most recently Firuz. At this point Fath Ali Shah of Persia sent Mahmud an ultimatum to dispose of Fateh Khan or face a massive Persian invasion. These combined factors, persuaded Mahmud to sacrifice his vizier. Fateh Khan was seized, blinded, kept prisoner, and finally cut to pieces in 1818. Like Zaman, Mahmud had destroyed the man who was keeping him on the throne and his fall was equally swift. Fateh Khan's brothers led a general revolt and assumed control themselves while Mahmud, Kamran, and Firuz fled to Herat.

At first the brothers offered the throne to Shuja but when he would not agree to their conditions they parcelled the provinces out

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amongst themselves. Their mutual amity did not last long. In 1822 total chaos ensued as they began fighting among themselves and each province became in effect an independent principality. Kabul was the main prize and Dost Mohammed Khan finally secured it in 1826. The rise of Dost Mohammed provided some improvement in stability but only at Kabul. None of his brothers could ever get a solid grip on their provinces. Herat was also the scene of power struggles. By 1824 control had passed into the hands of Kamran. His father Mahmud, became a puppet and remained so until his death in 1829.

These continued civil wars and the division of royal authority were disastrous for Afghanistan. Herat was cast adrift and now isolated and surrounded by enemies. On the west, the Persians were eager to make good their long-standing claim to the city. On the east, only the disunity of Fateh Khan's brothers prevented them from avenging him. Herat might have fallen to either one if it had not first begun to arouse the interest of outside powers.

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7Ferrier, pp. 173-198.
CHAPTER 4

RUSSIAN AND BRITISH INTERESTS IN WESTERN ASIA

Of the seventeenth century empires in Western Asia, only the Russian remained strong. In the tradition of the great universal empires, Russia saw itself as a force for peace, order, and security. All peoples and all nations had their place in the Russian system and even once-rival empires were tolerated as long as they acknowledged the supremacy of the Russian Tsar. ¹ Russia's main concern in Western Asia was to keep the Ottoman and Persian empires in their place and to keep the whole frontier peaceful and quiet.

Russia decisively defeated the Ottoman empire in 1828-29 and the victory caused the Russians to revise their policy towards the Ottomans which heretofore had been very aggressive. The war opened up for the first time the possibility of a complete collapse of the Ottoman empire. Mohammed Ali, the Ottoman viceroy of Egypt, was practically independent and almost as powerful as the Sultan himself. The Russian victory in 1829 convinced him that he either had to break away from the empire or be destroyed along with it. If he succeeded in that, the Ottoman empire would cease to exist and all Europe was fearful of the struggle that would

ensue for the remains. In 1829 the Tsar decided that the dissolution of the Ottoman empire would be more dangerous to Russia than its continued existence and the disadvantages of such an event would far outweigh the benefits of any possible territorial gains. Russia would rather have a weak state that recognized its supremacy than to have it replaced by other, perhaps stronger or more dangerous powers. Russia therefore in 1829 committed itself to the maintenance of the Ottoman empire.

Russia's relationship with Persia was similar. The Persians had been defeated twice and they now recognized the supremacy of the Tsar and his claim to the Caucasus. Russia on its part realized that further aggression against Persia would cause the total collapse of Kajar rule and therefore was satisfied with the situation. The Murid revolt in the Caucasus showed that the tribal anarchy that would likely ensue would be much harder to deal with. Beginning in the 1820's a religious brotherhood, the Murids, led an anti-Russian crusade in the higher mountains. Russian efforts to crush the movement only increased its strength, and excellent leadership welded the tribes into an effective fighting force. Although the Murid revolt was confined to the mountain tribes, it constantly threatened Russian communications through the Caucasus and made the strategic situation vis-à-vis Persia and Turkey very precarious.

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East of the Caspian Sea Russia faced the nomad Kazakhs. At times united and powerful, the Kazakhs had more often been divided into the Great, Middle, and Lesser Hordes. Serious defeats at the hands of the Kalmuk Mongols in the mid-eighteenth century led the Middle and Lesser Hordes to seek Russian protection. Control of the roving tribes was difficult however, and the Russians built a line of forts to protect their Siberian settlements from raids. The tribal leaders made a formal submission in 1822 but the tribesmen still evaded control. The insecurity of Russian rule and the resulting instability were problems which were solved only after years of minor but constant warfare, in which the Kazakhs were often supported by the Uzbeg Khanates to the south.

The wars of the 1820's established for Russia a position of predominance in Western Asia. Russia decisively defeated the Ottoman and Persian empires and made them acknowledge Russian supremacy, the Kazakhs had submitted, and only the Uzbeg and Afghan states and the Arabian deserts remained untouched by the Tsar's power. Russia had every reason to be satisfied with this situation but it was not to go unchallenged. The Russian position and the British challenge to it that developed during the 1830's were the conditions that made Mohammed Shah's march on Herat in 1837 an event of more than purely local importance.

The British East India Company, from small beginnings at trading stations along the coast in the seventeenth century, had come to dominate the entire Indian subcontinent. Because of poor communications links, the real rulers of India were the Governors-General and the bureaucracy

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that had grown up in India itself. The Governors-General were carefully selected and they cooperated closely with their colleagues in the British Government, but in the early nineteenth century, British policy in Western Asia was for the most part determined by the political and strategic needs of the Indian empire.

Like all great empires, British India was concerned with order, stability, and undisputed domination. It tolerated minor states on the frontiers or within India only if they recognized British supremacy. Yet whereas the Russians could not conceive of an alternative to their empire, and attempted to integrate all their dominions and convince their subjects of the principle of Autocracy, the British always doubted their ability to resist challenges in India, and they made little attempt to unify their possessions or provide an ideology for their rule. They lacked a sense of their imperial mission and their empire was insecure as a result.

Along with empire in India came the need to protect the frontiers. Historically most invaders of India have come by way of the passes in the northwest. Some like the Moguls founded great empires, others like the Afghans had little lasting impact. Nevertheless the image of armies pouring out of the Khyber pass was well established. It was the activity of Zaman Shah and the schemes of Napoleon that first fixed British attentions on the Northwest. Considering Napoleon's accomplishments by

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7 Wesson, The Imperial Order, pp. 10-11.

1806, it seemed plausible that he could arouse the nations of Iran and Central Asia and lead them to India. The participation of Russia in these plans only made the danger more real. The British response to this threat was to set up several buffer states in the northwest to absorb the shock and perhaps block an invasion. In 1808 and 1809, at the height of the French threat, embassies were sent to Afghanistan, Persia, Sind, and the Sikhs to secure treaties of alliance against Napoleon. 9

The French threat was ephemeral and soon faded away but the buffer policy remained. The Sikh state of Ranjit Singh became the anchor of British policy in the northwest. Beginning in 1799, Ranjit Singh had put together a compact state out of the many Sikh clans that had dominated the Punjab after the death of Ahmad Shah in 1773. Ranjit Singh's treaty with the British in 1809 prevented him from expanding eastward and uniting all the Sikhs, but gave him a free hand in the west. The strength of the Sikh state was its army, which was the most effective force in India outside of the British. But he did not build an administration that could function without his personal supervision and that was his greatest weakness, placing all his other achievements in jeopardy. 10

The Sikh state was a good buffer, effectively shielding India from the disorders in Afghanistan, but Ranjit Singh's westward expansion caused other problems for the British. After the collapse of Afghanistan

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in 1818, the Sikhs annexed the provinces along the Indus river one by one. In 1823 Ranjit forced Peshawar to pay him tribute. The involvement of the Sikhs added a new dimension to the already complicated Afghan scene. British attempts to preserve peace on the Northwest frontier between the Sikhs and their neighbors eventually drew the British into war in Afghanistan.

Important as India was however, other matters also figured in British considerations. The balance of power in Europe was the most important but the economy was also beginning to command some attention. The industrial revolution was just beginning to take hold and trade was essential to keep the industrial machine going. Great quantities of food and raw materials were needed and Britain in the early nineteenth century was the world's greatest market, buying about one third of all other countries exports. It was considered the duty of the Government to keep the sea lanes open and to ensure dependable supplies and markets. As time went on the economy assumed more and more importance in determining British policy around the world but during the 1830's political and military considerations came first.

