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THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN BEFORE AMIR AMANULLAH KHAN

Khudayberdiev Ikrom Ilkhomjon ugli

Acting Associate Professor (PhD) of the Department of
"Social Humanities and History" of TIFT University

Abstract

This article covers the political processes that occurred before the rise to power of Amir Amanullah Khan, who implemented major reforms in the history of Afghanistan. The article is also enriched with the scientific work of scholars studying the history of Afghanistan, ensuring that the information presented has a scientific basis.

Keywords: "Iron Emir", Amir Abdurahman, Amonullah Khan, Nasrullah Khan, Ulya Hazrat, British India, R.T. Stewart, Muhammad Husayn Khan.

After the death of Amir Abdurahman on October 1, 1901, his son Habibullah Khan ascended the throne. Amir Abdurahman raised his sons as heirs to the throne and regularly supervised them. While Amir Abdurahman became famous in history as the "Iron Emir", Habibullah Khan managed to significantly soften the situation in politics and the state. Compared to his father, Habibullah Khan preferred a more luxurious life, playing golf, hunting, traveling, in short, enjoying life. During this period, two groups of different views were formed in Afghanistan. These were the young Afghans and the old-timers. The old-timers supported the old regime, while the young Afghans were in favor of new reforms. However, the goal of both groups was to become independent, to break away from dependence, and to become a colony of Great Britain. The supporters of



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constitutional reforms were in the palace, and they were known as the “secret party of the palace.” One of the party members was Prince Amonullah. It was formed more as a group than a party. Most of the party members were people close to the monarch, that is, the sons of the khans of large tribes. Amir Abdurahman kept them as hostages in the palace to keep their father, and they were given a special upbringing. They were young people with political views who played a big role in the life of Kabul and worked in important positions in the state. The goal of the party was to put Amonullah Khan on the throne. Later, they planned several actions against the state, but no results were achieved. The khan, who learned of these actions, hanged them. Three types of groups began to propagate their ideas in the palace.

1. A clerical group led by Nasrullah Khan
2. A group based on Turkish ideas led by Inoyatullah Khan
3. A group based on the idea of national reform led by Mahmud Tarzi and Amanullah Khan.

Habibullah Khan was obliged to maintain a neutral position towards Great Britain. Nor would the British ambassador in Afghanistan allow this¹. A year before the death of Amir Habibullah in 1918, the situation in Afghanistan was very critical, which was due to the policy pursued by the emir, namely, his refusal to establish relations with Soviet Russia and at the same time not trying to gain independence. He devoted much of his time to royal life and holidays, and was strongly influenced by the temporary Minister of Finance, Muhammad Hussein. At the end of 1908, the death of the mother of one of the emir's wives, Prince Hayatullah, and the marriage of Habibullah to the daughter of a prominent family, led to a decline in the position of Ulya Hazrat. But under his pressure, the emir was forced to annul his marriage. The end of the First World War had given a new

¹ Ghaus Abdul Samad. *The Fall of Afghanistan* – New York. 1988. – 26 p.



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color to the world situation. The victorious powers demanded respect for the rights of small nations and promoted and established the idea of self-determination. On January 18, 1919, the Paris Peace Conference began. Amir Habibullah Khan did not understand that there was a great opportunity for independence. On February 2, Habibullah Khan sent a letter to Chelmsford. He wrote a letter asking him to consider Afghanistan an independent state and to participate in the conference. The Amir offered the Prime Minister two options:

1. Great Britain to obtain the recognition of Afghanistan as an independent state by all the participants in the conference;
2. If this condition is not met, Afghanistan will send its representatives to the conference to obtain the recognition of Afghanistan's independence²

The British were in no hurry to respond to this letter and only prepared a response letter on February 19. The letter explained why Afghanistan could not participate in the Paris Conference and emphasized that Great Britain would never ignore Afghanistan and would continue to support its interests. Habibullah Khan did not wait for a response letter. At that time, he went hunting in Laghman, a province north of Jalalabad, which was his favorite pastime, accompanied by his servants. He sent his youngest son Hayatullah Khan to the palace to temporarily manage the palace, and he went hunting accompanied by his son Inoyatullah Khan and his brother Nasrullah Khan, his wife Ulya Hazrat, the commander-in-chief of the military command, General Nodir Khan, his father and brother Shah Wali Khan. Omanullah Khan's friend Shujouddavla Khan was also with him. Habibullah Khan's 24-year-old bodyguard, Shah Ali Reza Khan, said that at about 3 a.m. someone entered the tent and shot the emir in the ear. No one in Afghanistan knows who carried out the assassination attempt. According to rumors, since Amanullah Khan held high positions after he came to power, it was Shujouddavla

² Stewart Rea Tally. *Fire in Afghanistan 1914-1929*. – New York. 1973. – 27 p.



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Khan. But there is no evidence for this to this day. According to Afghan historian M.G. Gubor, Shujaudavla Khan was captured by a guard when he was leaving the tent, but Nadir Khan released him. After this incident, misunderstandings began in the camp and it was decided to return to Jalalabad, but Shujaudavla Khan was sent to the capital to mediate between Nasrullah and Amanullah. Amir Habibullah was buried on his favorite golf course in Jalalabad. Later, his body was placed in a mausoleum near the golf course.

