



## The Timurid state's foreign policy in the Middle East

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### ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the geopolitical significance of Amir Timur's foreign policy. It examines the main directions of his diplomatic and military strategy, as well as his role in shaping the balance of power and expanding the political influence of the Timurid state. Particular attention is paid to the fact that Amir Timur's policy contributed to the formation of a new configuration of international relations in the Middle East by integrating elements of political pragmatism, trade and economic cooperation, and civilizational dialogue. The analysis demonstrates that Amir Timur's foreign policy not only strengthened the international standing of his state but also exerted a long-term impact on political processes in the region.

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## Temuriylar davlatining Yaqin Sharqdagi tashqi siyosati

**Kalit so'zlar:**

Amir Temur,  
Yaqin Sharq,  
geosiyosat,  
xalqaro munosabatlar,  
tashqi siyosat,  
diplomatiya,  
qudrat muvozanati,  
Temuriylar,  
mintaqaviy xavfsizlik,  
strategiya.

### ANNOTATSIYA

Maqolada Amir Temur tashqi siyosatining geosiyosiy ahamiyati tahlil qilingan. Uning diplomatik va harbiy strategiyasi asosiy yo'nalishlari, qudrat muvozanati va Temuriylar davlatining siyosiy ta'sirini kengaytirishdagi roli o'rganilgan. Xususan, Amir Temur siyosati Yaqin Sharqdagi xalqaro munosabatlarning yangi tarkibini shakllantirishda, siyosiy pragmatizm, savdo-iqtisodiy hamkorlik va sivilizatsion muloqot elementlarini o'zida mujassam etgani alohida tadqiq etilgan. Tahlil natijasida Amir Temurning tashqi siyosati nafaqat davlatning xalqaro nufuzini mustahkamlagani, balki mintaqadagi siyosiy jarayonlarga uzoq muddatli ta'sir ko'rsatgani ochib berilgan.

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# Внешняя политика государства Тимуридов на Ближнем Востоке

## АННОТАЦИЯ

### *Ключевые слова:*

Амир Темур,  
Ближний Восток,  
геополитика,  
международные  
отношения,  
внешняя политика,  
дипломатия,  
баланс сил,  
Тимуриды,  
региональная  
безопасность,  
стратегия.

В статье анализируется геополитическое значение внешней политики Амира Темура. Рассматриваются основные направления его дипломатической и военной стратегии, роль в формировании баланса сил и расширении политического влияния государства Тимуридов. Особое внимание уделяется тому, что политика Амира Темура сыграла важную роль в формировании новой конфигурации международных отношений на Ближнем Востоке, вобрав в себя элементы политического прагматизма, торгово-экономического сотрудничества и цивилизационного диалога. В результате проведённого анализа показано, что внешняя политика Амира Темура не только способствовала укреплению международного авторитета государства, но и оказала долгосрочное влияние на политические процессы в регионе.

## INTRODUCTION

In academic literature, the campaigns of Amir Temur into the Middle East are conventionally referred to as the “Three-Year Campaign” the “Five-Year Campaign”, and the “Seven-Year Campaign”. These terms are used in this study strictly as a matter of convention. The initial campaign of Amir Temur in 1384–1385 into Mazandaran, Rustamdar and Azerbaijan is formally designated as the “Two-Year Campaign into the Lands of Iran” in the scholarly historical monograph *Amir Temur* by Academician B.A. Akhmedov [1]. This study provides a comprehensive historical and artistic narrative of the aforementioned campaigns. In addition, A. Ziyov’s *History of Uzbek Statehood*, particularly the section entitled “Statehood of Uzbekistan during the Era of Amir Timur and the Timurid Dynasty,” [2] offers an extensive account of these events. Likewise, the Turkish scholar Ismail Akan’s work “The Great Empire of Timur” [3] presents a detailed examination of the key aspects and dynamics of these campaigns. The chronology of this period is likewise documented in the works of Nizam al-Din Shami, Sharaf al-Din Ali Yazdi, and Fasih Khawafi, as well as in the appendix to the monograph *Amir Timur in World History*, specifically in the section entitled “Chronological Data and Genealogical Tables of the Reign of Amir Timur and His Successors.” [4].

## OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

This study does not seek to reconstruct the detailed chronology of events; rather, it aims to elucidate and synthesize the principal dimensions of Amir Timur’s policy, diplomacy, and military strategy in the Near and Middle East. Central attention is devoted to revealing the multifaceted character of the *Sahibqiran*, providing the most accurate possible analysis of the sequence of events, and highlighting his strategic foresight. The study also emphasizes that, in his dealings with various rulers, Timur prioritized consistently peaceful negotiation and the establishment of amicable relations, resorting to armed conflict only as a measure of last resort. The historical developments under consideration are examined on the basis of Eastern manuscript sources and the *Temur Tuzuklari*.

## **METHODS**

The research is grounded in logical-historical and historical-analytical approaches. A historical-comparative analysis is undertaken, upon the basis of which broader generalizations are formulated. The theoretical and methodological foundation of the study is constituted by the political and diplomatic practice of Amir Timur in the Near and Middle East.

## **RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS**

Throughout his “Three-Year,” “Five-Year,” and “Seven-Year” campaigns in the lands of the Near East, Amir Timur employed diplomatic instruments with notable effectiveness, resorting to military force only in exceptional circumstances in order to prevail over his political adversaries. Prior to initiating an assault on any state or fortified stronghold, the Sahibqiran consistently adhered to principles of justice: he dispatched letters and called upon local rulers to seek compromise. According to Nizam al-Din Shami, during his confrontation with Malik Ghiyāth al-Din, the ruler of the provinces of Ghur (Central Afghanistan) and Herat, Timur guaranteed the safety of two thousand subjects who came before him. He issued the following command: “Whoever among the inhabitants remains in his home and does not retreat to the fortress—he and his family shall be secure. Otherwise, let them face the consequences themselves” [5]. Failing in his attempts to mount effective resistance, Malik Ghiyath al-Din, after prolonged hesitation, ultimately submitted to the Sahibqiran. As the source relates: “I advanced toward Herat and found Malik Ghiyath al-Din in a state of stupefaction; having no alternative, he abandoned the city and presented to me his treasury and all his wealth” [6].

In his dealings with Malik Ghiyath al-Din, Amir Timur demonstrated the qualities of a skilled diplomat and a just political leader. He favored mutual agreements and peaceful coexistence over armed confrontation, consistently translating the firmness of his words into concrete action.

By the mid-fourteenth century, the Kurts (Kurts/Karts), having significantly strengthened their position, had seized Sistan, Kandahar, and several other provinces, and had begun to pose a serious threat to the territories controlled by the Sarbadars. According to the sources, the Kurt leader Ghiyath al-Din Pir‘Ali devastated the wheat fields, orchards, and vineyards surrounding Nishapur, uprooted century-old gardens, and filled wells and irrigation channels with earth [7].

Well informed about the unfolding developments, Amir Temur remained consistently concerned that the Kurts might once again pose a threat to the territories of Mawarannahr. Fully aware that, in the event of a simultaneous danger from the north and east posed by the Mongols, and from the south, the country would find itself in a precarious strategic position, he grasped the implications of this scenario both as a military commander and as a statesman. Consequently, he turned to diplomatic measures, seeking to consolidate relations with the Kurts [8].

This evidence indicates that Amir Temur dispatched envoys to the leader of the Kurts, Giyas al-Din Pir Ali, employing diplomatic channels to strengthen bilateral relations. In response to Sahibkiran’s letter, which stated: “Our friendship is longstanding. Our aim is to consolidate this friendship and to become bound by ties of kinship. Let the estrangement between us be transformed into unity,” Giyas al-Din Pir Ali replied: “I am your servant. Should Your Highness grant the honor of accepting my son Pirmukhammad among your retainers, it would be a great privilege for us.” In accordance

with this exchange, Sahibkiran resolved to arrange a marriage alliance between his close relative – Suyunch Qutlug oghli, the son of his sister Shirinbek and the aforementioned son of Giyas al-Din [9].

