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The Military Dynamics Of The Qandahar Conflict: A Comparative Study Of Mughal And Safavid Warfare (16th And 17th Centuries)

Mudasir Ahmad

Research Scholar at Aligarh Muslim University

Abstract

This article examines the Mughal–Safavid conflict over Qandahar between 1595 and 1653, a prolonged contest that revealed how two early modern empires adapted their institutions, technologies, and strategies to frontier war. Qandahar, situated at the crossroads of Iran, Central Asia, and India, was far more than a fortress. For the Mughals it was a defensive glacis protecting Kabul and Lahore; for the Safavids it was a patrimony unjustly alienated. Using chronicles, memoirs, travelogues, and modern scholarship, this study argues that the conflict turned less on shared gunpowder technology than on divergent institutional frameworks, logistical capacities, and styles of leadership. Mughal artillery and the Mansabdari system flourished in the plains of Hindustan but proved fragile in Afghanistan. Safavid reforms under Shah Abbas I and Shah Abbas II, though sustained by fewer resources, created a disciplined army well-suited to siege warfare and defence. By 1653, Qandahar's fate was sealed in favour of Iran, illustrating the central role of geography, supply, and cohesion in early modern imperial rivalry.

Keywords: Qandahar, Mughal Empire, Gunpowder Empires, Siege craft, Logistics

Introduction

Qandahar's significance in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries lay in both its location and its symbolism. Strategically, it commanded the caravan arteries linking Herat to Kabul, Mashhad to Multan, and the Bolan Pass to the Indus plain. Whoever held it controlled the hinge between plateau and plain. Abu al-Fazl, Akbar's chronicler, described the fortress as the "buttress of Hindustan's north-western gate," essential for the defence of Kabul and Lahore.[1] To the Safavids, however, its loss in 1595 was intolerable. Iskandar Beg Munshi, writing in the Alam-ara-i Abbasi, cast the city as an Iranian jewel that had slipped from its setting, demanding recovery as a test of dynastic honour.[2]

Qandahar was also freighted with dynastic memory. Babur, founder of the Mughal Empire, had briefly ruled the city before descending into India. His descendants regarded it as ancestral soil, not simply a fortress. Akbar's decision to occupy the city in 1595 therefore carried both sentimental and strategic weight. Yet this was also a moment of Safavid distraction: Shah ʿAbbasi I was fully engaged against the Ottomans in Mesopotamia and could spare no energy for his eastern frontier. Once incorporated into the Mughal system, Qandahar was governed by rotating mansabdars. This prevented entrenched local power but also meant imperial loyalty was shallow and constantly renegotiated. In warfare, the Mughals leaned heavily on artillery. Gigantic bronze cannon, cast in Agra and Lahore, symbolized imperial might and crushed stone walls in Hindustan. But as Jos Gommans observes, in Afghanistan these weapons became a liability: the same oxen-drawn siege guns that dazzled on the plains crawled through mountain passes and devoured supplies, turning strength into weakness.[3]

By contrast, the Safavids were quietly reshaping their army. Shah ʿAbbasi I rebalanced power away from Qizilbash tribal cavalry by creating corps of musketeers (tufangchis), artillerymen (tupchis), and Caucasian slave soldiers (ghulams). These reforms fostered cohesion and royal control, producing a more disciplined and flexible force. Andrew Newman highlights how this institutional evolution, though resource-limited, allowed the shah to recover ground lost earlier in his reign.[4]

Thus, by the early seventeenth century, Qandahar stood as a pressure point where two evolving military systems would collide: Mughal artillery-heavy imperial expeditions against Safavid infantry-centered siege craft. The first clash was still to come, but the outlines of the struggle were already visible. The Mughal capture of Qandahar in 1595 was opportunistic, but its retention proved fragile. Akbar's hold depended less on local loyalty than on the projection of force from Kabul and Lahore. While the Safavids were

[1] Abu al-Fazl Allami, *The Ain-i Akbari*, trans. H. Blochmann, Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1873, vol. 2, p.191.

[2] Iskandar Beg Munshi, *History of Shah ʿAbbasi the Great, Alam-ara-i ʿAbbasi*, trans. Roger Savory, vol. 2, Boulder: Westview, 1978, p.682.

