

Confidential.

M.O. 2. (H)

I 128  
75

5 FS

ORB.30  
5524

NOTES

R No. 130. A

ON

AFGHANISTAN AS A THEATRE OF WAR.

BY

COLONEL SIR O. B. C. ST. JOHN, R.E., K.C.S.I.



SIMLA :  
GOVERNMENT CENTRAL BRANCH PRESS.

1885.



Confidential.

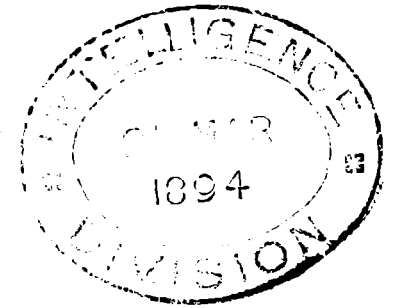
NOTES

ON

AFGHANISTAN AS A THEATRE OF WAR.

BY

COLONEL SIR O. B. C. ST. JOHN, R.E., K.C.S.I.



SIMLA :  
GOVERNMENT CENTRAL BRANCH PRESS.

1885.

**SIMLA :**  
**PRINTED BY THE SUPERINTENDENT, GOVERNMENT**  
**CENTRAL BRANCH PRESS.**

# NOTES

ON

## AFGHANISTAN AS A THEATRE OF WAR.



THE attached outline map shows the theatre of possible operations between England and Russia from the English base at Karachi to the Russian base at Krasnovodsk. Railways are marked on it by a double line, and roads passable for modern armies with artillery by single lines. To avoid confusion, the lines are drawn straight from point to point. Our information as regards these roads differs considerably. As far as the Helmand on the one side and Kabul on the other, they were traversed by our troops in the last war. Beyond the Helmand the road to Herat through Farah was twice passed by Ayub Khan in 1880-81 with wheeled artillery. Our own horse artillery went as far as Bamian on the road from Kabul to Balkh in 1839; and this is the most difficult part of the journey. Up to the last ten or twelve years, the Afghans transported artillery over the passes between Kabul and Balkh on elephants, until Naib Muhamad Alam Khan, Governor of Balkh, improved the road so as to make it passable for wheels. Guns are now dragged up the ascents by manual labour. Of the roads between Herat and Balkh through Turkistan, we only know that the Afghans have repeatedly operated on them, it is believed with wheeled artillery. The interior of the country is impassable to armies in its present condition.

2. The country we call 'Afghanistan' consists of two great mountain masses, the central plateau between them, and a certain part of the plains at their foot. The first of the two is the Paropamisus, or Hindu Kush, a prolongation of the Himalayas, ending almost abruptly a short distance west of Herat, where the Hari-rud valley divides it from the mountains of Persia, and makes the gap through which from the earliest historic times the legions of the North have poured to devastate the South. So far as we know, only one practicable military road (except in the vicinity of Herat) crosses the Hindu Kush,—that from Balkh to Kabul. Further east practicable passes exist, and may have been used by invaders; but the country is so difficult and sparsely populated, that the march of a European army through it would be impossible, though guerilla operations might be carried on.

The second mountain mass leaves the first at the extreme north-west corner of British India and runs south-by-west to the ocean. It is commonly called, from the name of a prominent peak, the Suleiman range, and is pierced by many passes, most of which are, or can easily be made, passable for wheels, the best known of them being the Khaiber, the Bolan, and the Harnai, all of which are now traversed by cart-roads. The triangular space between the two

ranges is filled by plateaux and subsidiary ranges or spurs, falling in the south and west to a sandy desert.

3. Of this country, which covers nearly 300,000 square miles the greater part is subject to the Amir of Kabul, the exception being all the outer slopes and most of the interior valleys of the Suleiman mountains, the eastern part of the Hindu Kush, and the higher valleys about its centre. His authority over the outlying parts of the country which acknowledge his supremacy is, moreover, very slight; and his actual dominions may be likened to a ring surrounding an independent nucleus, and divided from neighbouring states by tribes more or less independent. We are accustomed to talk of the Amir as our neighbour; but, as a matter of fact, districts under his direct rule and ours touch at a single point only, *viz.*, Pishin; while, except in Sistan and on the road between Herat and Meshed, the country governed by his deputies is nowhere contiguous to Persia throughout the long line of their common frontier as shown on our maps. A debateable land south of the Helmand river divides Afghanistan from the territories ruled by the Khan of Kelat. The independent states of Bajaur, Swat, and others lie between Kabul and Kashmir; while Roshan and Darwaza divide it from Asiatic Russia and Bokhara on the east. Farther west the Oxus forms the only boundary between the latter and the Amir's dominions; but even here Maimenah has never been held long by the Afghans; and the Turkomans within the nominal frontier of Afghanistan have been as free as their brethren outside it,—equally nominal subjects of Khiva or Bokhara.