However, despite his declarations of friendship and loyalty, Giyas al-Din Pir Ali in practice continued his military preparations and the strengthening of defensive fortifications. As Fasih Khavofi notes, he encircled the city of Herat with a formidable wall. The saint Zayn al-Din Abu Bakr Toyobadi sent him a letter of admonition, stating: “Calamities sent by Allah cannot be repelled by a wall. Do not oppress the people.” Instead of heeding this counsel, Giyas al-Din replied: “Imams should not interfere in affairs of state.” Angered by this response, the saint proceeded to the sacred mausoleum, offered prayers for the ruler, and foretold the fall of his throne, prophesying that authority would pass into the hands of Amir Temur [10].

Thus, through his actions, Malik Giyas al-Din openly demonstrated his unwillingness to honor the terms of friendship. He even explicitly refused to attend the quriltai convened in 1380–1381. Nizam al-Din Shami reports the following: “Amir Sahibkiran dispatched a courier to the ruler of Herat, Giyas al-Din, with the instruction: ‘The noyons and amirs will be present at the great quriltai; you must also appear.’ Malik Giyas al-Din respectfully replied to the courier: ‘If Amir Khodji Sayf al-Din comes, then I shall go with him.’” In accordance with the order, Amir Sayf al-Din set out for Herat. Upon his arrival, Giyas al-Din received him with due honors. Under the pretext of “I am preparing for the journey,” the Malik detained him for some time and took the opportunity to provision the fortress with grain. In the end, Khodji Sayf al-Din returned, while Malik Giyas al-Din failed to keep his word [11]. Subsequently, Amir Temur resolved firmly to punish him. On his way to Herat, he summoned Alibek Joni Qurbaniya (in Shami – Jawani Qurbaniya – A.U.), and they agreed to commence the campaign at the beginning of spring. When the time came to fulfill the promise, Alibek sent a letter to Sahibkiran: “These servants adhere to the agreement; if their determination and resolve remain unwavering, and Amir Sahibkiran himself leads the army, I shall appear before the troops as their commander [12].” However, he too failed to fulfill his promise. Moreover, he detained the envoy who had been sent and did not permit his return [12]. On his way, Sahibkiran captured the fortress of Pushang (Fushandj) and put to the sword those enemies who had offered resistance.

After the conquest of Khorasan, the rulers of Sistan, Kandahar, and other regions of present-day Afghanistan also submitted. As recorded in the Tuzuklar, Sahibkiran sent decrees to the local rulers urging them not to offer resistance: “If you join me, you shall be spared; if you oppose me, you shall perish. Then you shall see what becomes of your fate.” This action corresponded with divine predestination: as soon as my directives reached them, they began to submit and acknowledged my supremacy [13].

Following the capture of Herat, “the ruler of the Sarbadars, Ali Muayyad, paid homage and came to enter the service of Amir Temur. Sahibkiran honored him and allowed him to retain his position. However, the rulers of Jurjan, the Mazandaran governor Amir Wali, Tus-Qalat, Obivard, Nisa, and the Velbeks of Marv, while professing their obedience to Amir Temur, repeatedly violated the oath they had sworn. They even began to contemplate a plot against him [14].”

It should be noted that scholars who assess Amir Temur’s campaigns solely as acts of conquest and expansionism have approached the issue in a one-sided and superficial manner. Amir Temur allowed rulers who submitted fully to him to retain their territories

and caused no harm to the state; in this context, one should perceive not “conquest” or “cruelty,” but magnanimity, generosity, and humanism. Sahibkiran’s treatment of Alibek and Giyas al-Din corroborates this interpretation. Despite their treachery and violations of agreements, Sahibkiran demonstrated clemency and exhibited exemplary moral qualities.

