



WITHDRAWING - IMPORTANT CONNECTIONS

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by Tribal Analysis Center Staff



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Introduction

“The interests of security on the frontier and of commerce relations, compel the more civilized state to exercise a certain ascendancy over neighbors whose turbulence and nomadic instincts render them difficult to live with.... The State... must abandon the incessant struggle and deliver the frontier over to disorder, which renders property, security and civilization impossible, or it must plunge into the depths of the savage countries, where the difficulties and sacrifice to which it is exposed increases with each step in advance.... The greatest difficulty is in knowing where to stop.”¹

Prince Alexander Gorchakov

“...[T]he defeat of the resistance will place Pakistan in an untenable security position. The Pashtunistan issue driven by the Soviets instead of the Durranis would have been devastating to Pakistan.”²

Alex Alexia

(RAND 1984 testimony to Congress)

“Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity.”

Seneca the Younger

In order to even make the attempt to understand the complexity of the political and security relationships involving Afghanistan and its numerous neighbors while factoring in myriad changes that will occur following a general withdrawal of U.S. and its allies, primarily from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization(NATO), some understanding of the interrelationships within the ethnic groups comprising the population of Afghanistan, itself, must be developed. National boundaries currently in place divided ethnic groups that were also well established in both ethnic and tribal territories long before the actual borders of the nation-state were established. The collapse of the former Soviet Union and the emerging independence of the Central Asian States increased the number of contiguous countries having an interest in the welfare of their own ethnic groups living inside Afghanistan.

But of all these countries, it is primarily Pakistan that has a major interest in both military and political outcomes in Afghanistan. The formal boundary separating Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Durand line, is only recognized by Pakistan while Afghanistan’s territorial claims generally extend much further to the east and encompass tribal territories inhabited by the Pashtun tribes that are also found in Afghanistan. The former

1 Quote credited to Prince Alexander Gorchakov, the Russian foreign minister in 1864 in Bradsher, Henry S., *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1983, pg. 10.

2 Alexia, Alex, *The War in Afghanistan: Soviet Strategy and the State of the Resistance*, Rand, November, 1984. This quote was included in Alexia’s testimony to Congress.

monarchs of Afghanistan, all Durrani Pashtuns, and President Mohammad Daoud, the Durrani Pashtun responsible for the coup in 1973 that overthrew the last king, Zahir Shah, were advocates of the creation of a Pashtun homeland, but the sticking point was not well received in Pakistan since the Pashtunistan-to-be was to be created from Pakistan's national territory.

The primary scholar of the Pashtuns, Olaf Caroe, was precisely correct when he wrote the following in an academic journal review of Louis Dupree's book, *Afghanistan*:

*"...Pashtunistan, Sardar Daoud's dream of a reabsorption of all the Pashto-speakers on the North West Frontier into a Durrani-ruled state."*³

The tension between the two neighbors, one created in 1747 and the other, Pakistan, entered the United Nations in 1947, over the issue of the creation of Pashtunistan resulted in Pakistan closing its borders to Afghan trade for five months in 1955. This blockade allowed Daoud while serving as the Royal Prime Minister to his cousin, Zahir Shah, the necessary political cover to increase his efforts to develop ties with the Soviet Union. At the same time, however, Daoud also sought to strengthen ties with the United States while maintaining a non-aligned position relative to the Cold War tensions between the two superpowers of the period. When the United States declined to provide any military assistance to Afghanistan, after all Pakistan was a member of the "Central Treaty Organization" and allied to the United States. Following this rejection, Daoud turned to the Soviet Union for the military aid.⁴

Daoud remained obsessed with Pashtunistan and this left him, King Zahir Shah, and the rest of Afghanistan in potential conflict with Pakistan's rulers, as often as not military men. This tension continued and by 1961 Pakistan ordered its border with Afghanistan closed in an effort to discourage any additional support for the Pashtunistan concept. Unfortunately, serious unintended consequences began to develop as the Afghan government began to shift its trading patterns as the Soviet Union quickly took in Afghanistan's exports and the adjacent communist nation became the major trading partner for the landlocked Afghans. Normally, trade patterns precede military connections and the growing economic relationship between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union followed this pattern. Within months, discounted arms sales were also provided to the Afghan military and by 1963, Daoud felt sufficiently strong to order his military to move against Pakistan, an action that set him at odds with Zahir Shah. This crisis led to Daoud's resignation, but he remained in the background of Afghanistan's politics, festering over the lack of support he had received from Zahir Shah in his planned confrontation with Pakistan over the desire to create Pashtunistan.

