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PAKISTAN/AFGHANISTAN: THE DURAND LINE AND THE PASHTUN ISSUE

by
Joel M. Woldman

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prepared for
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Afghan claims to "Pashtunistan," the Pathan (Pashtun) majority areas on the Pakistan side of the Durand Line, have long been a source of tension between the two states. Those claims have been prosecuted more vigorously under some Afghan governments than others. Recent developments in both countries raise the possibility of a renewed, and perhaps unprecedented, escalation of the dispute. Since the 1971 secession of Bangladesh, Pakistan Government fears that further disintegration would threaten Pakistan's continued existence have led it to move vigorously against any hint of Pathan separatism. In Afghanistan, the 1973 coup of Mohammad Daud returned to power one of the most determined advocates of the "Pashtunistan" claim. Daud has been inclined to react strongly to what he views as Pakistani "oppression" of its Pathan minority.

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FOREWORD

Afghan irredentist claims on the western border provinces of Pakistan have been an irritant in relations between the two countries since the end of British rule in India in 1947. Because the revival of the issue by the new republican regime in Kabul poses a serious threat to the fragile stability of the region, the Office of Research and Analysis for the Near East and South Asia, Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR/RNA), asked INR consultant Joel M. Woldman to prepare a brief review and analysis of both the issue and the developments which led to the present impasse.

INR's consultant program is managed by the Office of External Research. Consultant studies are designed to supplement the Department's own in-house research capabilities by providing independent, expert views on key questions.

Dr. Woldman, a South Asia specialist, is a former Foreign Service officer of the U.S. Information Agency.

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Martin Packman
Assistant Dep. Director
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SUMMARY

When the British and the Afghans delimited the border between India and Afghanistan in 1893, they also created an enduring source of regional tension. Although the Durand Line achieved the immediate British objective of establishing the limits of Afghan authority, it also bifurcated the tribal lands of the Pathans, or "Pashtuns" as they are called on the Afghan side of the line. As a result, several tribes were split into Indian and Afghan branches, while others were deprived of any links they had previously enjoyed with related groups.

After the third Anglo-Afghan war in 1919, Afghan intrigues among the Pathans across the border were kept at a generally low level. In 1947, however, when the British announced that they would grant India independence, ambitious and historically minded Afghans saw an opportunity to regain the territory of the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), which they had lost in 1834. When it became apparent that the British would not give them a voice in the future of the NWFP, they seized upon Pan-Pathan nationalist demands for an independent or autonomous state -- "Pashtunistan" as the Afghans put it. Afghan hopes received a serious setback when the new dominion of Pakistan gave control of the NWFP. With the refusal of the new Government of Pakistan (GOP) to consider any change in the status of the NWFP, the stage was set for a history of strained relations which has persisted to the present.

Pak-Afghan relations deteriorated further when Prince Mohammad Daud, a cousin of King Zahir Shah, assumed the Afghan premiership in 1953. During his 10 years in office, "Pashtunistan" became the dominant theme in Afghan foreign policy. As a result of his determination to pursue this illusory objective, important economic links between Pakistan and Afghanistan were twice seriously disrupted -- in 1955 and again in 1961. That second confrontation over the "Pashtunistan" dispute resulted in the severance of diplomatic relations, which were not restored until Daud was removed by the King in 1973.

Although the new Afghan authorities officially deemphasized the "Pashtunistan" issue during the next 10 years, they continued to maintain clandestine ties with the Pathan nationalists in Pakistan. They provided cash subsidies and propaganda materials to Pathan extremists on the Pakistan side of the Durand Line, and welcomed the father of the Pathan nationalist movement,

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Abdul Ghaffar Khan, to Kabul, where he lived as a state guest in self-imposed exile from 1964 to 1972. Ghaffar Khan's presence was occasionally used to publicize the Afghan Government's continuing interest in "Pashtunistan."

Throughout the Pakistani constitutional crisis of early 1971 and the armed conflict which followed, the Afghans pursued a "wait-and-see" policy on "Pashtunistan." Once the war was over and Pakistan was reduced to its western wing, the Kabul authorities began to express concern over developments in the NWFP and its neighboring province of Baluchistan. With the continued unity of the remainder of Pakistan itself open to question, Afghan rhetoric gained in intensity, with Kabul again referring to Pakistan's two western provinces as "Occupied Pashtunistan."