During his military campaigns and political activities, Amir Temur never wavered from his convictions and consistently honored the promises he made, as numerous examples attest. Strict adherence to the principles of justice, fidelity to one’s word, and the inviolability of commitments constitute some of the key elements of Sahibkiran’s diplomatic practice. This was particularly evident in his policies in the Near East. As recorded in the Tuzuklar and corroborated by the accounts of Nizam al-Din Shami, Yazdi, and Mu’in al-Din Natanz, Sahibkiran consistently demonstrated mercy toward those who submitted to his authority. For example, he demonstrated clemency toward the rulers of Mazandaran and Sabzavor, the ruler of Shirvan, Ibrahim Darbandi, and numerous other beks and amirs who offered no resistance. In particular, the historian Mu’in al-Din Natanz cites multiple instances of Temur’s humane diplomatic approach, emphasizing one of the central principles of his policy: adherence to agreements and the concordance of word and deed. “Although all the commanders of Khorasan had come to the court, the defenders of the fortress of Turshiz were not yet prepared for battle... Ali Sadid, relying on the strength of the fortress, repelled the bold sword strikes with stones and reinforced the breaches... Thus, the mighty ruler found himself powerless to seize these four walls.” After prolonged resistance, Ali Sadid surrendered and personally handed over the keys of the fortress to Sahibkiran. “Amir Sahibkiran was pleased with his words and generously rewarded him with various gifts and honors.”

“... Sultan Sahibqiran advanced toward Erzurum and Erzincan. The wali of Erzincan, Tahurtan, approached him bearing numerous gifts and pledged his allegiance.” “Thereafter, they proceeded together toward the fortresses of Van and Sultan. Malik ‘Izz al-Din Shaykh came to the court and sought asylum... Subsequently, the ruler of Khoys, Silmos Zirak, likewise appealed to the court for protection and received appropriate gifts.” At the same time, those who remained defiant were punished without mercy. “I graciously accepted the submission of the governor of Mazandaran, who had declared his loyalty. Thereafter, I moved toward Gilan and Jurjan. Since the rulers of those regions refused to submit to me, I dispatched formidable detachments of my troops against them, while I personally led the army toward Iraq. I took Isfahan. Trusting the inhabitants of Isfahan, I entrusted them with the fortress. Yet they rose in rebellion and murdered the darugha I had appointed, together with three thousands of my soldiers. I ordered the extermination of the population of Isfahan,” the source continues [15].

Amir Temur’s harsh and uncompromising policy toward the population of Isfahan has been interpreted differently by various historians and has served as a basis for his condemnation as a cruel ruler. This interpretation was particularly widespread in Soviet historiography. In reality, the issue demands an impartial approach and an objective assessment to avoid one-sided conclusions. At the same time, earlier historians accurately documented the events in Isfahan. Sharaf al-Din Ali Yazdi writes: “The truth is as follows: the uneducated and reckless people did not obey the king’s command and killed three thousand Muslims. For this reason, the event occurred, and such an incident in Isfahan has never recurred. This happened on Monday, the sixth day of the month of Dhu al-Qi’dah [16].”

The events in Isfahan are also described in detail in the work of Ibn Arabshah: “The leaders of the Isfahanis... said, ‘As soon as evening falls, I will beat the drum... If you hear the sound of the drum, consider that my plan has been executed. Each of you must then seize the guest in your house and, guided by your base and carnal impulses, administer justice.’ Consequently, the Isfahanis rallied around such a lowly idea and committed a disastrous act. They did not fully comprehend that the consequences of their rash actions would lead to a grave calamity. Stripped of their bright garments and exposed, and with the sounding of the drum upon the tax collectors, misfortune descended upon them. The Isfahanis killed them approximately six thousand people and by morning, from the branches of the rebellion emerged rampant shoots, whose abundance wrought damage and brought about their death, and all perished as a result” [17].