After overthrowing Zahir Shah in 1973, probably after ten years of his simmering anger after Zahir Shah called off Daoud's order to invade Pakistan in 1963, Daoud became the last of the Durrani rulers of Afghanistan. His interest in gaining control over Pakistan's Pashtun region remained his key interest. He had actually ordered the Afghan army into Pakistan's Bajaur region during 1960 and suffered a defeat as Pakistan's military rulers reacted violently to Daoud's provocative act. In addition to the use of the Afghan army, Daoud utilized time-honored cash payments to the Pashtun tribes located along the border and continued to disseminate hostile propaganda against Pakistan.⁵

3 Caroe, Olaf, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 97, No. 3 (Jul-Sept 1997), pp. 341-342.

4 <http://countrystudies.us/afghanistan/26.htm>. Accessed December 15, 2012.

5 *Ibid.*

Mohammad Daoud, the last of the Durrani leaders, quickly made enemies following his coup against Zahir Shah and many of them attempted a second revolt, but were discovered, defeated, and hastily relocated to Pakistan where they found sanctuary. The new political refugees included men who remained insurgents, regardless of who was in charge in Afghanistan. They included such notables as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Ahmad Shah Masood, and Jalaluddin Haqqani, all of whom were soon contacted by Pakistan's security service, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, ISID – now commonly referred to as ISI – and enlisted into an anti-Daoud campaign that was more anti-Pashtunistan than anything else. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan created opportunities the Pakistani government, again led by a military officer, soon used to his advantage to undercut the Durrani Pashtun claims to Pakistan's territory. Additionally, General Zia managed to insert a wedge between the two large Pashtun confederacies, the Durrani and their cousins, the Ghilzai tribes. The wedge was arguably more effective in splitting the Pashtuns than was the century old Durand line that was now the border between the two feuding countries.

Tom Lansford's *A Bitter Harvest: US Foreign Policy and Afghanistan* has an excellent explanation of the animosity between the two South Asian neighbors and its continuing impact:

*“During the Soviet occupation, Pashtun rivalries continued unabated and were actually exacerbated by outside actors. For instance, successive Afghan governments had refused to recognize the borders drawn by the British when they established an independent Pakistan following World War II. Because this line of Afghan kings had maintained territorial claims to Pashtun areas of Pakistan, leaders in Islamabad had worked to undermine the Afghan monarchy and had offered support to the Ghilzai clans. This support was most crucial in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion when Pakistan's military dictator General Zia-ul Haq ‘effectively prevented the ex-king or his representatives from playing any role in the resistance.’ Zia sought to ensure that the Durrani did not play any role in any post-Soviet Afghan government. One result of this was the rise of the Ghilzai-based Taliban. Meanwhile, there remained a split within the Afghan Communist Party that reflected the tribal divide between the Durrani and the Ghilzai. Both factions of the Party distrusted each other and worked to undermine the power and influence of the other tribe.”*⁶

Moving forward along the Afghanistan timeline, it becomes easier to understand that the policy of the Pakistani government has consistently opposed the presence of Durrani tribal leaders, especially the powerful Durrani Pashtun tribes, the Popalzai and Barakzai, whose dominant families had provided Afghanistan's monarchs since 1747 and had in its earliest stages has created a Durrani empire that was eclipsed by power and territory only by the Ottoman Empire among Muslim ruled lands. The relatively new state, Pakistan, was still endeavoring to undercut the residual claim to their western region being pressed by the Afghan government under the Durrani when they established the Taliban Movement that was primarily composed of Ghilzai tribesmen in its early stages.

Pakistan's ISI was well prepared to create the Taliban Movement as a surrogate force since it had been using tribal surrogates since its first war with India and it mobilized a huge tribal lashkar that supported the army. Ten years of experience gained in managing and advising guerrilla operations against the Soviets in Afghanistan also brought skills to key Pakistani officers who were also ethnic Pashtuns. Several of them had been trained at Ft. Bragg.⁷

6 Lansford, Tom, *A Bitter Harvest: US Foreign Policy and Afghanistan*, Ashgate, 2003, pg. 17.

7 Examples of Pakistani officers attending Special Forces training include General Aslam Beg, the man generally credited with the creation of

It is the relationship between Pakistan's security services and the Taliban that remains worrisome in the long run, primarily the eighteen months to two year period after the U.S./NATO withdrawal is completed. In the initial period following the 2014 movement, primarily the first six months, the insurgency will probably be seriously disrupted since many of the membership of the Taliban were drawn into the insurgency by the presence of the "foreign military" in their country. The departure of these soldiers will remove one of the primary motivating factors to remain in the Taliban, particularly the southern insurgency managed from Quetta who are more likely to consider returning to their villages.

