



UBAYDULLAH KHAN'S MILITARY CAMPAIGNS TO KHORASAN: HISTORICAL SOURCES AND THEIR ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This article analyzes the military campaigns of Ubaydullah Khan - one of the prominent representatives of the shaybanid dynasty - into Khorasan and their political significance. These campaigns constituted an important stage in the struggle between the shaybanids and the safavids during the 16th century. The analysis is based on historical sources and holds great importance for understanding the political and military processes of that period.

Keywords: Ubaydullah Khan, Khorasan, Herat, shaybanids, safavids, siege, battle, army, source, history.

Introduction

The social, political, economic, and cultural life of Transoxiana and Khorasan at the end of the 15th century and the beginning of the 16th century is reflected in historical sources. The shaybanid dynasty occupies an important place in Uzbek statehood.

As a result of the activities of Muhammad Shaybani Khan¹ (1500–1510) and Ubaydullah Khan (1533–1540), the Uzbek statehood was established. Previously created maps did not feature a state called the “azbeks.” This later became the

¹ Muhammad Shaybani Khan was killed in 1510 at the Battle of Merv against Ismail Safavid. According to sources written by Iranian historians of that time, Shah Ismail Safavid cut off Shaybani Khan's head and hands and sent them to the supporters of the Sultan of Turkey and the Khan in Mazandaran. It is also reported that the Shah gilded the Khan's skull, fashioned it into a drinking cup, and regularly drank wine from it. See: [11: 389].



basis for the name of the Republic of Uzbekistan, founded in 1924. After the end of Shaybani Khan's rule, Ubaydullah Khan restored the state, founded the Bukhara Khanate, and supported science and education.

Under the leadership of Ubaydullah Khan, the shaybanids fought several times against the safavids in the 16th century to regain Khorasan. Manuscript sources and studies present varying dates and accounts of these conflicts. In this article, they are organized based on historical sources.

The history of the shaybanids in the 16th century relies on sources such as: Hafiz Tanish Bukhari's *Abdullanoma*, Muhammadiyor ibn Qatagon's *Musakhir al-Bilad*, Zahiriddin Babur's *Baburnama* (1494–1530), Ghyath al-Din Khondamir's *Habib us-Siyar* (1475–1534), and Hasanbek Rumlu's *Ahsanut-Tawarikh* (1530–1578).

Regarding the history of the shaybanid dynasty, scholars such as V.V. Bartold [7], A.A. Semyonov, R.G. Akhmedov [5], Z. Muqimov [10], A. Zamonov [8], and internationally M.B. Dickson [2], Nurten Kılıç [3], S.S. Ukten [4], A. Majid [6] have conducted research. Notably, the American scholar M.B. Dickson's studies focus on Ubaydullah Khan's campaigns to Khorasan and relations with Shah Tahmasp. Comparing these sources and studies reveals some inconsistencies and ambiguities in the historiography of the shaybanids.

After the Timurids, Khorasan, which was an integral part of the state established by Muhammad Shaybani Khan (1500–1510), as an economic and cultural center, fell under Safavid invasion following Shaybani Khan's death.

By analyzing the information presented in sources and studies created in Transoxiana and Iran regarding Ubaydullah Khan's campaigns to Khorasan, we have compiled the following chronology and events.



No	Date of Campaign	Name of Campaign	Brief Summary
1	1513–1514	Initial Campaign to Khorasan	Siege of Herat following the Battle of Gijduvan; withdrawal due to conflict.
2	1521	First Official Military Campaign	Siege of Herat (12 days); withdrawal due to lack of results.
3	1524–1525	Second Military Campaign	Capture of Merv, Sarakhs, Tus, and Astarabad; temporary control established.
4	1526–1528	Third Military Campaign	Battle of Jam; shaybanids defeated; suffered heavy losses.
5	1529–1531	Fourth Military Campaign	Temporary capture of Herat and Mashhad; later retaken by the Safavids.
6	1532–1533	Fifth Military Campaign	Siege of Herat (1.5 years); Ubaydullah Khan subsequently returned to Transoxiana.
7	1535–1537	Sixth and Final Military Campaign	Capture of Herat and Mashhad; Sufiyan Khalifa defeated; Herat handed back again.

