

Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA): A Modern – day Anachronism?

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Abstract

In this research article, the author has traced the historical events that led to the formation of the tribal belt, today called the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Spawned in the fire and fury of two contending empires, Czarist Russia and Imperial Britain (the 'Great Game'), FATA blazed its way through the pages of history, establishing for Imperial Britain a buffer bulwark on the northwest approaches to its colonial possessions. The author argues that the buffer has outlived its usefulness, and suggests that, as a relic of the past, it should cease to be treated as such. In his view, FATA should be merged into and integrated wholly with the political, administrative and legal infrastructure of Pakistan.

Introduction

The Story of the rise and expansion of British Power in India has been described in the fullest detail in many standard works. Many causes have been assigned to this expansion: imperialistic acquisitiveness, the urge to dominate, the repercussions of strife in Europe, the greed of great trading companies for dividends, the policies of ambitious men scarcely restrained by authority whose control was rendered nugatory by distance and else. Perhaps, all of these factors played some part or the other in the drama that unfolded with the foundation of the East India Company on 31 December 1600¹ and ended with the establishment of the two independent states of India and Pakistan in 1947. Britain's "forward policy"² which spawned what are today called the "Federally Administered Tribal Areas" or FATA³ and evolved the concept of a "buffer zone"⁴ on the north-west frontier, was but one facet of the impulses and influences that dominated and directed this growth of British imperial expansion in South Asia and which governed the gradual assumption by the British of control over the vast northern areas of the Indian subcontinent. In a word, the policy envisaged a northern frontier that can be pictured more meaningfully as a vast northward-moving zone, contiguous to the settled portions of the subcontinent which, as it gained momentum, caused a number of national and actual frontiers to emerge, each playing a distinctive role in imperial and administrative policy. Although varying in time and place, each role was identifiable on the successive frontiers until the conquest of the subcontinent was completed and consolidated – a process that can perhaps be best understood if placed in its proper historical setting.

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Afghanistan-Pakistan Border. (Source: **University of Texas Libraries**)

http://www.usip.org/pubs/usipeace_briefings/2006/1207_pakistan_afghanistan_border.html



Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federally_Administered_Tribal_Areas

Historical Perspective

British traders first touched the shores of India and established their trading settlement at Surat in 1612 when the Moghul Empire was at its zenith. By the end of the century, the fabric of state had been undermined at the hands of the weak and inept successors of the Emperor Aurangzeb and though the Moghuls continued for a century and a half to occupy the throne at Delhi, the Empire had already begun to dissolve slowly into component parts. A fresh wave of raiders and conquerors from the north – the Persians under Nadir Shah in 1739 and the Afghans under Ahmed Shah Durrani in 1756 and 1761 – hastened the disintegration of the Empire and added to the anarchy created by a century of misrule in northern India. During all this time, the British, in an effort marked by a remarkable continuity of purpose and sustained endeavor, were busy absorbing vast tracts of territory and acquiring power in all southern and central India. While many reasons may be assigned to each of the several steps of their northward expansion, the one that probably predominated was the British instinct for self preservation. Imperial rulers whose boundaries are

contiguous with unstable neighbors must, for the sake of their own preservation, overrun and absorb into their dominion the unstable on their borders.

It was not till the close of the 18th century that British influence spread definitely into northern India and first impinged on Central Asia. In 1772, the farthest British expansion northward was Bengal, while outside Bengal their possessions were few and isolated. By the end of the century, they had added to British India the whole of what became the Madras Presidency, while the "north – western territories" stretched into the southern Punjab. Twenty years later, the final defeat of the Marhatta Confederacy⁵ added the Bombay Presidency to their dominions and suzerainty over the Marhatta chieftains and the Rajput clans. Moving steadily forward across the great plains of India, the British gradually pushed northwards till their frontiers lay along the Satluj⁶ River where, for the first time, they entered the territories which, for a brief space of time, had formed part of the Durrani Empire of Ahmed Shah. As with any other imperialist power that reaches out beyond its boundaries, the British too sought to safeguard the territories they had conquered by probing, aggressively or defensively as the situation warranted, into the secrets and the policies of those which lay ahead.

By this time, Durrani rule in the southern Punjab had given place to the Sikhs. Little was known then of Afghan internal affairs or of the internecine strife among the Sadozais and the impending disintegration which was soon to reduce the Afghan rulers to impotence. Yet, the echoes of Ahmed Shah's last great invasion of India less than 40 years before still sounded in men's ears and the possibility of further inroads on a similar scale rankled fresh in men's minds. The first impression, therefore, that the Afghans made on the British rulers of India was of a menace, shadowy but nonetheless formidable, to the peace and security of their north-western territories. The opening years of the 19th century therefore, witnessed a series of British diplomatic approaches to Persia for assistance in guarding the north-west approaches to India against both Afghan incursion, and also against the rather remote possibility of the tide of French conquest under Napoleon spilling over and across the shores of Asia. As yet, the British had no clear conception of the strategic problems which would eventually confront them in their advance to the north-west. The Afghans were treated as potential enemies at this stage because they were considered to be possible rivals for hegemony over northern India. The strategic connection of Afghanistan with the security of India, that was to constitute the genesis of their future "forward policy", had not yet crossed the horizon of their consciousness.

It was not long, however, before changes on the political stage in Europe caused a rude awakening, and brought about a reorientation of British policy in the Middle East. The peace of Tilsit (1807) brought the Czar Alexander and the Emperor Napoleon together to concert measures for a joint invasion of India through Persia where French influence was now predominant. The British government took immediate steps to re-establish their position in Tehran and sent their first emissaries to the Afghan (and Sikh) courts for arranging defensive alliances against France and Russia for the protection of their Indian territories. As it happened, the tide of French conquest never reached the shores of Asia nor did the "race of conquerors" (the Uzbeks) in the north, press down across the Oxus valley towards

the ridges of the Hindu Kush. The result was that none of the newly forged defensive alliances really came into play. Still, within a span of the next 20 years, the jealousies and feuds between final claimants of throne led to the breakup of the Durrani Empire, the downfall of the ruling house and very nearly to the total dismemberment of Afghanistan. Sindh and Baluchistan asserted their independence, and a number of independent and warring principalities (Kabul, Kandhar, Balkh and Heart) established themselves, thus creating a power vacuum and rendering the Afghans powerless for good or evil in the affairs of Central Asia. Also, during this time, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, taking advantage of disunity amongst the Afghan Chiefs, seized the Peshawar valley in 1834, which all subsequent efforts of Kabul – both military and diplomatic – failed to recover. The implications of this seizure by the Sikh Maharaja were conveyed by Alexander Burnes to Lord Auckland in these words, “Maharaja’s (Ranjit Singh) attack on Peshawar drove the Afghans to seek for alliances which are injurious to British interests”⁷. Later, with the suppression of Sikhs, the British took control of Peshawar⁸, which could never again become a part of the Afghan Kingdom. Thus, when in the early 1800s the Afghan debacle left (what were beginning to be considered as the vital bastions of India’s north – western defenses), Kandhar, Heart and the Hindu Kush practically unguarded, there was no power on either side which was in a position to fill the vacuum and seize the gateways to India.

