

Landlocked Countries: Afghanistan

by Geir Sør-Reime

We have now been through around 350 island communities and their stamps in this column, and now we start a new series on landlocked countries, past and present, and their stamps.

In this context, a landlocked country will be defined as a country without any border with an ocean. That means that countries linked to an ocean through a navigable river is still considered landlocked. The same applies to countries with shores to lakes or inland seas.

We start this series with Afghanistan.

(NOTE: I am no expert on the early issues of Afghanistan, and I have therefore only identified these in relation to year of issue, not to exact Scott numbers.)

* * * * *

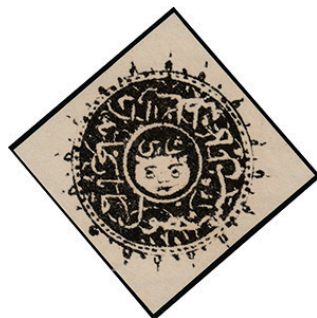
Afghanistan and its population have been in war and terror-ridden state for the last 30 years and the whole world is now hoping that the country will finally see peace, but most governments and observers are skeptical towards the promises of freedom and women's rights that the new Taliban government has given. We have witnessed brutal treatment of journalists and demonstrating women already, but Taliban has said that they now need to replace their fighters with professional police to uphold law and order and to prevent their fighters' treating civilians as enemies.

Afghanistan has an area of 252,072 square miles and a population of around 31 million. It was internationally recognized as an independent country in 1919. The country had been under British influence since 1838 and from 1879, Britain controlled the country's foreign relations. Internally, the country was ruled by an Amir from 1823, and the country was known as the Emirate of Afghanistan.

The first Afghan stamps appeared in 1871. Until 1928, when Afghanistan joined the Universal Postal Union, Afghan stamps had only internal validity, and foreign mail had to have additional franking with Indian stamps.



Uprated postcard: showing 1913 Afghan postcard (1909, H&G 1) uprated with Indian stamp



Left, 1871 First Afghan issue (Sc. 2); right, 1873, second issue (Sc. 11)

The first stamps had a circular design with a tiger's head in the center and the denomination and the year of issue around it.

In each corner of the stamp, there are rays. This design was used for 1871-73 issues.

From the second issue 1873 until the 1875 issue, there were no corner rays. These issues had the denomination above the tiger head, from 1876, the denomination appears below the tiger head.

In 1881, the central tiger head was replaced by the denomination in the center.



1876 Kabul printing: (Between Sc. 29 and 53)



Left to right, 1881 1 abasi, 2 abasi, 1 rupee (Sc. between 109 and 176)



Left, 1891 1 abasi (Sc. 177); right, 1892 (between Sc. 180-188A)



In 1891, rectangular (in landscape format) stamps with an inscription and from 1892 additionally with the national arms on top of the inscription were issued. Similar stamps in portrait format were issued 1909-16.



1909 Arms: 1 abasi (Sc. 205)

A f - g h a n i - s t a n ' s first commemorative stamps, celebrating the 2nd anniversary



1920, 2nd anniversary of Independence 3 paisas (Sc. 215)

of independence were issued in 1920, featuring the Royal Order of Independence. This Order was also depicted on 1921 definitive stamps.

Independence anniversary stamps were issued annually from 1923 onwards.

Also in 1923, a handstamp was applied by the Kabul post office to incoming foreign mail, to indicate postage to be collected from addressees. Stamps with this handstamp are listed as a separate issue by Scott.

(Shown, 30 paisas Sc. 219F)



In 1925, Afghanistan introduced a decimal currency, and the first stamp with decimal currency was the 1925 stamp for the 7th anniversary of independence, featuring the crest of King Amanullah.

In 1927 appeared a definitive issue in decimal currency, and in 1932, a pictorial stamp set for the calling of the national assembly and another depicting scenery of the country appeared. The latter was re-issued 1935-38 in different colors.



1926 7th anniversary of Independence (Sc. 224); same design as 1925 issue



Left, 1932 National Assembly (Sc. 263P); right, 1932 Parliament (Sc. 267P)



The 1931 stamp for the 13th anniversary of independence already depicted the independence monument.



Left, 1931 National Monument (Sc. 262); right 1933 Paghman, Arch of Paghman (Sc. 289)



The 1931 stamp for the 15th anniversary of independence depicted a triumph arch. The 1937-1959 Independence Day issues all showed portraits of King Mohammed Nadir Shah (king 1933-1973). He was also depicted on several values of the new 1939-47 definitive stamps.