[3] Jos J. L. Gommans, *Mughal Warfare: Indian Frontiers and Highroads to Empire, 1500–1700*, London: Routledge, 2002, pp. 97–103.

[4] Andrew J. Newman, *Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire.* London: I.B. Tauris, 200, pp. 87–89.

preoccupied with their Ottoman adversaries, Mughal authority went unchallenged. But with Jahangir's accession in 1605, a determined Safavid bid to recover Qandahar began.[5]

The first serious attempt came in 1606. According to Jahangir's memoirs, news of a Safavid advance from Herat caused deep alarm at court. Reinforcements were dispatched, and the fortress garrison managed to resist until the invaders withdrew. From the Iranian side, Iskandar Beg Munshi acknowledged the abortive campaign, attributing its failure to the shah's overriding need to concentrate resources against the Ottomans. The episode demonstrated both Qandahar's vulnerability and its importance as a bargaining chip in larger imperial rivalries.[6]

For the next decade, the fortress remained Mughal. But the Safavid position strengthened after Shah ʿAbbasi I concluded a peace treaty with the Ottomans in 1618. With his western front secured, the shah turned eastward. In 1621 he personally led an expedition to Qandahar, determined to bring the city back under Iranian rule. The timing was propitious: Jahangir's court was distracted by succession struggles, with Prince Khurram (later Shah Jahan) reluctant to act decisively lest he strengthen the position of his stepmother, Nur Jahan.[7]

The siege of Qandahar in 1622 displayed the fruits of Abbas's military reforms. Safavid troops dug approach trenches, used lighter cannon for mobility, and deployed disciplined musketeers close to the walls. Pietro Della Valle, who traveled through Persia in these years, emphasized the unusual discipline of the shah's infantry and their increasing reliance on firearms.[8] The Mughal garrison held out for several weeks, but without relief its supplies dwindled and morale collapsed. On 11 June 1622, the city capitulated.

For the Safavids, the conquest was a crowning achievement of Abbas's reign. Munshi's chronicle describes the shah's ceremonial entry into Qandahar and the distribution of rewards to his soldiers as proof of divine favor. For the Mughals, it was a humiliating setback. Jahangir's empire remained vast and wealthy, but the fall of Qandahar underscored the limitations of a system that relied on heavy artillery and princely command in an environment where mobility and cohesion mattered more. The first round of the contest for Qandahar ended with Iran in possession, a strategic reversal the Mughals would struggle to overturn.

The Safavid reconquest of Qandahar in 1622 ushered in a period of uneasy stability. For nearly two decades, the fortress remained under Iranian control. Yet the city was never secure. The Safavid shahs

[5] Jahangir, *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* (*Memoirs of Jahangir*), trans. Alexander Rogers, ed. Henry Beveridge, vol. 2, London: *Royal Asiatic Society*, 1909–14, pp.342–345.

[6] Iskandar Beg Munshi, *History of Shah Abbas the Great, Alam-ara-i Abbasi*, pp.683–685.

[7] Satish Chandra, *Medieval India: From Sultanate to the Mughals, 1526–1748*, vol. 2, Delhi: Har-Anand, 2005, p.209.

[8] Pietro Della Valle, *The Pilgrim: The Travels of Pietro Della Valle*, trans. Edward Grey, vol. 1, London: Hakluyt Society, 1892, p.314.

faced persistent internal challenges, while the Mughals, stung by their loss, quietly waited for an opportunity to recover what they regarded as ancestral soil.[9]

Shah Abbas I's death in 1629 marked a turning point. His successor, Shah Safi (r. 1629–42), inherited an empire weakened by court intrigues and the revival of factional rivalries. Isfahan remained splendid, but central authority waned. Rudi Matthee notes that Safi's reign was marked by "short-sighted policies, reckless executions, and military neglect," eroding the foundations his grandfather had laid. This malaise extended to the eastern frontier, where Safavid garrisons at Qandahar grew vulnerable to neglect and mistrust.