The dissolution of authority in the north-west promoted the security of the British-Indian possessions but they were haunted by fears of more distant threats: There was by now a serious realization both in London and Calcutta that the Russian threat to India, even if still far off, was developing in a manner deliberately calculated to disturb the British rulers of India. At first, it came not from the north but from the causes, where Russian pressure on the Persians in the early years of the 19th century brought the two nations into armed conflict. The Persians, terrified at the shadow of the great Russian bear on their northern borders, turned first to France and then, after the peace of Tilsit, to Britain for help. The British, preoccupied with affairs in India, did not at first respond to Persian overtures. By 1813, the Persians having suffered one defeat after another were forced to agree to the terms laid down in the Treaty of Gulistan, which confirmed the Russians in the possession of Georgia and most of the Caucasus and deprived the Persians of the right to maintain ships of war in the Caspian Sea. Alarmed by these events and the potential threat they presented to her Indian colonies, Britain, by a treaty in 1814, now undertook to assist the Persians in the event of foreign aggression; yet, when Russo-Persian hostilities resumed in 1826, the pledge was not honored as by that time the preponderant British fear of a French invasion of India had passed. Russia again defeated Persia and signed with her the Treaty of Turkomanchi in 1828, obtaining more territory, indemnity and considerable political influence in Tehran.

The next Russian move, however, came much too perilously close to have been taken lightly by the British rulers of India. In 1837, Persia, aided and influenced by Russia, laid siege to the Afghan principality of Heart, which had once formed part of her domains. The prevailing view in British circles was that Persia, if not impeded, would push her influence further into Afghanistan and eventually pave the way for Russia. By now, the British had become extremely suspicious and sensitive to all Russian activity, real or imagined, in Central Asia, for there was always a group of

political and military leaders who would raise the cry "India in danger". British response was, therefore, quick and forceful. A series of strong and lengthy diplomatic representations to St. Petersburg was made and those, along with diplomatic-cum-military pressures on Shah Mohammad Mirza of Persia coupled with the bravery of the Afghan defenders (who, in turn, were advised by British military officers), forced the lifting of historic siege of Herat and the Persian armies retreated in defeat. With the lifting of the siege, whatever hopes the Russians may have entertained for a favorable outcome (their first attempt, to extend their influence across the Afghan border and to gain possession in fact if not in name of the great flanking bastion of the Hindu Kush) were dashed. However the refusal at the time, unless Peshawar was restored, of the Amir in Kabul to conclude a defensive alliance with the British-backed Ranjit Singh against the impending danger of Russia expansion, was adjudged as an unfriendly attitude by the British rulers of India who, from then on, began to formulate and put into operation a policy of active interference in Afghan affairs that led directly to the disastrous First Afghan War (1839-1842). The Persian attack on Herat marks the point of initiation of British "forward policy" in Central Asia, which not only gave a new direction to Anglo-Afghan relations but also marked the beginning of a long, difficult and delicate diplomatic tussle between the Indus and the Oxus.

With a succession of these historic events overshadowing the opening decades of the 19th century, there began a series of great strategic moves of the two European powers dominant in Asia, which before its close were to bring them face to face along a line stretching from the Chinese frontier all down to the Oxus, across the sands of the Kara Bel Plateau to the valley of Hari Hud and the frontiers of Persia. Till now the two great rivals had by no means come to real grips, but were still engaged in long distance reconnaissance through the agency of the small intervening powers. Their progress would involve the disappearance of many hitherto independent principalities and states, affect the fortunes of others and provide the historical justification for the application of the "forward policy", one of whose foremost advocates, Lord Palmerston, believed in the inevitable meeting of the Russian and the British frontiers in Central Asia. The Kyrgyz and the Turkmen would be subdued by Russia, while Khiva and Bukhara would acknowledge her suzerainty. In India, Punjab and Sindh would be annexed and become British provinces; Kalat, Kashmir and Chitral would be coerced to accept British paramountcy, while the long arm of Britain, in what was probably the most radical expression of the "forward policy" would stretch out across Afghanistan to guard the approaches to India. If the Russian drive to the south was looked on with fear and suspicion, British advance northward and particularly the invasion of Afghanistan, were regarded in St. Petersburg as an attempt by Great Britain to establish herself north of the Hindu Kush and forestall Russia in the markets of Central Asia. In the vicissitudes of this long drawn-out historic game played out in the heart of Asia, the "forward policy" would undergo periodic applications and variations depending on the changes of the political situation in Europe, the requirements of Britain's imperial defenses and also to some extent on the ambitions and policies of the men on the spot who ruled India.

The “Forward Policy”

The changing pattern of power politics in Europe and the growing risk of a general war between the powerful nations in the 19th century, involving large scale operations and resources, rendered the problem of Britain's imperial defense increasingly complex, strenuous and unwieldy. As a colonial power, her interests as a whole, therefore, led her to pursue generally a policy of non-aggressions and world peace and of attempting to relieve international tensions by persistent diplomatic remonstrance's and dexterous alliances. Simultaneously, distrustful of the designs of intriguing neighbors, disturbed by the pressure of a great expansionist power beyond Afghanistan (whose downward thrust, whether justified on the grounds of “historical necessity” or not, was certainly disruptive of British tranquility) and conscious of her inability to conduct the defense of distant colonies from London, Britain encouraged a programme of an Imperial Defense System, but one based on sound, reinforced, and modernized local defenses, coordinated and regulated by the prerequisites of the Imperial policy. India was the pivot of the British Empire in the East, the possession of which gave Britain pride, prestige and power. This precious embodiment of British success, which was the brightest jewel in the Imperial Crown, was to be jealously guarded against any foreign aggression an at all costs. The preoccupation of the British with the defense of their Indian territories against the seeming inexorability of the Russian advance had by now become a national obsession.

The interaction of these two facts of British policy – military preparedness and diplomatic pacification – on the north-western frontier of India during the last century put heavy demands on British ingenuity and resources. It often fell on the shoulders of the home government to tackle the formidable and vital task of developing a political strategy and the ground tactics for the defense of the north-western frontier regions. Clashing interests made this task difficult if not impossible. Governments with no precedents to build upon must devise a system that would satisfy ambitious colonials, greedy traders, land-hungry speculators, wealthy merchants, rabid imperialists, sentimental humanitarians and individualistic frontiersmen. Most disconcerting of all was the fact that any policy along this great frontier of empire would certainly be opposed by one or the other of the two most powerful pressure groups in the mother country – the advocates of the Forward and Stationary Schools. Indeed, any system that would satisfy the one would invariable arouse the ire of the other.

The conquest of Sindh in 1843 and the annexation of the Punjab in 1849, by advancing the British administrative boundary across the Indus, made it coterminous with the territories of the Bloch and Pathan tribes and brought the British in India into closer contact with the Khan of Kalat and the Amir of Afghanistan. Military strategists now became divided into two opposing camps, the Forward and the Stationary. When the controversies first opened, the opposing views were drastic in the extreme; on the one side an advance to Quetta if not to Heart; on the other, a retreat to the Indus. Military experts waxed eloquent over that they considered to be India's best line of defense arguing that while the essential function of any frontier is that of separation, a good frontier should also constitute militarily a good line of resistance. Four such possible lines were considered: (1) the River Indus, favored by the “non-

interventionists” but frowned upon by others on the maxim that mountains are better barriers than rivers; (2) the old Sikh Line which corresponded roughly to the administrative boundary of the post-Sikh years but which left uncontrolled practically the whole of the tribal areas; (3) the line from North Gilgit to Koh-i-Malik Siah, eventually (1893) demarcated as the Durand Line, which roughly divided the tribal areas equally between Afghans and the British; and (4) the so-called “scientific frontier” stretching from Kabul through Ghazni to Kandhar which covered the upper ends of the mountain passes and was, in fact, the Moghul frontier until Kandhar was lost in the reign of the Emperor Shah Jehan. Neither the old Sikh Line nor what eventually became the Durand Line was considered to be militarily defensible, but the latter was thought to have the advantage of reducing the danger of tribal incursions, while the threats to defence against regular invasions could be mitigated by the firm possession of Quetta from which any army passing through the western passes could be threatened on its flanks and rear. The radical section of the forward school did not know where their advances would stop; the moderates desired the best possible strategic frontier with the least possible advance. On the other hand, the extreme advocate of the Stationary would have held the Indus line; moderates were inclined to an advance, if it could have been proved to them that Russia constitutes any real menace.

