

CENTRAL ASIA

JOURNAL OF AREA STUDY CENTRE



PESHAWAR BASED INFORMATION ON AMANULLAH'S FLIGHT* FROM AFGHANISTAN

ABDUL KARIM KHAN

FAZAL-UR-RAHIM KHAN MARWAT

SAYED WIQAR ALI SHAH

The British Indian Government was alleged, not only by the Afghans themselves but also by the Frontier leaders in the British India, to have a hand in the uprising against Amir Amanullah Khan in early 1929. To substantiate this allegation the accusers have failed so far to bring in any documentary proof as an evidence against the accused, because, as the former allege, the latter destroyed all those documents that could prove their guilty involvement in Afghan affairs. However, there is a general consensus amongst the Afghans, if one were to write an Oral History of Afghanistan, that Amir Amanullah was not wanted by the '*Ferangies*' to be any longer on the throne of Kabul. Hence their machination; against him. The British were thus accused not only by the Afghans, but the sympathisers of Amir Amanullah Khan in India generally, and in the North-West Frontier Province particularly, also believed, as if fully convinced, that the British Government in India were out to oust Amanullah Khan and install someone of their own liking on the throne of Kabul.

*Much has been written about Amanullah Khan, both in his favour and otherwise, in the West as well as in Indo-Pakistan and Afghanistan. These writings are dependent upon whatever material scholars could get in their respective archival resources. The present study is, similarly, based upon the first-hand information available in the then British Government sources in Peshawar.

Thus Amir Amanullah Khan's sympathisers in Afghanistan and India believed that Habibullah, the *Bachcha Saqao*, had been encouraged by the British against him. It is against the background of this allegation, true or false, that the stance of what was explained as "British neutrality and non-intervention" in Afghan affairs proved most devastating and harmful in turning the scales in the battle field against Amir Amanullah Khan. This 'timely' neutrality and non-intervention of the British authorities went in favour of Habibullah. Through this neutrality, it is alleged, they cut off the very help which Amir Amanullah Khan bitterly needed in an hour of impending crisis.

Prior to the outbreak of revolt against his Government, Amir Amanullah Khan had, during his European tour, ordered several types of arms and ammunition from Europe. These large munition consignments were to reach Afghanistan through the sea ports of British India. Amir Amanullah Khan, at that time, did not suspect the intentions of the British authorities in regard to the safe delivery of these consignments to Afghanistan. But the Government of India did not feel easy about these consignments reaching the hands of Amir Amanullah Khan in an hour of dire need. Therefore, the Viceroy of India first deliberately delayed their delivery to Afghanistan, and then, when Amir Amanullah Khan's army was being pressed by hostile tribes, the Indian Government persuaded the Home Government to stop the delivery outright. The Viceroy, recommending Sir Francis Humphrys' suggestions from Kabul, wrote to the Secretary of State for India: "It is requested that arms and ammunition purchased by the Afghan Government (under Amanullah Khan) from Europe and already landed at the Indian ports... may at present be detained at their respective ports." This policy of the Indian Government served two purposes; First it weakened the military position of Amanullah Khan against the rebels at a

juncture when he needed these arms very badly. Second, it helped Bachcha Saqao against the former whose position he had already put in jeopardy. Had they not delayed the delivery of arms consignments, Amanullah Khan would not have lost his ground against the rebels so soon.

By the middle of May 1929, Amir Amanullah Khan's forces were already showing weaknesses before the rebel forces. The Indian Government had received confirmed reports that the forces of Bachcha Saqao were gaining ground in several parts of Afghanistan and that the day was not far off when Amanullah Khan would be captured by the rebels. It was at this most crucial and decisive juncture that the British Government in India and the Home Department played the card of their "policy of scrupulous neutrality and non-intervention". Hence the Viceroy wrote to the Secretary of State that "as soon as complete stability and uniformity is established throughout Afghanistan and the whole country is consolidated and brought under one supreme authority, in that case the Indian Government may.....permit the transition of the said arms and ammunition into Afghanistan".¹ This decision was proposed to be "meant for Russian as well as Afghan consumption".² Similarly the Viceroy directed the Baluchistan Government that "cases containing aeroplanes should not be allowed to cross the frontier" (into Afghanistan).³ These were two aircrafts' material which Amir Amanullah Khan had ordered from Europe and which had been booked from Karachi in early April (1929) to Afghan Trade Agent at Chaman (Baluchistan) for onward transition to Kabul.⁴

Amir Amanullah Khan knew full well that scales in the battle field had turned against him as his forces, in the second half of May 1929, had already found it difficult to resist the Shinwaris and Ghilzais' *lashkars*. To this belief he was led by several of his confidant

councillors. Not being able so far to quell the rebellion with an iron hand, as he had wished, and worried for the safety of his family, he decided to leave Afghanistan, never to return. How far he was right in analysing the situation to that bleak point of no return, cannot be judged even today because of the great confusion which prevailed at that time in Afghanistan.