During the reign of Amir Habibullah Khan (1901-1919), he tried to correct the political path of his father Abdurahman Khan in domestic and foreign policy, and partly followed it. He preferred to strengthen the state system and preserve the existing one. He focused on reorganizing the army to protect the rural population from popular uprisings. At the same time, he created the State Council in 1904 for representatives of the feudal opposition, which acted as an advisory body to the emir. The State Council consisted of the feudal elite and elders of the tribes. After the death of his father, Amanullah Khan simultaneously announced his intention to restore the full independence of Afghanistan.

The main goal of Amir Amanullah Khan was to create a strong Afghan state. And one of the most important and difficult tasks in this regard was to include Afghanistan in the United Nations as an independent state. However, when the emir came to power, other issues were on the agenda. First of all, it was to restore Afghanistan's independence in foreign policy and reform its power, which had weakened during the time of the emir's father. By this time, a favorable international situation had arisen to solve this problem. The British armed forces in the region were engaged in the struggle against Soviet power in Central Asia, and there was also a threat of rebellion in British India. The emir realized that the time had come to raise the issue of restoring full independence. Afghanistan was



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gaining the opportunity to wage war against the British state. This indicated that there was a threat of war in the near future.

While the funeral was in progress, Amir Nasrullah Khan gathered the court and announced that a new monarch should be appointed before the burial of the dead, in accordance with Muslim traditions. It was clear to everyone that Inoyatullah Khan was not truthful. The first to speak was Ali Ahmad, the nephew of Ulya Hazrat. He kissed Nasrullah's hand and said, "You are our emir." Princes Inoyatullah and Hayatullah followed him, and after him others repeated the same. Many thought that this scene was planned in advance³

On the same day, Amonullah Khan was called and urged to stay in the capital and maintain peace. Amonullah Khan asked a question related to the fate of the criminal. Nasrullah Khan was the first to comment on the news that he would be the Minister of India. "He spent less time than Habibullah Khan," Lord Chelmsford wrote in a reply to Nasrullah, using the words "Your Excellency" and writing; "I understand from your letter that you agree to follow all the decisions of your father." It is clear that there was no mention of Nasrullah Khan in the letter. But London stated that they would not recognize him as Prime Minister unless they officially recommended him.⁴

Thus began correspondence between Delhi and London. At a meeting of all prominent people convened in Jalalabad on February 21, Prince Inoyatullah Khan addressed a gathering. He asked everyone to recognize his uncle as the emir and, addressing himself, said, "I will serve you wholeheartedly, just as I served my father." As a result, everyone recognized Nasrullah Khan as the emir and signed his consent. At the end of the meeting, Nasrullah Khan read out a document confirming that he was the emir of Afghanistan, explaining that the people and

³ Stewart Rea Tally. *Fire in Afghanistan 1914-1929*. – New York. 1973. – 31-32 p.

⁴ Stewart Rea Tally. *Fire in Afghanistan 1914-1929*. – New York. 1973. – 29 p.



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the upper classes supported him and were subordinate to him. On that day, his name was mentioned in mosques and a sermon was delivered during Friday prayers. All provinces were announced about the death of Habibullah and called on to be loyal to the new emir Nasrullah Khan. Meanwhile, on February 21, Amonullah Khan, together with his mother, summoned several organization leaders, his grandfather's former advisor Abdul-Quddus Khan, and two other palace officials and held a three-hour consultation. As a result, Amonullah Khan gathered the capital's military and prominent citizens in the main square and announced that Habibullah Khan had been killed by his brother Nasrullah Khan, who had declared himself emir. Accusing Nasrullah Khan of betrayal, he kissed his sword and swore to avenge his father's death. Those present also swore to confirm his words.

"I declare openly that the kingdom of Afghanistan should be free and independent in its internal and external affairs, and have all the rights that other independent states have," and during his speech he promised to increase the monthly salary of the soldiers to five rupees. The population of the capital immediately recognized him as the emir. The soldiers in Jalalabad, the descendants of Yahya, were imprisoned. According to the American historian R.T. Stewart, Amanullah Khan sent a letter to Jalalabad and said that if Nasrullah Khan, who caused the death of Habibullah Khan, was not killed, he would behead all his relatives in Kabul. On February 28, Nasrullah, who never missed Friday prayers, heard that Amanullah Khan's name was being recited in the mosque sermon, not his own, and admitted his defeat. Amanullah Khan took control of the capital, the army, the finances, and the territories up to the borders of British India. He realizes that he is in a state of great despair⁵. With great despair, Nasrullah Khan, taking his relatives,

⁵ **Fletcher Arnold**. Afghanistan: Highway of Conquest. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1965. – 115 p.



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announces that he has abdicated in favor of Amanullah Khan. He and his assistants stop the plan to capture Kabul. On the same day, he is captured and sent to Kabul. On May 4, 1919, the Minister of Finance, Muhammad Husayn Khan, is also captured and hanged⁶.

In short, before Amanullah Khan came to the throne, there were various conflicting situations in Afghanistan's foreign and domestic politics, and as a result, Amanullah Khan realized that the era of reforms had come in Afghanistan. In implementing the reforms, Amanullah Khan tried to use the experience of his descendants. To implement these plans, he experienced various internal disagreements and struggles for the throne.

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⁶ Губар Мир Гулам Мухаммад. Афганистан дар масир-е тарих. (Афганистан на пути истории). – Кабул. 1967. (на языке дари), 75-76 с.