The military controversy was carried over to the realm of the “politicals” where there also emerged two diametrically opposed policies as to the political strategy to be followed on the north-western frontier of India. The protagonists of the “forward policy” vehemently advocated a policy of active advancement, requiring the expansion of strategic railways, the definite settlement of an advanced Afghan-British frontier, the reduction to order of the whole tribal territory (around 25, 000 sq. miles) and the coercion to implicit obedience of its unruly inhabiting people even at the risk of endangering rupture with the tribes, the rulers in Kabul and with the Russians. Afghanistan was henceforth to be considered the “frontier” of India, where no other European nation would be permitted to carry on commercial or political activities, or interfere, directly or indirectly, in Afghan affairs. Russian influence in Persia was also to be neutralized as the national independence and the territorial integrity of the country was considered to be equally essential for ensuring the defense of India and peace in Asia. Afghanistan and Persia were important because it was generally believed that Russia would advance towards India through the valley of Oxus, then occupied by the Khanates of Khiva and Bukhara, the latter of which had a common boundary with Afghanistan. Another alternative route by which Russia could possibly advance was through Persia and Herat. Thus both Afghanistan and Persia became objects of anxious and serious attention to the Government of India and the British Cabinet⁹. On the other hand, the advocates of non-intervention, while acknowledging the need for adequate fortifications against an imposed aggression, disagreed on the advisability of meeting the Russian threat in Persia and Afghanistan. They looked upon the risk involved with anxiety, because it menaced their delicately balanced policy of non-aggression elsewhere. They would ask, was armed preparedness desirable to meet any eventuality, and to aid the subtle stages of negotiations, or was it to be a guarantee in itself for security? This was the real dilemma of the ruling parties and governments in London that were charged with the formulation of the frontier policy.

The conflict between considerations of strategy and diplomacy presented a major difficulty and at times blurred political visions. To the policy-makers in distant London, either of the solutions propounded by the opposing schools of thought had much to commend it, yet neither seemed to meet all the requirements of the tricky situations encountered on the north-western frontier. The “forward policy” appeared to be influenced by an exclusive anxiety over the unpredictability of Russian behavior and the expansionist, autocratic and centralized nature of the Russian empire which was territorially united against the diffused British colonial empire, menacingly interposed between Asia and Europe and thus positioned to manipulate both its wings. But the policy seemed not to take into account the heavy cost of involvement, the great extent of the country to be subdued, the certainty of permanently estranging the tribes and the rulers in Kabul, the grim prospects of meeting the forces of a well-disciplined European power in an alien, unsurveyed, hostile and treacherous land. On the other hand, the policy of “masterly inactivity” behind a closed border involved non-interference with the Afghans, a disregard of the immediate menace of Russia and a determination not to be drawn into a distant conflict but to meet the enemy on ground that was not of his own choosing. On the face of it, this appeared to be a magnificent policy as long as the rulers in Kabul remained friendly and undisturbed by Russian propinquity. But it took an iron nerve and much confidence to remain untroubled in India not knowing when the Russians might move or what devil’s cauldron might be brewing behind the mountains of Hindu Kush.

In both cases, the fundamental underlying factor appeared to be the juxtaposition of the unbridled ambitions and mutual suspicions of two great imperial or man-made barriers on which their outposts could be aligned and behind which their nationals could move in absolute freedom and safety, pushed relentlessly onwards in their search to possess and control what they deemed to be their “natural frontiers”. The foundation on which the “forward policy” was built up and applied was the particular weight given by the British empire builders to the position of Russia on the Oxus as challenging British supremacy in southern Asia¹⁰ – a challenge which, in their view, could be implemented with deadly and devastating effect should tensions in Europe bring the two nations to a military confrontation with each other. No ruler of India could afford to allow a powerful and potentially hostile state to occupy or to outflank the great frontier barrier of India – the mountains of the Hindu Kush. On this simple fact, they believed, depended the peace of Asia and the world. The invasion of Afghan territory by Persia with Russian blessings in 1837 had aroused British fears of Russian expansion, proved the non-interventionists wrong and was the immediate cause responsible for the inauguration of Britain’s “forward policy” of active interference in Afghan affairs. It was the application and variations of this policy, alternated by periods of equally determined non-interference, that was to shape the entire course of British-Afghan and British-tribal relations, which at time were marked by a ruthless, bloody violence and at times by the niceties of careful diplomatic maneuvers.

Application and Variations:

The zone running southward from the Hindu Kush to the Arabian Sea, known to the British rulers of India as North West Frontier, posed two basic problems: the international and the tribal. There was the possibility of invasion by a foreign power,

and the constant problem of the control of the border tribes. The first, as has already been dealt at length, involved important questions of imperial defense and the formulation of the delicate and controversial Afghan policy. The second was largely concerned with devising the best system possible for the efficient political and/or military management of the lawless tribes, as a result of which two distinct school of frontier administration – the Sindh/Baluchistan and the Punjab – grew up. Both challenges to British power in northern India were inseparably lined: indeed, they were so closely interwoven that the application of the “forward policy” to one almost invariably produced repercussions in the other. Even so, the tribal question was probably the more recalcitrant of the other. Even eventual settlement of the imperial problem by no means settled the local problem of tribal control. For the sake of convenience, an attempt will be made to examine the application of the “forward policy” on a period-wise basis under the separate categorizations of international and tribal.

International: 1837 – 1838:

The year 1837 – the Russian sponsored Persian attack marked the inauguration of British “forward policy” in Afghanistan. Earlier in 1836, a British mission to Kabul (led by Captain Alexander (Amir Dost Mohammad), who was adamant in his refusal to conclude an alliance with the Sikhs (Maharaja Ranjit Singh) unless Peshawar was restored to the Afghan domains. The British has hoped to secure these advantages without making any political commitment that would upset the delicate balance of power between the Afghans and the Sikhs or renew Afghan hopes of recovering the Peshawar Valley. As it happened, the Persians succumbed to strong military-cum-diplomatic pressures from London and Calcutta and lifted the siege of Herat in 1838, while Britain obtained, through lengthy diplomatic correspondence, a Russian repudiation of its agents activities in Afghanistan and a positive assurance that Russia would have no political relations with Afghan chiefs or take part in their wars of family feuds. On the face of it, the Russian abdication of interference in Afghan affairs, brought about by a forceful and vigorous British stance, was unequivocal and emphatic, and the menace which had hung over Afghanistan and India seemed to have been averted at least for the time being. The advocates of the “forward policy” held this as their first diplomatic victory.

