

The Pashtunistan Conundrum: Historical Analysis of Territorial Claims and Global Interests

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Abstract

The Pashtunistan issue had historical significance for Pakistan, particularly regarding its relations with Afghanistan and its internal dynamics, especially in the northwestern regions of Pakistan. The regional as well as, international forces made use of this controversy in the best possible manner for the promotion of their objectives. India, America and Soviet Union got involved in the issue to safeguard their stakes in the region. The traditional rivalry between India and Pakistan had its distinct worth and expression on the issue. Patronage and support of Pashtun Nationalist movements left the region unstable and volatile. For the US the prime importance was to keep Pakistan engaged in the Cold War from their side. To strengthen its ties with Pakistan it totally ignored the Pashtun argument. On the other hand the involvement of the USSR on the issue of Pashtunistan was also based on Cold War. The unrest of Pashtuns was used by them for the promotion of their objectives. During this struggle for power, the Pashtun communities grapple with the tangible impacts of policies shaped by distant capitals, facing violence, uncertainty, and a quest for identity. Just like geopolitics intersects with human lives, the Pashtunistan issue transcends borders, highlighting the complexities of power, identity, and the human cost of global politics.

Keywords: Pashtunistan, geopolitics, Pashtun identity, global powers, ordinary lives.

Introduction

The boundary demarcation between British India and Afghanistan was settled in 1893. Mortimer Durand, representing British India, succeeded in concluding an agreement with Amir Abdur Rahman, the Afghan ruler. The later Afghan rulers though could never get back the frontier area and the tribes, but the ambition to do so remained strong. The British failed to convince the Afghan rulers to recognize the legacy of the Durand Line and transferred the “disputed” area to Pakistan in August 1947. The Afghan government claimed that Pashtuns across the Durand Line

were part of the great Afghan nation both ethnically and culturally and they shared a common language, tradition, and history. Their main contention was that Afghanistan accepted the Durand Line agreement under several internal and external constraints while negotiating with the British. The Afghan claim of Pashtunistan includes the Pashtun tribal area, the North West Frontier Province, Baluchistan, and the former states of Dir, Swat, Chitral, and Bajaur (now integrated with NWFP). Pak-Afghan relations remained in a state of low normalcy since 1947. The Pashtunistan issue was the base of misunderstanding and strained relations. Due to Pak-Afghan differences over the Pashtunistan issue, Afghanistan thought it necessary to secure alternative transit routes, expand internal support for Afghanistan in its conflict with Pakistan, and strengthen and renew the army. Pakistan on the other hand was also in need of socio-economic and military support to deal with its neighbours. The Pashtunistan issue had been a longstanding source of tension between Pakistan and Afghanistan, with global powers such as India, the Soviet Union, and the United States influencing the dynamics in the light of their interests. This article provides a comprehensive examination of how these global imperatives have shaped Pak-Afghan relations in relation to the Pashtunistan issue.

India

Pakistan, since its inception, has had no significant level of contact with Afghanistan. On the other hand, India, the traditional rival of Pakistan, despite not being close to Afghanistan geographically, tried to maintain good relations with it. The increasing good relations between Kabul and Delhi enhanced Pakistan's security concerns.¹ Ever since independence in 1947, the Indian leaders favoured Afghanistan's proposal for a referendum, on the ground that Pashtuns should have been given a third choice of initial independence until they reached the final decision of joining any state.² It is said that Mahatma Gandhi originated the idea of Pashtunistan for the benefit of his friend Abdul Ghaffar Khan.³ According to the Indian interpretation, the Pashtunistan comprised of NWFP, the tribal agencies, Kalat, and the whole of Baluchistan with the Makran coast on the Arabian Sea and part of the Sind province including the port of Karachi.⁴ India's interest in supporting Pashtunistan was that in the actual war with Pakistan over Kashmir, Afghanistan would open another front against Pakistan in the North West Frontier.⁵ Ayub Khan also verified this stance of India in the following words:

.... In this claim (of Pashtunistan) the Afghan were backed by India whose interest lay in ensuring that in the event of war with us over Kashmir, the Afghan should open a "second front"

¹ Niloufer Mahdi, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy 1971-1981: The Search for Security* (Rawalpindi: Ferozsons Pvt. Ltd., 1999), p. 123.

² Sally Aann Baynard, "Historical Setting", in Nyrop and Seekins, eds., *Afghanistan: a Country Study* (Foreign Area Studies: The American University, 1986), pp. 54. For further details on referendum see the same book on, p. 54.

³ M. M. Junaid, *The Resurgence of Pakistan* (Rawalpindi: National Book Foundation, n.d.), pp. 115-116.

⁴ Fazal-ur-Rahim Marwat, *The Evolution and Growth of Communism in Afghanistan (1917-79): An Appraisal* (Karachi: Royal Book Company, 1997), p. 282.