Left, 1939 Independence (21st, King Mohammed Nadir Shah) (Sc. 317); right, 1941 King Nadir Shah and Independence Monument (Sc. 328A)



Independence Day stamps featured the independence memorial, but there were instead annual issues celebrating the King's birthday, starting with his 46th birthday in 1960.



1960 King Birthday, Imperf (Sc. 481)

From 1951, there were also annual issues for the Pashtunistan Day. Large parts of the lands populated by Pashtu people are parts of Pakistan. A Free Pashtunistan Government was proclaimed in 1948.



1952 Free Pashtunistan Day (Sc. 406)

The 1951-55 Pashtunistan stamps were obligatory tax stamps, the 1956 issue was two semi-postal stamps, as were the 1958-60 stamps.

An agency produced Afghan stamps under a contract with the Afghan government between April 1961 and March 1964, but as these stamps hardly were available in Afghanistan, the Afghan post-office also issued locally produced stamps to cater for postal needs.

The agency produced 1961 and 1962 Pashtunistan, King's birthday and Independence stamps, but in 1963, there were locally produced stamps for these events.

The 1964 stamps for these events were issued after the termination of the agency contract.

The agency stamps are listed in full in Scott and the German Michel catalogs, whereas the British Gibbons catalog only list them in an appendix.

After the agency period, Afghanistan continued the three annual series for the Independence Day, the Pashtunistan Day and the King's Birthday, and added another annual issue promoting tourism (1964-70, 1972). In 1967, industrial development was also a stamp theme, as was the inauguration of a modern hydro-electric power station.



Left, 1955 Pashtunistan Day (Sc. 433); right, 1975 Pashtunistan Day (Sc. 917)



1961 Pashtunistan, Agency produced (Sc. 514-15 souvenir sheet)



1963 Independence, locally produced, (Sc. 653)



1972 King: 58th Birthday (Sc. 871), last issue with King's portrait



1969 Tourism (Sc. 798a)



Left, 1970 Tourism (Sc. 828); right, 1972 Tourism Buddha Shrine Hadda, later destroyed by Taliban (Sc. 861)





A 1970 set celebrated the Centenary of the first Afghanistan issue.



1970 Stamp Centenary (Sc. 840)

On 1972 Independence (Sc. 864) July 17, 1973, King Mohammad Zahir Shah was deposed by his brother-in-law, Mohammad Daoud Chan, married to the King's sister Zamina Begum. Daoud had been Prime Minister 1953-63. He proclaimed Afghanistan a republic with himself as President. He was

assassinated April 28, 1978, during the Communist-dominated Saur Revolution.



Left, 1975 President Daoud (Sc. 925-26); right, 1977 President Daoud, Promulgation of Constitution (Sc. 941, from S/S)

Daoud was depicted on four stamps issued for the first anniversary of the Afghan republic July 17, 1974, and on three definitive stamps issued September 14, 1974. For the third anniversary of the Republic, a stamp showing Daoud hoisting the republican flag was issued.

Daoud was elected President in 1977 and four stamps (also issued in a souvenir sheet) were issued for this event, and in February 1978, three additional definitive stamps with his portrait were issued. The arms of the Republic were shown on four September 1976 stamps.



Left, 1978 Elections (Sc. 945); right, 1976 Republican arms: (Sc. 932)

After the Communist coup-d'état in 1978, Afghanistan was transformed into the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan and some of the first stamps after the coup showed the new national arms.

Nur Mohammad Taraki was appointed President of the new Democratic Republic. He was portrayed on the first 1979 stamp and



1978 New arms (Sc. 948A)

on a stamp issued in April 1979, showing him reading the Communist Party's newspaper. He was



Left, 1979 Pres. Taraki reading Khalq newspaper (Sc. 959); right, 1979 President Taraki (Sc. 955)



also depicted on two 1979 stamps issued for the first anniversary of the Saur Revolution.

The Afghan Communist Party was divided into two factions, and in September 1979, Taraki was killed by the less Soviet-friendly faction of the party. He was replaced as President first by Hafizullah Amin (1979), Babrak Karmal (from December 27, 1979 to 1986) and Mohammad Najibullah (September 30, 1987-April 16, 1992, tortured to death by Taliban September 27, 1996). None of these were ever portrayed on stamps,

Soviet President Brezhnev feared that the new leadership of the Party would follow a more friendly line towards the West and decided to send Soviet forces into Afghanistan December 24, 1979, and killing President Amin three days later.

The Communist Party's policies very soon met with strong opposition among the Afghan population, and the Soviet invasion was no less popular. Resistance group, the so-called Mujaheddins soon started armed warfare against the Communist regime and their Soviet allies.

In 1980, a single stamp commemorated the second anniversary of the Communist take-over, and between 1981 and 1989, annual stamps commemorated the take-over.



