

Pashtunistan: A Construction of an Imaginary Entity

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Abstract

This article examines the dynamics of successive Afghan regimes' subjective interpretation of "Pashtunistan" by depicting the socioeconomic conditions of Pakistan's Pashtuns, which portrays their relative discrimination and deprivation. The article asserts that ethnopolitical elites engage in political adventurism due to the availability of opportunity and willingness. This paper aims to represent marginal interpretations of social, political, and economic discrimination of Pakistani Pashtuns as subjectively presented by the Afghan ethnopolitical elites, using a historical perspective to examine the crystallization of Pashtunistan as an imaginary entity. This article concludes by situating the Pashtun identity discourse and shedding light on this crucial aspect of Pashtunistan by examining why and how the Afghan government decided to employ Pashtun nationalism to create a conflict with Pakistan.

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Introduction

The most empirical claim of this paper is that it fills a knowledge gap concerning Pashtun nationalism. Most research on this subject has been conducted from a domestic perspective, focusing on the factors that influence Pakistan's attitude and behavior toward the Pashtuns of Pakistan. However, why this issue became the source of the Pak-Afghan irredentist conflict remains unexplored. Theoretically, a significant portion of contemporary ethnic conflict is associated with intrastate events, whereas the roles of other states are largely ignored. The interstate ethnic conflict is characterized by a series of deliberate strategic interactions and processes by which the behavior of one state creates a crisis for one or more state actors (Goertz and Diehl 1997).

Davis and Moore (1997) demonstrate that opportunities presented by ethnic divisions in neighboring states and ethnic alliances and constraints corresponding to a state's institutional structure and ethnic composition are the primary drivers of interstate ethnic crises. Consequently, ethnic conflicts result from the traditional combination of opportunity and willingness (Carment, James and Taydas 2006; Most and Starr 1980; Siverson and Star 1990). Leaders choose security-maximizing strategies for themselves and their followers by associating political ambitions with a sense of purpose. To maintain or expand their domestic political influence, ethnic leaders may generate crises (Saideman 1998).

Pakistan and Afghanistan are both ethnically diverse nations. The immediate challenge for the central governments of both states is to preserve national unity by constructing state-based nationalist narratives. Interestingly, while Pashtuns make up most of the population in Afghanistan, they are a minority in Pakistan. Consequently, because Pashtuns have historically ruled Afghanistan, ethnic identity is the primary source of state-centric nationalism in Afghanistan but a threat to the Islam-based nationalism of Pakistan. Support for irredentist claims against Pakistan by previous Afghan governments is a significant factor undermining relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. This fear of Pashtun nationalism justifies Pakistan's support for Islamist political actors such as the Taliban, whose religious ideology is viewed as a counter to the nationalist agenda. While the international community questions Pakistan's choice of partners in Afghanistan, these underlying factors are overlooked. This paper investigates why and how the Afghan government created the interstate ethnic conflict known as Pashtunistan with Pakistan, which has jeopardized the entire region's peace from 1947 to the present.

Roots of 'Pashtun's Identity

To investigate the identity history of Pashtuns and its relevance to the contemporary dynamics of Afghanistan, we must examine the historical legacies associated with Pashtunistan. Ahmad Shah Abdali established the Monarchy of the Sadozai clan in Afghanistan in 1747, ushering in the modern era of Afghanistan. Raj Mohan Gandhi believes that the 26-year-old Ahmad Shah attacked Mughal India ten times. (Gandhi, 2013, 86). Elphinstone explains Ahmad Shah's invasions: "For the consolidation of his domestic power, he relied heavily on the results of his foreign wars" (Elphinstone, 1942)." Elphinstone treats Ahmad Shah's Indian raids as entirely

subordinate to his political objective in Afghanistan (Banga, 1967 January). The last Afghan King to exert influence in South Asia was Zaman Shah, grandson of Ahmad Shah Abdal. He left Lahore for Kabul in 1799 to end his brother's rebellion.

