

Geo-Strategic Significance of Kandahar for Mughal Empire

Zahid Anwar* Sumaira† Sadia Riaz ‡

Abstract

Kandahar is one of the most significant and important region of Afghanistan. It had been ruled by the great dynasties like Greece, Muryans, Kushans, Hindu Shahis, Mongols and the Mughals etc. Because of its significant location, Kandahar remained the bone of contention between different Empires and dynasties. When the Mughal occupied India, it became necessary for them to make a strong hold on Kandahar because of its strategic location that connects Persia with India. Kandahar was a gateway to India from Persia and for the safety of India and Kabul the Mughals were struggling to have strong control over the area. It connects South Asian subcontinent with Central Asia, Middle East and the Persian Gulf. On the other side Persia considered Kandahar as her integral part particularly from the reign of Shah Tahmasp and always remained busy in taking its control from the Mughals. It was necessary for them to take control of Kandahar for accomplishing the Safavid expansion policy. Thus, Kandahar remained a sandwich between two great Empires.

Key Words: Kandahar, Trade, Geopolitics, Mughal, Safavid, Afghanistan,

Introduction

In history Kandahar, second largest city of Afghanistan called Alexandria Arachosia named after Alexander the great who founded it in 329 BC around a small ancient Arachosian town. It is the capital of the province, located in the south of the country at an altitude of 1,010 m above sea level. The *Arghandab River* runs along the west of the city. It has 15 districts and a total land area of 27,337 hectares. Kandahar is among one of the oldest known human settlements. It was due to its strategic location and trade routes of south, western and Central Asia that many Empire have long fought over Kandahar. Though in the 7th Century the Arabs conquered it but failed to fully convert its people to Islam until 870 AD, when Yaqub bin Layth a ruler of Saffaride dynasty invaded it. It is believed that from 7th century to 9th century probably the Zunbil dynasty (related to the Shahi dynasty of Kabul), were the rulers of Kandahar and surrounding areas. In the 11th century the Ghaznavide and Ghurides ruled Kandahar. The area was conquered by the

*Department of Political Science, University of Peshawar, Peshawar, Pakistan.

Email: zahid_anwar@upesh.edu.pk

†Ph. D Scholar, Area Study Centre, University of Peshawar, Peshawar, Pakistan.

‡ MPhil Scholar, Political Science, IIU, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Mongols under Chengiz Khan followed by the Taimurides. In the late 15th Century the Arghuns took the charge of Kandahar.

From Babur to Jahangir the Mughal rulers with some exceptions after the Persian invasion of Kandahar were able to regain it but during the reign of Shah Jahan Kandahar were lost by the Mughals forever and became part of Persia. Later on in 1709, Mir Wais Hotak took Kandahar from Persians and founded independent kingdom after turning Kandahar as a capital of his new dynasty. In 1747, Ahmad Shah Abdali made it the part of modern Afghanistan (Kandahar, 2015).

Invasion of Kandahar by Babur

Babur (founder of the Mughal Empire) took the control of Kabul in 1504 AD, which was at that time under the control of the Arghuns rulers of Kandahar. After establishing himself at Kabul Babur because of financial problems started raiding over the surrounding areas. After his attacks over the Indus and the areas of, Bannu, Kohat and Bangash, he next planned to make attack over Kandahar. But this plan was delayed because of two reasons, first he was attacked by fever and secondly the earthquake in Kabul, from fever though he recover quickly, but recovery from the earthquake took more than a month. After delay of a month and a half, Babur made attack on Kandahar in 1507 AD (Haig, 1987). Though the expedition to Kandahar was planned by Babur very early but was pushed by the invitation of the two sons of Zul-nun Arghun named Shuja Beg and Muqim Beg, the rulers of Kandahar. They were alarmed by the Uzbek invasion under Shaibani Khan. At the approach of Babur for their support these two brothers change their mind after which Babur attack Kandahar with five to six thousands less army, (as Babur army consists of one thousand while the Arghuns have six to seven thousands army) from the Arghuns brothers Babur defeated them and occupied Kandahar. He then gives the charge of Kandahar to his own brother Nasir Mirza, who lost Badakhshan and himself left Kandahar with the daughter of Mukim Arghun as a hostage of war. In that expedition of Kandahar Babur brought a lot of booty to Kabul consisting of a huge quantity of gold and silver, packages of silk and linen and with a large number of arms, velvet, tents, camels, sheep and horses etc. (Habibi, 1974) After a short time Kandahar was taken by the Uzbeks and after looting and plundering it they given Kandahar back to the Arghun brothers (Haig, 1987).

