



Hamlet in Kashgar: British Diplomacy and the 1920 Afghan Attempt to Establish Relations with the Republic of China¹

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ABSTRACT

The paper analyses the position of the British institutions, of the embassy in Peking and of the consulate general in Kashgar, before the attempt of the Afghan ruler Amānallāh to establish diplomatic relations with the Chinese Republic in 1920. Amānallāh, who ascended the throne of the emirate in 1919, rejected the British protectorate over Afghanistan and his victory in the Third Anglo-Afghan War certified the country's full independence. The provisional nature of the 1919 Treaty of Rawalpindi, followed by the Anglo-Afghan Treaty of 1921, left many doubts still open about the international status of Afghanistan. Moreover, the proximity between Afghanistan and the Russian Bolsheviks introduced a further ideological element of difficulty in the geopolitical picture of Central Asia after the First World War. Central to the diplomatic dialectic was also the status of Afghan subjects in China, particularly in Hsin-chiang, and to whom their possible consular protection should be entrusted. The last part of the paper is dedicated precisely to the analysis of a specific case, the arrest of a man considered an Afghan by the Chinese, but subject of the princely state of Chitral according to the British. The case helped to better define the boundaries of the matter. The paper is essentially based on British archival sources.

KEYWORDS

Afghanistan; United Kingdom; China; Hsin-chiang; Amānallāh; Russia; Bolsheviks; Great Game

INTRODUCTION

With the Third Anglo-Afghan War of 1919, Afghanistan regained its full independence also in foreign affairs, freeing itself from British *suzeraineté*. One of the first ac-

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tions of the young monarch Amānallāh³ (*regnabat* 1919–1929) was precisely aimed at establishing diplomatic relations with other countries through a series of missions and international agreements. This paper will focus on the analysis of the British position with regard to the Afghan attempt to establish, *inter alia*, diplomatic relations with the Republic of China.

The status of Afghanistan still had to be definitively clarified by the 1921 treaty, while the 1919 Treaty of Rawalpindi did not give full clarity on the situation in the country. Finally, a concrete case will be briefly analysed, namely the arrest and deportation of a subject of the princely state of Chitral, considered by Hsin-chiang authorities to be an Afghan subject. Despite the divergence between the British and Chinese on the real nationality of the man, the case served to clear up the diplomatic issue.

THE TREATY OF RAWALPINDI

The political history of relations between Afghanistan and Britain between the first half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century is marked by three wars and a series of agreements that cross, determine and surpass the temporal space of the Great Game. The First Anglo-Afghan War was fought between 1839 and 1842, parallel to the First Opium War with the Ch'ing Empire which led to the Treaty of Nanking, with the British conquest of Hong Kong and the opening of five Chinese ports to British trade without the need for intermediaries. On the Central Asian front, however, the defeat of Her Majesty's troops was heavy.⁴ A new conflict with Kabul was fought between 1878 and 1880.⁵ With the Second Anglo-Afghan War, the British managed to establish their own protectorate over the country,⁶ moving

3 In this paper the Wade-Giles phonetic transcription system was adopted for the Chinese language in order to ensure consistency with the names transcribed in the documents. For the Afghan names, I have followed the transliteration scheme of the *Encyclopædia Iranica*. The names of the cities of Kashgar (Uyghur Latin Yëziqi: *Qeshqer*) and Yarkand (Uyghur Latin Yëziqi: *Yeken*, also known in Chinese as Sha-ch'e 莎車) follow the common forms in English and in the documents of the time. For the toponyms of British India, the English form of the time was adopted. As for the names of persons, for whom it was not possible to trace the original form in the Arabic-Persian alphabet, it was preferred to leave them according to the phonetic transcriptions present in the archival documents. The name of the Tibetan capital Lha-sa follows the Wylie system of transliteration.

4 On the First Anglo-Afghan War, see: A. FORBES, *The Afghan Wars: 1839–42 and 1878–80*, London 1892, pp. 1–157.

5 *The Second Afghan War, 1878–1880: Abridged Official Account*, produced in the Intelligence Branch Army Head-Quarters, India, London, 1908.