⁵ Safdar Mahmood, *Pakistan Political Roots and Development: 1947-1999* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 223.

against Pakistan on the North west frontier. They also reasoned that if they had this understanding with Afghanistan, we would not be able to use the Pathan tribesmen against them. The Indians thought that they would thus be able to hem us in and embarrass us by a pincer movement.⁶

However, Pakistan rejected the demand for the right of self-determination of the Pashtuns on the ground that this issue had been settled in the referendum held in July 1947 and the majority had favoured a union with Pakistan. Abdul Qayyum Khan, former Chief Minister NWFP, and Pakistan's Minister for Home Affairs, stated once in the National Assembly: "... in that referendum the people of the Frontier voted for Pakistan. How can that decision of the people be challenged?" Pakistan also rejected the Afghan's claim that a limited choice of joining Pakistan or India was given to the Pashtuns. It stated that the voters themselves ignored any misleading offer because they sought "a genuine freedom within the Muslim Federation of Pakistan."⁷

Pakistan's clash with India over Kashmir provided an opportunity for the Afghan Government to rely on India's support for the Pashtunistan issue. According to the Annual Report on Afghanistan for 1949, an agreement was reached between India and Afghanistan under which India agreed to pay all expenses of the Afghan government for carrying out rebellious activities in Pakistan. India would make arms and ammunition to be supplied to the tribesmen by the Afghan government. The Government of India was further reported to have assured the surrender of NWFP and the tribal belt, even the entire trans-Indus territory to Afghanistan in case of the success of the plan. In return, it expected from Afghanistan Government to:

- a) Keep up the Pashtunistan movement;
- b) Prevent the tribesmen on both sides of the border from participating in the Kashmir *Jihad* if fighting is resumed; and
- c) Attack Pakistan, if hostilities were resumed between Pakistan and India over the Kashmir issue.⁸

In June 1947, Abdul Ghaffar Khan sent Girdhari Lal Puri, the then Deputy Speaker of the Frontier Legislative Assembly to Kabul, "to get Afghan aid in the Red Shirt propaganda for Pashtunistan." Lal Pure succeeded in providing support to the Pashtunistan movement from the press department. The Indian Government posted the same G. L. Puri as Cultural Secretary in the Indian Embassy in Kabul in June 1948. Puri used his old links to supply anti-Pakistan and pro-Pashtunistan material.⁹ On October 18, 1948, the Afghan Government presented their demands to an Indian trade delegation in Kabul. The delegation was more of a goodwill mission expected to

⁶ Mohammad Ayub Khan, *Friends Not Master: A Political Biography* (Karachi: Oxford University, 1967), pp. 174-175.

⁷ Azmat Hayat Khan, *The Durand Line: Its Geo-Strategic Importance* (University of Peshawar: Area Study Centre, 2000), pp. 189, 198-199.

⁸ Government of Pakistan, *Annual Report on Afghanistan for 1949 by the Ambassador of Pakistan to Kabul* (Karachi: Ministry of Interior, Information and Broadcasting, 1951), p. 11.

⁹ Marwat, *The Evolution and Growth of Communism*, p. 274.

acquaint the Indian Government with Afghan Government demands.¹⁰ On 1st January 1950, the Congress government, in pursuance of the Pashtunistan policy signed a treaty of “eternal friendship” with Afghanistan. The Indian press and media launched a massive battle in favour of Pashtunistan including celebrations of Pashtunistan Day in India despite Pakistan’s protests.¹¹ From 1st October 1950 to 31st March 1951, a series of self-styled Pashtun *Jirgas* (conferences) were held in India and much publicity was given to it, both in India and abroad in disregard to repeated Pakistani protests.¹² Pashtunistan always remained a ‘thorn’ in improving the bilateral relations between the two Muslim neighboring states. So much so that Afghanistan brought it to the International Islamic Economic Conference where Pakistan stood as a candidate for Muslim world leadership.¹³

On March 4, 1950, Sardar Najibullah, the Afghan ambassador to India, claimed that “tribesmen were electing regional assemblies preparatory to elect a central Assembly to set up a central government of Pashtunistan.” Pakistan’s Prime Minister declared in the constituent Assembly of Pakistan that these regional assemblies existed only in the paper in Kabul.¹⁴ Sardar Daud, then Prime Minister of Afghanistan, supported India’s stance on the Kashmir dispute while Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru supported the Afghan government on the Pashtunistan question.¹⁵ The tension between Pakistan and Afghanistan always encouraged Indo-Afghan relations. India and Afghanistan were trade partners and India used to take the largest share of Afghan fruit exports while India had to supply sugar, tea, and a variety of consumer goods to Afghanistan.¹⁶ However, in the Indo-Pak war of 1965, the Afghan Government remained neutral despite huge pressure from India. It condemned the bombing raids on Peshawar and Kohat, two important cities of Pashtunistan, in a communiqué terming it “the grave situation” and a matter of great anxiety to the people and Government of Afghanistan.¹⁷ In 1970, the Indian government offered to help Afghanistan develop “a direct route to the Arabian Sea by means of an all-weather road through the Iranian province of Kirman.”¹⁸ on June 23, 1972, Bhutto, then Head of State, warned Pakistan’s Chief of Army Staff in a secret memo, that in the future Pakistan should be prepared for a twin attack from Afghanistan and India.¹⁹