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CHAPTER 5

THE IMMEDIATE BACKGROUND

1830--1834

Many revolts had broken out in Persia after the end of the Russian war, especially in the East, and in 1830 the Shah charged Abbās Mirzā, the Crown Prince, with the task of restoring order in that area. He first put down rebels in Yazd and Kerman and then sent his army across the desert to Khorasan. The year 1831 he spent in energetically suppressing rebellious tribes and districts so that by the end of the year order had been restored. Khiva and Herat had supported these rebellions with encouragement and promises of aid but after Abbās' easy victories they backed down and did nothing. Nonetheless Abbās Mirzā decided that such interference could not go unpunished.¹

It was apparent to Persia that the nomad Turkmen were also a major source of instability on the eastern frontier. They blocked or outflanked the routes to both Khiva and Herat, and their slave raids were the terror of the settled peasants. Abbās Mirzā therefore made these nomads his next objective. In 1832 he attacked Serakhs, a Turkmen stronghold and a major center of the slave trade. After a short siege the place was stormed, the defenders massacred, and the Turkmen were quiet for a while. Abbās then summoned Kamran, the ruler of Herat, to

¹Watson, pp. 257-260.
demand that he resume payment of tribute. But Kamran sent his vizier in his place and did not satisfy the demands of the Persians who then planned another campaign.  

These Persian activities alarmed the British who were in the process of formulating a new defensive policy for India. In 1832 Shah Shuja wrote to the Governor-General asking for aid so that he could recover his throne and save Afghanistan from Persia, but he was not taken seriously. But when a threat to Herat materialized, the Governor-General changed his mind and gave Shuja a four month advance of his pension, knowing that this would enable Shuja to raise troops and march to recover his throne.  

After his victory at Serakhs, Abbas Mirza was recalled to Tehran, leaving his son, Mohammed Mirza, in charge. Leaving troops encircling Ghurian, Mohammed advanced directly to Herat and began to prepare for a siege. Abbas Mirza was also returning to Khorasan with an army of reinforcement and it looked as though Persian efforts would finally meet with success. But Abbas died in Mashad. When his son heard the news, he hastily concluded a truce with Herat and returned to Tehran to claim the position of Crown Prince.  

By 1834 Shuja had raised an army and was preparing to march. After extorting more men and money from Sind, he negotiated a treaty with

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2 Watson, pp. 262-265.  
4 See p. 32.  
5 Ferrier, p. 176; Watson, pp. 265-270.
Ranjit Singh whereby the Sikhs would get Peshawar in return for their aid. 6 Thus Shuja had high hopes of success when he marched on Kandahar and these were confirmed when he defeated Kohendil Khan, a brother of Dost Mohammed, and took possession of that city. Dost Mohammed had been at war with Kohendil but he put this quarrel aside and marched to help his brother. In doing so, Dost left his eastern flank uncovered, and Ranjit Singh promptly invaded and seized Peshawar while Dost defeated Shuja at Kandahar. Shuja soon returned to India and his British pension.

In summary, between 1830 and 1834 Persia made a sustained and largely successful effort to reestablish its position in Khorasan, but this effort was cut short and mostly negated by the untimely death of Abbas Mirza. Britain was alarmed at the Persian activity and responded by encouraging Shah Shuja to regain his throne. Shuja failed but Ranjit Singh of the Sikhs gained Peshawar in the process. At the same time Mohammed Ali began a war that almost destroyed the Ottoman empire. Russian intervention saved it and the Sultan then signed a treaty with the Tsar that convinced the British that Turkey had passed under complete Russian control. The treaty of Unkiar Skelessi was actually a treaty of mutual defense but the British thought it gave the Russian navy a one-way door to the Mediterranean sea. 7 All of this made the British determined to go through with their recently developed forward policy.


WARS IN IRAN, 1830-1834

- Campaigns of Abbas Mirza
- Campaigns of Shah Shuja
- Campaign of the Sikhs

Persian Provinces
British Residencies
Independent States
CHAPTER 6

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FORWARD POLICY

The Russian victories of 1828 and 1829 first called Britain's attention to Russia's dominance of Western Asia. At the same time old fears of an invasion of India by a European power, this time Russia, were revived. Longstanding concern for peace on the Northwestern frontier plus the new need to keep Russian predominance from spreading towards India, led Great Britain to develop what may be called the "Forward Policy." In its earliest form this consisted of a plan to open up the Indus river basin and the adjacent mountains to trade. British commerce would bind the area together and tie it to Britain.¹ This was essentially an expansion of the buffer policy as well as a solution to the conflicts in the area. Trade would be the local pacifying influence, with the extra advantage of offering new markets for British goods and thus stimulating the home economy.

Lord Bentinck, then Governor-General, took the first steps in implementing the new policy. In the first place the commercial possibilities of the area had to be explored. To this end a young British officer, Alexander Burnes, made his way in 1832 to Kabul, Bukhara, and

back to India through Persia on a fact finding mission. The next step taken was the opening of the Indus river to navigation. The Emirs of Sind were opposed to the idea until the British hinted that they might allow Ranjit Singh to expand at Sind's expense. Sind promptly agreed while Ranjit Singh himself was entirely agreeable to the plan.

The events of the early 1830's convinced the authors of the forward policy that they were correct in their analysis of the situation. With the Persian threat to Herat in 1833, Bentinck decided that a more active policy was necessary to protect the Indian frontiers. The British were always afraid of the unsettling effect the presence of a strong or unfriendly power on the frontiers would have on the internal peace of India. Whoever held Herat could directly influence Kandahar and Kabul, and the forward policy made Kandahar and Kabul part of the Indian defense system. Since Persia was presumed to be under Russian control after 1828, a Persian Herat would bring Russian influence to the borders of India with possibly dire consequences. The British therefore decided to prop up Afghanistan in the hope that it would become strong and united under a ruler friendly to Britain. Shah Shuja was available and eager to cooperate. After the Persians withdrew from Herat however, Shuja's failure did not seem so serious and nothing further was done for the moment.

The forward policy, originally developed by the Tory government, was adopted by the succeeding Whig government after 1830. The Whig

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2 Norris, The First Afghan War, pp. 55-56.

3 Norris, pp. 53-55; Robert A. Huttenback, British Relations with Sind 1799-1843; An Anatomy of Imperialism (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1962), pp. 18-29.
Foreign Secretary, Viscount Palmerston, originally had no policy with respect to Western Asia, and he had allowed the forward policy to be carried out from India on its own momentum. But after the treaty of Unkia Skelessi in 1833, the need to counter Russian influence became one of his main considerations. Palmerston went a step further and began to work towards displacing Russian influence, not just blocking it.

The years following 1833 saw a change in British public opinion which came to regard Russia as the chief threat to world peace. Russophobia was accompanied by an outpouring of anti-Russian propaganda which pointed out how Russia was tightening its hold on the east and how this threatened British interests, especially in India. Russophobia however, was only the surface manifestation of the worsening relations between England and Russia, reflecting the declining importance of Anglo-Russian trade, the contrast between liberal England and reactionary Russia, increasing knowledge of Russia which left unfavorable impressions, and the poor image of Nicholas I in Britain. Deeper was the vague and intangible, grand geopolitical conflict between Russia, expanding in the heart of Eurasia, and Britain, expanding around the periphery of Eurasia.

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Although the forward policy was developed to counter the Russian dominance of Western Asia, the Russian position was not as strong or as secure as the British believed. Even though the treaty of Unkiar Skelessi apparently made Turkey dependent on Russia, the fact was that Sultan Mahmud was very dissatisfied with it. Throughout his reign Mahmud had struggled to restore imperial authority over the provinces that had become semi-independent. In this task he was largely successful, except for Egypt. Mohammed Ali had grown stronger than the Sultan and although Russia had saved Turkey once and could do so again, the treaty of Unkiar Skelessi was purely defensive and the Russians even restrained Mahmud from taking any positive action. To preserve his empire, Mahmud felt he had to destroy Mohammed Ali and he began looking around for other help to do so.

The British thought that Russia controlled Persia as well but Persian policy towards Russia was governed by fear and the lack of any alternative. Britain had abandoned Persia in 1828 but as the forward policy developed, an effort was made to regain a foothold there. There

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2 Webster, The Foreign Policy of Palmerston, p. 596.
were various moves to upgrade the embassy to Persia and in 1832, military advisors were sent from India to train the Persian army. When Fath Ali Shah died in 1834, his grandson and heir apparent, Mohammed Mirza, was at Tabriz. Two of the late ruler’s sons also claimed the throne, but Mohammed Mirza had the support of both Britain and Russia. Russia’s offer to send troops was declined but British financial assistance was accepted and British officers led the army that defeated the other claimants. It might be expected that British influence in Persia was regaining lost ground.

