



The Invention of Pakistan How the British Raj Sundered

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Think of an Islamic country of plenary importance to Washington whose military leaders are notorious for their determination to acquire nuclear weapons, a country that has flouted international sanctions and promoted violence across its frontiers. So prevalent is local anti-Americanism that its voters last October awarded provincial power to radicals vowing to expel U.S. forces from border areas that shelter al-Qaeda chieftains who had fled from Afghanistan.

To be sure, the paragraph above does not express the whole truth about Pakistan, nor is it so intended. But it is inarguable that Pakistan's disorders have infected much of its region, and that the human and political costs of Pakistan's creation constitute the greatest failure in the unraveling of the British Empire. Pakistan is the archetypal imagined community, the offspring of precipitate partition; its frontiers are porous, its polyglot population exceptionally diverse. Its chief claim to unity is Islam, on which its authoritarian rulers have relied, inordinately. This has contributed to three wars and a nuclear confrontation with India—chiefly arising from the unresolved dispute over Kashmir—as well as the violent birth of Bangladesh in 1971.

A melancholy forgotten casualty has been the Red Shirts, a nonviolent, democratic, and secular liberation movement that once dominated the Pashtun areas on Paki-

stan's North-West Frontier. It was here that the zealous new members of the provincial assembly paused to pray last October for Mir Aimal Kasi, the Pakistani who had just been executed in America for killing two CIA employees in 1993 at the agency's main entrance in Langley, Virginia.

Where did it all begin? My own sense is that it originated in a misbegotten faith in partition. Outwardly, partition seems a pragmatic means of splitting the difference, thereby honoring the principle of self-determination and separating antagonistic peoples. Yet on closer inquiry, with rare exceptions, the postcolonial and post-Communist division of countries into separate states has uprooted millions of people, fomented internecine wars, degraded the citizenship of trapped minorities and perpetuated ancient grievances, closing both minds and frontiers. Give or take a little, this has been true of Pakistan, Kashmir, Ireland, Palestine and Cyprus, as well most recently of former Yugoslavia.

The unintended consequences of territorial surgery were evident for all to see after the first contentious partition of the imperial age. In 1905, during Lord Curzon's final, troubled year as viceroy of India, he won London's approval for slicing Bengal into two provinces: East Bengal, comprising 18 million Muslims and 12 million Hindus, and West Bengal, whose 47 million inhabitants were overwhelmingly Hindu. The purpose, Curzon insisted over and over again, was simply administrative efficiency—Bengal had grown too populous—yet his own advisers were well aware of the political

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implications. "Bengal united is a power," one of them counseled. "Bengal divided will pull several ways. That is what the Congress leaders feel; their apprehensions are perfectly correct and they form one of the great merits of the scheme.... One of our main objects is to split up and thereby weaken a solid body of opponents to our rule."

Furious protests resulted in West Bengal when the British announced the partition plan in 1903. Hindus saw it as giving needlessly enhanced status to East Bengal, whose peasant inhabitants had converted to Islam to escape their lower-caste status as Hindus (or so many indignantly claimed). Anger was most vehement among leaders of the bar and press in Calcutta, capital of both Bengal and the British Raj. Opponents mounted a mass boycott of British goods (known as the Svadeshi or indigenous products movement), mobilized clamorous rallies, signed bales of petitions and sang patriotic Bengali songs, some written by the future Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore. By contrast, in East Bengal, Muslims relished their new empowerment in a territory whose boundaries foreshadowed those of present-day Bangladesh.

The Hindu reaction was recalled by the late doyen of Bengal letters, Nirad C. Chaudhuri, in his *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*: "It was from the end of 1906 that we became conscious of a new kind of hatred for the Muslims, which sprang out of the present and showed signs of poisoning our personal relations with our Muslim neighbours and school-fellows. If the spouting enmity did not go to the length of inducing us to give up all intercourse with them, it made us at all events treat them with a marked decline of civility. We began to hear angry comments in the mouths of our elders that the Muslims were coming out quite openly in favor of partition and on the side of the English."

