

THE ROLE OF THE BABURID EMPIRE IN RELATIONS BETWEEN THE ASTRAKHANID AND SAFAVID DYNASTIES

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Abstract: This study examines the political, military, and cultural relations between the Astrakhanid dynasty and the Safavid Empire, with a particular focus on the role of the Baburid Empire in shaping these relationships. It specifically addresses the development and transformation of alliances and conflicts involving the Astrakhanids, Safavids, and Baburids, along with the regional struggles these interactions provoked. The research contributes a fresh perspective on the political landscape of Central Asia and the East during the early 17th century.

Keywords: Astrakhanids, Safavids, Baburids, Imamqulixon, Jahangir Shah, Shah Jahan, Shah Abbas I, political relations

Introduction

In this era, the interactions between the Astrakhanid, Safavid, and Baburid empires were central to the history of the region, impacting not only politics but also cultural, religious, and economic aspects of society. The Astrakhanids, Safavid Empire, and Baburid dynasty formed alliances and rivalries that significantly influenced the development of Central Asian geopolitics. This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the strategic decisions, conflicts, and alliances that molded these relations, focusing on how the Baburids engaged diplomatically and militarily with both the Astrakhanid and Safavid realms.

Political Context

The Baburid Empire, during its consolidation, sought to establish diplomatic relations with both the Astrakhanids and the Safavids. This period saw not only military confrontations but also marked cultural and religious tensions. The competition and alliances among the Baburids, Astrakhanids, and Safavids influenced the political geography of Turkestan.

Role of Baburid Influence in Astrakhanid-Safavid Relations

Throughout the late 16th to early 18th centuries, over fifteen official letters and exchanges between Turkestan khans and Baburid rulers reveal discussions on shared political strategies. Bukhara's internal conditions and its foreign relations with the Safavids and Baburids allow for an informed evaluation of Bukhara-Hindustan relations¹.

During the reigns of the Ashtarkhanoid rulers Baki Muhammad Khan and Vali Muhammad Khan, there were almost no political or diplomatic relations with the Baburids. Only a certain part of trade and religious contacts remained intact.

During the reign of Imomqulixon, political relations with the Baburid Empire were revived². For ten years (1628-1638), relations between these two states remained friendly.

¹ Зияев А. Ценный источник по истории взаимоотношений Бухарского ханства и Индии XVII - начала XVIII века // Общественные науки в Узбекистане, № 3-4. 1992.

² Zamonov A, Subhonov F. Ashtarkoni hukmdorlar. – T.: 2021. 21 b.



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Specifically, in 1614, Imomqulixon sent his envoys to the court of Jahangir. The Indian historian Ramesh Varma, discussing the Ashtarkhanid envoys, emphasized the letter they carried. According to him, the political relations between the two regions were good during the times of Abdullah Khan II and Akbar Shah, and it is a positive sign that these relations continue now. Additionally, the letter mentions that Abdullah Khan II and Akbar Shah had together conquered many territories that previously belonged to the Safavids³.

At the same time, in 1612, the Safavids reached a peace agreement with the Ottomans. This accelerated the Safavid shah's campaign to the east. Jahangir, realizing this, understood that he needed to strengthen relations with the Ashtarkhanids without delay. The threat from the Safavids prompted the Baburids to quickly form closer ties with the Ashtarkhanids⁴.

Specifically, Shah Salim (Jahangir) (1605-1627) made greater efforts than his father to improve relations with the Ashtarkhanid dynasty. Jahangir tried to maintain balanced relations with both the Safavids and the Ashtarkhanids. The main reason for this, as mentioned earlier, was Khorasan, and another key reason was Kandahar. Through Kandahar, the Baburid Empire bordered the Safavids.

Therefore, in 1605, Jahangir sent his envoys to Shah Abbas I. The purpose of this mission was twofold: first, to address the lack of closeness and the threat posed by the Safavids to the western part of the country; second, to create an opportunity to access the Hijaz and the Ottoman Empire through the Safavids⁵.

In the “Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri” dedicated to Jahangir (Shah Salim), there are detailed descriptions of the envoys who came to Turkistan and their missions. According to the source, Jahangir considered Turkistan his ancestral homeland and always aimed to conquer this land whenever possible. However, internal problems within the state consistently prevented him from invading these lands. Specifically, he states in his memoirs, "... Conquering Bukhara, the inheritance of my forefathers' kingdom, was my first priority. I wanted to clear the field of Hindustan from conspirators and rebels, place one of my sons on this throne, and then proceed there myself..."⁶. During Imomqulixon's campaign to Tashkent, Jahangir sent an envoy to him, declaring his friendship. The aim of this move was to signal the need for external assistance to counter the threat of a Safavid attack⁷.

