

“THE DURAND LINE” ISSUE’S ROOTS: FROM AMIR ABDURRAHMAN TO MUHAMMAD DOVUD

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ABSTRACT: This article discusses the signing of “The Durand Line” Agreement and its consequences for the relations between Afghanistan and British India (later Pakistan). Additionally, it presents the chronology of events and incidents that took place along The Durand Line.

KEYWORDS: Durand Line, “The Great Game”, “Pashtunistan”, “Balochistan”, Durbar, “Taliban” movement, FATA, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa.

INTRODUCTION

The Durand Line was signed on November 12, 1893, by Abdurrahman, Amir of Afghanistan and Sir Mortimer Durand, the Foreign Secretary of British India. The agreement, known as “The Durand Line” Agreement, was created as a result of negotiations[1]. The British Indian government benefited greatly from the signing of the Durand Agreement, as it provided significant advantages for the garrisons in Gilgit, Swat, and Chitral and created a defense line against potential Russian invasion through the Wakhan corridor. However, this demarcation did not stop tribal conflicts and incursions into the territories of various tribes, including the Mohsuds (1897), Mohmands (1897-1898), Waziris (1897), Afridis, and Orakzais (1897). All of this further extended British rule and control into tribal territories[2]. Afghan researcher Zalmay Ahmad Gulzod describes this in his dissertation, stating that in 1897, the Pashtun tribal uprising posed a significant threat to British power in the region. The establishment of The Durand Line led to the inclusion of Pashtun tribal territories within the sphere of British India’s influence. As a result, the tribal uprisings demonstrated their dissatisfaction with the Durand Line[3].

MAIN PART

In general, The Durand Line refers to the controversial border established in the late 19th century by British emissaries as a buffer state between the most influential imperial powers of the time, with the aim of preventing open conflict[4].

After Amir Abdurrahman’s eldest son, Habibullah, assumed the position of amir following his father’s death, hostilities completely ceased. By the year 1901, when Habibullah became amir, the

Russians and the British had established their respective borders with Afghanistan in the north, British India in the south and southeast, and even China in the northeast and northwest[5]. During the years 1901-1919, Amir Habibullah continued his father's reforms and maintained Afghanistan's neutrality during the First World War[6]. In 1901, under the orders of the British India's Viceroy Lord Curzon, the North-West Frontier Province was established, further deepening the issue[7]. This region now falls within present-day Pakistan and is still causing some disputed issues between Afghanistan and Pakistan[8]. However, according to some sources, The Durand Line was mentioned as "the boundary" between Afghanistan and British India in two treaties signed in Kabul in 1905 and 1921[9].

According to the agreement reached in 1907 between Great Britain and Tsarist Russia, the Fors State was divided into spheres of influence, and both sides agreed to refrain from interfering with China's control over Tibet. Russia handed over Afghanistan to British influence, but London required Afghanistan to refrain from foreign affairs and to keep any part of the country from being annexed or absorbed. Consequently, since it did not participate in the Kabul Agreement, Amir Habibullah declared it invalid. After Amir Habibullah, Amir Amanullah ascended to the throne and declared Afghanistan's independence. Interestingly, the Soviet government, which was formed shortly thereafter, immediately recognized Afghanistan as an independent state. However, the British did not accept this and as a result, in 1919, Amir Amanullah called on the Pashtun tribes on both sides of The Durand Line to fight against the British. The Third Anglo-Afghan War, which lasted one month, ensured the full sovereignty of Kabul. In this way, the British officially recognized Afghanistan's independence in the 1919 Rawalpindi Agreement[10][11].

After the initial agreement was signed in Rawalpindi, Amanullakhan faced widespread opposition with strong protests everywhere. In the context of the weakness of the Ottoman Caliphate, Amanullakhan's position was elevated, and he began to be seen as a leading figure among Muslims. Therefore, he was given the title of "g'oziy" (victorious).

The achievement of independence ushered in political, economic, and cultural development pathways for Afghanistan. After gaining independence, Amanullah Khan focused on implementing substantial reforms in both domestic and foreign policies. As relations with the British Empire cooled in foreign affairs, it naturally led to the initiation of a strong partnership with Russia. It is worth noting that Russia recognized Afghanistan's independence officially well before its proclamation on March 28, 1919, making Afghanistan the first recognized state in the world to achieve independence. Afghan historian Mir Ghulam Muhammad Ghubar highlighted the friendly and sincere nature of the Afghanistan-Russia relations in his book "On the Path of Afghan History" mentioning the signing of a friendship treaty between the two countries on February 28, 1921. According to the historian, Amanullah Khan also signed agreements with Turkey, Iran, China, Japan, Switzerland, and Poland regarding cooperation. Additionally, he established political relations with leading European states, signing a series of agreements with Italy on June 3, 1921, and with France on April 28, 1922 [12]. The changes implemented in foreign policy paved the way for the growth of Afghanistan's international influence, bringing about new changes in the country's economy and domestic political life, particularly enhancing its international standing[13].

The achievement of independence by Afghanistan and the significant political and economic developments that took place in the country between 1919 and 1929, marked by a series of extensive reforms, are closely associated with the name of Amanullah Khan. It is possible to say that Amanullah Khan established a strong foundation for an independent Afghan state, bringing about notable changes in the country's way of life[14].