The Khorasan Campaigns of 1513–1514. After the Battle of Gijduvan, Jonibek Sultan crossed the Amu Darya River and headed towards Herat [15:1228]. Together with Ubaydullah Khan, they besieged Herat for 60 days, but a conflict arose between them. Due to this dispute, they retreated from around Herat. Jonibek Sultan crossed back over the Amu Darya and returned to Karmina. However, Muhammad Temur Sultan blocked Ubaydullah Khan's path to Bukhara at the Murghab River. Afterwards, they returned to Tus and Mashhad, occupied the territories from Merv to Isfara, and retreated according to demands. **1521² – Ubaydullah Khan's First Military Campaign to Khorasan**
On May 24, 1521, Ubaydullah Khan led an army of 30,000 to Khorasan

² Abdulqadir Majid writes that during the first campaign in 1515, Ubaydullokhon sent a letter to the Ottoman Sultan informing him about his movement towards Khorasan. However, there is no information about a campaign to Khorasan in 1515 in other sources. Martin Dickson dates this campaign to 1524–1526. In Muhammad ibn Arab Qatagon's *Musakhir al-Bilad*, the campaign is noted as occurring in Hijri 929 (1522); Hasanbek Rumlu's *Ahsan ut-Tawarikh* records it as Hijri 927; Munshi's *Tarikh-i Alam-ara-yi Abbasi* also mentions Hijri 929; and Ghiyathiddin Khondamir's *Habib us-Siyar* records it as Hijri 927. These sources indicate that the campaign took



[15:1244].

Ubaydullah Khan divided his forces into three groups and attempted to besiege Herat for several days. Shah Ismail³ died in 1524, and his son Tahmasp ascended the throne, but the affairs of the state were managed by the amirs. The Shaybanids, however, looted the cities and villages before retreating.

1524-1525⁴– Ubaydullah Khan’s Second Military Campaign to Khorasan. This campaign was initiated under the leadership of religious leaders. Nearly all the Shaybanid sultans, including Abu Said⁵ (1531–1533), Suyunhoja Khan, Jonibek Sultan, and Kiston Qora⁶ Sultan, gathered around Ubaydullah Khan in October 1524. Merv, Sarakhs, Tus⁷, and Astarabad were captured. Temporary control was established over these territories.

Durmushkhan, the father-in-law of Khorasan’s deputy Som Mirza, strongly defended Herat. The shaybanids attacked through the Firuzabad gate and besieged Herat for four months. Without open clashes, they were forced to retreat back to Transoxiana.

The Third Military Campaign to Khorasan (1526–1528⁸)
The shaybanid campaign of 1526 was caused by political turmoil in Iran, the death of Shah Ismail Safavid, and fragmentation within the government. The young Shah Tahmasp’s affairs were managed by Div Sultan, while at the same time two factions vied for power: Kopek Sultan in Tabriz and Khorasan, and Chukha Sultan in Isfahan and Hamadan. Taking advantage of this situation,

place in the mid-920s AH. Based on this information, we have accepted this campaign as having occurred in 1521 and consider this date accurate.

³ Ismail I Safavid (July 17, 1487 – May 23, 1524) was the Shah of Iran (from 1502), the founder of the Safavid state, a military leader, and a poet.

⁴ In the work *Musakhir al-Bilad*, the years Hijri 932–938 (1525–1528) are mentioned; in *Ahsan ut-Tawarikh*, Hijri 932 (1525–1526); in *Tarikh-i Alam-ara-yi Abbasi*, 933–934 (1527–1528); in *Habib us-Siyar*, the mid-year of 927; and in Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur’s *Baburnama*, the years 1525–1526 are indicated. M. Dickson dates this period to 1526–1528.