¹⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Commonwealth Relation, “Weekly Report No. 4, for Monday to the 1st November 1948 from Pakistan Missions in Foreign Countries”, National Documentation Center, Acc. No. 1946 (A), File No. 310/ CF/48.

¹¹ Marwat, *The Evolution and Growth of Communism*, p. 281.

¹² Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Commonwealth Relations, “Half Yearly Summary No. 2, for the period 1st October 1948 to 31st March 1949”, National Documentation Center, Acc. No. 1891 (local), File No. 150 /CF/ 48.

¹³ Arif Hussain, *Pakistan: Its Ideology and Foreign Policy* (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1966), p. 120.

¹⁴ Zarina Salamat, *Pakistan 1947-58: A Historical Review* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1992), p. 191.

¹⁵ Raja Anwar, *The Tragedy of Afghanistan* (London: Verso, 1988), p. 33.

¹⁶ Richard S. Newell, *The Politics of Afghanistan* (London: Cornell University, 1972), p. 191.

¹⁷ Government of Pakistan, *Background Information and Analysis: Pak-Afghan Relations (A General Survey) 1947-73* (Islamabad: Bureau of National Research and Reference, n.d.), p. 16.

¹⁸ Newell, *The Politics of Afghanistan*, p. 191.

¹⁹ Mahdi, *Pakistan’s Foreign Policy*, p. 123.

Zahir Shah being ambiguous on the Kashmir issue did not favour India in its war with Pakistan in 1947-49, 1965, and 1971.²⁰ However, Sardar Daud, who took power in July 1973, instantly made Pashtunistan the central point of his policy. *The Times of India* (Delhi) explained Daud's policy in the following words, "Daud will no doubt try to consolidate his position by activating the demand for the right of self-determination for Pashto-speaking people on the eastern side of the Khyber." India agreed to train the Afghan armed forces and cooperate in defense and economic fields during Daud's visit to India on March 10, 1975. Pakistan's press warned of a threat to Pakistan from the "pincer movement" strategy of India and Afghanistan, which aimed at the dismemberment of Pakistan. The fear was not merely of Indian military aid and training to the Afghans but of a series of events of high tension in the preceding twelve months. On September 20, 1974, Bhutto, while talking to the *Washington Post*, revealed the possibility of full-scale war in less than a month as Kabul had concentrated its troops on Pakistan's western border while India had accumulated supplementary forces on the Azad Kashmir and Sialkot borders. Daud's remarks in April 1974, that "if Pakistan attacks Afghanistan, India and other countries will come to the rescue of Afghanistan" were alarming to Pakistan.²¹ On March 11, 1975, *The Pakistan Times* commented:

.... Pakistan has ample reason to watch Afghanistan's growing military links with India. The visit of a high-powered Indian military mission to Kabul earlier this month was not just a goodwill visit, especially in view of the fact that the mission was suddenly joined by the Indian Deputy Defence Minister. In normal times Kabul-Delhi relations should be of no concern to a third party, but the situation in this region is far from normal. Any military preparedness by Afghanistan, which exceeds minimal defense requirements, is bound to cause concern to its neighbours.²²

The Delhi-Kabul relations always remained a security concern for Pakistan because of its interference in the NWFP and Baluchistan. In the seventies, though Bhutto tried to "deal with the problem at both the trans-regional and bilateral level."²³ However, the problem continued as Afghanistan was always supportive of the Indo-Soviet strategic alliance. Due to these reasons, Pakistan could never develop a comprehensive Afghan policy.²⁴

Soviet Union

²⁰ Area Study Centre, *Afghanistan: Special Issue* (University of Peshawar: Area Study Centre, n.d.), p. 283.

²¹ Mahdi, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy*, pp. 125, 131- 132.

²² *The Pakistan Times*, 11 March 1975.

²³ Mahdi, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy*, p. 132.

²⁴ Babar Shah, "Pakistan's Afghanistan Policy: An Evaluation", *A Quarterly Journal of the Institute of Strategic Studies*, Vol. XX, Islamabad, No. 2 and 3. Spring and summer 2000.

