

1 / Political Struggles over the Afghanistan-Pakistan Borderlands

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Since the drawdown of the United States military presence in Iraq in 2009, Afghanistan and, by extension, Pakistan have become the main immediate military and political challenges not only for Washington but also for a large number of allies of the United States. The primary reason Afghanistan and Pakistan have become the focal point of much of the Western world's military and political involvement is because this region harbors terrorist organizations with international reach, such as al-Qaida, as well as local groups such as the Taliban. These local groups, while more inward-looking, have hosted international terrorists and continue to have links with al-Qaida and a host of other terrorist outfits. A victory by groups such as the Taliban in Afghanistan or the Tehrik-e Taliban-e Pakistan (TTP) in Pakistan not only could allow al-Qaida-type organizations to incubate with ease in the territory of Afghanistan and Pakistan, but also, in the case of the latter country, might lead to a nuclear-weapons-capable radical regime. Since the start of hostilities in Afghanistan in 2001, a healthy relationship between Kabul and

Islamabad has been considered a prerequisite for success in the West's attempt to dismantle al-Qaida and also to deny it and organizations of its type a foothold in the Afghanistan. This was further "officialized" by the administration of U.S. President Barack Obama when it became a core part of its policy to succeed in Afghanistan. In his speech establishing his administration's policies for Afghanistan, President Obama said that the United States would "act with the full recognition" that success in "Afghanistan is inextricably linked" to U.S. partnership with Pakistan.¹ Since that speech, many organizations within the U.S. government and those supporting it have formed their Af-Pak groups and task forces in order to better accommodate the new Afghanistan policy, which has formally recognized Pakistan as an integral part. While the policy of connecting the Afghan problem, and therefore the solution to that problem, to Pakistan can only be regarded as overdue by eight years, this chapter briefly reviews the historical and geopolitical reasons this is a significant obstacle and suggests a possible path forward to common ground.

At the core of the current conundrum between Afghanistan and Pakistan is both countries' refusal to accept the viability of the other as a state with full sovereignty within their current internationally accepted boundaries. From the dawn of the formation of Pakistan as a separate state in 1947, Afghanistan has regarded its southeastern neighbor as an illegitimate usurper of Afghan territory. Pakistan, on the other hand, has tried to defuse the irredentist claims of its northwestern neighbor through a series of intrigues designed to keep Afghanistan weak and dependent on Pakistan, while working on replacing Afghanistan's nationalism with a more Pakistani-controlled pan-Islamism, thus rendering Afghan nationalistic territorial claims irrelevant.

While one can argue that the current Afghan-Pakistani deadlock is not solely a result of the two countries' boundary dispute, the border issue is like the eight-hundred-pound gorilla in the room. At the height of tensions between the two countries, Afghanistan, with a much weaker military and economy, was never a serious threat to Pakistan's sovereignty; however, as argued by Pakistani scholar and diplomat Husain Haqqani, Afghanistan's claims on Pakistan's territory led to an "overall feeling of insecurity" within Pakistani leadership and "became part of the combination of perceived security threats that required" military buildup and

the forging of alliances.² Beginning in the mid-1970s, the use of Islam to curtail Afghanistan's ambitions gradually gained currency among Pakistani strategists. This Islamization policy became much more rigorous after the victory of the leftist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) in 1978 and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union a year later.³ The fervor of Afghanistan's claims on Pakistan territory has lessened significantly when one compares the official rhetoric of Kabul since the 1990s to what was prevalent in the three decades after Pakistan's formation. Nevertheless, in this chapter I argue that unless the narrative attached to the Durand Line—as the Afghan-Pakistani border is popularly referred to—is debated between Kabul and Islamabad, and both sides orient on finding a mutually respectful solution, for the foreseeable future the pendulum of affairs between Pakistan and Afghanistan most likely will remain in the zone of mistrust, swinging between indirect conflict and periods of fake friendship. In this state, the pendulum will not move toward the center where the two states would regard each other as equal partners working toward harmonization of their policies toward groups such as al-Qaida and the neo-Taliban.⁴ Thus, a cloud of uncertainty resides over both countries, with potentially dire consequences for Afghanistan and Pakistan but also with global repercussions—as in the terrorist attacks in 2001 in the United States, in 2004 in Madrid, in 2007 in London, and in 2008 in Mumbai, to name a few.