Nonetheless, within a few years, Ranjit Singh seized control of present-day Punjab and North West Frontier Province (currently known as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) (Durrani, 1999, 255-256). In addition, Ranjit Singh seized Afghan territory east of the Indus. In June 1818, Multan was conquered, followed by Kashmir in July 1819. The Afghans lost Peshawar in 1834. Finally, in 1836, the Sikhs conquered Bannu, Kohat, and Dera Ghazi Khan. Unfortunately, Ranjit Singh died in 1839, and after defeating the Sikhs in 1849, the British conquered these regions (Grewal, 1990, 99-100).

On November 12, 1893, Amir Abdul Rehman, the then-Amir of Afghanistan, and Sir Mortimer Durand signed the Durand Line Treaty. Thus, the Pashtun regions not already under Afghan control were formally subjugated to British India (Sykes, 1926, 217). As a result, no Afghan government ever raised the Pashtunistan issue during British rule (Ahmad, 2015, 8). Nonetheless, as the subcontinent was being partitioned and Pakistan's distinct identity was emerging, the Afghan rulers considered annexing the Pashtun regions of Pakistan and Baluchistan to gain access to the sea. These facts illustrate the determination of the "Afghan Pashtun ethnic leadership" (Ahmad, 2015, 9).

Literature indicates that the Pashtunistan issue gained momentum after Mohammed Daoud became Afghanistan's prime minister (1953-1963). (Firdous, 2002, 48-54). Nonetheless, between 1963 and 1973, both nations had working relationships. In 1973, when Daoud became the first President of Afghanistan following the overthrow of Zahir Shah's Monarchy, the Pashtunistan issue was once more heightened (Adamec, 247-248).

Afghan Monarchy and the Pashtunistan Issue: Historical Overview

This debate over the Afghan irredentism dates back to British rule on the subcontinent; in June 1947, the United Kingdom partitioned British India into two dominions, which began on February 20, 1947. The Congress Party of India agreed with the King's decision; consequently, on June 3, 1947, upon the proposal of the British Government, Parliament approved the tripartite agreement "with the provision that a referendum in British India (but not in the princely states) should give the population the option of joining Hindu India or Muslim Pakistan." The princely or indigenous states had three options: (1) they could join India, (2) they could join Pakistan, or (3) they could remain independent until a decision could be made regarding whether to join India or Pakistan. (Ghaus, 1988, 66).

The parliamentary decision, which came to be known as the Partition Agreement, stipulated that the future status of the British-administered Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP, presently Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) would be determined by a referendum allowing it to join one of the new states. The NWFP, situated west of the Indus River and constituting a portion of the Frontier, was primarily inhabited by Pashtuns. The Afghan government protested immediately and demanded that the people of NWFP should also be given a choice to choose between union with Afghanistan and the formation of a separate Pashtun nation. Their first request was denied quickly, and their second request was met with silence (Fletcher, 1980, 252). Therefore, a referendum was held in the NWFP at the end of June 1947 without the Pashtuns requesting further independence. As a result of the vote, the NWFP was incorporated into Pakistan. Following the establishment of Pakistan in November 1947, the British held a series of jirgas with the khans (tribal elders) of the Tribal Agencies to discuss the future political status of the tribal belt, which could be annexed by either India or Pakistan. As a result, the tribal elders incorporated the Tribal Agencies into Pakistan (Cunningham, 1949).

Afghanistan and Pakistani Pashtun nationalist leaders objected to the results of the tribal jirgas, claiming that British colonial officers orchestrated these gatherings and ensured that only pro-British, pro-Pakistan tribal elders attended. In addition, Afghanistan argued that, because the tribes had separate agreements with Britain, they should have been considered native or princely states and offered a third option, namely, to remain independent for a specified period (Ghaus:1988, 68). Afghanistan declared the NWFP plebiscite and the tribal jirgas null and void due to these objections, maintaining that the people of those areas emerging from the colonial rule were not permitted to determine their future accurately. Furthermore, Afghanistan declared officially that it did not recognize the NWFP and Tribal Agencies as Pakistan.