This trend escalated dramatically when former Prime Minister Daud, Afghanistan's champion of the "Pashtunistan" cause, seized power in July 1973. Shortly after the coup, Daud declared "Pashtunistan" to be Afghanistan's "only" foreign policy problem and asserted that it would soon be "solved."

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Historical Background

Afghan interest in what is now Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) dates back to the 11th century. The Amirs of Afghanistan actually ruled the NWFP from 1747 through 1834; Peshawar was their winter capital. Both President Mohammad Daud and his cousin, the recently deposed King Zahir Shah, are direct descendants of the last Afghan governor of Peshawar; like their ancestor, they also are ethnic Pashtuns.*

Following the first two Anglo-Afghan wars (1838-42 and 1878-80), the British, in order to delimit Afghan authority and facilitate their control of the frontier region, signed a border agreement in Kabul in 1893. The new boundary, known as the Durand Line, after its chief British negotiator, Sir Mortimer Durand, achieved imperial British strategic objectives by completing the delimitation of Afghanistan as a buffer state between the British and Russian Empires. The significance of the Durand Line for Afghan-British Indian relations, however, was that it cut through the heart of tribal territory, leaving some six million Pashtuns in Afghanistan and five million in India. The Line not only rent the ethnic unity of the Pathans, but split several tribes into Afghan and Indian branches. This ethnic anomalism has posed serious obstacles to friendly relations between successive Afghan and British Indian or Pakistani Governments for over 80 years.

In their continuing efforts to assert their independence from British domination, Afghan rulers used the nominal allegiance of the tribes on the Indian side of the line as a political weapon. Although the third and final

*For the purposes of this study, the Pakistani branches of the group will be referred to as "Pathans" and their Afghan cousins as "Pashtuns."

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Anglo-Afghan war of 1919 resulted in an end to British tutelage, British strategy continued to emphasize the importance of the NWFP and a neutral Afghanistan as the best guarantee against Russian expansion toward India. Given the weakness of the Afghan regime, its own apprehensions as to British intentions and bona fides could be expressed only by periodically stirring up the Pathan tribes on the Indian side. Known as the "prickly hedge" policy, this maintenance of tribal unrest as a deterrent against future British aggression also served as a constant reminder to the Indian Pathans of their ethnic and historic links with the Afghan Government. The Amirs' support of the Pathans was repaid in 1929 when the non-Pashtun usurper of the Afghan throne was deposed with the help of tribal war parties from India.

During the Second World War the Afghans initiated discussions with the British in an effort to guarantee a voice for themselves should there be any change in the status of India which might affect the future of the NWFP. Although the British apparently did promise to discuss the future status of the Pathan-majority province if a change seemed imminent, they did not in fact do so.

The Pathan nationalist party in the NWFP, the "Red Shirts" of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, had always been allied with the Hindu-dominated Indian National Congress. Although the Red Shirts were able to win the first postwar Provincial Assembly election in 1946, they were soon engaged in a struggle for their political lives by the pro-Pakistan Muslim League. In an effort to counteract the League's unanswerable religious appeal to the fanatically devout Pathans, Ghaffar Khan in the spring of 1947 proposed the idea of an independent Pathan state, to be called "Pakhtunistan."* As the provincial referendum approached which would decide the future affiliation of the NWFP with either India or Pakistan, the Red Shirts made Pakhtunistan the central plank of their party platform.

The Pakhtunistan concept, formulated in desperation as a last-ditch attempt to forestall the accession of the NWFP to Pakistan, was based on an emotional appeal which took no cognizance of the viability or cohesiveness of the proposed state. The adoption of the Pakhtunistan objective by the

*Because Afghan Pashtuns generally speak the softer southwestern dialect of the tribal language, they pronounce the word "Pashtunistan." Pakistani Pathans, most of whom speak the more guttural northwestern dialect, tend to pronounce it "Pakhtunistan."