So impassioned was the protest, and so persevering, that at the great Durbar in 1911 celebrating his accession to the throne,

King George V announced both the rescinding of partition, and the transfer of the Raj's capital from Calcutta to Delhi. Yet as the historian Stanley Wolpert has observed, even if Curzon had no obvious political motives for partition, its political aftereffects were monumental: "Svadeshi and boycott, national education and svaraj [self-government], the major planks of India's independence movement, assumed nationwide significance for the first time in the scheme's wake." In his presidential address to the Indian National Congress in December 1905, Gopal Gokhale expressed the mood: "The whole country has been stirred to its deepest depths of sorrow and resentment, as had never been the case before."

No less important, the seeds of India's future division were sown.

☞ Three persistent questions haunt the founding of Pakistan. Did the British deliberately inspire Hindu-Islamic enmity to divide and rule? Was partition inescapable? Did Britain's precipitate withdrawal from India in 1947 contribute to massacres that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives? Regarding the first question, the British editor and imperial veteran H. V. Hodson offers the standard yet credible rejoinder in his account of the Raj's final months, *The Great Divide*: "It is not possible to divide and rule unless the ruled are ready to be divided. The British may have used the Hindu-Muslim rivalry for their own advantage, but they did not invent it. They did not write the annals of Indian history, nor prescribe the conflicting customs of her communities, nor foment the murderous riots that periodically flared between Hindus and Muslims in her villages and cities. They were realists, and if they did use India's divisions for their advantage, the divisions themselves were already real."

Nonetheless, even if one grants Hodson's point, the jury remains out on the second question. Concerning the third, there is fresh evidence that British haste and surrep-

titious conniving made a bad outcome worse. Certainly only a decade prior to India's division, partition was but the dream of visionaries. The name "Pakistan," in the consensual version, was coined by a thirty-five-year-old Punjabi Muslim, Choudhary Rahmat Ali, who said he spoke for three other Muslims at Cambridge University.

In 1933, Ali published a pamphlet titled *Now or Never* "on behalf of the thirty million Muslims" living in the five northern units of India. Subsequently Ali offered this explanation for his invented acronym: "Pakistan is both a Persian and an Urdu word, composed of letters taken from the names of our homelands: that is, Punjab, Afghanistan (N.-W. Frontier Province), Kashmir, Iran, Sindh, Tukharistan, and Baluchistan. It means the land of the Paks, the spiritually pure and clean."

What gave propulsion to Ali's idea was the widening schism between the Hindu-dominated Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, the twin engines of India's liberation movement. Their alliance cracked after the British Parliament adopted the Government of India Act in 1935. The act established a federal system that granted substantial autonomy to eleven provinces, of which Muslims comprised the majority in four: Bengal, Punjab, Sind and the North-West Frontier Province. When the first elections were held in 1937, Congress ran up majorities in six provinces and became the biggest single party in Assam. The Muslim League, however, lagged badly in four Muslim-majority provinces, owing to factional disputes, Muslim support for the interfaith Unionists in the Punjab, and the popularity of the Red Shirts, a movement allied with Congress, in the North-West. Disappointed Muslim Leaguers proposed a compromise: form coalitions in those provinces where they had finished a strong second. But the predominantly Hindu Congress would agree to power sharing only if Muslim Leaguers gave up their separate identity.

"In other words," writes Penderel Moon, formerly of the Indian Civil Service, in his oft-quoted account, *Divide and Quit*, "Congress were prepared to share the throne only with Muslims who consented to merge themselves in a predominantly Hindu organization. They offered the League not partnership but absorption. This proved to be a fatal error—the prime cause of the creation of Pakistan—but in the circumstances it was a very natural one. There was nothing in parliamentary tradition requiring Congress on the morrow of victory to enter into a coalition with another party; and a coalition with the League, which the Congress leaders looked upon as a purely communal organization, was particularly distasteful to them."

To Muslim leaders, it seemed a portent of likely humiliation under a "Hindu Raj"—already a popular epithet. Exacerbating political differences were the conflicting personalities of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the unchallenged head of the Muslim League, and Mohandas K. Gandhi, the unquestioned mentor and conscience of the Indian National Congress. Both were lawyers, and both supported the Allied cause during World War I, in the vain belief that freedom would be India's reward for suffering substantial casualties. Jinnah was born in Karachi, circa 1875, and trained as a barrister in London at Lincoln's Inn. Soon after returning to India in 1896, he made his mark both at the Bombay bar and within the National Congress, becoming renowned as "the ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity." This itself was unusual. His family belonged to the minority Ismaili community led by the Aga Khan, not to mainstream Sunni Islam. "Anglicized and aloof in manner," Rajmohan Gandhi writes of him, "incapable of oratory in an Indian tongue, keeping his distance from mosques, opposed to the mixing of religion and politics, he yet became inseparable, in that final phase, from the cry of Islam in danger."