Thus in 1507 AD, he marched against Kandahar by capturing it and leaving it in the charge of his brother Nasir Mirza. After Uzbek attack under Shaibani Khan, Kandahar was lost to them.

In September 1507, Babur led another expedition, but at this time because of the Uzbek fears. As Babur thought that after occupying Kandahar the next marched of Shaibani Khan Army would be on Kabul. In 1520 A. D, Babur made another attempt over Kandahar but return back unsuccessfully after feeling the

disunity among his soldiers. It was at last in 1522 A. D that Babur captured Kandahar and appointed his own son Mirza Kamran there (Raj, 2015).

From 1520 AD to 1522 AD, Babur's attacked and besieged Kandahar for three times. This first siege ended in June 1520 AD, when a serious disease broke out in Babur's camp. In 1521 AD, once again Babur besieged the area. During that siege, Shah Beg left for Sind, after agreeing to leave the city to Babur in a year's time, or in the belief that the Persian emissaries had convinced Babur to accept his submission. In this version of the siege Shah Beg's governor then betrayed the city to Babur. Whichever version of the end of the siege is true Babur get the keys of Kandahar on 6 September 1522 AD (History of war, 2015).

Kandahar during the reign of Humayun

During the reign of Humayun Kandahar became a buffer zone on which both the Mughals and the Persians fought several time. For a long time the area of Kandahar was a bone of contention between Persian and Mughals. For some time it remains at the position of Mughals, and for other with the Persians. After the capture of Kandahar by the Mughals, the Persians started a series of campaign for the occupation of Kandahar. It was the early years of Humayun rule that Kandahar was occupied by the Persians. As Babur before his death left Kandahar under the possessions of Mirza Kamran, who was a semi- independent ruler of Kabul and Kandahar. Kamran Mirza the in charge of Kandahar marched against them and retaken it from the Persian control. Kamran Mirza himself busy in expansion of his territories against his brother appointed Kalan Beg as governor and in charge of Kandahar with a number of troops and he himself returned to Kabul. Later on after his return from Kandahar the Persian army once again made an attack over Kandahar and compels its governor to flee from there by once again leaving the area to the Persians. Shah Thamsph of Persia made an attack over Kandahar. The Persian army provides tough resistance to the governor of Kandahar. They besieged Kandahar, after which Kalan Beg, *Subehdar* or governor of Kandahar did not afford a war with the huge and powerful Persian army evacuate and leave Kandahar to them with a great palace built for himself in Chinese fashion, decorated with carpets and vases. Shah Thamsph became very happy with the capture of Kandahar without resistance. He left the charge of Kandahar after some time to his nobles and himself left for Iraq (Bakhshi, 2006).

Kamran Mirza after learning about the successful Persian attack over Kandahar became annoyed with the governor of Kandahar, Khwaja Kalan Khan, who left the city to Persian army without fighting and fled to Lahore. He marched from Lahore towards Kandahar and besieged the fort of the city. As a huge number of the Persian army already left for Iraq and Persia, and the remaining forces and nobles were not able to face the huge army of Kamran. After a short siege of Kandahar Kamran defeated the Persians and once again Kandahar came under the

suzerainty of the Mughals (Bakhshi, 2006).

Humayun Seeks the Persian Assistance

Humayun on the other hand became homeless after her Shah Suri capturing all of his Mughal domains in India. His brothers failed to help him thus he moved towards Kandahar to try his fortune there. On the way he was informed about the danger that waiting for him in Kandahar, as his brother Mirza Askari on behalf of Kamran Mirza fully prepared himself and his troops against him. He also came to know about the conspiracy of his brother in the form of a letter, which Mirza Askari wrote to different Indian chiefs for his murder. When Humayun became hopeless from there he turned towards Herat on the advice of Bairam Beg (Mohsen, 2014).

