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MILITARY STRATAGEMS OF AMIR TEMUR'S TROOPS IN BATTLES

Qosimov Muhammatali Khakimovich

Senior Lecturer, Institute of Ground Forces

Abstract

This article discusses the periods of activity of the great commander Amir Temur, the organizational structure of his army, weapons and equipment, military campaigns, as well as the military tactics and stratagems used during his campaigns.

Keywords: Movarounnahr, era, military campaigns, emir, Mongols, ulus, military commander, cavalry, firearms, artillery, order of battle, cannon, military affairs.

Introduction

Amir Temur ibn Taraghay Bahadur (1336–1405) had two clearly distinguished periods in his life and activities.

The first period covers the years **1360–1386**. During this period, Temur struggled to establish a strong and centralized independent state in Movarounnahr, free from the Mongol Khanate. Together with the Turkic and Tajik nobility and other social forces interested in the unification of Movarounnahr, he fought against the medieval feudal lords who opposed centralization and unification and sought to preserve the country in a fragmented state.

The second period of Temur's activities began mainly in **1386** and continued until **1402**. This period was characterized by his military campaigns traditionally known as the **Three-Year, Five-Year, and Seven-Year Campaigns** [1].

From a young age, Temurbek developed a particular interest and passion for military affairs. His early interest in the art of war was undoubtedly influenced to

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some extent by his father, Amir Taraghay, one of the prominent figures in the state of Amir Qazaghan, who was renowned for his courage, determination, and nobility.

Having reached young adulthood, Temurbek realized that the only way to achieve his noble objectives was to seize political power. These objectives included putting an end to nearly one and a half centuries of Mongol domination, ending the internal conflicts and wars prevailing in the Chagatai Ulus as a result of feudal fragmentation, assisting the population exhausted by internal and external oppression, rebuilding devastated cities and villages, and protecting the ulus from external invasions.

With the sincere support of his companions, who had pledged to stand by him in both times of joy and hardship, as well as with the direct participation and support of various sections of the population of Movarounnahr suffering under Mongol rule, Temurbek succeeded in seizing power in **1370**. He subsequently achieved the unification of the fragmented country and restored its independence, extending his campaigns to regions including Northern Anatolia and India.

The positive changes that took place in social, political, and economic life after Temurbek came to power were also reflected in military affairs and the development of military art.

In pursuit of such strategic objectives as establishing control over major caravan routes, further strengthening the power of the ulus, and improving the living conditions of the population, Temurbek repeatedly led his troops into regions such as Jatah, Iran, Afghanistan, the Caucasus, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Dasht-i Qipchaq, Northern Anatolia, and India, achieving numerous victories. Military history rightly recognizes Temurbek as one of the greatest commanders in the world. His military talent was particularly manifested in two areas: as a skilled military organizer and as an outstanding commander.

As a great military leader and innovative military organizer, Temurbek succeeded in creating a highly disciplined army, skillfully commanding military units during

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battles, effectively deploying military forces to decisive areas of combat, overcoming various obstacles and difficulties through resourcefulness, and maintaining the necessary level of morale among his troops.

The Sahibqiran thoroughly studied and analyzed the organization of the armies of the Turkic and Mongol peoples, particularly the army of Genghis Khan, and introduced necessary modifications. Although the structure of the army established by Temurbek was to some extent similar to the military system and organization created by Genghis Khan, it differed in several important respects [2].

First, while the armies of the Genghisids were composed primarily of popular militias mobilized on the basis of universal military obligation, Temurbek's army did not have such a general-popular character. During the period of Genghis Khan, the main basis of the army consisted of nomadic populations. In contrast, according to the specific requirements established by the supreme commander, Temurbek recruited a significant number of soldiers not only from pastoral communities but also from settled populations engaged in crafts, handicrafts, and agriculture.

Second, alongside cavalry, which constituted the main military force, Temurbek's army also contained a considerable number of infantry units. It is known that, apart from the *hashar*—troops forcibly recruited from the populations of conquered territories—the army of Genghis Khan did not have a significant infantry component.