The other insurgent groups allied with the "Quetta Shura" Taliban, primarily the Haqqani Network and Hezb-i Islami (Gulbuddin) , or HIG, probably have more specific regions where they probably hope to gain both autonomy and political control. The Haqqani Network probably desired to gain the region generally dominated by the large Ghilzai Zadran tribe, Paktia, Paktika, Khowst, and Logar provinces and given their close association with Pakistan – Jalaluddin Haqqani's family has been operating out of Miram Shah, North Waziristan, since 1975 and is believed to have such a close relationship with ISI as to be viewed as an armed surrogate of this intelligence organization. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's HIG has lost much of its political stamina in recent years, but HIG seems to be playing a Sinn Fein-IRA strategy with many members of HIG reconciling, even entering the Karzai-led government and attending peace negotiations in the Maldives⁸ with their reconciled members while other HIG elements continue fighting – and occasionally fights the Taliban. The region most likely to have HIG's interest as an autonomous region includes Konar, Nuristan, Kapsia, and parts of Nangarhar province.

If these two zones were controlled by the insurgent organizations having the closest relationship with Pakistan, the long simmering Pashtunistan issue would be settled in Pakistan's favor with the Pashtun "homeland" being created from Afghan national territory rather from land claimed by Pakistan. Additionally, since both Jalaluddin Haqqani and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar have enjoyed both sanctuary and support from Pakistan since 1973 and both men are Ghilzai Pashtuns, Pakistan's desire to weaken the Durrani Pashtuns who formed the governments of Afghanistan from 1747 through 1978 would be accomplished, probably permanently. Pakistan's ruling elite has the advantage of understanding one key cultural factor far better than Americans, and this is critical in managing ethnic and tribal politics.

Populations tend to view themselves as affiliated with a "nation" if all members have a common bloodline that allows "nationalism" to emerge as a unifying factor for the group. The "nationalism" that becomes a unifying bond is normally confused with "patriotism" by Americans who never experienced the ethnic-related politics that is common in South Asia and most of the rest of the world. For this reason, Americans tend to view "nations" as "nation-states" having many aspects of culture and society as shared, common values, such as are found in the United States. For this reason, we engage in "nation-building" in regions inhabited by many different, and often opposing, "nations" and tend to make the error of believing that the view from the capital city is uniform downward to the grassroots level of the country being supported with "nation-building." Pakistan understands the differences quite well.

the Taliban, and Colonel Sultan Amir Tarar, known widely by his war name, "Colonel Imam" who was later murdered by the leadership of the Pakistani version of the Taliban under Hakimullah Mehsud.

⁸ See Saeed Shah's "Afghanistan: Peace talks with the Taliban's Gulbuddin Hekmatyar," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 11, 2010; <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/2010/0211/Afghanistan-Peace-talks-with-the-Taliban-s-Gulbuddin-Hekmatyar> Accessed January 2, 2013.

For Americans, the Arab presence is a very important factor and the creation of autonomous regions – as offered by Najibullah, himself an Ahmadzai Ghilzai Pashtun from Paktia province that had managed its own affairs autonomously independent of Kabul following the region’s support for Nadir Shah in defeating Habibullah Kalakani, the Tajik who gained control of the country following King Amanullah’s abdication – is worrisome. Much of this potential threat is probably overrated due to a properly continuing animosity toward al-Qa’ida’s and its alliance with the Taliban Pashtuns while Pashtuns are historically influenced by one of the Sufi schools that are opposed violently by the Salafist Wahabbi Arabs engaging in their version of jihad for their own reasons. Some of the concern is derived from overstating their presence in Afghanistan during the anti-Soviet period. For example, Milt Bearden, the senior officer in the Central Intelligence Agency at the time of the Soviet withdrawal credited the Arabs with having thousands of volunteers present. From Bearden:

“As the war dragged on, a number of Arab states quietly emptied their prisons of their homegrown troublemakers and sent them off to the Afghan jihad with the hope that they might not return. By the end of the war, we had estimated that as many as twenty thousand Arabs may have passed through Pakistan and Afghanistan.

