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The Great Game Anew: US Cold-War Policy and Pakistan's North-West Frontier, 1947–65

Elisabeth Leake*

With the advent of independence, Pakistan almost immediately became embroiled in the hegemonic struggle of the cold war. Courted by the United States for its strategic North-West Frontier, Pakistan quickly became a Western ally. Fears of tribal unrest in the region and conflicting Pakistani and Afghan claims to the frontier, however, soon complicated the United States' broader strategic vision. As Afghanistan continued to call for the establishment of an autonomous 'Pakhtunistan' comprising the North-West Frontier settled districts and tribal zone - and threatened to turn to the Soviet Union if US policy-makers did not support the Afghan position - US officials were torn between their official alliance with Pakistan and their desire to prevent a Soviet–Afghan understanding. Mirroring circumstances elsewhere in the Third World, local conflicts on the North-West Frontier mirrored US strategists' wider plans for spreading Western influence. Officials ultimately opted for a flawed neutral position, angering the Pakistan government and alienating the Afghans. The US position towards the North-West Frontier - or lack thereof - eventually resulted in failure and a continued impasse in relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Keywords: cold war; Pakistan; Afghanistan; Pakhtunistan

As the cold war extended beyond Europe into what was becoming known as the 'Third World', those countries emerging from colonisation were immediately at risk. In South Asia, newly independent Pakistan tottered under the burden of a weighty question: Would the Great Game of so many decades finally erupt into all-out war on the uneasy North-West Frontier? In political and military discussions taking place within Pakistan, and abroad in Great Britain and the United States, the North-West Frontier retained its geostrategic importance as the crossroads between the Middle East and South and Central Asia. Moreover, renewed tensions between the Soviet Union and its Second World War allies left Western policy-makers with few doubts that the Great Game had gained global proportions. Great Britain maintained an interest in the region but its Commonwealth ties to both Pakistan and India prevented it from involvement in its defence. The United States, in contrast, faced fewer limitations, and it thus adopted many of colonial Britain's attitudes and policies towards the frontier.

Tense Afghan–Pakistan relations tempered US policy towards the region. Free of the political pressures of the British Empire, Afghanistan immediately confronted Pakistan. As soon as discussions of Indian independence commenced, Afghan officials demanded the establishment of 'Pakhtunistan', an envisioned autonomous zone

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comprising the North-West Frontier and Baluchistan which would share social, cultural, and political ties with Afghanistan. While Pakistan refused to consider the secession of the North-West Frontier, Afghanistan became increasingly strident in its irredentist claims. The Pakhtunistan dispute grew so acrimonious that Pakistan and Afghanistan verged on armed conflict in 1949, 1955, and 1960. While the United States supported Pakistani sovereignty over the tribal zone, broader cold-war considerations made US officials hesitant to alienate Afghanistan. The country's government had made clear that if the United States proved unsympathetic, it would turn to the Soviet Union for aid. Even when US officials refused to take a stance on Pakhtunistan, Afghan officials took this as an indication of US support for Pakistan and sought new ties with their Soviet neighbours.

Pakistan may not have been a primary battleground of the cold war, but the possibility of a clash between East and West on the Pakistan-Afghanistan borderlands haunted US policy-makers much as it had British colonial officials. Cold-war and South Asian historians have often overlooked the complexities of diplomacy between the United States, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. They have focused on the underlying contradictions of US policy towards South Asia and the primacy of Indo-Pakistan relations.¹ Those studies that recognise and focus on Afghan-Pakistan relations take a decidedly nationalist approach to the problem, usually sympathising with Afghanistan's claims and considering the dispute as a primarily local problem.² This study builds on current historiography of the cold war which recognises the violence that often marked the cold war on the periphery, particularly at the junctures of decolonisation and Great Power politics.³

The United States' stance towards Pakistan's North-West Frontier exemplified the uncomfortable contradictions and complications of US cold-war policy, the clash between local politics and broader strategic considerations. With Pakistan, US officials faced a new state: a nation wrestling with its colonial legacies and struggling to balance secular and Islamic interests. While the decision to aid Pakistan fit into US policy-makers' broader policy of spreading the 'American form of progress', officials struggled to work with a Pakistani central government wrought with instability and which still did not exercise control over large portions of society.⁴ Particularly on the North-West Frontier, specifically the tribal zone rather than the neighbouring province, local Pakhtuns maintained many of their own tribal political and social structures and even strengthened notions of localism with limited interaction with the developed nation-state.⁵ The United States' broader policy of using local governments to enact its cold-war strategy came into question in Pakistan as US policy-makers struggled to address local situations over which Pakistan's central government had little control.⁶

Moreover, US government officials faced particular difficulties with the Afghan-Pakistan borderlands because they lacked a ground presence in the North-West Frontier tribal zone. As in their attempts to deal with other non-state entities, particularly in the Middle East, US policy-makers struggled to understand the tribal structures of the North-West Frontier - or to respond with adequate, appropriate regional strategies. Despite various non-governmental organisations which had access to the region and had formed local relationships, US officials relied on the Pakistan and Afghan governments for reports on tribal circumstances to formulate their policies; they consequently made numerous decisions that had little relation to actual developments in the tribal zone. Irrespective of official ignorance about the North-West Frontier, US policy-makers entangled themselves in the Pakhtunistan

debate, trying to reconcile between conflicting Afghan and Pakistani claims. But with little knowledge of the tribesmen's own preferences, officials focused on how the dispute affected broader US strategy rather than trying to develop the region.

In the context of its broader cold-war policy towards the Third World, the United States struggled to address the security of Pakistan's North-West Frontier. Concerns about the power vacuum left by Great Britain's withdrawal and the opportunity for increased Soviet influence left US officials with few doubts that US involvement was necessary. However, officials still wavered between openly supporting the Pakistan government in its enduring conflict with Afghanistan over Pakhtunistan or expressing some sympathies with Afghanistan to prevent it from siding with the Soviet Union. US policy-makers proved incapable of reaching a definitive regional policy until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and even then, officials did not adequately address local developments in the tribal zone - with disastrous, if indirect, consequences in the twenty-first century. Throughout the first decades of the cold war, regardless, the divergence between Pakistani and Afghan policy towards the North-West Frontier collided with the United States' broader strategic interests; because of the United States' unwillingness to take a firm stance on the North-West Frontier issue, US interests in the region were actually undermined for years to come. Afghanistan ultimately succumbed to Soviet pressures, while the Afghan-Pakistan dispute came no closer to settlement.

The United States and its early ties to Pakistan, 1947-50

By 1949-50, fears generated by Stalin's attempts to retain Iran's oilfields, build bases along the entrance to the Black Sea and take over Italy's former North African colonies, as well as building tensions in Europe and the first Soviet atomic bomb in August 1949, led US officials to adopt a broader cold-war strategy. Decolonisation in Asia also concerned US policy-makers, who feared recently freed countries would turn to Communism. As anti-colonial struggles progressed throughout South-East and East Asia, officials at the Central Intelligence Agency fretted: 'Along the littoral of the Asiatic continent, political and social tensions have increased as the controls formerly applied by the countries of Western Europe have weakened. These tensions are being exploited by the USSR and by local Communist groups and sympathizers.'⁷

US officials had traditionally relied on Great Britain to determine the West's policy towards South Asia. Even as the British withdrawal became inevitable, US policy-makers did little more than support British efforts first to preserve India's unity and then to partition the subcontinent.⁸ When the relationship between newly independent Pakistan and India devolved into open warfare over Kashmir, US officials again resisted involvement, refusing to participate in mediation efforts instigated by the British and United Nations.⁹ But US officials recognised the geostrategic importance of the area and the need for a regional policy. Echoing generations of British strategists, officials at the US Department of State focused on the position of Pakistan's North-West Frontier: 'Pakistan is of particular strategic importance to the US because, like Afghanistan, it lies across the invasion routes from Russia to India, and flanks the oil fields of the Persian Gulf; and also because the Pakistan bases in the Karachi-Lahore area are in closer proximity to the Soviet heartland than any other that might be made available to us.'¹⁰ While US officials doubted immediate Soviet interest in South Asia, they recognised that should the Soviet Union decide

to acquire the subcontinent's natural, industrial, and human resources, the North-West Frontier would present the main invasion route.