Jinnah was a constitutionalist and secularist who shunned advertising his faith on his tailored sleeves. Indeed, his rift with Gandhi after World War I stemmed in part from the Mahatma's turning to *satyagraha*, or nonviolent resistance, using Hindu doctrine to energize mass support and adopting his universally recognized trademarks, the dhoti and spinning wheel. In *The Idea of India*, the Delhi-born historian Sunil Khilnani has succinctly stated Jinnah's own program: "Jinnah saw the Muslims as forming a single community, or 'nation,' but he envisaged an existence for them alongside a 'Hindu nation' within a united, confederal India. The core of his disagreement with Congress concerned the structure of the future state. Jinnah was determined to prevent the creation of a unitary central state with procedures of political representation that threatened to put it in the hands of a numerically dominant religious community. As such, this was a perfectly secular ambition. *But the contingencies of politics and the convenient availability of powerful lines of social difference pushed it in a quite contrary direction.*" (Emphasis added.)

Whatever hope remained for compromise lay in the hands of Britain's last viceroy, Louis, Earl Mountbatten of Burma, great-grandson of Queen Victoria, nephew of the tsar and tsarina of Russia and cousin of King George VI. Empowered by Britain's Labor government with man-on-the-spot discretion to free India, Lord Mountbatten arrived in Delhi in March 1947. By then, the communal breach that developed after the 1937 elections had widened appreciably during World War II, when Gandhi and Congress, unable to obtain unequivocal pledges of independence, launched a challenging "Quit India" campaign. The British responded by jailing thousands of Congress officeholders, to the advantage of the unjailed Muslim Leaguers. Yet it needs stressing that Gandhi was wholly opposed to partition. As he wrote in 1939 to a Muslim correspondent, "Why is India not one

nation? Was it not one during, say, the Moghul period? Is India composed of two nations? If so, why only two? Are not Christians a third, Parsis a fourth, and so on? Are the Muslims of China a nation separate from the other Chinese?... How are the Muslims of the Punjab different from the Hindus and the Sikhs? Are they not all Punjabis, drinking the same water, breathing the same air and deriving sustenance from the same soil?... And what is to happen to the handful of Muslims living in the numerous villages where the population is predominantly Hindu, and conversely to the Hindus where, as in the Frontier Province or Sind, they are a handful? The way suggested by the correspondent is the way of strife."

One reads this, in Rajmohan Gandhi's *The Good Boatman*, with wonder and sympathy. Certainly Gandhi foresaw the calamities ahead more clearly than the pragmatic surgeons of partition. For this he paid with his life; Gandhi had begun a hunger strike protesting communal violence and was planning to visit newborn Pakistan when he was shot mortally in January 1948 by a Hindu fanatic who believed him too partial to Muslims. So who, or what, was responsible for the breakup of India?

☞ As viceroy, Mountbatten was given broad discretionary authority by Prime Minister Clement Attlee, who also agreed, at his insistence, on a swifter transfer of power than the Labor government envisioned. With minimal deliberation, Mountbatten from the first rejected confederal proposals as unworkable and acceded in principle to partition. Still, even if division was unavoidable, it is difficult to praise its execution. As viceroy, Mountbatten surreptitiously assisted the Hindu side. His method for demarcating frontiers was at best arbitrary, at worst reckless. His timetable for separation left the Indian army on the sidelines when communal slaughters began.

Gandhi and Jinnah emerge with greater credit. In his first meetings with the vice-

roy, the Mahatma advanced the bold idea of offering Jinnah the prime ministership of India, while providing for a truncated Pakistan within India with the possibility of expansion. In the words of Rajmohan Gandhi, in his fair-minded biography of his grandfather: “No student of this episode can fail to be struck by the exertions of the Viceroy’s office against the scheme. The staff, and the Viceroy too, seemed to resist a solution emanating from Gandhi, an encroachment on their prerogative by an unrepentant foe of the Raj.” Gandhi’s offer was never put to Jinnah, and instead Mountbatten moved directly to partition.

