



AUSTRIAN RED CROSS

ACCORD

Austrian Centre for Country of Origin
& Asylum Research and Documentation

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Afghanistan: Khost province (period 1992-1995): 1) Information on the conflict in Khost; 2) Role and duties of the Director-General (Mudir-e-Umoomi) of Logistics of the 25th Brigade (Firq-e-Besht o Panj); 3) Standards of conduct of men under the command of [name removed] (allegedly the commander of Rabbani's forces in Khost)

This response was commissioned by the UNHCR Protection Information Unit. Views expressed in the response are not necessarily those of UNHCR.

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to ACCORD within time constraints and in accordance with ACCORD's methodological standards and the *Common EU Guidelines for processing Country of Origin Information (COI)*.

This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status, asylum or other form of international protection.

Please read in full all documents referred to.

Non-English language information is comprehensively summarised in English. Original language quotations are provided for reference.

1) Information on the conflict in Khost

Among the sources consulted by ACCORD within time constraints, only the following information focussing on events in 1991 and 1995 could be found on the conflict in Khost, no detailed information could be found on the period between 1992 and 1995.

According to Frank A. Clements' book „Conflict in Afghanistan: A Historical Encyclopedia“, published in 2003, the town and (former) district of Khost saw severe fighting during the Afghan civil war (1989-2001). The town of Khost was besieged by mujahideen forces in 1986 and finally fell to them on 31 March 1991:

“Khost is a town and administrative district in Paktia Province, which occupies the upper portion of the valley of the Shamil and Kaitu Rivers. [...] The town and district saw severe fighting during the Afghan civil war (1989-2001) due to their strategic location on the supply lines of the mujahideen forces, being some 18 miles from Pakistan. Many of the leaders of the Marxist regime in Kabul originally came from the district and were supported by the population. The town was besieged by mujahideen forces in 1986 and finally fell to them on 31 March 1991, after which about 2,000 residents fled to Pakistan because of concerns about their security under the mujahideen. [...] During the period of Taliban rule (1996 to 2001), Khost, as a predominantly Pashtun area, was strongly pro-Taliban.” (Clements, 2003, p. 147-148)

The Economist provides the following detailed account of the capture of the besieged town of Khost by mujahideen on 1 April 1991:

"With spring and the new campaigning season has come an unexpected victory for the mujaheddin - their first of substance since Soviet troops left Afghanistan two years ago. On April 1st the town of Khost fell to the rebels after a fierce fight. Mujaheddin leaders based in Peshawar in Pakistan are talking grandly of setting up in Khost an administration to rival the one in Kabul. Like many Afghan towns, Khost, despite its population of 50,000, is little more than a jumble of mudbrick buildings clustered around an old stone citadel. It is only 20 miles from Pakistan and, as befits one of the most isolated outposts of the Kabul government, was formidably defended. Ringing the town were two fortified ramparts, one and three kilometres from the centre, and between them a well-guarded airstrip - its one reliable link to the capital. Thus protected, Khost withstood a dozen sieges in as many years. Why it fell this time is unclear. The mujaheddin attack was hardly a surprise: it had been the talk of the bazaar for weeks, and the government had taken care to reinforce the garrison of some 3,000 troops with thousands of tribal militiamen, to whom it pays retainers. As for the mujaheddin, they assembled several thousand fighters for the attack, and thousands more joined in at the last moment, attracted by the possibility of loot. But the attacking force of perhaps 12,000 men, though beefed up with tanks and artillery, was largely uncoordinated. It was run by a committee, or shura, of local mujaheddin commanders and representatives of the Pakistan-based mujaheddin parties - hardly the most promising command structure. At first it looked as though the mujaheddin would be repulsed once again. The government was able to reinforce the garrison by air, and showered bombs and Scud rockets on the mujaheddin. Some 1,000 mujaheddin were reported killed or wounded, against 600 defenders - a high toll for Afghanistan's civil war. Then, after 17 days of battle, Khost's garrison suddenly surrendered. One report said the garrison capitulated as soon as the rebels captured the airstrip. Another said the tribal militiamen swapped sides when the going got tough. The Kabul government said the reason Khost fell was that the Pakistani army and air force took over the attack on March 31st. "This is open war between Pakistan and Afghanistan, nothing less," said the Afghan envoy in Islamabad." (Economist, 6 April 1991)

The New York Times (NYT) reports in an article of 2 April 1991 that US-backed Afghan mujahideen have seized the garrison town of Khost and captured 6,000 Government troops stationed there. Among the captured troops were 600 members of the Revolutionary Guard, the elite unit of President Najibullah:

„Washington, April 1 — Afghan guerrillas have seized the garrison town of Khost and captured 6,000 Government troops to begin a spring offensive to try to topple the Soviet-backed Government, Administration officials said today. ‚This is definitely a major victory for the mujahedeen,‘ a State Department official said, referring to the rebels. He noted that Khost, near the border with Pakistan, guards the vital supply routes connecting the capital, Kabul, to the north, with the southwestern provinces. The Administration used the victory to warn President Najibullah of Afghanistan that if he did not give up control of the country, the United States-backed guerrillas would redouble their military efforts. [...] American officials reported that five Afghan tribal groups displayed impressive

coordination in the attack, and effectively deployed tanks, armored personnel carriers and mortars they had captured from the army in the last two years. Among the troops they captured were 600 members of the Revolutionary Guard, Mr. Najibullah's elite unit. The guerrillas now control 80 percent of the countryside, 200 district capitals and six provincial capitals." (NYT, 2 April 1991)

In his book "Aiding Afghanistan", published 1995, Asger Christensen also writes that the town of Khost, which was conquered in April 1991, was thoroughly looted both by mujaheddin and others, including tribesmen from the Pakistani side of the border:

"When the Kabul regime abandoned some areas to the mujaheddin in order to consolidate its forces after the Soviet withdrawal, these areas were subjected to looting as happened in Asadabad in Kunar in October 1988. The same was the case with the few towns that fell to the mujaheddin before the final collapse of the Kabul regime. Thus, the town of Khost in Paktia, which was conquered in April 1991, was thoroughly looted both by mujaheddin and others including tribesmen from the Pakistani side of the border." (Christensen, 1995, p. 81)

Human Rights Watch (HRW) states that the seizure of the city of Khost by mujahideen forces at the end of March 1991 was primarily a result of Pakistani intervention rather than coordination and unity among mujahedin commanders. Captured government soldiers were permitted to see the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and there were no confirmed reports of summary executions. However, the city was looted by mujahedin and allied tribal militia:

"The stalemate on the Afghan battlefield was broken briefly at the end of March when the eastern city of Khost fell to the mujahedin. Despite initial statements by the U.S. Administration that the fall of Khost signaled a new unity among the rebels, the military success was in fact more a result of Pakistani intervention than coordination among mujahedin commanders. However, the battle did exhibit some improvements in the mujahedin's respect for international humanitarian law. For the first time, captured government soldiers were seen promptly by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and there were no confirmed reports of summary executions. However, the city, or what was left of it, was rapidly looted by mujahedin and allied tribal militia, and the victory changed little in the political arena." (HRW, 1 January 1992)

According to the book "Decoding the New Taliban" edited by Antonio Giustozzi (2009), in 1995 the Taliban took control over the provinces of Paktia, Paktika and Khost without a fight. On 15 February 1995 the mujahideen-led administration of Khost town stepped down and handed over provincial affairs to the Taliban. In some areas, however, the Taliban had to fight local forces like those of Hekmatyar's Hizb-I Islami Afghanistan (Islamic Party of Afghanistan) in Eastern Khost in August 1996:

"Within the post-2001 insurgency, Loya Paktia (Greater Paktia) represents a quasi-autonomous region. Its three constituent provinces, Paktia, Paktika and Khost, are one of the three major Pashtun regions of the country, along with Southern (sometimes called South-Western) Afghanistan around Kandahar and Eastern Afghanistan around Jalalabad.

[...] The Taliban did not have to conquer most of Loya Paktia on their advance towards Kabul in 1995. They took Paktia, Paktika and Khost without a fight in the last days of January. Paktika's large Suleimankhel tribe called them to take over the province's centre, Sharana, after they had conquered Ghazni (on 20 January 1995) from a particularly abusive mujahidin commander, Qari Baba. Khost town followed on 15 February. The mujahidin-led administration of the province went to receive the Taliban advance party at the Seta Kandao pass in neighboring Paktia, stepped down and handed over provincial affairs to the newcomers. [...] In some areas, however, the Taliban had to fight local forces like those of Hekmatyar's Hizb-I Islami Afghanistan (Islamic Party of Afghanistan) in Eastern Khost in August 1996." (Giustozzi, 2009, p. 57-58)

Iranian news agency IRNA reports on 18 February 1995 that according to Afghan sources, Taliban took control of bases of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami in Khost province without encountering any resistance. They entered into Khost and took over some strategic areas in the province:

"The formidable Afghan Taleban have overrun the bases of main opposition forces led by Golboddin Hekmatyar in southern Khost province [in Paktia Province south of Logar, adjoining Waziristan tribal area of Pakistan] without encountering any resistance, Afghan sources said here on Thursday. Taleban or religious students who drove Hezb-e Eslami forces out of their main military base on the outskirts of Kabul on Tuesday [14th February], entered into Khost the other day and took over some strategic pickets in the province." (IRNA, 18 February 1995)

2) Role and duties of the Director-General (Mudir-e-Umoomi) of Logistics of the 25th Brigade (Firq-e-Besht o Panj)

Among the sources consulted by ACCORD within time constraints no information could be found on the role and duties of the Director-General (Mudir-e-Umoomi) of Logistics of the 25th Brigade (Firq-e-Besht o Panj) in the period 1992-1995.