6 Pierre Louis Napoleon Cavnagari and the Emir of Afghanistan, Moḥammad Ya'qūb, signed the Treaty of Gandamak (Gandomak) on 26 May 1879. The text reads: "III. His Highness the Amir of Afghanistan and its dependencies agrees to conduct his relations with foreign States in accordance with the advice and wishes of the British Government. His Highness the Amir will enter into no engagements with foreign States, and will not take up arms against any foreign State, except with the concurrence of the British Government. On these conditions the British Government will support the Amir against any foreign aggression with money, arms, or troops, to be em-



further north the first line of defence of the British Raj border from a possible Russian invasion. The Great Game ended in 1907 with the Anglo-Russian Convention.⁷ The two European powers delimited their spheres of influence in Persia and recognized the Chinese *suzeraineté* over Tibet, pledging to respect the territorial integrity and not to interfere in the internal administration of the Land of Snows, not to send representatives to Lha-sa and not to request any concession. As for Afghanistan — whose status as British protectorate had been reaffirmed by another agreement with the Emir in 1905⁸ — the 1907 entente reiterated the British influence, which, however, could not be used against the Russians. The latter accepted the role of the British as intermediaries (with the exception of direct relations between the border authorities for local matters), obtaining, however, the same commercial privileges granted by Kabul to the British and the Indians.

The Third Anglo-Afghan War of 1919 sanctioned the full independence of Afghanistan also in the field of international relations: the conflict began a few months after the end of the First World War, in May 1919, with the ascension to the throne of Amānallāh (*regnabat* 1919–1929), which formally proclaimed the independence of

ployed in whatsoever manner the British Government may judge best for this purpose. Should British troops at any time enter Afghanistan for the purpose of repelling foreign aggression, they will return to their stations in British territory as soon as the object for which they entered has been accomplished. IV. With a view to the maintenance of the direct and intimate relations now established between the British Government and His Highness the Amir of Afghanistan and for the better protection of the frontiers of His Highness' dominion, it is agreed that a British Representative shall reside at Kabul, with a suitable escort, in a place of residence appropriate to his rank and dignity. It is also agreed that the British Government shall have the right to depute British Agents with suitable escorts to the Afghan frontiers, whensoever this may be considered necessary by the British Government in the interests of both States, on the occurrence of any important external fact. His Highness the Amir of Afghanistan may on his part depute an Agent to reside at the Court of His Excellency the Viceroy and Governor-General of India, and at such other places in British India as may be similarly agreed upon". The full text (English version) of the treaty is in *British and Foreign State Papers, 1878–1879*, Vol. LXX, compiled by the Librarian and Keeper of the Papers, Foreign Office, London, 1886, pp. 49–52. Cavagnari was the first British Representative in Kabul, but was killed a few weeks after taking up his post during an attack against the British legation. The attack reopened the hostilities that continued until 1880 with the exile of Moḥammad Ya' qūb and the ascent to the throne of 'Abd-al-Raḥmān (*regnabat* 1880–1901). On the Second Anglo-Afghan War, see also: H. HENSMAN, *The Afghan War of 1879–80*, London 1881; FORBES, pp. 159–327. On Cavagnari, see: K. P. DEY, *The Life and Career of Major Sir Louis Cavagnari, C.S.I., British Envoy at Cabul, Together with a Brief Outline of the Second Afghan War*, Calcutta 1881. For a political history of Afghanistan in the second half of the nineteenth century, see: M. H. KAKAR, *A Political and Diplomatic History of Afghanistan, 1863–1901*, Leiden 2006.

7 The National Archives, London-Kew (further only TNA), Foreign Office (further only FO) 535/10, Enclosure 1 in No. 49, Convention, 18 (31) August 1907, pp. 31–35.

8 British Library, London (further only BL), Mss Eur F131/5, *Treaty between the British Government and the Amir of Afghanistan, Dated 21 March 1905, with papers relating thereto*, London, 1905, Parliamentary Paper Cd 2534, No. 8, Translation of Treaty signed at Kabul on the 21st March, 1905, p. 9.