For the Mughals, Shah Jahan's accession in 1628 provided a fresh chance to press claims on Qandahar. His reign was characterized by both grandeur and restlessness: the building of the Taj Mahal and Red Fort at Delhi coincided with incessant campaigns in the Deccan and Central Asia. Qandahar loomed large in his imperial imagination, both as a fortress of strategic value and as a symbol of Mughal legitimacy as heirs to the Timurid legacy.[10]

The opportunity to recover the city came not through battle but through betrayal. In 1638, ʿAli Mardan Khan, the Safavid governor of Qandahar, defected to the Mughals. Fearing Shah Safi's suspicion and attracted by Mughal wealth, he delivered the fortress without resistance. Inayat Khan's Shah Jahan-nāma describes the transfer in ceremonial detail: the governor's march into Mughal service, his lavish reception at court, and his reward with a mansab of 7,000 cavalry and extensive estates. The recovery was a diplomatic coup for Shah Jahan, who proclaimed it as the restoration of Mughal honor after the humiliation of 1622.[11]

Yet the nature of the recovery revealed its fragility. The Mughals had not stormed the fortress; they had purchased loyalty. The reliance on defection underscored both Safavid weakness and Mughal dependence on opportunism. Qandahar was once again in Indian hands, but its possession rested on the shifting sands of frontier politics. European observers were quick to note the transactional character of Mughal frontier policy. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, traveling in the mid-seventeenth century, observed that Mughal governors often relied on subsidies and bribes to keep border chiefs loyal. In Qandahar, this dynamic played out on a grand scale: the city was not so much conquered as bought.[12]

The Mughal triumph of 1638, while celebrated, carried within it the seeds of future contest. The Safavid dynasty, rejuvenated under Shah Abbas II after 1642, would make recovery of the fortress a priority once

[9] Rudi Matthee, *Persia in Crisis: Safavid Decline and the Fall of Isfahan*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2012, pp.63–65.

[10] Satish Chandra, *Medieval India: From Sultanate to the Mughals*, pp. 212-213.

[11] Inayat Khan, *Shah Jahan-nāma*, trans. Wheeler Thackston, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1990, pp.56–58.

[12] Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Travels in India*, trans. V. Ball, vol. 1, London: Macmillan, 1889, p.273.

again. For now, however, Shah Jahan enjoyed his prize. The empire's northwestern marches seemed secure, though appearances would prove deceiving.

The Safavid recovery of Qandahar in 1649 marked the second major turning point in the long struggle. After its peaceful transfer to Mughal hands in 1638, the fortress stood for a decade as a Mughal outpost. Yet this tenure was undermined by the realities of frontier governance: supply lines stretching across the Punjab and Kabul, rotating Mansabdar governors with shallow local ties, and an empire increasingly distracted by wars in the Deccan.

The decisive shift came with the accession of Shah Abbas II (r. 1642–66). Unlike his immediate predecessor, he combined youth with energy and determination. Keen to reassert Safavid prestige, he turned eastward once stability was restored at Isfahan. Rudi Matthee stresses that Abbas II inherited not a bankrupt empire but one with latent capacity, provided it was mobilized effectively.[13] His strategy was to revive the eastern frontier through careful provisioning, stockpiling grain and ammunition in Khurasan well before moving on Qandahar. In December 1648 the shah launched his campaign.

Contemporary chronicles emphasize the boldness of his timing: a winter march that took the Mughal garrison by surprise. The Safavid army, leaner and more mobile than its Mughal counterpart, relied on light artillery, musketeers, and entrenched sappers to encircle the city. Iskandar Beg Munshi's continuation, though formulaic, describes how trenches and mines steadily undermined the Mughal defenses.[14]

By February 1649, supplies inside Qandahar were exhausted, and the garrison surrendered. For the Mughals, the loss was catastrophic. Shah Jahan had invested heavily in frontier prestige, presenting himself as a Timurid heir. To see Qandahar, slip away again—this time through direct military defeat—was a blow to both honour and strategy. Satish Chandra notes that the emperor reacted with characteristic resolve, ordering massive preparations for its recovery.[15]

The reconquest also highlighted the Safavids' institutional strengths. Their army was not the largest, but its logistical planning and cohesive command structure proved superior in Afghanistan's unforgiving environment. Shah Abbas II's personal presence at the siege echoed the precedent set by his grandfather in 1622, demonstrating the importance of royal leadership in Safavid military culture.

From a broader perspective, the fall of Qandahar in 1649 was the last great Safavid victory. It secured the dynasty's eastern frontier and symbolized the enduring effectiveness of its military reforms. Yet it also set the stage for the Mughal counter-sieges of the early 1650s, which would reveal the limits of Mughal power in Afghanistan and the unsustainability of projecting massive armies so far from India's heartland.