1839

Despite Russian assurances that activities in Afghanistan would be limited to the pursuit of commercial aims, the British authorities in India were suspicious of their “apparent political self-abnegation”. Russia’s favorable position in Persia, her support of Persia in Central Asia, and her alleged diplomatic moves in Kabul (which the British insisted contributed to the failure of the Burn’s mission) increased British distrust. Under such circumstances, the ill-timed Russian expedition against the Khanate of Khiva in 1839 brought stern warning from Lord Palmerston who threatened to extend the British forward line to Central Asia proper – to capture the upper course of the Oxus River as a measure of “precaution and defence”- if Khivan independence was jeopardized. The Russian military expedition ended in natural disaster, and that failure halted both the threat of major confrontation between the two colonial rivals and the test of the “forward policy”. Nevertheless, British

apprehensions of Russia's long-range political and economic aims in Central Asia remained and they were now persuaded by the advocates of the "forward policy" to secure themselves by taking it out on the unfortunate ruler of Afghanistan.

1839 – 1842

The unfriendly and non-cooperative attitude of the Amir in Kabul in Britain's hour of peril (the siege of Herat), having been judged to have been adopted under Russian advice, was an insult that imperial Britain could neither forget nor afford to ignore. It was proposed to chastise the Amir by uniting, by force of arms, the Afghan principalities of Kandhar and Kabul and by replacing him by another ruler who would be more likely to adjust his interests with those of the Britain in Central Asia and who would be bound by "every tie of interest as well as of gratitude to become and remain the faithful ally of Great Britain". Such a person was available in Shah Shuja, who had lived in India since 1816 as an exile and who still hoped to regain the Afghan throne. Accordingly, early in 1839, the British armies crossed the Indus, took possession of Kandhar, crowned Shah Shuja as Afghan ruler and entered Kabul without opposition. By this aggressive interventionist action, it was hoped to achieve British paramountcy in Afghanistan which the British had earlier failed to acquire by negotiations. For the first and the last time in history, the British were in actual physical occupation of the great north-western frontier of their dominion. The triumph of the 'forward policy' was complete but short lived. Rebellions against the British backed Shah Shuja, who had more than once been rejected by the Afghan people, broke out all over the country. Kabul was abandoned by the British army in 1841 and on its retreat the army was almost annihilated at the Khurd Kabul Pass, the British mission (including Captain Alexander Burnes and Sir William Macnaughten,, Secretary to the Government of India) was massacred, Shah Shuja was murdered in 1842 and his son fled Afghanistan in fear, and in the end the Amir Dost Muhammad once again became the ruler in Afghanistan. The country reverted to its original position and British interests in Central Asia remained threatened as before. Thus, in bloodshed and disaster ended the first attempt of the British to gain control of the Hindu Kush. The 'forward policy' was shattered and its first military application turned out to be an absolute failure.

1842-1876

After the reverses of the First Afghan War and until 1866, 'Containment', commonly known as 'masterly inactivity' became the general aim of British policy towards Afghanistan. The ideal of this policy was complete non-interference in the affairs of the peoples beyond the Indus frontier. Any frontier was to be purely defensive and to be fought near the supply bases. To this end, British garrisons were stationed as near as possible without arousing suspicion. The British authorities in India also did not undertake any liability on behalf of the rulers in Kabul and their territorial integrity. The period could be sub-divided as under:

- a. 1842-1854: During the first 12 years immediately following the forward policy debacle in Afghanistan, the general state of the relations between the British in India and Kabul was, as described by Lord Dalhousie, one of 'sullen quiescence on either side, without offence, but without good will or

intercourse. There was only one occasion for offence in 1849 when the Amir, taking advantage of the Anglo Sikh War (following the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh), attempted unsuccessfully to occupy Peshawar. The failure of the Russians in Khiva having come about the same time as the British losses in Afghanistan, both powers seemed to have recoiled and for some time the Russians as well as the British remained away from Afghanistan. The annexation of Sindh in 1843 and of the Punjab in 1849, however, brought the Indian empire to the belt of tribal territory beyond which lay Afghanistan. The tribes, in essence master less, lawless and fanatical owed in some cases a shadowy allegiance to the rulers in Kabul. The proponents of the 'forward policy', playing on fears of the Russians threat to the safety of Indian empire, once again advocated a policy of active advancement and subjugation of the tribes, while the advocates of the 'Stationary School' argued that the established of amicable relations with the Afghans would decrease the friction between British forces and the tribes along the North West Frontier. The latter insisted that theirs was a 'expedient' policy, specially at a time when the prospect of a war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire loomed large in Europe. The outbreak of the Crimean War (1854-56) clinched the issue and the protagonists of the 'Stationary School' are able to prevail.

- b. 1855 – 1857: The changed political situation in Europe, that made war between Russia and Great Britain imminent, inclined the British in India to an attempt at reconciliation and closer connection with the Amir in Kabul with a view to 'providing in Afghanistan an effectual barrier against any possible Russian aggression'. The British signed an agreement with the Afghans in 1855¹¹, and an Anglo-Afghan treaty followed in 1857. Great Britain agreed to respect the Amir's possessions in Afghanistan and never interfere with them, while the Amir agreed similarly to respect British territory and be a friend of our (British) friends and enemy of our enemies. The outbreak of the 'Indian Mutiny' in 1857 made the Afghan treaty invaluable to the British: The Afghans refrained from hostile action and this factor strengthened immensely the shaky position of the British in the Punjab,. Indeed, this position at the time was so precarious that serious consideration was given to a proposal put forward by the advocates of the "Stationary School" to cede Peshawar to the Afghans in order to secure their goodwill and protect British posts in the Punjab. The proposal generated such heat and opposition among the protagonists of the 'forward policy', both in India and Great Britain that the Government finally ruled out surrendering Peshawar to the Afghans under any circumstances.
- c. 1858-1868: In the decade under discussion, the British continued to pursue a policy of non-intervention in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. Lord Lawrence, one of the major architects of the policy and the leading spokesman for the "Stationary School", not only opposed any British presence or interference in Afghanistan, but in fact opposed the "forcible or amicable" occupation of any territory beyond the Indian frontiers. He argued that intervention in Afghanistan would engender 'irritation, defiance and hatred in the minds of the Afghans, without in the least strengthening

our power either for attack or defense”. The policy of non-intervention came under attack following the death of Amir Dost Muhammad in 1863 when internal dissensions and anarchy once again dominated the country. In the face of Afghan political instability, the Conservatives and the Russophobes castigated the non-interventionist policy of ‘masterly inactivity’¹² as a policy of myopia and urged that it be replaced by a vigorous ‘forward policy’. The only concession made to this demand was the adopted of a strategy of ‘divide and rule’ in the tribal belt that aimed at keeping the tribes as buffers between the Afghan ruler’s domain and the British possessions in India. Apart from this, an attitude of strict and scrupulous neutrality towards the furious, internecine struggle for succession raging in Kabul was maintained and British policy, in general, aimed at maintaining a strong, friendly and independent Afghanistan. In pursuance of this policy, the Government of India accorded friendly recognition to successive occupants of the Afghan throne, made gifts of arms and money, and carefully refrained from interfering in the internal affairs of the state. Any invader, Asian or European, was to be met in the Indus Valley and not as the advocates of the ‘forward policy’ would have it, in the valleys of the Oxus.

