



## **MAHSUDS AND WAZIRS; MALIKS AND MULLAHS IN COMPETITION**

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About Tribal Analysis Center

# Mahsuds and Wazirs; Maliks and Mullahs in Competition

*No patchwork scheme—and all our present recent schemes...are mere patchwork—will settle the Waziristan problem. Not until the military steam-roller has passed over the country from end to end, will there be peace. But I do not want to be the person to start that machine.*

*Lord Curzon, Britain's viceroy of India*



*The great drawback to progress in Afghanistan has been those men who, under the pretense of religion, have taught things which were entirely contrary to the teachings of Mohammad, and that, being the false leaders of the religion. The sooner they are got rid of, the better.*

*Amir Abd al-Rahman (Kabul's Iron Amir)*

The Pashtun tribes have individual “personality” characteristics and this is a factor more commonly seen within the independent tribes – and their sub-tribes – than in the large tribal “confederations” located in southern Afghanistan, the Durrani and Ghilzai tribes that have developed intermarried leadership clans and have more in common than those unaffiliated, independent tribes. Isolated and surrounded by larger, and probably later arriving migrating Pashtun tribes and restricted to poorer land, the Mahsud tribe of the Wazirs evolved into a nearly unique “tribal culture.”

For context, it is useful to review the overarching genealogy of the Pashtuns. Each of the great branches traces its origin to a son of Kais, the first of the Pashtun line. Sarbani Pashtuns, the Durrani, Ghori Khel, Khakai Khel, Shinwari, Yusufzai, Muhammadzai, and Mohmands, claim descent from Sarban, one of Kais' three sons. The Ghilzai Pashtuns, that include the Suleiman Khel and Aka Khel, are descendents of Baitan, through his daughter and a Persian prince. The Afridis, Khattaks, Wazirs, Mahsuds, Dauris, Turis, Jajis, and Bangash are descendents of Ghurghusht.<sup>1</sup>

1. Spain, James W., *The Pathan Borderland*, pg. 41.

The independent tribes of the Ghurghusht genealogical “cluster” may have a common ancestry, but unlike the Durrani and Ghilzai tribes that banded together in loose confederations to defend against foreign invasions along the many potential routes available to attackers, the geographic isolation of these independent tribes allowed them to compete with one another for resources rather than prepare for defense against outsiders. This factor also contributed greatly to their xenophobia.

Anthropologist Akbar Ahmad provides insights that only a former political agent who served in Waziristan, and who was descended from the Durrani Barakzai tribe and the rulers of Swat, could provide. He explained why the Wazir tribes, the large group that once included the Mahsuds, have maintained their focus on local affairs:

Unlike tribes such as the Yusufzais, the Waziristan tribes avoided military service with the British. The Wazirs stayed away to a man, and the few Mahsuds entering British service normally deserted or rebelled.

Their attraction to employment in India was weak. Unlike the Yusufzais and other northern tribes, Wazir tribes did not migrate into India to find jobs and interact more freely with the world outside Waziristan’s arid hills.

The tribes of Waziristan interacted more freely with Afghanistan than India throughout their history and were involved in setting a new monarch on the Afghan throne in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

Waziristan was more geographically isolated from outside influences than the other Pashtun regions. Invaders seeking India’s riches used the region’s northern passes and exposed the tribes living there to some outside influence while the southern Pashtun tribes experienced trade through a wide variety of traveling groups along with invasion and occupation by frequent Persian armies. Due to its difficult terrain, Waziristan remained relatively isolated from outside influences.<sup>2</sup>

Geography has had a great effect on the character of the tribes living in Waziristan and the Mahsuds were the losers in the competition for property, ending up with the poorest land and surrounded by related, but antagonistic tribes. Having a less prominent claim to Waziri lineages, they were encircled by Wazirs on three sides and the Bhattanis on the fourth. Again Akbar Ahmad provides a good explanation for the Mahsud independent character:

“Elders say, ‘We are surrounded by Wazirs. We have to fight for survival. We have to be more aggressive and cleverer.’ As a result the Mahsuds were and are more united, exhibiting internal solidarity in conflict situations.”<sup>3</sup>

But the very independence of the people of Waziristan, especially the Mahsuds, contributes to their unruly behavior. Every man tends to view himself as his own malik and with every man “claiming to be an elder, the title is devalued.”<sup>4</sup> As a result, jirgas must be convened to arrive at

2. Ahmad, Akbar S., *Religion and Politics in Muslim Society*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1983, pg. 28.

3. *Ibid*, pg. 28. Ahmad also explains “Although the Mahsuds view themselves as a tribe distinct from the Wazirs, they exhibit a marked tendency to act and think in terms of three separate clans. Dre Mahsud, literally three Mahsuds: Alizai, Bahlozai, and Shaman Khel .... Each clan tends to speak for itself. It is tempting to suggest that in time the three clans may well assume separate tribal identities, repeating a process started by the Mahsuds when they separated from the Wazirs,” pg. 19.

4. *Ibid*, pg. 23.

any decision for the tribe. It is in the jirga that the mullahs have an advantage over the secular maliks, and their connection to religion and ability to rouse an audience's religious fervor frequently allows them to control the results of the jirgas. Religion and politics have become inextricably intertwined during the relative isolation of Waziristan over long centuries. The combination of a mullah's religious fervor and tribes with martial spirit makes Waziristan a very dangerous place. Curiously, the very independence of the individual elder-malik within this unique culture normally provided some control over the mullahs seeking to assert primacy over the tribes. Independent Maliks frequently challenged the mullahs and put them back in their place in Pashtun society.