[13] Rudi Matthee, *Persia in Crisis: Safavid Decline and the Fall of Isfahan*, pp.75–77.

[14] Iskandar Beg Munshi, *History of Shah Abbas*, pp.712–715.

[15] Satish Chandra, *Medieval India: From Sultanate to the Mughals*, p. 214.

The Mughal response to the Safavid capture of Qandahar in 1649 was immediate and determined. For Shah Jahan, the fortress was not only a strategic outpost but also a matter of dynastic prestige. He ordered a series of massive campaigns to recover it, committing treasure, manpower, and the most advanced artillery of the empire. Between 1651 and 1653, three separate expeditions were launched, led by his sons Aurangzeb and Dara Shukoh.

The first expedition, under Aurangzeb in 1651, showcased both the scale and limitations of Mughal power. Contemporary estimates suggest an army of nearly 50,000 was assembled, accompanied by enormous siege guns cast in Lahore. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, who travelled in northern India at this time, remarked on the colossal size of Mughal cannon, noting that they were "more fit for the plains than for the mountains."[16] The march toward Qandahar revealed the truth of this observation. Oxen and elephants strained to haul the heavy bronze pieces across stony passes, while fodder and water shortages decimated the baggage train. By the time Aurangzeb reached the fortress, the artillery was in poor condition, and supplies had dwindled. The siege collapsed after weeks of inconclusive bombardment.

Undeterred, Shah Jahan ordered a second attempt in 1652. Once again, the army was large, and the artillery formidable. Yet the same problems repeated themselves. The Safavid garrison, provisioned in advance from depots in Khurasan, held out behind strengthened fortifications. Rudi Matthee emphasizes that Safavid success lay not only in military discipline but also in administrative foresight: supplies were stockpiled well before hostilities began.[17]

The Mughals, by contrast, relied on convoys stretching back hundreds of miles into India, which proved vulnerable to attrition and delay. After months of costly effort, the siege was abandoned. The final attempt in 1653 fell to Dara Shukoh, Shah Jahan's favored son and heir. Dara was more a mystic than a soldier, and his leadership reflected both his charisma and his inexperience. He commanded another vast army, but morale was already low after two failed sieges. Satish Chandra observes that the Mughal nobility, exhausted by repeated mobilizations, lacked enthusiasm for yet another Afghan campaign.[18]

The Safavid defenders, by contrast, were emboldened by previous victories. The siege sputtered out after only a few weeks. The three failed campaigns drained Mughal resources. Tavernier noted that grain prices in Multan and Lahore spiked as supplies were diverted, straining the empire's economy. The failure also exposed divisions within the Mughal court. Aurangzeb, who had shown greater competence in the field, resented his brother Dara's primacy; Dara, in turn, dismissed Aurangzeb as overly austere and ambitious.

[16] Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Travels in India*, Trans, pp.275–278.

[17] Rudi Matthee, *Persia in Crisis: Safavid Decline and the Fall of Isfahan*, pp.79–80.

[18] Satish Chandra, *Medieval India: From Sultanate to the Mughals*, pp.215–216.

These tensions would later erupt in the Mughal war of succession (1657–59), but at Qandahar they already cast a long shadow.

By the end of 1653, Shah Jahan was forced to concede defeat. Qandahar remained in Safavid hands. The Mughal inability to project power sustainably into Afghanistan revealed a fundamental limit of their imperial system: immense resources could not overcome geography, logistics, and the cohesion of a determined opponent. The campaigns for Qandahar revealed not only the fortunes of two dynasties but also the contrasting character of their military systems. Both the Mughal and Safavid empires belonged to what historians have called the "gunpowder empires," but their approaches to war diverged in ways that directly shaped the outcome of the struggle.