Temurbek was among the first commanders in the East to introduce **fire-emitting weapons, known as ra'd**, or cannons, into his army. The Sahibqiran also established special infantry units for conducting military operations in mountainous regions.

Temurbek introduced a system of deploying the army on the battlefield by dividing it into **seven major divisions**, which became an important feature of his military organization. His army also included units composed of women, who

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stood alongside men during battles and demonstrated considerable courage and resilience.

The army of Temurbek consisted of soldiers recruited from Movarounnahr, Dasht-i Qipchaq, Khorasan, Iran, Badakhshan, Moghulistan, Khwarazm, Mazandaran, Jatah, and other territories. It possessed many characteristics of a regular army. The troops were precisely and systematically organized, and their battle formation, known as the *yasol*, was continuously improved from one campaign to another.

The army was equipped with the most advanced weapons and military technology of its time. Soldiers were supplied with standardized weapons and equipment, while different military units could be distinguished from one another by their clothing, banners, or standards. Such distinctions greatly facilitated command and control during battle.

Temurbek pursued a number of strategic objectives that contributed to his numerous victories. These included destroying enemy defenses through various methods; launching sudden and powerful attacks against cities protected by large and strong defensive fortifications; capturing the rulers and, especially, military commanders of conquered territories; maintaining prolonged sieges of fortresses and strongholds; encircling enemy forces as extensively as possible; conquering enemy villages, cities, districts, and provinces one after another; pursuing the enemy until its forces were completely defeated; and appointing trusted representatives to administer conquered territories.

From a tactical perspective, Temurbek's army possessed several distinctive characteristics. Unlike the battle formations of the armies of the Qarakhanids, Ghaznavids, Seljuks, and Genghisids, Temurbek's army was divided into seven major units. Reconnaissance was highly organized, and appropriate measures and plans were developed to ensure the effective movement of military units both during campaigns and on the battlefield. Particular attention was given to rapid command and control during combat.

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Temurbek personally supervised the selection of commanders of units consisting of tens, hundreds, thousands, and *tumans*. The proper selection and appointment of commanders with strong military leadership abilities often had a significant influence on the successful outcome of battles.

Another major contribution of the Sahibqiran to the development of military art was the introduction of the **qunbul**—a cavalry unit designed to protect the flanks of the army from enemy attacks and, conversely, to maneuver around the enemy's sides and strike from the rear.

According to historical accounts, such a military unit had not existed in the armies of famous commanders such as Alexander the Great, Hannibal, Louis XIV, Frederick the Great, or Genghis Khan. Only in the nineteenth century can a comparable unit protecting the flanks of an army be observed in the battle formations of Napoleon Bonaparte's army.

According to some military specialists, before undertaking military expeditions to Eastern countries, Napoleon carefully studied the organization of Temurbek's army and his methods of warfare and adopted those tactical techniques he considered useful [3].

According to information provided in historical sources, cavalry constituted the striking force of Temurbek's army. Cavalrymen were divided into groups equipped with light and heavy weapons.

Light cavalry, armed mainly with bows, quivers, and swords, was primarily responsible for reconnaissance and guard duties and was permitted to engage the enemy directly only when absolutely necessary.

Heavy cavalrymen were elite warriors equipped with helmets, armor, swords, bows, quivers, shields, and spears. They were responsible for resisting the enemy's main attack and played a major role in determining the outcome of battles.

Before setting out on a campaign, Temurbek summoned state officials, ministers, commanders, *beks*, and *amirs* to a military council, or *mashvarat*. At the same

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time, a special order known as **tunkal** was issued for the mobilization of troops from various provinces and districts of the ulus, as well as from subordinate territories.

The decree was rapidly delivered to the relevant locations by a high-ranking official and the commander-in-chief's aide, known as the **tavachi**—an official responsible for delivering the ruler's orders to military units.

In addition to mobilizing troops, the *tavachi* was responsible for monitoring the location of military units in camps and during campaigns, their battle formation (*yasol*), and their movement from one place to another.