The Durand Line

The "Durand Line," arbitrarily drawn by the British Raj in India with the formal acquiescence, if not total satisfaction, of the Afghan ruler, Amir Abdul Rahman (r. 1880–1901), to clearly demarcate the two sides' sovereign authorities, served immediate national interests but functioned only as a paper exercise in governance. The treaty negotiated between the amir and Sir Henry Mortimer Durand, the foreign secretary of the British Raj, was signed on November 12, 1893, though Abdul Rahman never relinquished his desire to bring under his control the Pashtuns living in the semiautonomous tribal lands on the Indian side of the border. He nevertheless was keenly aware that his country served as a curtain (*hijab*) between British India and Russian Central Asia. Exploiting

"Anglo-Russian rivalries to further his political objectives," the amir had chosen to befriend the former. He believed that Russian plans called for total occupation of the Afghan territories, while Britain simply desired to protect their imperial rule over India.⁵ Thus, Abdul Rahman sought to secure his own territory and worry about the Pashtuns in India later or leave that for his successors. According to Malcolm E. Yapp, although the amir told Durand in 1893 that he "wanted a wall around his country so that he might know exactly where he was," he had a longer-term agenda that he chose not to disclose at that time. Yapp continues,

Equally and plainly, however, he regarded the relinquishment of his claims to the tribal territories on the north-western frontier of British India—the area to which he referred as Yaghistan, although the term sometimes has a wider application—as temporary concessions of a nature similar to that which he had been obliged to make in order to secure British recognition [of his amirship] in 1880. Without doubt the Amir hoped that in the course of time Islamic or Afghan rule—the distinction was to become much more important than he realized—would be extended over these tribal areas and Afghanistan would gain an outlet to the sea. But in the circumstances of 1893 there was no way in which he could realise his ambitions.⁶

To contain any Afghan ambitions on India's northwest frontier region, after the death of Abdul Rahman in 1901, the British concluded a treaty with his son and successor, Amir Habibullah (r. 1901–1919), in 1905, affirming British India's control over the new amir's foreign policy dealings. Following his assassination in 1919, his son Amanullah (r. 1919–1929) acceded to the throne as the ruler of Afghanistan. After a brief armed conflict known as the Third Anglo-Afghan War, in which Kabul tried to incite Pashtuns in the tribal areas of India, Afghanistan and British India concluded a treaty of peace in August 1919, resulting in Afghanistan's full independence; however, Amanullah was unable to gain control of the tribal areas and reluctantly accepted the Indo-Afghan frontier (the Durand Line) as it had been accepted previously by his father and grandfather.⁷ This point was reaffirmed two years later in 1921 when the two countries established normal diplomatic relations as sovereign states.⁸ The Afghan official stance regarding the territories and peoples across the

Indo-Afghan frontier remained, for the most part, static until the formation of Pakistan as an independent country in 1947.

Pashtunistan/Pakhtunistan Policy

The concept of an independent homeland for the Pashtuns in what was then the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and the tribal regions adjoining the Afghan border in India was first raised by the Khudai Khidmatgar organization with the support of the All India National Congress. This homeland would serve as a countermeasure to attempts by the All India Muslim League to partition the subcontinent into a Muslim majority state of Pakistan and a Hindu majority state of India. Although almost 100 percent Muslim, the Pashtun Khudai Khidmatgar leadership, fearful of domination by Punjabis in a postpartition state, supported Congress's initial stance on keeping India whole. After the Congress and Muslim League agreed on the partition plan, the main leader of the Khudai Khidmatgar movement, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, told Mohandas Gandhi—his close personal friend—that by choosing partition, Congress had thrown the Pashtuns "to the wolves," and therefore, having been "disowned" by India, Pashtuns opted not to participate in a referendum to join India or Pakistan, but rather would decide on creating a "Pakhtunistan or Pakistan."⁹

