

THE MYTH OF PASHTUNISTAN

The so called Pashtunistan issue has been a problem that has marred relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan since the time of creation of Pakistan in August 1947. Rather Afghanistan opposed the admission of Pakistan into the United Nations (UN) on the grounds that the new State comprised areas on which Afghanistan had a claim. This soured relations between the two neighbors at the outset and no Afghan administration has recognized the Durand Line as an international boundary. This has complicated relationships leading to borders skirmishes, stopping of transit trade and breakdown of diplomatic relations. An attempt is being made to analyze this issue which has led to poor relations between the two neighbors despite the identity of religion, culture and economic interests.

Historical Perspective:

The subcontinent has faced invasions from the west through the Hindu Kush or through the lower hills to the south and east of the range throughout history. Most of the conquerors established empires in India. Once authority was established, the centre of gravity of the empires shifted to India. Initially the Hindu Kush region remained part of the empire but usually broke away till a new set of invasions occurred and empire building commenced, all over again. It is however conceded that not all invasions ended up in empire establishment. This had been a regular cycle from the dawn of history till the last invasions by the Durrani King, Ahmad Shah.

Areas west of Indus were part of the Achaemenian Empire formed under Cyrus the Great. Present day Afghanistan and NWFP was the Seventh Satrapy (District) of the empire. After the defeat of Darius by Alexander of Macedonia, the area formed part of the Greek/Macedonian Empire for a short time. After the death of Alexander, the Greeks formed their own fiefdom around Balkh (Bactria) while the Mauryan Kings, Chandra Gupta and Ashoka extended their empire up to the Hindu Kush around the 250 BC.

After the death of Ashoka, the Bactrian Greeks extended their influence up to northern India for a short period. Around the second century BC the Kushans established themselves in the Oxus valley gradually extending their reign to northern India. Peshawar was the capital of the Kushan Kingdom under the great King Kanishka.

The Hunnish invasions in the 5th century AD destroyed the Kushan Empire. The Huns initially established themselves in Bactria and a hundred years later extended their rule to northern India for a brief period. The local people however rose against them and the local Huns intermingled with local fighting class to create a new group called the Rajputs whose fiefdoms existed in northern India till the rise of Islam and a new set of invasions took place. These Muslim rulers kept northern India and parts of Afghanistan under their control till the nineteenth century.

The fall of the Mughal Empire resulted in two invasions of the subcontinent i.e. by Nadir Shah Afshar and later by the Durrani King, Ahmad Shah.

Ahmad Shah Abdali (Durrani) created the Afghan state in 1747. His Empire comprised areas from the Oxus to Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan and Kashmir. His successors however could not retain the territories west of Indus. From the period 1761 to 1823 the present day areas of North West Frontier were under the Durrani Kings with Peshawar utilized as a capital for winter. In 1823 after the battle of Nowshera, Peshawar valley came under the direct Sikh rule. Ranjit Singh's successors were inept and gradually the British started asserting themselves in the Punjab and Frontier after the first Sikh War in 1846. The Sikhs were decisively defeated by the British in 1849 and the territory of Punjab west of river Sutlej, Peshawar and North West Frontier fell to the British.

After the Second Sikh War (1849) the British debated as to where the boundaries of the British India should rest. Some advocated the Indus while others were of the opinion to extend to the present NWFP. The Frontier was thus amalgamated into the province of Punjab. By and large the tribes of North West Frontier welcomed the British rule as they had been unhappy due to atrocities of the Sikhs, and high handedness of the Persian speaking Durrani Sardars who taxed and occupied large swathes of agriculture land. The British rule was considered more just and benevolent.