The Russian empire was also suffering from distracting revolts within its frontiers. In 1834 a new leader, Shamil, appeared at the head of the Murid revolt in the Caucasus. Shamil carried the fighting to the Russian controlled lowlands and intensified the struggle. Expeditions were sent into the mountains by the Russians, but although they could capture mountain strongholds, they couldn’t hold them and they could never lay hands on Shamil. The increased fighting put a strain on Russian finances and prevented them from coping with other problems. The same situation was incurred by revolts in 1836 and 1837 among the Kazakhs. Kanesary Kasim united most of the Great and Middle Hordes against the Russians and for several years thereafter, made life on the frontier insecure, interrupted Russian trade, and cut off Russian contacts

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5Baddeley, pp. 289 ff.
with the Uzbek Khanates. These Russian setbacks however did not cause the British to abandon their policies.

CHAPTER 8

INTRIGUES IN AFGHANISTAN

1834--1837

Of all the territories once ruled by Ahmad Shah, by 1835 only Kabul, Kandahar, and Herat remained, each under a different ruler. Economic ruin accompanied anarchy, and the population of Herat and Kandahar declined 60-70% in the years since the fall of Zaman Shah. Kabul was better off but was barely holding its own. The only significant result of Shah Shuja's invasion of 1834 was that it left the Sikhs in control of Peshawar. Ranjit Singh's rule now extended all across the Indus up to the edge of the mountains. He had deprived the Durranis of their richest provinces and the loss was acutely felt. Responsibility for defense against the Sikhs and recovery of lost land now fell on Dost Mohammed. In May 1835, he faced the Sikhs in battle at the mouth of the Khyber pass. Some of his key leaders deserted however, and he retired, defeated, to Kabul. Next Dost Mohammed tried diplomacy. In May 1836, he wrote to the new Governor-General, Lord Auckland, congratulating him on his appointment and expressing the hope that the British might restrain the aggression of the Sikhs. Auckland replied that it was "not the prac-
tice of the British Government to interfere with the affairs of other independent states."

Getting nothing from the British, Dost began to look elsewhere. Early in 1837 he wrote to Mohammed Shah of Persia complaining about all his troubles and asking for Persian aid. He even made the gesture of admitting Persian sovereignty, and stated that if Persia did not help him he would have to turn to the British. In return for Persian help against the Sikhs he would aid the Shah against Herat. Since there was little that Persia could do to harm the Sikhs at this point, Dost Mohammed was apparently trying to use the threat of turning to Persia to gain help from the British. In the absence of a response from India however, his feelers to the Shah took on more significance.

While extending these diplomatic feelers, Dost made another try with his army. In April 1837 his son, Mohammed Akbar Khan, led the army out of the Khyber pass and defeated the Sikhs. But he failed to take any of the Sikh forts, much less Peshawar itself. Ranjit Singh poured in reinforcements, determined to hold Peshawar at all costs, and Akbar was forced to retreat. Dost Mohammed was bitter over this frustrating campaign and even more determined to succeed another time. Afghan-Sikh relations were worsening at a most crucial time.

This conflict upset the calculations of those in charge of the forward policy. For trade to flourish there had to be peace between

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4 Correspondence Relating to Persia and Afghanistan, Dost Mohammed to Auckland, May 31, 1836; Auckland to Dost Mohammed, August 22, 1836, pp. 395-397.

5 Correspondence, Dost Mohammed to Mohammed Shah, pp. 27-28.

6 Caroe, Pathans, pp. 314-315.
Afghans and Sikhs. The British were thus confronted with the problem of how to make peace between the two when neither would consider it unless he held Peshawar. At this point Auckland sent Alexander Burnes on another mission to Kabul. This was ostensibly a commercial mission to arrange for trade, but the Peshawar problem was at the heart of the matter since Dost wanted British support on that score before granting any concessions. Burnes' mission also took on another dimension as, while he was making his way to Kabul, the Persians were marching on Herat. 7

Herat was almost in ruins at this time. Struggles among the Sadozais, Persian threats and invasions, tribal raids and feuds, and cholera had reduced the population of the city from 100,000 to 40,000 since 1810. The traditional industries collapsed as the people either died off or simply moved away. That Herat had survived at all as an independent principality is a comment on its enemies. Shah Mahmud died in 1829 and Kamran, his son, once he succeeded to the title, abandoned affairs of state to his vizier, Yar Mohammed Khan. Yar Mohammed followed a policy of strengthening Herat while undermining Kamran and he soon had complete control in his own hands. 8

Herat would probably have fallen to the Persians in 1833 but for the death of Abbas Mirza. Yar Mohammed made an agreement with Mohammed Mirza to pay tribute but as soon as the Persian army was gone he promptly forgot all about it. 9 During the next few years Yar was

7 Norris, pp. 90-113, 118-123.
8 Ferrier, pp. 173-174; Gregorian, pp. 53, 424n.
9 Correspondence, Ellis to Palmerston, December 30, 1835, p. 6; Ferrier, 175-176.
busy building up his power. In 1834 he established a measure of control over Seistan, which had gone its own way since the death of Ahmad Shah. This was a direct challenge to both Kandahar and Persia since they both claimed Seistan. Yar was also successful in controlling, or at least gaining the cooperation of the tribes surrounding Herat. He repaired the city walls, built up his army, and conducted purges of possible pro-Persian people in his territory. By 1837 the vizier was in complete control, and Kamran was reduced to a mere puppet, in fear for his own life. Kamran continued to be useful however, as a scapegoat to blame oppression and misfortune on.  

The strengthening of Herat was particularly threatening to Kandahar. Kohendil Khan, who ruled the city after his older brothers died in 1829, was afraid of the Sikhs and jealous of his brother, Dost Mohammed, the British were far away, so the only ones he could turn to for help against Herat were the Persians. In July 1836, Kohendil sent an ambassador to the Shah proposing that Kandahar submit to Persia, retaining only internal autonomy. Kandahar was then to help Persia against Herat in return for aid against Dost Mohammed and the Sikhs. Persia was agreeable because it could use the help against Herat, and also because Kandahar had once belonged to the Safavis and even its nominal submission would be an accomplishment.  

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10 Correspondence, McNeill to Macnaghten, January 22, 1837, p. 26; Ferrier, pp. 76-77.

11 Correspondence, Ellis to Palmerston, April 1, 1836, p. 11; Ferrier, p. 193.
CHAPTER 9

DETERMINATION IN PERSIA
1834--1837

After the death of Fath Ali Shah in 1834, most of Khorasan revolted. Restoring order occupied the new Shah's brother most of the next year and only after this could any plans be made. Mohammed Shah's number one objective was the unfinished business of Herat. He was determined to capture it to make up for his own failure in 1833 as well as to continue the repeated efforts going back to the founder of the Kajar dynasty. The conquest of Herat was seen as the solution to many problems on Persia's eastern frontier. The encouragement that Herat always gave to rebels in Khorasan would be ended. It would also be an indirect blow at the Turkmen and would serve as a warning to Khiva and Bukhara. Finally the possession of Herat could lead to the recovery of Seistan, Kandahar, and Baluchistan, all of which had owed allegiance to the Safavis.

In June 1836 the Shah announced his intention to march against Khiva and Herat. In this he was overly ambitious. There was cholera in Khorasan which precluded any operations in that direction. The Persian army then marched against the Goklan and Yomut Turkmen but it could not come to grips with them. Desultory warfare went on for several months and by November the army had fallen back to Astrabad, still skirmishing with the Turkmen. At Astrabad food was short, pay was in arrears, and
morale was very low. The campaign was a dismal failure. The contrast between this operation and the wars of Abbas Mirza four years earlier, in the same area, with the same army, against the same enemy, seems to indicate that the greatest failure was that of leadership.

The British Minister had done his best to discourage Mohammed Shah from marching east in 1836, but he had to contend not only with the Shah's determination but also with the activities of the Russians. There was a change in Russian policy in Persia that apparently coincided with the arrival of the new Minister, Count Ivan Simonich, in 1835. In 1834 the Russians had cooperated with the British in Persia, but in 1836 Simonich was actively promoting the campaign in direct opposition to British policy. More than that, Simonich promised Russian aid and possibly helped the Persians with their financial preparations.

The question arises as to why the Russians were doing this. The British were sure that it was for the purpose of subverting their rule in India. They always assumed that a Persian Herat would become a center of Russian influence, which would then spread to the borders of India, and they feared the effects of this on the internal peace of India. The more extreme Russophobes thought that the march on Herat would be the first step in the anticipated Russian invasion of India. However the Russian motives were perhaps not so sinister. It may be

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1 Correspondence, McNeill to Palmerston, October 8, 1836, McNeill to Palmerston, November 3, 1836, pp. 20-21.