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Afghans shortly before partition was largely a result of their own dissatisfaction with the offhand treatment of their earlier request to the British that they be consulted in the matter. They also continued to harbor the illusion that their support for Pashtunistan (as they pronounced it) would guarantee them some voice in the future of the NWFP.

Within 10 days of the June 3, 1947, announcement of the imminent partition of the Indian Empire, Afghan authorities informed both the British and Indian Governments that the inhabitants of the region between the Durand Line and the river Indus were Afghans and must decide for themselves whether to declare their independence or join Afghanistan, Pakistan, or India. The British responded by reminding the Afghans that they had reaffirmed their recognition of the Durand boundary in the Treaty of 1921. They also asked the Afghans not to intervene in the NWFP at the time of the transfer of power.

Shortly after the inauguration of Pakistan on August 14, 1947, the Government of Afghanistan reiterated its position on the future of the Pathans. On the grounds that the Pathans had not had a fair plebiscite, Afghanistan voted against Pakistan's admission to the United Nations -- the only member to do so. Further discussions between Pakistani and Afghan representatives toward the end of 1947 were fruitless, since Pakistan refused to accept the Afghan contention that all former treaties with the British were null and void. The Pakistanis continued to maintain that they had inherited British rights to the NWFP and that the Pathans in both the administered districts of the Province and the tribal areas had, by the 1947 referendum and in tribal councils, indicated decisively their desire to join Pakistan.

Kabul's Campaign for "Pashtunistan" (1948-53)

In June 1948 Pakistani Pathan leader Ghaffar Khan, his son Wali, and other Red Shirt activists were arrested by Pakistani authorities for sedition. The Afghan Government on the same day mounted a press and radio campaign for an independent Pashtunistan. Radio Kabul began to emphasize the theme that Pakistani colonialism, as the successor to British imperialism, had as its objective the domination of the Pathans and exploitation of their resources for the benefit of the Punjabi majority. The Pakistani Pathans were increasingly referred to as "trans-Durand Afghans."

Throughout 1949 the Pakistan and Afghan Governments traded claims and counterclaims over the Pashtunistan issue. There were also some minor military actions on both sides of

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the Pakistan-Afghanistan border in the tribal areas. On July 26, the Afghan National Assembly officially repudiated the treaties concluded with Britain over the tribal territories. Pakistan's official response was that the Afghan action cast doubt on the validity of Afghanistan's borders with Iran and the USSR, since those boundaries had also been the result of "imperialist" diktats.

Within a year Afghan-sponsored agitation on the Pakistani side of the border was on the rise. A "Pashtunistan Fund" was created and a "Pakhtun Provisional Parliament" was established with branches in various parts of the tribal areas. The first "president" of the parliament was the Faqir of Ipi, a longtime foe of the British in the Waziristan Tribal Agency. Under his aegis the Pashtunistan flag was raised, with respectable publicity from Radio Kabul. In late September the government of Pakistan announced that a large Afghan raiding party, including regular army troops, had crossed into Pakistan, but it was repulsed by Pakistan forces. The Afghan authorities denied the charge; it was apparent, however, that the objective of this otherwise purposeless and dangerous activity was to focus world attention on the Pashtunistan issue.

Student Presses for Pashtunistan (1953-63)

Pashtunistan became a major theme of Afghan foreign policy under the leadership of Sardar Mohammad Daud. Prince Daud, the former Defense and Interior Minister and a cousin and brother-in-law of King Zahir Shah, assumed the prime ministership in 1953. As the U.S. military assistance relationship with Pakistan grew, Daud turned to the Soviets in 1954 for the military and economic support that he felt Afghan security required. One of the reasons that he took this step was his concern that Afghanistan would no longer be able to pursue the Pashtunistan issue if its antiquated military establishment faced the threat of armed response from a U.S.-equipped Pakistan army and air force.