In the later half of nineteenth century two empires i.e. The British and Russian competed for influence and control of the Central Asian region. This was termed as the “Great Game”. The Russian advances into Central Asia and attempts to influence Afghanistan created fears of a Russian invasion of India. These resulted in Anglo Afghan wars of 1838-1842 and 1878-1881. Afghanistan was finally accepted as buffer state and its boundaries finally demarcated with the British India and Russian Central Asia. The border with British India was marked by Sir Mortimer Durand in 1893 and a treaty signed by Afghan ruler, Amir Abdul Rehman (1881-1901) (Annex A). This marked the culmination of the British forward policy. The border generally follows the watershed.

In 1901 under the Viceroy Lord Curzon, the North West Frontier province was created and separated from Punjab and it comprised the settled areas called the Province and the tribal areas where the tribes were given autonomy in their internal affairs.

The Durand Line was accepted as a defacto international boundary by Amir Abdul Rehman, Amir Habibullah Khan and finally King Amanullah Khan under the Treaty of Rawalpindi. Afghanistan was given its true sovereignty by allowing it to conduct its own foreign affairs in the aftermath of the Third Afghan War 1919(Annex B and C).

As the British rule appeared to be ending in mid 1940s, Afghanistan laid claim to areas along its western borders. This claim appeared to be based more on economic grounds as Afghanistan, a landlocked country wanted an outlet towards the sea. Its claims about the rights of Pashtuns and signing the 1893 treaty under duress did not carry weight due to Afghanistan itself being a multi ethnic state and the fact that no force was used to sign the Durand Line agreement. Amir Abdul Rehman’s speech in the Darbar at Salam Khana Hall in November 1893 is the proof of the same.

Pashtunistan Issue:

The issue of Pashtunistan was raised at the time of partition of India as Afghanistan questioned the legal position of the Durand Line. Main political parties of India i.e. All India Muslim League and the Indian National Congress (the party ruled NWFP till 1947) did not recognize the Afghan claims. Nehru said that the NWFP was an integral part of India and Afghanistan had no locus standi. It is different matter that it changed its stance in the post referendum era. Initially the Congress Party and the British were reluctant to the proposal of partition of India. As the Muslim demand for partition gathered momentum Punjab and Bengal were partitioned to join Pakistan, Sindh opted for Pakistan and in Baluchistan the Shahi Jirga also decided to join Pakistan. In NWFP which was ruled by the Congress Party, it was proposed to have a referendum to ascertain the will of the people. This was held between 7 and 16 July 1947. The result was over 98 percent in the favor of Pakistan. The Congress ministry in NWFP boycotted the referendum. In the tribal territory the Viceroy left it to the tribes to make a decision. The tribes unanimously decided to join Pakistan. A fact confirmed by the then Governor NWFP, Sir George Cunningham.

Robert Turnbull revealed in the New York Times in November 1949 that the tribes opted for Pakistan and part of the agreement reached was as follows:

“We proclaimed we are a part of Pakistan and we promised that in case of need we will try to the best of our ability to help whenever called upon by the Pakistan Government. The Pakistan Government will continue to bestow on us the allowances and other benefits which we are receiving. The internal management of the tribes will remain as before”.

It thus shows that Pakistan was created with the full support of its citizens and there was no dissent. The Khudai Khidmatgars (KK) call for independence was more of a political slogan with no grass root support.

Afghan Stand:

The Afghans claim to the Pashtun areas of Pakistan is based on the following:-

- Pashtuns of Pakistan are linked to Afghanistan because of ethnic, linguistic, geographical and historical reasons.
- Amir Abdul Rehman was under constraint to accept the Durand Line Treaty and had no freedom to negotiate with the British. Therefore the treaty is invalid.

- A wrong committed by the British had to be corrected.
- The referendum was false because the people were not given any other option except to join Pakistan or India and therefore could not be judged as the will of the people.
- The Indus has been the natural boundary of Afghanistan through the ages.
- The British had to mount a number of expeditions to subdue its Pashtun subjects. Therefore they were unwillingly subjugated.
- The tribal territories were not a formal part of British India. Some were administrative areas and some independent tribal areas. Under international law conversion of such an area into political entity was an innovation by Pakistan produced through irregular means.