The North-West Frontier acquired even greater significance for US planners when they considered the new country's overall security. Pakistan had lost many of the subcontinent's major industrial centres and it was left to defend two regions separated by thousands of miles with a severely reduced army; in the division of resources, Pakistan retained about 36% of the colonial Indian Army - 140,000 troops to India's 410,000 - but struggled to gain more than 7% of the Raj's surplus army stores.¹¹ Pakistan's struggling economy, its failed campaign in Kashmir, the presence of secessionist elements in East Bengal, and continuing tensions on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border left the country in a precarious position. At the most basic level, US policy towards Pakistan depended on the country's survival.

As early as February 1950, some State Department officials advocated US military aid for Pakistan. However, the government refused such action at a time when it was refining its vague South Asian policy. Many State Department officials still considered India to be the 'keystone' to 'effective policy in Asia', though neither Jawaharlal Nehru's refusal to join any defence pacts nor his earlier visit to the United States in October 1949 did much to impress.¹² The US subsequently invited Liaquat Ali Khan, Pakistan's Prime Minister, for a visit but even after he expressed overt support for US cold-war initiatives, US leaders remained hesitant to choose Pakistan over India. When Soviet officials in 1951 quickly agreed to send 50,000 tons of wheat in food aid to India while the US Congress prevaricated - taken in conjunction with Nehru's professed admiration for the Soviet five-year economic plans - the possibility of Soviet influence in India appeared possible.¹³ US officials did not want to create additional incentives for Indian officials to turn to the Soviet Union for aid.

The United States and the Afghan-Pakistan border dispute: early intervention

Despite the United States' unwillingness unequivocally to choose Pakistan as its primary partner in South Asia, it still was prepared to intervene if cold-war interests necessitated action. The dispute between Pakistan and Afghanistan over the North-West Frontier led to some of the earliest US involvement in South Asia. While the origins of the 'Pakhtunistan' controversy remain unclear, the issue really erupted with Britain's withdrawal and partition.¹⁴ During negotiations between the British and leaders of the Indian National Congress and Muslim League, the Afghan government protested the transfer of the North-West Frontier Province and tribal zone to Pakistani control. Afghan press and radio campaigns went so far as to claim 'that Pathans were Afghan rather than Indians and they should have the utmost freedom [sic] either to form a separate free State or to rejoin their mother-land [which was] Afghanistan'.¹⁵ The Khudai Khidmatgars, a Pakhtun nationalist party based in the North-West Frontier Province and allied with the Congress - but with few ties to the tribal zone - also pushed for the establishment of Pakhtunistan as an alternative to Pakistan.

While Britain rejected the claims by Afghanistan and the Khudai Khidmatgars, reaffirming the Durand Line's legality and refusing to contemplate the 'Balkanisation' of the subcontinent, the dispute continued to beleaguer the new Pakistan government. Militarily and financially incapable of maintaining the large frontier garrisons that the British had manned - and encouraged by early support in the tribal zone for a Pakistani rather than a Pakhtun state - Pakistan withdrew its army

from the North-West Frontier tribal zone, leaving its governance to political agents supported by the frontier-scouts' battalions.¹⁶ Instead, the state adopted new measures for maintaining peace on the frontier, instituting political, economic, and educational reforms. For the time being, the government continued the British system of providing monetary subsidies to the tribes' leaders.¹⁷ Meanwhile, the Pakistan government outlawed the Khudai Khidmatgars and arrested their leaders for allegedly trying to pass information to the Indian government and planning the assassination of Muslim League officials on the frontier.¹⁸ In reality, the new regime was suppressing the most vocal proponents of Pakhtunistan.

Throughout this, Afghanistan remained intent on disrupting all ties between the frontier and Pakistan's central government. Afghan officials, particularly the Prime Minister from 1953, Mohammed Daud Khan, affirmed their support for an independent Pakhtunistan, claiming: 'It is quite evident from daily gatherings of various tribes [sic] on both sides of the Durand Line who demand their independence and who have declared the independence of [Pakhtunistan] that the people of the North-west Frontier are unwilling to live with the Pakistanis with whom they have nothing in common.'¹⁹ Meanwhile the renowned tribal leader, the Faqir of Ipi, who had rebelled against British colonial rule and subsequently fought against the creation of Pakistan and whom British and Pakistani officials suspected to be in Afghan pay, renewed his attacks on frontier-scouts' outposts and encouraged raids and looting.²⁰ As a consequence, the Pakistan government resorted to a bombing campaign to subdue the Faqir which the Afghan government immediately decried as a deliberate attack on tribal women and children.²¹ One inflammatory Kabul radio broadcast proclaimed: 'Pashtoon brethren wake up[,] eradicate your personal enmity and rally round the red banner of Pashtoonistan. Beware the nefarious designs of the enemies who are determined to shackle you in perpetual slavery.'²²

The Pakistan government reacted angrily to Afghan interference on the North-West Frontier. It sent formal protests to the Afghan government condemning its implicit permission for the incendiary broadcasts. The Pakistan government emphasised that the North-West Frontier tribesmen had the opportunity to join Afghanistan upon partition: having agreed to British rule through a series of treaties that became defunct upon Indian independence, the frontier Pakhtuns did not owe their allegiance to the new South Asian countries. Regardless the tribesmen chose to negotiate new agreements with Pakistan, not Afghanistan.

Relations between the two countries continued to degenerate throughout 1949 and 1950. While Afghan broadcasts argued that frontier tribesmen sought independence, the Pakistan government maintained the tribesmen's loyalty.²³ Reports from US Embassy officials in both Kabul and Karachi backed Pakistan's claims. One US official in Karachi who toured the frontier reported that various frontier tribes were generally quiet and that any crimes that occurred locally 'seem due to the usual family quarrels over women and land'.²⁴ Louis Dreyfus, the US Ambassador to Afghanistan, also remarked: 'It is apparently only by courtesy of the Afghan Government that anything at all [about Pakhtunistan] appears in published form.'²⁵ More threatening than the press releases, however, were reports of violence on the frontier: Dreyfus wrote in August 1950 that clashes between Pakistani and Afghan nationals had shaken the region.²⁶ In early October Pakistan's Foreign Secretary informed the US Embassy that an Afghan war party had transgressed the border on 30 September; about 500 Afghan tribesmen and army regulars had invaded and local Pakistani commanders had orders to 'throw this force into Afghan territory'.²⁷

Afghan officials reached out to traditionally militant elements on the Pakistani side of the frontier such as the Faqir of Ipi, who supported an autonomous Pakhtunistan. By 1950, with aid from Afghan nationals, the Faqir of Ipi had proclaimed himself president of the 'Central Pushtoonistan Government'.²⁸ Afghan officials handed out 'Pakhtunistan' flags and claimed that they received widespread support. A US intelligence report, however, disputed Afghan claims, commenting that 'even if the Pushtoonistan idea is seriously entertained by a few groups among several of the tribes, however, not a single tribe appears to have committed itself as a unit to the movement. On the contrary, a number of tribal leaders have expressed hearty disapproval.'²⁹

As armed conflict between Pakistan and Afghanistan loomed on the frontier, US officials became increasingly concerned. When Pakistan announced in January 1950 that it would move battalions back into the North-West Frontier to deter Afghan aggression, both the US State Department and the British Foreign Office were perturbed. Other countries also called for a settlement of the dispute: Italy, France, Egypt, and Iraq advocated a resolution, though none were willing to moderate.³⁰ When the US turned to Britain to intervene, the Foreign Office argued that its position in the region was 'at very low ebb' because of the complete withdrawal of British troops.³¹