### **From Ahmad:**

“The romance of Waziristan was related to the reputation of its tribes as fighters: ‘The Wazirs and Mahsuds operating in their own country, can be classed among the finest fighters in the world.’ (General Staff 1921, pg. 5). They were ‘physically the hardest people on earth’ (Masters 1965, pg. 161). Waziristan tribes were considered ‘the best umpires in the world as they seldom allow a tactical error to go unpunished’ (General Staff 1936, pg. 163). The Mahsuds, in particular, were considered ‘tougher, spiritually and physically than even Afridis, Orakzais or Yusufzais’ (O. Caroe, personal communication).”<sup>5</sup>

Analysts frequently make the error of viewing the activities of the mullahs as based on their religious fervor and desire to implement *Shari'a* – God's Rule – in the region under their personal control. A careful review of the backgrounds of the typical mullah involved in fomenting conflict will generally reveal that their religious credentials are limited and they normally are “self-ordained.” These are not men having religious goals for their followers; they are clearly revolutionary leaders set on a course that will provide them with personal power and all that is associated with control over a large population. Most accomplish their short-term goals until their success and ambition leads them to stretch into failure, normally by challenging the power structure represented by the secular leaders of the subtribes. But as they pass through the various stages of their individual insurgencies, entire societies experience suffering until the secular maliks are able to regain the control they lost to the opportunists posing as religious leaders within a very naïve tribal culture.

A very significant factor, however, is present in this volatile, primitive mix of humanity. Tribal maliks and khans, the generally respected secular tribal governance connected to the national government through “subsidies” and formal political positions, normally have the financial means to educate their children quite well. In many cases, these “tribal elites” are preparing their offspring to replace them in managing the tribe, but many – if not most – of the educated children of the maliks and khans become business professionals and do not return to their home villages. As a result, the maliks and khans serving as hereditary elders may not have an offspring available to replace them. This factor worsens significantly during tribal turbulence.

Maliks and khans also tend to maintain two residences rather than remain in village compounds with few amenities that their financial success could bring. As a result, the men serving as senior elders may not be living with the tribe for a significant part of the year. Of equal significance, mullah-inspired violence provides ample reason for the secular elders to extend their absences from their tribal areas. For example, Afghanistan's Helmand province lost many of their tribal elders during conflict with the mullahs of the “Akhundzada” family that was more interested in controlling the opium trade than in spreading Islam. This also happens in Pakistan's tribal areas. Once an area has lost its tribal elders to either violence or migration, the process may be irreversible.

5. *Ibid*, pg. 30.

Another factor missed by concerned scholars and analysts involves the hierarchy found within the sub-tribes and the desire of low-status sub-tribes to gain higher levels within the Pashtun tribal “caste system.” The leading sub-tribe, the one having the highest status among their cousins, the “Khan Khel,” often speaks for the entire tribe. And the fractious Pashtuns in the lower ranks of the sub-tribe hierarchy normally resent the elevated position of their “cousin sub-tribe.” And it is from those lower status sub-tribes that the “opportunist mullahs” frequently emerge to rally their co-tribal members to challenge the established social, political, and religious order in which they operate. Again, it is no accident of history or anthropology that Mullah Omar and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar are from lower status Ghilzai tribes, Hotak and Kharoti, respectively. In reality, they are absolute revolutionaries seeking to establish a new social and political order upon the region in which they live – with them, themselves, leading the new system – as they challenge the higher caste tribes, the Durrani tribes and the Suleiman Khel tribe of their own Ghilzai Confederation, for tribal primacy. This current reality follows a very old pattern of tribal behavior.

### **First Case Study: Mullah Powindah**

Mullah Powindah is best described as a “Marobi Shabi Khel Alizai Mahsud,”<sup>6</sup> a description that very specifically describes only one unique individual in a region where naming conventions are not well understood by outsiders. This system describes an individual from Marobi, a village on the Makin – Tank road in South Waziristan, who was from the Shabi Khel clan of the Alizai sub-tribe of the Mahsud tribe.

The man’s actual name was Mohiuddin and while he was not a trained religious scholar, he was familiar “with the main tenets of Islam” and close to the clergy. Soon he adopted the title “mullah” and entered into the daily lives of the people he was affiliated with in Waziristan.<sup>7</sup>

Mohiuddin” was initially known as the “Selani Mullah,” but as he became more politically active he changed his identity. By becoming “Mullah Powindah”, Mohiuddin was able to get a very large number of Pashtun tribes and sub-tribes look to him as a religious leader. The “powindahs” are the Pashtun mercantilist nomads<sup>8</sup> – and are found within nearly all of the Pashtun tribes. By becoming the “Mullah Powindah,” Mohiuddin was able to appeal to tribes other than just his own tribe, the Mahsuds, by being an “outsider” in relation to the non-Mahsuds he courted by actually giving him something in common with the non-Mahsuds.

### **Hugh Beattie explains the significance:**

“The Mullah Powindah appears to have been the first Mahsud (at least in the British period) claiming religious authority to have something of a political leader in his own right. Charismatic religious leaders among frontier Pashtuns have usually been in some way outsiders, part of whose appeal rested on the very fact that they had no local links which would have identified them with one political group rather than another. But as a Shabi Khel Alizai [Mahsud], the Mullah Powindah was not an outsider in that sense. It may be that the Mahsud’s sense of their own separate identity was so strong that only in crisis would they follow someone who was not from the tribe.”<sup>9</sup>

6. Olesen, Asta, *Islam and Politics in Afghanistan*, pg. 109.

7. This is derived from a Wikipedia article that was apparently developed by a Pashtun familiar with the history of Mullah Powindah in ways not readily available to western scholars.

