

The First Anglo-Afghan War

To justify his plan, Auckland issued the Simla Manifesto in October 1838, setting forth the necessary reasons for British intervention in Afghanistan. The manifesto stated that in order to insure the welfare of India, the British must have a trustworthy ally on India's western frontier. The British pretend that their troops were merely supporting Shuja's small army in retaking what was once his throne fooled no one. Although the Simla Manifesto stated that British troops would be withdrawn as soon as Shuja was installed in Kabul, Shuja's rule depended entirely on British arms to suppress rebellion and on British funds to buy the support of tribal chiefs. The British denied that they were invading Afghanistan, instead claiming they were merely supporting its legitimate Shuja government "against foreign interference and factious opposition."

From the British point of view, the First Anglo-Afghan War (1838-42) (often called "Auckland's Folly") was an unmitigated disaster, despite the ease with which Dost Mohammad was deposed and Shuja enthroned. An army of British and Indian troops set out from the Punjab in December 1838 and reached Quetta by late March 1839. A month later, the British took Qandahar without a battle. In July, after a two-month delay in Qandahar, the British attacked the fortress of Ghazni, overlooking a plain leading to India, and achieved a decisive victory over Dost Mohammad's troops led by one of his sons. Dost Mohammad fled with his loyal followers across the passes to Bamian, and ultimately to Bukhara. In August 1839, after almost thirty years, Shuja was again enthroned in Kabul. Some British troops returned to India, but it soon became clear that Shuja's rule could only be maintained with the presence of British forces. After he unsuccessfully attacked the British and their Afghan protégé, Dost Mohammad surrendered to them and was exiled in India in late 1840.

By October 1841, however, disaffected Afghan tribes were flocking to support Dost Mohammad's son, Mohammad Akbar, in Bamian. On January 1, 1842, their presence no longer wanted, an agreement was reached that provided for the safe exodus of the British garrison and its dependents from Afghanistan. Five days later, the retreat began, and as they struggled through the snowbound passes, the British were attacked by Ghilzai warriors. Although Dr. W. Brydon is frequently mentioned as the only survivor of the march to Jalalabad--out of a column of more than 16,000 (consisting of about 4,500 military personnel, both British and Indian, along with as many as 12,000 camp followers) who undertook the retreat--a few more survived as prisoners and hostages. His British protectors gone, Shuja remained in power only a few months before being assassinated in April 1842.

The complete destruction of the garrison prompted brutal retaliation by the British against the Afghans and touched off yet another power struggle for dominance of Afghanistan. In the fall of 1842, British forces from Qandahar and Peshawar entered Kabul just long enough to rescue the few British prisoners and burn the Great Bazaar. Although the foreign invasion provided the Afghan tribes with a temporary sense of unity they had previously lacked, the loss of life and property was followed by a bitter resentment of foreign

influence.

The Russians advanced steadily southward toward Afghanistan in the three decades after the First Anglo-Afghan War. In 1842 the Russian border was on the other side of the Aral Sea from Afghanistan, but five short years later the tsar's outposts had moved to the lower reaches of the Amu Darya. By 1865 Tashkent had been formally annexed, as was Samarkand three years later. A peace treaty in 1868 with Amir Muzaffar al-Din, the ruler of Bukhara, virtually stripped him of his independence. Russian control now extended as far as the northern bank of the Amu Darya.

Source: *U.S. Library of Congress*