Shah Abbas I, who was monitoring these developments and strengthening his western front, realized that he needed to attack the east sooner. Consequently, he ordered the gathering of a large army in Nishapur to prepare for the campaign. At that time, Imomqulixon and Nadir Muhammad Sultan were fighting against the Kazakh khanates in the north. Upon learning that

³ Burton A, The Bukharans: A Dynastic, Diplomatic and commercial history (1550-1702), New York. 1997. Great Britain: Curzon p.122.

⁴ Münçi İskəndərbəy Türkman Dünyası bəzəyən Abbasın tarixi. I kitab. s 1148-1150. Bakı – 2010.

⁵ Naimur Rahman Farooqi. “Mughal-Ottoman Relations: (A Study of Political and Diplomatic Relations between Mughal India and the Ottoman Empire, 1556-1748).”. Delhi. 2009. p. 24.

⁶ The Jahangirnama. Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India Translated, edited, and annotated by Wheeler M. Thackston. Oxford University Press New York.1999. p. 68.

⁷ Burton, Audrey, The Bukharans: A Dynastic, Diplomatic and commercial history (1550-1702), New York. 1997. Pp.151-152.



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Abbas I was assembling troops around Khorasan, Imomqulxon promptly sent a letter to Abbas I. The purpose of this letter was to temporarily pacify the western front. The envoy emphasized that if there was an attack on Balkh during the march to Kandahar, Bukhara would respond accordingly. After this situation, Shah Abbas decides to abandon the attack. He plans to carry out the Kandahar campaign without entering Balkh⁸. On May 20, 1622, he began the siege of the city. After a one-month siege, Kandahar was captured by the Persian forces on June 22.⁹

In this situation, an anti-Safavid alliance was needed, and Jahangir Shah began to establish relations with the Ashtarkhanids, who were not only the Safavids' enemies but also a common adversary. Having decided to establish good relations with Imam Quli Khan, Jahangir Shah sent Mir Berkan as an envoy to Bukhara in 1622. In the spring of 1623, an envoy led by Uzbek Khoja was sent from Bukhara to the court of Jahangir Shah. Uzbek Khoja, who returned to Bukhara, brought a proposal from Jahangir Shah to fight against the Safavids together. In his letter, Jahangir Shah emphasized that the relations between the two states had been strengthened and disagreements had been resolved. In the continuation of the letter, he stated that the two states should act together against the Shiites and that Sunni sultans should always support each other. He also expressed hope that Imam Quli Khan would join him in this endeavor¹⁰.

When this letter reached Imam Quli Khan, the situation had changed significantly, as Khan had already signed a peace treaty with Shah Abbas I. As a result, the planned campaign against the Safavids was called off. After this event, for several years, ambassadors were exchanged between the two states.

In 1625, the Baburids sent an envoy named Mir Sayyid Baraka to Bukhara. The envoy was given ten thousand rupees, five thousand of which were to be delivered to Khoja Solih Dahbedi, with instructions to pray for the prosperity of the dynasty, just as his ancestors had done. The remaining five thousand rupees were to be distributed among the officials and the population at the blessed tomb of sahibkaran Timur¹¹.

At this point, it became known that the ruler of Turan, Imam Quli Khan, had played the role of an intermediary for several years, serving as the envoy of the royal court. When the news spread that His Majesty had not paid attention to Shah Jahan and that Shah Jahan had risen against his father, Imam Quli Khan sent Abdurahim Khoja, the son of Khoja Kalon, with gifts to accompany Mir Sayyid Baraka and deliver a letter¹².