Ultimately, the State Department proposed to negotiate a settlement between the two countries. While officials agreed that the Durand Line was the legal demarcation between the two countries, the State Department remained apprehensive of antagonising Afghanistan; an intelligence report reflected that: 'On numerous occasions Afghan officials have sought to influence Western Powers by pointing out that Afghanistan would have to turn to [the] USSR for aid if the West continued to ignore the righteousness of the Afghan demands on Pakistan.'³² As Dreyfus also surmised: 'The United States, agreeing with the British view that Pakistan has the stronger case, insists that Afghanistan drop the Pushtoonistan campaign. At the same time, however, it is in the interests of the United States to prevent Afghanistan from being forced into closer economic or political relations' with the Soviet Union.³³ Torn, the State Department offered an ambiguous settlement plan. It called for a ceasefire on the frontier, the exchange of ambassadors between the two countries, and future discussions of the Pakhtunistan issue.³⁴ Upon hearing that the US refused to take an explicit stance on the Durand Line, Pakistani officials rejected the offer, insisting that the future of the North-West Frontier was an entirely domestic concern.³⁵

Fearing an opportunity for Soviet influence in a historically volatile region, US officials tried to arbitrate in Pakistan–Afghanistan relations despite a broader policy of non-intervention in South Asia. War on the North-West Frontier would undermine the defensive perimeter which the United States hoped to establish around the Soviet Union, while locally it threatened the very survival of Pakistan: taken in broader context, the creation of an autonomous Pakhtunistan could have led to the total collapse of Pakistan. The United States, nevertheless, acted as a hesitant superpower, refusing to take an explicit stance on the Pakhtunistan issue.

The rise of the United States–Pakistan alliance, 1950–4

The outbreak of the Korean War in late 1950 initiated the first 'war by proxy' of the cold war and confirmed US policy-makers' fears that Communist-inspired military conflicts could sweep the globe.³⁶ Pakistan gained new strategic and political

significance for the West as a bulwark against Communist expansion. Pakistan offered an alternative source for a US presence in the East after its Korean base collapsed. State Department officials reflected that:

Pakistan occupies the eastern and western flanks of one of the largest non-Communist areas of Asia. Eastern Pakistan lying next to Burma has attained new importance in relation to possible expansive tendencies of the Chinese People's Republic. Western Pakistan inherited the primary responsibility for the defense of the Northwest Frontier, the gateway for traditional large-scale Central Asian invasions of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent.³⁷

These considerations led Britain and the United States seriously to contemplate including Pakistan in a Middle Eastern defence pact. However, US dissatisfaction with prototypes and British hesitance to provide Pakistan with aid for fear of backlash in India prevented any organisation from launching.³⁸ Pakistan's tense relations with its northern and southern neighbours were a further deterrent. Believing that Pakistan must co-operate with India and Afghanistan before it could participate in broader schemes, US officials contemplated reopening negotiations between Afghanistan and Pakistan over Pakhtunistan and they advocated new UN mediation on Kashmir.

While these considerations caused US planners to hesitate, other factors led them to overcome their objections and arrange an agreement with Pakistan. After Nehru challenged US efforts to reunite Korea, hopes of new ties between the United States and India dimmed; the US Congress rejected an Indian request for economic aid after further inflammatory speeches by Nehru. A subsequent intelligence report concluded that India was unlikely to stray from its non-alignment policy.³⁹ Nehru's firm belief in non-alignment further led him to clash with the new US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, and his 'cold warrior' mentality.⁴⁰

Within Pakistan, the accession of Mohammed Ayub Khan as Commander-in-Chief in 1951 and Ali Bogra as Prime Minister in 1953 established a distinctly pro-US administration while Dulles' visit to the Middle East and South Asia - and his subsequent conviction of the region's instability - led him to believe that a defence pact with Pakistani participation was imperative.⁴¹ US officials consequently advocated the establishment of a 'northern tier' of allied states in the Middle East, including Pakistan, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran.⁴² Developing a Turkish-Pakistani defence pact as the basis for its Middle Eastern plans, State Department planners believed that: 'With luck, skilled diplomacy and effective United States support, [it would] effect a major political realignment in the Middle East and ultimately shift the balance of power in the area in favor of the free world.'⁴³ Negotiations resulted in an arms deal between the United States and Pakistan in 1953, the subsequent Turkish-Pakistani alliance in April 1954 and a Mutual Defence Assistance Agreement between Pakistan and the United States in May.⁴⁴ US officials further approved of Pakistan's membership in the British-supported Baghdad Pact - later the Central Treaty Organization - in 1955.

The United States, the Soviet Union, and Pakistan-Afghan relations

While the State Department had hesitated in allying with Pakistan in part because of Afghanistan's shared border with the Soviet Union, the vehemence of Afghan and Soviet protests still caught officials unaware, particularly when Afghan-Pakistan

relations seemed somewhat improved. The Afghan government, perceiving growing US interest in Pakistan, had sought new ties with its neighbour as a means of gaining US aid. Pakistan, however, remained hostile to Afghanistan and refused to budge on the Pakhtunistan issue. To emphasise its refusal to co-operate, the North-West Frontier Provincial Assembly rejected a proposal to rename the province Pakhtunistan; the provincial Chief Minister, Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan, proclaimed: 'The people of the province hated the word Pakhtoonistan.'⁴⁵

Instead, the provincial government focused on increasing ties between the region's settled districts and tribal zone. Under Qayyum Khan, parts of the tribal zone were absorbed into the province while in the autonomous areas the government undertook building projects to provide new economic opportunities for tribesmen.⁴⁶ During all of this development, raids by Afghan nationals continued; Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Zafrulla Khan, reported that from January 1951 to January 1952, fifty-eight raids had occurred on the North-West Frontier. On 24 March 1952 an attack by 3,000 Afghan irregulars had been turned back near the border.⁴⁷ Despite these affronts, Zafrulla Khan maintained that Pakistan would not retaliate. The government had little reason to act when, overall, the North-West Frontier tribesmen maintained their allegiance to Pakistan; according to the Pakistan press, local Pakhtuns reiterated their support for Pakistan and passed resolutions warning Afghanistan to stop its interference.⁴⁸

Political pragmatism inspired Afghan leaders to reconsider their policy towards Pakistan as United States–Pakistan relations warmed. As early as 1952, Afghan officials approached US representatives with a proposal to merge Pakistan and Afghanistan. Afghan Ambassador to the UN, Mohammad Khabir Khan Louddin, explained to one US official that the federated state would consist of three regions, Afghanistan, Pakhtunistan, and Pakistan. Pakistan unsurprisingly ignored this early proposal. Louddin himself admitted that the sole benefit Pakistan would gain from merging with Afghanistan would be the solution of the Pakhtunistan controversy.⁴⁹ The Afghan government made a second approach in mid-1954 after Pakistan and the United States had allied; again they were rebuffed.

