

# The genesis of durand line, pakistan factor and pashthunistan



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## **Introduction**

1. The Durand Line is a 2, 450 km (1, 519 mile) border between Afghanistan and Pakistan ranging from the spur of the Sarikol range in the north, to the Iranian border to the south-west[1]. It is named after Sir Mortimer Durand, who in 1893, as a representative of the British-Indian government, had negotiated and concluded an agreement in Kabul with the ruler of Afghanistan[2]. When Pakistan came into being in 1947, the Afghan government was quick to reject the Durand Line as the International border between the two countries because it divided the Pashtun tribes that inhabit the region on both sides of the Pak-Afghan border. Thus, Afghanistan laid claim to the larger Pashto-speaking areas that fall within Pakistan's North-West Frontier and Balochistan provinces. Pakistan refused to entertain the thought of ceding any territory, and, thus, firmly rejected the idea, insisting that the Durand Line must remain and be recognized as the international border between the two countries. Hence, the status of the Durand Line has remained a constant political friction throughout the history of Af-Pak relations.

2. The question arises, then, why the Afghans are constantly trying to prove the invalidity of the Durand Line. In other words, " Why do they want to obliterate the Durand Line?" or " Why has Durand line become such a sour issue for the Pashtun's?" These questions also lead us to my hypothesis that instability in the Pak- Afghan border region lies in the historical controversies and aberrations surrounding the pashtun divide which originated from the act of drawing of Durand line. The argument made here is that the main cause of instability in this region is an unnatural division made between the

pashtun community which has led to Afghanistan's hostility towards Pakistan and the later attempt to bring instability in the region to suppress the Pashtunistan demand or redrawing of the borders.

### **Afghanistan as a Nation State**

3. In the middle of eighteenth century, the military and political genius of Ahmad Shah Durrani (1747-73) created an Afghan state in the form of a tribal confederacy that was, for the first time, a distinct political entity in central Asia, and a clearly recognizable progenitor of present day Afghanistan[3](Refer fig 1). According to Olivier Roy, the real founder of the modern state of Afghanistan is generally accepted to be Amir Abdur Rehman Khan (1880-1901), and the state was given stability by foreign imperialism[4]. At this time, the British were establishing themselves firmly, throughout substantial parts of India[5]. During the first quarter of the 19th century, while the British consolidated their power in India, Tsarist Russia expanded the Map showing Ahmad Shah Durrani's Empire territory under its control to the south by subjugating and annexing central Asian kingdoms and northern parts of Persia. Russia's steady advances created anxiety in Great Britain for the safety of its Indian empire[6].

4. The Russian interests in central Asia kicked off in the 1830s, at which time it considered Afghanistan to be a part of central Asia. Afghanistan separated the two great empires of the time and perceiving and acting itself as being a buffer state, it became a nation-state[7].

**The “ Great Game” and Carving of Northern Frontiers of Afghanistan**

5. From the beginning of 19th Century the British and the Russians started showing interest in Afghanistan. The “ Great Game” started when Persia, with Russian help attempted to take over Herat during Dost Mohammad’s rule (1835-63)[8]. The British actively sought to keep Afghanistan as an inhospitable route to any advancing armies. The Afghan rulers, from Amir Abdur Rehman onward, considered the policy of keeping their country inaccessible as the best method of keeping powerful neighbours at arm’s length[9]. After the first Anglo - Afghan war, active negotiations were carried out between the Russian and the British governments regarding Afghanistan[10]. In 1873, the Russians accepted Afghanistan’s new northern frontiers as following the course of the Oxus River from the Pamir, and then south-west to the Iranian border so as to include Afghani territory- i. e., Balkh, Maimanah and Herat[11](Refer fig 2).