1869 – 1873

In the meanwhile, vital change had come over the Central Asian scene. Until 1842, the Russian empire was still beyond the Aral Sea. By 1847, Russian advance posts had been gradually pushed forward to command the lower reaches of the Syr Darya. In 1864, Russian authority was extended to the borders of Kokand, Bokhara and Khiva; in 1865, Tashkent was occupied; in 1867, the new province of Russian Turkestan was created and Bokhara became a ‘subsidiary ally’ of the Czar; in 1869, Samark was annexed and the Russians were now rapidly approaching the river Oxus. The menace of Russia was increasing along with the clamor of the ‘Forward School’ for a new policy to meet the Russian threat. To the Amir in Kabul (Amir Sher Ali), the omens were unmistakable: there was now only Merv and the Oxus left between him and the Russians and at any moment an influx of refugees could embroil him with his great neighbor to the north. The Amir turned to his erstwhile friends in the south for advice and support. Accordingly, during 1869 – 1873, the British and the Afghans established closer relations and the views of the ‘Stationary School’ continued to prevail. The Amir paid an official visit to India and active negotiations were carried on between the British and Russian Governments regarding Afghanistan. British and Russian diplomats tentatively agreed on the creation of an intermediary buffer zone between the British and Russian domains: the British Government was to guarantee the independence of Kalat, Afghanistan and Yarkend; Russia that of Khiva, Kokand and Bokhara. After protracted negotiations, a final agreement was reached by which Russia recognized the northern and the north-western frontiers of Afghanistan and agreed to consider the country outside its sphere of influence. The Anglo-Afghan agreement was concluded in 1868 which reaffirmed provisions of the treaty of 1855: the British which reaffirmed provisions of the treaty of 1855: the British declared that they would not interfere in Afghan internal affairs, agreed not to force an

English Envoy on the Amir and undertook to respect Afghanistan's independence. The Amir, however, tried and failed to obtain a British commitment for future assistance, official recognitions of the dynastic rights of his family and an unequivocal guarantee of support in the event of any aggression. This, added to the Afghan pique over the 1872 British award in the Sistan Boundary dispute (interpreted by the Afghans as having unduly favored Persia), left a sore point that to some extent strained British-Afghan relations.

1874 - 1876

The rapid Russian advance in Central Asia went hand in hand with a general revision of Czarist foreign policy after the Crimean War that 'ended both an emphasis on maintenance of the status quo and a tendency to concentrate on Russian interest in Europe'. A militarist group, headed by General D.A. Milintin, had become increasingly powerful in Russia and had openly advocated as aggressive 'forward policy' in Central Asia. Some suggested that Herat should be handed over to Persia, and that the Hindu Kush, not the Oxus, should mark the frontier between the British and Russian empires. Others proposed the outright annexation of northern Afghanistan on the ground that it was a natural and necessary frontier for Russian Central Asia. A number of plans both serious and hypothetical, for a Russian invasion of India, were widely publicized. Many Russian statesmen and military men sought to publicize such schemes for diplomatic purposes agreeing with the axiom that the stronger Russia was in Central Asia, the weaker England would be in India, and the more accommodating she would be in Europe. All this had a great impact in Britain where they were viewed against a background of steady Russian advance in Central Asia, the so-called Easter Crisis of 1875-1878 and the Russo-Turkish war of 1877. The position of those in England and India (Sir Henry Rawlinson and Sir Bartlo Fere being the leading ones among them), who urged the adoption of a vigorous 'forward policy', was strengthened and their views found a ready audience among their countrymen, for there was great apprehension in Britain over the country's limitations as a land power as well as a tendency to magnify out of proportion any development that could be construed as a threat to India. The extension of the Russian railway system into Central Asia, with all its economic advantages and military implications, heightened the nervousness of British officials in India. Russia occupied Khiva in 1873 and Kokand in 1875 and by 1876 the agreement on the intermediary buffer zone was dead. The delicate balance of the policy of non-interference was already getting seriously upset when in 1874, the British Cabinet, which had supported Lord Lawrence's non-intervention policy in Afghanistan, was replaced by a Conservative Government headed by Benjamin Disraeli with Lord Salisbury the India Office. Under the leadership of Disraeli and Salisbury, the government reverted to the adoption of the 'forward policy'. In 1876, the new Viceroy, Lord Lytton arrived in India charged to break away from the policy of 'masterly inactivity' and to initiate a new basis of relations with Afghanistan and the Amir.

1876-1879

The objectives of the 'forward policy' in this period were to preclude Russian gains in Central Asia, to provide India with a 'scientific frontier' and to bring Afghanistan

under tighter British supervision and control. To achieve these objectives, it was proposed that the Afghan ruler be notified of British intentions (a) to stop all occasion for Russian advance in Afghanistan; (b) to place the forward posts of the British army at Quetta (as an excellent strategic point overlooking southern Afghanistan) (c) to extend the railway system to the foot of the Khyber Pass; and (d) to station carefully selected English agents at Kabul, Herat and Kandahar. In the British view, the Russo-Turkish war, the chance of Anglo-Russian war in Europe and the well-publicized Russian plans of action in India and Afghanistan all added a note of emergency to the need to settle affairs with Afghanistan. Only two alternatives were seen; to secure a forcible or negotiated diplomatic settlement with the Amir that would permanently assure British influence in Afghanistan or failing that, to break up the Afghan kingdom and conquer such Afghan territory as was necessary to secure the Indian frontier. The limit of the second alternative was an outer line with the Oxus for the ultimate boundary and Balkh, Maimana and Herat for its main outposts. As it turned out, the British were unable to negotiate or wrest a settlement from the Amir. That failure of diplomacy, coupled with the arrival of a Russian mission in Kabul seeking to conclude a mutual assistance treaty, precipitated a major crisis. The result was the Second Afghan War, a British occupation of eastern Afghanistan, dethroning of the Amir and the Treaty of Gandamak (1879)¹³ by which, the new Amir (Amir Yakub Khan) was forced to cede the strategic districts of Kurram Pass, Pishin and Sibi; to accept a permanent English representative; and to agree to follow the advice of the British authorities in India had succeeded in turning Baluchistan into a protectorate, bringing Afghanistan under forcible surveillance and giving India a scientific frontier. This was the high-water mark of the forward policy - the process of imperial expansion carried to its logical conclusion.

1880-1881

Once again history repeated itself. The new Afghan ruler, who lacked a hold over his people, could not prevent the outbreak of a general uprising against the British, during which a member of the British political mission were killed. The chances of a solution of the Afghan problem appeared remote and a protracted and costly war, possibly including a general uprising all along the India frontier, seemed imminent. These new developments as well as the return of the Liberals to power in England in 1880 forced the British to a reappraisal and finally, to a reversal of their 'forward policy' in Afghanistan. The Liberals and their new administration in India under Lord Rippon, saw the security of India in the friendship of the Amir and took the bold steps of withdrawal from Afghanistan and consolidation of the Amir's power in his kingdom, in order to achieve a political as opposed to a military settlement of the Afghan question. Although the new British administration in India was not entirely disposed to relinquish the scientific frontier (among the areas excluded from the withdrawal were the Khyber Pass, the Kurram Valley, Pishin, Sibi and Quetta) or to give up Britain's right to conduct Afghanistan's foreign relations, it was opposed to a rigorous control of the Amir or meddling in the country's internal affairs. It also rejected proposals from the advocates of the 'forward policy' for the fragmentation of Afghanistan and the British retention or control of Kandahar. The liberals forged a new Afghan policy whose essentials were a well-defended Indian frontier and a strong, united, friendly and independent Afghanistan under British political control. Afghanistan thus became a unique client state. The year 1881 marks the establishment of Afghanistan as the

'buffer state' and the formulation of a policy that, in reality, represented a compromise between the Forward and the Stationary Schools and which was to hold the field for more than 40 years.