8. <http://www.khyber.org/people/sarfaroshan/MohiudinMahsud-PowendaMullah.shtml>

9. Beattie, Hugh, *Imperial Frontier: Tribe and State in Waziristan*, pg. 156.

The British Army wrote about Mullah Powindah while he was a very fresh memory and explained that he had been a well-known figure in the vicinity of Bannu where he wandered as a *Talib-ul-ilm*, who they defined as “a motley crowd who mostly live in the hills in hot weather and wander about the Bannu villages in the cold weather, begging alms by day and committing offenses by night.”<sup>10</sup>

After being accused of involvement in the killing of a local jailor, he sought refuge with an influential malik in Idak, within Dawar territory, where he took the temporary title “*Badshah-i-Taliban*” or head of the Talibs<sup>11</sup>. Mohiuddin was a clever man and collected status and followers as he had any opportunity.

By 1894, he became the leader of a tribal faction that was hostile to the maliks. Soon, he was able to convince the members of a large jirga to select him as the leader in charge of dealings with the British government, displacing the maliks completely. The British at Wana were soon attacked, suffered casualties, and Mullah Powindah was able to spark a frontier war that was very similar to what is observed currently in Waziristan where a self-ordained religious figure leads a large militant force sustained by foreign funds and access to a safehaven in the vicinity of an international border that provides for a hasty retreat in the face of overwhelming force. But in the case of the Powindah Mullah, Kabul was his refuge when he was under pressure and the Afghan monarchy supported his efforts as late as 1913.<sup>12</sup>

As normally happens in Pashtun tribal politics, the maliks gradually were able to reassert themselves and regain control from the mullahs. The process reveals the tenuous balance of power that exists between the mullahs and maliks, especially within the Mahsud tribe that doesn’t seem to be all that religious. From Akbar Ahmad:

“Men such as [H]Adda Mullah ... Mullah Powindah ... seemed to appear from nowhere to mobilize society and lead the society.... The role of the mullah is negligible when the invading army is Muslim. In such a situation an ambiguity is inherent in the conflict. Jihad cannot be invoked against Muslims. When the Pakhtun tribes fought Mughal armies representing a Muslim dynasty, they were led by were led by traditional tribal leaders rather than by mullahs.

“In spite of their leadership in times of crises and their service in normal times, a certain explicit antipathy to the mullah is expressed by traditional Muslim writers, whether Pakhtun or non-Pakhtun. They find him a poor advertisement for Islam. Contemporary Mahsud scholars appear to conform to this view. Traditional leaders are, of course, clear about his role. Mahsud elders have firmly kept the mullah ‘in his place,’ and they quote examples of leading Mahsud mullahs. A popular example is Mir Badshah squelching Fazil Din, the son of Mullah Powindah, in public when the two were in Kashmir with the Mahsuds in 1947-8 for Jihad: ‘Don’t give us advice on how to conduct battles and matters that don’t concern you. You just lead prayers and wash bodies of our dead comrades according to Islam. We have other men to lead us in battle.’ Mahsuds report stories of their elders putting even Mullah Powindah in his place by the statement: ‘You are a mullah. Stick to your traditional business only.’”<sup>13</sup>

10. Frontier and Overseas Expeditions From India, Vol. II, North-west Frontier Tribes Between Kabul and Gumal Rivers, Simla, 1908, pg. 417.

11. *Ibid*, pg. 417.

12. Mullah Powindah’s reaching of *jihad* brought about the attack on Wana camp in 1894. Mullah Powindah was heavily involved in tribal politics, and, in relation to British payment of allowances to the Mahsuds, managed to out-manoeuvre [sic] the maliks so that in a *jirga* he was elected tribal representative vis-à-vis the British. The British tried to buy off the Mahsud from supporting Mullah Powindah, and to give him a land grant to discredit him in front of the tribe, but failed. In 1913, it was reported that Mullah Powindah was in receipt of an allowance from *Amir* Habibullah [Afghan monarch], and stayed in contact with Sardar Nasrullah. Throughout his career, it seems that he used Kabul as a safe refuge in his struggle with the British; Olesen, Asta, *Islam and Politics in Afghanistan*, pg. 109

13. Ahmad, Akbar S., *Resistance and Control in Pakistan*, pg. 92.

While believed to be “a poor advertisement for Islam,” a creative, tenacious mullah, even if self-ordained into the clergy, can use strong and practiced powers of persuasion and a self-proclaimed connection to Islam to rally a great number of the members of a warrior society to react militarily to a perceived threat to their way of life or faith. Current militant “mullahs” rely upon the same general themes used previously on the frontier as the more unsophisticated members of their target audience, the rural Pashtuns, hearing repetitions of similar “threats” from their oral histories, tend to accept the new messages as being factual.

In this case study, Mohibuddin – a man not connected directly to Islamic scholarship – was able to declare himself the leader of the local “Taliban,” foreshadowing Mullah Omar who appeared to repeat the same basic “story” yet again. He was relatively unknown, but emerged somewhat as the “Selani Mullah,” and he gradually expanded his power base and prestige until it allowed him to manage a political coup to displace the traditional secular maliks. As the “Powindah Mullah,” Mohibullah was able to assume a title that allowed him to expand his power base that allowed him to become the leader of a multi-tribal force as he moved against the British, the external threat and motivating factor that allowed him to begin rallying supporters against the “infidel” threat against Islam. This frequently occurring “story” had been heard by generations of earlier Pashtuns, beginning with the arrival of the first Wahabbi, Seyed Ahmad of Bereilly, in the 1820’s and it was easy to accept when the latest mullah started preaching it.