2 Correspondence, Ellis to Palmerston, January 8, 1836, January 15, 1836, April 16, June 25, 1836, pp. 6-8, 13-16.

3 Correspondence, Ellis to Palmerston, January 15, 1836, p. 8; Kelly, Persian Gulf, pp. 92-93; Webster, Palmerston, pp. 742-743.
assumed that they knew about British opposition to the Persian plans for Herat. Knowing this, they could see that if the Shah carried out his plans, the dispute could lead to a complete alienation between Britain and Persia. The British gains of the last few years would then be nullified and Russia's earlier position of primacy in Persia would be restored. This could possibly be accomplished by merely encouraging the Persians to do what they had already decided to do and at no risk to Russia.

Late in 1836 a new British Minister, Sir John McNeill, arrived in Persia. His mission was to restrain Persia from attacking Herat and also negotiate a new treaty. The 1814 treaty had become embarrassing, especially the clause that pledged Britain not to interfere in a Persian-Afghan war.\(^1\) But McNeill was in an impossible position. Mohammed Shah was not inclined to favor the British in spite of the aid provided him in securing the throne. In the first place the British had refused to aid Persia during the Russian war in spite of treaty obligations to do so. Then they had taken advantage of Persia's desperate position to get out of the obligations altogether. Now, in violation of another article of the treaty, they objected to the Persian conquest of Herat, a project that the Shah saw not only as a legitimate national goal but also as a matter of personal honor. Simonich's task was made easy.

After the unproductive campaign against the Turkmen, Mohammed Shah dispersed his troops with orders to muster again the following spring. During that time McNeill worked hard to arrange a diplomatic settlement. The Persians were agonizingly slow getting started in 1837,

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\(^1\)Kelly, p. 288.
and in June McNeill was able to obtain an agreement from Herat to cease all hostile acts against Persia and resume payment of tribute. But Yar Mohammed would not admit Persian sovereignty, and even if he had the Shah would not have accepted it. Herat had agreed to all this before and never kept its promises. McNeill was only wasting his time. 5

Yar Mohammed was definitely not wasting his time in these last few months. While the Persian army was dispersed he kept strengthening Herat's defenses and cementing his ties with the surrounding tribes. He also worked to consolidate his hold on Seistan. 6 Kohendil Khan in Kandahar was exceedingly alarmed by these moves. He wrote to the Persian governor of Khorasan urging him to strike at Herat while Yar Mohammed was fighting in Seistan. 7 While this brought no response from the Persians, the British took note of it and it greatly increased their worries.

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5 Correspondence, McNeill to Palmerston, June 30, 1837, Propositions to the Persian Government by Herat, Haji Mirza Aghasi to Herat, Various correspondence between McNeill and Haji Mirza Aghasi, pp. 41-57.

6 Correspondence, McNeill to Macnaghten, January 23, 1837, McNeill to Palmerston, September 28, 1837, pp. 26, 64.

7 Correspondence, Kohendil Khan to Ausef-ud-Dowleh, p. 63.
MAP 7

PERSIAN CAMPAIGNS, 1836-1838

--- Persian border
--- Campaign of 1836
--- Campaign of 1837
- Persian Provinces
- Russian Provinces
--- Independent States
CHAPTER 10

THE SIEGE OF HERAT

Mohammed Shah left Tehran with a skeletal force on June 23, 1837. Units of the Persian army had assembled at various points along the route to Herat and others had been called up throughout Persia. By October 28, the army, now over 30,000 men, reached Torbat-e-Jam on the eastern frontier of Persia. During October the Persians suffered from cold, the horses were weak and worn out from lack of forage, supplies were low and could only be purchased at highly inflated prices, there was no discipline and no precautions were taken against surprise attack.¹

At Torbat-e-Jam final plans were made for a four-pronged assault on the territory of Herat. Ghurian surrendered on November 15 and as the invaders approached, the Heratis proceeded to carry out a scorched earth policy. By November 23 the advanced guard of the Persian army reached the city, whose defenders put up a fierce resistance in the northwestern suburbs. However, the Afghan soldiers retreated behind the walls as the main body of Persians arrived the following day. Mohammed Shah set up his camp southwest of Herat to await the city's fall.²

¹Correspondence, McNeill to Palmerston, November 27, 1837, p. 78.
²Correspondence, McNeill to Palmerston, October 30, 1837, pp. 64-65; Ferrier, pp. 224-229.
The Shah had spent 155 days marching the 650 miles from Tehran to Herat. One hundred years earlier, Nadir Shah had covered 1200 miles between Isfahan and Kandahar, over more difficult and hostile terrain, in only 139 days. The contrast points out once again the poor leadership in the Persian army. Mohammed Shah was not incompetent, he had been well trained in military matters and seemed to know what he was doing. But he was fatally indecisive. Even when he could be brought to decide on a certain course of action he would seldom follow through on it.

The inability of the Shah to make decisions had serious consequences for the Persian army. Haji Mirza Aghasi, the Persian vizier, wanted to delay the taking of Herat until the Russians honored their promises of aid and his intrigues seriously hampered the war effort. The Persian officers seemed to be more interested in preventing their rivals from doing anything than in doing something themselves. There were indications that many of them had taken British bribes. Finally the Persians had to put up with both British and Russian observers who came with the army. The British constantly accused the Russians of aiding the Persians, but they themselves did not scruple about helping the Afghans in spite of their treaties.

The greatest problem the Persians faced was how to feed their men. What little supplies they had were quickly used up and the lines back to Mashad were insecure and often impassable. The harvests around

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3Lockhart, Nadir Shah, pp. 113-115.
4Ferrier, pp. 223, 229.
5Ferrier, p. 229.
Herat took place in late Spring and late Fall so the slow Persian march gave the defenders plenty of time to gather the grain or destroy it. At first the Persians hardly had any food at all but in December and January they began sending out expeditions to gather supplies from the remoter countryside that had escaped destruction. In the Spring of 1838 the Persians planted their own crops and it was only after these were harvested that the supply problem was really solved.

The resolve of Yar Mohammed Khan to defend the city was greatly strengthened by the timely arrival of a British officer. Lt. Eldred Pottinger was an artillery and political officer who was traveling on an unofficial fact-finding mission in Central Asia and just happened to be in Herat when the siege began. Some accounts say that Pottinger was sent on a secret mission to help Herat, others merely hint that he was more than just a traveller. It would not have been inconsistent for the British to have sent him to help in the defense, they certainly had time to do so, but none of this can be proven.

The fighting during November was limited to skirmishing. The Persians made ineffective and uncoordinated attacks on the walls and fired cannon at random into the city. The Persians at first did not have enough men to completely surround the city and three of the five gates remained open. The Afghans were even able to send their cattle out to graze. By January the Persians had increased their force to nearly 40,000 men and the ring around Herat had tightened but not closed. Winter

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6 Correspondence, Stoddart to McNeill, December 10, 1837, McNeill to Palmerston, January 26, 1838, McNeill to Palmerston, June 25, 1838, pp. 87, 90, 185; Ferrier, p. 232.

MAP 8

HERAT AT THE TIME OF THE SIEGE
Schematic Diagram of the Defences of Herat

NOTE: The height of the wall rampart varied in different places. In some sections the wall and parapet collapsed. The covered trenches were the most effective defence positions, and gates and corners were defended by towers over 100' high.

Canals supplying the city with water were cut by the Persians but sufficient water was stored in the reservoirs obtained from wells within.

Main streets were covered and lined with mosaics.

Vicinity of Herat

Mountains
Irrigation canals
Tunnels
Rutro
did not hinder operations but there were many desertions from the Persian army. One of the Persian divisions that had gone north had reached Maimana and succeeded in its objective of neutralizing the tribes. Meanwhile the Persians had advanced their trenches to within yards of the moat and mines were being dug under the walls. However there was no serious effort to storm the city. Both sides had settled in for a long siege. 8

The Persian army at Herat was considered a direct threat to the forward policy and the security of India. The stubborn defense and the fact that the Persians could support a large army there seemed to prove the great strategic value of the place, both as a bulwark of defense and as a staging ground for invasion. 9 The real reason for British alarm however, and what made this campaign different from and more serious than that of 1833, was the direct involvement of the Russians and the repercussions this was having in Afghanistan.

Simonich had encouraged this project ever since his arrival in Persia and had promised aid and furnished money to the Persians. Simonich was apparently free to use the money that Persia had collected to pay the rest of the indemnity from the Russian war. According to British reports, he used some of this fund to pay the expenses of the Persian army and also promised that if Persia took Herat the rest of the indemnity

8 Correspondence, Stoddart to McNeill, December, 1837, McNeill to Palmerston, January 26, 1838; McNeill to Palmerston, February 23, 1838, pp. 87, 90, 97; Ferrier, p. 236.