Humayun marched towards Herat with about 22 men accompanied him during his journey. Humayun was in two minds that either to go to Iraq or to Herat but later on chooses Herat. On his way to Herat in Sistan he was received with great respect by its Persian governor of the area Ahmad Sultan. Humayun from there went to Herat where they were received with great respect and it was from Herat that Humayun later on further moved towards the Persian capital Qazvin (Sayel, 1998).

It was in Persia that Humayun came to an agreement with the Shah of Persia Shah Thamsph over their conditional help against his brothers in the form of giving Kandahar to the Persians. After spending some days there in the hospitality of Shah Tamsph, Humayun with the help of a huge Persian army and requesting for his help against Kamran and Sher Shah. The Shah accepted his request and he moved from Persia towards Kandahar. They agreed to help Humayun on the condition that he after the conquest of Kandahar gives it to the Persians (Boyle, 1930).

Humayun started his return journey from Persia towards Kandahar and was accompanied by 10,000 Persian forces under the command of Shah Murad, one of the sons of Shah Thamsph (Begum, 1987). Mirza Askari the governor of Kandahar himself started preparation against the march of Humayun and Persian army. After reaching Kandahar the joint army of Humayun and Persian besieged it on 21st March, 1543 AD. Mirza Askari defended the city with bravery but failed to protect the city from the strong invaders. At that time of trouble when the news of the siege of Kandahar reached to Kamran at Kabul it was necessary for him to immediately provide assistance to Askari at Kandahar. But he waste a lot of time there and wait there for the victory of Askari, if it that time he would have quickly provided assistance to his brother Askari it would become difficult for Humayun and Persian forces to capture the city (Malleeson, 1983).

Humayun Victory at Kandahar

After long siege of Kandahar and return of Bairam Khan (who was at Kabul to win the support of the people of Kabul on Humayun behalf) to Humayun, Kamran set out from Kabul for the assistance and help of Askari against his brother Humayun and that of Persian army. When Kamran came out of Kabul, those officers who turned their loyalties on the side of Humayun on Bairam Khan hands including Mirza Husain Beg, Fazail Beg, Muhammad Sultan Mirza, Ulugh Beg Mirza, Muaid Beg, Qasim Husain Sultan and Sher Afgan Beg etc., they started revolt against Kamran and objected his march to Humayun. Those officers and nobles later on came to Kandahar and joined Humayun. After learning about the rebellion in Kabul, Kamran returned to Kabul. Ulugh Beg was one among those persons, who turned to the camp of Humayun; he went to Kandahar and gives Humayun the assurance of their support. He showed him several letters of officers in Kabul, who assured their support to Humayun. During the march of Humayun about 1,000 of men of Kamran army left him and recognized Humayun as their king (Begum, 1987).

The Persian troops that accompany Humayun at the siege of Kandahar became tired and thinking of about their return when the siege prolonged for about five months. At that crucial time the coming of Ulugh Beg and some other officers to the camp of Humayun and their support give new hope to the Persian troops and fought with new zeal and at last after a siege of about five months Askari surrender to Humayun on 3rd of September, 1543 A. D.. Their submission to Humayun army was caused by the lack of food for their troops and people because of after a long siege the food shortage occurred there (Begum, 1987).

Mirza Askari tried his level best for defending the city against Humayun, and remained faithful to Kamran, but Kamran did not proved himself worthy on the task, as he remained at Kabul and at the time of need did not provide help to him and waited at Kabul. If he came out first before the arrival of Bairam Khan to Kabul for the help of Mirza Askari they would easily repulse and defeat Humayun and his Persian army. He came out of the capital when Bairam Khan did his work there and thus Mirza Kamran lost one of the most important areas of Kandahar (Boyle, 1930).

But in Humayun Nama according to Gul Badan Begum, when Kamran came to know about the progress of Humayun to Kandahar he requested Khanzada Begum her paternal aunt to set out for Kandahar to meet Humayun with the purpose to made peace between them. Before leaving for Kandahar she made over Akbar to Mirza Kamran, who gives him into the care of Khanum. At one side Khanzada begum reached to Kandahar and the other side Humayun sent Bairam khan one of his friends and supporter towards Kabul to meet Kamran there. Humayun received Khanzada begum with great respect and she remained with

Humayun and later on accompanied him during his march to Kabul. She became ill in the way and after three days of fever she died and buried at Qabal-Chak, after three months her body was brought to Kabul and buried near Babur's tomb (Begum, 1987).