The ring of provinces under the direct government of the Amir since 1863 consists of three main divisions,—Kabul-Kandahar, Herat, and Afghan Turkistan. The first is the country of the Afghans proper; the second is a province of Persia annexed a century-and-a-half ago, and now colonized to a great extent by Afghans from Kandahar; the third is an outlying fragment of the Turk or Uzbeg states of Central Asia, and, with the exception of a colony of Ghilzais at Balkh, has no affinity or sympathy with its Kabul rulers. In short, the two last provinces are held only by the sword; and this, seeing that they are those most exposed to invasion, is a factor in the strategic problem of very high importance. In Kabul or Kandahar a Russian invader might expect a guerilla warfare; in Herat or Afghan Turkistan he might fairly hope to be received as a liberator.

4. Each of these three divisions of Afghanistan is connected by a single link with the other two. From Kandahar to Farah, 150 miles south of Herat, the road passes over a nearly level plain, with broad stretches of desert here and there, and is passable for wheeled artillery without previous preparation when the rivers Helmand and Khash are fordable—that is, for the greater part of the year. Parallel to it, a short distance to the north, is a second road which leaves Farah some miles to the south. It is believed not to be passable for wheels. On both roads, particularly the northern, there is a good supply of forage in the summer, with a certain amount of food-supplies at all times. Herat is connected with Maimenah, the nearest town of Turkistan, by difficult mountain roads barely passable for wheels, and affording little but fuel; while Turkistan communicates with Kabul by a high road, of which the main fault is that it crosses two lofty passes, which are closed with snow for some four months every year.

5. The next points to be mentioned are the towns and fortresses. To begin with *Kabul*, the capital. This is an open town of 75,000 inhabitants, with a walled citadel and an entrenched camp (Sherpur) outside it.

Defensive works were erected during our occupation on the heights around ; but to what extent it could be made defensible against a regular army, I am not aware. Probably, with time and a numerous garrison of good troops, it could not be invested by any army that could be brought against it. *Ghazni*, 90 miles from Kabul on the Kandahar road, is a small town fortified after the mediæval or Oriental fashion ; but its walls are in ruins, and it is commanded by heights in the vicinity. *Kelat-i-Ghilzai* is a fort in a strong natural position, irreducible, if properly defended, without a regular siege. It has no strategical importance, except as forming an outpost to *Kandahar*. This last is simply a rectangular walled enclosure untenable against a regular army. Its strategical position is most important, as it stands on a strip of cultivated country not more than 15 miles wide between the mountains on the north and the desert on the south. Through this strip an army marching south of the Paropamisus from Herat towards India must of necessity pass. The three western roads—from Sistan, from Herat direct, and from Herat through Farah—meet here, and beyond diverge into the three roads to Kabul, to India direct *viâ* Márúf, and to India *viâ* Pishin. Turning westward to the Herat province, we find not a single town on the road till we reach *Farah*, 250 miles from Kandahar,—*Girishk* on the Helmand being an insignificant little fort, not even commanding the passage of the river, which, it may here be remarked, by no means constitutes the formidable obstacle it has been supposed to be by some writers. When the Helmand is fordable at all, as it is as a rule for many months in the year, it is fordable in many places besides *Girishk*, which is mainly notable as the site of the permanent ferry during the winter and spring months. *Farah* was once a city of importance, but is now only the centre of an agricultural district. Its fortifications, which resemble those of Herat, give it a certain importance. *Lash* is a fort of considerable natural strength, 50 miles to the south-west of Farah and close to the Persian frontier. *Sabzawar*\* is a small town, I believe open, half way between *Farah* and *Herat*. To that famous place I now come ; and if it does not deserve the reputation of well-nigh impregnable strength occasionally given it, its defences are too formidable to expose it, if defended at all, to capture by the *coup-de-main* so often prophesied for it.