With the Muslim League and Congress agreeing on a partition plan in mid-1947, Afghan authorities felt left with a fait accompli, partially due to Kabul's lack of understanding of or involvement in the partition process. As a result, they began their multipronged quest to demand a voice in the future of the Pashtuns living in both the NWFP and the tribal regions adjoining the Afghan border.¹⁰ Afghanistan announced its "Pashtunistan" or "Pakhtunistan" policy by casting the sole negative vote in September 1947 at the United Nations General Assembly on the question of Pakistan's admission to the United Nations. Although Kabul recanted its negative vote, the stated Afghan policy was to "wholeheartedly" support the "principles on which the claim for an independent Pakhtunistan is based."¹¹ The geographical limits of the state imagined by the Afghan side extended from the "Pamir massif to the shores of the Arabian Sea and the Iranian frontier," covering an area of more than 190,000 square miles and including "all the territory between the River Indus, which is the natural

as prime minister from 1953 to 1963 and the country's first president from 1973 to 1978, to curtail minimal freedoms and usher in a more dictatorial system.¹⁶ Seemingly unable to alter or abandon the Pashtunistan option, successive Afghan governments have pursued the policy of hostility toward their neighbor; the notion that the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan was illegitimate became—and has remained to date—a significant part of the Afghan national narrative and, indeed, of that country's identity.

Initially, Pakistan did not regard Afghanistan's position as a direct threat to its territorial integrity, deeming it manageable.¹⁷ However, while Afghanistan pursued its hostile policies toward Pakistan, the latter was not able to "concentrate all its resources and attention on the Kashmir front." As such, the Afghan policies were regarded by Pakistan as a "diversionary tactic" benefiting India.¹⁸

Pakistan's threat perception toward Afghanistan was linked to Kabul's close ties with the Soviet Union and also to India. By not recognizing the border, Afghanistan was laying claim to more than half of Pakistani territory and supporting Pashtun and Baloch nationalism inside Pakistan. Soviet support for the Pashtunistan policies of Kabul showed up in official Moscow statements, such as a 1960 speech by the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Nikita S. Khrushchev, in which he said that "historically Pushtunistan has always been a part of Afghanistan."¹⁹ Islamabad regarded Kabul's demand for Pashtunistan as part of a larger Soviet policy of encroachment on its territory. To curtail Afghan nationalist demands, Pakistan relied on a policy that promoted Afghan Islamist groups and personalities as a tool to gain leverage inside Afghanistan and eventually provide Islamabad with a friendly and nonintrusive client government in Kabul. From the 1960s onward, Pakistani intelligence agencies encouraged their country's Islamist parties to seek ideological allies inside Afghanistan, as only "Afghans convinced of Islamic ideology, and Pakistan's special place in the revival of Islam's glory, would transform their country into Pakistan's allies."²⁰

With the PDPA victory in Kabul and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet forces a year later in 1979, Islamabad's perceived threats became an international concern. Pakistan's allies among Afghanistan's Islamist personalities rushed across the border to form the

and historical frontier of the Indian sub-continent, and the Afghan border."¹² In other words, the state envisaged by Kabul included all of the current Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces in addition to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan.

The historical rationale for including Balochistan as part of Kabul's concept of a Pashtun homeland is not precisely clear. However, as the Pashtunistan policy progressed, the Baloch were included as part of the people whose cause Afghanistan would champion. Kabul's claim to Balochistan may have been based on a brief period of rule in the seventeenth century by the Afghan ruler Ahmad Shah Durrani over the Khanate of Kalat. The Baloch, despite having greater grievances with the Pakistani state than with the Pashtuns and despite supporting armed struggles for independence, did not seem inclined to become part of a greater Pashtun state supported by Afghanistan, itself dominated by the Pashtuns.¹³ For Kabul, the unstated rationale of inclusion of Balochistan in the Pashtunistan scheme was to gain access to the open seas.