Kabul not only in internal administration, but also in foreign policy.⁹ The conflict ended after a few weeks with a peace treaty signed in Rawalpindi on 8 August 1919.¹⁰ The English delegation was led by Sir Hamilton Grant.¹¹ The Treaty of Rawalpindi did not formulate a permanent decision on the question of the Afghan sovereignty in foreign policy, but merely stated in Article 4 that “*the British Government is desirous of the re-establishment of the old friendship that has so long existed between Afghanistan and Great Britain provided they have guarantees that the Afghan Government are on their part sincerely anxious to regain the friendship of the British Government. The British Government are prepared therefore, provided the Afghan Government prove this by their acts and conduct, to receive another Afghan mission after 6 months for the discussion and amicable settlement of matters of common interest to the two Governments and the re-establishment of the old friendship on a satisfactory basis.*” With Article 5, “[t]he Afghan Government accept the Indo-Afghan frontier accepted by the late Amir. They further agree to the early demarcation by a British commission of the undemarcated portion of the line to the west of the Khyber where the recent Afghan aggression took place and to accept such boundary as the British commission may lay down. The British troops on this side will remain in their present positions until such demarcation has been effected.” A letter written by Grant was however given to the Afghan delegate to assure him of the newfound full autonomy: “*By the said Treaty and this letter, therefore, Afghanistan is left officially free and independent in its affairs, both internal and external. Furthermore, all previous treaties have been cancelled by this war.*”¹²

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- 9 BL, IOR/L/MIL/17/14/61, East India (Afghanistan). Papers regarding hostilities with Afghanistan 1919. Parliamentary Papers (HoC) 1919, XXXVIII, Cd 324, Proclamation by Amir Amanulla Khan (undated), No. 2, Translation, pp. 4–5. On the third Anglo-Afghan War: BL, IOR/R/12/LIB/106, *The Third Afghan War 1919. Official account: Compiled in the General Staff Branch, Army Headquarters India*, Calcutta: Government of India, 1926; P. SYKES, *A History of Afghanistan*, Vol. II, London 1940, pp. 270–282; G. N. MOLESWORTH, *Afghanistan 1919: An Account of Operations in the Third Afghan War*, Bombay 1962. On Afghanistan during Amānallāh see L. POULLADA, *Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan, 1919–1929: King Amanullah’s Failure to Modernize a Tribal Society*, Ithaca 1973.
- 10 BL, IOR/L/MIL/17/14/61, East India (Afghanistan). Papers regarding hostilities with Afghanistan 1919. Parliamentary Papers (HoC) 1919, XXXVIII, Cd 324, From the Viceroy to the Secretary of State for India, 9 August 1919, No. 66, pp. 35–36.
- 11 BL, IOR/L/MIL/17/14/61, East India (Afghanistan). Papers regarding hostilities with Afghanistan 1919. Parliamentary Papers (HoC) 1919, XXXVIII, Cd 324, From the Viceroy to the Secretary of State for India, 22 June 1919, No. 56, p. 31.
- 12 “*You asked me for some further assurance that the Treaty of Peace now offered by the British Government contains nothing that interferes with the complete liberty of Afghanistan in external or internal matters. My friend, if you will read the Treaty of Peace with care you will see that there is in it no such interference with the liberty of Afghanistan. You have informed me that the Government of Afghanistan is unwilling to renew the arrangement under which the late Amir, Habibulla Khan, agreed to follow the advice of the Government of Great Britain in matters affecting the external relations of Afghanistan, without reserve. I have therefore refrained from pressing this matter of which the Treaty of Peace contains no mention. By the said Treaty and this letter, therefore, Afghanistan is left officially free and independent in its affairs, both internal and external. Furthermore, all previous treaties have been cancelled by this war.*” BL, IOR/L/MIL/17/14/61, East India (Afghanistan). Papers regarding hostilities with Afghanistan 1919. Parliamentary Pa-