⁵ Abu Said Bahodirkhan (1531–1533) was the son of Kuchkunji Khan. He died in Safar month of 940 AH / August–September 1533. See: [10: 145].

⁶ Kiston Qora Sultan was one of the shaybanid sultans; the second son of Jonibek Sultan. He ruled as governor of Balkh from 932 AH / 1526 to 950 AH / 1544. See: [14: 398].

⁷ Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur reports that the shaybanid sultans captured the city of Tus after an eight-month siege. See: [9: 224].

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Ubaydullah Khan seized northern Khorasan and captured Merv, Sarakhs, Bistam, and Astarabad, expanding his borders as far as the Caspian Sea.

Under Ubaydullah Khan's leadership, Herat was besieged. However, due to Shah Tahmasp's arrival with a large army, after seven months they were forced to retreat to Merv⁹. Requesting reinforcements, the shaybanids assembled a large army—one of the largest forces ever to cross the Amu Darya in history.

These campaigns also had a religious aspect, with the prayers of the sheikhs and religious spirituality considered the key to victory. Shah Tahmasp's army halted in Mashhad. In 1528, during the initial battles at Jam and Khargird, the shaybanids initially won, but the Safavids, utilizing artillery, inflicted a major defeat on them. Ubaydullah Khan was severely wounded, and the shaybanids suffered heavy losses.

Although the defeat at the Battle of Jam weakened the shaybanids, it did not prevent Ubaydullah Khan from organizing another military campaign to Khorasan.

From 1529 to 1531, the fourth military campaign to Khorasan was launched. Due to his severe injury, Ubaydullah Khan did not participate at the forefront of these battles. The shaybanids captured Isfahan and attempted to secure the pilgrimage route. After Shah Tahmasp's departure, Ubaydullah Khan sent Suyunchmuhammad and his son Abdulaziz with six thousand cavalry to Mashhad, while he himself, with a separate force, seized Herat. The Qizilbash, led by Husain Khan, did not engage in battle and fled to Sistan [9: 224]. Through negotiations, Ubaydullah Khan easily took control of Herat and Mashhad.

However, in 1530, after Kuchkunji Khan died in Samarkand, when Ubaydullah Khan went to offer condolences, Herat fell again and he was unable to recapture the city [1: 471]. In 1531, Tahmasp launched a second campaign to Khorasan, forcing Ubaydullah Khan to abandon Herat and retreat to Merv. He called upon the shaybanid sultans for assistance and held a grand council. However, due to the defeat at the Battle of Jam and the inability to form an alliance with Abu Said,

⁹ In the Baburnama, it is mentioned that Ubaydullokxon was unable to find weapons and arms to hold positions around Herat and thus returned to Merv. In our view, he was unable to withstand Shah Tahmasp's army. See: [9: 256].



the shaybanids were unable to engage in open battle against the safavids. As a result, Ubaydullah Khan failed to secure support and returned to Bukhara.

The fifth military campaign to Khorasan was organized during the years 1532–1533¹⁰. During this campaign, Ubaydullah Khan captured Herat, Mashhad, and Astarabad. He seized the territories from Mashhad to Astarabad, laid siege to Herat, and cut off its water supplies. The governor of Balkh, Kistan Qara Sultan, and Jonibek Sultan came to assist. The siege of Herat, which began in 1532, lasted for 1.5 years [1:471]. On December 20, Shah Tahmasp arrived in Khorasan, ascended the throne in Herat, and subsequently captured Mashhad. In the spring of 1534, he announced a campaign to Mavarannahr and established his headquarters at Alang-i Nishin. Safavid commander Sufyon Khalifa, with a large force, captured Sabzevar, Nishapur, and Mashhad. Ubaydullah Khan was then forced to return to Mavarannahr. After the death of Oliy Khan Abu Said in 1533, Ubaydullah Khan became the chief khan of the shaybanid dynasty.