Afghan officials resorted to threats to gain the State Department's attention. They emphasised their precarious position sandwiched between the Soviet Union and those countries the United States considered vital for its cold-war strategy. Louddin warned: 'The Soviet Authorities obviously are fully aware of our predicament, and they may wish to exploit it realistically in a political sense.'⁵⁰ The Afghan Foreign Minister even attempted to portray the establishment of independent Pakhtunistan as an advance in the United States' cold-war strategy; while insisting Pakhtunistan must be carved out of Pakistan, not Afghanistan, he claimed the 'Pukhtoon state would be [an] excellent buffer against Russian penetration whereas Pukhtoons in present frame of mind might join "the enemies of Pakistan, Afghanistan and America" in case of an invasion'.⁵¹

Once the US–Pakistani alliance was signed, the Soviet government lodged several protests with the Government of Pakistan condemning 'the inclusion of Pakistan in a military bloc which is a tool of the aggressive forces of imperialism', to which Pakistan replied bluntly: 'It is the duty of the Government of Pakistan to take every step to safeguard the security of Pakistan and in the discharge of this paramount duty.'⁵² The Soviet reaction to the United States–Pakistan alliance, taken in conjunction with Pakistan's own hostilities, prevented US officials from seeking similar relations with Afghanistan: 'The Soviets would be very greatly alarmed over a similar program

for Afghanistan, so much so that they almost certainly would take drastic steps to prevent its accomplishment.⁵³ With these considerations and recognition that Afghanistan had little to provide the United States economically, politically, or militarily, the US government informed the Afghans that ‘when the latter had grown to the point where it could command respect, then perhaps would be the time for Afghan adherence’ to a defence pact.⁵⁴

Faced with this firm rebuttal, coupled with Pakistan’s adamant refusal to discuss Pakhtunistan, Afghanistan turned to the one country that had not snubbed it: the Soviet Union. It entered into economic agreements with the Soviets and their satellite nation, Czechoslovakia. The Afghan government also hardened its stance on the future of the North-West Frontier, announcing that it would co-operate with Pakistan only after the Pakhtunistan dispute had been resolved. As relations between the United States, Pakistan, and Afghanistan stalled, an Afghan official informed the US Ambassador to Pakistan, Horace Hildreth, that he ‘felt U.S. failed to realize that failure of Pak-Afghan negotiations would throw Afghanistan completely into Russian control’.⁵⁵

The 1955 watershed: the ascension of Khrushchev and Pakistan’s one-unit plan

Unfortunately for US planners, the strategy of the USSR’s new premier, Nikita Khrushchev, coupled with the latest Pakistan governing policy and a wave of anti-Pakistan sentiment in Afghanistan led to a flare-up on the frontier and even stronger antagonism between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The ascension of Khrushchev in 1953 had led to a fundamental shift in the Soviet Union’s relationship with the Third World. While Stalin had made limited forays into the non-Western world to serve Soviet interests and to frustrate and bait the United States, he did little to create an extra-European cold-war strategy after the Korean conflict ended in impasse. Khrushchev, in contrast, embraced the spread of Soviet influence throughout Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America. Under his rule, Soviet leadership re-evaluated Marxist theory in the context of the Third World, embracing citizens of those countries as the stimulus for the spread of revolution, aided, and encouraged by the Soviet Union.⁵⁶ Khrushchev’s interest in global expansion extended to South Asia and in 1955, he toured the region, visiting India, Burma, and Afghanistan. During his visits, Khrushchev praised Nehru for his neutral foreign policy and affirmed support for India’s position in Kashmir. Despite arguing for ‘peaceful coexistence’ between the Great Powers, Khrushchev actively encouraged Afghan intransigence towards Pakistan: during his stop in Afghanistan, Khrushchev not only announced his full backing of the Afghan stance on Pakhtunistan but also pledged \$100 million in economic aid to the struggling nation.⁵⁷

Khrushchev’s growing interest in the Third World coincided with the articulation of the non-aligned movement among various Asian nations. Mao Zedong’s efforts to seek agreements with Nehru created new concerns for US policy-makers. By 1954, the People’s Republic of China and India had signed an agreement over Tibet and had jointly embraced *panch shila*, or the five principles of coexistence. China’s representation at the 1955 Bandung conference seemed to signal Mao had succeeded in infiltrating the non-aligned movement, offering its resources to decolonising nations, while Nehru had made abundantly clear his unwillingness to compromise his policies for the sake of US aid.⁵⁸ The Bandung conference, which included representatives from Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Burma, provided a platform for

Nehru and Sukarno, the Indonesian leader, to advance their policies of non-engagement with the hegemonic struggle between the United States and Soviet Union.⁵⁹ While Pakistani representatives attended the conference, Pakistan's involvement in the Baghdad Pact and the South East Asian Treaty Organization, both supported and developed under Western auspices, prevented officials from more than a nominal presence at Bandung.

During this time, Pakistan was undergoing its own, internal political changes. Political wrangling since Bogra came to power had created tensions between Pakistan's civilian and military officials and on-going debates about the relationship between the two separate regions of Pakistan further complicated the country's governance. In elections in East Bengal, Bogra pushed for a Muslim League victory to overcome the various opposition parties which had coalesced under a 'United Front'; the United Front demanded restricting the central government's role to 'defence, foreign policy and currency'.⁶⁰ After winning a decisive victory in East Bengal, however, members of the United Front made a concerted protest against increased United States-Pakistan relations, observing an 'anti-US-Pakistan Military Pact Day'.⁶¹

As Bogra struggled to address these developments and continued to lose support, Pakistan's Governor-General, Malik Ghulam Muhammed, dissolved Pakistan's constituent assembly and supported Iskander Mirza, the former Defence Secretary, and Ayub Khan, the Commander-in-Chief, in taking over the government as Minister of the Interior and Minister for Defence, respectively. They retained Bogra as a puppet Prime Minister.⁶² To prevent East Bengal from dominating the rehabilitated constituent assembly, the central government pushed forward with a 'one-unit plan'; Ayub Khan and Mirza gained nominal provincial acceptance for the creation of a united West Pakistan which amalgamated the various provinces under a central government. Disregarding widespread discontent with the project, the central government pushed through the reorganisation, beginning the process of coalescing Pakistani political power at the centre.⁶³

A new low: the flag incident and Afghan-Pakistan relations

The Pakistan government's announcement of the one-unit plan on 28 March 1955 immediately produced a protest from the Afghans: 'The Afghanistan Government [sic] holds that any decision relating to the territory of Pushtoonistan is an indisputable right of Pushtoonistan itself and this encroachment upon the rights of Pushtoons by Pakistan is against all the canons and international laws.'⁶⁴ Even though the plan did not change the governing structure of the North-West Frontier tribal zone, the Afghan government immediately attacked Pakistan for supposedly limiting the rights of the local Pakhtuns.⁶⁵ Afghan resistance turned violent in Kabul where civilians attacked the Pakistan Embassy on 30 April and burned the Pakistani flag; to make matters worse, Pakistani citizens angrily responded by sacking the Afghan Consulate in Peshawar.⁶⁶

By early May the need for outside intervention had become evident. Kabul radio had inflamed the situation by alleging that Pakistani nationals had burned a Quran when they attacked the Afghan Consulate in Peshawar. The Afghan press claimed that the trans-border Pakhtuns were against the one-unit plan and that tribal leaders were organising violent protests, despite Pakistani political reports to the contrary. US officials in Kabul saw Afghan claims as 'another indication Daud will use even this dangerous measure in order [to] whip up popular feeling against Pakistan'.⁶⁷

British observers also disagreed with Afghan claims, not only reaffirming Britain's support for the Durand Line, but reporting that Pakhtun tribesmen with whom they spoke supported the one-unit plan because the new plan guaranteed increased economic aid for the tribal zone.⁶⁸ Sir Olaf Caroe, the former colonial North-West Frontier Province Governor, embraced the one-unit plan for increasing ties between the central government and tribal zone; nevertheless, British officials showed little interest in soothing relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan.⁶⁹

All the while, rumours abounded that the Government of Afghanistan had mobilised an armed force along the border with Pakistan. Mirza warned Prime Minister Daud that his support of Pakhtunistan would not be tolerated and he threatened to shut all Afghan and Pakistani consulates in both countries and to close the frontier, eliminating one of Afghanistan's primary trade routes.⁷⁰ Dulles demanded that the US Embassy in Karachi inform the Pakistan government that: 'We recognize Pakistan national honor and prestige involved. However Pakistan already has taken certain retaliatory measures. We would urge most careful consideration before taking further steps.'⁷¹ Under duress both internally and from abroad, Afghanistan and Pakistan accepted mediation efforts from Iraq, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia.⁷²