In the *Padshah Nama*, there are somewhat better details regarding the mutual relations and military conflicts between the two dynasties¹³. The Safavids' interest in Kabul and the surrounding areas accelerated Shah Jahan's rapprochement with Bukhara. The intensification of the aforementioned events was further hastened by the arrival of the envoy Hakim Hozik to Imam Quli Khan. In 1632, Nadr Muhammad Khan, at the suggestion of Imam Quli Khan, sent

⁸ Aydoğmuşoğlu. *Şah Abbas ve zamanı*, Ankara üniversitesi, basılmamış doktora tezi, Ankara 2013, s. 51

⁹ the above work. Page 56

¹⁰ Мухаммад Юсуф мунши. Муким-ханская история / перевод с тадж., предисл., примеч. и указатели проф. А.А. Семенова. – Ташкент, 1956. С.81-85

¹¹ عبدالحميد لهوري. پادشانامه. کلکته. ۱۸۶۷. ص ۳۵۸

¹² عبدالحميد لهوري. پادشانامه. کلکته. ۱۸۶۷. ص ۴۵۱

¹³ عبدالحميد لهوري. پادشانامه. کلکته. ۱۸۶۷. ص ۲۱۳-۲۰۹

an envoy to Shah Jahan. The envoy, Vaqqos Khoja, arrived at the Baburid court with various valuable gifts. Through this envoy, the Khan of Balkh proposed a joint struggle against the Safavids. Shah Jahan, appearing to show little regard for the actions of Nadr Muhammad Khan in Kabul, nevertheless honored the Balkh envoy Vaqqos Khoja, who had arrived in India in 1632. In return for the 15,000 rupees worth of gifts brought by the envoy, Shah Jahan bestowed gifts worth 40,000 rupees¹⁴.

Baburid Emperor Shah Jahan, like his ancestors, had plans to annex Transoxiana into his realm. According to the *Tarikh-i Qipchoqkhani*, he intended to conquer Balkh and Badakhshan, planning to appoint his son Aurangzeb as the ruler of those regions¹⁵. However, internal issues prevented this from happening.

Shortly afterward, the Baburid emperor arrived with his army in the vicinity of Kabul. Upon learning of this, the Khan of Balkh, Nadr Muhammad, sent word to his brother about the situation. Imam Quli Khan and Nadr Muhammad gathered their forces in Balkh. Before the battle, Imam Quli Khan sent the envoy Mansur Biy to Shah Jahan. The envoy emphasized that 'peace had prevailed for centuries between the ancestors of the two states, and if this peace were to be disrupted, the khanate would be prepared for war.' After receiving this message, Shah Jahan decided to retreat with his army¹⁶. Shah Jahan devised a plan to quickly strengthen ties with the Ashtarkhanids in anticipation of a potential attack by the Qizilbash. The aim of getting closer to Bukhara was not only to jointly resist the Safavids but also to gain insight into the internal situation of Bukhara and Balkh. During Imam Quli Khan's time, although political relations with the Baburids were not fully established, they did change in a relatively positive direction.

After Imam Quli Khan, Nadr Muhammad Khan was unable to continue the same political course as his predecessor. The division among the amirs and beks in the state, along with their elevation of his son Abdulaziz to the throne, led to a struggle for the throne between father and son. At a time when the situation had become extremely complicated, Nadr Muhammad Khan sought help from Shah Jahan. For the king, who aimed to annex Balkh and the surrounding regions to his own realm, this was a clear objective. Shah Jahan sent his son, Murad Baksh, with a large army to offer 'assistance'¹⁷.

In 1646-1647, Balkh and Badakhshan came under Baburid rule. On June 12, 1647, Abdulaziz Khan, with 50,000 cavalry, launched a battle against Aurangzeb's forces. The army also included Kazakhs. In 1658, Shah Jahan passed away, and his son Aurangzeb ascended to the throne. At that time, Abdulaziz Khan was ruling in Bukhara. Aurangzeb attempted to improve relations with Bukhara. This was also a significant issue for Turkistan, as the internal political developments there indicated the need to establish diplomatic relations with the Baburids. Therefore, in 1661, Subhan Quli Khan sent envoys to Aurangzeb on the occasion of his ascension to the throne. The goal of the mission was to form a common alliance against his

¹⁴ Низамутдинов. И. Из истории Среднеазиатско-Индийских Отношений (IX—XVIII вв.) Издательство “Узбекистан” -Ташкент —1969. С. 52

¹⁵ Хожамқұлы-бек Балхи «Тарих-и Қыпшаки». Алматы. 2017. 209.