The Afghan government has denied any territorial ambitions and states that they only support the Pashtun demand for a separate state. Afghans have only supported their Pashtun brothers demand for self determination.

In 1949 in the Afghan National Assembly passed a resolution repudiating all treaties, conventions and agreements concluded with British India. This was done unilaterally. Thus formally the Durand Line was rejected. By the late 60's and early 70's the demand for the right of self determination was extended to the Baluch areas, a clear indication of obtaining an outlet to the sea for the landlocked country.

The stated Afghan position on Pashtunistan is ambivalent and does not say in clear terms whether it wants to absorb the territory or supporting an independent Pashtun state on its eastern border.

The Afghan position and rhetoric has been different under various regimes. Daud as Prime Minister and later on as President was a very strong advocate of Pashtunistan. In 1976 he seems to have had a change of mind and developed closer relations with Pakistan.

The communist regime of President Tarakai appeared willing to retract on Pashtunistan as quid pro quo for Pakistan cutting off support to the anti communist insurgents. The subsequent communist rulers generally did not push the matter except the annual Pashtunistan Day ceremony.

The post Taliban regime has revived the problem and holds Pashtunistan Day albeit as a low key affair. It is more of pressure tactic than any serious effort.

Pakistan Stand:

Pakistan's argument is that the 1893 treaty was a valid international agreement. It was a bilateral agreement with the British India and also confirmed by the successive Afghan rulers. As a successor state Pakistan inherited all agreements and treaties and has gained full sovereignty over the areas inherited from British India.

The 1893 treaty was not obtained under duress and Sir Percy Skykes the biographer of Sir Mortimer Durand pointed out that there was no use of force or duress on the Amir of Afghanistan when the Anglo Afghan border agreement was being signed. The mission to Kabul led by Durand was not armed and stayed in Kabul for four weeks. Amir Abdul Rehman called the British his friends. Had the Afghans been in disagreement with the treaty they had ample time to show their displeasure.

Pakistan stand says that no injustice was done to any party and therefore there is no valid reason to question it later. Each side had agreed not to interfere in each other internal affairs.

On the question of self determination Pakistan argues that the referendum of July 1947 (under a Congress Ministry in power) people of the province had overwhelmingly decided to join Pakistan. The Congress seeing defeat boycotted the referendum and put up the bogey of Pashtunistan.

Pashtuns have never desired either to be independent or join Afghanistan. An independent Pashtun state (land locked) is not economically viable nor is it in the economic interest of Pashtuns to join an economically backward Afghanistan.

Through ages the present day NWFP has been economically linked to the sub continent (read Pakistan) and not to Afghanistan or Central Asia.

Sir George Cunningham stated that people of the tribal areas through representative jirga expressed their consent to join Pakistan. By virtue of this, the tribal areas had become an integral part of Pakistan.

Afghanistan's stand on Durand Line and Pashtunistan is confused and there is no clear cut stated position. Such absence of straightforward thinking shows the weak case of Afghanistan. There is a huge contradiction in the stated position and demands advanced by state and unofficial propagandists.

Pakistan asserts that there is no consistency in Afghan claims, which range from mere concern for Pashtun welfare to irredentist claims of Pashtun reunification.

Afghanistan like Pakistan is a multi ethnic state if there is requirement of reunification of Pashtuns then the Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmens should also be extended the same right.

The present day NWFP had remained part modern Afghanistan for about 50 years only. It was lost to the Sikhs and subsequently to the British after 1823 and 1849 respectively.

There are only 12 million Pashto speakers in Afghanistan while there are 22 million in Pakistan. It should therefore be the minority who should join the majority and not vice-versa. Pakistan's demand of a plebiscite in the Pashtun areas of Afghanistan was rejected in 1960.

Conclusions:

In the aforementioned we have put forward the historical perspective, the Afghan and Pakistani stands. We therefore can come to the following conclusions.