6. In 1863, the year in which it was added to the Kabul monarchy, Herat was a city of 30 to 40,000 inhabitants. It is nearly square in outline, and covers about a square mile. Its fortifications consist of an enormous mound of earth, excavated from the ground immediately beyond the ditch for a small depth to a considerable distance. On the top of this mound is a castellated rampart of the ordinary Asiatic type, and outside it are three parallel trenches or covered ways. Thus without flanking defences a quadruple line of fire is brought to bear on the exterior. This system of fortification seems peculiar to the locality. It is repeated at Farah, and the Turkomans at Merv commenced a similar huge mound-like rampart to resist the Russians. Students of obsolete systems of fortification may remember a scheme propounded some thirty years ago by Mr. Ferguson, the celebrated writer on architecture, which was similar in principle to the fortifications of Herat.

Against an unscientific enemy, and held by a people in arms, the defence of Herat was always good, and on one memorable occasion successful ; but its ramparts would not enable a garrison of a few thousand to hold the place for

\* There is a fortress here ; square in plan ; side 200 to 250 yards. It is a place of no strength, and might be taken by a *coup-de-main* with little loss.—*I. B. C.*

a week against an army of not very superior numbers if provided with a modern siege train. The recent military history of Herat is as follows. In 1837-38 it was besieged by a Persian army under Muhamad Shah. The siege began in November, and was raised ten months later by English intervention, when the defenders were on the point of being starved into surrender. Only at one period, and that for a short time, the siege was pressed with vigour; and Lieutenant Pottinger, to whom much of the merit of the defence is due, gave it as his opinion that its success was more owing to bad generalship on the part of the besiegers than to any strength in the fortifications or heroism in the besieged.

In 1856 Herat was taken after a short siege by a Persian army. In 1863 it was again taken, starved into surrender after a long blockade, by Dost Muhamad Khan, the Amir of Kabul. It is worthy of remark that in these sieges the Afghan population was fighting not only *pro aris et focis*, but was led by local rulers. At present their numbers have been reduced by the oppression and misgovernment of its Kabuli conquerors to one-third what it was in 1863; and if besieged again, it would be held, not by a people in arms, but by a few regiments of Kabul troops, aided by two or three thousand Herati soldiers, more likely to join a foreign enemy than to fight against him with anything like the spirit shown by their fathers in 1838 and 1863.

Herat seems to me as much wanting in strategic importance as it is in natural strength. It bars no road or pass, defends nothing but itself, nor is it particularly well situated to serve as a secondary base for a campaign to the east. Farah, 150 miles nearer Kandahar, is more important in this respect. Herat has advantages of course, but they are those of any fortified centre of a rich district. In the old empire of Persia its place was more important.

With Meshed, or Tûs and Merv, it completed a triangle of great cities, which defended the only gap in the mountain barrier between Iran and Turan. As long as the three remained in the same hands, the Turkish and Mongol hordes of the north were held in check till headed by a Timour or a Genghis. With the disruption of the Persian empire, Herat and Meshed fell into different hands. Neither being able to hold Merv without the other, it became the prey of the Turkoman, who used it as a base from which to devastate the country lying in the triangle between the three cities. Thus the relative importance of Herat disappeared, and it has now only its own intrinsic merits to go upon.

How it came to be called the key of India is inexplicable on military grounds. If rendered impregnable and held by a strong garrison, its line of communications with India is always liable to be cut by direct attack from Persian territory on Farah. To defend Afghanistan, putting India out of the question, the whole line Herat-Farah must be held. The latter once taken, the capture of Herat would be a mere question of time.

7. The remaining province of the Amir's dominions,—Afghan Turkistan,—consists of a belt of fertile country, interspersed with desert, between the Hindu Kush mountains and the river Oxus, and contains several towns, of which *Balkh* is the chief. To the west between Balkh and Herat are *Maimenah*, *Andkhui*, *Sar-i-pul*, *Akcha*, and *Shibarghan*; to the east lie *Tashkurghan*, *Kunduz*, and *Foizabad*. Of these, the last is the capital of the mountain province of Badakhshan, which is inaccessible to modern armies.