Effects of the Loss of Kandahar on Kamran

The loss of Kandahar to Kamran Mirza on one side help Humayun to strong his position but on the other side that defeat imbalance the position of Kamran Mirza and his hold at Kabul became very weak. One after another his officers and nobles started leaving him for Humayun. They demanded from Kamran to leave the governor of Badakhshan, whom Kamran imprisoned during one of his expedition and after occupation of Badakhshan. Yadgar-Nasir left Kabul for Humayun, Kamran brother Mirza Hindal when saw that all of Kamran friends and officers leaving him, he also left Kamran and surrendered to Humayun. The plan of Bairam Khan worked successfully and a number of officers joined their camp. Though the victory at Kandahar to some extent increased power of Humayun, the ex-emperor of India, and decreased the popularity and hold of Kamran (Begum, 1987).

As Humayun won the territory of Kandahar with the help of Persian and according to the agreement he had to leave the country to the Persian under the charge of Buda Khan, a teacher of Shah Murad and after leaving Kandahar Humayun was nothing on his account (Muhammad., 1998). Once again he was even without shelter, except some 5,000 of men who were without horses. Thus many of the men after looking over to the conditions of Humayun once again started transferring their sympathies towards Kamran, among them were Abdullah Khan and Junaid Beg, who fled to Kabul, and those who remained with him were hopeless. The condition of Humayun was that he did not either stay at Kandahar and nor he forwarded to other areas, because of no means of transport (horses) with them. Mirza Askari also having found an opportunity fled from them, but was caught and brought back (Boyle, 1930).

At that time of trouble, fortune helped Humayun on the way that in Herat where the Persian army took the possession of the area, some of the army officers sold their horses on the hands of some Indian traders, those Indian traders with their horses passed on from the way where Humayun and his army encamped. Humayun and his army took horses from those traders, though at that time they had no money to pay. Humayun promised them that he would give them the price after regaining the control of the area. Later, when peace was restored, he fulfilled his promise by giving them the worth of their horses. After the coming of the horses Humayun took a fresh breath but at the same time a new problem of the fodder for the horses arose. At that time once again fortune struck the way of Humayun with the sudden death of the ruler of Kandahar Shah Murad, son of Persian Shah Thamsph. When he was alive, Humayun did not made an attack over Kandahar,

because of the agreement and promised made to his father. It was after his son death at the right time for Humayun which provide an opportunity for him to avail that opportunity he made an attack over Kandahar and after a tuff battle Humayun got the control of Kandahar from Persian. With that victory over the Persians at Kandahar Humayun after a long time found a place of shelter for himself (Boyle, 1930).It was that victory of Humayun at Kandahar that makes him able to take the control of not only of his brother territory but also recaptured his lost territories of India by defeating the sons of Sher Shah Suri. After recapturing his Indian possessions Humayun went back there by leaving Kandahar as the part Mughal Empire.

Akbar and Jahangir's Policy for Kandahar

Humayun made the same mistake done by his father Babur by dividing his Empire e among his sons by giving the charge of Kandahar to one of his sons Mirza Muhammad Hakim. During his rule at Kandahar as he was busy in wars with his brother and Mughal emperor Akbar, his control over Kandahar weakened that encouraged the Persian to raid the area. In 1595 AD, Akbar after consolidating his position and after overcoming on the civil war against his brother started recapturing the lost territories of his Indian Empire e. In 1595 AD, after negotiation with the governor of Kandahar Mozaffar-Hosayn Mirzā, the Mughal army took control of the area. This invasion of Kandahar became possible through the diplomacy of Akbar. The ruler of Persia, Shah Abbas, became shocked with the Mughal victory and the lots of important fortress of Kandahar to them (wikipedia, Siege of Kandahar, 2014).

Hosayn Khan, the governor of Herat moved towards Kandahar on 27th of October 1605 AD, after the death of Akbar with the intensions of capturing the city. Šāh Beg Khan, the Mughal governor defended the area for about three to four months from Persian invasion held out the Persian, when the new ruler, Jahangir, sent assistance that lifted the siege. The new ruler Jahangir remained successful by withdrawing the Persian from the area but was not the final occupation for the Mughals.