9 Correspondence, McNeill to Palmerston, February 23, 1838, p. 99.
would be cancelled. Nothing short of sending Russian troops could have been more direct, but even worse from the British point of view was the activity of Simonich in Afghanistan. He was trying to isolate Herat and arrange a coalition of states to help the Persians reduce the city. Both Kandahar and Kabul had reason to join such an arrangement and a major diplomatic battle developed at Kabul between British and Russian agents.

Dost Mohammed was at the center of all this. The Sikhs, in alliance with Britain, were pressing him on one side while the Persians, supported by Russia were active on his other flank. He preferred the support of the British who were closer and more powerful, and able to restrain Ranjit Singh, but at the same time he reasoned that the British would be more eager to aid him if it was known that otherwise he would turn to Persia and Russia. The appearance in Kabul of Burnes in September, and Captain Vitkevitch, a Russian agent, in December, gave Dost a great opportunity to play one off against the other.

Burnes was favorable to Dost Mohammed and argued his case in his reports to the Governor-General. Auckland however, stuck to his alliance with Ranjit Singh, whom he considered practically the only stable factor in the whole area. Certainly the recent history of Afghanistan gave little hope of long-range stability. Burnes therefore could offer nothing and this gave Vitkevitch his opportunity. Vitkevitch came from


Kandahar where he had been working on a treaty between Kohendil Khan and the Shah. In Kabul he spared no effort to point out the advantages of alliance with Persia and he made great promises of Russian aid. Dost would tell each what the other had promised in the hope of getting further promises but he could never get what he really wanted, Peshawar, from Burnes. Finally in March 1838, Burnes was asked to leave Kabul. 12

When Burnes left Kabul, Kandahar had all but signed an alliance with Persia. As Auckland saw it, Herat was about to fall and Kabul and Kandahar had aligned themselves with Persia (Russia). Supported by a victorious Persia, the Afghans would likely take the offensive against the Sikhs. Ranjit Singh might not be able to hold his own and the defenses of India would be in shambles. The very events the forward policy was designed to prevent seemed imminent and Auckland decided that intervention was necessary. Auckland had other problems to worry about as well. In addition to Afghanistan, Nepal and Burma were threatening war on the Indian border. Relations with China were deteriorating over the questions of trade and opium. Mohammed Ali's armies were active in Arabia where they appeared to be pushing towards the Persian Gulf and finally the conflict between Mohammed Ali and Sultan Mahmud could flair up at any time with serious threats to European peace.

As Auckland weighed his various alternatives the Russian government was also reconsidering the situation. The result was that the Tsar decided to back off from the recent Persian policy. Exactly when and why he did this is obscure but the decision must have been made in March or

12 Norris, pp. 146-151.
April of 1838.\textsuperscript{13} At that time the Russians couldn't have known about the failure of British negotiations at Kabul or of Auckland's decision. What they did know was that after several months the Shah had not been able to take Herat. They would also have known that Simonich's diplomacy in Afghanistan was alarming to the British. The Tsar possibly realized that if the situation did not change the British might overreact and this could have far-reaching consequences. Under the circumstances he decided to recall Simonich and withdraw support from Persia, but unfortunately communications were so slow that this decision did not become known until it was too late.

Both British and Russian agents were active at Herat. The British accused the Russians of financing the whole Persian effort and there were suggestions that much of the Persian ineffectiveness was caused by judiciously placed British bribes. The real extent and effectiveness of this activity will probably never be known but some of the British activity was more open. In April, 1838, McNeill decided to go to Herat to see what he could do and when he arrived the Persians were preparing for a major assault. On April 18 the Persian cannon began a heavy bombardment which opened large gaps in the walls and an assault was ordered for the night of the 19th. McNeill later said that the troops were eager to go but they never got a chance for on the day of the 19th, McNeill talked the Shah into calling a truce and trying negotiations once again. The assault was cancelled and McNeill wrote Palmerston that whereas the Persians had been primed for an assault that

\textsuperscript{13}Correspondence, Palmerston to McNeill, April 7, 1838, p. 91.
night, it would be difficult for their morale to reach the same level again, "as I anticipated."\textsuperscript{14}

Shortly after McNeill left Tehran for Herat, Count Simonich decided to follow. He arrived on April 20, just after McNeill had frustrated the assault and he exerted himself to see that this would not happen again. First he persuaded the Shah to cancel negotiations which had bogged down anyway. Simonich tried to inject new life into the Persian army, most importantly by keeping the Shah firm in his resolve to take the city. He also paid the Persian officers and men which did wonders to restore their morale. Finally Russian officers with Simonich advised the Persians and helped them with their plans. All the while Simonich did not know that he had been recalled.\textsuperscript{15}

By June the Persians had completely sealed off Herat. Crops were being harvested and reinforcements were arriving regularly. Simonich's diplomacy was beginning to pay off as well, as a treaty was signed with Kohendil Khan that bound Kandahar to Persia. Simonich personally guaranteed the treaty in the name of the Tsar.\textsuperscript{16} Herat under siege was a different story. Supplies were running low, Persian cannon had caused widespread destruction, and there was disease and famine. The Heratis also had to suffer from their own defenders, the troops of Yar Mohammed, who ruthlessly confiscated supplies and money wherever they

\textsuperscript{14}Correspondence, McNeill to Palmerston, May 12, 1838, pp. 126-130; Kaye, pp. 254-255.

\textsuperscript{15}Correspondence, McNeill to Palmerston, May 12, 1838, p. 127; Ferrier, pp. 248-249; Mosely, "Russia's Asiatic Policy in 1838," Modern Europe, pp. 53-54.

\textsuperscript{16}Correspondence, McNeill to Palmerston, August 1, 1838, p. 185.
could be found. Yar was also quick to crush even the slightest hint of a pro-Persian movement among the citizens. The people of Herat lived under a reign of terror. 17

With Simonich at Herat McNeill's position became untenable. His presence only encouraged Herat to resist the siege and he was snubbed, ignored, harassed, his messengers and servants attacked, until he decided that it was insufferable for the Minister of Great Britain to put up with such treatment. He made a final effort to resolve the differences between Britain and Persia and when the Persians rejected this he left Herat on June 7, and broke off diplomatic relations. 18 The original Russian objective was thereby achieved but the far-reaching consequences that the Russians had feared were beginning to happen.

These developments marked the low point as far as the British were concerned. McNeill had been forced to break with Persia. It looked as though the fall of Herat was imminent. Kandahar had allied with Persia and Kabul was leaning in that direction. The British on all fronts launched a massive effort to restore the situation in their favor and the first move was already underway. In order to exert direct pressure on Persia, Auckland had decided to send a small force to the island of Khark in the Persian Gulf. Five hundred Sepoys sailed from Bombay on June 4. 19 Auckland also began to increase the strength of the

17 Kaye, pp. 269-270, 278.

18 Correspondence, McNeill to Palmerston, June 25, 1838, including various correspondence between McNeill and the Persian Government, pp. 149-164.

19 Kelly, pp. 295-296.
Indian army and started negotiations with Ranjit Singh and Shah Shuja to arrange Suja's restoration to the Afghan throne. At the same time, negotiations were begun with the Ottoman empire to put pressure on both Persia and Russia from that quarter. 20

Throughout June rumors of warlike preparations of the British in India were reaching the Shah. He could only assume, especially after McNeill's departure from Herat, that these were directed at him. The Persians also expected a British ultimatum threatening war if they didn't withdraw. Finally on June 22, Simonich received official word that he was recalled and that the Tsar had changed his policy. An emergency council was held and the Shah decided to make a final all-out effort before it was too late. An assault was ordered for June 24. 21

The plan called for a simultaneous assault at noon, when both sides were usually sleeping, on five places along the south and west walls. The assault was preceded by a cannonade which was to make breaches in the walls. One of the attacking columns, at the southwest corner, turned back shortly after leaving its trenches. At the Irak gate and in the northwest quadrant, the Persians advanced to the foot of the rampart but were beaten back. The attack at the Kandahar gate was easily repulsed and the Persians were chased back to their trenches. The southeast corner however, was the scene of bitter fighting and the issue was in doubt there for several hours. 22

20 Mosely, Russian Diplomacy, p. 134.
21 Ferrier, p. 255.
A French adventurer in the Persian army, General Semineau, was in charge of the Assault at this place. On the previous day the tower at the corner was demolished by cannon fire, much to the amazement of both Persians and Afghans. On the 24th, the assault commenced at noon as planned, but of the four battalions assigned to attack only one did so. These 400 men gained a foothold in the breach but they encountered fierce resistance. They called for reinforcements from the other battalions but these refused to move. Semineau claimed they were immobilized by British gold and the orders of Haji Mirza Aghasi, the Persian Vizier. Finally Semineau prevailed upon General Berovski, a Polish soldier in the Persian service, to rally a few companies in support of the attack. But they fell back when Berovski was killed. Semineau claimed that Berovski was shot from behind and that he himself was wounded by fire from the rear. No further aid was forthcoming. The Persians in the breach held out for five hours but were eventually forced to retreat.23

A slightly different story came from Lt. Pottinger inside Herat. After the heavy fire of the Persian cannon ceased, the Afghans relaxed and so were surprised by the assault at noon. At the southeast corner the Persians gained the lower trench and advanced to the upper one. They were thrown back but they advanced again and carried it. From there they assaulted the breach in the wall. They attacked and were pushed back several times. Both Yar Mohammed and Pottinger rushed to the scene.

