

## REVIEW OF THE FACTORS LEADING TO THE FALL OF THE SECOND REIGN OF AMIR SHER ALI KHAN

**Khalid Sadid**

Assistant professor, History Department, Art Faculty, Alberoni University

Author: Contact details for correspondence:

Email: khalidsadid6@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

This article, entitled "Investigating the Factors Leading to the Fall of the Second Emirate of Amir Sher Ali Khan," addresses this topic from various perspectives. The period of Amir Sher Ali Khan's emirate is considered one of the sensitive and pivotal periods in the contemporary history of Afghanistan, drawing the attention of political elites and domestic and foreign scholars. The aim of the author is to analyze and respond to the collapse and downfall of the government of Amir Sher Ali Khan, as it reflects one of the significant issues in the contemporary history of Afghanistan. By reflecting and clarifying this issue, the future leaders of this land, which are the generations of today and tomorrow, will draw lessons from the past experiences for a dynamic future. The purpose of this research is to understand and identify the factors leading to the fall of the second Emirate of Amir Sher Ali Khan. In this regard, the research is organized into two sections: the first section focuses on internal factors leading to the downfall of the second Emirate of Amir, while the second section examines external factors, particularly the role of Britain. Finally, based on the hypotheses formulated in this research, the roles of internal and external factors in the collapse of Amir Sher Ali Khan's government are discussed, including the role of political elites, feudal lords and courtiers, as well as the instability and mistakes of Amir Sher Ali Khan and his fluctuating internal policies. This research is based on a descriptive and analytical method, and the materials and findings of this study are obtained through library research, aiming to identify the factors leading to the fall of the second Emirate of Amir Sher Ali Khan during this period.

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, Amir Sher Ali Khan, downfall, internal and external factors.

### Introduction

Amir Sher Ali Khan was the third son of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan. He ascended to the throne twice, from 1863 to 1866 and from 1868 to 1878 (Mohammadi, 2008: 37). He returned to Kabul for the



second time in 1878 after defeating Amir Mohammad Azam Khan and Sardar Abdul Rahman Khan in the Battle of Ghazni, re-establishing his authority over Afghanistan (Mirzadeh, 2020: 84-90). His second emirate, from 1868 to 1878, is considered one of the turning points in the contemporary history of Afghanistan, as it led to a series of transformations in the country's political, economic, social, and cultural structures. Among his most notable actions were the establishment of the first six-member cabinet, the creation of a disciplined army of five thousand soldiers, the founding of a printing press for disseminating proclamations and orders, the establishment of national and military schools, the establishment of the first postal and telegraph office, and the formation of a twelve-member council (Pamir, 2021: 271-272). However, due to his inconsistent domestic policies, nepotism, inappropriate appointments, lack of coordination among his political elites, familial hypocrisy, incomplete understanding of spies and English sympathizers, and interference from major contemporary colonial powers, especially Britain, his regime collapsed after a decade. Both internal prominent factors and external influences led to the downfall of his second emirate, as the constant rivalry and interference of Russia and Britain in Afghanistan's internal affairs have historically led to the downfall and collapse of contemporary Afghan regimes, with most governments in the country facing defeat and collapse due to unprofessional politics and misguided diplomacy in the past century. Based on this, the key issue of the present research is to identify the factors that led to the downfall of Amir Sher Ali Khan's second emirate.

There have been valuable studies on various aspects of the second emirate of Amir Sher Ali Khan; however, many of these studies either lack comprehensive and accurate information regarding its downfall or are scattered and non-descriptive and analytical. Therefore, I have examined and analyzed the factors leading to the collapse of Amir Sher Ali Khan's second emirate on both internal and external levels.

The identification of the factors leading to the downfall of Amir Sher Ali Khan's second emirate marks a significant milestone for cultural elites and domestic and foreign scholars. The children of today and the future of the country need a thorough understanding of this period to ensure the progress and development of the nation. Reflecting on this issue is crucial for the future architects of this land, as they will draw invaluable lessons from the past for a dynamic future. Furthermore, research on this matter can offer fresh and novel insights for Afghanistan's educated youth.