Thus, the policy's major strategic rationale—in addition to sentimental and historical links with the Pashtuns—was to allow for the pursuit of a policy of confrontation with its new neighbor.¹⁴ Though Kabul's stated policy did not explicitly demand the annexation of Pakistani territory west of the Indus River, the Afghan National Assembly in 1949 repudiated all treaties, conventions, and agreements concluded between Afghanistan and British India, thus nullifying the terms of the Durand Agreement and subsequent Afghan pledges of noninterference in the affairs of tribes residing on the opposite side of the Durand Line. Furthermore, in 1955, after West Pakistan became a unified province under the One Unit policy, a *loya jirga* (grand assembly) held in Kabul rejected the inclusion of Pashtun areas as part of Pakistan.¹⁵

Through the 1970s, Afghan policies toward Pakistan ranged from hostile to lukewarm, with periods of limited armed conflict along their mutual border and attacks on diplomatic missions. Until the victory of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan in 1978, the Pashtunistan issue formed a major component of Afghan foreign policy and drained much of that country's meager resources and most of its political capital. According to some Afghan historians, the pursuit of the Pashtunistan policy enabled Afghan rulers, especially Muhammad Daud, who served

anticommunist resistance under the leadership of Pakistan. The decade-long occupation of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union, coupled with the reliance of the Afghan resistance (the *mujahedin*) on Pakistani support, not only enabled Islamabad to enter the Afghan political scene as never before but also altered the nature of Afghanistan's leadership. The elite evolved from a nationalist group based on Afghan exclusivity to a non-statist Islamist group that felt as comfortable in Pakistan as they did in Afghanistan. The royal government of Afghanistan—as well as Muhammad Daud's republic—had regarded itself as the vanguard of Pashtun nationalism and thus regarded the creation of Pakistan as an affront to Afghanistan's very nature as the land of the Pashtuns. The PDPA leadership, while split between international Marxists and those keen on Afghan nationalism, still regarded Afghanistan as a country that had obligations, not only to bring equality and justice to its own people, but also to redress the needs of the Pashtun and Baloch people across the border in Pakistan. Islamabad hoped that the mujahedin leadership, in contrast, would support the notion of an Islamic nation in which ethnicity and borders would be secondary to the unity of the community. Afghan leaders with such a vision would render Afghanistan's claims on Pakistani territory irrelevant and would make Pakistan—a country created on the basis of Islamic identity rather than nationalism—the dominant power not only in Afghanistan but in the region. In sum, according to Haqqani,

The prospects of Afghanistan, with Indian backing, stirring the ethnic cauldron in Pakistan became part of the list of challenges that the country's leaders had to deal with to forge Pakistan's identity as an independent state. Pakistan's Afghan policy was fitted into the overarching policy tripod. Pakistan emphasized its Islamic ideology with the hope of blunting the challenge of ethnic nationalism supported by Afghanistan, tied Afghan aspirations for a Pashtunistan to an India plan to break up Pakistan, and sought U.S. assistance in pursuing an agenda of regional influence.²¹

Pakistan's support of the Afghan resistance against the Soviets and their allied PDPA regime in Kabul provided Islamabad with the opportunity to once and for all eliminate the dangers of being squeezed between the pincers of two enemies, Afghanistan in the west and India in the east.

Indeed, during the final days of the PDPA regime in Kabul in the early 1990s, Pakistani officials repeatedly asserted that they did not accept the burden of, and risks associated with, being a front-line state in the war against Soviets in Afghanistan for the sole purpose of "merely hav[ing] an Afghanistān like the one that preceded the conflict."²² According to Marvin Weinbaum, in 1991 Pakistan looked forward to securing a "strategic depth" in a friendly Afghanistan vis-à-vis the Indian threat. "A conflict inside Afghanistan that ended favorably," Weinbaum argued, "could provide the kind of friendly regime, expectedly an Islamist one . . . that would enable Pakistan to avoid traditional insecurity or at least neutralize its western tribal borderlands and avoid future Afghan governments with strong links to New Delhi."²³

To Islamabad's dismay, its goal of installing an Islamabad-friendly, Islamist ally in Kabul after the last PDPA government fell in 1992 failed because the Afghan side began a protracted civil war. Islamabad's influence to realize its vision of establishing a client state in Kabul faded. Some of the personalities reared by Pakistan since the mid-1970s to serve as Islamabad's policy implementers in Afghanistan turned against their old masters, mostly not for ideological reasons but rather for simple political expediency. The border issue lay dormant and unresolved, and increasingly the new rulers of Kabul accused Pakistan of interfering in the internal affairs of their country and turned to alternative allies, including Islamabad's archenemy, India.