Balkh was once one of the principal places in Asia, as is shown by its Arabic title—"Om-al-Balada," Mother of Cities. The old town is now nearly



deserted in favour of Mazar-i-Sharif, a day's journey distant to the east. Our knowledge of this place is very limited. It is the residence of the Governor of Afghan Turkistan, but does not appear to be fortified. Tashkurghan is a small walled town on the main road to Kabul. Maimenah, Sar-i-pul, Shibarghan, and Andkhui form a quadrilateral of fortresses, which have a considerable reputation for strength in the country, but, with the possible exception of Sar-i-pul, do not appear to deserve it. That Maimenah has generally been able to set the rulers of Herat and Balkh at defiance is due more to the courage of its people than the natural advantages of its position.

8. The extent to which a country is able to support armies is a factor in strategy of the highest importance, though too often neglected. We are often told that Russia will hurl a hundred thousand men here, pour fifty thousand men there, and mass an equal number somewhere else, without the slightest intimation of how they are to be fed when they get there or on the road. It is evident that neither side in a campaign can bring into the field more men and horses than it can feed; and the limit is very soon reached in Central Asia. Granted that Russia has unlimited numbers of men at her disposal, it is clear that they are useless to her, except as reserves, in a theatre of war where they cannot be supported. It is also evident that an army dependent on pack animals for its food and theirs can only move a certain distance from its base. Camels are from this point of view the most valuable of beasts of burden, being able to find food where any other animal would starve. But even camels cannot go on for long without regular feeding, as we found to our cost in the earlier part of the last Afghan war, when thousands of Indian camels perished from insufficient and improper food. It is impossible to lay down exact rules showing how far from its base a European army in Afghanistan is forced to rely upon the resources of the country for its food. But the experience of the last war throws sufficient light on the subject to enable us to estimate the conditions of another campaign on the same or a similar field. At Kandahar our army in 1879 was 400 miles from its base at Sukkur, a distance afterwards shortened by the Sibi railway to 250 miles. Yet throughout the whole period of our occupation,—from the beginning of January 1879 to the end of April 1881,—it was never found practicable to bring foodgrain to Kandahar in any appreciable quantity. Men and beasts were alike dependent on the resources of the country, which never failed, though towards the end they were severely strained. During the last twelve months I calculate that on the average 25,000 men, including camp-followers, and 10,000 animals, excluding camels, were thus fed in the Kandahar district, supplies being drawn from the country within a radius of 100 miles. It does not follow anywhere that, because 30,000 men can be fed for twelve months, 60,000 can be fed for six. This is particularly the case in Afghanistan and similar countries where food centres are separated by wide stretches of desert and difficult mountain passes.

In Kandahar we rarely had more than a few days' reserve of grain in hand, and were occasionally obliged to send out columns to a distance to procure food for themselves on the spot, and lessen the pressure at headquarters.

From my experience in Southern Afghanistan, I am inclined to think that it would not be safe to calculate on feeding more than 30,000 troops and camp-followers continuously in and about Kandahar; nor do I think that more than 40,000 could be fed for a limited period, say a couple of months. Of the resources of Kabul and Herat, I can only judge by their revenue as compared

to that of Kandahar. The latter province pays about 15 lakhs of rupees a year, Kabul 40, and Herat 10. Kandahar however, being the home of the Duranis, is more lightly assessed than Kabul and Herat; and perhaps the relative capacity of feeding troops may be taken in the case of Kabul to be double that of Kandahar, and that of Herat at one-half. This does not include Farah and Afghan Sistan, both large grain-producing districts, whence considerable supplies might be obtained by an army operating to the south of Herat.

In addition to this, an army occupying the Herat valley might, if permitted by the Government of Persia, draw considerable supplies from that country. I cannot find out what the strength of Muhamad Shah's army was in 1838; but it was certainly not less than 30,000 men, with an equal number of camp-followers.

The people round Herat entered the city before the siege after destroying everything that they could not carry with them, and thus the invaders were mainly dependent on their own country for supplies.

[*Note.*—\* Possibly the blue-book may give information on this point, written by Colonel Stoddart or other English officers in the Shah's camp. Nothing is to be found in Kaye's *History*,—the only account of the siege I have been able to find.]

