

The issue of the Durand Line became more sensitive after 1947, when the British empire in India was split into two independent states: India and Pakistan. Afghanistan, deep into its own search for identity and the formation of a nationalistic agenda, called for the right of self-determination for Pashtuns inhabiting the region between the Durand Line and the Indus River. This became known, at least in Kabul, as the "Pashtunistan" policy, and it had the effect of alienating Afghanistan and its new neighbor, Pakistan. On official Afghan maps at that time, the Durand Line was marked as disputed.

The issue of "Pashtunistan" has brought Afghanistan and Pakistan to the brink of war on more than one occasion, and drained Afghanistan's political and real economy. For Pakistan, the existence of two hostile neighbors, Afghanistan and India, had become a source of great concern. Even though Kabul eventually opted to stay out of all of the Indo-Pakistani wars, the possibility of having to fight on two fronts at one time pushed Pakistan to try to muscle the weaker of the threats – Afghanistan -- continuously over the years.

Islamabad's golden chance to reduce the real or perceived Afghan threat came when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979. Although initially Pakistan was viewed as the next step in the Soviet march towards the "warm waters" of the Indian Ocean, the Soviets became bogged down in Afghanistan. And this occurred with the help of mainly Pakistan-based resistance groups. Finally, Islamabad could envision a friendly post Soviet Afghanistan, if not its own satellite state. The quest to have an Islamabad-friendly government in Kabul manifested itself in the person of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and other resistance leaders, all the way to the formation of the Taliban in 1994.

Time To Settle The Durand

Today, both Afghanistan and Pakistan have suffered from their misjudgments of one another over the past five decades. There is no need to prolong this suffering, which has served as an indirect catalyst for international terrorism and a source of great instability in both states.

The Durand Line that was drawn on the map by a British emissary 110 years ago should not be allowed by the leadership of both states to become a flashpoint. To ensure its viability and secure the sovereignty of both Afghanistan and Pakistan, it should be demarcated wholly and officially.

AFGHAN LEADER CALLS ON PAKISTAN'S HELP TO FIGHT TERRORISM.

Transitional Administration Chairman Karzai told the BBC that a resurgence of Taliban attacks is "not a serious concern" but that with Pakistan's help Afghanistan could be rid of the rebel elements for good, AFP reported on 2 August. Karzai said that "what is important for us in this region, especially for Afghanistan and Pakistan, is to fight terrorism together...and to finish this menace." Meanwhile, AFP reported that after weeks of strained relations between Islamabad and Kabul over border tensions, Pakistani Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri will visit Afghanistan later this month. The Associated Press of Pakistan reportedly quoted Kasuri as saying the two countries had "close and brotherly relations" but that "forces averse to the growing Pakistan-Afghanistan ties are trying to reverse" them. (Isabelle Laughlin)

AFGHANISTAN, PAKISTAN TO MONITOR BORDER USING GPS...

To ensure that Afghan and Pakistani forces do not cross the poorly defined border between the two countries during antiterrorist military activities, Kabul and Islamabad have agreed to use the Global Positioning System (GPS) under the aegis of the United States, the Pakistani daily "Dawn" reported on 30 July. The agreement came at a 29 July meeting of the tripartite commission of Afghan, Pakistani, and U.S. representatives that was established on 15 July to investigate claims by Afghanistan that Pakistani forces had violated its territory (see "RFE/RL Afghanistan Report," 17 July 2003). An unidentified Pakistani official said, "The Afghans brought Russian maps of the Pakistani-Afghan border, the Americans had their own maps, and we gave them ours," adding that GPS technology is being used to "see if there has been any [Pakistani] intrusion as alleged" by Kabul. The official maintained Islamabad's position that its forces have never crossed into Afghan territory, adding that they were positioned "minus one kilometer from the zero-line." He said that the border was quiet despite skirmishes on 26 July (see "RFE/RL Afghanistan Report," 11 and 24 July 2003). (Amin Tarzi)