In September 1947, amid escalating tensions in Afghan-Pakistani relations, Pakistan applied for membership in the United Nations. Afghanistan, a United Nations member since September 1946, was the only nation to vote against this resolution (Wolpert, 1982, 120-121). The Afghan representative, Abdul Hussein Khan Aziz, explained his voice as follows:

Afghanistan heartily shares in rejoicing Pakistan's people in their freedom. We have profound respect for Pakistan. May Pakistan prosper. The Afghanistan delegation does not wish to oppose the membership of Pakistan in this great Organization. Still, it is with the most profound regret that we cannot vote for Pakistan. This unhappy circumstance is because we cannot recognize the northwest Frontier as a part of Pakistan so long as the people of the northwest Frontier have not

been given an opportunity free from any influence-and, I repeat, free from any evidence to determine for themselves whether they wish to be independent or to become part of Pakistan (U.N. General Assembly Meetings: 1947).

The incident poisoned relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, even though Afghanistan retracted its negative vote on October 20, 1947. This marks the start of an unstable and tense relationship between the two countries (Fletcher, 254). In June 1948, the Pakistani government apprehended Abdul Ghafar Khan, his brother Dr. Khan Sahib (chief minister of the NWFP when the Congress-controlled ministry voted for union with India), and several other Pashtun leaders. They were guilty of collaborating with subversive Frontier forces and given prison or house arrest sentences (Fletcher, 254). However, Afghanistan increased its support for the independence of Pashtun lands now claimed by Pakistan due to the arrest of Pashtun leaders. Afghanistan claimed that the territories comprising the independent Pashtun state, or Pashtunistan (the land of the Pashtuns), would consist of the NWFP, the Tribal Agencies, and a portion of northwestern Baluchistan (Fletcher, 254).

In July 1949, a Loya Jirga was convened in Kabul to discuss Afghanistan's Pashtunistan policy amid heightened tensions resulting from the Pakistani bombing of the Afghan village of Mogholgay. Consequently, the jirga formally revoked all of Afghanistan's treaties with the United Kingdom regarding the Durand Line or the status of the Pashtuns (Dupree, 1980, 492).

At the behest of Afghanistan, Afridi and other tribes gathered at Tirah Bagh, the center of the Afridi homeland in Pakistan, east of the Durand Line. This assembly of tribes proclaimed the establishment of Pashtunistan in exile in August 1949. In addition, a National Assembly of Pashtunistan was established, and a flag was adopted for the new nation (Saikal, 2006, 117-120). As declared by the tribal jirga, the Afghan government announced its full support for Pashtunistan. Afghanistan was ordered to observe Pashtunistan Day on August 31 as a national holiday (Khan, 2013, 22).

The Afghan populace believed that if the Pashtun lands were not returned to Afghanistan, they should at least be granted independence. It was thought that an independent Pashtunistan would ultimately merge with Afghanistan, eventually reunifying the Afghan nation voluntarily. In addition to its official stance on Pashtunistan, Afghanistan demanded the annexation of Baluchistan, which would provide the landlocked nation access to the Indian Ocean (Hyman, 1981, 120). Western analysts immediately cited this discrepancy as proof that the Afghans were uncertain about their Pashtunistan claim and that their territorial ambitions were nothing short of imperialistic (Ghaus, 1988, 72). The calculated vagueness of the Afghan position regarding the province of Baluchistan increased or decreased over time, depending on the evolution of the situation.

In the early days of the Pashtunistan issue, when India supported the demand for an independent Pashtunistan to embarrass Pakistan, there was also an Indian version of Pashtunistan that was frequently confused with the official Afghan position. In the Indian version, Pashtunistan included the NWFP, the Tribal Agencies, Kalat, Baluchistan, the Makran Coast along the Arabian Sea, and a portion of Sind province, including Karachi (Paliwal, 2017).

The Pakistani government dismissed Pashtunistan as a figment of Afghan rulers' imaginations who desired to incorporate Pakistani territory into their domain. Moreover, Pakistan maintained that only a small number of Pashtun dissidents supported Afghanistan's "Pashtunistan stunt" (Mahmood, 2005).

The Afghan Search for International Support for Pashtunistan

During the dissolution of British India, the Afghan government prioritized strengthening ties with the Soviet Union and advancing the consolidation of Afghanistan's growing friendship with the United States. The primary objective of closer relations with the USSR was to deter threats from the north. In addition, they might bring additional benefits, such as transit facilities, increased trade, and aid. On the other hand, the US emotionally appealed to Afghan leaders and intellectuals (Qassem: 2016, 53). Afghan rulers hoped to involve the United States in Afghanistan's economic development and obtain U.S. support to protect Afghanistan's political independence by strengthening Afghan-U.S. relations (Zakhiwal, 2000).