“The Afghan Arabs occasionally saw combat against the Soviet and DRA forces, but their military role would be greatly inflated after the Soviets withdrew.... There was little concern at the time over the role of the Afghan Arabs in Pakistan or Afghanistan, with the exception of localized criticism by Western nongovernmental organizations of the harsh fundamentalism of the Saudi Wahabbis, whose influence in the refugee camps in Pakistan was pervasive. It was in these squalid camps that a generation of young Afghan males would be born into and raised in the strictest fundamentalism of the Deobandi and Wahhabi Islamic schools, the *madrassas*, setting the stage for a new problem a decade later.⁹

The actual numbers of Arabs entering Afghanistan to develop a relationship with the generally Sufi population was reported to be far less by a key Arab participant, Abdullah Anas, the son-in-law of Abdullah Azzam – Bin Ladin’s mentor and co-founder of HAMAS – who explained that the Arab numbers were actually much smaller than Bearden and the CIA estimated:

“And there are also those who say the Arabs, or those who have been called “the Afghan Arabs,” played a significant role in the battles against the Red Army. Yes, the Arabs participated in these battles and contributed along the side of their Afghan brothers in paying a share in the price of confrontation. Many of them had been martyred. However, the truth also necessitates the admission that the role of the Arabs, from rifles [sic] carriers to the artillery launchers, was ‘a drop in the sea.’ The entire effort was carried out by the Afghans themselves. Therefore, I wonder when I see some Arab [media] systems, and even western, try to depict the Afghan Arabs as the origin of the Afghan jihad. The reader may believe that if he is not aware of the details of the Afghan issue; he may believe that the “Afghan Arabs” are the origin, while the Afghans are the branch. However, the opposite is correct. The total number of the Arabs in Afghanistan did not exceed two thousand individuals. The full participation of the Islamic nation by its sons who went to Afghanistan, Arabs and non-Arabs, did not exceed two thousand mujahid. A very small group of this number actually entered Afghanistan and participated in the battles with the Afghans. The rest were working in Peshawar as doctors, drivers, chefs, auditors and engineers. I don’t know the objective behind inflating the size of the “Afghan Arabs” and their role. This, unfortunately, had left a negative image in the Arab countries as those who were in Afghanistan were pictured as constituting a threat that must be uprooted. Some regimes had used this card to suppress freedoms and political life. A former Algerian intelligence officer, who currently lives in Europe, asked me about the

9 Bearden, Milton and James Risen, *The Main Enemy: The Inside Story of the CIA’s Final Showdown With the KGB*, New York: Random House, 2003,, pg. 366.

number of Algerians in Afghanistan, and I replied it is not more than three hundred; and he commented saying; yes, the number that was recorded in my unit in the capital was two hundred fifty.”¹⁰

Anas’ account indicates that U.S. intelligence collection priorities on the presence and activities of the Arabs arriving in Pakistan were considerably lower than they might have been. Bearden’s estimate of twenty thousand Arabs is ten times the estimate of Anas, a participant in the jihad who was closely associated with Abdallah Azzam and in a position to know the degree and quality of the Arab jihad volunteers. Arab jihadist propaganda was able to inflate the actual numbers and significance of the “Afghan Arabs” to the level that their claim to have been the critical variable in the fighting against the Soviets and Afghan communists is widely accepted. Arab Wahabbis viewed the Afghans of all ethnic groups as “imperfect Muslims” due to their Sufi beliefs and it is unlikely that large numbers of Arabs will find their way into any autonomous zones that might be negotiated as a part of a national reconciliation program similar to the one proposed by Najibullah in 1989.

The exception to this general statement is Nuristan and some contiguous areas where indigenous Wahabbi Afghans affiliated with the Panjpiri Madrassa in nearby Swabi District in Pakistan’s Khyber Pashtunkhwa Province. As co-religionists of the Arab Wahabbis, most of whom are affiliated with al-Qa’ida, this region would have to be observed carefully and raids conducted periodically to gradually remove this potential threat. Hekmatyar’s HIG suffered a military defeat by the Panjpiris in the early 1990’s and this factor could be utilized politically to deny the Arabs easy access to the northeastern provinces of Afghanistan if generally autonomous regions were created as a part of an overall reconciliation settlement one the U.S./NATO forces have withdrawn.