The sixth military campaign to Khorasan was organized during the years 1535–1537¹¹.

During these years, the shaybanid sultans organized several military campaigns into Khorasan. Ubaydullah Khan sent Sheikh Abu-Said Afrosiyab, Qoraja Bahodir, and Sayyid Mirzo with 4,000 cavalry to capture Herat. Sufyan Khalifa opposed them with 1,500 horsemen and won a victory. Later, Ubaydullah Khan also sent 1,500 cavalry, but the Iranians defeated this force as well, causing the loss of 250 soldiers.

Sultan Khalifa, who had reached eighty years of age under Som Mirza's patronage, was appointed governor of Herat. Exploiting his old age and weakness, the Shaybanids, led by Bayram Sultan and Kiston Qora, attacked Herat and defeated Sultan Khalifa's troops. Nine hundred Qizilbash soldiers were killed, and the shaybanids returned with substantial spoils [1:471].

¹⁰As with the previous military campaigns where there were date discrepancies, similar inconsistencies are observed during these campaigns as well. In the “Tarikhi Olamoroi Abbosi,” the siege of Herat is dated to 1530, in “Musakhir al-Bilad” to 1531, and in “Ahsan ut-Tawarikh” the Shaybanids are reported to have besieged Herat in May 1532. In the main section of “Ahsan ut-Tawarikh,” this campaign is dated to 1532, while the latter part notes that the siege lasted one and a half years and ended in October 1532. If the siege lasted 1.5 years, then Ubaydullokhon may have started besieging Herat in May 1531.

¹¹ This date appears almost identically in the works “Musakhir al-Bilad,” “Ahsan ut-Tawarikh,” and “Tarikhi Olamoroi Abbosi.”



After the death of the governor of Herat, the city sent envoys requesting help from Sufyan Khalifa. He appointed his eldest son as governor of Mashhad and arrived in Herat in 1535. In 1536, upon hearing about the Ottoman Empire's campaign into Iraq and the events in Khorasan, Ubaydullah Khan crossed the Amu Darya and laid siege to Mashhad. Although Sufyan Khalifa's wife took command of the defense, the siege prolonged and ultimately led to the campaign against Herat.

On January 15, 1536, Sufyan Khalifa failed to secure a victory at the Abdolabad fortress near Nishapur, defended for 35 days before retreating with his troops. The fortress was captured by shaybanid forces, Sufyan Khalifa was captured and executed by order of Ubaydullah Khan [1:471].

The situation in Herat became favorable for Ubaydullah Khan, who transferred governance to Khizr Chalabi. However, dissatisfied with their oppression, the people of Herat secretly invited Ubaydullah Khan to the city. On March 11, 1536, Ubaydullah Khan positioned his troops near Herat in the Murad Garden and entered the city on August 16 after a 50-day siege. He ruled Herat for four months. Upon hearing of Shah Tahmasp's attack, Ubaydullah Khan left Darveshbeek in charge of Herat and returned to Bukhara to seize Mashhad [11:134]. This occurred in January 1537 and marked Ubaydullah Khan's final campaign into Khorasan. He passed away in Bukhara on March 17, 1540 [11:134].

In conclusion, during the struggle for Khorasan between the shaybanids and the safavids, the shaybanids held the advantage in most campaigns except the Battle of Jam. Meanwhile, Shah Ismail and Shah Tahmasp, wary of the local deputies in Khorasan, appointed their most trusted and closest aides to key governmental positions. As a result, Khorasan became the most intense and complex theater of conflict between the two states.

Ubaydullah Khan and later Abdullah Khan II were among the most active military leaders of the shaybanids in Khorasan, achieving many military successes. However, despite all the battles, the safavids ultimately secured dominance over Khorasan. After Ubaydullah Khan's campaigns, the shaybanids were forced into a defensive posture and could no longer conduct extensive military operations. This political-military balance persisted until the reign of Abdullah Khan II.



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