Although rapprochement with the USSR was now part of Afghanistan's general policy, it proceeded relatively slowly, primarily because Afghan PM Shah Mahmud Khan was reluctant to take steps that would bring Afghanistan too close to the Soviet Union. Similarly, the Soviet Union appeared reluctant under Joseph Stalin to play a more significant political and economic role in Asia, particularly after defeating Turkey and Iran in 1945 and 1946. (Arnold, 1981, 30). The Soviets, however, occasionally meddled in Afghanistan's internal affairs. For instance, they frequently objected to American and other Western specialists working on various projects in Afghanistan (Fletcher, 244). Nevertheless, Afghan leaders pursued with vigor the consolidation of Afghanistan's relations with the United States despite these objections. For example, following his election as prime minister, Shah Mahmud made the following proclamation:

We are convinced that America's championship of the small nations guarantees my country's security against aggression. America's attitude is our salvation. For the first time in our history, we are free of the threat of great powers using our mountain passes as pathways to the empire. Now we *can* concentrate our talents and resources on bettering our peoples' living conditions (Bradsher, 1983, 18).

Afghan leaders sought economic assistance, political support regarding Pashtunistan, and military equipment to modernize the army from the United States in response to such exceptionally high expectations (Bradsher, 17). However, the American reaction to Afghan requests for political support in pursuit of the Pashtunistan issue was negligible and unequivocally negative regarding military aid (National Security Council, 1978).

Afghanistan could not garner sufficient support to end its international isolation due to the Pashtunistan issue. Even help from the Soviet Union was unavailable at the time. India was the sole asset in this regard despite being opportunistic, unreliable, and rapidly dwindling. As Pakistan's antagonist, India was solely motivated by self-interest. In 1950, the U.S. embassy in Kabul recommended that the United States grant Afghanistan's request for arms. "to exclude Soviet influence, cement Afghan-American friendship, preserve internal security, and promote Pakistan dispute resolution" (Bradsher, 20). However, the United States military rejected the suggestion once more. The decision to arm Afghanistan may have been influenced by Washington's fears of additional Soviet activity in Asia after the Korean War in June 1950. (Poullada, 1981, 178-182).

Mohammed Daoud's Era of Premiership

Shah Mahmud resigned at the beginning of September 1953, and on September 20, 1953, King Zahir Shah appointed General Mohammad Daoud as prime minister. Daoud was the King's cousin and brother-in-law. Afghanistan's political isolation, which the previous regime failed to end, limited foreign aid, prevented Afghanistan from attracting support for the Pashtunistan issue, and hindered the urgently required modernization of the army. In light of the West's demonstrated disregard for Afghanistan's problems, Mohammad Daoud's government decided to seek assistance and support from the Soviet Union (Fletcher, 1980, 267).

In light of the abysmal Pak-Afghan relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan, there was a remote possibility that the United States would grant Afghanistan's request for arms. As the United States' closest ally in Asia, Japan was viewed as the link between the newly established regional arrangements, the Baghdad Pact (later renamed the Central Treaty Organization [CENTO] after Iraq's withdrawal), and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). Therefore, Pakistan's privileged position prevented the United States from supplying Afghanistan with military aid. Louis Dupree stated the following regarding the U.S. government's refusal to grant Afghanistan's request for arms:

The Daoud government officially stated the Americans refused to give Afghanistan military aid because the Afghans would not sign the required Mutual Security Agreement or join the Baghdad Pact. However, the unofficial American version of Afghanistan's reluctance to join the Baghdad Pact differs somewhat. According to U.S. diplomats on the scene, some Afghan military wanted to join the Pact but demanded assurances that the U.S. would defend them if their acceptance of arms aid precipitated a Russian invasion or significant subversive efforts inside Afghanistan. However, for strategic (Afghanistan is not all that important to the defense of the free world, logistical (how to defend Afghanistan given its geographic position), and pragmatic (few believed the Soviets capable of sending the Afghans massive military assistance) reasons, American military planners decided against such assurance (Dupree, 1980, 510-511).