Many of the insulting remarks and accusations directed at Amir Temur found in Ibn Arabshah are accompanied by evidently exaggerated figures: he claims that 600,000 people were killed in Isfahan, a number that is entirely inconsistent with reality. A similar tendency to distort historical facts is evident in the Bavarian chronicler Johann Schiltberger. According to his account, after the rebels killed six thousand soldiers, a horrific mass execution ensued, which similarly imparts an excessively tragic tone to the events, failing to reflect the actual number of casualties [18]. Furthermore, both Ibn Arabshah and Schiltberger assert that numerous infants perished under the hooves of horses in Isfahan, with Schiltberger specifying the number as seven thousand children [19].

No information regarding this appears in other sources. This, in itself, indicates that the aforementioned claims were deliberately fabricated with the purpose of diminishing the stature and achievements of Amir Temur, portraying him in a negative light for the populations of other regions, and inciting fear and panic.

During his military campaigns in the Near East, Amir Temur demonstrated exceptional command acumen while simultaneously adhering to principles of humanity. In preparation for the campaign against Iraq, he assembled an army of 80,000 cavalymen. Naturally, the deployment of such a large force within the territory of a single country, along with the provision of necessary food and forage, posed an extremely complex logistical challenge. Such a situation could inevitably cause considerable inconvenience and provoke discontent among the local population. Yet, concern for the populace and their protection constituted one of the primary objectives of his policy, which he consistently demonstrated in practice. Accordingly, he adopted a highly prudent course of action: he divided the army into three contingents and dispatched them sequentially against Iraq. This judicious strategy, coupled with carefully considered diplomatic measures, proved highly effective, as the concentrated forces were thereby distributed across all regions of Iraq [20].

Following these extensive political and military preparations and meticulously conducted campaigns, the regions of Khorasan, Mazandaran, Sistan, and Sabzavor were subdued within a short period (1381–1383). In Sistan, the fortified cities – Zireh, Zova, Farah, Bust, and others surrendered after intense fighting. In 1384, Amir Temur launched a campaign against Astarabad and Azerbaijan, capturing the cities of Omul, Sori, Sultaniya, and Tabriz. As a result of these actions, the throne of Hulagu came under Amir Temur’s control. The heir of the province of Fars, Umarshah, was entrusted with the eastern territories, while all western lands were assigned to Miran Shah. In this manner, Amir Temur became the undisputed holder of the “throne of Hulagu.”

## CONCLUSION

Amir Temur's policy in the Near East, contrary to prevailing stereotypes in Soviet historiography and certain interpretations by European scholars, cannot be reduced solely to acts of violence, plunder, and mass killings of the population. On the contrary, its principal objective was the establishment of durable peace and order in regions plagued by internecine conflicts, where the despotic power of local feudal rulers had intensified and the common people suffered profound hardship. Amir Temur implemented a comprehensive system of governance that enabled the consolidation of fragmented territories under a single center of authority, thereby ensuring social stability and protecting the population from arbitrary oppression.

His policy was grounded in principles of just governance and the rational allocation of resources, thereby creating conditions for economic and social recovery following prolonged conflicts. Under these circumstances, central authority was strengthened, tensions between rival local rulers were reduced, and the population was afforded the opportunity for relatively secure existence and the restoration of normal life. Thus, Amir Temur's activities in the Near East represented not merely the coercive suppression of opponents but a comprehensive state-building effort aimed at harmonizing relations among various social strata and across different regions.

In assessing the personality and activities of Amir Temur, it is critically important to consider this particular aspect of his policy the endeavor to organize fragmented territories and ensure long-term stability. Only with this understanding can one achieve an objective and historically accurate evaluation of his role in shaping the political and social structure of the Near East at the turn of the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries. The analysis of political events and strategic decisions presented in this study confirms that Amir Temur's activities were multifaceted, encompassing not only military conquests but also the systematic implementation of political and administrative measures aimed at the integration and stabilization of the region.

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