The two countries' leaders and their mediators finally arrived at an agreement in September through which a ceremonial 'flag raising' took place at the Pakistan Embassy in Kabul. While basic diplomatic and economic relations were re-established between the two countries, the Pakhtunistan dispute had not been resolved.⁷³ The launch of West Pakistan on 14 October renewed tensions between the two countries with a corresponding surge in frontier troubles. On the day the plan took effect, the Afghan government delivered a note of protest to the British government, complaining about the one-unit plan and Pakistan's stance towards Pakhtunistan.⁷⁴ Kabul radio renewed its incendiary broadcasts, lamenting: 'O Pukhtuns, why do you hate Pushto and how do you tolerate the foreign flag over your country? - If there is a foreign flag for ever over your country, how [sic] would you call yourself a Pukhtun?'⁷⁵ Afghan leaders again called upon the Faqir of Ipi, who had been driven to the Afghan side of the border by Pakistani bombing campaigns. The Afghan government agreed to supply the Faqir with guns and Afghan artillery support so he could cross the border and attack a scouts' post; while local Pakistani political agents expected minimal trouble among the frontier tribesmen, Pakistan's Governor-General warned that he intended to teach the Afghans 'a lesson'.⁷⁶ The Pakistan press reported several attacks by the Faqir's followers, supported by Afghan nationals throughout November and December.⁷⁷

During the escalation, the State Department debated its course of action. Officials 'believe[d the] possible danger [of] expansion [of] Soviet influence to borders [of] subcontinent [was] greatly increased by recent Pak-Afghan tension'.⁷⁸ Officials at the US Embassy in Kabul lamented: 'Somewhat desperate because of predicament in which it finds itself following its futile public opposition to "one unit", and further stirred by increasing East-West attention to this country particularly following announcement of Iran's intention to adhere to Baghdad Pact, GOA is once again seeking [to] involve USG in its dispute with GOP and exerting maximum effort to do so.'⁷⁹ Stuck between its alliance with Pakistan and its fear of pushing Afghanistan into the arms of the Soviets, the United States refrained from directly taking part in mediations between the two nations. While US officials maintained that the one-unit plan remained a domestic issue, the State Department warned: 'We would hope that the Government of Pakistan, in meeting any developments in its relations with

Afghanistan, will keep in mind the extremely adverse repercussions which might follow any action by the Pakistanis [sic]. Such charges could be turned against United States military assistance programs in the area.⁸⁰

The United States had good reason to be worried. Even by choosing inaction the US signalled that it did not sympathise with Afghanistan's claims. Afghanistan increasingly turned to the Soviet Union for support. Officials accepted Khrushchev's proposed \$100 million in economic aid and Soviet support in the Pakhtunistan dispute. In discussions with US officials, Afghanistan's Foreign Minister, Prince Naim, 'reiterated his "deep faith" in the free world cause but his bitter concern that the impasse with the GOP (Pakistan) leaves Afghanistan with "only one course" – turning northward'.⁸¹ He asked: 'With Pakistan having unsheathed sword [sic] could anybody dispute its [Afghanistan's] right to use small knife?'⁸² At the same time, while he claimed that Afghanistan's new ties with the Soviet Union were 'absolutely without any political conditions or implications', he threatened that if the United States did not reconsider its stance on regional issues, 'there is little if any hope of preventing this country from being brought into [the] Soviet sphere.'⁸³

The evolving relationship between South Asia and the Great Powers, 1956–8

By March 1956 the United States had provided Pakistan with \$350 million in military aid yet US officials concluded that its South Asian ally could provide little actual support for US interests abroad.⁸⁴ US strategists had recognised at an early stage that Pakistan largely had entered the alliance because of its desire to protect its own borders against India and Afghanistan and State Department officials unhappily concluded: 'The development and continued maintenance by Pakistan of military aid forces of the character and magnitude now envisioned in the program to which the U.S. is committed would entail substantial continuing U.S. economic and military aid as well as a heavy burden upon Pakistan itself.'⁸⁵

Regional developments created further difficulties. Khrushchev's administration continued to expand its ties with India and Afghanistan and put pressure on Pakistan and other South Asian countries, offering them economic credits, industrial equipment, and trade opportunities; State Department officials viewed this move 'as a cost necessary to the opening of new markets but could also be viewed as the cost of advancing political strategy'.⁸⁶ Afghanistan began its first five-year economic plan with Soviet support. During 1956, while Ceylon increased its trade with Communist nations, China, like the USSR, provided Nepal with a grant and industrial equipment.⁸⁷ Pakistan, feeling the pressure of Soviet and Chinese aid to many of its neighbours and intent on preserving its regional position, followed suit, renegotiating trade agreements with the Soviet Union to expand its exports of jute and cotton; Pakistani officials also organised official visits to China.⁸⁸ US officials reflected that: 'The USSR uses Pakistan as an example for other recalcitrants, to show how the USSR can punish with one hand (Kashmir, the Pushtoon question), and feed tidbits of reconciliation with the other (an offer of a steel mill, an offer of friendly "coexistence", an offer of a trade agreement).'⁸⁹

At the same time that Pakistan felt regional pressures to temper its relations with the Communist bloc, the country's support for the US was further limited by internal developments and growing domestic disillusionment with US policy. Pakistan's rice crop failed in 1956–7 and conflicts within the government about compromising between defence and economic spending resulted only in a limited five-year plan that

would increase Pakistan's gross national income by 15%.⁹⁰ Public discontent with the state of Pakistan's governance and economy became increasingly vocal. Frustrations became particularly evident with the nationalisation of the Suez Canal; Pakistani public opinion overwhelmingly supported Nasser. While Pakistani officials hoped to build its relations with the Islamic world by mediating between Nasser and the West, Pakistani representatives ultimately bowed to US and British pressure and supported their position, infuriating both Nasser and the Pakistani public. Cowed by the domestic backlash, Pakistan's delegation for the second conference about Suez refused to support the proposed users' association for the canal, instead backing Egypt.⁹¹

Meanwhile, Afghanistan, despite its acceptance of Soviet economic aid, tried to maintain a semblance of neutrality in its foreign policy. Afghan officials accepted US offers of economic aid. S.N. Haksar, the Indian Ambassador to Afghanistan, noted: 'When Afghanistan accepted a loan of \$100 million from Russia, the Western powers were not slow in thinking that Afghanistan had joined the Communist Camp. Equally, when Afghanistan accepted the aid which [US] Ambassador Richardson went around doling out to the West Asian countries many sceptics thought that it signified attachment to the Western Bloc. However, the Afghan leaders missed no opportunity for reiterating their policy of neutrality.'⁹² But after having made an agreement with the Soviets, Afghan officials could not retreat. While both President Eisenhower and Kliment Voroshilov, Chairman of the Presidium, toured Afghanistan in 1958, that same year 'saw greater [Afghan] dependence, howsoever unintended, on Russia in both the Military and Economic fields'.⁹³ Allen Dulles, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, bemoaned that: 'Afghanistan's economic dependence on the USSR has in the last eight months expanded to the point where, if the present trend continues, the Soviet Union will probably be able within the next few years to influence effectively Afghan political as well as economic policy.'⁹⁴ The sheer scale and ambition of Afghanistan's economic plans necessitated foreign aid.