However, seen from another perspective, with the demise of PDPA the objectives of the Islamabad-backed insurgency were partially achieved, with Pakistan becoming the main external player in the Afghan political game. From the early 1990s until the demise of the Taliban regime at the end of 2001, Pakistan's position on the political process in Kabul either directly dictated the results or became the most significant determinant of the outcomes. Frustrated with the inability of its clients in Afghanistan—led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, leader of a branch of the Hizb-e Islami—to consolidate their myriad positions and cement their rule as a unified Afghan government, and exceedingly worried about India's reach into and influence within Afghan affairs, Pakistan supported an alternative to the mujahedin in a movement sprung from within ranks of Afghan seminary students studying in Pakistan, namely the Taliban.

By the mid-1990s "Pakistan had de facto control of most of Afghanistan through their proxy Taliban."²⁴ However, even the subservient Taliban would renege on the issue of the legitimacy of the Afghan-Pakistan border. According to Ahmed Rashid, while the Pakistani military "assumed that the Taliban would recognize the Durand Line" and would "curb Pashtun nationalism in the NWFP," in practice the "opposite occurred," with the Taliban refusing to drop claims to parts of Pakistani territory. "The Taliban fostered Pashtun nationalism, albeit of an Islamic character."²⁵

The combination of conservative Pashtunism and radical Islamism made the Taliban an increasing international and internal liability for Pakistan. In September 2001 this dual nature of the Taliban regime enabled al-Qaida to carry out devastating attacks on U.S. soil from its sanctuaries in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, prompting Islamabad to make a quick turnaround and abandon its proxy in favor of joining in a strategic partnership with the United States. However, from the beginning this partnership had an "asterisk," as explained by Haider A. H. Mullick, that Pakistan would pursue al-Qaida but would "selectively target—and in later years abet—the Afghan Taliban in the hope of rekindling strategic depth vis-à-vis India under the blanket of its strategic spread."²⁶

Revival of the Border Issue

In Islamabad's calculation, post-Taliban Afghanistan presented a step backward in its grand strategic scheme of having an Islamist-oriented and Pakistan-dependent government in Kabul that would also preferably be hostile or at least lukewarm to India. The realities in Afghanistan were in most cases the opposite, and with Western backing, Kabul found new life to exercise its dormant dreams of a "greater Afghanistan," with a greater number of Afghans linking overall insecurity and the inability of their country to move forward to schemes—some real, others imagined—orchestrated by Pakistan. While the issue of legitimacy of the international border between Afghanistan and Pakistan has not been formally discussed as an issue itself in any great detail, the very fact that the border remains contested should be great cause for concern. In 2007, after Pakistan announced that as a countermeasure to cross-border activities by insurgents it would construct a fence along designated

portions of its boundary with Afghanistan, authorities in Kabul reacted with disdain. Afghan officials remained more diplomatic about the reasons for Kabul's rejection of planned fencing of the border; however, the government-owned Kabul daily, *Anis*, published an editorial accusing Pakistan of knowingly "acting against an absolute right of the Afghans" and vowed that "one day when Afghans are mighty, they will surely reclaim that part of their territory."²⁷ In Pakistan's threat perception, regardless of the actual ability of Afghanistan to endanger its territorial integrity, the reopening of the Pashtunistan question is surely a major step backward from the 1990s when Islamabad relished the thoughts of dominating its neighbor to the west. Kabul, on the other hand, regards Pashtunistan as the only trump card in its position in a game where Pakistan—at least in Afghanistan's perception—holds most, if not all, of the other cards. The stance by the Afghan government has been supported by some of its Western allies as well, providing more credence to Kabul's irredentist stance. Writing in 1991, Weinbaum had envisaged that the Pashtunistan issue could be reopened at a future date as "an Afghan counterweight to a Pakistan that was perceived as asserting too strong an influence."²⁸