¹⁶ Мухаммад Юсуф мунши. Муким-ханская история / перевод с тадж., предисл., примеч. и указатели проф. А.А. Семенова. – Ташкент, 1956. С.92-94

¹⁷ Хожамқұлы-бек Балхи «Тарих-и Қыпшаки». Алматы. 2017. 644 б.

brother, as Subhan Quli Khan had sent a similar letter to Shah Abbas II in 1660. Shah Abbas II had stated that he would not interfere in the dispute between the two brothers¹⁸.

In the *Ma'osiriy Olamgiri*, it is mentioned that between 1670 and 1680, envoys from the Ashtarkhanids arrived twice — Abdulaziz Khan from Bukhara and Subhan Quli Khan from Balkh. They came from Turkistan with numerous gifts and were received with great honor in the Baburid capital¹⁹. The purpose of the envoys' visit was to further strengthen the friendship between the two dynasties and to unite in the struggle against the Safavids. Aurangzeb received these envoys very warmly and promised to work toward forming a joint alliance.

In 1681, Subhan Quli Khan ascended to the throne of Bukhara. During this period, the attacks from Khwarezm had not ceased. From an external perspective, Subhan Quli Khan needed a strong ally. In this context, in 1685, Aurangzeb's envoy, Zabardast Khan, arrived in Bukhara with various gifts. The envoy emphasized that Aurangzeb had intended to congratulate Subhan Quli Khan on his ascension to the throne earlier, but internal issues within the dynasty had prevented this. The envoy brought a proposal to strengthen mutual friendship and to unite against a common enemy. He also reminded them that relations between the two states had previously been good, and that several envoys had already been sent from Bukhara²⁰.

In 1689, Subhan Quli Khan sent envoys to India, led by Nazarbi. In his letter, the Khan reminded Aurangzeb of the events in Balkh and the attacks by Anush Khan. He then spoke about the unruliness of the Shiites, their constant threat to Bukhara, and reminded him of the raids carried out in the Marv region²¹.

A new chill in the relations between the two states began after Subhan Quli Khan's son, Siddiq Muhammad Khan, attempted to pursue an independent policy in Balkh. He tried to detain the Baburid envoys who were arriving in Balkh. The reason for this was his desire to establish an independent political state separate from his father. In the message Aurangzeb sent to Subhan Quli Khan, it was stated that the complications between the two states were directly caused by Siddiq Muhammad Khan's policies. Overall, during Subhan Quli Khan's reign, he made efforts to maintain relations with both the Baburids and the Safavids. The disruption of these efforts was also caused by the constant attacks from the Khiva Khanate.

After Subhan Quli Khan, the situation in Bukhara became significantly more tense, and this led to a certain stagnation in the relations between the two dynasties. During the reign of Ubaydullah Khan, Baburid Ambassador Bahadur Shah (1707–1712) visited Bukhara, as noted by Azamat Ziyo in his research²². During Ubaydullah Khan's reign, in the context of internal

¹⁸ Burton A. The Bukharans: A Dynastic, Diplomatic and commercial history (1550-1702), Great Britain: Curzon Press, 1997. Pp.274-278.

¹⁹ Saqi Must'ad Khan. Maasir-I- 'Alamgiri: A History of the Emperor Aurangzib-'Alamgir (reign 1658-1707). Translated into english and annotated by Sir Jadunath Sarkar. Kalkutta-1947. Pp. 20-23.

²⁰ Мухаммад Юсуф мунши. Муким-ханская история / перевод с тадж., предисл., примеч. и указатели проф. А.А. Семенова. – Ташкент, 1956. С 137.

²¹ Низомиддинов. И.Ф. XVI-XVIII асрларда Ўрта Осиё-Хиндистон муносабатлари. Тошкент-1966. 66 б.

²² Азamat Ziyo. Силсилат ас-салотин как исторический источник. Диссертация кандидата исторических наук. Ташкент. 1990. С. 185.

problems within the country, relations with foreign states deteriorated. Nevertheless, diplomatic missions between the Baburids and Bukhara still took place during Ubaydullah Khan's time. However, discussions about a common alliance against the Safavids were rarely mentioned.

Conclusion

In summary, the political, military, and cultural interactions among the Astrakhanids, Safavids, and Baburids played a crucial role in shaping the political landscape of Central Asia and the Middle East. The alliances and conflicts between these powers, particularly around strategic regions like Qandahar and Khorasan, underscore the complex dynamics at play. These diplomatic engagements influenced the geopolitical stability of the area and contributed to defining the boundaries and influence of Turkestan and Hindustan.

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