1881-1907

During this period, Afghanistan continued to be a major preoccupation of British diplomacy. The British tried to reach a *modus vivendi* with Russia with respect to Afghanistan. They insisted that any understanding had to be based on a reiteration of a Russian guarantee of non-intervention in Afghanistan and on a settlement of Afghanistan's northern frontier. One of Britain's chief aims was to prevent the Russians from attempting to manipulate the non-Pukhtun ethnic groups of northern Afghanistan in order to preserve a foothold in the country. The consolidation of the Amir's power, the occupation of Merv by Russia in 1884, and Panjdeh in 1885, led to the appointment of an Anglo-Russian Boundary Commission, the delimitation of the ill-defined northern boundary of Afghanistan in 1887, and finally to the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 whereby Russia acceded to British claims in Afghanistan in return for trade and commerce concessions. The southern boundary of Afghanistan still remained undemarked and this gave rise to renewed misunderstandings and strained relationships between the British, rulers of India and the Afghans and to the revival of the 'forward policy' under the viceroynalties of Lord Lansdowne (1884-1894) and Lord Elgin (1894- 1895). The Durand Agreement of November 1893¹⁴ prevented an open clash and culminated in the demarcation of the disputed territories by a series of joint Indo-Afghan commissions punctuated at times by prolonged diplomatic negotiations. The chief benefit of the demarcation from the British point of view was the placing of a narrow slice of Afghan territory all the way along up to China between Russia and Britain in British India's sphere of influence. Actually, Durand Line extended from Chitral to Zhob Valley¹⁵. The demarcation, which was widely criticized at the time for having been dictated by political expediency and for perpetuating ethnological and topographical errors, led to a series of tribal uprisings and British-Afghan relations suffered serious setbacks at the time under the viceroyalty of the dynamic and aggressive Lord Curzon (1899-1905). Indeed, it was not until 1905 that Indo-Afghan friendship received legal recognition in a treaty signed for the first time between British India and the new Afghan state.

Nevertheless, the agreement of 1893 managed to hold *the* advocates of the 'forward policy' in check - only in so far as the imperial problem was concerned. For, with regard to this problem, equilibrium had at length been obtained, so that both the empires had found what they had long sought: a stable, if not, natural frontier based on firm foundations, treaties and duly demarcated boundaries. But to the British, the Durand Agreement was far more than this. It was as it were a concrete symbol of compromise - the manifestation of a policy which, whatever its merits, was not carried to its logical conclusion. A series of political compromises accentuated by historical accidents had prevented the British from following the law of political and strategic development of a physical occupation of the natural frontiers of India. They solved the major imperial problem, but in such a way that had set up for themselves (and for their successors) another problem which had defied solution ever since. This was the problem of the control of the border tribes, to which field the advocates of the 'forward policy' now turned their guns.

Tribal: 1800-1849

In the first two decades of the 19th Century, when the Sikhs under Maharaja Ranjit Singh took advantage of the internecine strife which was disrupting the Afghan empire to advance across the Indus and extend their control over the whole Peshawar valley and the Derajat, several of the Pathan tribes fell under their sway. It was, however, an unstable control. The Sikhs made no attempt to come to terms with the unruly Pukhtuns on the hills but established their frontiers along the edge of the tribal lands where the cultivated field of the plains gives place to the stony, barren slopes running upto the rugged brown hills beyond. During this period, as has been noted above, the British were still moving forward. In 1843, they overran and annexed Sindh and in 1849, after the defeat of the Sikhs, they took over the whole of the Punjab, including the trans-Indus territories upto the foothills bordering on the Amir's domains. It was this ill-defined, frontier that the British took over in 1849. The first fifty odd years from the British annexation are best seen in two periods: the first from 1849 to 1878, and the second from that year upto the severance of the frontier districts from the Punjab by Lord Curzon in 1901.

1849-1878

For some years, the new rulers of Sindh and the trans-Indus territories to the north were occupied with the task of building up an administration inside their borders. The developments of the period could be sub-divided territory-wise and summed up as under:

- a. **Sindh:** By about 1850, the military subjugation of Sindh by Sir Charles Napier and its pacification by Brigadier-General John Jacob had been completed under a policy (the Sindh School) that can be roughly described as an uncompromising repression of outrages by a strong show of military forces. Military posts were pushed far out into the neighboring hills to cope with the marauding incursions by the Bugtis from the Kachhi Hills and Dombkis and Jakhranis from the Kachhi plains. New forts were built and the depredations of the Baluch bands were checked by vigilant patrolling and a mobile system of defense. The civil and military administrations were combined in the person of the general who was not only the Commander-in-chief but also sole political agent, superintendent of police, chief magistrate, chief engineer and revenue officer. Once the initial lawlessness of the tribes of this part of the frontier had been overcome, the task of establishing order and setting up a capable and vigorous administration was not difficult.
- b. **Kalat:** Some heat and friction was generated, in relations with the Khan of Kalat whose territories, after the annexation of Sindh, had become coterminous with the British administrative boundary. Initially, the authorities in Sindh carried on political negotiations with the Khan in an attempt to control the Chief. Later, as the 'forward policy' began to take shape, relations between Kalat and the Government of India came to be regulated by a treaty of 1854 which, inter-alia, pledged first consulting the British; to receive British troops in Kalat whenever such a step should be deemed necessary and to prevent his subjects from harassing the British borders. By 1871, the sardars

were in open revolt against the Khan who, with the help of a British subsidy, was attempting to increase his authority at the expense of his confederated chiefs. The Sandeman mission of 1876 formally reconciled the sardars and led to the Mastung Agreement and the treaty of 1876 which marked the death of nonintervention on the southern frontier and the initiation of 'forward policy'. By the Treaty of Jacobabad (1876), the Khan was forced to grant permission for the location of troops in and the construction of railway and telegraph line through, Kalat territory. The importance of the treaty lies in the fact that it was the foundation of Baluch Agency for, in 1877, Major Sir Robert Sandeman was appointed Agent to the Governor-General with headquarters at Quetta. The advocates of the 'forward policy' (Lord Lytton) justified this advance on the ground that it was impossible to remain inert spectators of the anarchy in Kalat when the connection between Kalat and Sindh was so intimate that any disturbance in the one was immediately reflected in the other.