An attempt was made at the time to incorporate Afghanistan into the Western alliance system if Nikita S. Khrushchev's memoirs were not merely Communist disinformation. He argued:

During our December 1955 visit, it was evident that the United States was invading Afghanistan to establish a military base (Khrushchev, 1970, 560-562).

At the time, influential Afghans were generally less opposed to military alliances. Nevertheless, they believed that communism could not be contained by arming inherently vulnerable Asian nations, organizing them into military partnerships, establishing a few air force bases on their territory, and then requesting their assistance in containing Soviet and Chinese threats (Cullather, 2002, 512-537). However, the core strength of the US military was located thousands of miles away. Therefore, they believed a military alliance similar to NATO (whose forces included substantial U.S. contingents permanently stationed in Europe and prepared to counter Soviet aggression) would be more critical than those established in Asia.

Most Afghans were aware of the dangers of Soviet involvement in their economic development. Afghanistan, however, had reached a point in its history where advancements could no longer be stalled. "They [the Afghan rulers] were aware that failure to advance their country could be more dangerous than any agent of the Kremlin. In addition, the rising hopes of revolution had finally arrived in Afghanistan. Such a volatile and energetic populace could not be expected to be satisfied if their nation lagged behind its neighbors" (Fletcher, 1980, 269).

In the post-Stalin era, the Soviets were more eager to have an influential presence and had always been sensitive to Afghanistan's viewpoints, so they readily accepted the Afghan overture. Increased economic cooperation between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union strengthened the relationship between the two countries. Soviet analysts who were confident in their analysis viewed Afghanistan's stance toward Pashtunistan occasionally and subtly sympathetic (Saikal, 2010, 8). The way forward filled the void left by Western indifference to Afghanistan's future. Encouraged by its accession to SEATO (it would join the Baghdad Pact the following year) and by American political and military support, Pakistan announced the fusion of all three provinces of West Pakistan and the Baluchistan States Union into a "one unit" system at the start of March 1955. (Mushtaq, 2009, 279-292).

Pakistan's announcement in 1955 that it would consolidate its control over its tribal areas significantly heightened tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan. On March 29, 1955, Afghan prime minister Mohammed Daoud Khan criticized Pakistan's actions on Radio Kabul. As a result, the Afghan government inspired demonstrations in Kabul, Kandahar, and Jalalabad (Ross and Vassefi, 2012). As a result, "Pakistan flags were torn down and insulted, and the [Pashtunistan] flag was raised atop the Pakistan Embassy in Kabul's chancery" (Qureshi, 105, 1966). Afghan-Pakistani relations remained tense even though the flag incident was resolved in September 1955 through the mediation of Egypt, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan ended its economic blockade. However, the possibility of armed conflict between the two nations was always present. Therefore, it became imperative to strengthen the Afghan army (Bradsher, 1983, 27). Mohammed Daoud asked the Soviet Union for military equipment and instructors. During an official visit to Afghanistan in December 1955, Soviet Government and Soviet Communist Party leaders Nikolai Bulganin and Nikita Khrushchev investigated the possibility of further consolidating Russo-Afghan ties. The two Russian leaders offered Afghanistan a long-term development loan of \$100 million to be repaid with 2% interest over thirty years (Dupree, 1980, 508). The Soviet military aid to Afghanistan was also agreed upon during the Kabul talks, although the arms sale agreement was not made public until mid-1956 (Bradsher, 1983, 27).

In response to earlier requests, the Soviets informed Mohammad Daoud that the Soviet Union supported Afghanistan's position on the Pashtunistan issue before the Kabul talks between Russian leaders and Mohammad Daoud. In his banquet speech in Kabul on December 16, 1955, Bulganin stated:

We sympathize with Afghanistan's policy on the question of Pashtunistan. The Soviet Union stands for an equitable solution to Pashtunistan's problems which cannot be settled without taking into account the vital interests of the peoples of Pashtunistan (Bulganin and Khrushchev: 1956, 34).