9. There is one point of much importance connected with this part of the subject, and that is the inordinate proportion of camp-followers accompanying an Indian army. A Russian army in Asia consists of fighting men and a comparatively small number of non-combatants in the various departments and of the men in attendance on the beasts of burden. It knows nothing of the swarm of dooly-bearers, grass-cutters, syces, and other servants which encumber an Anglo-Indian army in the field. These amount to at least 70 per cent. of the number of combatants; and if they are indispensable, an English General fighting a Russian in Afghanistan must calculate that in any given district his opponent will be able to feed some 40 or 50 per cent. more fighting men than he can himself.

10. It is a dictum of English writers on war that any wheeled vehicle is preferable to any beast of burden as a means of ordinary transport. Our experience in Afghanistan does not bear this out. The carts sent up in the later part of the war carried one and a half camel-loads only, and were drawn by two bullocks, each of which required more food supplied it than a camel, while each cart absorbed the services of one man, who could have looked after from three to five camels. Probably from the point of view of food, cart carriage is twice as costly in Afghanistan as camel carriage.

11. The resources of supply on the great highways of Afghanistan are very unequal. On the Kabul-Kandahar road they are good. Sir Donald Stewart took an army of 5,000 to 6,000 men, with a large army of camp-followers, from Kandahar to Kabul in the worst season of the year,—*viz.*, the spring. Sir Frederick Roberts brought down 10,000 fighting men with 10,000 baggage animals in August,—the best time of year for marching, the wheat and barley crops being stacked and the maize crops green in the fields.

Ayub Khan twice brought a force of some 8,000 men to Kandahar from Herat, choosing on both occasions the month of July, when the crops were stacked on the ground. A little later, he could not have marched over the same road without searching the villages for grain and fodder. Sir Michael Biddulph's division of about 4,000 fighting men was unable to support itself in the country between the Helmand and Kandahar in January and February.

\* Nearly 40,000 men and 80 guns.—*I. B. C.*

In July 1880 I fed General Burrows's force of 2,750 fighting men, 1,200 horses, and some 2,600 followers without difficulty for nearly a month in the same country; but I could not have fed a much larger number, though I could have fed that force for some little time longer. I do not think that it would be practicable to move a force along the Kandahar-Herat road in columns stronger than 5,000 each, though probably two might move on parallel lines between the Helmand and Farah.

The road from Kabul to Balkh is probably well supplied for all but two or three marches about the middle; that from Herat to Maimenah has little but forage.

12. Our experience, and I believe that of the Russians, shows that for campaigning in Central Asia about one beast of burden per fighting man is required, in addition to any that may be permanently employed on the line of communications. Taking this fact into consideration, in addition to those adduced as to the food resources and roads of the country, it may, in my opinion, be assumed that an army corps of 25,000 men is the maximum that can profitably be employed in any one province of Afghanistan; and I am not at all sure that 15,000 would not be nearer the mark. To try and bring larger numbers into the field would only force the troops to scatter in order to live, and prevent the formation of the depots of supplies, which are essential to combined strategical movements. Going a step lower, I consider that a division of 5,000 men is the maximum that can be kept in the diameter of a day's march anywhere, except in the immediate vicinity of large towns; while many parts of the country could not support more than half that number.

13. One more point remains for consideration in this part of the subject,—the employment of native levies on either side. Stress has been laid by many writers on the formidable hordes of Turkomans which the Russians are to raise and arm and pour through Afghanistan into India; while others point out to the English Government that there are crowds of men in Afghanistan who only want arms and British officers to make them valuable allies.

As regards the levy of Turkomans, no doubt they would be very glad to be employed by the Russians; but, in the first place, it would be a dangerous experiment. In case of defeat, they would be the first to turn against their employers in the hope of recovering their independence. In the second, the Turkoman, let loose upon Afghanistan in any numbers, would naturally follow his hereditary instincts, and plunder, burn, and destroy. By so doing he would excite a popular feeling against his employers, which does not at present exist in the Herat and Turkistan provinces. This would give the war that character which the Russians wish to avoid. Their idea has always been national to enter Afghanistan in the character of liberators and allies against us (or, as matters have turned out, it would now be against our nominee the Amir). To let loose on the country a swarm of hereditary plunderers like the Turkomans would be fatal to the success of this plan. It could do no harm to us, as we can play the same game against them. The result, however, would be that the country would be harried between us, and that the regular troops, by whom alone decisive results can be obtained, would be unable to move in the country for want of supplies. The same argument applies to levies on our own side. They would be useless as regards fighting the Russians,—would give us a bad name in every district but their own, and would eat the food of real soldiers, of whom we can put quite as many as we can feed into the country. I should be sorry to see a rupee of our money spent on the entertainment of native levies, except as *khasadars* on lines of communication.