The Soviet Union had always taken a special interest in Asia because of its geographical location.²⁵ Josef Stalin, (1924-1953) then premier of the Soviet Union, offered of visit to Moscow on June 2, 1949, and was accepted by Liaqat Ali Khan, then Prime Minister of Pakistan. However, the visit to the Soviet Union was materialized after fifteen years when many changes had taken place in national and international scenarios.²⁶ Till 1955, the Soviets were indifferent to the Indo-Pak regional disputes and Pak-Afghan conflicts²⁷ therefore did not support Kabul's stance on the Pashtunistan issue. I.M. Reysnev, a Soviet scholar in his article, entitled "Afghanistan" observes: ... In these conditions the Afghan government, which is landowner-bourgeois nationalists in character, while denying the right to national self-determination of the non-Afghan peoples within Afghanistan itself, supports the movement for national self-determination of the Afghans in India (united) with the separation of lands from Pakistan into the independent area of Pashtunistan. Afghan ruling circles, while emphasizing the national unity of the Afghans on both sides of the frontier, are taking every step, to deprive the national movement of the Afghans abroad of its revolutionary, anti-feudal, and anti-imperialist character.²⁸

On the other hand, Washington's refusal to provide arms to Daud provided an opportunity for the Soviets to help Afghanistan. In addition, the post-Stalin Soviet leadership was especially searching for friends in the neighbouring Third World countries.²⁹ It is also worth mentioning, that the Soviet Union had been providing military hardware to Afghanistan since 1921 and later on signed many treaties of friendship and cooperation with Afghanistan.³⁰ Thus in the 1950s, Afghanistan tilted completely towards the Soviet Union. The closure of the Pak-Afghan border had always forced Afghanistan to seek Russian help for its trade. Due to the closure of the Pak-Afghan border in 1950, a new trade agreement between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union was signed, because of which trade between the two countries increased by 50 percent.³¹ Similarly, after the Pak-Afghan border closure in July 1955, the Soviet-Afghan five-year transit agreement facilitated the free transport of goods over the territory of both countries. Afghan Foreign Minister Mohammad Naim proudly said: "If one door is slammed shut and another is opened, we will go through it."³²

²⁵ Mahmood, *Pakistan Political Roots*, p. 210.

²⁶ Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, *Bilateralism: New Directions* (Islamabad: Directorate of Research and Publications, 1976), pp. 13-14.

²⁷ Tahir Amin, *Afghanistan Crisis: Implications and Options for Muslim World, Iran and Pakistan* (Islamabad: Institute of Policy Studies, 1982), p. 54.

²⁸ Zulfikar Khalid, *Pakistan in the Pamir Knot: Geostrategic Imperatives* (Lahore: Vanguard Books Ltd., 1987), p. 115.

²⁹ Thomas T. Hammond, *Red Flag over Afghanistan: The Communist Coup, the Soviet Invasion, and the Consequences* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1984), p. 24; Kamal Matinuddin, *Power Struggle in the Hindu Kush: Afghanistan (1978-91)* (Lahore: Wajidalis Pvt. Ltd., 1991), p. 18; Amin Saikal and William Maley, *Regime Change in Afghanistan: Foreign Intervention and the Politics of Legitimacy* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1991), p. 20.

³⁰ Matinuddin, *Power Struggle in the Hindu Kush*, p. 18.

³¹ Hammond, *Red Flag over Afghanistan*, pp. 24-25.

³² Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Soviet Policy towards Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan: The Dynamics of Influence* (New York: Prager Publishers, 1982), p. 130.

In 1955, the interest of the West in the countries on the southern side of the Soviet Union, the U.S. policy of containment, the creation of SEATO (South East Asia Treaty Organization) on September 8, 1954, and the Baghdad Pact on February 24, 1955, later CENTO (Central Treaty Organization) provoked the Soviet Union's security concerns.³³ Pakistan's membership of SEATO and CENTO provoked the Soviet Union which refused to honour its promise on Kashmir embodied in the resolution of the Security Council. It justified the Indian claim on Kashmir and extended economic and military assistance to it.³⁴ It also supported Afghanistan in challenging the validity of the Durand Line. The Soviet support enabled Afghanistan to adopt a more stubborn attitude towards Pakistan on the Pashtunistan issue.