Despite these developments, relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan remained rigidly polite. The narrow escape from war in 1955 restrained Afghan and Pakistani officials in their relations and the shock of Afghanistan's turn to the Soviets moulded further United States–Pakistan discussions. Early in 1956, US officials warned that:

It appears that the [Afghan] ruling oligarchy has been convinced that it has a viable alternative to its traditional outlet through Pakistan and that it stands to gain materially and in bargaining power by Soviet support. These leaders seem to be either blind or indifferent to the risks involved in their flirtation with the USSR, presumably because of the demonstrable benefits quickly coming from the Soviet side.⁹⁵

US officials expressed some concern about Soviet interests in extending the Pakhtunistan dispute. Planners noted with some anxiety the establishment of highways and airfield improvements by Soviet workers on major routes to Pakistan as well as Soviet offers of aid for the Royal Afghan Air Force; they worried that if an Afghan-supported Pakhtunistan came into existence, the Soviets would gain access to the Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, and Indian Ocean.⁹⁶

While US officials recognised that any solution of the Pakhtunistan dispute was unlikely, they encouraged Pakistan to seek better relations with Afghanistan, to which the Pakistan Charge in Kabul agreed.⁹⁷ Pakistan was 'deterred from initiating any forceful action by the fear that the USSR would come to Afghanistan's assistance and by [the] realization that aggressive action might adversely affect US and world opinion

in general'.⁹⁸ By August 1957 US officials could report with some relief that: 'Responsible Pakistani leaders continue to support a policy, similar to that of the U.S., of seeking to draw Afghanistan closer to the free world and away from the USSR.'⁹⁹ As Pakistan and Afghanistan tempered their attitudes towards each other, the North-West Frontier remained quiet, providing little excuse for new tensions to arise. Nevertheless, officials continued to believe, in the words of Henry Byroade, US Ambassador to Afghanistan: 'We face a losing battle here with Soviets unless Pushtunistan problem can be solved. [sic] All in all, attitude here is one of fear and frustration, producing fatalistic complex leading to acceptance risks [of] turning to Russia.'¹⁰⁰

By this time, however, State Department officials had begun to reconsider their relationship with Pakistan and its neighbours. The National Security Council produced a new recommendation, which advocated increased US economic assistance for India.¹⁰¹ The success of Communists in elections in the Indian state of Kerala pushed the Eisenhower Administration into providing India with \$750 million in economic aid over three years.¹⁰² Eisenhower tried to encourage an *entente* between India and Pakistan, briefly broaching the subject of new discussions of Kashmir in the United Nations Security Council. Nehru bluntly informed Eisenhower that Indo-Pakistan tensions no longer solely involved Kashmir but were tainted by communal hatred and violence.¹⁰³ The rupture of Sino-Indian relations also renewed US interest in India. The Sino-Indian border conflict - begun after a March 1959 rebellion in Tibet led the Dalai Lama to seek asylum in India - caused a fissure in relations between the two countries and highlighted a number of territorial disputes along their shared border. Khrushchev, unwilling to threaten his forthcoming visit to the United States or alienate India, a major economic ally, refused to support Mao, thus leaving the border dispute unresolved and also turning China and India into opposing powers.¹⁰⁴

Regardless of these regional developments Pakistani officials resented US officials' policy shift, particularly in the context of a continued stalemate in Kashmir and suspicions that India really meant to use US funds to build up its army; Pakistan's Prime Minister, Feroz Khan Noon, threatened to overhaul Pakistan foreign policy.¹⁰⁵ Pakistan, however, still heavily relied on US aid while US policy-makers did not want to eliminate all ties with Pakistan; this was particularly the case when defence planners wanted to establish military bases in Pakistan and the fall of the US-supported Iraqi monarchy in July 1958 created a power gap in the Western position in the Middle East.¹⁰⁶ Developments within Pakistan further shaped US policy; in 1958 President Mirza declared martial rule in Pakistan only to be overthrown almost immediately by Ayub Khan who essentially assumed a dictatorship. While Ayub Khan's coup did not signal any drastic changes in Pakistan's governing system, Ayub Khan took a more pragmatic view on international and regional relations. While taking new steps to improve relations with India, even proposing a regional defence pact which Nehru rejected, Ayub Khan also took a stronger stance towards the United States. He demanded increased US military aid to reaffirm the United States' support for Pakistan, though he co-operated with US policy-makers' independent efforts to improve relations with the subcontinent.¹⁰⁷

The ascension of Ayub Khan and the new North-West Frontier crisis, 1959–65

Regional relations had already begun to deteriorate with the ascension of Ayub Khan. Ayub Khan responded vehemently to a map circulated in 1960 by the Afghan

government which included Pakhtunistan within Afghanistan's political boundaries and he sent a formal note of protest. Subsequent talks between Ayub Khan and Prince Naim failed. Naim complained that Ayub Khan had promised formal negotiations about Pakhtunistan, while Ayub Khan refused to address this issue. Relations became even more strained when Khrushchev publicly announced his support for Afghan's position, leading the Pakistan government to react angrily, saying 'the time has come to put by some of the restraint which Pakistan has all along observed with reference to the propaganda carried on by the ruling family in Afghanistan.' Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Manzur Qadir, declared: 'It is now up to the rulers of Afghanistan either to give up their propaganda and their attempt at misleading the Pukhtoon people and learn the ways of reasonable neighbourly relations, or to accept the offer of ascertaining the wishes of Pukhtoons in Afghanistan as a first step to any other that might be necessary.'¹⁰⁸ Prince Naim retorted equally vehemently, calling Pakistan an 'oppressive, colonialistic' nation.¹⁰⁹ In turn, Afghan propaganda against Pakistan renewed and Pakistan began to react with its own verbal attacks; US officials worried that 'relations between the two countries are now perhaps at the lowest ebb since 1955.'¹¹⁰

On 28 September 1960 Pakistan's Foreign Minister reported that Afghan troops had massed on the border of Dir in the North-West Frontier. Dir, a former princely state which had acceded to Pakistan, had remained governed by its traditional Nawab but with Afghan troop concentrations and rumours that the Nawab sympathised with Afghanistan, Pakistani officials reacted swiftly, flying in frontier scouts and removing the Nawab and his son.¹¹¹ As Pakistan deployed troops into the region, W.M. Rountree, the US Ambassador to Pakistan, advocated a settlement, noting that renewed conflict 'entails grave dangers involving far more than localized fighting among tribal people'.¹¹² Afghan nationals indeed crossed the border and made local attacks.¹¹³ Despite the Afghan call for North-West Frontier tribesmen to rally to the Pakhtunistan cause, tribesmen rejected the appeal, even repulsing Afghan *lashkars*, or war parties, that transgressed the border.¹¹⁴ Facing defeat, the Afghan propaganda machine turned its attention to the United States, claiming that: 'Pakistan is permitting "its allies" to construct atomic rocket bases in "Pushtunistan" for use against Afghanistan and for the destruction of "Pushtunistan"'. At times they imply that the United States masterminded the activities of Pakistan in Bajaur and Dir.'¹¹⁵

US policy-makers grew increasingly concerned about the crisis as Khrushchev amplified Soviet involvement. British officials informed the US Embassy that: 'Radio Moscow has gone so far as to allege that Pakistan has been making military preparations against India and Afghanistan as part of subversive activities in South East Asia and the Middle East.'¹¹⁶ In a 1960 speech, Khrushchev declared his support for the Pakhtunistan movement: 'Our position stems from the Leninist national policy, which says that every nation has the right to self-determination, that national questions must be solved in conformity with the will of the peoples.'¹¹⁷ Indian officials in Kabul surmised that: 'The unequivocal support given by Prime Minister Khrushchev to the Afghan demand for Pushtoonistan not only constituted an adequate reward for the extremely cordial relations which Afghanistan has striven to cultivate with the USSR but it also gave considerable confidence and self-assurance to this country in her demand for Pushtoonistan.'¹¹⁸

The State Department recognised the hopelessness of the situation. US officials concluded: 'The bulk of the Pushtuns have no fixed loyalty, either to Pakistan or Afghanistan. [sic] In fact, if put to the test, both governments know they cannot

rely on which way the Pushtuns may jump.¹¹⁹ Byroade, the US Ambassador to Kabul, was 'a greatly worried man. There was fear that these Tribal incursions may result in a big scale war between Afghanistan and Pakistan.'¹²⁰ He ruefully told Indian officials that he 'consider[ed] that [the] Durand Line is an established fact and should be acknowledged as such, but no one seems to know where the Durand Line is'.¹²¹