The difficulty over the position to assume for British diplomacy in China — and that will be analysed in the next pages — laid in fact in the ambiguity of the situation of Afghanistan between 1919 and 1921. The deliberate ambiguity and temporariness of the 1919 treaty left the British hoping for a rapid return as protagonists on the scene of Afghan foreign policy. In the words of Lord Chelmsford, Viceroy of India, in the aftermath of the Treaty of Rawalpindi: *“We regard result of peace negotiations as highly satisfactory. With a few modifications, none of which is essential, Afghan delegates have accepted our draft Treaty in full. [...] While we realise that we have embarked on the nature of an experiment, we ourselves believe that in the end it may well prove more satisfactory and successful than the old arrangement. Much will depend on the way Afghan Government is handled. They are very sensitive of the outward shadows of their liberties, but we feel confident that, if due allowance is made for this, there is every chance that they will eventually seek our advice of their own accord in essential matters.”*¹³

THE 1920 AFGHAN MISSION AND THE AFGHAN SUBJECTS IN CHINA

In March 1920, Miles Lampson — at the time British chargé d'affaires in Peking¹⁴ — asked for information from the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs about the news of an Afghan delegate sent *“to Peking to negotiate on the subject of commercial relations”*.¹⁵ The Chinese minister denied the news of a mission to the capital, but specified that *“an Afghan King’s letter addressed to President had been handed to Governor of Hsinchiang and should reach Peking in about a month from now”*.¹⁶ In this regard, the diplomat asked

pers (HoC) 1919, XXXVIII, Cd 324, From the Viceroy to the Secretary of State for India, 9 August 1919, No. 67, p. 36.

13 BL, IOR/L/PS/10/819, File 1953/1919, Part I, Viceroy to Secretary of State for India, 9 August 1919, no. 852, f. 173, p. 59. The Treaty of Rawalpindi, however, was followed by the Anglo-Afghan Treaty of 1921. This document formally reaffirmed in Article 1 the control of Kabul of its foreign policy, but at the same time the Afghans recognized the border with the Raj along the Durand Line, that had been defined in 1893 by another agreement signed by Emir ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān and Sir Henry Mortimer Durand. English text of the 1921 Treaty: *Treaty between British and Afghan Governments. Signed at Kabul, November 22, 1921*, Cmd. 1786, London 1922.

14 TNA, FO 371/5323, Foreign Office to India Office, 3 April 1920, f. 175.

15 TNA, FO 371/5323, Mr. Lampson to Foreign Office, 10 March 1920, f. 160. Actually, as early as 1919, the Afghans had already tried to open their own consulate in Kashgar. Four Afghans, including the interpreter of the mission in Taškent, Abdul Ghani, — who had also worked with the illustrious Swedish explorer Sven Hedin — had gone to Irkeštam, on the Russian-Chinese border, to negotiate the issue, but they had been rejected by the Tao-yin of Kashgar. According to Percy T. Etherton, British Consul-General in Kashgar, an Afghan diplomatic representation in Hsin-chiang *“would simply resolve itself into a Bolshevik centre and a dangerous intrigue against us”*. TNA, FO 371/3698, Major P. T. Etherton to Foreign Secretary, 1 October 1919 (British Consulate-General, Kashgar Diary for September 1919), f. 356, p. 3.

16 TNA, FO 371/5323, Mr. Lampson to Foreign Office, 10 March 1920, f. 160.

“any special instructions” to the Foreign Office.¹⁷ The Afghan mission was led by Mahendra Pratap.¹⁸

A problem that could involve the British diplomatic authorities was the position to be taken in case of request for protection by Afghan subjects. According to the India Office, “His Majesty’s Government have foregone right to control Afghan foreign relations and therefore logically His Majesty’s Representatives abroad are no longer obliged to assist Afghan subjects.”¹⁹ As said, the provisional nature of the Treaty of Rawalpindi, however, did not definitively clarify the issue, but for the India Office “Afghan attempts to obtain direct representation abroad should be in no way encouraged”.²⁰