The geographical position of Afghanistan and his own unfortunate placement therein compelled Amanullah Khan to seek shelter on the land of his former foe—the British India. The nearest place of safety where he could flee to with all safety was the Indo-Afghan border at Chaman in Baluchistan. After giving a severe battle to the rebels with whatever forces he was left with by that time, he left Kelat-i-Ghalzai on 22nd May, 1929 in the afternoon and reached Qandahar on the 23rd early next morning. After a short respite of less than 3 hours at Qandahar he left the same morning, at 8.00 A.M. and reached Chaman at 1.00 P.M. His unexpected arrival at Chaman struck the Baluchistan Government with stunning surprise as it was without any previous permission, or at least, information. The Baluchistan Government found it difficult to let Amanullah Khan's party remain either at Chaman or at Quetta because of internal political situation.⁵

Besides his Queen Surriyya and brother Sardar Inayatullah Khan, Amanullah Khan's party consisted of 27 men including several sardars, 35 women and children and 30 other followers. They arrived at Chaman in about 20 cars and lorries "without food and in a state of great dejection".⁶ The party was accommodated in the Political Bungalow at Chaman which was guarded by Gurkhas.⁷ Besides his political and military reverses Amanullah Khan was greatly worried over the health of Queen Surriyya who was pregnant and a short time was left to delivery.⁸

The Baluchistan Government, thus embarrassed at having received an unwelcome guest, telegraphed to the Government of India that it was "impossible for them (Amanullah Khan's Party) to remain at Chaman for more than one night and it would be most difficult to accommodate such a large party in Quetta," and suggested that immediate arrangements should be made to send the party by rail from Chaman direct to Bombay.⁹ Moreover, the Baluchistan Government were worried for having failed, despite the desires of the Government of India, to ascertain (a) the plans of Amanullah Khan's exit out of India, and (b) the number of persons who would accompany him if he were to leave India for his next possible destination in Europe which he could not indicate as he "was extremely dejected" and unable to decide.¹⁰

The Government of India in the Foreign Department pressed hard the Baluchistan Government in very clear terms: "It should be made plain with all courtesy to Amanullah that Government's declared policy of neutrality and non-intervention unfortunately preclude their extending further hospitality to himself, ex-Queen Surriyya and their party. They will, however, be glad, on learning his destination, to do all in their power to arrange for expeditious and comfortable transit of the party across the Indian territory. Should Amanullah not propose spontaneously to leave as soon as Special Train is available, it should be made clear to him again of course with utmost courtesy that he must do so."¹¹ However to the great relief of the Baluchistan Government, Amanullah Khan desired to proceed immediately to Bombay and embark for Italy.¹² The Government of India made prompt arrangements for a Special Train to take the party from Baluchistan to Bombay. The train left Quetta at 8.00 P.M. on 25th July "under a Police guard travelling on train consisting of one Deputy Superintendent, two Sub-Inspectors and 25 other rank and file".¹³

The attitude of the Government of India towards Amanullah Khan was in fact, one of show and substantially yielding nothing. Besides instructions for accommodating the party, the Foreign Department in Simla emphatically urged the Bombay authorities that "no ceremony will...be called for, but arrangements...should be appropriate to high personal status of ex-King and Queen".¹⁴ The Foreign Department further directed Bombay that to avoid least possible delay over "departure of ex-King Amanullah from India, please get in touch with Syed Qasim, the Afghan Minister at Rome...and advise him informally to lose no time in getting in communication with Italian authorities regarding ex-King's proposal to go to Italy".¹⁵

Lord Irwin, the Viceroy, however, was most courteous to Amanullah Khan who was then a fallen potentate. He wired to Amanullah Khan who was still on his train journey to Bombay: "The news of the arduous journey undertaken by Queen Surriyya and yourself has filled me with deep concern. I have enjoined on my officers to do all in their power to mitigate the irksomeness and discomforts of your passage through India at this trying season. If there is anything further that they can do to make your journey less difficult, I am most anxious that you should feel that they are at your service".¹⁶ This was but lip-service in which the Foreign Department never failed. To forestall Amanullah Khan's intentions, if any, of getting help for settling matters in Afghanistan in his favour, Lord Irwin did not mention anything regarding disturbances in Afghanistan. Amanullah Khan, himself a great diplomat, wired back to the Viceroy: "I am deeply touched by Your Excellency's kind message...I have received in the course of this journey every assistance, attention and consideration from your respected officers. My wife and I thank Your Excellency for your kind and friendly attention in instructing them to facilitate our journey".¹⁷