With the U.S.-led efforts to bring security and stability in Afghanistan still not achieved, greater emphasis has been placed on an Afghanistan-Pakistan solution to curtail the spread of al-Qaida-type terrorism in both countries and beyond. However, "Pakistan-Afghanistan collaboration cannot take place as effectively" until the disputed Durand Line border is officially recognized and its security becomes a collaborative effort by both states.²⁹

CONCLUSIONS

Pakistan and Afghanistan have coexisted as neighbors since 1947, and although they share historical, cultural, and commercial ties, the two neighbors have failed to regard one another as fully legitimate states. Instead, Afghanistan has set out to undermine Pakistan's territorial integrity, and Pakistan has aimed at thwarting Afghanistan's political independence. At the core of these policies lies the Durand Line. Even though solving the border issue and rendering the Durand Line irrelevant might not solve all

of the grievances—based on the real or imagined actions of either party—that have become part of the operating narratives and strategic calculations of both Kabul and Islamabad, a mutually agreed-upon border with joint responsibility over its security and commercial potentials has to be regarded as a great step forward, not only in reassuring both parties of the other's goodwill but also in changing the omnipresent policies of negativity to one with a positive outlook. To the skeptics, the European experience could serve as a good model, albeit with stark differences between the two cases. Europe has illustrated that borders that once divided can indeed unite.

On the Pakistani side, an initial step to legitimize the border would be the incorporation of FATA into Pakistan proper. This step would stop Afghan claims that Pashtuns living in FATA are not full Pakistani citizens, thereby fueling Kabul's long-standing claim of stewardship of these people. Also, a fully integrated FATA would make it more difficult for the insurgents and terrorists to incubate in the region. Writing seven years after Pakistan's formation, Major General M. Hayaud Din recommended that his country within twenty to twenty-five years strive to replace the agencies composing FATA with administrative districts. "For obvious geographical and political reasons the anomaly of our Frontier must be re-adjusted,"³⁰ he added. Similar suggestions have been put forth in more recent times, with Shuja Nawaz recommending that Pakistan end the "treatment of FATA as a buffer zone between Afghanistan and Pakistan and treat the Durand Line as a true border . . . [with] Afghan recognition of the Durand Line as a *de jure* border."³¹

As the party disputing the legitimacy of its border with Pakistan, Afghanistan ought to make a bold move to turn the page in relation to not only its neighbor but also itself. A reversal of the Pashtunistan narrative along with efforts to render the border irrelevant through connecting communities on either side of the Durand Line via commerce and projects would not only benefit those communities, but would also go a long way in binding the people of both countries beyond the historical claims and counterclaims. However, observers of Afghanistan note that recognition of the Durand Line by Kabul as a *de jure* border would be tantamount to political suicide for any particular Afghan government. To avoid such a political and stability risk, perhaps the voice of the Afghan

people should be made the deciding factor through a *loya jirga*, of course after a thorough awareness campaign on the benefits of such a move.

As part of the solution, Pakistan would be expected to abandon its desire to overly influence the future makeup of the Afghan political system, provided Kabul neither harbors any territorial ambitions on Pakistani territory nor allows its own territory to be used for fomenting anti-Pakistan elements. Afghanistan should also expect to be given access to a Pakistani port on preferential arrangements. Construction of a limited railway inside Afghanistan and connecting that to the Pakistani railroad network would be an added bonus for both countries. Islamabad should also abandon its policy of trying to shut India out of the Afghan commercial and political scene.

According to an unnamed Western diplomat, Pakistan has fears, perhaps legitimate, that if it stopped playing the card of supporting the neo-Taliban, Pashtunistan "as an issue will come back" to dominate the relations between Islamabad and Kabul, as it did prior to the 1990s. The diplomat suggested that both Afghanistan and Pakistan "need to stop political games," adding that "Pakistan needs to stop seeing Afghanistan as a stalking-horse for India" while "Afghans have to stop holding over Pakistan the Sword of Damocles" in the form of Pashtunistan.³² Indeed, not only for Afghanistan and Pakistan, but for NATO-led efforts under way in Afghanistan, a rearrangement of Pakistan-Afghanistan bilateral relations, beginning with resolving the difficult question of the common boundary between the two states, seems a necessary ingredient for success.