The following article contains references to the 25th army division in Khost within this time period:

In an article published in 2008 in „Central Asia“, the Research Journal of the Area Study Centre at the University of Peshawar, Syed Fida Yunas provides a historical overview of government military operations conducted in Khost. Yunas mentions a „No 25 Division Khost“ as one of the Afghan army divisions that were defending the garrison town of Khost (which was known as „little Moscow“) against mujahideen forces until its capture on 31 March 1991. Brigadier Gul Aqa, the commander of 25th Brigade in Khost, and his 60 soldiers and officers surrendered to mujahideen leader Maulvi Jalal-ud-Din Haqqani:

"With completion of the first phase of the Soviet's troop's withdrawal, the Afghan army, in their re-deployment programme, withdrew troops from certain places, correspondingly encouraging the mujahideen for increasing their pressure on the Kabul regime. On 5 October 1988, Sherane, the capital of Paktika province, fell to the mujahideen. It had been

evacuated by the government troops leaving behind a large quantity of weapons. After the unsuccessful attempt to capture Khost the mujahideen once again turned their attention towards it. All the Peshawar-based parties and their commanders in the field coordinated their efforts to try once again to liberate Khost. The following forces of the Regime defended Khost at that time:

1. ARMY

Formation	Strength (all ranks)
a. No 25 Div Khost	1500
b. No 2 Border Bde Gp	800
c. Descent/Para Bde	666
d. No 37 Commando Bde Gp	300
e. No 53 Jauzjani Div (of Gen Dostam)	1100
f. Re-enforcement from Kabul	500
Total	4866

On March 2, 1991, the mujahideen started advancing towards this garrison town, known as 'little Moscow'. They eliminated the border security posts around the city and simultaneously occupied the mountain passes which connected Khost with Gardez to prevent re-enforcements coming. Both the old and new airports of Khost were then their next objectives. Both the airports had become unusable when the mujahideen advanced to within 200 metres of them and the Kabul regime forces could no longer use them for resupply of their besieged garrison town. They lost two aircrafts on 26 and 29 March while attempting to do so because of the automatic fire from the ground. On 31 March 1991, Khost was in the hands of the mujahideen. About 2200 officers and men of the Afghan army, including some Generals were taken prisoners. A large amount of heavy weapons, tanks, artillery guns and aircraft had come in their possession. About 500 regime soldiers were killed.

Three Afghan Army Brigadiers – Abdul Halim Commander Guard-e-Khas force in Khost, Atta Mohammad head of the KHAD force and belonging to Ghazni province and Abd-ur-Rehman from Kabul province, also belonging to Guard-e-Khas force, were included in the 306 prisoners who were captured by National Islamic Front of Afghanistan (NIFA of Pir Syed Ahmad Gailani). They were held in a NIFA facility at Shagai. Brigadier Gul Aqa, along with his 60 soldiers and officers, had surrendered to Maulvi Jalal-ud-Din Haqqani. Gul Aqa had served as a commander of the 19th unit in Khost for six years. He was appointed commander 25th Brigade in Khost when the mujahideen had increased their pressure on Khost one year ago.

Mujahideen's casualties were said to be 200 killed and 500 wounded in the battle. General Rahim Wardak who was Kabul's Military Attaché in India but defected to the mujahideen in 1978 (to Effendi Gailani's NIFA) and (June 2007 – Afghan Defence Minister in President Karzai's government in Kabul) said that: „The victory in Khost is more of a moral booster for the mujahideen. The fall of a city, known as little Moscow, has helped the mujahideen regain self confidence“ . (The News; 07 April 1991) (Yunas, summer 2008)

3) Standards of conduct of men under the command of [name removed] (allegedly the commander of Rabbani's forces in Khost)

Among the sources consulted by ACCORD within time constraints no information could be found on standards of conduct of men under the command of [name removed]. Research was conducted on ecoi.net, Refworld, Google, Google Books, BBC Monitoring and Factiva using combinations of the following search terms: Khost, Paktia, [name removed], command, commander, forces, government, pro-government, Rabbani.

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