14. I now come to the general strategy of the country. As before mentioned, each of the three great divisions of Afghanistan seems to belong naturally to the power behind it,—Herat-Farah to Persia, Afghan Turkistan to Turkistan proper, and Kabul-Kandahar to India. In the first and third cases it forms a bulwark as well. The Kabul-Kandahar line affords a perfect defence to India, its centre and right flank being shielded by a curtain of impassable mountains, and its left flank by equally difficult deserts.

The Farah-Herat line, with the addition of Merv, would form a line of defence to Persia not very much inferior; but Merv having passed into Russian hands, the value of Herat and Farah to her is now political rather than military. The possession of Afghan Turkistan would give Russia no particular military strength, as long as she did not gain the passes of the Hindu Kush, but would complete her possession of the Oxus valley, of which she already holds the northern and larger half.

Again, none of the three powers has any interest *from a defensive point of view* in going outside the line in its own immediate front. The favourite panacea against Russian invasion is the military occupation of Herat by England. The position would obviously be a false one.

We should be presenting to attack a single point connected with our own country by a single line of communication, of which the last 150 miles (from Farah to Herat) lies close to a hostile frontier; while Russia would be able to concentrate on it from the three separate bases of Turkistan, Merv, and Meshed. The defence of Sebastopol under somewhat similar circumstances cost Russia more than half a dozen campaigns in the field; and for us to attempt to fortify and hold Herat as a permanency would be to create for ourselves another Sebastopol.

To advise that Balkh should be held as an outwork for the defence of Kabul does not seem to have occurred to anyone; but any reason given for occupying Herat would be equally applicable to Balkh.

Nor would Herat be of any extraordinary value to Russia as a step towards India. It would represent no particular obstacle overcome, unless England chose to go and hold it, but merely so many miles on the road. Its greatest value would be to protect the line of rail Russia will probably complete between the Caspian and the Oxus; but there would seem to be no particular object in taking special means for protecting what there is nobody to attack.

If Russia, occupying Herat, advances on Kandahar, we shall be in a position to meet her at a convenient distance from our own base, and with the advantage in the way of supplies.

15. Turning from general and hypothetical considerations to the state of affairs actually existing, the first point to be noticed is that we have two bases,—Peshawar and Sibi,—connected by a line of rail. We have, therefore, ready means of throwing our reserves on either line. Russia, on the contrary, has her two bases separated by a desert practically impassable for military purposes, and has all her reserves on the one, the Caspian base. Both sides have roads of lateral communication at a short distance across the frontier,—our side between Kabul and Kandahar, and the Russian side between Balkh or Andkhui and Maimenah. This gives a great advantage to the country that enters Afghanistan as an ally. Were Russia to join Afghanistan in a war against us, as she was nearly doing in 1878, she would at once occupy Maimenah and Balkh from Merv and Samarcand simultaneously, and in all probability seize the passes of the Hindu Kush while we were fighting our way to Kandahar and Kabul, and establishing communication along that line. By the time we had

done this, she would have brought as many troops as she wanted from the Caspian to Balkh and Herat, and could operate on either or both lines as it seemed best to her. Under present circumstances, putting aside the peculiar political position of the Amir, and the uncertain attitude of Kabul, the first step prudence would dictate our taking would be to occupy that city and Kandahar, to perfect the communication between them, and to fortify Bamian and the passes on either side.

If by the time we had occupied the passes the Russians had failed to occupy Balkh, and complete the junction of their two lines of advance, we might then push on and cut off their Samarcand army and drive it back across the Oxus.

It might even be possible to follow it into the Khanates, which would be glad of the opportunity to regain their independence. If the Russians had occupied Afghan Turkistan before we could get there, we should have still the choice of fighting there, leaving only a corps of observation at Kandahar, or of making the Bamian passes secure, and throwing our main body on the Herat line.

