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The Establishment of Control by the Turkestan General-Governorate Over Foreign Nations in Turkestan (The Case of Afghan Emigrants)

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ABSTRACT

The second half of the 19th century marks a particularly intense period in world history, characterized by intense colonial rivalry. During this time, Central Asia and Afghanistan became contested territories between the British and Russian Empires. It is no exaggeration to say that the abundance of natural resources, cheap labor, and ready markets in these regions became the primary drivers of imperial competition.

The metropolitan powers engaged in diplomatic struggles and skillfully utilized the services of local populations, including those with ethnic and cultural ties, such as the Afghans and the inhabitants of the Central Asian khanates. Historical research conducted on the activities of Afghan princes residing in Turkestan — such as Iskandarbek, Abdur Rahman, Ishaq Khan, and Ismail Khan — serves as clear evidence supporting this view.

Keywords: emigrant, imperial policy, colonial condition, position, bridgehead, diplomacy, general-governorate.

Introduction: For nearly three centuries, the Russian Empire had established not only economic dominance but, arguably, political supremacy as well in Central Asia. Russia's ability to outpace Britain in the Central Asian question can be explained by several factors. With the emergence of a centralized Russian state in the 16th century, the development of production relations, trade, urbanization, and the growing demand for raw materials all accelerated. As a result, Russia began to establish relations with foreign countries — most notably with the Central Asian khanates. What began as economic engagement gradually acquired political significance.

Historians interpret Russia's penetration into the territory of the khanates as part of a broader strategy to reach India. Indeed, this aim was not absent from Russian imperial objectives.

However, subsequent diplomatic developments led the empire to abandon its ambitions in India and instead focus on consolidating control over the Central Asian khanates.

Nonetheless, the diplomatic strategies pursued through the colonization of Turkestan suggest otherwise. The historical activities of Afghan princes who lived in Turkestan — such as Iskandarbek, Abdur Rahman, Ishaq Khan, and Ismail Khan — provide evidence that supports this perspective [15, pp. 73–74].

Main Part: The General-Governorate of Turkestan played a significant role in the political activity of Amir Abdur Rahman of Afghanistan. During the Soviet period, historians paid particular attention to the figure of Sardar Abdur Rahman. His failure in Afghanistan, followed by his migration to Turkestan and subsequent life there, became the subject of considerable interest. This individual, who played a crucial role in the history of Afghan statehood, indeed had a remarkable political career.

On September 18, 1869, Abdur Rahman arrived in Khiva, then in Bukhara, and finally on February 13, 1870, he reached the General-Governorate of Turkestan, accompanied by an entourage of 221 individuals. The Russian government placed him under its protection, initially granting him an annual pension of 18,000 rubles, which was later increased to 25,000 rubles. With the support of the Russian Empire, Sardar Abdur Rahman made efforts to reclaim power in Afghanistan. For this purpose, he sought permission from the General-Governorate to establish a military base in Kerki or Sherobod for a military incursion into Afghanistan. However, this request was denied [1, p. 417], a move that clearly illustrates the Russian Empire's attempt to conceal its true foreign policy intentions.

The historiography of this period concerning Sardar Abdur Rahman continued even after V.V. Bartold. In 1863, Amir Dost Mohammad Khan of Afghanistan passed away, which sparked a fierce struggle for the throne. Ultimately, his son Sher Ali Khan emerged victorious. Abdur Rahman Khan, Sher Ali Khan's nephew, having been defeated in the power struggle, received permission from the Russian Emperor to settle in Turkestan. Later, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs would utilize Abdur Rahman Khan's expertise.

Abdur Rahman Khan and his close associates settled in the “Kavarzor” neighborhood of present-day Samarkand. The local population referred to this area as “the Afghan garden.” He also began to receive an annual government pension of 10,000 rubles from the Russian Emperor [2, pp. 437–439].