The independent Pakistan. As for Pakistan, the formation of the state took place after the Durand Line agreement, which defined the border between the two sides. This agreement was confirmed by the Ravalpindi Treaty (1919), which marked the conclusion of the Third Anglo-Afghan War [15]. In late 1946, a letter was sent by Sardar Shah Mahmud, the Prime Minister of Afghanistan and the successor of King Zahir Shah (who had ascended to the position of Prime Minister that same year after the abdication of his uncle, Hashim Khan), to the British authorities, describing the events related to the Durand Line issue. In the letter, Shah Mahmud requested attention to the significant fate that awaited the Pashtuns after the country's partition. On June 13, 1947, the Prime Minister of Afghanistan sent a memorandum to the British Embassy in Kabul titled "The Choice of Self-Government for the Pashtuns and Baloch or Granting the Possibility of Joining Afghanistan". This memorandum was based on the premise that the Pashtuns and Baloch were Afghan people and that they should decide whether to join this state or declare their independence. In response to the memorandum, the British government referred to the 1921 agreement and requested that Afghanistan refrain from interfering in the process of division in the northwestern regions. The Afghans emphasized that once the British left India during the partition, the Durand Line agreement would be invalidated, and a certain part of Pakistan would become part of Afghanistan. On June 21, Sardar Shah Mahmud sent another letter to Britain, emphasizing the necessity of Afghanistan's access to the sea and the right to transit from Haybar to Karachi [16]. However, these attempts proved unsuccessful. Some territories, particularly Mohmand, Bajaur, and Orakzai, remained separate from Afghanistan after the establishment of Pakistan in 1947 [17]. "Indeed, the borders of the state in the desert region demonstrate the territorial frontier of the country in a classical style compared to the boundaries of air and sea. Pakistan shares a total of 7,092 kilometers of borders with neighboring countries, including 2,611 kilometers with Afghanistan. Out of the 34 provinces in Afghanistan, 11 share borders with Pakistan [18].

Since Pakistan gained independence in 1947, the Afghan government repeatedly acknowledges that the Durand Line, which separates the two countries, cannot be recognized as an international border between them. In 1947, Kabul opposed Pakistan's admission to the United Nations. Afghanistan insisted that Pakistan should not be recognized until the "Pashtunistan" issue was resolved. However, Kabul retracted its objection after a month. In February 1948, Kabul became one of the first governments to establish diplomatic relations with Pakistan" [19].

In 1947, the establishment of Pakistan as a separate independent state led to the emergence of several conflicting situations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. For example, the risk of war escalated due to the uprising in 1955. In the years 1961-1963, diplomatic relations between these countries were strained [20].

The Durand Line was not recognized by successive Afghan governments, including the government of King Zahir Shah, even after the departure of the British from India [21].

In 1978, Muhammad Daud, who was assassinated through a coup, supported the idea of “Pashtunistan” to strengthen his political position in Afghanistan. At that time, the United States, knowing that the formation of “Pashtunistan” would divide its ally Pakistan, rejected Daud’s request for military assistance when he appealed to Washington. In other words, in an official diplomatic note, US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in 1954 rejected Daud’s request for military aid from the US. Instead, he urged Daud to resolve the “Pashtunistan” issue with Pakistan. Dulles sent a copy of the note to Pakistan’s representative in Washington. As a result, after Washington rejected his request, Daud, within a month, initiated the first meeting on arms with Moscow and organized it with the Soviet Union. Within a year, Soviet leaders Nikita Khrushchev and Nikolai Bulganin visited Kabul to start large-scale military and economic aid programs by the Soviet Union to Afghanistan[22].

In 1919, when Afghanistan achieved full independence, it accepted this border as a de facto boundary with British India. However, Pakistan, upon gaining independence, did not recognize the agreements related to the British Indian borders with Afghanistan as valid. At the time these agreements were signed, Pakistan did not exist as a state. Afghan governments have never fully accepted the Durand Line as an official border between the two countries and have made various claims to parts of Pakistan’s North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), Balochistan, and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). This has been a continuous source of tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Afghanistan demanded a renegotiation of its border with the British. Its request was rejected. When Pakistan joined the United Nations in 1947, Afghanistan was the only member state to vote against its membership. Furthermore, Afghanistan declared that all previous agreements regarding the Durand Line, including subsequent Afghan-British treaties that supported it, were not valid, citing that Afghan rulers had signed them under British pressure. Afghanistan’s call for the establishment of an independent “Pashtunistan” separate from Pakistan, which was rhetorically popular but strategically unrealistic, extended its claims up to the Indus River. During the Cold War, Pakistan aligned with the United States, while Afghanistan sought diplomatic and military assistance from the Soviet Union. The US-Soviet rivalry further complicated the Afghanistan-Pakistan border dispute [23].

The US military ordered not to cross the Durand Line during operations against Taliban, as the United States considered the region beyond Pakistan and Afghanistan to be a country with significant strategic interests. Therefore, the Durand Line is accepted as a “de-facto” boundary [24].

The director of the International Cooperation Center at New York University, Barnett Rubin, writes the following in the journal “Foreign Affairs”: “The English established a three-stage border to separate their empire from Russia. The first border separated the territories of the Indian subcontinent directly under British rule from the territories under Pashtun control (today’s line separates the territories managed by the state of Pakistan from those managed by the FATA). The second border, known as the Durand Line, separated Pashtun tribal territories from the territories under Afghan government control. This now forms the international border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Externally, the Durand Line defined the limits of British influence in Afghanistan vis-à-vis Russia, Iran, and China. Along the Pakistani side of the Durand Line lie the Balochistan

provinces, the North-West Frontier Province, and the seven tribal agencies of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The Afghan side of the border stretches from the Nuristan province in the northeast to Nimruz in the southwest. The English created a special legal structure called the Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR) to manage tribal areas, which is still in place under the legal regime of the FATF today” [25].

CONCLUSION

Based on the historical facts mentioned earlier, it can be understood that the negative aspects of the Durand Line border issue have been persisting, and the situation has further intensified since the formation of the state of Pakistan. It is still a matter that remains unresolved.

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