Institutions and Command

The Mughals mobilized their armies through the mansabdari system, which integrated nobles from across India into a hierarchy defined by rank (mansab) and cavalry obligations (sawar). This allowed them to assemble vast forces quickly, drawing upon Rajput clans, Afghan horsemen, and Persian émigrés. Yet the system's strength was also its weakness. The rotation of Jagirs meant no governor developed enduring ties to Qandahar, and nobles often calculated their loyalty against personal advancement. Satish Chandra points out that Mughal expeditions were frequently hampered by internal rivalry and lack of coordination, particularly when imperial princes sought to outshine one another in the field.[19]

By contrast, the Safavid military under Shah Abbas I and II relied on standing corps of musketeers, artillerymen, and ghulāms directly dependent on the crown. These reforms curbed the power of the Qizilbash tribal elite and created a more cohesive command structure. Andrew Newman argues that while the Safavid state lacked the Mughal Empire's vast revenues, it compensated with tighter central control and a force that could be redeployed with greater reliability.[20]

The shah's personal presence in the 1622 and 1649 campaigns underscored this cohesion: victories were achieved not by overwhelming numbers but by coordinated effort.

Siege craft and Firepower

In both empires, artillery symbolized sovereignty. The Mughals invested heavily in massive bronze cannon, whose presence at sieges projected imperial authority as much as destructive capacity. Yet in Afghanistan these guns became liabilities. Their transport consumed resources, their deployment slowed campaigns, and their sheer weight often made them ineffective against well-provisioned defenders. Jean Chardin, who

[19] *Ibid*, p.220.

[20] Andrew J. Newman, *Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2006, pp.92–94.

traveled in Persia later in the seventeenth century, observed that Mughal reliance on oversized artillery contrasted with Safavid preference for lighter, mobile pieces better suited to mountain warfare.[21]

The Safavids' siege craft emphasized methodical approaches: digging trenches, placing batteries close to walls, and deploying musketeers to suppress defenders. These tactics mirrored contemporary Ottoman practices and were reinforced by the shahs' investment in European style gunners. The result was a more flexible use of firepower, tailored to Afghanistan's environment rather than India's plains.

Logistics and Geography

Perhaps the most decisive factor was logistics. Mughal expeditions relied on supply lines stretching back across the Punjab and Sind. Each campaign required convoys of grain, fodder, and coin, vulnerable to attrition over hundreds of miles. Tavernier noted the ruinous effect on Indian markets when supplies were diverted to sustain the Afghan front.[22]

The Safavids, operating from Khurasan, fought on shorter lines. Their provisioning was prearranged through depots in Herat and Mashhad, ensuring that sieges could be maintained even in harsh winters. The geography of Afghanistan magnified these differences. The Mughals, accustomed to mobilizing on fertile plains, struggled with barren terrain where draft animals starved and movement slowed. The Safavids, operating within a plateau environment more familiar to their troops, exploited the mountains as defensive allies.

For the Mughals, Qandahar was closely tied to their Timurid heritage. Babur, founder of the dynasty, had once ruled the city before his descent into Hindustan. Later emperors, from Akbar to Shah Jahan, emphasized their lineage from Timur as a justification for their imperial authority. Holding Qandahar therefore carried the aura of ancestral right. Losing it, conversely, was seen as a wound to dynastic prestige. Satish Chandra notes that Shah Jahan's repeated campaigns against the fortress were motivated as much by "a sense of honor and continuity with the Timurid past" as by military necessity.[23]

The Safavids viewed the fortress through a different lens. To them, Qandahar was not merely strategic but integral to their claim as defenders of Iranian territory. Its loss in 1595 was portrayed by chroniclers like Iskandar Beg Munshi as an affront to the dynasty's dignity, requiring redress. The successful reconquests of 1622 and 1649 were thus celebrated as providential vindications of Safavid kingship. Court ceremonies emphasized the shah's personal role in restoring the fortress, reinforcing the idea that victory was a sign of divine favor bestowed on the dynasty.

[21] Jean Chardin, *The Travels of Sir John Chardin in Persia, 1673–1677*, ed. N. M. Penzer, London: Argonaut, 1927, vol. 2, p.156.

[22] Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Travels in India*, Trans, p. 277.

[23] Satish Chandra, *Medieval India: From Sultanate to the Mughals*, p.218.