Afterward, the Soviet Union's relations with Pakistan were characterized by Pakistan's frontier dispute with Afghanistan.³⁵ During 1955-1979, the Soviet Union provided economic and military aid amounting to \$ 2.5 billion to Afghanistan which alarmed the US.³⁶ The battle between the USSR and the US to surpass each other in controlling Afghanistan's policies through aid was decided in favour of the former. The contributing factors in Russia's favour were Pakistan-US military pacts and Daud's obsession with the Pashtunistan issue.³⁷ The Soviets could not disengage Pakistan from following its Western-oriented policy despite its repeated efforts.³⁸ It is alleged that the Soviet Union tried to encourage local forces against Pakistan on the Pak-Afghan border in Baluchistan and NWFP.³⁹ In 1960, the Soviet Union encouraged Afghanistan to start border clashes with Pakistan and favored a small proxy war between the two for its own benefit.⁴⁰ On March 5, 1960, Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev, then Prime Minister of the Soviet Union (1953-64) openly endorsed Afghanistan's irredentist claim of Pashtunistan against Pakistan at Moscow's Sports Palace in these words:

- a) Pashtunistan has always been part of Afghanistan;
- b) When the British 'turn to their policy of divide and rule' split the country in 1947 into two states of India and Pakistan, millions of Pashtuns found themselves within the border of Pakistan;
- c) Afghanistan has not recognized this situation and has demanded that 'Pashtunistan be given the right of self-determination under conditions of freedom and non-intervention.

Khrushchev reiterated that Afghanistan's demands were "entirely legitimate and consistent with the principles of the UN charter." He further said, "Our sympathies in this matter

³³ Amin, *Afghanistan Crisis*, p. 54.

³⁴ Mahmood, *Pakistan Political Roots*, p. 211.

³⁵ Babar Shah, "Pakistan's Afghan Policy: An Evaluation", *A Quarterly Journal of the Institute of Strategic Studies*, p. 172.

³⁶ Saikal and Maley, *Regime Change in Afghanistan*, pp. 20-21.

³⁷ Khalid, *Pakistan in the Pamir Knot*, p. 64.

³⁸ Raghunath Ram, *Soviet Policy Towards Pakistan* (New Delhi: S. Chand and Company Ltd., 1983), p. 100.

³⁹ Richard P. Cronin, "Pakistani Capabilities to Meet the Soviet Threat from Afghanistan", in Theodore L. Eliot jr. and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff jr., eds., *The Red Army on Pakistan's Border: Policy Implications for the United States* (Washington: International Defence Publishers, 1986), pp. 34-35.

⁴⁰ Khalid, *Pakistan in the Pamir Knot*, pp. 116-117.

lie with the Pashtun people, with Afghanistan.”⁴¹ On March 6, 1960, Pakistan’s Foreign Minister, Manzur Qadir declared the Soviet act as an interference in the internal affairs of Pakistan. President Ayub Khan called it “an attempt to aggravate the problems in this part of the world and to pave the way for the age-old attempt of the North to dominate the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent and the areas surrounding it.”

In March 1960, Khrushchev visited Afghanistan and again supported the Afghan claim to certain tribal territories in the northwestern region of Pakistan. Pashtunistan was the focus of a joint communiqué issued after Khrushchev’s visit to Afghanistan. Khrushchev and Daud stated in the joint communiqué that “the solution of the problem of people on the Pak-Afghan border should be reached under the principles of the United Nations Charter.”⁴²

After the U-2 incident in May 1960, the Soviet Government sent strong warning notes on May 13, 1960, to the Governments of Turkey, Pakistan, and Norway to allow foreign military aircraft to use their airspace for making plans of encroachment into Soviet airspace.⁴³ In the 1961 Pak-Afghan crisis though, the Soviet Union provided transit facilities and economic assistance to Afghanistan but withheld full support on the Pashtunistan issue due to its growing rift with China.⁴⁴

In October 1961, the Soviet Union and Afghanistan signed another agreement of economic and technical assistance totaling around \$ 227.6 million to help Afghanistan in the implementation of the second five-year plan.⁴⁵ Pakistan expressed concern over Afghanistan’s reliance on the Soviet’s economic and military assistance. However, Daud stated: “You Pakistanis are Johnnie come lately in the community of nations. We Afghans have dealt with the Russians for nearly 200 years and with the Soviets since the revolution. How can you teach us the art of diplomacy? We know how to deal with the Soviet Union.” Afghanistan also turned down Ayub Khan’s invitation to join CENTO.⁴⁶

After Daud’s removal from the Prime Ministership on March 9, 1963, Zahir Shah neglected the Pashtunistan issue for the normalization of relations with Pakistan. When Soviet President Leonid I. Brezhnev visited Kabul in October 1963, the Pashtunistan issue was not even mentioned in the joint communiqué. Kabul stopped propaganda on the Durand Line.⁴⁷ Similarly, when Zahir Shah’s first Prime Minister (during the constitutional decade, 1963-73), Mohammad Yousaf visited the Soviet Union from April 21- 30, 1965, the Pashtunistan issue was totally overlooked in the Soviet-Afghan communiqué issued on April 30. Zahir Shah was warmly welcomed by Soviet

⁴¹ Hafeez Malik, *Soviet-Pakistan Relations and Post-Soviet Dynamics, 1947-92* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1994), pp. 124-125.