But as powerful as the Mullah Powindah became, the secular maliks were eventually able to erode his position as they sought to regain control over his tribe, the Mahsuds. Eventually, their control was so complete that his son, Fazil Din, was essentially told to “shut up,” publicly, during the Mahsud’s tribal jihad in Kashmir during the unsettled times as Pakistan gained its independence and fought its first war with India.

It has been under extraordinary circumstances in which mullahs have managed to displace the traditional maliks and initiate jihad against an external threat in order to maintain their powerful newly acquired positions. Once in control, mullahs must keep the external threats very apparent to their followers or risk losing to the maliks in a constant political rivalry that often involved deadly competition. Once in power, the mullahs must keep their society in turbulence or peace will return – along with the maliks. One lesson is abundantly clear: Mullahs never control peaceful societies.

### **Second Case Study: Mullah of Waziristan**

While the Mahsud tribesman, Mullah Powindah, used the presence of the British government in Waziristan to attract his supporters, the “Mullah of Waziristan” was from the Wazir tribe and opposed the Pakistani government and the Mahsud tribe in an interesting variation of the cycle of mullahs vs. maliks.

Some intriguing, interconnected factors reveal their significance through a careful review of mullahs moving into tribal leadership positions. First, while Islam does not provide for a religious hierarchy as seen in Christianity, a charismatic mullah is able to appropriate, if only locally, the role of “high priest” for themselves. Once his elevated status is established, unsophisticated followers readily accept his new position – possibly because emerging mullah leaders are repeating a historical pattern that the Pashtuns have frequently heard in their tribal histories. By following an established “pattern” and claiming to possess powers that others claimed before, the unscrupulous “mullah” is able to claim the legacy of other revolutionary mullahs from the past and use this factor to attract supporters familiar with this repetition of history. For example, Osama Bin Laden was following nearly an identical pattern to the one set by Sayed Ahmad Shah of Bareilly, the region’s first Wahhabi, who remained a religious cohesion factor after his death when his followers created a “stage” within a cave, complete with a “manikin” of him, which could be observed from a

distance. This is not unlike Bin Laden's "disappearance" and periodic "appearances" in modern video and audio tapes that are accepted by distant followers much as the Yusufzai Pashtun population and the "Hindustani Fanatics" continued to believe that Seyed Ahmad Shah was still living and inspiring his followers to attempt even greater deeds for Islam than the attacks he led against the period's "infidel threat," the Sikhs. Worse yet, Seyed Ahmad Shah was buried in the Indus river, paralleling Bin Laden's watery grave – possibly foreshadowing the development of a following for the Saudi terrorist like that of Seyed Ahmad Shah of Bareilly.

Second, the widespread concept of "Ummah," or the greater community of all Muslims, eases the generally subversive work of the charismatic mullah to assemble new followers. This factor allows the mullah to work to attract tribes outside of his own to enter his frequently revolutionary movement against the tribes, secular class, the malikis and khans.

The Waziristan Mullah was able to capitalize upon both of these factors. Akbar Ahmad served as South Waziristan's Political Agent during this violent period and he provided an excellent history of this turbulent episode. The Waziristan Mullah's name was Noor Muhammad and he was from the Wazir Bizan Khel subtribe,<sup>14</sup> but he was the primary focus of a tribal war between the Wazirs and the Mahsuds in the mid-1970's. According to Akbar Ahmad:

"This war, sparked by the rise of a proto-Taliban-style religious figure named Noor Muhammad, was essentially a drive by the Wazirs to establish a separate tribal agency to get them out from under domination by the majority\* Mahsuds. Perhaps the key objective of Noor's rebellion was to force the government of Pakistan to open the Gomal Road, which would allow the Wazirs to travel and trade without having to go through Mahsud territory. The government of Pakistan eventually sent in tanks to crush the rebellion, and the Gomal Road remained closed."<sup>15</sup>

Ahmad also explained the significance of a careful study of Waziristan:

"A careful review of the situation in Waziristan will not explain much about Islam, but it will illustrate much about Muslim society, particularly the independent Pashtun tribes living there. When the "call" is made, Pashtuns will respond to defend Islam regardless of their imperfect understanding of it. In many ways, their response is based in social requirements – possibly far more than being based in religion."<sup>16</sup>

The former political agent is quite correct in asserting his belief that a study of Waziristan would be a useful exercise in understanding this unique portion of the Muslim world, a huge region with its cultural roots fixed firmly in a tribal raider mentality. Historically, the smaller, weaker Pashtun sub-tribes had been forced onto poorer land where they remained at the basic subsistence level. When they needed resources not available to them in their own territory, they often raided outward into the "settled areas" where comparatively wealthy tribesmen lived in villages. This raiding tendency led these poorer tribes and sub-tribes into conflict with the British on numerous occasions as they sent their troops to recover rustled cattle, kidnapped women, and punish the troublemakers in hopes that the raiders would be properly restrained through a strategy of "assured destruction" for continued raiding. In many ways, this raiding behavior continues today but in a different manner.

14. *Ibid*, pg. 49.

\*Ahmad describes the Mahsuds as a "majority." The relative sizes of the two tribes is uncertain. If the Mahsuds represent a larger population than the Wazir tribes, they are restricted to a smaller territory and this may be an additional factor in their aggressiveness. Overcrowding frequently results in outward expansion or raiding among tribal societies. In this case, it is probable that Ahmad meant that the Mahsuds were growing more powerful than the local Wazirs.