The contradiction of the Chinese position, however, was highlighted in the refusal of the Chinese authorities “to admit Afghan Consul, Kashgar, and at same time refuse to recognise any longer our right to protect Afghan subjects”.²¹ This position had already been explicitly defined by the President of the Chinese Republic at the end of April 1919.²² Percy T. Etherton, British Consul-General in the Chinese Turkestan, was instead in favour of continuing the consular protection of the Afghan subjects.²³ Even the Viceroy of India, Lord Chelmsford, recognized the need for British extension of protection not only because of the Chinese refusal, but also “in face of evidence of desire of Afghan Government that their subjects should no longer be dependent on our Consular protection”.²⁴ The idea of Viceroy was therefore a “withdrawal of our Consular aid and protection from Afghans in Chinese Turkestan”.²⁵ Furthermore, if the Afghan government had failed to open its consulate in Kashgar “it would be powerful lever in our hands if Afghan Government were forced to apply to us for aid”.²⁶

From the Chinese point of view, in fact, the issue concerned the lack of clarity on the new international status of Afghanistan.²⁷ The letter that Amānallāh had sent first to the Governor of Hsin-chiang and then to Peking explained to the Chinese the newfound autonomy in foreign policy, inviting them to send a representative to the country.²⁸ In this regard, the Chinese minister asked Lampson for clarifications, but

17 Ibidem.

18 M. PRATAP (Raja), *My Life Story Of Fiftyfive Years (December 1886 to December 1941)*, Delhi 1941, pp. 61–65.

19 TNA, FO 371/5323, India Office to Viceroy, 8 March 1920, f. 163.

20 Ibidem.

21 TNA, FO 371/5323, From Viceroy to India Office, 9 March 1920, f. 171.

22 TNA, FO 371/5318, Major P. T. Etherton to Foreign Secretary, 1 December 1919 (British Consulate-General, Kashgar, Diary for November 1919), f. 72, p. 1.

23 “Consul-General, Kashgar, wishes Chinese Government to be pressed to recognise this right”, TNA, FO 371/5323, From Viceroy to India Office, 9 March 1920, f. 171.

24 Ibidem.

25 Ibidem.

26 Ibidem.

27 TNA, FO 371/5323, Mr. Lampson to Foreign Office, 30 March 1920, f. 173.

28 Ibidem. As reported by the British Consul-General in Kashgar, there was also an explicit “request to Chinese not to allow British any jurisdiction, in the case of Afghan subject”. TNA, FO 371/5323, Mr. Lampson to Foreign Office, 22 March 1920, f. 168. Furthermore, according to Etherton “Chinese reply will probably be non-committal; they are undoubtedly apprehensive of Afghan and Bolshevik aggression”. Ibidem.



the latter avoided a definite answer, with the excuse of not having a copy of the treaty and to wait in any case for the prospected changes to the document.²⁹

Even according to Secretary of State for India Edwin Montagu, as well as for the Viceroy of India, the British Consul-General in Kashgar was not supposed to continue to formally protect the Afghan subjects.³⁰ For Montagu, however, Etherton did not have to formally renounce to the “*right to protect Afghans*”, but he had to play his role on the basis of the positions of the Chinese authorities of Hsin-chiang.³¹ The same position was also shared by George Curzon,³² at the time Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

On 10 April 1920, a few days after the matters dealt with up to now, Lampson sent a (“*very urgent*”) telegram to the Foreign Office: “*I have received very mutilated telegram from His Majesty’s Consul General at Kashgar to the effect that question is arising in acute form and that Chinese local authorities challenge our right now to protect Afghan(?) and) have in one case arrested and imprisoned an Afghan holding British registration certificate.*”³³ The British Consul-General in Kashgar “*enquires whether he is authorized to demand surrender of imprisoned man and to continue protection generally*”.³⁴ Lampson realized that it would be quite embarrassing for British diplomacy not to take a clear position on that occasion with regard to the issue of protection of Afghan subjects.³⁵