I felt a compelling need to thoroughly identify, analyze, and dissect the factors leading to the collapse of Amir Sher Ali Khan's second emirate if we aim to steer our country, Afghanistan, towards political stability and development. Only by carefully examining the past



can we act more judiciously and accurately now, as Ahmad Kasravi, the Iranian historian, aptly said, "A nation that does not know its history is doomed to repeat it."

This article, which investigates the factors behind the collapse of Amir Sher Ali Khan's second emirate, aims to comprehensively identify and understand the reasons for the downfall of his reign in Afghanistan. Why did Amir Sher Ali Khan's second emirate collapse? What roles did internal and external factors play in the downfall of his regime?

### Internal and External Factors in the Fall of the Second Emirate of Amir Sher Ali Khan

#### 1. Polygamy and Power Division under Amir Dost Mohammad Khan and Its Effects

Several factors contributed to the downfall of Sher Ali Khan's second reign, one of which was related to the polygamous nature of his father, Amir Dost Mohammad Khan. Like Timur Shah Durrani, Amir Dost Mohammad Khan had multiple wives, resulting in numerous offspring. Unfortunately, Amir did not find the opportunity to properly educate and raise his children in family matters. Consequently, each of his sons became a source of significant headaches for the people and the political system of Afghanistan. The most significant adverse consequences can be seen in Amir Sher Ali Khan's governance. Another significant political mistake Amir Dost Mohammad Khan made alongside polygamy was appointing his sons to key provinces, particularly those with ethnic ties through their mothers or residents. For instance, Muhammad Afzal Khan as the governor of Turkistan, Muhammad Azam Khan as the governor of Kandahar, Sher Ali Khan as the heir apparent, Muhammad Amin Khan as the governor of Qandahar, Muhammad Sharif Khan as the governor of Farah, Wali Muhammad Khan as the governor of Aqcha, Faiz Muhammad Islami Khan as the governor of Ghur, and Muhammad Hassan Khan from the Hazara lineage in the Hazarajat. However, with this mistake, Amir paved the way for disobedience to central government authority and laid the foundation for internal conflicts, similar to Minister Fath Khan's role in the country (Farhang, 2005: 348-362). Therefore, when Amir Sher Ali Khan ascended to the throne, he faced abundant problems from his family members and brothers (Zamani, 2019: 79). On the very day the sermon was delivered in Herat in the name of Amir Sher Ali Khan, all his brothers who had come to Herat with their deceased father fled to various provinces and rebelled against him where they held authority (Ataie, 2005: 138). It is worth mentioning that unfortunately, Amir Sher Ali Khan repeated the history of his father's significant mistake. He also relied heavily on his family members, dividing important governmental duties among them. However, most of them lacked competence and



capability to carry out their assigned tasks, being weak and incompetent individuals who created grounds for government crises and instability (Pamir, 2021: 276).

## 2. Weak and Unstable Domestic Policies of the Amir

Amir Sher Ali Khan was not a successful individual in domestic politics, nor was he a good administrator. He failed to establish domestic and foreign policies, as well as familial relationships, based on his own real interests or the benefit of the country, which led to an inability to prevent external threats. Although he harbored important aspirations for strengthening the central government and modernizing certain aspects of the country, he lacked the qualities necessary to achieve such transformations. This deficiency ultimately resulted in the failure of his grand plans and objectives both domestically and internationally. In his domestic administration, Amir was authoritarian and self-willed, but lacked the ruthlessness and severity to control most Eastern governors (Sedid, 2021: 65). Although Amir Sher Ali Khan was a progressive and enlightened individual with good intentions for the country, his weak administration often sabotaged his plans. His impulsive nature and lack of stability often rendered his schemes unsuccessful. These failures not only caused significant problems for himself and created internal conflicts within his family but also led to failures in foreign policy, allowing the British to take advantage of his weaknesses and invade Afghanistan for the second time. The people of Afghanistan did not rise against them as they did not do so in the first invasion, and the British did not abandon Afghanistan (Farhang, 2005: 394-396).