15. <http://corner.nationalreview.com/post/?q=YWRkNmFhNzA0MDFhMjUyYzUxYTdjNzY3MDA4MjM5NTQ=>

16. Ahmad, *Religion and Politics in Muslim Society*, pp. 4-5.

Lower status tribes and sub-tribes are frequently the source of the problems experienced in the FATA, the Northwest Frontier Province, and even inside Afghanistan, as poorer tribes seek resources and status denied them by the more powerful, higher status tribes. In these situations, both mullahs and maliks cooperate in leading their people into violent situations. In many ways, the government's response to this general tendency toward violence has worsened the violence. Government allowances to maliks are intended to ensure that the people led by the malik remain on good behavior. These payments are calculated on a monthly basis, but are paid annually. Much like the mullahs who cannot attract supporters during peaceful times, the maliks have good reason to ensure that trouble develops periodically – or their subsidies gradually erode. Kidnapping of officials, holding them for ransom or concessions, erection of roadblocks for the extortion of travelers, and the occasional sniping incident or bomb is part of a highly developed method of “tribal raiding.” Ahmad wrote, “To create a problem, control it, and terminate it is an acknowledged and highly regarded yardstick of political skill.” This tendency goes far beyond western Pakistan and has also been developed into an art form in distant Yemen where tourists are often kidnapped to force government concessions and road construction. This “raiding tendency” of the smaller, poorest tribes combined with jealousy of their more wealthy cousins are among the factors that allow creative, ambitious men to “self-ordain” and as mullahs, to lead their relatively naïve followers into jihad-like aggressive activity. Noor Mohammad, the “Waziristan mullah”, followed this precise pattern, but he focused his followers on the Mahsud tribe rather than the typical “foreign infidels.” Some form of “external threat” is essential for mullahs as they attempt to mobilize their followers. Atypically, Noor Mohammad chose his enemies poorly and his “proto-Taliban” movement failed.

Akbar Ahmad is correct with his view of the Waziristan Mullah's revolt as “proto-Taliban-like,” but the context of the period is important in understanding Noor Mohammad's successful approach to creating a revolutionary change within the Wazir tribe. His movement was crushed in what Lord Curzon would describe as a “steam roller” when the Pakistani army moved against him in 1976. Significantly, this was three years before the Soviet Union intervened in Afghanistan to create a series of unstoppable, cascading events that culminated in the eventual evolution of angry, frustrated Pashtuns into the Taliban Movement – that closely followed the pattern set by Noor Mohammad prior to 1976.

By focusing the ire of the Wazirs on the Mahsud's growing tribal power and wealth, Noor Mohammad was soon able to maneuver himself into a position from which he evolved into a symbol of Wazir honor, not an insignificant accomplishment in an honor-bound culture governed by a warrior's code, Pashtunwali. Additionally, the Wazir tribes seem to suffer somewhat from an inferiority complex due to their relative isolation and their language, Wazirwola,<sup>17</sup> which is a dialect of Pashto, but is relatively unintelligible to both northern (Pakhtun) and southern (Pashtun) populations. These factors, physical and linguistic isolation, combined with a political situation that leaves them connected to both Pakistan and Afghanistan due to the Afghan refusal to recognize the Durand Line, make the Wazir tribes considerably more militant and aggressive when compared to other Pashtun tribes.

Noor Mohammad also creatively followed the pattern established by the Hadda Mullah, the Haji of Turangzai, and Ghaffar Khan, the leader of the Red Shirt Movement, by developing his base of supporters by his focus on education and establishing a madrassa. The students, Noor Mohammad's *Talibs*, were soon moving throughout the region where they became his best organizers.

Like his “revolutionary” predecessors, especially the Haji of Turangzai and Ghaffar Khan, Noor Mohammad soon introduced the concept of “Pakhtunistan” (Pashtunistan among southern Pashtuns) into his movement. This shift occurred following a visit to Noor Mohammad from Arbab Sikander Khan, the head of the National Awami Party and governor of Northwest Frontier Province. The Awami party was the political descendent

17. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wazir\\_\(Tribe\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wazir_(Tribe))

of the Red Shirt Movement and recently was again running the Notherwest Frontier Province with Asfandiyar Wali Khan, the grandson of Ghaffar Khan, as its leader. As a result, Noor Mohammad was soon aligned with the Pashtun nationalist movement.<sup>18</sup>

Soon after the dismissal of the National Awami Party by Bhutto's ruling party in Islamabad, the Pakistan People's Party, Noor Mohammad appeared to ally his movement with Bhutto. Not long before the Pakistani military moved against him, one of Ahmad's Assistant Political Agents wrote to him on March 30, 1975:

“After the fall of the NAP government in the province, Noor Mohammad has given out to have joined the PPP but this fact does not appear to be true. I believe that Maulvi Noor Mohammad who has become an important and wealthy man over the past 8/10 years is a part by himself. A clever, power loving man, conscious of the lukewarm policies of the Political Administrations, well established in the midst of orthodox ignorant Wazirs can very well play the role of religious leader.”<sup>19</sup>

This accurate description by the Assistant Political Agent can be applied to nearly any “revolutionary,” self-ordained mullah found in a leadership capacity in the FATA and the Northwest Frontier Province today. Weak political administration, peace “treaties” that allow the mullah class to consolidate their local power, and a “lukewarm” national policy combines with casualties and flight among the maliks and khans to permit a political vacuum to develop that is soon filled by religious opportunists. This situation will remain, unfortunately, until Lord Curzon's “steam roller” – raw military power – is again used to crush the “revolutionary” mullahs who will soon be feuding among themselves as the perceived external threat is no longer present to unify them.