- c. **Punjab:** The settlement of the frontier areas north-eastward from the Gomal River posed a different and more formidable problem. Not only was this frontier longer (225 miles), mountainous and therefore, more difficult to defend, but it was also inhabited by an agglomeration of tribes of Pukhtun origin, some of which were divided and split by the devastating scourge of the blood feud and united only in a fierce determination to defend themselves and their liberty from all forms of external pressure. Some of the tribes accepted the Afghan ruler as suzerain and rendered to him some sort of feudatory service. A different approach here was called for (the Punjab School), as it was realized that success in this area would depend to a very large extent upon an efficient political management of the tribes. At this stage, the attitude of the Punjab administration towards the question of retaining the trans-Indus territories at all was sufficiently developed to counter any idea of a 'forward policy' beyond the administered borders.
- i. The aims of the Punjab administration were three-fold: to protect their subjects from the attacks of marauding bands whose economic distress and the love of loot drove them down from the hills to ravage the rich plains of the northern Punjab; to keep the trade routes open; and, as far as possible, to secure tranquility to the hitherto blood-stained border. To achieve these objectives, a number of defensive and offensive measures were taken. A chain of forts was erected along the British borders, parallel to which a good military road was constructed. A special force, the Punjab-Frontier Force, was raised as an armed body under civilian control to deal with the raiders of the marches. In the period under review (1849-1878), no less than 37 punitive expeditions were sent across the administrative border to show each tribe, in turn, the strength of the British Government and the folly of resisting it by force of arms. Apart from these punitive expeditions, a system of fines and blockades was introduced to force the contumacious tribesmen into submission.
- ii. Various conciliatory methods were also adopted to show the tribes men how they could benefit by becoming friendly neighbors. The hated capitation tax of the Sikh days and all frontier duties were also abolished; a system of complete freedom of trade was instituted and commercial intercourse encouraged in every way. Steps were taken to increase the

Powindah trade; fairs were held for the exchange of commodities; roads were constructed from the passes to the nearest bazars; and steam communication was established on the upper Indus. Free medical treatment was provided in the hospitals and dispensaries established at various points along the frontiers; tribal maliks and jigas were encouraged to enter British territory for the settlement of their disputes; and attempts were made to colonize waste lands with families from across the borders. Lastly, the ranks of the army and the police were thrown open for all those desirous of entering British service. On a broad view, the first 30 years represented the testing time of what has been called the 'close-border policy'; during these years there were numerous military probes through one or the other part of the tribal territory, but no permanent occupation.

1879-1901:

The next 20 years are those of the development of the 'forward policy'. The events of this period could be sub-divided territory-wise and summed up as under:

- a. **Kalat:** The first step in the new policy was taken, as has been noted above, in 1876 when Quetta and its environs, together with Bolan Pass leading to it, were leased to the British Government on perpetual quit-rent to remain under nominal Kalat sovereignty but to be administered by Calcutta in accordance with local custom. The deliberate advancement of the Indian frontier to Shal was resented and feared by the Amir in Kabul (Amir Sher Ali) and according to some historians, this move, even more than the Sistan Award-prompted his decision to play with the Russians and was, therefore, a cause of the Second Afghan War. By the Treaty of Gandamak (1879), Pishin, Sibi and Lorali (the Pukhtun areas north and east of Quetta needed to round off a new province) were handed over by the new Amir to the Government of India as 'assigned districts' and were retained by the British in the general withdrawal from Afghanistan that took place later under the Liberals. This cessation had the effect of carrying the frontier across the Khojak Range to Chaman within a short distance of Kandahar and during the next 10 years, the railway line was also carried to the frontier at Chaman by a tunnel through the hills. By the year 1889, the British had pushed forward from Pishin into the Zhob and Bori Valleys upto a point south of the Gomal Pass known today as Fort Sandeman. The result was the creation of the new province of British Baluchistan that now consisted of tracts assigned by the Treaty of Gandamak and agency territories which were acquired by lease or otherwise brought under the control of the Government of India with native princely states of Kalat and Lasbela owing suzerainty to Britain. The subsequent pacification of Baluchistan under the Sandeman system is outside the scope of this paper, but it was here in Baluchistan that the 'forward policy', as applied to the tribal areas, was first brought to light.
- b. **Punjab:**
 - i. The forward move in Baluchistan was accompanied by a permanent advance into the Khyber Pass and exclusion of the Afghans, by the Treaty of Gandamak (1879), from the Kurram Valley. For the next 10

- years, the British continued to probe aggressively though cautiously forward and were able, under the famous Sir Robert Warburton, to open up the pass itself and to move freely under tribal escort to its upper or western end. The British also managed to have themselves admitted to the Malagori and Shilman areas between the pass and the Kabul River and all over the Loargal plateau (where Landi Kotal now stands) up to a point just below the forbidden highlands of the Afridi Tirah. In the nineties, the forward moves were resumed - this time on the Kurram Line - with the military occupation of Samana in 1891 and Kurram in 1892.
- ii. Throughout this period, the Amir in Kabul watched with displeasure and apprehension this continuing tendency on the part of the British to advance their boundaries – “like pushing a knife into my vitals” (‘Life of Abdur Rahman by himself: Vol. II, Ch. VI). In reply, he disregarded the Government of India’s injunction not to meddle with Dir and Bajaur by seizing the district of Asmar, pushed forward his outposts into Waziristan, threatened the Turis of Kurram, assumed virtual sovereignty over the Afridis of Tirah, and strengthened his, connections with the Mohmands. By 1893, relations had been so strained that a crisis was at hand, and the settlement of some sort of boundary to check their encroachments had become urgent. The outcome was the Durand Agreement of 1893 which, inter-alia, defined the southern and eastern limits of the Amir’s dominions beyond a certain line. The agreement did not define the line as the boundary of India, as the British did not intend to absorb the tribes into their administrative system, but only to extend their own and exclude the Amir’s authority from the territory east and south of the line.
 - iii. Much has been said about the Durand Line: that it is ‘illogical from the point of view of ethnography, of strategy and of geography’; that it ‘cuts across one of the main basins of the Indus watershed’; and that it ‘splits the tribes and divides them into two’. To the British under the circumstances then prevailing, this was probably the best line possible. A forward movement with intention of occupying the whole tribal areas was out of question. Such a movement would have been very costly in lives and treasure and would almost certainly have led to a war with Afghanistan and the disruption of the Afghan Government without advancing one step nearer to the solution of the tribal problem. There could in fact be no general forward movement on the frontier which did not engender the stability of the Afghan Government, and consequently threaten the whole framework of Britain’s Central Asian policy. As it has been said, on the British side the demarcation of the Durand Line represented a recrudescence of the ‘forward policy’ as applied to the local sphere of the tribal areas.
 - iv. Throughout the nineties, as the demarcation on ground of the Durand Line was carried out, there was forward tendency along the frontier to Wana in Waziristan and up the Tochi Valley in an endeavour to control the turbulent Wazir country. In 1895, the most

extensive advance of all took place into Dir and Chitral which was bought about partly by the conduct of the tribes and partly as a countermove to Russian advance in the Pamirs. The tribes had watched all this penetration of their valleys with growing anxiety. The demarcation of the Durand Line, with its accompanying definition of spheres of influence, the setting up of five political agencies (Malakand, Khyber, Kurram, North Waziristan and South Waziristan), and finally the passage of troops in all directions through their territory and the garrisoning of these tracts (which were not only strategically important but also the most fertile portion of the land) - all this was regarded as a deliberate menace to a long-cherished independence. By 1897, a series of tribal uprisings took place that scorched the frontier from Waziristan to the Malakand Pass. Retribution followed, and by 1898, Tirah and Dargai had been taken and the Khyber reoccupied, outposts were established in the valleys and political agents appointed to deal with what the British called "the wild men of the hills".