Amanullah Khan and his party reached Bombay on 28th May. He had already decided never to harbour any intention of "ever returning to Afghanistan." During his journey he had disclosed his next destination of refuge—Rome. He had lost his kingdom and almost himself. He attributed the "whole of his misfortune to Russians who had estranged him from the British, the traditional friends of his father and grandfather. . . . and who, when the crisis came, had not lifted a finger to help him. . . ." The revolution "had taken him completely by surprise and. . . he had not deposited a penny in Foreign banks. His sole capital consisted of what he had with him equivalent to about four lakh British pounds which he would have to share with his brother and his retinue".¹⁸

Amanullah Khan wanted from the Government of India assurances over certain matters which, though had become of utmost importance and priority due to his changed circumstances, would have been just trifles if things were different. He made the following requests to which he asked that "categorical replies be given to enable him to know exactly where he stands" :—

- (a) "Would Government of India be prepared to permit members of his suite whom he is quite unable to support and who could not possibly gain a livelihood in Europe to reside in India, and would they contribute to their support?"
- (b) "Would Government be prepared to change his money for him at a fair rate; it consists of 30,000 to 40,000 gold Amaniyya valued at approximately ten rupees each and about one lakh Afghanis as he anticipates difficulty in inducing Bombay Banks to take it over at reasonable rate?"
- (c) "Will British Government assist him to recover his private property in Kabul consisting of fac-

tories and cash the value of which he estimates at 6 crores?

(d) "Is British Government, out of consideration for his father's friendship, prepared to advance him anything on security of his property in Kabul?"

(e) "Would British Government be prepared to educate some of his sons and near relations, about half a dozen, in England?"¹⁹

Although, in anticipation of the Government of India, Major Wickham, his *Mehmandar* in Bombay, had told him very frankly to "be prepared for disappointment," still he was "just begging",²⁰ as Wickham wrote to Simla.

The Foreign Department, Government of India, greeted Amanullah Khan's demands with a big, blunt blow of NO! as "it would violate Government's policy of neutrality and non-intervention to give important personages, during the civil war, other than temporary harbourage in India still more to finance them". Wickham was told that "embarrassment of Government of India will be less the earlier his (Amanullah's) departure". Realising the nature of their treatment with the ex-Amir, the Foreign Department further asked Wikham to "reduce these unsatisfying answers to as courteous a form as possible".²¹

For a person like Major Wickham, who was an ex-counsellor at Kabul and had enjoyed more than often royal hospitality with the family of Amanullah Khan, it was of course very tough time to be hard with his 'guest'. He reported the following to the Foreign Department: "I gilded the pill with proper courtesy and personal sympathy, but at the same time made it quite clear that the Government's decisions were final. He accepted the inevitable with dignity and courage.... He remarked that:

He was no waster like ex-Shah of Persia, that he had worked night and day for the welfare of his people, and that in his downfall he had at least the solace of a clear conscience.

He nearly broke down....and regretted that instead of being annihilated with his family like late Czar of Russia he was destined to wander in foreign lands".²²

Amanullah Khan, to add to his personal grief, was greatly worried for the health of Queen Surriyya as she was pregnant with an expected date of delivery on 12th June and would be able to sail only on 22nd.²³ And to further add to his miseries there was a sad realisation of his being not financially so sound to support the large retinue he had brought from Afghanistan and who had become his burdensome liability. He at one time, during an interview with Wickham, suddenly burst out:

"I cannot support them all in Europe....What are they to do? You say they can neither go back to Afghanistan nor remain in India. Have they no right to live anywhere? Should they throw themselves into the sea or collect together in a room and set fire to it?"²⁴

Amanullah Khan had hoped to get somewhat a lenient attitude from London where he had wired the Home Government, but to his bad luck that too proved not more than an evasive reply from King George who wired him back:

"I thank Your Majesty sincerely for your messages and for your good wishes for my recovery. It is a great pleasure to Queen and me to know that my Government have been able to contribute in some degree to comfort of Queen Surriyya and yourself at this time".²⁵

The Government of India anxiously wanted to hasten the exit of Amanullah Khan and his party out

of India. To the query of the Foreign Office, London, whether King Amanullah would be admitted to Italy, His Majesty's Representative at Rome replied that "the Italian Government have no objection to his coming to Italy".²⁶ Thus getting this 'No Objection' from Rome and London, the Government of India conveyed to Wickham that they were prepared to defray the charges of passage of Amanullah and party to Constantinople by purchasing tickets but "in an ordinary way" and give them "small lump *mehmandari*".²⁷

Having given birth to a baby Queen Surriyya was now fit to sail on 22nd June, 1929. The Government of India had been waiting only for the day. Wickham reported, the same day, the sailing of Amanullah and party on the "MULTAN" with Major Fraser, late Military Attache, Kabul, being entrusted with duties of *Mehmandar*. The Viceroy, to his great relief at last, reported the much awaited departure to the Secretary of State at London.²⁹

REFERENCES

NOTE:— All the Telegrams referred to in this Paper are available in the Chief Commissioner's Office, N.W.F.P. (Political Branch), Peshawar File No. 37/24(24/71-F.R.P.) Vol. XVIII-1929. Subject Title is:— "*Afghanistan Rebellion*".