But even with ascendant mullahs in control, the traditional maliks and khans are frequently in opposition to them. Tribes, especially the Wazir and Mahsud tribes, are composed of very independent sub-tribes that tend to follow leaders that benefit their tribe most. Far from being unanimous in their view related to inter- and intra-tribal politics, the sub-tribes frequently act very independently and may follow leaders other than the opportunist mullahs seeking personal power.

### **Third Case Study: Malik Faridullah Khan**

While many maliks are pro-government and receive subsidies to ensure their loyalty, it is very difficult to document all of their activities. One malik, Faridullah Khan, is a good example of a malik who worked with the Pakistani government at the expense of the mullahs – who had natural allies among many of the local Arabic-speaking foreigners who had access to external sources of funding and support from other individuals whose ancestral roots were closer to Mecca and Medina. While he wasn't the only malik involved in supporting the Pakistani government, Faridullah Khan operated in Waziristan among the Ahmadzai Wazirs, much like Mullah Powindah and the Waziristan Mullah, but he took an opposite side and forms a useful case study.

The local newspapers began to report on the pro-government activities of former senator Faridullah Khan in July 2004. He was very active in working to stabilize the region near Shakai, a location long dominated by foreign extremists and the site of a large confrontation that left two

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18. Ahmad, Op. Cit. pg. 58.

19. *Ibid*, pg. 59.

major al-Qa'ida leaders dead. The Canadian, Khadr<sup>20</sup>, and the Uighur, Abu Mohammad al-Turkestani<sup>21</sup> were killed there while fighting Pakistani troops there in October, 2003.

**The Jang newspapers reported the following in July 2004:**

“Secretary Fata Security Brig (ret'd) Mehmood Shah, Political Agent Asmatullah Gandapur, former Senator Malik Faridullah Khan, Maulana Abdul Malik MNA, tribal elders and officials of the political administration were present on the occasion. FC troops entered into the valley in the aftermath of agreement reached between the government and local tribes last week. Sperkai, Khoniakhel, Shodiakai and Khojalkhel tribes of Ahmadzai Wazir while Miami and Malakshahi tribes of Utmanzai Wazir had assured the government of all out support besides furnishing a guarantee worth Rs 10 million. The tribes under the agreement have pledged not to provide sanctuary to foreigners, protect military installations and assist government in development activities. Prominent tribal leader Malik Faridullah Khan played a crucial role in gathering the tribes of Shakai on a single platform and brokering an agreement between them and the government. Addressing the gathering, ex-senator Malik Faridullah Khan welcomed the deployment of FC troops in the area and hoped that it will ensure peace and stability. He said a peaceful environment was pre-requisite for development and progress. He thanked the government for giving tehsil [sub-district] status to Shakai. Malik Faridullah Khan urged all tribes to strengthen the hands of security forces for securing frontiers of the country and maintaining peace in the agency. Brigadier (ret'd) Mehmood Shah said it was a matter of great satisfaction that all tribes were able to gather for the cause of peace in the area. He said that government would not allow a few individuals to disturb peaceful atmosphere in the area for their ulterior motives. He said the government would soon initiate massive development works, which will change the socio-economic lot of the people of the area. He hoped that all tribesmen would abide by their pledge and ensure peace in the area. Later Mehmood Shah distributed foodstuff worth Rs 0.6 million on behalf of the governor NWFP among the affectees of the military operation and poor people of the area.”<sup>22</sup>

Faridullah Khan remained politically active as he attempted to organize tribes in the vicinity of Shakai to support the national government and oppose al-Qa'ida.

“Meanwhile, a 30-member delegation from Shakai will leave Wana for Peshawar on Wednesday to meet NWFP Governor Syed Iftikhar Hussain Shah. The meeting follows Monday's agreement with the government by four tribes in Shakai to fight foreigners and support the government. Former federal minister Faridullah Khan, who helped broker the agreement and the surrender of wanted men Eda Khan and Dilwar Khan, will lead the delegation. Official sources said that the governor might announce a special development package for Shakai after the tribe's agreement to support the government against foreigners linked to Qaeda.”

Faridullah Khan was having a significant impact in stabilizing the area surrounding Shakai for the Islamabad government. In return, the government provided separate sub-district identity for the Shakai area as a separate tehsil and sent financial aid. The newspapers reported on the positive role played by Faridullah:

20. South Waziristan's Mullah Nazir began battling the Uzbek contingent after he accused them of assassinating Arab al Qaeda operatives Saiful Asad and Sheikh Asadullah, a Saudi. Asadullah was one of Nazir's lieutenants and served as al Qaeda's financiers in the region. Asadullah replaced Ahmad Saeed Abdur Rehman Khadr al Kanadi, an al Qaeda operative who was killed in 2003. Kanadi was “designated by the United Nations as a high-ranking al Qaeda member.”

21. Hasan Mahsum (aka Abu-Muhammad al-Turkestani) was killed in what was at the time Pakistan's “largest-ever offensive against al-Qaida”, in the lawless region of Waziristan.

22. <http://www.as-sahwah.com/viewnews.php?newsID=2208>

“Prominent tribal leader Malik Faridullah Khan played crucial role in gathering the tribes of Shakai on a single platform and brokering the agreement.... Senator Malik Faridullah Khan welcomed deployment of FC Troops in the area and expressed the hope that it would ensure peace and stability in the area. He said that peaceful environment was the most important pre-requisite for the development and progress. He thanked government for giving Tehsil status to Shakai. Malik Faridullah Khan urged all tribes to strengthen the hands of security forces for securing frontiers of the country and maintaining peace in the agency.”