⁴² Ram, *Soviet Policy Towards Pakistan*, pp. 100-101.

⁴³ Khalid, *Pakistan in the Pamir Knot*, pp. 118-119.

⁴⁴ Rubinstein, *Soviet Policy Towards Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan*, p. 131.

⁴⁵ Malik, *Soviet-Pakistan Relations and Post-Soviet Dynamics*, p. 127.

⁴⁶ Babar Shah, “Pakistan’s Afghan Policy: An Evaluation”, *A Quarterly Journal of the Institute of Strategic Studies*, p. 172; Malik, *Soviet-Pakistan Relations and Post-Soviet Dynamics*, p. 128.

⁴⁷ Rubinstein, *Soviet Policy Towards Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan*, p. 138.

President Leonid I. Brezhnev and Prime Minister A. N. Kosygin on August 3, 1965 however, the Pashtunistan issue was not even touched.

The Soviet's decision to keep itself aloof from the Pashtunistan issue after the U-2 incident in 1960, paved the way for the improvement of Pak-Soviet relations. President Ayub Khan's visit to the Soviet Union in 1965, further stabilized the relations. The Pashtunistan issue was not discussed, during Zahir Shah's third Prime Minister, Mohammad Hashim Maiwandwal's visit to Moscow in 1966.⁴⁸ In 1969, Brezhnev initiated his Asian Collective Security Plan for the containment of China.⁴⁹ On March 25, 1970, Kosygin briefed President Yahya Khan on the importance of the regional grouping however Pakistan's foreign ministry spokesman clearly stated that "Pakistan would not join an alliance against China." Pakistan's rejection of the Soviet-sponsored Asian Collective Security Pact caused Soviet resentment against Pakistan in the 1970s. On April 2, 1971, Soviet President Podgorny disapproved of Pakistan's use of force in East Pakistan.⁵⁰ During Zahir Shah's visit to Moscow (September 1971) and President Podgorny's visit to Kabul (May 1973) the Pashtunistan issue was not discussed.⁵¹ Afghanistan adopted neutrality in the Indo-Pak war of 1971.

During Zahir Shah's visit to Moscow on December 13, 1971, the Soviet leaders pressured Zahir Shah to follow a more "pro-Moscow-Indian axis policy" during the war in the Subcontinent. However, Zahir Shah did not agree to their demands.⁵² In early 1972, Pak-Soviet relations were very cold. Bhutto revealed in February 1972, that Moscow was rousing trouble in Pakistan from the North-West Frontier edging Afghanistan down to Baluchistan on the Arabian Sea through its agents and propaganda. In March 1972, Bhutto visited Moscow on a barrier-repairing mission. However, the Soviet position on the 1971 events was a matter of concern for Pakistan.⁵³ During his second official visit to Moscow from October 24-26, 1974, Bhutto revealed to the Soviets leaders that Afghanistan was involved in Baluch uprising and province wide violence in the NWFP in collaboration with the National Awami Party. He requested the Russian leaders to ask Afghanistan to stop interfering in the domestic affairs of Pakistan.⁵⁴ Bhutto being an experienced diplomat, was successful in reducing Russian's hostility towards Pakistan.⁵⁵ Referring to his Moscow's visit in a public meeting (in Bahawalnagar on November 4, 1974) Bhutto said that he had requested the Soviet Government to discourage Afghanistan from

⁴⁸ Malik, *Soviet-Pakistan Relations and Post-Soviet Dynamics*, p. 130.

⁴⁹ S. Henry Bradsher, *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union* (Durham: Duke University, Press, 1985), p. 63.

⁵⁰ Mahmood, *Pakistan Political Roots*, p. 215.

⁵¹ Rubinstein, *Soviet Policy towards Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan*, pp. 138-139.

⁵² Fazul Haque Kazi, *Law and Politics in Pakistan* (Karachi: Royal Book Company, 1976), pp. 201-202.

⁵³ Mahmood, *Pakistan Political Roots*, pp. 218-219.

⁵⁴ Abdul Samad Ghaus, *The Fall of Afghanistan: An Insider's Account* (Washington: Pergamon Brassey's International Defense Publishers, 1988), p. 120.