**Northern and Western borders of Afghanistan and Wakhan Corridor.**

6. Later, when the British occupied Quetta in 1876, Russians made advances into Afghanistan. They sent a diplomatic mission to seek a mutual assistance treaty with the Afghans against the British. This was accepted reluctantly by the Amir. The British also sent a mission to the Amir, having similar objectives. But this time the Amir did not give a response immediately. This led to second Anglo-Afghan War[12], which resulted in the Treaty of Gandamak[13] on May 26, 1879. By this treaty, for the first time Afghanistan was deprived of its traditional character of being a buffer state, its Amir becoming a virtually a feudal state of the British Crown[14]. However, the Gandamak plan failed to achieve peace in the region, and the forward policy

was adopted; i. e., move forward into Afghan territory, gain control, and create a buffer state to protect India[15]. Tensions between the British and the Russians continued in Europe, and also had an impact on central Asia. The situation later improved as a result of negotiations between the Russian and the British governments, and by 1887, Afghanistan's northern boundary was laid firmly along the Oxus River. Afghanistan also agreed to create a land corridor between the British Indian territory in north-eastern Afghanistan and Russia. This became known as the "Wakhan Corridor"[16] (Refer fig 2).

7. Necessity to Draw Southern Border of Afghanistan With the decision as to the northern boundaries of Afghanistan, Russia insisted that the British should draw a line and to form southern boundaries of Afghanistan beyond which British should not advance. The need to stabilize the British India border with Afghanistan also arose, as Afghanistan was internally weak due to political instability and relations of Amir Abdur Rehman (1880-1901) with the British Government of India were also getting strained[17].

### **The Durand Line Agreement**

8. To settle the southern boundary question, the Amir of Afghanistan asked the Government of British India to send a mission and on October 2, 1893 Sir Mortimer Durand (the Foreign Secretary of India) took a mission to Kabul. After frank negotiations and discussions, an agreement was signed on November 12, 1893, which laid down a boundary for the alignment of the Durand Line[18]. It defined the southern and eastern limits of the Amir's dominion, beyond which he willingly renounced any claim. The Durand Line

is sometimes referred to as the “ Zero Line”. The complete text of the agreement is given in Appendix A.

### **Inadequacies Of Delineation**

9. The frontier, as described in the Durand Agreement was agreed to be marked jointly, by representatives from both governments. Since the Amir was anxious to complete the work of demarcation speedily, he suggested three different joint commissions to delimit the frontier. The first commission was to work on the boundary near the head of the Khyber Pass; the second on the Kurram Valley and country immediately south of it; and the third one on the frontier which marched within the Balochistan Agency territories[19]. However, this demarcation could not be completed in Mohmand and Waziristan areas as desired. Therefore, the boundary had to be demarcated with border pillars (BPs) where it did not follow natural features(Refer fig3). Some BPs were constructed around inaccessible areas, thus, the border became dilapidated over time. But the residue still exists at certain places on the ridge lines. The inadequacies in demarcation were the result of the following:-

#### **(a)The Untimely Transfer of Sir Mortimer Durand. Sir Mortimer**

The Durand Line Is Shown With Red Color

Durand, who was mainly responsible for arranging the delimitation and possessed a wealth of experience of Afghan affairs, was transferred to Persia in 1894 while the difficult phase of demarcation was to kick off[20].

**(b) The Effects of Having No Survey and the Unavailability of Exact Maps.** The unavailability of a correct copy of the maps of the Durand Agreement had its effect on the survey. The actual survey taken was inadequate, because the Afghans refused to allow any work to take place, except that which was absolutely necessary for the delineation[21]. The difficulty of demarcation was reinforced due to the geographical watershed, which coincided with tribal boundaries in few sectors. This was a prominent problem in the case of Kunar and Kabul rivers[22].

(c) Tribal Resentment. The major hurdle in the demarcation was the resentment of the tribes against the forward policy of British India, as the Pashtuns, the largest tribal grouping in the world, were divided on the border. The complex character of the Afghan people and the geographical surroundings further complicated the process. For some tribes this boundary was a thing so foreign to their nomadic, independent life-style of wandering in search of food, shelter, family, tribal friends or game that drawing it only served to set the border ablaze with controversy for the coming years[23]. The demarcation along the frontier of Waziristan and Mohmand could not be completed due to heavy armed resentment in these areas[24].

(d) Political Expediency and Tribe Divide. The delineation generally tried to follow tribal boundaries, e. g., by separating those tribes which go to market to Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu, Tank and Quetta from those with economic links with Khurassan, i. e., those having Kabul, Ghazni, and Kandahar as their market towns[25]. However, the aspirations of most of the Pashtuns were not satisfied. Demarcation that are dictated by political expediency, rather

than by scientific and social consideration, tended to culminate in an uprising of the resentful tribes' inhabiting disputed area.