The city also carried confessional overtones. As champions of Twelver Shi'ism, the Safavids cast their wars against the Sunni Mughals in a moral register. While the Mughal emperors cultivated an image of tolerance—Jahangir and Shah Jahan employed Shia nobles and negotiated alliances with Iran—the Safavid court frequently depicted Qandahar's recovery as a triumph of Shi'i Islam over Sunni rivals. This sectarian coloring did not always determine strategy, but it infused the rhetoric of victory.[24]

European observers, such as Jean Chardin and Pietro Della Valle, often remarked on the intensity with which both empires invested symbolic value in Qandahar. To them, the fortress seemed a remote frontier city, but to Isfahan and Delhi it was a jewel whose possession affirmed rightful sovereignty. For the Mughals, its loss gnawed at imperial pride, while for the Safavids, its recovery was a reaffirmation of their place as a major power in Asia. The symbolic weight of Qandahar thus magnified each campaign's consequences. Victories and defeats reverberated beyond the battlefield into questions of legitimacy, succession, and identity. When the Mughal sieges of the 1650s collapsed, the material loss was compounded by reputational damage. Conversely, Safavid success helped offset the dynasty's gradual decline elsewhere, sustaining its prestige into the late seventeenth century.[25]

The struggle for Qandahar was more than a border conflict; it tested the resilience of two empires. Over nearly six decades (1595–1653), the fortress repeatedly changed hands, each shift altering the prestige balance of South and West Asia. For the Mughals, these wars exposed the limits of an expansive yet unwieldy system. The mansabdari framework let Shah Jahan raise vast armies but also bred factionalism, reliance on heavy artillery, and logistical strain. The repeated failures of Aurangzeb and Dara Shukoh to retake Qandahar reflected systemic weaknesses rather than personal shortcomings. As J.F. Richards notes, the frontier revealed Mughal contradictions—wealthy at the center, fragile at the margins."[26]

The Safavids, though less affluent, relied on cohesion and reform. Shah ʿAbbas I's musketeer and artillery corps, supported by ghulāms, enabled his heirs to retake Qandahar with smaller, disciplined forces. Their edge lay in logistics—supplies from Khurasan, shorter routes, and siege tactics suited to Afghan terrain. As Rudi Matthee notes, the 1649 victory was the Safavid army's final peak, masking an underlying decline. Qandahar also carried deep symbolic value. For the Mughals, it represented Timurid legacy and imperial honor, making its loss a blow to legitimacy. For the Safavids, its recovery signified divine favor and Shi'i strength. Each campaign thus held cultural weight: defeat meant humiliation, while triumph reinforced prestige. The contest over Qandahar intertwined military struggles with ideological identity.[27]

[24] Andrew J. Newman, *Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire*, pp.95–97.

[25] Rudi Matthee, *Persia in Crisis: Safavid Decline and the Fall of Isfahan*, pp.81–83.

[26] Jos J.L. Gommans, *Mughal Warfare: Indian Frontiers and Highroads to Empire*, pp.145–147.

[27] Roger Savory, *Iran under the Safavids*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980, pp.152–155.

By 1653, Qandahar firmly remained with the Safavids, and the Mughals, weakened by Deccan campaigns and succession struggles, never tried to reclaim it. The fortress shifted from a contested frontier to a stable boundary, showing how geography and institutions outweighed sheer power in imperial conflicts. This struggle foreshadowed the Mughals' later overextension and the Safavids' fragile prestige, with Qandahar briefly shaping the destinies of both empires.

Conclusion

The struggle between the Mughal and Safavid empires over Qandahar from 1595 to 1653 reveals that organizational coherence and effective logistics shaped military success more decisively than technological or financial superiority. Though both powers possessed advanced gunpowder weaponry and considerable treasuries, the conflict's resolution depended on administrative efficiency, supply chain effectiveness, territorial proximity, and command quality. The citadel alternated between empires on four occasions---seized by Mughal armies in 1595, recaptured by Safavid forces in 1622, acquired through betrayal in 1638, and permanently secured in 1649---with each transfer illuminating contrasting approaches to warfare in difficult topography. Mughal rulers from Akbar to Shah Jahan viewed Qandahar as integral to their Timurid lineage and as a strategic bulwark shielding Kabul and northern India. However, the mechanisms of Mughal authority in Hindustan---the mansabdari apparatus, reliance on cumbersome siege guns, and command vested in imperial princes---proved ineffective in Afghanistan's demanding terrain. Safavid victory emerged from Shah ʿAbbasi I's centralized army restructuring, advantageous supply routes from Khurasani depots, and deployment of more portable artillery adapted to highland conditions. The definitive Mughal defeat in 1653 demonstrated that administrative adaptability and geographical positioning could prevail over greater financial resources and larger armies.

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