When Prince Naim approached Byroade with a proposal for US mediation, the Ambassador prevaricated, commenting to the Department of State that all US efforts had failed in the past and: 'Another effort would seem unlikely to succeed unless Afghan position could be more realistically defined and Ayub could be convinced honestly to try find some face-saving solution for RGA that did not prejudice Pakistan's vital interest.'¹²² The State Department pressured the Pakistan government into a more co-operative position, demanding that it ignore Afghan propaganda and insults. Pakistani leaders initially backed down but Rountree noted that: 'GOP officials resent fact that US has not come publicly to its defense on this issue as have British, despite fact that USSR has publicly sided with Afghanistan.'¹²³

In May 1961 official Pakistani and Afghan forces clashed on the border, creating the prospect of all-out war on the North-West Frontier.¹²⁴ By then Ayub Khan had increased the Pakistan Army presence on the frontier to close to 20,000 troops.¹²⁵ In September he closed Afghanistan's consulates and trade agencies in Pakistan. The closure of the Pakistani border caused immense disruptions to Afghan's export-reliant economy and it further complicated US efforts to maintain friendly relations with Afghans. US aid had to traverse the North-West Frontier to enter Afghanistan and the blockade left 25,000 tons of goods stuck in Pakistan. The blockade lasted for more than a year, and while Afghan officials succeeded in negotiating new trade routes through the Soviet Union and Iran - Soviet officials even began airlifting fruit out of the country - 'there is little doubt that economically Afghanistan has suffered very badly. The revenue from customs duty has declined sharply and high prices of goods and inflationary tendencies are very much evident.'¹²⁶ John Steeves, who replaced Byroade as Ambassador in January 1962, fretted: 'When I consider far-reaching possible results to free world interests in this area and especially to Pakistan I cannot do otherwise than recommend that we urge Pakistan muster necessary courage, imagination and far sighted self-interest to thus restore her influence in this area.'¹²⁷

US attempts to mediate between Afghan and Pakistani leaders met with complete failure. Livingston Merchant, then US Ambassador to Canada, was sent as a special envoy in late October 1961 to try to negotiate a settlement between the two countries but he found that all leaders took intractable lines and refused to compromise. Merchant ultimately concluded 'it is best to leave matter as it stands', noting that further discussions would only alienate Ayub Khan: 'We must bear in mind his importance as an ally and recognize he has in fact already made some distasteful concessions in my present formula in order to meet part way our concern and sense urgency which he decidedly does not share.'¹²⁸ US officials subsequently decided against further interference. When Chester Bowles, acting as a special representative and adviser on African, Asian, and Latin American affairs, advocated new US efforts to aid Afghanistan by creating further alternative transit routes via Iran, National Security Council staff concluded that: 'While all concerned agree with Bowles that US should make a major effort to help Afghans stay out of Soviet

clutches, the rest of us disagree with him on tactics.¹²⁹ US policy-makers ultimately left mediation efforts to their Middle Eastern allies.

Worsening circumstances in Afghanistan ultimately forced Mohammad Daud to resign as Prime Minister, allowing less obdurate leaders to negotiate a settlement. The Iranian Foreign Minister also succeeded in November 1962, after a year of failed attempts, in introducing talks between Afghan and Pakistan ministers, allowing both Pakistan and Afghanistan to retreat from war, either hot or cold.¹³⁰ By 1963, while Afghan officials continued to declare their support for Pakhtunistan, they did so in muted tones; Indian officials recognised that: 'The new Government still stood by its Pakhtoonistan stand but they had to separate the economic issues from the political.'¹³¹ The Governor of Jalalabad even went so far as to tell Pakhtun tribal leaders that if West Pakistan was 'undone' and the North-West Frontier Province renamed Pakhtunistan, then: 'The demand of "occupied Pakhtunistan" would be met.'¹³² In turn, Pakistani leaders, led by Ayub Khan, made a concerted effort to improve relations with their Afghan counterparts. Ayub Khan offered to let the Afghan King tour the North-West Frontier tribal zone to assure himself that local Pakhtuns were not being oppressed; the two countries also exchanged trade delegations and took part in additional political discussions.¹³³

Even while US officials could feel relief at improving Afghan–Pakistan relations, the outbreak of the 1965 Indo-Pakistan War created new problems. The election of John F. Kennedy and his liberal administration had signalled an even starker shift in US policy. Facing various dilemmas about its global policy, the Kennedy administration took a more sympathetic stance towards India. By 1961, the Kennedy administration had earmarked \$500 million in aid for India in comparison to \$125 million for Pakistan.¹³⁴ The Indian Army's stunning loss to Chinese forces in the 1962 Sino-Indian border conflict led to further agreements between Kennedy and Nehru for a \$160 million military-aid package. The Pakistan government reacted angrily to these developments and subsequently reached a series of agreements with China despite vehement US protests.¹³⁵ While the Kennedy administration tried to assuage Pakistani concerns by reopening negotiations about the future of Kashmir, relations remained tense.

US dealings with South Asia came to a head with the 1965 Indo-Pakistan War; Pakistan faced a decisive defeat, not only losing to the Indian Army but infuriating the new US President, Lyndon Johnson; Johnson, who was enraged that two countries receiving US aid had clashed so violently and publicly despite US demands to the contrary, subsequently froze all aid to both Pakistan and India.¹³⁶ The US–Pakistan goodwill of the past decade largely vanished as regional struggles surmounted any cold-war concerns.

As in the previous Kashmir conflict, officials in South Asia and abroad feared that North-West Frontier tribesmen would serve as a large guerrilla force, which would infiltrate Kashmir. The diplomatic developments of the previous three years, however, limited Pakhtun involvement from either side of the Afghan–Pakistan border. Significantly, neither Afghan officials nor tribesmen created any major disturbances during the Indo-Pakistan war, keeping unrest on the frontier at a minimum. Pakhtun tribesmen at a tribal meeting attended by Ayub Khan even assured him of their wholehearted support for Pakistan's position on Kashmir.¹³⁷ In stark contrast to the previous twenty years, Pakhtuns on either side of the Afghan–Pakistan border abstained from further disrupting already volatile relations. At least for the next few years, the Pakhtunistan dispute would fade into the background.

Conclusion

By 1965, the United States' concerns about supporting Pakistan had been confirmed. While Pakistan did not demand direct US aid as it clashed with Afghanistan over the future of the North-West Frontier, the United States' pact prevented it from taking actions that might have precluded Afghanistan from turning to the Soviet Union for aid. As Pakistan threatened to retaliate against Afghanistan for its irredentist claims, the United States could only caution the Pakistan government that a harsh response would not help the West's position in the region. The US recognised both Pakistani and Afghan intransigence concerning Pakhtunistan and realised few solutions existed. Stuck in a helpless position when faced with hostility between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the United States had even fewer alternatives once the Soviet Union also became involved in the dispute. While US officials recognised the necessity of easing tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan - and maintaining peace on the frontier - few opportunities for solutions appeared.

US officials realised that while an alliance with Pakistan theoretically strengthened the West's position in South Asia and the Middle East, in practice it only created complications. Beyond the constant threat of war between India and Pakistan, the enduring conflicts along the North-West Frontier, particularly in the semi-autonomous tribal region, continuously undermined US policy. Instead of using Pakistan as a military stronghold, local clashes on the frontier forced policy-makers to make costly choices between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Mired in a rather fruitless relationship with Pakistan, US policy-makers could take few initiatives in developing the US-Pakistani alliance, instead having to react time and again to local developments with far-reaching consequences. Reminiscent of decades of British colonial rule, US policy-makers seeking to expand Western influence in South Asia were forced to moderate and reconsider their objectives in response to local politics; the North-West Frontier remained a deciding factor in moulding US strategy and successes.

US policy towards South Asia was frequently reactive rather than strategic; local developments and relationships prevented Western officials from really incorporating South Asia in its cold-war plans and instead forced US policy-makers into the role of reluctant mediators. By failing to resolve regional conflicts, whether between Pakistan and Afghanistan or Pakistan and India, when they decided that they needed a South Asian base, US officials handicapped their position in the region and allowed tensions to persist. These tensions have continued to complicate the United States' relationship with South Asia, even into the modern day.