In his report to the Supreme Soviet in Moscow on December 29, 1955, Bulganin said:

We think the demands of Afghanistan to give the population of bordering Pashtunistan an opportunity to express their will are justified and grounded freely. The region's people have the same right to national self-determination as others. Therefore, there can be no justification for the stand of those who do not want to reckon with and disregard the lawful national interests of the people of Pashtunistan ((Bulganin and Khrushchev: 1956, 23).

In addition to bolstering Afghanistan's position, Russia's assistance to Pashtunistan had an immediate and tangible benefit. A Soviet veto would prevent Pakistan from bringing the Afghan-Pakistani dispute to the United Nations Security Council as Afghanistan's interference in Pakistan's internal affairs. This rumored Pakistani action, however, never occurred. Pakistan is unlikely to have brought the issue before the United Nations, and Soviet support for Afghanistan would not have encouraged Pakistan. The Soviet Union brought Afghanistan closer to it in the three areas of economic assistance, military aid, and Pashtunistan. Instead, the West was astonished by the unprecedented scale of Russian financial aid to Afghanistan, Soviet support for Pashtunistan, and the Russo-Afghan military Pact (Fletcher, 1980, 285).

Further Deterioration of Afghan-Pakistani Relations

In October 1958, the Chief of Army Staff of Pakistan, General Mohammad Ayub Khan, a Pashtun, successfully executed a coup d'état. Mohammad Daoud sent his brother Mohammad Naim, the foreign minister, to meet with Ayub Khan in Pakistan to continue the dialogue with Pakistan. Unfortunately, the meeting did not go as planned (Tytler, 1967). In the interim, Afghanistan utilized a local dispute between the Nawab of Dir and Khan of Jandul in Bajour to advance its Pashtunistan campaign in September 1960 and May 1961 by dispatching Afghan irregulars and "army troops disguised as tribesmen" into Bajaur. The inhabitants of Bajour, however, resented the presence of Afghans in their region and severely punished them. This incident caused Afghanistan significant embarrassment (Ewans, 2001, 114-119).

On August 23, 1961, Pakistan requested that Afghanistan close its consulates and trade offices in Pakistan and closed its consulates and trade offices in Pakistan (Peshawar, Parachinar, Quetta, and Chaman). The beginning of Afghanistan's annual exports of grapes and melons to India and Pakistan coincided with the closure of the Afghan-Pakistani border in 1961. Without the Pakistani market, transporting these perishable goods to other markets became a significant concern (Griffith, 1981, 149).

In the winter of 1961-1962, the Afghan government was concerned that Pakistan's border closure would prevent the seasonal migration of Afghan nomads to the warm banks of the Indus River. This incident made Afghan nomads resent the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan (Hyman, 1982, 31-32). Zahir Shah questioned the wisdom of Daoud's Pashtunistan policy and close relationship with the Soviet Union in light of the crisis. On March 9, 1963, Daoud realized his only way out of the problem was to resign (Saikal, 2004, 129). Musa Shafiq, who served as prime minister between 1963 and 1973, sought to foster cordial relations with Pakistan. The Pashtunistan issue, however, had reached a point where no Afghan leader could avoid it. Therefore, he occasionally declared his support for the Pashtunistan cause. 1973 saw the overthrow of Zahir Shah's regime, the abolition of the Monarchy, and Daoud's election as the country's first president (Qayum, Shah, and Alam, 2017, 49). However, when Afghanistan granted Pakistani Baloch refugees' asylum in Kandahar, tensions intensified between the two nations (Qadir, 2020, 305).

On September 7, 1974, Daoud sent a letter to the U.N. Secretary-General condemning Pakistan's excessive use of force against the Balochi insurgency (Wolpert, 1982). However, the irredentist policies of Afghanistan prompted Pakistan to punish Afghanistan. In turn, it began to support the Afghan Islamists, who initially conducted hit-and-run operations against Daoud's forces. Later, following the failure of a coup in Afghanistan, they fled to Pakistan (Adamec, 2012, 215-217). Due to Pakistan's support of Islamist activities, Daoud decided in 1975 to temporarily reduce tensions with Pakistan. Moreover, he had observed that this Pashtunistan issue had become a source of Soviet influence in Afghanistan. Thus, he dispatched his military to Pakistan for training (Adamec, 2012, 18). On April 27, 1978, however, the Afghan Communist Party, renamed the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), overthrew him, and Noor Muhammad Taraki became president of Afghanistan (Schofield, 2011, 44). But due to a conflict between the new president and his vice president, Taraki was assassinated on October 9, 1979, and Amin became head of state.

Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan

In December 1979, when Hafizullah Amin could not control the PDPA insurgency, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan to save the regime (Rasanayagam: 2011, 90). Consequently, Hafiullah Amin was killed, and Babrak Karmal became president of the Soviet-backed government (Adamec, 2012, 242). Pakistan viewed the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as a threat to its existence. Similarly, the United States considered it detrimental to its regional interests. In response, both nations joined forces to aid the resistance. The puppet regime in Afghanistan initiated support for non-state armed groups in Pakistan and subversive activity (Andrew and Mitrokhin, 2005, 356-360). The opposition and its allies (the United States and Pakistan) made it impossible for the Soviet Union to remain in Afghanistan. As a result, the Soviet Union was forced to withdraw from Afghanistan. Before leaving Afghanistan, the Soviets adequately armed the remaining puppet regime in Afghanistan, led by President Najibullah. In addition, Moscow continued to provide the administration with economic assistance. However, the government fell in March 1992 due to the cessation of Soviet aid and the revolt of its supporting militias (Guistozzi, 243). The collapse of the regime and subsequent anarchy sparked interethnic conflict between warring groups. This conflict persisted until the Taliban emerged and filled the void.

In 1996, the Taliban successfully established control over 95 percent of Afghanistan. After their victory in the capital, Pakistan, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia immediately recognized them as legitimate governments. The Taliban did not consider accepting the Durand Line as an international border during their rule in Afghanistan because they believed it would reflect poorly on their nation (Wagner and Khan, 2013, 79). Moreover, the Taliban had a terrible reputation for respecting human rights and maintained close ties with Al Qaeda and other extremist organizations. Al Qaeda was suspected of involvement in the September 11, 2001 attack on the Twin Towers in Manhattan, New York. The United States demanded that Mullah Omar, the leader of the Taliban regime, hand over Osama bin Laden, but he refused. This prompted the United States to attack Afghanistan and destroy the Taliban regime in December 2001. (Gall, 2014, 4-6).

Afghanistan in Post- the Taliban Regime Era

As stated previously, Pakistan played a crucial role in facilitating the United States' War on Terror and the subsequent demise of the Taliban. Pakistan traded its support for political and strategic advantages in this regard (Yasmeen, 2003, 188-201). In addition to servicing its loans from various international institutions, the United States has pledged to address Pakistan's two most pressing concerns: recognizing the Kashmir dispute as central to Pakistan and ensuring a friendly regime in Kabul (USAID: 2020). The United States of America pledged to address Pakistan's two primary concerns: recognizing the Kashmir dispute as fundamental to Pakistan and assuring a friendly regime in Kabul (The Australian, October 17, 2001).

Despite this, Pakistan's concerns were not adequately addressed, and the Pashtunistan problem persisted in various forms. As the new government of Karzai pursued the remaining Taliban, the Taliban invaded Pakistani soil. Pakistan assisted the United States in capturing Taliban and Al Qaeda agents, but the Karzai regime blamed Pakistan for aiding the Taliban rebellion (Lafraie, 2009, 106).

In the post-Taliban era, the push for Pashtunistan of the Afghan political system, the tendency to return to the ethnic-nationalistic practices of the old Monarchy and republican regimes, the sidelining of influential non-Pashtun regional leaders, and the significant influence of Pashtun expatriates, most of whom remained outside and detached from new realities evolving for 30 years contributed to the revival of Pashtun nationalism along the lines of past Afghanistan regime

After 2001, political stability restored Afghanistan to its pre-1980 form (Qaseem, 2009). However, the policy outputs of the new Afghan government were reminiscent of the old practices that poisoned Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. For example, the new Afghan government annually observed Pashtunistan Day on August 31. In 2006, when the Baloch insurgent leader Akbar Bugti was killed while fighting with Pakistani Law Enforcing Agencies, the Afghan Ministry of Border and Tribal Affairs expressed solidarity with the Baloch communities in Pakistan. Another ministry attended his funeral at Kabul's principal mosque (Lawa, 2006). The Afghan Government even provided refuge to Baloch insurgents, prompting Pakistan to accuse it of inciting Balochistan insurgency (Samad, 2014, 300). However, relations improved after Ashraf Ghani succeeded Hamid Karzai on September 21, 2014.