To demarcate frontiers, the viceroy established a Boundary Commission, winning agreement from Jinnah and Jawaharlal Nehru (the Congress leader) on Sir Cyril Radcliffe, a distinguished British barrister, as its chairman. It was a curious choice. As Radcliffe’s former private secretary, Christopher Beaumont, later remarked in an interview, the chairman had never traveled east and “was a bit flummoxed by the whole thing. It was a rather impossible assignment, really. To partition that subcontinent in six weeks was absurd.”

Only when he arrived in India did Radcliffe learn from Mountbatten that he had thirty-six days to draw boundaries that bisected the Punjab and Bengal, dissolving Hindu-Muslim-Sikh communities rooted in centuries of history. Radcliffe was given a pile of maps, figures from a 1943 census, and the assistance of four judges, two Hindus and two Muslims. “They were totally useless,” Beaumont recalled. “They simply took the communal line, so he was left on his own.”

Radcliffe completed his top-secret labors by August 13, two days before India’s freedom was proclaimed at midnight. The morning after independence, writes Stanley Wolpert, the biographer of Gandhi and Nehru as well as Jinnah, the Boundary Commission’s awards were revealed, and the celebration gave way to slaughter: “In and

around Amritsar bands of armed Sikhs killed every Muslim they could find, while in and around Lahore, Muslim gangs—many of them ‘police’—sharpened their knives and emptied their guns at Hindus and Sikhs. Entire trainloads of refugees were gutted and turned into rolling coffins, funeral pyres on wheels, food for bloated vultures who darkened the skies over the Punjab.” Partition uprooted more than 10 million people, and estimates of the number slaughtered range from under 200,000 to at least 1 million. These are estimates; having agreed to the carve-up, its perpetrators had little incentive to reckon its mortal cost.

In 1966, W. H. Auden wrote a twenty-six-line poem, “Partition,” that was a judgment on both Viscount Radcliffe (as he became in 1962) and the hasty surgical statecraft he exemplified. It reads in part:

Unbiased at least he was when he arrived on his mission,
Having never set eyes on this land he was called to partition
Between two peoples fanatically at odds,
With their different diets and incompatible gods...
Shut up in a lonely mansion, with police night and day
Patrolling the gardens to keep assassins away,
He got down to work, to the task of settling the fate
Of millions. The maps at his disposal were out of date
And the Census Returns almost certainly incorrect,
But there was no time to check them, no time to inspect
Contested areas. The weather was frightfully hot,
And a bout of dysentery kept him constantly on the trot,
But in seven weeks it was done, the frontiers decided,
A continent for better or worse divided.

The controversy did not abate with Radcliffe's death in 1977. From the moment of partition, critics challenged the viceroy's avowals that the Boundary Commission operated with total independence, claiming he had secretly interceded to rig the results in India's favor. Mountbatten's defenders categorically dispute the accusation. For his part, Radcliffe on winding up his work destroyed all confidential records, refused thereafter to discuss the commission's work and never visited India or Pakistan. These matters stood until 1992, when Christopher Beaumont, Radcliffe's former aide and the last surviving principal, learned that his grandson had been given the partition of India as an honors subject at Cambridge University. The onetime private secretary now concluded "that the event had passed into history, and that the time had come for the truth to be revealed."

Beaumont provided the *Daily Telegraph* with a memorandum he had prepared many years earlier on the commission's deliberations, an essay that formed the basis for a detailed article in the staunchly Conservative paper. He had already entrusted the document to All Souls College at Oxford and had confided its substance to Penderel Moon, also of All Souls and then completing his history of the Raj. Thus in a very British way, Beaumont confirmed that frontiers had been secretly redrawn to Pakistan's disadvantage. The most important reversal involved Ferozepore, an area of some four hundred square miles, important because its canal headwaters controlled the irrigation system in the princely state of Bikaner. Forewarned by a leak of Ferozepore's award to Pakistan, Nehru joined with the Maharajah of Bikaner in appealing to the viceroy. After a private lunch with Mountbatten—Radcliffe's second and last meeting with the viceroy—the chairman bowed to pressure and altered the Punjab line. "This episode reflects great discredit on Mountbatten and Nehru," Beaumont's memorandum concluded, "and less on Radcliffe."