Afghanistan's stand is confused and ambivalent and one can not conclude as to what do they want. If for arguments sake Afghanistan is a Pashtun state. It can per se speak for the Pashtun rights all over the world. However the constitution of Afghanistan does not say so. It acknowledges that it is a multi ethnic state and every citizen is an Afghan irrespective of his ethnic background. If therefore foregoes its right to speak for Pashtuns. Pashtuns have through out history never collectively formed a nation and have been part of other states. Afghanistan for that matter came into existence in 1747 AD. Before that the areas it comprises today were part of either Iran or India.

The official language of Afghanistan barring the Taliban period was Persian rather than Pashto. What interest would a Pashtun of Pakistan have in a Persian speaking state?

The Pashtuns of Pakistan and Afghanistan today have no socio economic compatibility.

Pakistan has a population of 22 million Pashtuns while Afghanistan has per official figures around 12 million. It is always the minority that gravitates towards the majority. If ethnicity is taken as a yard stick for multi ethnic states it would create problems for Afghan statehood.

The British before partition granted the right of self determination to the people of NWFP in July 1947. If at all some body is to be asked it is the Afghan Pashtuns. This would be interesting because the Afghan refugees have through surveys wanted to stay in Pakistan if for nothing else because of the economic opportunities. A plebiscite may result in the disintegration of Afghanistan.

The Durand Line agreement/ treaty was under no circumstances forced on Amir Abdul Rehman. Successive rulers ratification and the Treaty of Rawalpindi of 1919 are documentary evidence.

Pashtunistan state is not economically viable. The people of the areas to the east of Durand Line are economically integrated with the rest of Pakistan. Pakistani cities of Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi/Islamabad have large Pashtun population. The complete Pashtun economy will disintegrate if these links are cut and permanently settled Pashtun population in Pakistani cities are sent back.

There has been no significant movement or desire by the Pashtuns either during British rule or thereafter to seek an independent status or to join Afghanistan.

The KK movement was an offshoot of the Congress Party. The KK did not want a division of India and thus did not want to opt out of India. No Pashtun nationalist party has demanded secession of Pashtuns from Pakistan.

The NWFP in any case is not entirely Pashtun. A significant portion of the population speaks Hindko, Saraiki and Chitrali. What about their rights or why would they join Afghanistan?

The Afghan government has also been talking of Baluch rights. This is curious. It only speaks of territorial ambitions and outlet towards the sea and nothing else.

Ghaffar Khan was considered by the successive Afghans governments to be a Pashtun leader who favored Pashtunistan. Let us see what he and his son Abdul Wali Khan had to say,

“There is no issue. It is only a demand to rename the area inhabited by the Pashtuns. But the vested interests deliberately distorted our position to give us a bad name. This has become a cliché to vilify our people. Let there be another name to identify the area inhabited by the Pashtuns”.

Abdul Ghaffar Khan 1977.

“By Pashtunistan my father (Abdul Ghaffar Khan) had always meant the existing province of NWFP which was to be renamed after the Pashtuns. I myself and my party however have never even used this expression”.

Abdul Wali Khan 1975.

The Pakistan Afghanistan border has been recognized by all countries of the world as an international boundary. Even the official Afghan maps do not show it is a disputed boundary. No country in the world therefore considers NWFP or Pashtun territories of Pakistan as disputed. Not even Pakistan's arch enemy India.

We have attempted to give a dispassionate view of the Pashtunistan issue. Much that we wanted we could not find any valid reason for Afghanistan to raise this issue time and again. Myopic Afghan leaders have thus created more problems for their country rather than gaining anything worthwhile. It is in Afghanistan's interest that it develops relations with Pakistan and removes all irritants. That is what its national interests demand. They ought to have political courage and the wisdom to rise above petty issues.

Analyst
FASIC

ANNEX A

ANNEX A

RELEVANT SECTIONS OF THE DURAND AGREEMENT, 1893.

