

British Forward Policy in Balochistan

HISTORY

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Abstract

In the British forward policy, the social and economic infrastructure of Balochistan represented almost all characteristics of a desert society, such as isolation, group feeling, hospitality, tribal enmity. There was not any area in Balochistan that could be considered an urban settlement. This paper presents a historical survey of the involvement of Balochistan in the particular era, those circumstances and factors have been examined that brought the British to Balochistan. The first Afghan war was fought apparently to send a message to Moscow that the British would not tolerate any Russian advances towards their Indian empire. To what extent the Russian threat, or for that matter, the earlier French threat under Napoleon, were real or imagined, is also covered in this paper.

Key words: Afghanistan, British Balochistan, Chandragupta Maurya, Forward Policy, Gulf, Kalat, Persian.

Summary

The holistic account of British Forward policy in Balochistan begins with the Great Game in which Russia, France and England were involved. The Russians were looking for access to warm water. After many abortive attempts Russian concentrated on the central Asian steppes in order to find route to the Persian Gulf as well as the Indian Ocean. The British perceived the Russian advances in the central Asia as a threat to their Indian empire because of the ancient historical, religious and cultural linkages between Central Asia and South Asia. This linkage goes all the way back to the period of Indus valley civilization. Successive Indian rulers from Chandragupta Maurya onwards pursued a Forward policy towards Central Asia. In turn successive Central Asia leaders and people penetrated South Asia during the latter long period of internal weakness. Both the areas were particularly linked since the sultanate period. A part from religious, cultural and linguistic links, commercial relations were perhaps more important. The British did not

want to lose the trade with central Asia, No wonder; Russian advances in central Asia were cause for much concern in London. In the end of the eighteen century the Russians had occupied the Central Asian steppes and in fact had started sending diplomatic mission to Iran and Afghanistan. (Louis 1977 p362).

After his initial success in Egypt and Syria in 1798, Napoleon has sent mission to the Qajar Shah of Iran. A military mission was also sent to train the Iranian Army. The other area of the French contact was Mysore under Tipu Sultan who was fighting a war against the British after the defeat and death of Tipu Sultan in 1799, the French concentrated on Iran. The Russian defeated the Iranians in 1807, Iran lost more territory to Russia and they also lost faith in the French pledges of help against the Russians. The British did not wait for long to take advantage of the situation, the British resident in Basra offered the Shah of Iran 125,000 amount and several diamonds from George 11th to fight the Russians, not only that he sent Mountstruarts Elphinstone to Peshawar, where the ruler of Kabul, Shah Shuja-Ul-Mulk had his capital in winter. Elphinstone managed to extract a treaty of mutual defense between the British and the Afghans. (Fraser1967,p 80)

Although the battle of Waterloo in 1815 put an end to the French threats to the British India, the Russian presence remained effective in the region. Russians emerged as major rivals of the British in Asia. The Iranians tried to recover their lost territories from the Russians but invariably ended up losing even more, The “Anglo-Persian treaty” of 1814, (Anwar, 1963p4) which promised military and financial aid to the Iranians against Russia. Infact when Shah Abbas Mirza Qajar tried to recover part of the Caucasus in 1826. (Tyler. 1967.p 81)With the help of the British, it again resulted in a disastrous defeat. To add to their woes, the British never fulfilled their commitments. By the treaty of received a heavy indemnity from the Iranians along with external territorial rights and commercial advantages. It seemed that British had some sort of understanding with Russians and infact wanted to weaken Iran so that it would no longer pose a threat the British interests in India and Afghanistan on the one hand, they signed treaties with Iran for help in case of foreign invasion and on the other, with Afghan against the Iranians, it was evident in Elphinstone’s contacts with Shah Shuja. (Louis, 1977,p 365)

In 1809, Shah Shuja was replaced, and after unsuccessful attempts to seek help from different rulers of the area, he fled to Lahore in 1813, he became a British pensioner, by now the Sikhs under Ranjit Singh had become a formidable power and the British sought their help in reinstating Shah Shuja to the throne of Kabul. However, after many years of civil war, Afghans acknowledged Dost Mohammad Khan as the Amir of Kabul. In the process, the Afghans had lost their territories in Sindh and Balochistan. The

Mirs of Sindh and Khans of Balochistan had broken away from the influence of Kabul.