⁵⁵ Mahmood, *Pakistan Political Roots*, pp. 219.

interfering in Pakistan's affairs. He also said that he had made it clear to them that Kabul should not help NAP for creating law and order situation in Pakistan.⁵⁶

The joint communiqué issued at the end of Daud's visit to Moscow in 1974, stated that Pak-Afghan political dispute would be solved peacefully through negotiation. Though the communiqué was totally against Daud's desire, he agreed to support the "creation of a security system by the collective efforts of all Asian people".⁵⁷ In December 1975, President Podgorny visited Kabul and stressed the need for peace in the area. He extended the 1931 Non-Aggression Treaty for another ten years to give moral support to Daud. The Pashtunistan issue had by now lost its importance in the eyes of the Soviet Union as Brezhnev had been imploring the sanctity of the frontiers in his Asian Collective Security Plan of 1969.⁵⁸ In this way, an important change was seen in the Russian stance on Pashtunistan. The Shah of Iran also tried to reduce the tension between the two neighborly countries by promising economic assistance to Kabul. It was the result of these developments that the Afghan deputy foreign minister Waheed Abdullah did not mention Afghanistan's conflicts with Pakistan during his speech in the seventh Islamic Foreign Minister's Conference in Istanbul in May 1976. The news media of both countries also stopped hostile propaganda against each other.⁵⁹

United States

The Americans started taking an interest in Asia amid the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union due to the perceived threat of communist expansion in the region in the early fifties. The USA initiated a collective defense against the "Red Tide"⁶⁰ by the name of Marshal Plan to restructure the economy of war-destroyed Europe and extend aid to the Asian countries in 1947.⁶¹ Afghanistan and the US had signed their first agreement for the construction of a dam on the river Helmand in 1946. Between 1951 and 1953, two long-term technical assistance treaties were signed. However, close relations were hampered between the two countries due to Pak-US relations.⁶² Pakistan was in need of diplomatic support and economic assistance to cope with its socio-economic problems. This motivated Liaqat Ali Khan to visit the USA in 1950. Since the visit was undertaken in disregard to Stalin's offer, much importance was attached to it. Notwithstanding Liaqat's non-aligned policy, he was taken as implicitly inclined to the West.⁶³

The American support for the Pashtunistan issue and military assistance to Afghanistan was totally negative. The Americans were not interested in the Pashtunistan issue, and the little

⁵⁶ Saeeduddin Ahmed Dar, ed., *Selected Documents on Pakistan's Relations with Afghanistan: 1947-1985* (Islamabad: National Institute of Pakistan Studies Quaid-i-Azam University, 1986), pp. 129-130.

⁵⁷ Rubinstein, *Soviet Policy Towards Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan*, pp. 140-141.

⁵⁸ Matinuddin, *Power Struggle in the Hindu Kush*, p. 24.

⁵⁹ Mahmood, *Pakistan Political Roots*, pp. 219-220.

⁶⁰ Matinuddin, *Power Struggle in the Hindu Kush*, p. 18.

⁶¹ Mahmood, *Pakistan Political Roots*, p. 194.

⁶² Anwar, *The Tragedy of Afghanistan*, p. 33.

⁶³ Mahmood, *Pakistan Political Roots*, pp. 194-195.

information they had of it had been learned from the British officials who had created this issue during their colonial days. In mid-1952, during the Korean War, it became crystal clear that the US interest in South Asia was limited to the containment of Communism and thus American attitude rolled the Kabul ball “into the Indo-Soviet Lobby.”⁶⁴ Afghanistan's repeated efforts to procure arms from the US in 1948, 1951, and 1954 failed due to the fact that the land-locked and backward Afghanistan, with apparently tiny economic potential,⁶⁵ its location as well as poor communications were less important to the Americans. In addition, the risk of intensifying the Cold War, its close ties with Pakistan, and the fear that sending military equipment to Afghanistan would so alarm the Soviets to make some kind of move against Afghanistan.⁶⁶

In addition, the US made joining the Baghdad Pact mandatory/a precondition for obtaining US arms. Daud, then Prime Minister of Afghanistan and cousin and brother-in-law of Zahir Shah, refused to join the Pact due to Pakistan's presence in it.⁶⁷ Consequently, the USA rejected Afghanistan's request for arms and instead chose Pakistan and Iran as better allies to serve its interests in the region.⁶⁸ It sent military aid to Pakistan, for it had joined the SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) in 1954 and the Baghdad Pact later called CENTO (Central Treaty Organization) in 1955.⁶⁹ Though Pakistan had joined the US-sponsored alliances to strengthen its defense against India, Daud termed it as “a grave danger to the security and peace of Afghanistan.”⁷⁰ The Eisenhower administration in addition to refusing Afghanistan's request advised it to solve the Pashtunistan issue with Pakistan. A copy of the US President's letter was sent to Pakistan to satisfy its new partner.⁷¹ The US rejection of Afghanistan's request for arms, and its refusal to support Afghanistan on the Pashtunistan issue dragged Afghanistan closer to the Soviet sphere of influence in the 1950s.

Robert G. Neumann, who served as US ambassador to Afghanistan from 1966 to 1973 stated that the US had the apprehension that even huge US aid might not save Afghanistan if the Soviet Union ever decides to invade the country. However, the US continued to provide economic aid to Afghanistan, which was not as much as that of the Soviet Union.⁷² On the other hand, the Soviet Union supplied arms to Afghanistan.⁷³ Ambassador Robert G. Neuman summarized US policy towards Afghanistan, before the communist take over, in the following words:

.... For the US, Afghanistan has at the present limited direct interest; it is not an important trading partner; it is not an access route for U.S. trade with others; it is not presently . . . a source of oil or

⁶⁴ Marwat, *The Evolution and Growth of Communism*, pp. 282, 288-289.