When the "One Unit" plan was announced in March 1955, the situation in Pakistan grew intolerable from the Afghan point of view. Under this new constitutional arrangement, the four provinces of West Pakistan would be merged to form a single unit with its provincial capital at Lahore. Following a violent speech by Daud condemning the plan as a plot against Afghan self-determination in the NWFP, a mob attacked the Pakistan Embassy in Kabul, desecrated the flag, and injured several staff members. Similar incidents occurred when demonstrations were held at the Pakistan consulates in Calcutta and Qandahar.

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Pakistan reacted by closing the border to transit traffic for Afghanistan. This seriously disrupted the Afghan economy, which depended on an uninterrupted flow of commodities from the outside world via the port of Karachi. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were severely strained as consulates were closed and ambassadors recalled. The blockade lasted 6 months until the dispute could be resolved on the basis of a "gentlemen's agreement." Despite the apparent resolution, however, Afghan awareness of Pakistan's power to blockade their borders has clouded the atmosphere of Pak-Afghan relations ever since then. It has also served to reorient some Afghan trade toward the Soviet Union.

Bilateral relations continued to be strained during the remaining years of the Daud regime as each side attempted to reassert the validity of its own position on the Pashtunistan question. Afghanistan was particularly incensed by a SEATO declaration in 1956 that the region up to the Durand Line was Pakistani territory and hence within the treaty area.* Afghanistan responded by strengthening its ties to the USSR. The Soviet military assistance program begun in 1956 permitted the Daud regime to modernize its army. With this modernized army the government was able to overcome a tribal revolt near the Pakistan border against extension of central authority into that region through roadbuilding and military conscription efforts. President Ayub responded with an official protest against the new Afghan communications routes into the frontier areas.

The Afghans intensified their Pashtunistan campaign during the same period. Both King Zahir Shah and Prime Minister Daud repeated earlier claims for self-determination for the Pakistani Pathans in broadcasts on Radio Afghanistan. The situation deteriorated further in 1960 and 1961 when Afghan irregulars and army troops dressed as tribesmen twice crossed the Durand Line into the Bajaur area north of the Khyber Pass and tried to foment revolt among the Pakistani Pathans. The final step in the escalation was Kabul's unilateral -- and ultimately self-defeating -- sealing of the border and the severing of diplomatic relations in September 1961.

Economic pressures on the Afghans again built up rapidly. Their traditional trade links with the subcontinent were disrupted at the very time when their fruit crop was ready for

* This has continued to be the U.S. position on the question.

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report to India and Pakistan. Although the Pakistanis had announced their willingness to permit the flow of in-transit goods to and from Afghanistan, Daud made settlement of the Pashtunistan issue the quid pro quo for reopening the border.

The Soviet Union, by purchasing the bulk of the fruit crop and organizing an airlift to transport it north, prevented economic disaster for Afghanistan. The Soviets also provided additional transit facilities for essential imports. Since the border closure halted growing U.S. aid inputs which were imported wholly via Pakistan, the U.S. Government attempted to mediate. The 3-week attempt at reconciliation was unsuccessful and President Kennedy's envoy, Livingston Merchant, returned emptyhanded.

The 1961-63 border closure also affected the seasonal migration of Afghan Pashtun nomads -- the Kuchi or Powindah herdsmen who traditionally wintered in Pakistan. The Ayub government refused to permit the Afghan nomads to enter Pakistan without passports and visas. Pakistan had never imposed this requirement before on the Powindahs, who had crossed the border almost at will.* Afghanistan, for its part, would not issue them travel documents, which would imply acceptance of the Durand Line as an international boundary. The USSR again aided the Daud government by providing the nomads with clothing, food, and fodder for their animals. Fortunately for them, the two winters of closed borders were comparatively mild.

Afghanistan Deemphasizes Pashtunistan (1963-73)

Although the Pashtunistan demand was not abandoned, the continued break in diplomatic and economic relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan grew increasingly less tenable for both countries. From its own point of view, in terms of continued independence and neutrality, Afghanistan was jeopardizing its position by being forced to rely so strongly on the Soviet Union. Internal opposition to this close relationship with the Russians was growing among the conservative Afghan clergy (the ulema), and the intelligentsia became increasingly more restive under the domestic authoritarianism of Daud. Under growing pressure for change within the country, Daud was forced to resign in favor of a new power coalition

* Although this requirement was never abolished, the Powindahs were permitted to enter Pakistan without passports between 1963 and 1973. The Government of Pakistan again imposed the requirement in late 1973, but subsequently agreed to waive it.