Faridullah’s success, however, came at the expense of ruthless men and their allies in the violent Waziristan region. Unfortunately, there is a specific, unseen threshold at which the extremists must act or they begin to lose control in the constant cycle of malik vs. mullah violence. In the case of the courageous Senator Faridullah Khan, the extremists were soon to act. First, they sent a very specific warning that the senator should stop his activities against them by exploding a bomb at his compound on March 30, 2005:

“A bomb exploded outside a guesthouse in the Shakai area of South Waziristan damaging the main gate and the boundary wall. The guesthouse is owned by pro-Government tribal elder and former Federal Minister, Malik Faridullah Khan.”<sup>23</sup>

Faridullah ignored the warning and continued his work on the behalf of the government. The Dawn newspaper reported the following on May 29, 2005:

“Suspected militants on Sunday killed a key tribal ally of the government in the restive South Waziristan tribal region along with his cousin and bodyguard, witnesses and a senior government official said. Ex-senator and former federal minister Faridullah Khan was ambushed a short while after he had left South Waziristan’s regional headquarters Wana after attending a media briefing by GOC, Wana, Maj-Gen Niaz Khattak. Two others accompanying the chief of Ahmadzai Wazir tribe in the whole of South Waziristan were wounded. One of them is stated to be in critical condition, official sources told Dawn. Officials said that Mr. Khan, who had played a pivotal role in opening up the Shakai Valley, the last bastion of foreign militants, to the Pakistan Army, had been killed by militants.”<sup>24</sup>

Faridullah Khan wasn’t the only key malik opposing the extremists operating in Waziristan during 2005. A report prepared by State Department was terse in its tone as it revealed that extremist violence continued in the FATA during 2005. It also showed that the traditional elements of governance were under attack as the violent cycle of malik vs. mullah continued:

“Foreign terrorists and their local tribal allies attacked and killed military personnel, government officials, and pro-government tribal chiefs in the FATA. For example, on January 22, unidentified gunmen shot and killed Mohammad Ibrahim Khan Mehsud, senior vice president of the tribal peace committee in Makeen, South Waziristan, at his home in Tauda Cheena. On May 29, militants killed former federal minister and pro-government tribal leader Faridullah Khan, his cousin, and a bodyguard after attacking his vehicle in South Waziristan. On July 22, unidentified gunmen shot and killed Mir Zalam Khan, the pro-government chief of the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe, after attacking his vehicle in Wana, South Waziristan. His two brothers and a nephew also died in the attack.”<sup>25</sup>

23. <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/Waziristan/timeline/2005.htm>

24. <http://www.dawn.com/2005/05/30/top5.htm>

25. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61710.htm>

And the militants carrying out these attacks in South Waziristan? They were probably affiliated with Mullah Nazir, the local leader who later ordered his men to attack the Uzbeks in the area. While these are definitely attacks by villains against other villains, the maliks of South Waziristan can take little comfort in this turn of events. Mullah Nazir and his militants are still closely affiliated with Arab extremists and the cycle of violence can be expected to continue within South Waziristan.

### **Sequel Now Forming**

There are common factors that carry themselves across generations within the Pashtuns. One factor that seems the last to be understood is the tension between Islam vs. Pashtunwali. As pointed out previously, the unsophisticated, naïve average Pashtun tribesman can be rallied quickly behind a charismatic leader to unite in defending Islam from an external threat. He will do this in spite of the fact that he actually knows little about the faith he will willingly defend with his life, if necessary. At the same time, the socially schizophrenic Pashtun also must be willing to defend his tribe and/or sub-tribe from aggressors, even if the potential attackers are also Pashtuns, and even if they are from a different sub-tribe within his own tribe. These schizophrenic tensions are present at all times, but are generally minimized into the tribal background when an external threat is present to unify these unsophisticated tribesmen. Mullahs, even those who are self-ordained, generally have both an acquired lineage from similar respected religious leaders from the past and excellent oratory skills needed to rally followers to a shared cause. Malik and khans, by way of comparison, must rely upon their inherited lineage and access to government subsidies in order to maintain control of those willing to accept their leadership and this leaves the maliks at a distinct disadvantage. Obviously, the malik/khan/government alliance is failing under the pressure of the charismatic mullahs and the funds provided by their external allies, primarily the extremist Arabs.

Interestingly, there are new factors entering into the “tribal equation” that have not been seen before. As the power of the insurgent groups in the FATA and the former Northwest Frontier Province has grown at the expense of the comparative military force available to Pakistan that has decreased, the local balance of power has shifted dramatically. And, adding to this complexity, the fairly recent election victory of the Awami National Party, the inheritors of the lineage of Ghaffar Khan, the old Red Shirts and their Pashtun peace movement, have done what peace movements do best. They entered into peace negotiations with the separate extremist groups loosely united into the “Pakistan Taliban.”

While both sides engaged with the negotiations and peace treaties that have been created and signed, one agency at a time, there may be an unintended consequence – other than the extremists violating their agreements before the ink is dry on the signed documents. The temporary treaties may be reducing the major external threat that unifies the extremist groups, the Pakistani military. And as this external threat gradually begins to dissipate, each individual group will probably be involved in consolidating their power within their individual fiefdoms, each based on a separate agency that was originally formed along individual tribal boundaries. As a result of the consolidation processes and the lack of a unifying threat, the social schizophrenia will probably grow as tribe begins to oppose tribe.