On the one hand there was the position of the Afghan government, opposed to leaving the protection of their subjects in the hands of Britain.³⁶ It was indeed vital, for the nascent Afghan diplomacy, to define its own role without constraints. Having to negotiate a new treaty with the British shortly, the position of Kabul has to be seen as an attempt to anticipate its terms in the international relations space, in order to fix, on a political ground, what was formally guaranteed by the Grant’s letter to the Afghan delegate in Rawalpindi. Indeed, if the Afghans had kept relying on British diplomacy, this could have undermined the recent external autonomy of the Central Asian emirate. At the same time, if the British had continued to represent Afghan interests abroad, this situation would have reported back to the period before the accession to the throne of Amānallāh and the Third Anglo-Afghan War and conditioned the new negotiations. A first response to Lampson came from the Viceroy of India, reaffirming the position that the Consul-General in Kashgar had to follow: “*He should*

29 “*He asked whether it was the fact that Afghanistan was now in a position to openly direct diplomatic relations with foreign countries? I replied that not being in possession of text of Treaty I was afraid that it was useless to discuss its provisions of which I had not accurate knowledge: but I understood that it was subject to revision in 6 months from its entry into force. This fact appeared to make a marked impression upon him.*” TNA, FO 371/5323, Mr. Lampson to Foreign Office, 30 March 1920, f. 173.

30 TNA, FO 371/5323, Secretary of State for India to Viceroy, 5 April 1920, f. 183.

31 Ibidem.

32 TNA, FO 371/5323, India Office to Foreign Office, 3 April 1920, f. 180A.

33 TNA, FO 371/5323, Mr. Lampson to Foreign Office, 10 April 1920, f. 185.

34 Ibidem.

35 Ibidem.

36 Ibidem.

now definitely be instructed not to press Chinese authorities to recognise his right to afford Consular protection to Afghan subjects in Chinese Turkestan.”³⁷

British diplomacy had to move cautiously. As understood by Lord Chelmsford, a direct British intervention aimed at preventing the establishment of diplomatic relations between Kabul and other countries could have resulted in a stronger Afghan aversion towards their old protectors: “All Amir’s actions since signing of peace treaty point to increasing desire of Afghanistan to pose as fully independent and civilised nation, and we see no probability of her consenting, in course of any negotiations which can at present be anticipated, to restore our control of her foreign relations in any shape. Only prospect of ultimate reversion to former status seems to lie in her being given all the rope she wants. If she then finds herself hopelessly embarrassed she may turn again to us for advice. If on the other hand we now seek by subterranean means to prevent other Powers from entering into direct relations with her she will certainly attribute their refusal to us and only become more suspicious and hostile”.³⁸ Moreover, the Viceroy fully realized the impossibility to intervene anyway on “unfriendly Powers such as Germany” to prevent a formal relationship with the Afghan government, while a similar action on “friendly Powers” would have done nothing but leave a free hand to the others.³⁹ The hope was that the overabundance of foreign delegations in Kabul would not allow the emergence of a new hegemonic power over the emirate capable of undermining the role that geography (“from our geographical position”) had assigned, however, to the Raj and then to Great Britain.⁴⁰ Lord Chelmsford also hoped that such a presence of foreign representatives would contribute to the opening of Afghanistan.⁴¹ It was therefore possible to inform Peking about the new status of Afghanistan and perhaps also to communicate to the Chinese authorities “that the only foreign representative at present in Kabul is that of Bolsheviks”.⁴²

On 24 April, the British ambassador to Peking, Beilby Alston, therefore asked the Foreign Office for authorization “to instruct all Consuls to abandon tacit claim to protect Afghan subjects in China”.⁴³

While recognizing “the force of the arguments” explained by Lord Chelmsford, the Secretary for India, Montagu, was less inclined to a clear British position with other countries on Afghan autonomy: “He [Montagu] feels doubtful whether, at the present time — when a renewal of hostilities is possible and the relations between Great Britain and

37 TNA, FO 371/5323, Viceroy of India to Mr. Lampson, 13 April 1920, f. 191.

38 TNA, FO 371/5323, Viceroy of India to India Office, 17 April 1920, f. 200.

39 Ibidem.

40 “There would be of course be great possibility of embarrassment in presence at Kabul of representatives of other Powers such as Turkey, Russia, Persia, China, Japan, Germany and France, but their intrigues would probably neutralise one another and perplex the Afghans, while we should always exercise predominant influence from our geographical position in the same way as Czarist Russia did at Teheran.” Ibidem.