Political considerations would, however, probably oblige us, except in extreme circumstances, to confine our attention, as far as forward operations are concerned, to the Kandahar line.

16. As soon as war is declared, the Russian General, or whoever directs the plan of operations, will have two lines of action to choose between, provided, as seems to me probable, he has not enough men and carriage to operate on both. The first, the most obvious, and that which is generally taken for granted he would adopt, would be to throw all his weight against Herat so as to take it before an English army could come to its assistance.

Success in this would be mainly a question of time; and to calculate this I have now no data. Everything would depend on the amount of carriage the Russians can procure at Kizil-Arvat and Sarakhs, and what we could collect at Sibi and Pishin.

We have a 20 or 25 days' longer march; and the newspapers will give a great deal more information about us than we shall get about Russian movements and strength.

Herat might offer a better resistance than is expected; and an army of 15 or 20,000 Russians—more there are not likely to be—besieging Herat would be in an awkward position with a British army of equal strength arriving to its relief. Defeat or retreat would be almost equally disastrous.

It would probably be wiser for the Russian Commander to wait before attacking Herat, to make all arrangements to secure the co-operation of Persia, to threaten Farah, and to obtain all information possible about the movements of the English and the nature of their agreement with the Amir. In the meantime safe and profitable employment for the troops and carriage available would be found in a combined movement against Afghan Turkistan from Merv and Samarcand. Two divisions from the Khanates would probably be available. The first would take up a position in front of Balkh and make a show of crossing the Oxus, while the other would cross at Kilif, or lower down, and possess itself of Andkhui. At the same time, a division from Panjdeh or thereabouts would move on Maimenah. If both attacks were successful, as might reasonably be expected, the two Russian armies would join hands, though Kilif, Andkhui, Maimenah and Merv, and Russian Turkistan would be secured from invasion, while a secure base would be established for the occupation of the rest of Afghan Turkistan. It can hardly be supposed that this would present any great difficulty. The only enemies the Russians would have to

meet would be the Afghan regulars, not very formidable foes. The people, if well treated, would probably welcome the invaders.

It is indeed possible that the whole of Afghan Turkistan may be occupied without a struggle. Its Governor Muhamad Izhak Khan is an ambitious man, and not on very friendly terms with the Amir, of whom he is almost independent. It would be in accordance with the traditions of Afghan history to find him welcoming the Russians as allies against his cousin Abdurrahman Khan, the friend of the English,—allies who would support him in gaining the throne of Afghanistan, and whom he would assist in invading India.