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led by King Zahir Shah; his uncle, Marshal Shah Wali; and his cousin, Sardar Abdul Wali.

The new regime's first accomplishment was the restoration of diplomatic, consular, and commercial relations with Pakistan in May 1963. At the same time, however, an Afghan representative made it clear that Afghanistan would continue to deny the legitimacy of the Durand Line. When the Loya Jirga (a supra-parliamentary body acting as a constituent assembly) approved Afghanistan's new constitution in September 1964, it also approved a resolution affirming the country's "religious, national and historic" duty to support the rights of the Pakistani Pashtuns and its anticipation of a settlement on the basis of their true aspirations.

Although the Afghan Government (RGA) was content to deescalate Pashtunistan in the interest of improved relations with Pakistan, it was not averse to exploiting the issue whenever possible. Such an opportunity arose in late 1964 when Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the Pakistani Pathan leader, applied for an Afghan visa during a visit to Europe and the Middle East. Although the Pakistan Government had attempted to restrict his travel in South Asia to countries other than India or Afghanistan, the visa was granted quickly in Cairo and the old man received a triumphant welcome in Kabul on December 12.

Greeted by Prime Minister Muhammad Yusuf and his cabinet, and crowds shouting "Long live Pashtunistan!" Ghaffar Khan (by his own account) assured the press that he had come to Afghanistan only for medical treatment. Since Kabul is not normally thought of as being very well-served in that respect, the statement was open to a different interpretation in Islamabad. He was, however, provided a Czech physician and treated as a state guest by the Afghan Government.

With an eye to the situation in the NWFP and anticipating the January presidential election in Pakistan, Ghaffar Khan asked the RGA not to make political capital of his stay in Kabul. This request was apparently honored, for the exuberant press and radio coverage which followed his arrival subsided soon afterward. Ghaffar Khan reportedly refused permission for the official Afghan news service to interview him for publication; he told the Afghans that he was a "loyal Pakistani" and that his concept of "Pakhtunistan" -- in essence, a measure of autonomy for the Pathans within Pakistan -- was

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quite different from the Pashtunistan being promoted by the RGA. He also went so far as to criticize the Afghans' poor record on promoting the Pashto language. The old man's health problems persisted, and he entered a hospital for regular treatment and a less conspicuous presence.

Between 1965 and 1967 Pashtunistan had a decidedly low priority as a foreign policy issue in Afghanistan, beyond perfunctory annual "Pashtunistan Day" references. Despite temptations to take advantage of the dislocation caused by the September 1965 Indo-Pakistan war, the RGA merely voiced "great concern" at "the bombing of Pashtunistan" by the Indian Air Force. Relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan were sufficiently good by early 1967 that King Zahir Shah and Queen Homaira were welcomed in Rawalpindi for a brief stay en route back to Kabul from a state visit to India.

By late 1967, however, Pashtunistan fever was again in the air. Before his October resignation on grounds of poor health, Afghan Premier Maiwandwal delivered a tough speech in favor of Pashtun rights at the annual Jeshyn (Independence Day) observance. His successor, N. A. Etemadi, also stressed Pashtunistan in his first policy speech to the Lower House and pledged vigorous "peaceful" efforts for Pathan self-determination. Ghaffar Khan, who had been relatively quiescent during his Afghan stay, was "unleashed" to stir up with some success pro-Pashtunistan feeling among members of the Loya Jirga. The old man again surfaced on the occasion of the 1968 Afghan Independence Day celebration to tell his audience that Pashtunistan was still his goal and that whoever supported this, "be he a Red Kafir or a Hindu," was his friend.

Shortly after the December 1970 Pakistan election, King Zahir Shah told U.S. Ambassador Neumann that he was unhappy with the results because of the poor showing of the pro-Pathan National Awami Party (NAP). As the Pakistani constitutional crisis grew ever more intractable and positions hardened, the RGA watched and waited. Anticipating the economic effect which massive disruption in Pakistan would have on Afghanistan, the Afghans again deemphasized Pashtunistan, reportedly exercising great caution in handling tribal subsidies. They were also said to have actually

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discouraged the efforts of Pakistani tribal dissidents to enlist fresh Afghan support.