During the turmoil and uncertainty in Afghanistan, the Sikhs had occupied Peshawar in 1834. In 1836 Amir Dost Mohammad Khan defeated the Sikhs, they had almost recovered Peshawar but instead of occupying the city, he sought British approval. He sent a letter to the new Governor General, Lord Auckland, and asked permission for retaining Peshawar. (Louis 1977, p 369)

Ironically, "Auckland himself", according to the Fraser Tytler, "in fact, was the responsible for the First Afghan War", (Tytler 1967, p 84) According to him "Auckland went to war to safeguard the internal rather than the external frontier. (Yapp, 1980, p253) He dispatched Captain Alexander Burnes to sort out the Afghanistan situation. Burnes arrived at Kabul in 1837. He declared that the objectives of his mission were to restore commercial relation between India and central Asia and to work out the policy for opening River Indus for commerce. (John William 1999, p18) Amir Dost Muhammad Khan wanted British help in recovering Peshawar, only to realize soon that British would do nothing at the expense of their relationship with the Sikh.

Interestingly, on December 19, 1837, a Russian Diplomat, Captain Ivan Vickovich, arrived at Kabul with letter from the Russian Government, for the same purpose that Burnes had come. (Norris 1967, p134) In order to make the British position absolutely clear Burnes, the British envoy delivered the following ultimatum to Dost Muhammad Khan on March 6, 1838,

"You must desist from all correspondence with Persia and Russia: You must never receive agents from them or have ought to do with him without our sanction: You must dismiss Captain Vickovich with courtesy: You must surrender claims to Pashawar on your. Account as that chief belongs to Maharaja Ranjeet Singh, you must also respect the Independence of Qandahar and Pashawar and cooperate in arrangement to unit your family". (Louis1977, p371)

The British did not recover Peshawar from Sikhs, Disappointed and frustrated Dost Mohammad Khan entered into negotiations with the Russian representative. This event in Kabul made the British reassess their policy in the region, which ultimately led to their occupation of Balochistan. Lord Auckland sent an army to Persian Gulf to occupy Kharaj Island in June 1838. At the same time, a treaty was signed between the British, the Sikh ruler (Ranjit Singh) and Shah Shuja, the treaty stipulated that with the Sikh and the British help Shah Shuja would rule Kabul and Qandahar. (john William1999,p319-23) In turn Shah Shuja would recognize the Sikh government in the Punjab, in North-west Frontier including Peshawar and Kashmir, but excluded from further advances against the Amirs of Sindh.

Shah Shuja surrendered himself before the British and aligned his destiny with the Indian subcontinent, rather than with Central Asia. The Governor General was convinced that a friendly power and intimate connection with Afghanistan, a peaceful alliance with Lahore and an established influence in Sindh are objects for which some hazard may well be run. (Embree 1979, p.30-31)

Consequently, the British raised a large military force known as the Army of Indus, at Ferozpur to attack Afghanistan and install Shah Shuja on the throne of Kabul. When the time came for the Indus Army to attack on Afghanistan, Ranjit Singh not only withdrew his pledge to support the mission, but also refused to let the Indus Army (General Keane) to march through his territory. General Keane had to find an alternative route through Sindh and Balochistan. Keeping in view the most hostile government, he denuded Balochistan a better resource to keep his army moving. (Naseer, 2000, p.49)

The British had already signed a treaty with the Khan of Kalat in March 1839, who honored this agreement to the best of his abilities. The Indus Army reached Quetta in 1839, for its onward journey to Qandahar. The Indus Army occupied Qandahar and entered Kabul along with Shah Shuja without any resistance. Dost Muhammad Khan fled to Bukhara.

During this period two important events influenced the future. Ranjit Singh died in 1839, and thus the British prospects of occupying the Punjab became brighter, secondly the British realized that the Shah Shuja was extremely unpopular among the Afghans and if they withdrew their forces, he would be dethroned, it was therefore decided to maintain a British garrison in Afghanistan. Realizing the difficulty of persuading the Afghan chief to accept a British 'stooge' as their leader, William Macnaghten was sent to do the job. Almost every conceivable move was made to reconcile the people to Shah Shuja but in vain, in the letter of Captain Macgregor, he confessed.