In contrast to his predecessor Hamid Karzai, President Ghani adopted a policy of reconciliation with Pakistan. He delayed the execution of the strategic partnership agreement with India, pursued close ties with Pakistan's security establishment, and enacted measures to assuage Pakistani concerns regarding cross-border terrorism. As a result, Pakistan successfully brought Taliban representatives to the negotiating table in Murree on July 7, 2015. But unfortunately, the peace process was derailed, and President Ghani held Pakistan responsible for several terrorist attacks in Afghanistan (Usman and Khan, 2017, 1-17).

The Taliban took power after the Ashraf Ghani regime collapsed on August 15, 2021, and the United States withdrew its forces on August 31, 2021. (Yousaf and Jabarkhail, 2022, 117). Initially, it was anticipated that the new Taliban regime would be amicable with Pakistan and downplay Pashtun nationalism. However, relations between the Taliban and Pakistan began deteriorating when the Taliban refused to abandon support for the Pashtun religious militant group Tehrek-Taliban-Pakistan (TTP). However, the Taliban reiterated their refusal to allow the TTP to launch attacks from Afghanistan against Pakistan (Geo, 2021). TTP attacks continue, however, to this day.

Conclusion

Having accumulated the factors behind each successive Afghan regime's support of Pashtunistan/Pashtun nationalism while keeping in mind the inter-state ethnic conflicts concept of 'Most and Star 1990,' and Carment, James and Taydas2006, which asserts that interstate ethnic conflicts are caused by a combination of two types of factors: 1) opportunity; 2) willingness, we can conclude that the partition of British India into India and Pakistan afforded Afghanistan an opportunity. Afghanistan believed that, due to the British departure from South Asia, it might be able to manipulate the United Kingdom to obtain a land or sea outlet in Pakistan. Pashtunistan was the justification for this political adventure.

When the British did not heed the Afghan demand, Afghanistan exerted pressure on Pakistan by mobilizing Pakistani Pashtuns against their state through Pashtun nationalism. President Daoud was primarily responsible for this entire interstate conflict. While the Afghan irredentist claim required international channels, it attempted to attract the attention of the United States but was unsuccessful due to Pakistan's superior foreign policy. Having failed, it turned to the USSR, eagerly awaiting the opportunity. It immediately supported the Pashtunistan claim of the Afghans. This also allowed the USSR to penetrate Afghan society, which led to the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan posed a threat to Pakistan's very existence. Nonetheless, it was an opportunity for the United States to exact revenge on the USSR for its support of anti-American rebels in Vietnam (1955-1975). Therefore, both countries supported the Afghan resistance that forced the withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1989. However, civil war ensued after the demise of the Najibullah regime and the invasion of Soviet forces. This led to the Taliban's appearance in 1994. The Taliban dominated the Afghan civil war and established a rule recognized by Pakistan and a few other nations. Pakistan accepted the Taliban government in Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001 because it believed this religious regime would delegitimize the Pashtunistan issue and recognize the Durand Line. However, the Taliban feared losing the support of the Afghan Pashtuns and did not recognize the Durand Line.

In the post-Taliban era, from 2001 until August 15, 2021, US-backed regimes in Afghanistan had the same issue. The Karzai regime wanted to divert the attention of the Afghan population away from the occupying forces' abuses, so it gave Pashtunistan its full support and began celebrating Pashtunistan Day on August 31. The Ashraf Ghani administration initially attempted to establish friendly relations with Pakistan; however, it was later discovered to be supporting Pashtun nationalist groups in Pakistan, such as the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM). After the fall of the Ghani regime and the withdrawal of US forces, the New Taliban regime is also

supporting the predominantly Pashtun religious militant group Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The Afghan Taliban are using the TTP to pressure Pakistan to continue funding the Taliban regime, as no other nation has recognized it and receives no international funding.

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