When civil war finally erupted in East Pakistan in March 1971, the RGA continued to observe developments across the border anxiously. During the following months of rising tension, the Afghans took a wait-and-see attitude on Pashtunistan. While there were reports that it sympathized with the Bengalis in their struggle for independence from Pakistani domination, the RGA did nothing to foment disorder on Pakistan's western border.

This favor was repaid when, during even the darkest days of the December war between India and Pakistan, the West Pakistan authorities continued to transship U.S. wheat from Karachi to the Khyber border to help stave off the effects of the severe famine then raging in Afghanistan. Although King Zahir's sudden Moscow visit during the war was seen as an ominous sign in Pakistan, the King apparently made no effort to enlist Soviet support for Afghan border claims and received none.

Once the war was over and Pakistan was reduced to its former western wing, the center of attention shifted to the new President, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and his ability to solve the staggering problems facing the country. Not the least of these was the future constitutional relationship between the Central Government and the provinces, especially the opposition strongholds of Baluchistan and the NWFP. Bhutto's first official visit outside Pakistan following his assumption of office was a short trip to Kabul. The choice of Afghanistan was an indication of his growing awareness of the potential threat which the Pashtunistan demand posed to the continued existence of Pakistan.

During 1972 the RGA expressed growing interest in Pakistan's two border provinces, which it called "occupied Pashtunistan." When Bhutto removed the two governors of these provinces in February 1973 following the discovery of a cache of Soviet-made arms in the Iraqi Embassy in Islamabad, he lost no time in informing the Afghans that although Pakistan regarded friendship with Afghanistan as important, the question of "government status" in the two border provinces was strictly an internal Pakistani concern. In response, the Afghan Government asserted that everything which played a major role in the destiny of those provinces had a great impact on Afghan public opinion and that impact would guide official policy.

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From mid-1971 onward, Afghanistan also became an important way station for a kind of "underground railroad" by means of which thousands of Bengalis stranded or detained in West Pakistan could escape and make their way to India, and after December 17, to Bangladesh. The riddlemen were tribal Pathans who used their cousins on the Afghan side to help smuggle their human cargo over the border. Although the RGA refrained from taking a public stand on the East Pakistan secessionists, its sympathies were with them. This grew as much from humanitarian considerations as the possible impetus which the success of the action might give to similar Pathan efforts.

Daud II: Pashtunistan Revisited

The Pashtunistan dispute passed through a comparatively dormant phase during the 10 years following the ouster from power of Mohammad Daud in 1963. While no Afghan Government, even in the limited parliamentary system which operated on the basis of the 1964 constitution, could survive without at least lip service to the Pashtun cause, the interregnum was marked by correct if not cordial bilateral relations. The crucial economic aspect of the relationship continued on a more or less even keel. The two best examples of this were Pakistan's permission for Afghan fruit exports to be shipped across its territory to India despite Pakistan's embargo on any economic ties with its eastern neighbor and the 1971 wheat transit arrangement described above.

The situation took a radical turn for the worse, however, when Daud, the architect of Afghanistan's disastrous earlier Pashtunistan policy, seized power and declared a republic on July 17, 1973. The new President's first public statement after the coup singled out the Pashtunistan issue as Afghanistan's only current foreign policy problem and asserted that it "would be solved."

The new regime, exercising what it considered to be its legitimate proprietary interest in the welfare of Pakistani Pathans and their "Baluch brothers," has reacted with predictable expressions of concern at each move by Bhutto against the Pathan-led National Awami Party opposition. In addition, Afghan representative Fazhwak referred to Pakistan at the Algiers Conference of Nonaligned Nations in September 1973, as a "colonial power" that had torn away seven million people from their "Afghan fatherland." By these acts, the new Daud government set the stage for a new, and perhaps unprecedented escalation of an issue which has long plagued the region.

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