According to the *tunkal*, provincial governors, district and city *beks*, and commanders of fortresses and strongholds were required to arrive at the designated assembly point—the *miod*—on time, without delay, with the number of soldiers specified by Temurbek, together with the necessary horses, weapons, food, and fodder [4].

Before his campaign to Dasht-i Qipchaq (1390–1391), Temurbek ordered his governors to supply the army with enough food, weapons, clothing, and other essential provisions for one year.

Each cavalryman was provided with one bow, thirty arrows, one quiver, one shield, and one additional horse.

During the campaign, every ten soldiers were required to have one tent, two shovels, one pickaxe, one sickle, one saw, one adze, one axe, and one hundred needles. In addition, each soldier was required to carry a certain amount of rope, one piece of durable leather, and one cooking pot.

Long before beginning a campaign, the Sahibqiran repeatedly sent his **spies and informants** to the enemy's territory or headquarters in order to obtain accurate and comprehensive information about the enemy's armed forces, defensive structures, and internal situation.

Only after obtaining the necessary information about the enemy did he begin preparations for the campaign.

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During campaigns, Sahibqiran also paid serious attention to hiring local guides, known as **qajarchilar**, who could lead the army through difficult and inaccessible terrain.

On the eve of a campaign, Temurbek traditionally visited his spiritual mentors and guides with sincere faith and devotion, fulfilling the appropriate rituals of visitation.

After a sufficient number of troops had been assembled, all types of military units—including archers, spearmen, *qoruraandozlar* (soldiers who threw glass containers filled with the incendiary substance naphtha), *sangandozlar* (stone throwers), *taxshandozlar* (crossbowmen), *mayjaniq* operators (catapult crews), *arroda* operators (stone-throwing mechanisms), *tiricharx* operators, and other military units—were inspected [5].

Temurbek's army also included special artillerymen known as **ra'dandozlar**, whose task was to ensure the continuous operation of the *ra'd*, a fire-emitting weapon that could launch containers filled with incendiary substances such as petroleum or naphtha.

The number of artillerymen operating the *ra'd*, which was considered an effective weapon for besieging fortified castles and strongholds and for inflicting heavy losses on enemy forces, reportedly reached **10,000 men**. According to the cited sources, *ra'dandozlar* were first employed by Temurbek in **1379**.

During Amir Timur's campaign in India (1398–1399), when he approached Delhi, he encountered an army led by Prince Sultan Mahmud, Mallu Khan, and other prominent Indian commanders. Their forces reportedly consisted of **10,000 cavalrymen, 20,000 elite infantrymen, and 120 war elephants**.

The Sahibqiran first considered how to counter the elephants, which terrified his soldiers and threatened to disrupt their formations.

He immediately ordered the manufacture of thousands of sharp, triangular metal spikes called **munduls**, which were to be scattered on the ground in the path of the elephants. He also ordered that bulls—or, according to some accounts,

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camels—with combustible thorny materials attached to their heads and sides be set on fire and driven toward the elephants.

In addition, he instructed his soldiers not to aim their arrows and spears at the bodies of the elephants but rather to attack their trunks with swords.

When the two armies began combat, Temurbek ordered some of his troops to retreat. Seeing the retreating Timurid soldiers, the Indians assumed that they were fleeing and advanced in pursuit. The elephants, followed by the cavalry and infantry, moved forward.

When the elephants reached the area where the spikes had been placed, the sharp objects pierced their feet. At the same time, Temurbek's soldiers wounded the elephants' trunks, forcing the animals to retreat and causing disorder among the enemy forces.

In their panic, the elephants ran toward the two flanks of their own army, trampling their own soldiers. These measures strengthened the morale of Temurbek's warriors and contributed to his victory [6].

Conclusion

In conclusion, victories in wars and armed conflicts—both in the past and in the present—depend not only on the army's equipment with modern weapons and its level of combat readiness, but also on the **tactical stratagems, methods, and techniques** employed during military operations.

The military experience of Amir Temur demonstrates the importance of effective organization, reconnaissance, mobility, disciplined command and control, appropriate use of different branches of the army, battlefield maneuver, deception, and the ability to adapt tactics to the specific conditions of warfare.

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