41 “Moreover, presence of numerous foreign representatives at Kabul which Amir seems to desire can hardly fail in the long run to act as solvent to harsh and fanatical spirit of Afghans to break down their isolation and make them much less unpleasant and dangerous neighbours than they have hitherto been.” Ibidem.

42 Ibidem.

43 TNA, FO 371/5323, Mr. Alston to Foreign Office, 24 April 1920, f. 202.



Afghanistan may again be profoundly altered:- His Majesty's Government would be well-advised to commit themselves to a definite pronouncement as to the international status of Afghanistan vis-a-vis other Powers."⁴⁴ Montagu therefore preferred to leave the issue still in the political and institutional limbo that the Treaty of Rawalpindi had outlined, if not directly with Afghanistan, at least with the other states and instead of a clear indication to the consuls by Alston, "*His Majesty's Minister at Peking should content himself with informing them of the terms of the Treaty of August 1919 and of Sir Hamilton Grant's letter to the Afghan delegate and leave them to draw their own conclusion*".⁴⁵ However, Montagu was not opposed to informing the other consuls about the position to be taken vis-à-vis the Afghan subjects, i.e. continuing to formally maintain the possibility of providing consular protection, but avoiding acting in concrete cases in the face of a Chinese denial.⁴⁶ Furthermore, a similar issue was also involving the Kingdom of Siam, another country where Afghans were trying to establish their own diplomatic representation, although the country was evidently outside Kabul's network of direct interests.⁴⁷

THE ARREST OF MAHOMET SAID

Among the cases that ended up on the Etherton's desk in Kashgar in 1920, one was that of a certain Mahomet Said, "*a British subject from Chitral [...], an escaped criminal*".⁴⁸ Chitral was one of the small princely states of British India, on the border with Afghanistan.⁴⁹ According to the British Embassy in Peking, Mahomet Said had been arrested along with others, "*a mixed party of Afghans and others, probably opium smugglers, who had entered Chinese territory by an unfrequented route*".⁵⁰ After the arrest, Ma-

44 TNA, FO 371/5323, India Office to Foreign Office, 6 May 1920 (No. P3383; Registry number F761/111/10), f. 206.

45 Ibidem.

46 "[...] while not explicitly abandoning in principle the right to protect Afghan subjects, they should in practice refrain from any attempt to exercise the right in opposition to the wishes of the local Chinese authorities." TNA, FO 371/5323, India Office to Foreign Office, 6 May 1920 (No. P2895; Registry number F762/111/10), f. 212.

47 TNA, FO 371/5323, India Office to Foreign Office, 6 May 1920 (No. P2895; Registry number F762/111/10), f. 212; TNA, FO 371/5323, Earl Curzon to Mr. Seymour (Bangkok), 13 May 1920, No. 1, f. 215; TNA, FO 371/5324, Mr. Seymour to Earl Curzon, 18 October 1920, No. 1, f. 17; TNA, FO 371/5324, Government of India to Mr. Seymour, 10 August 1920, Enclosure 1 in No. 1, f. 17; TNA, FO 371/5324, Mr. Seymour to Government of India, 18 October 1920, Enclosure 2 in No. 1, f. 17.

48 TNA, FO 371/5323, Mr. Clive (Peking) to Earl Curzon (Foreign Office), 1 July 1920, f. 217.

49 The territory of the ancient state and of the homonymous city is today in Pakistan. The State of Chitral had accepted the *suzeraineté* of Kashmir in 1878 and then, in 1885, it was visited by the Lokhart Mission (I. D. SCOTT, *Notes on Chitral*, Simla 1937, pp. 3–4). For the report of the Mission: BL, IOR/L/PS/20/B57, *The Gilgit Mission, 1885–86. By Colonel Sir W. S. A. Lockhart and Colonel R. G. Woodthorpe*, London 1889). In 1891, the King of Chitral obtained from the British an annual payment of 12,000 Rs., accepting the English guide for international relations and for the defence of the border (SCOTT, p. 4).