'I have been striving in vain to sow Nifaq (dissension) among the rebels and it is perfectly wonderful how they hang together'

Finally, in desperation, the British decided to leave Afghanistan and their retreat proved the foolishness of the adventure. Their retreat began on January 1842. In addition to the hazards of the freezing weather, the resistance and the attacks of the local people combined to make this retreat one of the most humiliating and bloody in the history of wars. (Naseer, 2000 p, 53)

The first Afghan war proved to be more disastrous for Sindh and Balochistan. The British had realized the importance of the both there area and central Asia policy. The logistic importance of the area especially the coastal area of Balochistan attracted them for pursuance of their forward policy westward. They wanted to capture a suitable port (Jiwani) which was

on few days cruise from London to Bombay, they had already acquired Karachi Port facilities in 1820s. They were well aware of the political and administrative set up of the local ruler.

By signing a treaty in October 1841. The Khan of Kalat agreed that the British Government would station troops in Kalat, control its foreign relations and rule the state with the British Resident. Within the next few years. The British had annexed Sindh (1843) and the Punjab (1849) and now there was hardly any possibility for the Khan of Kalat to look for a potentially in neighborhood. (Aitchison vol .xi p, 351-52)

Now the British realized that it was their best interest to keep the pressure through the frontiers to make sure that the Russians did not succeed in their efforts to move towards Herat and then to Qandahar.

But when the Iranians, encouraged the Russians, occupied Herat in 1853, it was considered as a clever Russian move the British immediately moved to establish friendly relations with Amir Dost Muhammad khan of Kabul through treaty of Peshawar in 1855. But the new treaty (1854) recognized the khan as an independent ruler while he was expected to oppose the enemies of British and to be friendly with their supporters. Another treaty was signed at Mastung in 1876, by which khan's authority was recognized over the area from south of Kalat to Arabian Sea and west of Sindh to Iran including Lasbela. The treaty of 1862 was further strengthened, when the boundary between Balochistan and British Indian was defined and Kalat was declared and as a neighboring state of India. The subsidy was also doubled. (Aitchison, p353)

The Khan of Kalat signed the treaty of 1863 to safeguard the British installations. The British Government agreed to pay 20,500 rupees per annum to the Khan for the establishment of posts and development of traffic along the trade routes. In this year khan received further boost from the death of Amir Dost Mohammad khan, the ruler of Kabul. In fact, the British Agent in Qandahar reported to the government that khan of Kalat, Mir Khudadad khan had offered the province of Shal (Quetta) to the ruler of Qandahar if they latter would assist him in consolidating his position at Kalat.(Aitchison p357) The British had realized now that, for the Khan to be an effective and successful ruler, it was essential that he should have the best of relations with the sardars of different tribes in his area, it was stipulated that it would be better if the British presence were secured in that area to ensure that this relationship remain good and cordial as well as to keep an eye over the activities of the khan. It was in the view that British occupied Quetta in 1876 through the treaty of Mastung. This treaty was imposed on the khan by the special representative of the Governor General Sir Robert Sandeman, in this way the British influence in affairs of Balochistan had increase. Now the

situation had changed and the British had assumed more power in this region. This treaty of course led to the construction of telegraph and railway lines through the Kalat territory. The influence around Quetta and Bolan Pass and the Khan's control was reduced to nominal. (Mir Ahmed.1890p22-23)

In order to understand the subsequent events in Balochistan, we have to take into account how the British perceived their interests in Afghanistan. As discussed earlier, the relevance of the vast territory of Balochistan to the British Empire became manifest during the first Afghan war (1839-1842), which was apparently fought to protect Afghanistan from Russian influence. Since Balochistan provided easy access to Qandahar and Herat, development in Afghanistan and Central Asia shaped the British policy towards Balochistan. A loyal and friendly Balochistan definitely meant a safe and reliable launching pad for the necessary intervention in Afghanistan and even in Iran. We shall see how the 'Great Game' shaped the destiny of Balochistan after the second Afghan War.

On the other hand the situation changed in Afghanistan, when the new viceroy, Lord Lytton, added fuel to the fire, he demanded that Mir of Kabul Sher Ali should accept a British resident at his court, on the refusal, he invaded Afghanistan in 1878, and second Anglo-Afghan war started, frustrated Amir Sher Ali had to escape to Turkistan. He died near Balkh in 1879. Amir Sher Ali was succeeded by his son, Amir Yaqub Ali Khan in 1879. In order to prevent further advances of the British Amir Yaqub Ali acceded to their demand in the treaty.