The legacies of early US cold-war policy towards Pakistan and Afghanistan were significant. Despite Afghan attempts to appear neutral in the global struggle, the conflict over Pakhtunistan in the early 1950s led Afghan officials to accept significant Soviet aid for the first time. Developing ties between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union ultimately provided the opportunity for the Soviets to invade in 1979 when Afghanistan had succumbed to internal ruling conflicts. Meanwhile relations between the United States and Pakistan significantly cooled after the 1965 war, though the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan led US officials to use their ties with the Pakistani government to provide proxy aid to Afghan rebels.

Significantly as well, the dispute over the legal border between Pakistan and Afghanistan still lingers. The Afghan government continues to refuse to recognise the Durand Line as an official demarcation, causing lasting tensions between the two neighbours. The aftermath of Operation Enduring Freedom has further highlighted

the instability of the Afghan–Pakistan borderlands. Members of al Qaida have moved easily between Afghanistan and Pakistan’s North-West Frontier, finding sanctuary in the same hills where generations of tribal insurgents hid, fought, and died. The permeability of the Durand Line, which historically allowed Afghan officials to foster unrest amongst the Pakhtuns in Pakistan’s North-West Frontier, remains a challenge for today’s policy-makers. While the key issues and players have changed, the North-West Frontier’s strategic importance, both in regional and international relations, remains. US policy-makers, like their British predecessors, failed to incorporate the North-West Frontier into broader governing structures during the cold war, thus giving local Pakhtuns extraordinary power for manipulating politics. Whether future strategists will resolve the frontier conundrum, finally pacifying the region, still remains to be seen.

Notes

1. See F.N. Bajwa, *Pakistan and the West: The First Decade 1947–1957* (Karachi, 1996); D. Kux, *The United States and Pakistan 1947–2000: Disenchanted Allies* (Oxford, 2001); R. J. McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan* (New York, 1994).
2. See K. Kaur, *Pak-Afghanistan Relations* (New Delhi, 1985); A.T. Embree (ed), *Pakistan’s Western Borderland: The Transformation of a Political Order* (Karachi, 1979); J. Roberts, *The Origins of Conflict in Afghanistan* (London, 2003).
3. See, for example, M. Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria’s Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (New York, 2002); G. Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (London, 2004); O. A. Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of our Times* (New York, 2005). For the transition from colonial to cold-war struggles, see also C. Bayly and T. Harper, *Forgotten Wars: The End of Britain’s Asian Empire* (London, 2007).
4. Westad, *Global Cold War*, 20–1.
5. This article refers to the tribesmen as ‘Pakhtuns’ for the sake of consistency; historical records use a variety of names for the tribes including ‘Pakhtuns’, ‘Pathans’, ‘Pashtuns’, and ‘Pashtos’.
6. Westad, *Global Cold War*, 24.
7. CIA, ‘Review of the World Situation’, 16 Sept. 1948, D[eclassified] D[ocuments] R[eference] S[ystem] [Accessed 7 March 2011].
8. Kux, *United States and Pakistan*, 9–14.
9. See C. Dasgupta, *War and Diplomacy in Kashmir, 1947–48* (New Delhi, 2002).
10. Office of [South] Asian Affairs memorandum, ‘Military Aid for South Asian Countries’, 1 Nov. 1949, [Department of State Records, US National Archives, College Park, MD.] RG 59, A1 1447, Box 23.
11. A. Jalal, *The State of Martial Rule: The Origins of Pakistan’s Political Economy of Defence* (New York, 1990) 42.
12. OSAA memorandum, ‘Military Aid for South Asian Countries’, 1 Nov. 1949, RG 59, A1 1447, box 23; Bajwa, *Pakistan and the West*, 14.
13. R. Guha, *India after Gandhi: The History of the World’s Largest Republic* (New York, 2007) 171.
14. Explanations have ranged from Afghan hopes of gaining access to a port on the Arabian Sea and greater economic independence to manipulation by Afghan leaders to distract local populations from the government’s weaknesses to genuine concern for the Pakhtuns’ wellbeing. For discussion of Pakhtunistan’s origins, see Embree, *Pakistan’s Western Borderlands* and Kaur, *Pak-Afghanistan Relations*.
15. Meeting of the Indian Cabinet, case nos. 162, 170 and 171/33/47, Mountbatten papers, Minutes of Indian Cabinet meetings, 4 July 1947, in N. Mansergh and P. Moon (eds), *The Transfer of Power 1942–7*, 11 (London, 1982) no. 493.

16. 'Pakistan Army leaves Razmak Fortress: Convoy's Eleven-Day March to Bannu', *The Times of India*, 20 Dec. 1947, 1; 'Pakistan's New Tribal Policy: Friendship instead of Fear', *The Times of India*, 29 Dec. 1947, 7.
17. P. Talbot to W.S. Rogers, 15 Jan. 1950, RG 84, UD 3063, box 2.
18. 'Alleged Frontier Province plot: Charge against Red Shirts', *The Times of India*, 15 March 1949, 1.
19. Afghan Embassy, Washington, DC, press release 5, 1 June 1949, RG 84, UD 3063, box 16.
20. By 1947, the Faqir of Ipi had been fomenting unrest against local officials for almost a decade. He was the driving force behind the 1936–7 North-West Frontier revolt against the British, while during the Second World War he received payments from Axis agents to encourage a tribal insurgency. See M. Hauner, 'One Man against the Empire: The Faqir of Ipi and the British in Central Asia on the Eve of and During the Second World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, xvi (1981), 183–212, and A. Warren, *Waziristan, the Faqir of Ipi, and the Indian Army: The North-West Frontier Revolt of 1936–37* (Karachi, 2000).
21. 'North Waziristan Border Clashes: Pakistan Planes Bomb Tribal Areas: Hostilities Sequel to Arrest of Red Shirts', *The Times of India*, 10 July 1948, 1; Pakistan Embassy, Washington, DC, press release, 2 June 1949, RG 84, UD 3063, box 16; US Embassy, Kabul, to S[ecretary of] S[tate], telegram, 'Newspaper Reports of Pushtoon Activities in Pakistan Tribal Territory', 29 Aug. 1950, UD 3064A, box 28.
22. US Embassy, Karachi, to D[epartment of] S[tate], desp. 86, 11 July 1950, RG 84, UD 3064A, box 24.
23. Copy of translation of article from *Islah*, 'Acute Anxiety and Upheaval in Quetta. Huge Demonstrations against Pakistan. Counter Steps taken by Karachi Officials', 21 July 1949, RG 84, UD 3063, box 16; US Embassy, Kabul, to SS, telegram, 'Newspaper Reports of Pushtoon Activities in Pakistan Tribal Territory', 29 Aug. 1950, RG 84, UD 3064A, box 28; Pakistan Embassy, Washington, DC, press release, 16 June 1949, RG 84, UD 3063, box 16.
24. W. Perkins to DS, 'Current Situation in Malakand Agency', 16 Oct. 1950, RG 84, UD 3064A, box 24; W. Perkins to DS, 'Political Situation Among Afridi and Mohmand Tribes on Afghan Border', 10 Oct. 1950, RG 84, UD 3064A, box 24.
25. US Embassy, Kabul, to US Embassy, Karachi, desp. 10, 'Transmitting Translation of Purported Communiqué of National Assembly of Pushtoonistan', 11 Jan. 1950, RG 84, UD 3064A, box 28.
26. US Embassy, Kabul, to SS, desp. 50, 'Afghan-Pakistan Relations', 2 Aug. 1950, RG 84, UD 3064A, box 24.
27. 'Short Notice Question in the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan (Legislature) on Saturday, the 7th October 1950', 7 Oct. 1950, RG 84, UD 3064A, box 24; US Embassy, Karachi, to SS, tel. 308, 2 Oct. 1950, RG 84, UD 3064A, box 24.
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