Partition and the massacres it provoked were part of a continental-scale upheaval that attended the British withdrawal. When the Hindu maharajah of predominantly Muslim Kashmir dithered before choosing accession to India, the Indian army and Pakistani irregulars momentarily clashed in October 1947 under circumstances still disputed more than a half century later. The harshest words about divide-and-quit were uttered not by the enemies of the outgoing Raj but by its appalled indigenous allies. Nirad Chaudhuri spoke for them in *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!*, the second volume of his autobiography:

By what the British administrators *did* and also what they did *not*, they stultified two hundred years of British rule in India by disregarding two of its highest moral justifications: first, the establishment and maintenance of the unity of India; secondly, the enforcement of *Pax Britannica* to save the lives of Indians.... Then an apologia emerged *ex post facto* which is the most shameless sophistry I have read anywhere. It was argued and is still being argued that if the British had not left—the manner of their leaving being conveniently glossed over—there would have been uprisings and therefore loss of life far exceeding what was seen. Now, the conjuring up of hypothetical bogeys which no one can prove or deny is the first defence of every coward who yields at the first sign of trouble.

A further arresting passage from Chaudhuri concerns Jinnah, whose generally negative reputation in the West was mirrored in the Oscar-winning 1982 epic, *Gandhi*. In the film, Jinnah slinks in the shadows wearing an ill-fitting suit, thereby adding sartorial insult to historic injury in a work that skittishly fails even to make clear the Hindu identity of Gandhi's assassin. Chaudhuri expresses the contrary view: "I must set down

at this point that Jinnah is the only man who came out with success and honour from the ignoble end of the British Empire in India. He never made a secret of what he wanted, never prevaricated, never compromised, and yet succeeded in inflicting unmitigated defeat on the British Government and the Indian National Congress. He achieved something which not even he could have believed to be within reach in 1946.”

The interesting question is what might have happened had Jinnah not been terminally ill. Weighing only seventy pounds, he died of cancer on September 11, 1948, when his creation, Pakistan, was barely a year old. It is hard to believe that Pakistan’s *quaid-i-azam* (great leader) would have approved his offspring’s glum clerical cast, its support for Islamic zealots in Afghanistan and Kashmir, its oligarchic rule by generals or feudal landlords—and yet all these things were byproducts of Pakistan’s violent birth and synthetic nationhood. When on August 11, 1947, Pakistan’s constituent assembly met in Karachi for the first time, Jinnah spoke these words from the chair:

You will no doubt agree with me that the first duty of a Government is to maintain law and order, so that the life, property and religious beliefs of its subjects are fully protected by the State. [He followed with an appeal to forget the past and cooperate regardless of color, caste or creed.] I cannot emphasize it too much. We should begin to work together in that spirit, and in the course of time all these angularities of the majority and minority communities, the Hindu community and the Muslim community—because even as regards Muslims you have Pathans, Punjabis, Shias, Sunnis and so on, and among the Hindus you have Brahmins, Vashnavas, Khattris, and also Bengalees, Madrasis, and so on—will vanish. Indeed if you ask me this has been the biggest hin-

drance in the way of India to attain freedom and independence and but for this we would have been free peoples long ago.... Now, we should keep in front of us our ideal...that in the course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus, and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the state.

Jinnah spoke in his capacity as first governor-general of soon to be sovereign Pakistan, and his words honor his memory. Yet the difficulty of respecting his scruples was soon apparent. Pakistan is less a country than a jumble of discordant peoples and places. After a half century, it still has a provisional, unfinished quality. Its successive rulers, braided or civilian, have governed under seven different constitutions, and not one has completed his or her term of office or managed an orderly transfer of power. The official language, Urdu, is the mother tongue of but 8 percent of its people, the other principal languages being Punjabi (48 percent), Sindhi (12 percent), Siraiki, a variant of Punjabi (10 percent), Pushto (8 percent), and Baluchi (3 percent).

A visitor senses the same cultural and political bewilderment in Islamabad, whose construction began in 1961 to replace the former capital at Karachi. All that seems Asian about Islamabad is its impressive setting on a plateau below the Himalayan foothills. Otherwise, with its late International Style buildings Islamabad is like an alien implant grafted on adjacent Rawalpindi—an impression enhanced by Shah Faisal Mosque, among the world’s largest, designed by a Turk, built with Saudi petrodollars, its four sleek minarets resembling rockets. Following Pakistan’s nuclear bomb test in 1998, a futuristic granite simulacrum of the weapon rose in Islamabad, illuminated at night in a warning glow of orange.