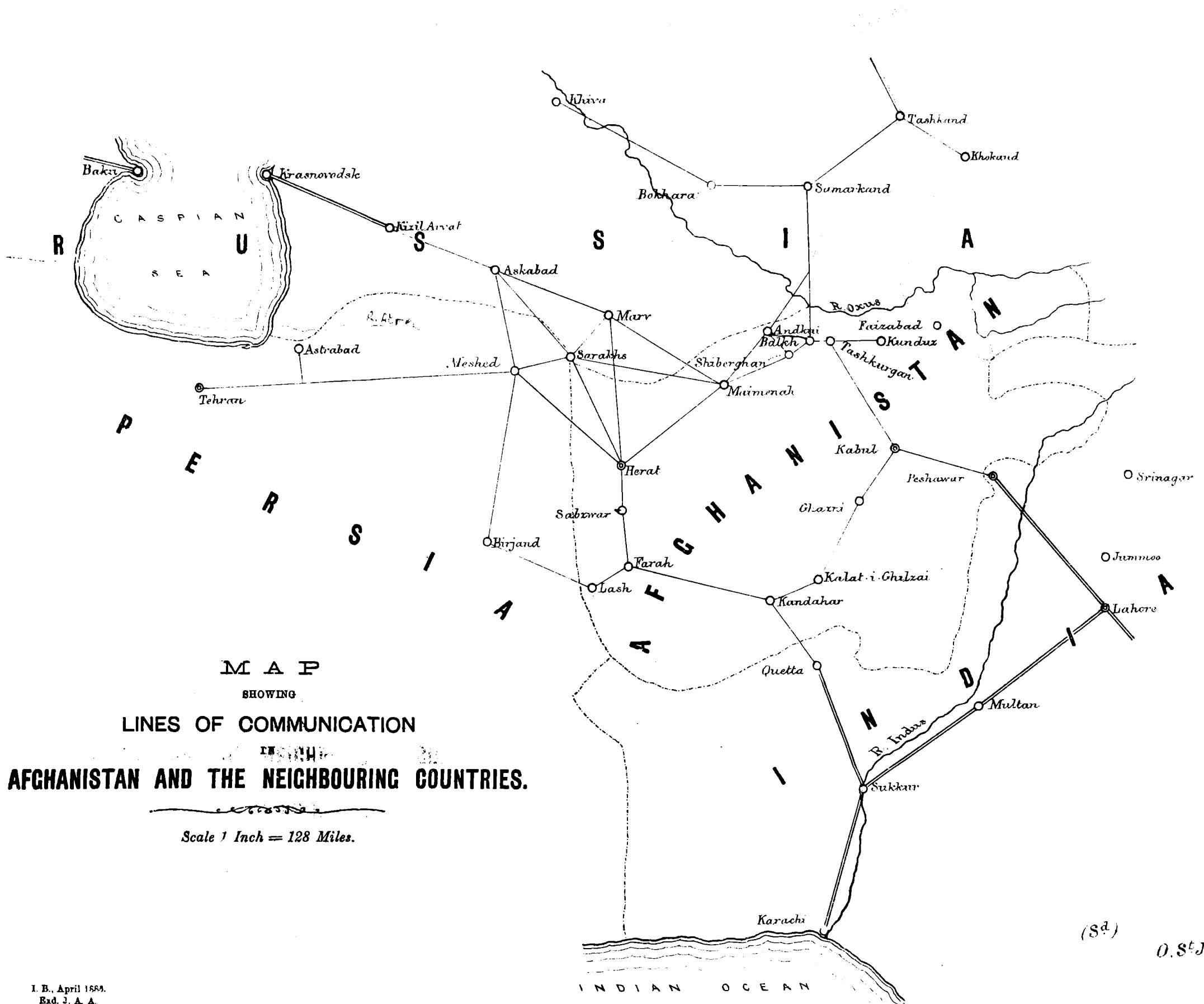
If the invasion and occupation of Afghan Turkistan were the first objective of the Russians, no question of the neutrality or alliance of Persia would be necessarily involved.

Without her active aid, or at least benevolent neutrality, a formal siege of Herat would be difficult, if not impossible.

17. After the preliminary operations of the war, the future action of Russia would mainly depend on the extent to which we may be willing to assist the Amir, or to which he may consent to invite our assistance. Left to his own resources, three months or less from the actual commencement of hostilities he will, in all probability, have lost everything beyond the Hindu Kush in the north and the Khash river in the south; and unless the Russians commit the error of attempting operations against Kabul or Kandahar, it is difficult to see how any decisive result can be obtained in Afghanistan. The fate of Afghan Turkistan and Herat must depend on the fortunes of the war in other parts of the world. There is something to be said in favour of sending British troops at once to resist an invasion of Afghan Turkistan or Herat. Nothing under the present aspect of affairs could justify an attempt to turn the Russians out of those provinces by direct attack when once they have conquered and occupied them. If the Russians attempt an advance on Kabul or Kandahar, we could not hope to have better battle-fields than the country between Kabul and Bamian or that west of Kandahar.

18. Finally, whether the present situation culminate in war or not, and whatever the result of that war, short of the expulsion of Russia from her Trans-Caspian province, it may be taken for granted that she will connect the Caspian and the Oxus by rail as soon as possible and continue the Kizil Arvat line to Sarakhs and Merv. When this is once done, no efforts of ours from India can prevent her occupying Afghan Turkistan and the Herat province. If she once does so *permanently*, India will not be perfectly safe till Kabul and Kandahar are held by British troops and connected with each other and with India by rail.

O. B. C. ST. JOHN, *Colonel.*



**MAP**  
 SHOWING  
**LINES OF COMMUNICATION**  
**IN AFGHANISTAN AND THE NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES.**

Scale 1 Inch = 128 Miles.

I. B., April 1884.  
 Ed. J. A. A.

(Sd)  
 O. St. John, Colonel  
 R.E.