23Notes of General Semineau, quoted in Ferrier, pp. 250-254.
Yar Mohammed lost hope and was about to give up but the example of Pottinger, who rushed into action, restored his confidence. The defenders were wavering but when Yar furiously rushed into combat they fell on the Persians and drove them back. 24

The Persians were repulsed in total failure, due perhaps in part to the heroism of Pottinger or treason among the Persians but fundamentally to the complete ineffectiveness of the Persian army. Pottinger later said that the Persians could have taken the city the first day with proper use of the means at their disposal, and that one British regiment could have stormed the place with ease. Semineau claimed that if his plans had been followed not even the most blatant treason could have prevented victory. 25

CHAPTER 11

THE BRITISH RESPONSE

British activities continued unabated despite the Persian failure. The Shah was still before Herat, the situation in Afghanistan had not improved, and it was not known that the Russians had backed down. The expedition to the Persian Gulf reached Khark on June 17 and troops landed two days later.¹ On June 25 a treaty was signed at Lahore between Shah Shuja, Ranjit Singh, and the Government of India which reaffirmed the Shuja-Ranjit treaty of 1834 and cleared the way for Shuja to try again. This time there was no room for failure so it was decided to send British troops to ensure the success of the operation.² British negotiations with Turkey also paid off as on August 18 the Sultan signed a commercial treaty with Britain that caused the Russians to become very concerned about their relationship with the Ottoman empire.³

The British also sent an ultimatum to the Shah threatening war if he stayed at Herat. This was delivered by one of McNeill's aides, Colonel Stoddart, on August 11, 1838.⁴ The failure of the assault, the landings at Khark, the recall of Simonich and the loss of Russian support,

¹Kelly, pp. 295-296.
²Norris, pp. 192-193.
³Mosely, Diplomacy, pp. 36-37, 40-43, 102-109.
⁴Correspondence, Message to be delivered to the Shah, Stoddart to McNeill, August 12, 1838, p. 189, 201-202.
the obvious difficulties of continuing the siege, news of unrest and rebellion in Persia, British preparations for war in India, and now an ultimatum, all combined to make Mohammed Shah give up. He agreed to the British demand to leave.

The actual departure was delayed due to lack of baggage animals until September 9. Then, in the words of Col. Stoddart, "The Shah has mounted his horse 'Ameerij' and is gone." The Persians had camped before Herat for 280 days. On his return to Tehran in October, Mohammed Shah issued a proclamation stating that all his aims had been accomplished: the entire east including Kabul, Kandahar, and a host of minor places had submitted; Herat had been reduced to four bare walls and left powerless; it was his concern, the proclamation continued, for the tranquility of his provinces, the approach of winter, and the warlike preparations of the British in total disregard for three treaties, that caused him to return.

The departure of the Persian army brought little relief to the long-suffering Heratis. The city had been ruined by Persian bombardment and the Persian army had stripped the country bare before leaving. There was no food and no money even for the 8,000 people who were still alive. To raise revenue Yar Mohammed sold his own citizens as slaves to the Turkmen. Pottinger, and Stoddart who joined him after the Persians left, planned to convert Herat into a bastion of British influence but they did not have much to work with.

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5 Correspondence, Stoddart to McNeill, 10:26 A.M., September 9, 1838, p. 220.
6 Correspondence, Proclamation of Mohammed Shah, October, 1838, pp. 258-259.
Yar Mohammed however, did not resist the Persians only to become subject to the British. The slave trade was a major issue between them since the British wanted it suppressed. They also wanted to regularize the administration of Herat and modernize the army with the help of British advisors. The British were willing to finance these projects and Yar was only too glad to take their money, but that was as far as he was willing to go. He would have none of their projects and frustrated them at every turn. Showing his independence he carried on a friendly correspondence with Mohammed Shah, even proposing an alliance to oppose the anticipated British march into Afghanistan. Pottinger and Stoddart tried to get around the vizier by working through Kamran but that proved useless. Yar Mohammed remained in complete control of his own affairs.7

Although the Shah had left Herat the Persians remained in occupation of Ghurian and several other forts. In Afghanistan Kohendil Khan was still allied to Persia and now planned to attack Herat himself, and Dost Mohammed had not changed his position so it was still necessary to restore Shah Shuja. In a declaration justifying his moves, Auckland mentioned the desire of the British to promote trade, the "unprovoked" attack of Dost Mohammed against the Sikhs, the intrigues of Persia throughout Afghanistan, the "unjustifiable" siege of Herat, and the claims of Shah Shuja. In conclusion he stated, "the welfare of our possessions in the east requires that we should have on our western frontier an ally who is interested in resisting aggression, and establishing tranquility, in the place of chiefs ranging themselves in subservience to a hostile

7Ferrier, pp. 258-259, 403-406.
power, and seeking to promote schemes of conquest and aggrandizement."

One day after the Shah left Herat the orders were given for the Indian army to assemble for the invasion. Kandahar was to be the first objective since Kohendil Khan was more involved with the Persians and from there the army could strike either at Kabul or Herat as needed. A Sikh army was to march directly on Kabul. On November 27, 1838, Auckland arrived at Ferozepore to meet with Ranjit Singh and review the troops. Several days later the armies marched. 9

The British invasion of Afghanistan put the Russians in a difficult position. They had backed off in Persia to avoid provoking exactly this kind of reaction. They had lost much prestige because of their involvement at Herat, since all Asia knew that Britain and Russia were in confrontation and Russia had come out looking like the loser. The British invasion almost demanded some kind of response but Russia was powerless to intervene directly in Afghanistan. However, it was felt that a campaign against Khiva could have the desired result of restoring Russian prestige while not further antagonizing the British. Khiva was unconnected with the events at Herat and its conquest would be a direct benefit to Russia since it was a center of the slave trade and was supporting the Kazakh rebellion of Kenesary Kasim. 10

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8 Correspondence, Declaration of the Governor-General, October 1, 1838, pp. 299-303.


10 Memorandum of Nesselrode to Tsar Nicholas in Mosely, "Russian Policy in Asia," 675-681.
THE BRITISH RESPONSE, DECEMBER 1838 - NOVEMBER 1839

MAP 9

Combined Army movements (Indus)

Bengal Division movements (Bengal)

Bombay Division movements (Bombay)

Movements of Shuja's forces (Shuja)

Sikh Army movements

Minor British operations

British Garrisons

British Residencies

Persian Provinces

Eastern border of Persia

Independent States
The attention of both Britain and Russia was diverted at this point to the Middle East where the Sultan had renewed the war with Mohammed Ali, lost his army, and died five days later leaving the Ottoman empire both defenseless and leaderless. While European peace hung in the balance at Constantinople the British army in Afghanistan plodded on. Kohendil Khan fled to Persia as the invaders approached Kandahar and Shah Shuja entered that city in triumph. Bowing to the inevitable, Yar Mohammed sent an embassy to congratulate Shuja on his success. The envoys negotiated an agreement with the British that recognized the prerogatives of Yar Mohammed and allowed a British resident to reside at Herat. D'Arcy Todd, who had previously served with McNeill in Persia, was sent with numerous instructions that, if fulfilled, would establish British control over Herat.