### **The Validity Of The Durand Line Agreement**

10 . International Rules. When the British Empire in India was split in 1947 into two independent states India and Pakistan the issue of the Durand Line became more sensitive. Pakistan succeeded to all the rights and all the international agreements and undertakings that the British Indian government of the region had entered into and inherited this agreement[26].

11. Confirmation by SEATO and the United StatesThe international community accepts the Durand Line, in 1956 the SEATO Ministerial Council Meeting held at Karachi accepted the Durand Line as the internationally recognized boundary[27]. USA also accepted the Durand Line as the international frontier between Pakistan and Afghanistan[28].

### **Afghanistan's Claims**

12. Denouncing the Treaty. The Afghan government staged a complete " volte-face" when the British government announced its firm resolves to transfer its sovereignty over the sub-continent to its people[29]. They urged that Afghan territory up to the natural border, the River Indus should be returned to Afghanistan[30]. A formal representation was accordingly made to the government of undivided India, demanding the restoration of a large area of the sub-continent on the ground that, with the withdrawal of the British, the 1893 treaty would lapse automatically, thereby claiming that the boundary of Afghanistan in the east was that delimited by Ahmad Shah Durrani's Empire in 1747-73. The government of British India rejected the



validity of the Afghan claim to the territory east of the Durand Line. The most commonly given reason for Afghan claims is that the Durand Line agreement was signed by Amir under duress. Afghanistan even cast a vote against the admission of Pakistan to the United Nations.

13. Dari Or Pashto Translation. The agreement that was signed by Abdul Rahman Khan was in English which he did not understand, therefore it leads to the suspicion of forgery or false documentation. The Dari or Pashto translation of this document or agreement has never been signed by Amir Abdul Rahman Khan. Several other researchers have provided arguments to the contrary that this document was signed and has expired. The argument between Afghanistan and Pakistan centres on this issue of validity. But, the Government of Balochistan in exile challenges the “legality” of the Durand Line Agreement between Afghanistan and British India in 1893, not its “validity”. They believe that the Durand Line Agreement is an illegal agreement, and therefore, it is null and void[31]. (Refer fig 4)

### **Map Published By The Proponents Of Greater Pashtunistan**

14. Unilateral Cancellation of the Agreement. After strongly opposing Pakistan's membership in the UN initially, Afghanistan later accepted the new state on October 20, 1947. The Afghan parliament, in June 1949, proceeded to announce the unilateral cancellation of all the treaties that former Afghan governments has signed with the British-India government, including the Durand Treaty, thereby proclaiming that the Afghan government does not recognize the Durand Line as a legal boundary between Afghanistan and Pakistan[32]. Though this proclamation was not

acknowledged by the world, the Durand Line has since been challenged by successive Afghans as illegal and arbitrary.

15. Expiration of Agreement after Lapse of Hundred Years. As per the traditional laws the Durand Line agreement was to lapse after a hundred years of its signing. This brought in another controversy about the validity of the agreement as after a life of hundred years it lost its legal standing in 1993. Thus, it was rightly demanded that areas of Pakistan be returned to Afghanistan, similar to how Hong Kong was returned to China[33]. But Pakistan stood firm that neither the Durand agreement makes any mention of any time period, nor is it validated under any international law. Pakistan claims that the Durand line agreement therefore has no expiration limit, and the interpretation of a hundred year expiration is only traditional custom which restricts the validity of the Durand Line agreement to the lifetimes of the Afghan rulers who ratified it[34].

16. Free Movement Across The Durand Line. The agreement allows Afghan Pashtun tribes living on both sides to move across the line freely and as such they resolutely refused to recognize it. The Pashtuns are divided into more than 60 clans. In Pakistan, Pashto speakers are only 8 percent of the population of 145 million, which is otherwise dominated by Punjabis. In Afghanistan, Pashtuns are in majority and naturally dominate Afghan affairs. Different sub-tribes have different origins, but they are united by language, religion, and Pashtunwali code of behaviour that emphasizes honour, dignity, relentlessly seeking vengeance when wronged, and warm, protective hospitality. Under the auspices of such like traditions, the people are exploiting it for unofficial trade and smuggling activities under the guise of <https://assignbuster.com/the-genesis-of-durand-line-pakistan-factor-and-pashtunistan/>

authorized free movement[35]. It remains a fact that this boundary has never been able to stop the free movement of people on either side. No Afghan regime after 1893, even the Taliban, has never accepted the validity of the Durand Line.