Left 1980 Saur, 2nd Anniversary of Communist Revolution (Sc. 974) right, 1984 Saur 6th Anniversary (Sc. 1076)



The Communists replaced Afghanistan's Parliament with Loya Jurgah ("the grand assembly") and the first anniversary of its first session was marked by an April 1986 stamp.

The annual Independence Day and Pashtunistan Day stamps were resumed by the Communists, and tourism stamps were issued in 1975, 1978, 1980, 1982, 1984, and 1985. Annual stamps for the Communist take-over were issued 1979-1989.



1986 Loya Jirgah: 1st Anniversary of First Grand Assembly of Democratic Republic (Sc. 1192a)



Clockwise from upper left: 1985 Independence, 66th Anniversary (Sc. 1154); 1985 Tourism, Buddha statues in Bamyán (Sc. 1156C); 1986 Pashtunistan (Sc. 1196); 1988 Saur 10th Anniversary (Sc. 1318)



President Mohammad Najibullah launched an initiative for national reconciliation which was publicized on a May 1987

stamp. There was also a stamp for the first regional elections in Afghanistan in August 1987. There were also elections for the re-established Parliament in 1988. Already in late 1987, the official name of the country reverted to Republic of Afghanistan. National reconciliation was also the theme of a 1988 stamp.



Upper left, 1987 Reconciliation, National Reconciliation campaign (Sc. 1249); upper right, 1989 Reconciliation, 2nd Anniversary of National Reconciliation Institute (Sc. 1329); right, 2002 Reconciliation, National reconciliation

Soviet forces withdrew from Afghanistan February 15, 1989, after a little more than 9 years in the country. Among the nations that have commemorated the anniversaries of this withdrawal are Belarus and the Russian-supported separatist republics of Transnistria and Donetsk.

Although Najibullah's government continued until 1992, they did not issue further stamps. Taliban entered Kabul on September 27, 1996, and proclaimed the "Islamic State of Afghanistan". Taliban did not issue any stamps except for a series of new value overprints on a 1988 stamp series for use by the National Bank for letters to foreign banks.

Between 1996 and 2001 there appeared on the market several stamp issues that in principle would be authorized by the international recognized Afghan government in the north (the Northern Alliance). In any case, all these issues, including many unauthorized were declared invalid by the re-organized Afghan Post in 2002. Only one issue from this period has an Afghan-related theme, four 1996 stamps commemorating the 4th Anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, the Farmers' Day, the 77th Anniversary of Independence and Mohamad's Birthday.



1996 Islamic Revolution, listed in Scott as declared "false" by the Afghanistan Postal Administration

New stamps did not appear until 2002, after the U.S.-led invasion of the country. The 2002 stamps honor Ahmad Shah Masood, the leader of the Northern Alliance, assassinated in 2001, lament the Taliban destruction of the enormous Buddha statues carved into a rock (previously and undamaged shown on 1972 and 1985 stamps), and a stamp promoting national reconciliation (again).

Left, 2002 Reconciliation, National reconciliation; right, 2002 Masood, 1st Death Anniversary of Ahmed Shah Masood (Sc. 1384)



In 2003, there was a stamp for the first anniversary of a new Loya Jurgah, this time led by the new President, Hamid Karzai. He was also portrayed on two 2004 stamps, celebrating his inauguration as President, and there were also two stamps for the Presidential elections themselves. In 2005, a souvenir sheet confirmed Karzai's victory in the 2004 Presidential elections, and the first anniversary of the Presidential elections was marked by an April 2007 stamp. The same year, three stamps promoted national unity.



Upper left, 2003 Loya Jurgah, Great Assembly meeting (Sc. 1395); upper right, 2004 Presidential election (Sc. 1432)l right, 2004 President Karzai: (Sc. 1434)



Left to right, 2007 Parliamentary Elections, 1st Anniversary (Sc. 1452); 2007 National Unity, Mirwais Nika (Sc. 1459)



In 2019, the centenary of Afghanistan's independence was celebrated with a stamp portrayed Amir/King Amanullah Khan (Amir 1919-26, King 1926-29). No new stamps were issued 2020, and in 2021 there was one stamp in January in memory of the Japanese medical doctor Tetsu Nakamura, killed in Afghanistan in December 2019, at the age of 73.

2019 Independence: Centenary of Afghan independence



2021 Nakamura: commemorating Japanese medical doctor Tetsu Nakamura



2021 bin Laden fantasy

2021 did see the appearance of fantasy stamps for the Taliban and Osama bin Laden.

Now it remains to see if the Taliban government this time will offer the Afghan people a postal service and by that, new stamps.