**Aitchison, C.U.: A Collections of Treaties, Engagements and
Sanads etc., Vol. XIII, pp. 255-258**

I. Agreement signed at Kabul on 12th November 1893. Whereas the British Government has represented to the Amir that the Russian Government presses for the literal fulfillment of the Agreement of 1873 between Russia and England by which it was decided that the River Oxus should form the northern boundary of Afghanistan from Lake Victoria (Wood's Lake) or Sarikul on the east to the junction of the Kokcha with the Oxus, and whereas the British Government considers itself bound to abide by the terms of this Agreement, if the Russian Government equally abides by them, Abdul Rahman, wishing to show his friendship to the British Government and his readiness to accept their advice in matters affecting his relations with foreign powers, hereby agrees that he will evacuate all the districts held by him to the north of this portion of the Oxus on the clear understanding that all the districts lying to the south of this portion of the Oxus, and not now in his possession, be handed over to him in exchange. And Durand hereby declares that the transfer to the Amir of the said transaction; and undertakes that arrangements will be made with the Russian Government to carry out the transfer of the said lands to the north and south of the Oxus.

II. Whereas certain questions have arisen regarding the frontier of Afghanistan on the side of India, and whereas both the Amir and the Government of India are desirous of settling these questions by a friendly understanding, and of fixing the limits of their respective spheres of influence the following decision were made:

1. The eastern and southern frontier of His Highness's dominions, from Wakhan to the Persian border, shall follow the line shown in the map attached to the is agreement.

2. The Government of India will at no time exercise interference in the territories lying beyond this line on the side of Afghanistan, and the Amir will at no time exercise interference in the territories lying beyond this line on the side of India.

3. The British Government thus agrees to the Ameer retaining Asmar and the valley above it, as far as Chanak. Amir Agrees on the other hand that he will at no time exercise interference in Swat, Bajaur or Chitral, including the Arnawai, or Bashgul valley. The British Government also agrees to leave to Amir the Birmal tract as shown in the detailed map already given and he relinquishes his claim to the rest of the Waziri country and Dawar. The Amir also relinquishes his claim to Chageh.

4. The frontier line will hereafter be laid down in detail and demarcated. wherever this may be practicable and desirable by Joint British and Afghan Commissioners, whose object will be to arrive by mutual understanding at a boundary which shall adhere with the greatest possible exactness to the line shown in the map attached to this agreement having due regard to the existing local rights of villages adjoining the frontier.

5. With reference to the question of Chaman, the Amir withdraws his objection to the British Cantonment and concedes the rights purchased by him in the Sirkai Tilerai water. At this part of the frontier the line will be drawn as follows:

From the crest of the Khwaja Amran range near the Pasha Kotal, which remains in British territory, the line will run in such a direction as to leave Murgha Chaman and the Sharobe spring to Afghanistan, and to pass

halfway between the new Chaman Fort and the Afghan outpost known locally as Laskhar Dand. The line will then pass half-way between the railway station and the hill known as the Main Baldak and turning southwards, will rejoin the Khwaja Amran range, leaving the Gwasha Post in British Territory and the road to Shorawak to the west and south of Gwasha in Afghanistan. The British Government will not exercise any interference within half a mile of the road.

6. The above articles of arrangement are regarded by the Government of India and the Amir of Afghanistan as a full and satisfactory settlement of all the principal differences of opinion which have arisen between them in regard to the frontier; and both the Government of India and the Amir undertake that any differences of detail, such as those which will have to be considered hereafter by the officers appointed to demarcate the boundary line, shall be settled in a friendly spirit, so as to remove for the future as far as possible all causes of doubt and misunderstanding between the two Governments.

7. Being fully satisfied of His Highness's goodwill to the British Government, and wishing to see Afghanistan independent and strong, the Government of India will raise no objection to the purchase and import by His Highness of munitions of war, and they will themselves grant him some help in this respect. Further in order to mark their sense of the friendly spirit in which the Amir has entered into these negotiations. The Government of India undertake to increase by the sum of six lakhs of rupees a year the subsidy of twelve lakhs now granted to His Highness.