### **PAKISTAN'S STAND**

17. Boundry. Pakistan's boundary with Afghanistan is about 2, 250 kilometers long. In the north, it runs along the ridges of the Hindu Kush (meaning Hindu Killer) mountains and the Pamirs, where a narrow strip of Afghan territory called the Wakhan Corridor extends between Pakistan and Tajikistan.[36].

18. Pak Territorial Integrity. To maintain its current territorial integrity, it is in Pakistan's interest to have a weak and destabilized government in Afghanistan so there is no one to challenge the authenticity of the Durand Line Agreement. It is generally believed that Pakistani intelligence agencies have provided shelter for members of Al-Qaeda and Taliban who are committing acts of terrorism within Afghanistan to destabilize the democratically elected government of President Hamid Karzai. However, in the current perspective it may be inaccurate to insist on the inviolability of any frontier, including the Durand Line.

19. Pakistan's Attempt to Regain Influence. Islamabad is trying to balance its efforts to re-assert state control over areas on its side of the border. The challenge for Pakistan is to regain influence in its western neighbour by reviving its contacts and thus influence with the Afghan Taliban while rolling back Talibanisation in its own Pashtun areas. It's efforts to neutralize FATA

based domestic rebels is focused on Taliban groups, whose support Pakistan needs to crush the domestic insurgency and re-establish its influence in Afghanistan. While Pakistan's Pashtun areas are most affected by Talibanisation, the phenomenon has made considerable inroads into Pakistan's core, where the Taliban, like the LeT/JuD, manifest themselves more as social movement. This is why, in addition to the counterinsurgency and counterterrorism campaign, Pakistan has also begun focusing on anti-extremism and de-radicalization efforts the ideological battle which is designed to drain the swamp in which the jihadists are able to grow and operate[37]. A strong Pashtun dominated central government in Kabul would destabilize Pakistan. This is why Pakistan nurtured and supported the Taliban who had a stronger Islamic rather than Pashtun identity.

20. The Price Of Holding The Line. The Pashtun inhabited border area with Afghanistan is governed by the Federally Administered Tribal Agency (FATA), and is under the direct control of the central government. Frontier regulations stipulate that the clans could retain their own legal order, with elders' councils and local jirgas (courts). Above all, the regulations allowed smuggling of weapons and washing machines, drugs and television sets to go on. The Pakistan-Afghanistan agreement on shipping, which in reality legalizes smuggling, is one of the means of controlling latent tribal irredentism but it costs Pakistan US\$4 billion each year in lost customs This massive smuggling is one of the major reasons why Pakistan's economy is in such a shambles today.[38]An unstable Af-Pak border is not a trouble free proposition for Pakistan, while it may work in favor of Pakistan's geopolitical interests, it hurts the country's economy[39].

21. Strategic Depth. Pakistan wants an Afghan government dominated by ethnic Pashtuns that will provide it strategic depth both in its conflict with India and in maintaining access to Central Asian resources. This is why Pakistan trained and armed the Taliban, and continues to do so even after joining the USA in GWOT, thus parlaying the border ambiguities into geopolitical gains. Pakistan had to pursue a sub-imperial engagement in Afghanistan to secure a client regime, which would not only give it a 'strategic depth' against India but would also help stabilise its volatile Western border. Islamabad came close to achieving this objective in 1996 when the pro-Pakistan Taliban seized control of Kabul and extended their power over two thirds of the country[40]. Pakistan pursued a proactive Afghan policy for two principal reasons. First, to preserve Pakistan's western border and, second, to provide 'strategic depth' against India. The concept of the 'strategic depth' was first articulated by the army chief General Mirza Aslam Beg and tried out in the high-profile Zarb-e-Momin military exercise in 1989-90. Simply put, the doctrine calls for a dispersal of Pakistan's military assets in Afghanistan beyond the Durand Line and well beyond the current offensive capabilities of the Indian military. This would ensure the protection of Pakistan's military hardware in case of hostilities with India[41].