A prominent factor illustrating Amir Sher Ali Khan's weak domestic policy was his tendency towards self-will and his incomplete understanding of the foreign policies of European countries. He not only lacked strong and unwavering trust in his army and cabinet members but also, in many cases, disregarded the importance of consulting and heeding the advice of informed and loyal counselors. When the British invaded Afghanistan for the second time, Amir, having lost his courage, sought to abandon the capital in hopes of Russian cooperation, opting to move to Mazar-i-Sharif. Despite wise counsel from knowledgeable figures in his court advising him to trust in the powerful forces of the Afghan people and the bravery of his fifty-thousand-strong armed forces, he chose to abandon Kabul and move north. Consequently, the country fell into a political vacuum, creating more opportunities for British interference and invasion. This hasty move by Amir Sher Ali Khan not only occurred when he had sufficient human resources and military capabilities at his disposal but also when, several months earlier, Britain, Germany, Italy, Austria, France, and Russia had raised the issue of Afghanistan and India at a conference in June 1878. As a result of this conference, Russia had pledged not to attack Afghanistan as long as it was



recognized as an independent country and not threatened by India. This decision and commitment undoubtedly undermined Russian help and cooperation for Amir Sher Ali Khan. However, it is highly probable that Amir was not sufficiently aware of this political shift between the two major powers of that time and futilely pinned his hopes on Russian authorities. It was on this basis that Kaufman, the governor of Turkestan, explicitly stated in a letter to Amir that he should abandon the idea of leaving the Russian territory (Pamir, 2021: 276).

The greatest challenge and weakness of the Amir's emirate was family hypocrisy, as it shook the foundations of his government. In the first phase of his emirate, his brothers hindered the establishment of stability and security, and in the second phase, his sons took on this responsibility. The reason for this was the tribal nature of the government system. On the other hand, the weakness of Amir's judgment and lack of foresight led to hypocrisy, animosity, and enmity even within his own family. Similar to Shah Jahan Gorkani, differences arose among his children, initially favoring his eldest son, Muhammad Ali Khan, as he was the heir and successor. However, Muhammad Ali was killed in a battle with Muhammad Amin Khan near Kandahar, plunging him into grief and mourning for several weeks. Moreover, another significant mistake of Amir Sher Ali Khan was favoring his eldest and capable sons, Muhammad Yaqub Khan and Muhammad Ayub Khan, over his younger son, Prince Abdullah, who was dearly loved by his mother, Aisha, the daughter of his uncle Amir Afzal Khan. Abdullah, the seven-year-old son of Amir, was considered as the successor due to his mother's request. This action of the Amir caused distress and disappointment among all his young sons. Consequently, Amir Ayub Khan sought refuge in Iran, while Amir Yaqub Khan left the court and rushed to Herat, where he seized control and took over the governorship for a while. Another significant injustice and unfairness of the Amir among his sons not only led to family hypocrisy but also paved the way for foreign interference in Afghan affairs (Pamir, 2021: 275-276).

### 3- Lack of moderation and stability in foreign policy

Undoubtedly, adopting a suitable and balanced foreign policy can have a positive impact on the stability of a political system. This becomes particularly crucial when a country has a powerful and influential neighbor, as the type of foreign policy adopted towards that country can either foster understanding or lead to confrontation. Furthermore, adopting a foreign policy towards other countries, especially powerful neighbors, should be based on national interests and devoid of excessive emotions or enmity, in a logical and proportional manner considering both potential and actual capabilities and resources.



Although initially Amir Sher Ali Khan sought to maintain balance and equilibrium in international politics and relations with Russia and Britain, aiming for neutrality and balance in his foreign policy to attract more friends and strengthen the defense and security of his government, thereby developing independent relations with the outside world, this balance was not always maintained consistently. Like the foreign policy of Sardar Mohammad Daoud Khan, it sometimes leaned towards one side and sometimes towards the other. This unbalanced foreign policy led Afghanistan to confront Britain with enmity. On the other hand, Amir Sher Ali Khan had positioned the country in the hope of Soviet support in confrontation with Britain. This lack of balance in foreign policy, given the intense competition between the two rival empires, led to British dissatisfaction with the government of Afghanistan, and given Britain's exceptional influence and penetration in Afghan affairs over several decades, it made Britain pessimistic about Amir Sher Ali Khan's government.

Another manifestation of the lack of moderation in Amir's foreign policy was his unrestrained anger and use of harsh words against the British. Although Amir was a progressive thinker, his anger often reached a point of irrationality, to the extent that when he went home, he would not leave for a week and would be treated rudely, shouting loudly that the English wanted to belittle him among my people (Ataai, 2005: 140).