- v. The arrival of Lord Curzon as Viceroy in 1899 swung the pendulum back. The active 'forward policy' pursued in the nineties was replaced by one of non-interference¹⁶ resembling in many respects the old 'close-border' system. To implement this policy, he proposed the withdrawal of British forces from advanced positions, employment of tribal forces in defense of tribal territory, concentration of British forces in British territory with more British forces behind them as a safeguard and a support and improvement of communications in the rear. By such a disposition of forces, it was hoped to increase by gradual degrees the control of Waziristan and the other tribal areas. The creation of the North West Frontier Province in 1901 was the consummation of all of Curzon's frontier policy¹⁷. The new province was divided into two parts: the settled districts of Hazara, Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu and Dera Ismail Khan, and the trans-border tracts which lay between the administrative and Durand boundaries. The British knew fully well that finality could never be reached on the north-western frontier and did not claim that the above solution of the problem would last forever. But during the next few years, with the exception of short expeditions (known as Wilcox's Week-end Wars), no major punitive operations took place until the years 1917 when a wave of unrest necessitated the dispatch of strong punitive expeditions against the Mohmands and the Mahsuds. Serious doubts were now beginning to be cast on the efficacy of this latest substitution of the 'forward policy'.

It would detract from the fullness of this study if mention were not made of at least one important subsequent development in relation to the application of the 'forward policy' in the tribal areas. In the year 1919, Amir Habibullah was assassinated, in a flood of a popular anti-British sentiment. His third son, Amir Amanullah, who was

young, popular, ambitious and represented nationalism and progress, was swept on to throne. He saw in the 'forward policy' a continuation of that slow pressure which had marked the British advance through India, till it had driven his predecessor, the Amir Sher Ali, from his throne and 20 years later had caused the whole frontier to flare up in revolt. This and other internal and external developments led to an Afghan attack and the Third Afghan War was on. Under the strain of this war, the Curzon policy of 'withdrawal and concentration' broke down altogether and British control of the trans-frontier areas vanished as it were overnight. The break down had come with dramatic swiftness. The outbreak of hostilities in May 1919 was accompanied by the publication in tribal territory of a 'Farman' by the Amir summoning the tribes to a 'jihad' against the British infidels. Once more, the pendulum swung over this seemingly insoluble problem. The 'close-border policy' gave way to the 'modified forward policy' and once again, the British pushed forward into tribal territory. Advance posts and cantonments were established in the heart of Mahsud, Wazir territory; the Malaki allowances and Khassadar systems were introduced; and the inaccessibility of some of the tribal areas was sought to be removed by the rapid construction of a network of good military roads. The Report of the Frontier Enquiry Commission of 1922 gave its official blessings to this policy as being one that was best suited to conditions obtaining in the tribal areas. Gradually, under the name of the 'modified forward policy', the theory of peaceful penetration of the tribal areas and of the gradual extension of control over the tribes lying between the administrative border and the Durand Line, was extended to cover the whole frontier from the Gomal River to the Malakand Pass. The 'modified forward policy', however, required for its fulfillment a similar penetration by the Afghan Government to a point where they could ensure the peace of the Afghan interference on the Indian side of the Durand Line should cease. The history of subsequent developments (which are outside the scope of this paper) has shown that whenever either or both of the above conditions were left deliberately unfulfilled, a wave of tribal unrest has swept the frontier areas. It was this fluid and difficult situation, fraught with much danger that Pakistan inherited from the British at the dawn of its independence in August 1947.

Appraisal

In the main body of this study, an appraisal of the 'forward policy' has gone hand in hand with an exposition of the historical settings and the successive stages in which it was evolved. A repetition of what has already been said is, therefore, not intended here. To this day, however, historians have continued to ask one searching question: if the 'forward policy' was primarily motivated by the desire to strengthen Britain's imperial defence against the menace of a Russian invasion from Central Asia, how real was this danger of Russian aggression? No authentic plan has been found, although attempts had been made to discover Russian designs. The reported Skobeloff plan for a Russian invasion of India in the 1870s was considered even at that time 'a mad project'. Rawlinson's prophecies and Lytton's fears did not come true even after the annexation of Merv and Panjdeh. No military aid was requested by the Amir under the alleged Russo-Afghan treaty, nor was there any corroborative evidence of its existence. Intrigues and disruptions continued in Persia and Afghanistan but the long-heralded and the 'inevitable' Anglo-Russian war in Asia never came.

As it is, the belief more than the fact often determines policy. While the-British expansion on the Central Asia side stopped, the Russian advance continued and the gulf between the two empires was reduced year by year by advances on the Russian side. Since the Russian advance was an extending phenomenon, the degree of fear must be synchronized with the increasing Russian proximity. To this must be added the basic British distrust of Russian statements and intentions. The problem in fact was two fold. It was not merely that of a possible invasion of India. It also included the results of a wide-spread belief in its likelihood. The idea of an attack upon British India by Russia may have been dismissed by some British statesmen as being utterly impossible but the fact remained that the invasion of India in those days was “a common topic of conversation in every assemblage of chiefs from Tabriz to Peshawar”. Aware of the British susceptibility to their acquisitions, the Russians exploited British fears to increase their bargaining power across the European conference tables.

Dissension in the British camp was far more consumption of energy than the enemy’s intrigue. The British policy towards Afghanistan and the tribal question was therefore constantly fluctuating. Major changes that had taken place had their origin in party politics in Britain and thus in the changes of government in London. Broadly speaking the Conservatives advocated a ‘forward policy’ as against the Liberals policy of ‘containment’. Within both these parties, there were further divisions of opinion. According to some historians, both appear to have overestimated the danger of Russian designs in the north-west. Both tended to attribute to the internal disorders of Afghanistan an anti-British quality which was never decisively established. Both were quick in making diplomatic representations to Russia, reminding her of her assurances and seeking affirmation. Both sought diplomatic redress and both remained skeptical of its outcome. And thus, the ‘forward policy’, spawned in the fire and fury of two contending empires, blazed its way through the pages of history, cutting through hordes of primitive peoples and leaving in its trail the debris of hitherto independent principalities and nations, but in the process establishing for the British a bulwark on the north-west that stood the test of their times.

That bulwark still stands today but not as a sentinel — nor even as a “prickly hedge” — guarding the north-west approaches to Pakistan. Advances in military technology and changes in the international balance of power have taken care of that. Today, FATA is a mere belt of territory supposedly acting as a “buffer zone”, between the Afghan border and the settled districts (to use old British terminology) that are administered now under Pakistan’s legal system. The writ of the latter’s law stops on the borders of FATA. It continues to be inhabited by the same Pukhtun tribes whose highly intractable nature as well as the political-cum-military compulsions of the time had forced Imperial Britain to make a compromise and leave the inhabitants to run their lives according to their customary laws and traditions. On independence in 1947, Pakistan continued the same arrangements. The result has been that the entire tribal belt has come to pose a serious law and order problem for state authority on either side of the belt, with the area’s rugged mountainous topography and the “Pukhtunwali” code of honor of its inhabitants offering an ideal sanctuary for all kinds

of unsocial elements (from smugglers to gun-runners, from drug-pedlars to terrorists and fugitives from the law). Indeed, the entire region of the tribal belt from Swat and Indus Kohistan down to the Kliawaja Amran Range in Baluchistan has always been known as "Yaghistan" or the Land of the Rebels. As a relic of the past which has outlived its usefulness, FATA today has become a modern-day anachronism. There are many who feel that it is time that its unique, separate legal status be abolished and merged into and integrated wholly with the political, administrative and legal infrastructure of Pakistan.

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