In an attempt to unify the extremists, the deceased Baitullah Mahsud once was designated the leader of Pakistan’s Taliban while Utmanzai Wazir Gul Bahadur was in the number two position. Baitullah, obviously, was a member of the Mahsud tribe with a lineage or heritage that goes only to his brother, Abdullah, who was captured in Afghanistan and sent to Guantanamo before being killed in fighting in Pakistan. Now, opportunist Hakimullah Mahsud has replaced the violently deceased Baitullah. Unlike the Mahsud leaders, Gul Bahadur is an Utmanzai Wazir from North Waziristan with a legacy claimed directly from his grandfather, the legendary Faqir of Ipi, and from him an “acquired genealogy” back through history to the Hadda Mullah and the equally legendary Akhund of Swat. Interesting tribal balance of power tensions will obviously continue to evolve

as these tribal and lineage realities become major factors if the Pakistani army becomes less of an external threat, whether weakened or sufficiently strong to institute some form of stability.

On the Mahsud side of the power equation, was Baitullah attempting to follow in the footsteps of the Powindah Mullah, another Mahsud with little actual religious training? In this case, Baitullah also was connected to the al-Tabligh religious movement, and through it, he had potential international reach that other “revolutionary” mullahs lacked in previous revolts against the maliks and their government allies. Unlike his Sufi predecessors, Baitullah and his replacement, Hakimullah, also absorbed enough Wahhabism to rely upon suicide bombers as a weapon. The key question now involves in Hakimullah’s ability to maintain his position within the “Pakistan Taliban” when he will ultimately be challenged by someone with the revolutionary religious pedigree such as possessed by Gul Bahadur through his legendary direct ancestor and the religious lineage he inherited.

On the Utmanzai Wazir side of the equation, will Gul Bahadur gradually consolidate his control over large portions of North Waziristan and begin to challenge the Mahsuds are now supporting Baitullah’s successor, Hakimullah? The eight-to-ten year conflict between the Ahmadzai Wazirs and the Mahsuds in South Waziristan ended in 1976, well within living memory and residual tension must still remain between the two tribes. While the Ahmadzai Wazir were primarily affected, will the power consolidation efforts of each side start “ethnic cleansing” of minority Mahsud clans living in both Wazir tribal territories? Will the Mahsuds take similar action against Wazir enclaves within their territory? Probably. And as old Pashtunwali scores are settled and resettled, the Islamic component of Pashtun schizophrenia is likely to slide further into the cultural background of Pashtunwali and the cultural requirement for revenge.

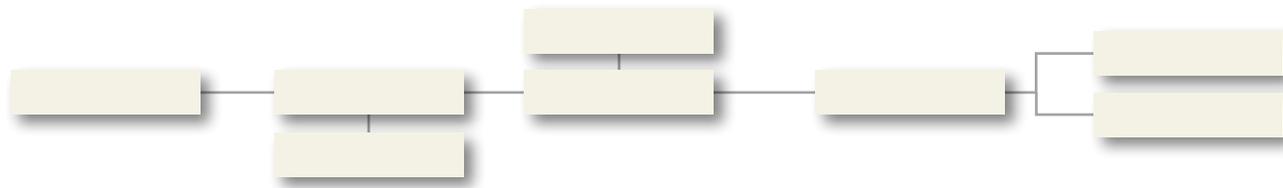
Arabs and Seyed groups affiliated with the “revolutionary” mullahs will probably attempt to mediate and may be somewhat successful. Outsiders have a sound history of serving as mediators between warring Pashtun factions and the Arabs from “the Land of the Two Holy Places” may be able to reduce the conflict arising from Pashtunwali’s Badal, or revenge, requirement. One factor remains relatively certain, however. The mullahs cannot control, much less govern, societies that exist in some form of peace and there are far too many degrees of separation between the Pashtun clergy and the tribal secular maliks and khans for any persistent peace to develop, regardless of the status of the mediators. The layers of animosity include secular vs. religious, wealth vs. poverty, traditional vs. revolutionary, Sufism vs. Deobandism and Salafism, the jirga’s consensus vs. caliphate-like rule, participatory governance vs. authoritarian rulers, and Pashtunwali vs. Shari’a. With this grim reality understood, it is highly probable that the Muslim extremists, of all stripes, in western Pakistan will continue to violate treaties with the secular Pakistani government until they totally dismantle the tribal and government structure or are themselves destroyed. They cannot coexist in a population whose cultural schizophrenia desires both the Ummah and its’ Shari’a along with tribal egalitarianism and Pashtunwali.



# TRIBAL ANALYSIS CENTER

Traditional anthropological research conducted among tribes inhabiting remote areas where insurgents and criminals operate has become increasingly difficult to implement. Studies carried out among people living in small-scale societies now are nearly impossible due to the physical dangers associated with the civil and religious unrest found in those areas. Swat, for example, has become so dangerous that Frederick Barth's studies only could be repeated at the risk of the investigator's life. Similar research is not feasible among Burma's Rohingya tribes located on both sides of the border with Bangladesh, as well as with the Pashtuns in Afghanistan's interior and within Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, where even Pakistan's army enters with reluctance.

Given the difficulties of conducting direct fieldwork in conflictive areas, the Tribal Analysis Center utilizes an indirect approach. Using multidisciplinary research, we seek to collect and analyze data obtained from a wide variety of sources, both current and historical. In the absence of new ethnographic fieldwork to update our base of knowledge, the Tribal Analysis Center compiles and summarizes existing research and documents on tribal societies, combining this material with contemporary press reports and articles. We assume that much can be gleaned from well-informed observers who are not anthropologists, ranging from journalists and travelers to government officials.



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