⁶⁵ Saikal and Maley, *Regime Change in Afghanistan*, p. 20.

⁶⁶ Hammond, *Red Flag over Afghanistan*, p. 26.

⁶⁷ Anwar, *The Tragedy of Afghanistan*, p. 33.

⁶⁸ Matinuddin, *Power Struggle in the Hindu Kush*, p. 18.

⁶⁹ Hammond, *Red Flag over Afghanistan*, p. 24.

⁷⁰ Matinuddin, *Power Struggle in the Hindu Kush*, p. 18.

⁷¹ Anwar, *The Tragedy of Afghanistan*, p. 33.

⁷² Hammond, *Red Flag over Afghanistan*, p. 24-26.

⁷³ W. Norman Brown, *The United States and India, Pakistan, Bangladesh* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 352.

scarce strategic metals . . . there are no treaty ties or defense commitments; and Afghanistan does not provide us with significant defense, intelligence, or scientific facilities However Afghanistan has important interests for us which have in large part derived from its strategic location between central Asia and the Indian subcontinent.⁷⁴ Ambassador Theodore L. Eliot Jr., who succeeded Neumann, said that he persuaded Daud to be nonaligned and maintain good relations with other states. The US also asked Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Japan to give more economic assistance to Afghanistan. According to Eliot the US was not against Afghanistan's good relations with the Soviet Union but wanted Afghanistan to be independent as the Pashtunistan issue had made it too dependent on the Soviet Union.⁷⁵

Afghanistan showed its resentment at the US resumption of arms sales to Pakistan. At a state banquet in India on March 10, 1975, Daud, then President, showed his government's deep concern over the US lifting of the arms embargo against Pakistan at a time "when Pakistan was engaged in shedding blood in Baluchistan." He warned that the promotion of an armament race, it would lead to a disparity in the area. He further said that Afghanistan expects the United States would work for prevailing peace and stability in the region so that people could spend their resources on economic development rather than arms. Y. B. Chavan, Indian Foreign Minister also affirmed Daud's views.⁷⁶ In response to the criticism of President Daud and Y. B. Chavan, a Pakistan Foreign Office spokesman said "this orchestrated chorus of condemnation of the US decision did not come as a surprise to Pakistan." The spokesman pointed out that the lifting of the embargo in favour of India was neglected in the center.⁷⁷ The US took a keen interest in the Shah of Iran's efforts for the Kabul-Islamabad reconciliation. In August 1976, Henry Kissinger visited Pakistan, primarily to "carry forward the process of reconciliation' and to consolidate the US influences."⁷⁸

To sum up, India and the Soviet Union's support of the Pashtunistan issue, always encouraged Afghanistan to maintain a hostile policy towards Pakistan. On the other hand, the United States' support of Pakistan's position on the Pashtunistan issue, stopped it from providing arms to Afghanistan. It also pressured Afghanistan to solve the Pashtunistan issue with Pakistan. It shows that the Pashtunistan issue had become an issue of the Cold War between the two major power blocs. Thus, Pak-Afghan relations were always characterized by the Pashtunistan issue which in turn was influenced by the policies of the SuperPowers and India.

⁷⁴ Hammond, *Red Flag over Afghanistan*, p. 26.

⁷⁵ Hammond, *Red Flag over Afghanistan*, p. 26.

⁷⁶ Ghaus, *The Fall of Afghanistan*, pp. 124-125.

⁷⁷ *Dawn*, 13 March 1975.

⁷⁸ Mahmood, *Pakistan Political Roots*, p. 220.

Conclusion

In the complex maze of geopolitics surrounding Pashtunistan, decisions made in faraway capitals greatly affect the lives of ordinary Pashtuns. For them, it is not just about power plays or territorial disputes. It is about their daily struggles, hopes and dreams. As they navigate a landscape shaped by forces beyond their control, they yearn for stability, security and, above all, recognition of their identity. Despite the challenges they face, the resilience of the Pashtun people shines through. Their unwavering spirit and determination to create a better future for themselves and their children creates hope in the midst of chaos. As we consider the human stories behind the headlines, it is critical for the world to listen to their voices, acknowledge their aspirations, and work toward solutions that prioritize their well-being over political agendas. As this chapter of Pashtunistan's history unfolds, let us remember the faces, dreams and struggles of those caught in the crossfire of geopolitics. Let's strive for a future where every Pashtun can live with dignity, respect, and the freedom to shape their own destiny.