Todd arrived in July and on August 13 concluded a treaty with Yar Mohammed and Kamran. The treaty recognized both Kamran's and Yar's positions and pledged the British to non-interference in Herat's internal affairs. Britain was to send money and officers to assist in defence against foreign enemies. Kamran promised to cooperate with Shuja and to submit any disputes to British arbitration. Kamran also promised not to correspond with any foreign powers without British consent, to remove obstacles to trade, and to end the slave trade. The British felt that


all their aims were accomplished by this treaty but they underestimated Yar Mohammed.\textsuperscript{13}

The first serious fighting encountered by the Army of the Indus was at Ghazni which was stormed and taken. As the British approached Kabul, Dost Mohammed's supporters deserted him and after token resistance Dost fled to Bukhara. On August 7, 1838, Shah Shuja remounted his throne at Kabul after almost thirty years. By and large the Afghans accepted the restoration of Shuja. His receptions at Kabul and Kandahar were sufficiently enthusiastic to convince the British that he had considerable support. There was some unrest among the tribes and a force had to be sent against the Ghilzais in October, but it could now be said that the British had reestablished their defenses on the Northwest frontier. The forward policy was restored.\textsuperscript{14}

But in December 1838 the Russian General Perovski left Orenburg with 5,000 men and marched on Khiva. The expedition had been especially planned for winter when the deserts around Khiva were more passable.\textsuperscript{15} This was widely seen as a countermove to the British thrust into Afghanistan and the British were alarmed. There was even speculation that this was the oft-anticipated invasion of India and the possibility of a direct clash appeared. The British felt that they had to meet this challenge and to do so they had to postpone their planned withdrawal to India.

\textsuperscript{13}Aitchison, pp. 170-172.

\textsuperscript{14}Norris, pp. 270-274.

\textsuperscript{15}Rawlinson, England and Russia in the East, pp. 150-151; Ferrier, p. 402.
Preparations were begun to move across the Hindu Kush mountains into Central Asia.¹⁶

The serious escalation of the conflict that might have resulted was prevented only by the weather. Perovski's force encountered unusually fierce blizzards and was forced to turn back with heavy losses.¹⁷ The British then abandoned their plans to move across the mountains but for one reason or other they kept postponing their withdrawal from Afghanistan. As time went on, their occupation forces took on a more permanent aspect. A regular cantonment was built and some of the officers even brought their wives and families. The British could never be sure that Shuja could survive without their continued support and Shuja's position seemed to be getting worse instead of better.

The treaty signed with Herat in August did not end the British difficulties with Yar Mohammed. British money flowed into Herat, commerce resumed, agriculture recovered, and repairs on the city began. But the slave trade was not ended, no army or administrative reforms were undertaken, and worst of all Yar resumed his correspondence with Mohammed Shah, professing friendship and even offering to place Herat under Persian protection. Yar also gave aid and reinforcements to Aktur Khan Alizai who led a rebellion of the Durrans against Shah Shuja beginning in December 1840. Herat seethed with intrigue as Todd, Yar Mohammed, supporters of Kamran, and enemies of the vizier plotted and counter-

¹⁶ Norris, pp. 314, 318.
¹⁷ Ferrier, p. 402.
plotted against one another. Through it all however, Yar was in control. 18

By 1841 the situation at Herat had deteriorated to the point where the British were simply pouring money down the drain. Todd realized this but he could do nothing with Yar Mohammed. The British wanted a connection with Herat and Yar took advantage of this to get all he could out of them while preserving his own independence. Finally Todd gave Yar an ultimatum and withheld the subsidy until the vizier gave guarantees for his conduct. The specific guarantee Todd had in mind was the stationing of British troops in the citadel of Herat. Yar of course would not agree to this and told Todd either to resume the subsidy or leave; Todd left Herat on February 10, 1841. 19

Todd's action in breaking with Herat was repudiated by the Government of India but the connection was not restored. There was a reaction against the British at Herat and many who had done business with Todd found their profits confiscated by Yar Mohammed. With the British envoy also departed the last hope of Kamran's party to regain power. The prince's sons made a desperate attempt to seize control by themselves but their plot was discovered and they found themselves besieged in the citadel by troops loyal to the vizier. Kamran's sons appealed to the British but to no avail. After a siege of fifty days Yar captured the citadel. Kamran was stripped of his treasures and imprisoned and his sons were exiled. Yar Mohammed only awaited a

18 Ferrier, pp. 407-411, 335.
19 Ferrier, pp. 412-417; Norris, p. 344.
favorable moment to put an end to his nominal sovereign. 20

Relations between Britain and Persia were in a state of suspended hostilities after the siege, mainly because of the continued occupation of Ghurian by the Persians. The Persian army had to be disbanded after the war for lack of funds, and revolts had broken out in many areas. By 1841 it was becoming apparent to the Persians that continued hostility with Britain was doing them no good, and the British for their part still wanted to maintain some Persian strength against Russia. Perhaps it was Yar Mohammed's friendly correspondence that allowed the Shah to withdraw from Ghurian; in any case this cleared the way for a settlement and McNeill returned to Tehran. One of his first accomplishments was the signing of a commercial treaty in October 1841, and by March the following year the British felt safe enough to withdraw from Khark. 21

The Middle East crisis also faded away as Britain and Russia came to see a common interest in preserving the Ottoman empire. British troops landed in Palestine and Mohammed Ali's challenge to the Sultan collapsed. 22

After his restoration, Shah Shuja was confronted with the old problem of tribal versus royal power. Backed by British troops and aided by British efficiency he was able to consolidate the central power. But the tribes resented their loss and felt that Shuja was a mere puppet in the hands of the British. The most serious challenge to his rule came from the rebellion of the Durranis under Aktur Khan. This was suppressed

20Ferrier, pp. 471-472.
21Kelly, pp. 347-349.
22Dodwell, pp. 189-191.
by British troops from Kandahar but it flared up again and Aktur Khan was finally defeated only in August 1841. Shuja was actually in an impossible position, surrounded as he was by British advisors and troops. The real ruler of Afghanistan was William Macnaghten, Auckland's chief aide whom he had sent as the senior political agent in Kabul. 23

Auckland had intended to stay in Afghanistan only until Shuja was established but the longer the British stayed the more precarious Shuja's position became. The British invasion had been accompanied by an inflow of money which caused inflation, especially at Kabul. This undermined the position of the city classes and turned them against Shah Shuja. The occupation was also causing huge deficits in the Indian budget and there was an attempt to cut back. 24 On November 2, 1841 there was a demonstration against the British in Kabul that turned into a riot. Events got out of control before Shuja could do anything, the British garrison did nothing, and the riot turned into a rebellion. 25

During December the whole country around Kabul was in arms against the British but still they did nothing. Mohammed Akbar Khan, Dost Mohammed's son, came out of the hills where he had been hiding and took charge of the revolt. Macnaghten was killed while trying to negotiate with Akbar, the army was isolated in its camp, and Shuja's authority


vanished. On January 6, 1842, the British commander negotiated with Akbar for safe passage back to India but while winding through the passes during the next few days, the British army was attacked and destroyed. 26

26 Norris, pp. 366-381; Yapp, "Revolutions," 347.
MAP 10

WESTERN ASIA IN THE 1840'S
CHAPTER 12

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The city of Herat in 1837 and 1838 was the focal point of a number of pressures and conditions which, in conjunction made the siege a significant event. These ranged from personal and tribal jealousies, through the imperial pretensions of tribal states, to the global policies of great empires. In the end each of the military efforts to influence the situation failed and on the surface nothing was changed, but these failures only masked the reality of a much different situation.

An essential precondition to the importance of the siege was the state of economic exhaustion and political anarchy that prevailed in Iran in the 1830's. The great empires of the seventeenth century had collapsed and in the wars that followed, the prosperity of the area was destroyed. The weakness of the tribal states, Persia and Afghanistan, that arose out of the ruins was a constant source of instability that invited both internal revolts and outside influences. There was a power vacuum and powers on the outside inevitably became involved in what was going on within.

The immediate motive for the siege was the desire of Persia to restore its vanished empire. Seen in this regard the campaign of 1837 was but the latest in a long series of attempts to regain lost territory in the east. Herat had been the main objective of these efforts since
control over Mashad was established in 1803. Whenever there was peace in the west, and no political crisis at hand, there was a Persian move to retake Herat.

The opportunity for Persia to achieve this goal was created when the tension between Sadozai and Mohammedzai finally tore apart the fragile structure of the Afghan state. Herat was cut off from the rest of Afghanistan and would appear to have been easy pickings for any of its numerous enemies if they could make a serious effort to take it. If these had been the only factors, the siege of Herat would have had only local importance but there were two more.

There was the worldwide expansion of the British. The growth of the British economy fueled this expansion and the British were constantly searching for new markets and supplies. More importantly the British were the rulers of a great empire in India and were concerned for its defense. A keystone of this defense was a buffer on the Northwest frontier. The state of Ranjit Singh provided this buffer for a time but when a greater threat was perceived it was felt that a stronger buffer was needed.