Moreover, Amir Sher Ali Khan never agreed with all the policies of the British from the beginning to the end and harbored a strong hatred for the British. This animosity was openly expressed to British representatives, and Amir's open disdain for the British caused significant problems for him, especially as the British were very cunning and alert opponents. The British initially wanted Amir Sher Ali Khan to accommodate them in his Chout, but when they realized that Amir Sher Ali Khan was reluctant to follow a specific line and was not willing to bow to them, they once again resorted to the old version, the version where the sons of Sardar Payanda Khan were assassinated and blinded by themselves and then expelled from the field. After them, the sons of Sardar Dost Mohammad Khan were put to death, and they were so suppressed that they had no movement and activity left, and now they have adapted this plan for the children of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan as well (Ataai, 2005: 37-38).

Amir Sher Ali Khan was suspicious of England's behavior in the region in his foreign policy and showed favor to Russia, repeating his father's (Amir Dost Mohammad Khan) historical mistake, especially in response to Lord Lytton's request for the reopening of British representation in Kabul and Herat, as well as receiving news of Amir Sher Ali



Khan's dealings with General Kaufman in Tashkent and receiving evidence of General Stolietoff's presence in Kabul, which convinced England that Amir Sher Ali Khan had sided with the Russians, and this gave them a good excuse to invade Afghanistan once again and bring down the regime of Amir Sher Ali Khan (Ansari, 2012: 148).

#### 4- The Role of Feudals and Tribal Leaders

In our beloved country, Afghanistan, feudal lords and tribal leaders have always enjoyed power in tandem with the government. This phenomenon traces back to the long-standing autonomy and independence of tribal communities. Each feudal lord and tribal leader considered themselves as autonomous rulers and independent figures. In this land, given its tribal structure, the power and influence of the government have always been influenced by the power and influence of the tribes.

In Afghanistan, tribal leaders, landowners, and prominent tribal figures have been staunch and long-standing opponents of the central government, often refusing to obey and submit to central authority and instead engaging in lawlessness and defiance. Because the power of the government does not originate from the capital but rather from the power and influence of feudal lords and tribal leaders. Based on this, in terms of military and combating external pressures or foreign forces, the government has often relied on tribal and feudal forces as a means of confrontation and resistance against external forces. Given the prominent role of feudal lords and tribal leaders, they have been instrumental in mobilizing popular movements for confrontation and confrontation with foreign forces (Mirzai, 2014: 80-81).

Accordingly, Afghan rulers have always sought to reduce the power and influence of tribal leaders and feudal lords in favor of the central government. For example, Ahmad Shah Durrani sought to reduce the power of tribal leaders by creating a unified state and keeping tribal leaders engaged in wars. He relied more on the influence of his wars abroad to consolidate his power domestically. If these wars were accompanied by victories, his name would be glorified, and maintaining the loyalty of tribal leaders and feudal lords through rewards and honors would become possible. Similarly, Amir Abdul Rahman Khan, a self-reliant ruler, sought to suppress the power and influence of powerful tribal leaders through the establishment of a strong and disciplined army using strict strategies.

However, all Afghan kings from Ahmad Shah Durrani to Amir Abdul Rahman Khan have not succeeded in separating their rule and authority from the influence and power of tribes and feudal lords and in establishing their sovereignty outside the influence of tribes and feudal lords. Instead, during this period, tribal leaders have not only preserved their long-standing autonomy but also succeeded in maintaining their military power



and independence from the central government in the political structure of Afghanistan. This trend continued until the era of Amir Sher Ali Khan.