Kabul
12 Nov. 1893

H.M. Durand
Amir Abdul Rehman Khan

ANNEX B

ANNEX B

TREATY WITH AMIR HABIBULLAH KHAN CONTRIBUTING THE AGREEMENTS WHICH HAD EXISTED BETWEEN THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT AND AMIR ABDUR RAHMAN KHAN 1905

He is God. Extolled be His Perfection

His Majesty Siraj-ul-millat-wa-ud-din Amir Habibullah Khan. Independent King of the State of Afghanistan and its dependencies, on the one part, and the Honorable Mr. Louis William Dane, C.S.I., Foreign Secretary of the Mighty Government of India and Representative of the Exalted British Government on other part.

His said majesty does hereby agree to this that, in the principles and in the matters of subsidiary importance of the treaty regarding internal and external affairs and of the engagements which his Highness, my late father, that is, Zia-ul-millat-wa-ud-din, who has found mercy, may God enlighten his tomb concluded and acted upon with the Exalted British Government, I also have acted, am acting and will act upon the same agreement and compact, and I will not contravene them in any dealing or in any promise.

The said Honorable Mr. Louis William Dane does hereby agree to this that as to the very agreement and agreement which the Exalted British Government concluded and acted upon with the noble father of his majesty Siraj-ul-millat-wa-ud-din, that is, His Highness Zia-ul-millat-wa-ud-din, who has found mercy, regarding the internal and external affairs and matters of principle or of subsidiary importance, I confirm them and write that they (the British Government) will not act contrary to those agreements and engagements in any way at any time.

Made on Tuesday the 14th day of Muharram-ul-Haram of the year 1323 Jijri, corresponding to the 21st day of March of the year 1905 A.D.

(Persian seal of Amir Habibullah Khan)

This is correct. I have sealed and signed.

AMIR HABIBULLAH
LOUIS W. DANE
Foreign Secretary representing the
Government of India

ANNEX C

ANNEX C

**TREATY OF PEACE BETWEEN THE ILLUSTRIOUS
BRITISH GOVERNMENT AND THE INDEPENDENT
AFGHAN GOVERNMENT, CONCLUDED AT
RAWALPINDI ON THE 8TH AUGUST 1919,
CORRESPONDING TO TE 11TH ZIQADA,
1341 Hijra**

The following Articles for the restoration of peace have been agreed upon by the British Government and the Afghan Government:

Article 1:

From the date of the signing of this Treaty there shall be peace between the British Government, on the one part, and the Government of Afghanistan on the other.

Article 2:

In view of the circumstances which have brought about the present war between the British Government and the Government of Afghanistan, the British Government to mark their displeasure, withdraw the privilege enjoyed by former Amirs of importing arms, ammunition or warlike munitions through India to Afghanistan.

Article 3:

The arrears of the late Amir's subsidy are furthermore confiscated, and no subsidy is granted to the present Amir.

Article 4:

At the same time, the British Government are desirous of the re-establishment of the old friendship that has so long existed between Afghanistan and Great Britain, provided they have guaranteed that the Afghan Government are, on their part, sincerely anxious to regain the friendship of the British Government. The British Government are prepared, therefore, provided the Afghan Government prove this by their acts and conduct, to receive another Afghan mission after six months for the discussion and settlement of matters of common interest to the two Governments and the re-establishment of the old friendship on a satisfactory basis.

Article 5:

The Afghan Government accept the Indo-Afghan frontier accepted by the late Amir. They further agree to the early demarcation by a British Commission of the undermarked portion of the line west of the Khyber, where the recent Afghan aggression took place, and to accept such boundary as the British Commission may lay down. The British troops on this side will remain in their present positions until such demarcation has been effected.

All AHMAD KHAN
Commissary for Home Affairs and
Chief of the Peace Delegation of
the Afghan Government

A.H. GRANT
Foreign Secretary to the
Government of India and
Chief of the Peace
Delegation of the British

Government