There are key questions that should be reviewed and answers developed should be scrutinized carefully as the withdrawal process continues. A few are:

- What were the key techniques and procedures used by the Durrani Pashtun monarchs between 1747 and 1978 that allowed them to rule the different Afghan ethnic groups having different religious affiliations successfully? There’s no doubt that despite the frequent succession crises that Afghanistan’s rulers were able to keep the country together successfully.
- Recently, Afghanistan was governed by political elites led by president Karzai, himself a Durrani Pashtun. What are the factors that are keeping him from governing successfully as Durrani leaders manage to do from 1747 through 1973? Is the presence of his foreign allies a factor that is contributing to the continuation of the insurgency? Will the ground truth shift with Afghanistan under Ghilzai President Ghani? Will “Pashtunistan” diminish as an issue for Pakistan with the Durrani out of control in Kabul?
- While it’s impossible to return to the decades prior to the 1920s civil war that seems to be responsible for much of the tension found between the Pashtuns and Tajiks, is there a way to accept this as an obvious end state and work toward the creation of autonomous governing zones without creating the conditions necessary for the emergence of secession movements?
- What are the factors related to insurgent movements that are not well understood that should be studied carefully before planning for any form of reconciliation?

¹⁰ Anas, Abdullah, *The Birth of the Afghan Arabs: The Biography of Abdullah Anas, between Mas’ud and Abdallah Azzam*, Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, [undated], from a translation prepared by SAIC, pp. 71-72.

David Galula's revolutionary warfare explanations shows some of the missed the key points. Little has changed in areas afflicted with an insurgency movement and while maintaining a focus on expelling the Soviets from Afghanistan and defeating the Afghan communists –like the U.S./NATO forces, they missed the key aspect of victory in an insurgency: gaining and maintaining the control of the population.¹¹

- One basic difference between insurgency and counterinsurgency, in Col. Galula's definition, is that the insurgent starts out with nothing but a cause and grows to strength, while the counterinsurgent often starts with everything but a cause and gradually declines in strength to the point of weakness.¹²
- ...they should be aware, too, that aid programs and various attempts to raise the people's standard of living have never yielded the desired result.¹³
- .. the most susceptible ..., were the least significant among them, men with little to lose and much to gain by ...the promise to raise them from obscurity.¹⁴
- From General Lansdale: ...there has to be a motive...around which to create the political basis that is essential for a viable guerrilla movement.¹⁵
- ...once the insurgents established a strong foothold and organization, terrain ceased to be the overriding factor; population density...then became decisive.¹⁶

We should remind ourselves that in the case of Vietnam, both sides were vying for the 75 to 80 per cent of the politically apathetic population.¹⁷ Afghanistan is no different except that most of the non-Pashtun ethnic groups have gravitated toward the central government. Galula's axioms and postulates regarding insurgency need to be applied to the Pashtun population of Afghanistan as the U.S./NATO forces withdraw. The insurgents lack great advantages, especially during the initial months following the withdrawal, but the longer it takes for the government to achieve some form of stability the more danger they will be in from the organizing insurgents with advisers with the continuing goal of eliminating the concept of Pashtunistan as a disruptive issue for Pakistan. This problem drew the focus of successive Pakistani leaders and was a major reason they engaged the Soviets as American surrogates since, as Alex Alexia noted at the time, if the Soviets were able to gain control of the Pashtunistan issue and use Afghanistan's Pashtuns to infiltrate into Pakistan's Pashtun regions, Pakistan would have been placed into an untenable security position. Knowing this vulnerability, Pakistan is very likely to continue to support the Taliban insurgents unless the Afghan government can develop a realistic reconciliation program – much like the one Najibullah attempted to create and implement.

11 See Rand's Counterinsurgency: A Symposium, April 16-20, 1962; <http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/reports/2006/R412-1.pdf> Accessed January 3, 2013. {Footnotes refer to an original draft of the conference proceedings rather than the finished publication that is not easily searched.]

12 Ibid, pg. 7.

13 Ibid, pg. 7.

14 Ibid, pg. 10.

15 Ibid, pg. 10.

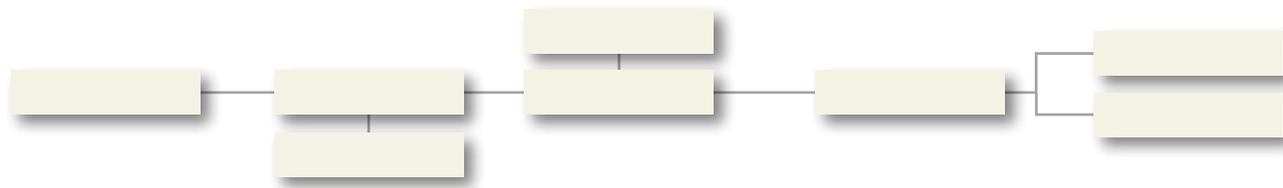
16 Ibid, pg. 16.

17 Ibid, pg. 18.

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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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