#### 5- Lack of Intellectual Coordination Among Political Elites in Government

One of the pillars of stability and sustainability in a political system is the unity and coordination among political elites of a government. In case of lack of coordination and intellectual coherence among political elites, the government becomes destabilized and loses its political stability. Historical experiences and realities indicate that the development of reforms results from the products of stability in society. This itself requires rationality, wisdom, coordination, and consensus among political elites. Systematizing the behavior of institutions and individuals is one of the important levels of human civilization. If there are no rules, people do whatever they want, and tradition disappears for no reason. It is not surprising that in countries undergoing transformation, when the management of an institution changes, all methods, traditions, and rules also change. The main reason for this situation is that among individuals engaged in a particular cause, there are no common principles, and each person has their own methods, refusing to follow others. The most severe form of this situation is in politics, where if there are no common goals and rules among politicians and political elites in the government, there should be no hope of effectiveness and success in issues. Therefore, systematizing behaviors, traditions, and methods is the basis of coordination and coherence, and after that, we witness development from all sides. The experience of industrialized countries in the world shows that the role of the system and government is more important than ever in moving towards reforms and development. In sociology and political science, it is the government that is highlighted as an independent player in analyses because the first condition for reaching such countries is political elites who have intellectual cohesion and political consistency. This is not achieved until one of its important factors, namely intellectual cohesion and political consistency among political elites, is observed, and there is no gap and contradiction within the government front. Otherwise, towards reforms, development, and progress in a country is not possible (Jalali, 2010: 2).

Based on this, one of the reasons for the fall of the government of Amir Sher Ali Khan was the lack of coordination among political elites, especially among the courtiers. According to Karim Pekar, factionalism among senior officials posed another challenge to the successes of Amir Sher Ali Khan. Family and tribal rivalries also played a role in the fall of the Amir's second regime (Pamir, 2021: 275-277).





## 6- Incompetent Governance of Government Appointees

One of the fundamental factors that led to the downfall of Amir Sher Ali Khan's government was his nepotism and appointment of incompetent and corrupt officials in governance affairs. Amir Sher Ali Khan excessively relied and trusted his family members, assigning important governmental duties to them, such as Sardar Walimohammad Khan Lati, Sardar Mehrdel Khan, Sardar Mohammad Eslam Khan, Sardar Mohammad Hassan Khan, Sardar Abdullah Khan, Sardar Yayha Khan, and others. These individuals not only lacked the desire for the survival of Amir's rule but were also considered loyalists and servants of the British, especially during the initial British occupation. Historians even write that Amir appointed one of his nephews named Sardar Fath Mohammad Khan as the governor of Herat province, although he lacked any qualifications for governance. Whatever clothes he wore, they were adorned with gold and silk from Herat's wealth, and apart from this, he did nothing else (Pamir, 2021: 276).

Furthermore, the individuals appointed by Amir Sher Ali Khan to key administrative positions were not those who were committed to serving the people, developing the country, ensuring justice, and protecting the country's borders from foreign invasions. Instead, their goal was merely to collect taxes and products from peasants and merchants, often through coercion and tyranny, and to seize the property of others and rule over the inhabitants of the provinces (Atai, 2005: 174).

## 7- Excessive Trust of Amir in Mysterious Foreign Elements within the Court

The incomplete knowledge of Amir Sher Ali Khan about spies and agents of the British is one of the important factors in the collapse of his second reign. Due to his incomplete and inaccurate knowledge of the elements within the court, Amir Sher Ali Khan excessively trusted a number of Indian Muslim elements residing in Kabul who were actually British spies, bringing them close to his court. Among them were Abdul Majid, Gholam Nakhshband, Fath Ali, Karim Bakhsh, Qazi Qadar, and others (Pamir, 2021: 276).

## 8- The Role of the British in the Fall of the Amir Sher Ali Khan's Sultanate

The British policy strategy in Afghanistan aimed to keep the country fragmented, weak, and separate from the world, devoid of political independence and international relations. They sought to prevent the spread of modern civilization and culture, keep the nation in hypocrisy and internal conflicts, make governments detested by the people, force governments to resort to them, and, at the same time, introduce the country to the world through their

extensive propaganda as ignorant, barbaric, thieving, and deceitful, without any historical virtue or honor.

Therefore, it is not contrary to reality that the government of Britain was indifferent to the fall of Amir Sher Ali Khan's rule. The British government did not recognize Amir Sher Ali Khan as a friend or ally and was concerned about his proximity to Russia. In addition to military aggression against Amir Sher Ali Khan's regime, the British government transferred its own individuals and spies disguised as Indian Muslims to Kabul and Amir's court, and these individuals regularly reported all events within the court to Britain. Although Amir Sher Ali Khan, like his father (Amir Dost Mohammad Khan), sought good relations with Britain after ascending the throne, the British government, fearing the proximity between Afghanistan and Russia, became alarmed. The important and fundamental point is that Amir Sher Ali Khan lacked sufficient experience in foreign policy, and on the other hand, the Shah's advisors lacked initial information about global politics. Amir could not establish good relations with Britain after gaining sovereignty, and his proximity to Russia became a cause for concern for the British government. Despite all the deficiencies and shortcomings, it cannot be denied that the role of British intelligence and military aggression played a significant role in the fall of Amir Sher Ali Khan's rule for the second time (Pamir, 2021: 240).