On the other hand with Persian victories against the Ottomans, once again rose the desire of recapturing Kandahar in Shah Abbas. It was after the end of Ottoman-Persian War (1603-1618 AD), Shah Abbas secured enough strength for attacking Kandahar. It was in 1621 AD that a huge Persian army was gathered at Nishapur. Shah Abbas after celebrating the new-year at Tabas Gilaki (area in Southern Khorasan), joined his army there by starting expedition towards Kandahar. After the arrival of Persian army on 20th May they besieged Kandahar. Jahangir though informed with Persian's movements failed to respond quickly. Thus it was impossible for a small garrison of 3,000 men to hold the area for long against the superior Persian army (wikipedia, Mughal Persian wars,, 2014).

In 1622 AD when Shah Abbas the ruler of Persia led an expedition to Kandahar, Ashraf Khan the governor of Kandahar demanded help from the governor of Multan named Khan Jahan. Though he was ready for his help but Jahangir did not allow him, as he wanted to face Shah Abbas himself and started his preparation against him by saying that king should be faced by a king. Later on Jahangir became busy in suppressing the rebellions in India thus Shah Abbas got the opportunity and attacked and conquered Kandahar within forty days.

Shah Abbas send one of his men Muhammad Ali Beg as a Persian ambassador to Jahangir court in India in the month of March 1631 AD. He remained at the Mughal court till October 1632 AD to negotiate an end to the conflict between the Persians and the Mughals.

Kandahar remained in the position of the Persians till 1637 AD. Jahangir sent some expedition but failed because the people of the area also supported the Persians (Khan, ND). Later on due to the turn of the people support on Mughal side because of their services in the Mughal army many of the inhabitants of Kandahar started opposing the Persian rule which helped the Mughals to regain their lost territory.

The reign of Shah Jahan marked with continuous struggle against the Persians in those areas which are now parts of Afghanistan. In the year 1639 AD, after capturing Bamyan Shah Safi of Persia there was a possibility of attacking Kandahar next. Shah Jahan, with the assistance of Kamran Khan and Malik Maghdood, marched towards Kandahar and started negotiation for its surrender under Ali Mardan Khan, in 1638 AD. As Shah Jahan expected that the Persians would attempt for recapturing the city soon, he ordered of repairing the walls of the fortress rapidly while a huge Mughal army based in Kabul protect the area. Later on when Shah Jahan realized that no Persian attack came, he in 1646 AD sent his son, Murad Baksh, for expedition of Badakhshan.

The Mughal emperor was busy in his expedition towards Balkh and Badakhshan; the Persian once again started struggle for getting the control of Kandahar. As in 1648 AD Shah Abbas ii assumed full authority at Persia he started his march with 40,000 army personnel for the recovering of Kandahar and reached to Khurasan. After capturing Bost the Persian emperor laid the siege of Kandahar and easily captured it on 22nd of February, 1649 AD. When the Mughals got the news it was too late to reinforce forces from Kabul and Multan. Shah Jahan sent an expedition under Aurangzeb, who after his returned from Balkh became the governor of Multan. For the encouragement of the army huge allowances were given to the army. Shah Jahan also ordered the conversion of Kabul to a permanent military camp for the purpose to take action against Kandahar as well as against the frontier tribes of the area. The expedition to Kandahar consists of 50,000 horse and 20,000 foot soldiers. Aurangzeb during the first expedition towards Kandahar passed through the pass of Kotal and Ali Masjid accompanied by Sadullah Khan. Aurangzeb in a letter written to Jahan Ara mentioned the passes and beautiful

places of Kabul, as she along with Shah Jahan was on her way to Kabul. In the first expedition the Mughal failed in taking Kandahar from the Persian occupation which was lost to them in 1649 AD (Mehta, 2009).