This greater threat was the apparent Russian domination of Western Asia. After 1828 and more so after 1833, it appeared as though the Tsar had gained control over Persia and Turkey and was using them to extend his power. The British were particularly afraid of the effect a Russian presence on the Indian border would have on the internal peace of India. The Russian position was not as pervasive or as sinister as the British imagined, but it was to some degree real and the Russians were concerned to preserve it.
Each of the parties involved saw Herat from a different perspective. To Mohammed Shah of Persia, Herat was an integral part of the Persian empire. Historically, religiously, ethnically and in all respects it belonged to Persia even though it was temporarily detached. The reconquest of Herat was a long-standing goal of his family and he was committed to it as a matter of personal honor. There was no question in his eyes as to the rightness of his cause.

The Afghan chiefs each had different ideas about the position of Herat. To Kamran it was the last refuge of the Sadozai dynasty. For Yar Mohammed it was a place he had seized upon where he could establish his own power. These two had nowhere else to go. To Kohendil Khan on the other hand Herat was a mortal enemy that must be destroyed and if possible added to his own possessions. There was also a debt to pay for the destruction of Painda and Feth Khan. Dost Mohammed also had this blood feud but he was less concerned with Herat. When the occasion arose however, he saw that Herat might be a useful bargaining point to accomplish other ends.

Herat had long been known as the "Key to India" and the city retained that image in the eyes of the British. It was not that they felt they should have it in their own hands but that it had to be kept out of the hands of strong or unfriendly powers. Persia qualified as one of these after 1828. The British did not really fear a direct invasion but whoever held Herat was in a position to influence Afghanistan and the forward policy made Afghanistan part of the Indian defense system. The internal peace of India was always the prime concern of the British and their interest in Herat varied as threats to this peace came and went.
To the Tsar and his ministers Herat was probably just another of the small principalities that dotted Iran and Central Asia. However they were no doubt aware of its importance to Persia and its relationship to British India. After the wars of the early 1830's it was apparent that Persia and Britain were at odds concerning the position of Herat. The Russians were in an excellent position to exploit this difference to their own advantage and this is the key to the whole affair.

A tentative explanation for the Russian's actions in these years is that they decided to exploit the British fears for the security of their Indian empire in order to enhance Russia's own position in Persia. By encouraging the Persians in their objective of taking Herat, Russia could provoke a complete break between Persia and Britain, leaving the field to Russia. The risks to Russia were minimal, since Persia wanted Herat anyway and seemingly had the means to take it. The British fell for it completely.

Things began to go wrong, however, when the Shah was not able to take Herat right away. This gave the British a chance to seize the initiative and they were quite effective in stalling the Persian effort. At this point Simonich decided that he had to act to counter the British moves. He sent agents into Afghanistan to arrange a coalition against Herat. Possibly he became personally involved in the siege or did not realize the implications of what he was doing. He may even have been acting against orders. In any case his actions and involvement were what touched off the British response.

Those in control of Russian policy realized what was happening and ordered the recall of Simonich in April or May of 1838 to avoid an
overreaction by the British. But by the time the word got to Simonich it was too late, the damage had been done. The British saw their frontier defenses in shambles and set armies marching to restore them.

With the departure of the Persian army from Herat the focus of the crisis was lost but the various moves underway went on independently to their conclusion. The British army occupied Afghanistan but could not hold it. The Russians made one attempt to restore their tarnished prestige but failed. The Persians continued to occupy the border fortresses until Herat went through the motions of professing friendship. This cleared the way for a reconciliation of Britain and Persia. The British sent another army back to Kabul to exact retribution but withdrew after doing no more than burning the Kabul bazaar. Only then was it possible to assess what had happened.

In Persia the failure of the siege was followed by a near breakdown of the imperial government. The army had to be disbanded, revolts broke out in almost all provinces, and the government was completely bankrupt. There was no improvement during the 1840's. On a broader scale the siege marks the last attempt of the Persians to restore their lost empire. Before this there had been almost constant and continuous campaigns in the east or the west. The few Persian military efforts during the rest of the nineteenth century were sporadic, half-hearted, and almost totally unsuccessful. The foreign affairs of Persia for the remainder of the century consist mainly of dealings between Russia and Britain.

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A more subtle change was also accelerated in Persian society. Symbolic of this, a Persian history written in 1882 concentrates on imperial events up to 1838 but after the siege of Herat is almost exclusively concerned with the affairs of a single province. The decline of Persia had started quite some time before this, but after 1838 the fall was precipitous. The Kajars had failed to restore the empire and people seem to have just lost interest.

The changes in Afghanistan were not quite as profound. Dost Mohammed returned to Kabul after the second British withdrawal. He worked to consolidate and extend his power and by the time of his death in 1863 had reunited Kandahar, and Herat with Kabul. Dost had been impressed with the fact that his power was dependent on British India and he was very careful not to give offense in that direction. The British occupation had also brought lessons in efficient administration which Dost tried to apply as best he could.

Kohendil Khan also returned, to rule Kandahar until his death in 1851. In 1855 Kandahar became subject to Dost Mohammed at Kabul. Yar Mohammed Khan continued at Herat and tried to rebuild his ravaged city. When he died in 1853 Herat was briefly occupied by Persia, but the Persians withdrew under British pressure and the city retained a precarious independence until becoming subject to Dost Mohammed in 1863. Dost Mohammed's death in 1863 however set off another round of anarchy which lasted until the 1880's before the final shape of Afghanistan was attained.

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The most significant result as far as Afghanistan was concerned was that it was clearly made part of the British imperial system. Its role was that of a buffer, and it was not ruled directly, but it was strictly controlled. The British would repeat their invasion on two subsequent occasions to enforce this connection. The Afghans derived some small benefit however in that it did ensure the survival of Afghanistan.

Russia had risked almost nothing in this affair and had lost only a small amount of prestige. But the Russians had learned some significant things. They had tested the British and discovered the limits beyond which they would react. In the 1860's and 1870's Russia brought all Central Asia and the Uzbeg Khanates under its rule unopposed by Britain but stopped 100 miles north of Herat. Russia also proved to its satisfaction that a real or imagined threat to India could be very useful in dealing with the British. This was the first time Russia had tried such a move and it would not be the last.

Finally the British had established the outer limit of their Indian empire and the line was drawn at Herat. The Russian conquest of the Uzbegs brought no British response but a threat to Herat sent armies marching. When Russia marched on Khiva in 1839 the British briefly considered moving deeper into Central Asia but as a result of this crisis the limit was pulled back to Herat and never moved again.

The relations of Britain and Russia in Iran were thus defined between 1837 and 1842. Russia possessed a predominant influence in Persia but the British could not be excluded altogether. Afghanistan was a part of the Indian empire but anything beyond Herat was left to Russia by default. Persia and Afghanistan lost the ability to act
independently as they had done in the past. After all the numerous crises during the rest of the nineteenth century, and after all the comings and goings of British and Russian agents in what was called the "Great Game," when the spheres of influence were officially drawn by the Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907 they corresponded almost exactly with what was established by the events surrounding the Siege of Herat.
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PERSONS MENTIONED IN THE TEXT


Akbar = Mohammed Akbar Khan.

Aktur Khan Alizai. Leader of a rebellion of Durrani tribesmen against Shah Shuja 1840-42.

Lord Auckland (George Eden) 1784-1849. British Politician. Governor-General of India 1836-42.


Berovski. Polish (?) soldier of fortune serving in the Persian army at the siege of Herat.


Kenesary Kasim. Leader of a Kazakh revolt against Russia 1837-47.


Sir John McNeill 1795-1883. British Minister to Persia 1836-42.


Mohammed Akbar Khan. Son of Dost Mohammed. Led revolt against the British 1842.


Mohammed Mirza = Mohammed Shah Kajar.


Nadir Kuli = Nadir Shah


Nicholas I Romanov 1796-1855. Tsar of Russia 1825-55.

Painda Khan Mohammedzai. Head of the Barakzais c 1790.


General Perovski. Russian commander at Orenburg. Head of the Khiva expedition of 1839.


General Semineau. French soldier of fortune in the Persian army at Herat.

Shamil 1790-1871. Leader of the Murid revolt against Russia in the Caucasus 1834-59.


Count Ivan Simonich. Russian Minister to Persia 1835-38.

Lt. Colonel Charles Stoddart 1806-42. British Political officer with Persian army at Herat and later envoy to Herat.