Despite having helped Abdur Rahman ascend to power, the Russian Empire soon realized he was not the compliant ruler they had expected. As a result, Russian attention shifted toward Sardar Ishaq Khan — Abdur Rahman's cousin — who had aided him in gaining power but later fell out with him and remained in the General-Governorate of Turkestan. From the Russian Empire's perspective, Sardar Ishaq Khan might still present an opportunity to restore and strengthen its influence in Afghanistan. For this reason, the Empire granted him political asylum and placed him under financial support.

After the failure of the uprising against Amir Abdurahman in Afghanistan, one of the contenders to the Afghan throne, Sardor Iskhoq Khan, took refuge in Samarkand and lived under the patronage of the Russian Empire. He had extended a loan of 500,000 *tanga* at an annual interest rate of 15%, from which he received regular payments. Additionally, he had nearly 30 dependent and indebted peasants under his control. Citing the large number of Afghans fleeing the oppression of Amir Abdurahman and the high costs of sustaining them, Iskhoq Khan formally petitioned to be granted ownership of the Robota Khoja territory near Panjikent. His petition was translated by Count Rastovtsev. Imperial officials, seeking to advance political objectives, did not oppose his acquisition of immovable property.

However, document No. 1521 in Fund I-1 of the National Archive of Uzbekistan contains official perspectives opposing the ownership of property by Afghan nationals. This reflects suspicions

within the Russian imperial government that some Afghan citizens might be agents of British intelligence. Accordingly, Afghans residing in the region were kept under strict surveillance. The Turkestan General-Governorate regularly addressed local administrators with two key questions: (1) How many Afghans reside in the territory? (2) What occupations are they engaged in?

In line with this policy, the Samarkand Military Governor sent a report dated May 30, 1898, in response to a questionnaire issued by the Turkestan General-Governorate in 1897. It stated: “There are a total of 305 Afghans residing in Samarkand and its surrounding districts. Of these, 120 live with Iskhoq Khan, 80 reside in the city of Samarkand, and 105 live in the districts. Iskhoq Khan and those residing with him are involved in the trade of tea, cotton, and other goods.”

Following directives from the Russian imperial government, the Turkestan General-Governorate did not hesitate to allocate funds to keep the *Jamshid Khans* in Samarkand under control. According to order No. 848/112 from the central administration in 1913, starting from 1914, annual pensions of 3,000 rubles were allocated to the *Jamshid* lineage khans, Afghan khans in Samarkand, and Iskhoq Khan’s son, Ibrohim Khan. The necessity of ensuring that Sardor Iskhoq Khan and the *Jamshid* lineage khans would serve as future protectors of Russian imperial interests in Afghanistan justified generous financial expenditures from the imperial treasury. Even after the death of Iskhoq Khan—who was the most influential among the Afghan khans—these disbursements continued.

According to a record from the Finance Department dated April 15, 1916, archived under document No. 12995, although Iskhoq Khan had received an annual pension of 3,000 rubles over a five-year period, his family continued to request assistance from the General-Governorate. During this time, the Russian Empire was engaged in World War I and was also incurring substantial expenses to suppress national liberation movements in Turkestan. These developments compelled the administration to adopt a more cautious approach to financial spending. Moreover, the Afghan khans were not delivering the anticipated strategic outcomes. As a result, a decision was made to reduce and ultimately terminate the financial support to Iskhoq Khan’s family as of May 2, 1917.

However, the imperial government later revised this decision. A notation written on the reverse side of a response dated July 27, 1917, from the Turkestan Treasury Chamber (document No. 20392) records the approval to allocate an annual pension of 3,000 rubles to Iskhoq Khan’s family. This letter of approval was subsequently sent to the Samarkand regional commissioner.

Conclusion and Recommendations: In conclusion, it can be stated that the tribal and clan leaders of Afghan origin who resided in Samarkand served as instruments of the Russian Empire’s influence over Afghanistan. Their social, economic, and cultural interests were not recognized on par with those of the local ethnic groups. However, tribal leaders such as Iskhq Khan, who held political significance, were provided with material support. This policy clearly reflects the essence of the Russian Empire’s foreign strategy. Another important finding of this study is that interactions between Afghans and the local population were placed under strict surveillance.

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