### Conclusion

From the analysis of the factors surrounding Amir Sher Ali Khan, it is concluded that both internal and external factors played a major and fundamental role in the downfall of his government. A deep examination of Amir Sher Ali Khan's governance period reveals that internal and external factors simultaneously contributed to the collapse of his regime. It was the internal factors that paved the way for foreign interventions in Afghanistan and ultimately led to the weakening and downfall of Amir Sher Ali Khan's second reign. When considering the internal factors and mistakes of Amir Sher Ali Khan in reform and governance affairs, it becomes apparent that internal factors such as injustice and unfairness towards his children and family members, nepotistic appointments based on incompetence and lack of governance talent, reliance on dubious advisors with British leanings, lack of coordination among political elites, incomplete and inaccurate knowledge of mysterious individuals and British spies in governance affairs, fluctuating and inconsistent domestic policies in administrative matters, the role of multiple wives of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan and power distribution among family members, nepotism and excessive trust of Amir in his family members, as well as the failure to adopt a moderate and



desirable foreign policy in foreign relations were among the major and fundamental factors leading to the collapse of Amir Sher Ali Khan's second reign.

From the course of analysis and examination of this research, it can be concluded that alongside internal factors, external factors, especially the prominent role of Britain, in the fall of Amir Sher Ali Khan's government is undeniable. In reality, internal factors provided the groundwork and platform for external factors, namely British interventions in Afghanistan's internal affairs.

## References

1. Ansari, Farooq. (2012). Focused History of Afghanistan. Kabul: Emiri.
2. Al-Mojaddedi, Mohammad Sadiq. (Undated). Political Memoirs, Part One. Edited by Mohammad Naeem Mojaddedi. USA: Islamic Jurisprudence Publications.
3. Pamir, Karim Paykar. (2021). Brief Political History of Afghanistan. Canada: Knowledge Society.
4. Jalali, Reza. (2010). Intellectual Cohesion of Political Elites within Governance and Formation of Stability in the Political System. Tehran: Quarterly Journal of International Relations Studies.
5. Zamani, Khair Mohammad. (2019). Contemporary History of Afghanistan. Kabul: Azam.
6. Sasanpour, Shahzad. (2011). Failure of Reforms by Amanullah Khan and the Formation of the Bacha-i Saqao Government in Afghanistan. Iran: Islamic History Studies, Imam Hossein University.
7. Ataie, Mohammad Ibrahim. (2005). Contemporary History of Afghanistan. Kabul: Miwand.
8. Ghobar, Mir Ghulam Mohammad. (2010). Afghanistan on the Path of History. Kabul: Suroor Saadat.
9. Farhang, Mir Mohammad Sadegh. (2005). Afghanistan in the Last Five Centuries. Kabul: Mohammad Ibrahim Shariati Afghanistan.
10. Qudrat, Mohammad Naeem. (Undated). Black and White Pages from the Historical Images of Afghanistan. Kabul: Ministry of Education.
11. Farokh, Mehdi. (1935). Political History of Afghanistan. Iran: Tehran.
12. Masbahzadeh, Seyyed Mohammad Baqer. (2009). Brief Political History of Afghanistan. Mashhad: Merandez.
13. Mohammadi, Ghulam Mohammad. (2008). Quagmire of Contemporary Afghan History. Saeed: Kabul.
14. Mojaddedi, Fazl Ghani. (2020). Page from the Contemporary History of Afghanistan. USA: Islamic Jurisprudence.
15. Mirzai, Mohammad Naser. (2014). Reforms of Amanullah Khan, King of Afghanistan. Iran: Andisheh Foundation.
16. Navid, Sanzal. (2009). Religious Reactions and Social Transformations in Afghanistan, 1919-1929. Translated by Mohammad Naeem Mojaddedi. Kabul: Ahrari Publications.