The Gandamak treaty added the District of Kurram, Pishin, Sibbi, Loralai and the Pashtoon territories and the permanent control of Khyber and Michni passes to the British Empire. Not only the treaty extended the boundaries of Balochistan it reduced Afghanistan to dependency.

This was very important development because now the British had established themselves on the western frontiers of Balochistan within the next decade; a broad railway line was constructed up to Chaman by tunnels through the hilly areas. In the words of Edward Oliver, Balochistan thus became the first point of advance in the forward policy.

The next decade saw the establishment of the British administration in Balochistan, which remain intact more or less for a long time. The near Eastern part of Balochistan mostly by Pashtoons, came under the direct administration of the Balochistan Agency. Further division of Balochistan took place in 1877 where by some Baloch tribes of Darajat were put under the Punjab administration like Buzdar, Khetran, Khosa Laghari, Qaisrani etc. In order to finalize the demarcation of the border between Balochistan and Afghanistan, a "Baluch Afghan Boundary Commission" in 1895, Colonel (Khuda Buksh. 1974p18-20)

McMohan brought to a successful conclusion the demarcation of Durand Line from Gomal to Koh-i-Mulk Siah, Sir Thomas Holdistch proposed a boundary between Balochistan and Iran in order to remove the threat of the raiders and to demarcate the area under the Khan the British government and the Shah of Iran had already approved a proposal in Tehran in 1871. According to the Major General Goldsmith, Panjgur, Parum, Kohuk, Boludea, including Mand, Tump, Nasirabad, Kej, Dehs, to the eastward and Dasht all its dependencies as far as sea, were declared to be beyond the Persian frontiers. By the end of the nineteenth century, The British had consolidated their hold on Balochistan reduced the status of Khan of Kalat and secured their borders with Iran and Afghanistan through railway Line and road links, and cantonments. (Administrative report, p.9)

The British had established themselves as ruler of Balochistan without much opposition. They received enthusiastic support from the royal sardars during the First World War. The British thought that Government would invade Indian Empire through Balochistan, and would ultimately break their Indian Empire. In 1916, The German agents allegedly killed two British officers, Lt Horst and Lt Hughes in Makran, which resulted in the unleashing of several Punitive expeditions under General Dyer. The areas hit were Jhalawan in 1915-16 and Marri-Bughti areas in 1918. (dyer1921p454-55)

The whole Pashtoon belt adjacent to the Afghanistan border, including the Zhob, Killa Saifullah, Loralai, Sanjawi, areas were up in revolt at the advent of third Afghan war in 1919. The British had to face resistance from the Pashtoon freedom fighters in Balochistan. The first two decades of the twentieth century witnessed many developments that affected people of Balochistan significantly. During 1915-1919, the British faced revolts from both Baloch and Pashtoon tribes.

The Durand Line was drawn under a treaty signed on November 1893 between Sir Mortimer Durand on behalf of the British Indian and Amir Abdul Rehman of Afghanistan. Thus Afghanistan emerged as the buffer state lying between the imperial British India and the Czarist Empire (after 1917, the Soviet Union) in the central Asia. (ahmedzai2000p216)

Conclusion

First it can be said that by the time political activities began in India on a large scale, Balochistan was still struggling to cope with the policies of the British administration.

After the death of Mir Mehmood Khan in 1931, Lord Willington, The viceroy of India, visited Balochistan to install the new Khan (Mir Azam Khan) himself, a grand Durbar was held at Quetta on April 1932 for the purpose. After Mir Azam Khan, Mir Ahmed Yar Khan, succeeded him in

1933, which eventually helped the transformation of Balochistan from a British dependency to a part of Pakistan.

The British had employed the policy of divide and rule by keeping the Khan under their supervision and acting as intermediaries between the Sardars and the Khan. They ensured the Khan and the tribal chief that confusion and complications existed between their relationships. They had established their rule in Balochistan but continuously faced opposition from different tribes. They used strategic points to achieve their aim in Balochistan demarcation of boundaries, and actively intervening in the affairs of the two neighboring Muslims states of Afghanistan and Iran.

The Russian and the French influence was over, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, emergence of Germany as a major power, Turkey being its ally; never let the British sit comfortably. All this determined the nature of administrative patterns of the British rule in Balochistan. In case the new state of Pakistan for a better or worse, lives with realities that link it with the great transformation of politics that took place in the sub-continent in the mid-nineteenth century.

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