1. Telegram No. 1687-S, Dated 16-5-1929.
From Viceroy (Foreign & Poll: Deptt:), Simla.
To Secretary of State for India, London.
- 1-A. Telegram No. 1441, Dated 2-5-1929.
From Secretary of State for India, London.
To Viceroy (Foreign & Poll: Deptt:), Simla.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Telegram No. 1535-S, Dated 30-4-1929.
From Foreign, Simla.
To Baluchistan, Quetta.

4. Telegram No. 946-S, Dated 29-4-1929.
From Baluchistan, Quetta.
To Foreign, Simla.
5. Telegram No. 1034-S, Dated 23-5-1929.
From Baluchistan, Quetta.
To Foreign, Simla.
6. Telegram No. 1737-S, Dated 24-5-1929.
From Foreign Simla.
To Norwef, Nathiagali.
See also Telegram No. 1046-S, Dated 25-5-1929.
From Baluchistan, Quetta.
To Foreign, Simla.
Repeated to Norwef, Nathiagali.
7. Telegram No. 1033-S, Dated 23-5-1929.
From Baluchistan, Quetta.
To Foreign, Simla.
8. Telegram No. 1035-S, Dated 24-5-1929.
From Baluchistan, Quetta.
To Foreign Simla.
9. Telegram No. 1034-S, Dated 23-5-1929.
From Baluchistan, Quetta.
To Foreign, Simla.
10. Telegram No. 1039-S, Dated 23-5-1929.
From Baluchistan, Quetta.
To Foreign, Simla.
11. Telegram No. 1733-S, Dated 23-5-1929.
From Foreign, Simla.
To Baluchistan, Quetta.
12. Telegram No. 1035-S, Dated 24-5-1929.
From Baluchistan, Quetta.
To Foreign, Simla.
13. Telegram No. 1039-S, Dated 25-5-1929.
From Baluchistan, Quetta.
To Foreign, Simla.

14. Telegram No. 1741-S, Dated 24-5-1929.
From Foreign, Simla.
To Bompol, Bombay.
15. Telegram No. 1743-S, Dated 24-5-1929.
From Foreign, Simla.
To Bompol, Bombay.
16. Telegram No. 1752-S, Dated 25-5-1929.
From Foreign, Simla.
To Major Wickham, ex-Amir's Special Train,
c/o Station Master, Samasata.
17. Telegram No. 4, Dated 26-5-1929.
From Wickham, Jind.
To Foreign, Simla.
18. Telegram No. 6, Dated 28-5-1929.
From Wickham, Bombay.
To Foreign, Simla.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. Telegram No. 1793-S, Dated 28-5-1929.
From Foreign, Simla.
To Wickham c/o Bompol, Bombay.
22. Telegram No. 10, Dated 30-5-1929.
From Wickham, Bombay.
To Foreign, Simla.
23. Telegram No. 30, Dated 6-6-1929.
From Wickham, Bombay.
To Foreign, Simla.
24. Telegram No. 21, Dated 2-6-1929.
From Wickham, Bombay.
To Foreign, Simla.
25. Telegram No. 1770, Dated 4-6-1929.
From Secretary of State for India, London.
To Viceroy (Foreign & Poll: Deptt:), Simla.

26. Telegram No. 1697, Dated 28-5-1929.
From Secretary of State for India, London.
To Viceroy (Foreign & Poll: Deptt:), Simla.
27. Telegram No. 1703, Dated 29-5-1929.
From Secretary of State for India, London.
To Viceroy (Foreign & Poll: Deptt:), Simla.
28. Telegram No. 2010-S, Dated 20-6-1929.
From Wickham, Bombay.
To Foreign, Simla.
29. Telegram No. 2031-S, Dated 22-6-1929.
From Viceroy (Foreign & Poll: Deptt:), Simla.
To Secretary of State for India, London.



CASPIAN SEA
(Hyrcanium)

Ural Mts.

Kebchaq Desert

KHWARAM SEA
(Aral Sea)

Kyzyl Kum Desert

KHWAZARISTAN
Kara Kum Desert

DIHISTAN

JURJAN

ASKABAD
(Ashkhabad)

GHARJESTAN

AFGHANISTAN

SEISTAN

ZAVOLESTAN

TAKHARISTAN

(KABUL) JALALABAD
KABUL