### **Pashtunistan**

22. Greater Pashtunistan. Afghanistan challenged the Durand Line following the announcement of the partition plan for the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent on June 3, 1947[42]. Kabul laid claim to part of northern areas where the Pashtuns live, and even non-Pashtun area of Balochistan. Strong feelings of Pashtun nationalism emanated

from Kabul, Pakistan could not survive as a separate state thus it started a counter propaganda against this demand of Pashtuns. Afghanistan is a multiethnic state, but its demographic and political center of gravity is and has always been Pashtun[43]. Indeed, Pakistan and Afghanistan nearly went to war in 1954 over the “ Greater Pashtunistan” issue. This peculiar political demography explains why no Afghan government has ever recognized the border and why every Pakistani government has striven to influence Afghan politics away from ethnic-based Pashtun identification.

23. A 1958 Afghan stamp promoting “ Greater Pashtunistan Day” [credit: ] Vast numbers of Afghans believe that Pakistan is deliberately undermining Afghanistan and Pashtun problem in particular. Consequently, Afghan leaders have repeatedly found it impossible to discuss the border due to immense public passion. Pakistan, also a multiethnic state, fears that further dismemberment (East Pakistan split off to become Bangladesh in 1971) might spell the end of the Pakistani state altogether. Provincial autonomy for Pashtuns of Afghanistan was the main demand of the Afghan Government all along the Durand Line controversy. It’s also noteworthy to point out that the Pashtuns have more in common with Pakistanis than they do with the other ethnicities of Afghanistan: Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, etc. This again is a complicated matter since Pakistan is organised along generally ethnic lines while Afghanistan is organised on mixed lines, the Afghan provinces being size of Pakistani districts. However, the fact is Afghanistan never showed willingness to allow its own Pashtun majority regions to join an independent Pashtunistan. The rise of Taliban was partly due to Pushtun frustrations. It was the historic phenomenon of coming together of Paushtun tribesmen at

the time of crisis. Pushtuns of different inclinations either openly supported or approved of them this created an 'artificial unity among Pashtuns'[44].

24. Anti Punjabi Domination. The Pashtunistan movement in Pakistan is against the Punjabi domination[45]. The dissatisfaction focuses on the role of Punjabi civil servants in the provincial administration and on Islamabad's resistance to the use of the Pashtu language as the medium of instruction in education. The central political problem facing Pakistan is how to deal with the deep ethnic tensions between the Punjabi majority, which controls the armed forces, and Baluchi, Sindhi and Pashtun minorities that have been denied a fair share of economic and political power[46].

26. Pak Role to Stifle Pashtun Impulses. Pakistan has worked single-mindedly to stifle Pashtun impulses for an independent Pashtunistan both during and after the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. When the Soviet forces left, the ISI initially sought to install Afghan surrogates considered to be opposed to the Pashtunistan concept. When these groups proved unable to consolidate their power, Islamabad turned to the Taliban, who had a Pashtun base but were dominated by clerical leaders with a pan-Islamic ideology who had no previous identification with the Pashtunistan movement. Significantly, however, when the Taliban came to power they did not play to the tunes of Islamabad and did not recognise the Durand Line despite Pakistani pressures to do so[47]. In spite of the endemic conflict among different Pashtun groups, the notion of the ethnic and cultural unity of all Pashtuns has long been familiar to them as a symbolic complex of great potential for political unity.[48]The radicalisation of the Pashtun areas straddling the Pakistan-

Afghanistan border has intensified both Islamist zealotry and Pashtun  
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nationalism. In the conventional wisdom, one or the other, either Islamist or Pashtun identity, will eventually triumph, but an equally plausible possibility is that the result could be an 'Islamic Pashtunistan'[49]. In recent years, whenever the Durand issue has been raised, the administration of Afghan President Karzai has avoided comment, favouring a resolution of the issue through parliament. President Hamid Karzai, in an interview to Radio Liberty, has said that "The Afghan nation, and not Hamid Karzai, would have to decide the issue of Durand Line." In this manner, Afghanistan successfully avoids reigniting a historical conflict with Pakistan, while withholding acceptance of the Durand Line as a valid international border.

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