In 1652 AD Aurangzeb made an attempt to capture the city. That time there was an alliance between Abdul Aziz, Khan of Bukhara and Shah Abbas of Persia. In May 1652 AD, Shah Abbas, dispatched about 10,000 army men to Kabul to interrupt the Mughal supply lines. Though not strong enough to lift the siege, the Uzbeks endangered a Mughal convoy of 2,000 who were escorting one and a half million silver coins to the besieger's army at Kandahar. After two months of fighting with Persian resistance and the growing Uzbek threat compelled Aurangzeb to end the siege of Kandahar (wikipedia, 2016).

Aurangzeb after three months of failure of the first expedition to Kandahar returned towards Kabul to deal with the rising Uzbek thread who wants to attack Ghazni a city laid on the route of Kandahar and Kabul. After the failure of expedition to Kandahar Aurangzeb was recalled and Shah Jahan appointed Dara Shiko the new governor of Kabul, Lahore and Multan. Dara Shiko also tried to recapture the area of Kandahar and besieged it but failed and retreated to India (Sir WolseleyHaig, 1987).

In 1653 AD Shah Jahan sent his favorite son, Dara Shikoh, with a large army and two of the heaviest artillery pieces of the Mughal at that time were sent by Shah Jahan in 1653 AD to be sieged. After a long siege of five months the Mughals failed to breach the wall of the city and to capture the area finally giving up all attempts for recovering Kandahar. It was Shah Jahan rule that the Mughal lost Kandahar forever.

Shah Jahan after receiving the news of the loss of Kandahar marched himself up to Kabul to supervise the expedition for the recovery of Kandahar and once again appointed Aurangzeb the head of the expedition and throughout the summer season the fighting continued with the Persian but not succeeded. Shah Jahan returned to Delhi as he found his new capital of Delhi (Haig, 1987).

In those expeditions towards Kandahar the Afghan tribes also played important role and fought side by side with the Mughals. The fall of Kandahar was a great event and a challenging task for Shah Jahan reign to reconquered the lost territory. Three time expedition were sent for the conquest of Kandahar, two under Aurangzeb and one under Dara Shiko, but all failed and thus Kandahar became the part of Persia and forever lost to the Mughals. At the march of Aurangzeb during his first expedition to Kandahar along with Saadullah Khan, he mentioned in a letter to Jahan Ara about the beauty and green mountains of the areas of the province of Kabul, as she also was in the way to Kabul with emperor Shah Jahan (Munshi Al Malik Abul Fateh Qabil Khan, 1971). Later on it was Mir Hotak of the Ghilzi tribe that took Kandahar from the Persians by forming the Hotak dynasty and made Kandahar its capital. In 1715 AD, Mahmud Hotak killed his uncle Abdul Aziz on the suspicion of giving Kandahar to the Persians. In 1722 AD, Mahmud

Hotak marched against the Persian ruler with the purpose to capture the whole of Persia and proclaimed himself the king of Persia. In 1738 AD, a Persian general Nadir Shah Afshar destroyed Kandahar. Later on Ahmad Shah Abdali captured Kandahar from that dynasty and became the integral part of modern Afghanistan founded by him in 1747 AD.

Conclusion

Kandahar was strategically and economically an important place for the Mughals as well as for the Persians. Every year about fourteen thousands camel loaded with a number of articles traded between India to Kandahar. All of the trade between India and Persia took place through Kandahar. The area remained a bone of contention between Persian and the Mughals for most of the time of their rule. It was in 1522 AD, that Babur after the death of his relative and ruler of Kandahar, Mirza Hussain Baqira captured the area. Kandahar during almost every Mughal ruler was attacked by the Persian. In 1545 AD, Humayun after getting the support of the Persian agreed to give Kandahar to them. In 1595 AD under Akbar the Persians occupied Kandahar. Then during the reign of Jahangir in 1622 AD, Kandahar became the part of Persian Empire. During the reign of Shah Jahan in 1649 A. D it was once again became part of the Persian Empire e (Munshi Al Malik Abul Fateh Qabil Khan, 1971). With the passage of time the region became a controversial place for both great Empire as, Persia and India. Both Empires know the strategic importance of Kandahar and whenever they got the opportunity to attack Kandahar they with full power and courage did that. Because of the lack of unity among the citizens of Kabul and the absence of any form of a uniformed government of their own these people were suffered from the raids of the invaders. Kandahar was ruled mostly by the governors appointed by either side on their behalf as victorious.

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