50 TNA, FO 371/5323, Mr. Clive (Peking) to Earl Curzon (Foreign Office), 1 July 1920, f. 217.



homet Said had been (probably) deported from the Chinese territory “as an Afghan”, but the authorities had denied a Sino-British “joint enquiry in regard to his nationality”, notwithstanding the requests by Etherton.⁵¹ The matter had come up to Peking, to the British Embassy and therefore to the Wai-chiao Pu, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China.⁵² In the letter that the Wai-chiao Pu had sent to Beilby Alston, the Chinese assured him that Mahomet Said was of Afghan nationality and consequently “he should be dealt with as a non-treaty national and the Taoyin’s action was perfectly justified”.⁵³ In any case, Alston himself was not particularly interested in the question of defining the nationality of Mahomet Said, as for the fact that, as seen, the Chinese treated Afghans at this point “as ‘non treaty’ nationals”.⁵⁴ Indeed, the case of Mahomet Said had posed the issue openly.

Even for the India Office, while advising to protest with the Chinese government for not conducting an investigation together with the Kashgar consul, “no notice should be taken at present at any rate of Chinese definition of Afgans as non-Treaty individuals. This in fact appears to be correct definition in present circumstances”.⁵⁵ According to Montagu “it would be well to avoid raising the point in any way at the present time”.⁵⁶ The same position was also shared by Lord Chelmsford.⁵⁷

CONCLUSION

A new attempt, more fruitful than the one described in this article, to establish a Sino-Afghan relationship was again carried on by the Afghan Emir always with his envoy, Mahendra Pratap.⁵⁸ At the beginning of 1922 a Chinese mission went to Kabul and an Afghan consul arrived in Yarkand in October 1922.⁵⁹ According to Etherton, “[t]he appointment of this official and the consequent creation of an Afghan Consulate at Yarkand assists the Bolshevik scheme to establish a base for propaganda and intrigue in Turkistan, whence they can plot against India in more favourable circumstances than from their original base at Tashkent”.⁶⁰

The inquiry of the failed Afghan attempt to establish diplomatic relations with the Republic of China — analysed in the perspective of the English diplomacy and institutions — helps to clarify the ambiguity of the position of the Empire with respect

51 Ibidem.

52 TNA, FO 371/5323, ff. 217–218.

53 TNA, FO 371/5323, Wai Chiao Pu to His Majesty’s Minister, Peking, 23 June 1920, f. 221.

54 TNA, FO 371/5323, Mr. Clive (Peking) to Earl Curzon (Foreign Office), 1 July 1920, f. 218.

55 TNA, FO 371/5324, India Office to Viceroy, 21 September 1920, f. 3.

56 TNA, FO 371/5324, India Office to Foreign Office 12 October 1920, f. 5.

57 TNA, FO 371/5324, From Viceroy, Foreign and Political Department to India Office, 4 October 1920, f. 6.

58 P. T. ETHERTON, *In the Heart of Asia*, London, 1925, pp. 217–218.

59 Ibidem, pp. 219–220. According to Etherton: “The appointment of this official and the consequent creation of an Afghan Consulate at Yarkand assists the Bolshevik scheme to establish a base for propaganda and intrigue in Turkistan, whence they can plot against India in more favourable circumstances than from their original base at Tashkent.” Ibidem, p. 220.

60 Ibidem.



to the autonomy of Afghanistan in foreign policy following the Third Anglo-Afghan War. What has been presented in this paper also clarifies the objective difficulty for the British in having to manage a situation that would be clarified only in November 1921, with the signing of a new treaty between London and Kabul with a solemn and clear recognition of full Afghan independence. However, the prospect of the negotiations of the new treaty further influenced the position of the British diplomats and authorities, in as tight a position as they were among the different political and geopolitical purposes, i.e. the arduous balance that had to stem from earning the trust of the Afghans, the need to maintain, moreover, a more than privileged relationship with the Central Asian country and, finally, the attempt to limit and shape also the role of the other powers in their relations with the emirate.