Pakistan's miseries have been compounded by its geography, its loser's share of the Raj's spoils and its antipathetic diversity. A thousand miles of foreign territory separated West Pakistan with its 50 million inhabitants from the 45 million people in what was East Bengal, later East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. Not only did India inherit most of the Raj's transportation system, irrigation canals and top universities, but of the thousand indigenous officers in the elite Indian Civil Service and the national police, only a hundred were Muslims. This was the overworked skeleton staff, bolstered by fifty British civil servants and eleven Indian army officers, that overnight had to create Pakistan's administrative, judicial and diplomatic systems.

Adding to the challenge were the millions of *mobajirs*, or refugees, flooding the country. Nor did it help that the only bond uniting the inhabitants of West Pakistan and physically remote East Pakistan was Islam. Eventually and in unhappy wartime circumstances, the Bengalis went their own way in 1971, founding Bangladesh and loosing a fresh flood of refugees. Equally problematic was Baluchistan, the most westerly of Pakistan's provinces, with its beehive of fierce tribes on both sides of the frontiers with Iran and Afghanistan. Descending dramatically from the mountains to the Arabian Sea, Baluchistan terminates in what the British geographer Sir Thomas Holdich called "a brazen coast, washed by a molten sea." The Baluchs were (and are) as volatile as their setting. Their chiefs defiantly opposed accession to Pakistan, precipitating an invasion a year after independence, followed by martial law and the arrest of their khan, who was charged with conspiring with Kabul to hatch a full-scale uprising (a charge denied by the Baluchs and never proven).

And everywhere lie minatory memorials to the region's former glories. The Grand Trunk Road, the impressive thoroughfare connecting Kabul and Calcutta, built cen-

turies ago by the Mogul emperors, passes west of Rawalpindi. Its aging signposts still optimistically announce distances north to Kabul and south to Amritsar and Delhi. But freedom of movement vanished with partition. Although India and Pakistan pledged themselves to unfettered passage of trade, people and ideas, within a year after independence, amid mutual recrimination, frontiers were closed and have remained so. The present writer remembers a candlelit dinner (the power was out) at Mrs. Bhandari's Guest House in Amritsar, the Sikh capital in the Indian Punjab, when our innkeeper recalled how easy it once was to make a day trip to Lahore, which she had not been able to visit for more than forty years. She nostalgically recalled Lahore's great Mogul forts, the sparkling fountains in Shalimar gardens and the massive cannon known as Kim's Gun, in front of the Lahore museum with its riches of Gandharan sculpture. For ordinary Indians, all could be on another planet.

Just as evocative is Sind, a southwestern province named after the Indus River, the cradle of the Harappan civilization, where large-scale agriculture originated five thousand years ago. Sind provided the gateway to conquest by Alexander the Great, the Arabs and then the British. In 1843, General Charles Napier on his own authority annexed the area to the Raj, telegraphing his deed, so the well-worn story goes, in a single word, *peccavi* (I have sinned). In touring the province, Napier kept asking, "Whose lands are these?" And nearly everywhere the answer came, "Bhutto's lands."

It was still the case when Pakistan was born. Sir Shah Nawaz Khan Bhutto founded the first political party in Sind during the 1930s; his son, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, served as Pakistan's president from 1971 until his ouster six years later by General Muhammad Zia al-Haq, who approved Bhutto's execution and reinstated martial law. Bhutto's daughter Benazir grew up on the family estate in Larkana, not far from the ruins of

Mohenjo-daro, the greatest of Indus Valley sites, enhancing the sense of reflexive entitlement that marked her own turn as Pakistan's leader, after General Zia was killed in a still-mysterious air crash in 1988. With Benazir Bhutto, one encounters another major recurring theme—the persistence of a powerful landowning elite that collides repeatedly with the meritocratic military, a competition that gives bargaining leverage to the third major force in Pakistan, the Islamic establishment, with its political parties and its ubiquitous religious schools.

The importance of that third force was evident in the most arresting of Pakistan's pre- and post-independence dramas, the struggle for mastery in the North-West Frontier province. Here the last British governor and the Muslim League jointly side-tracked the Red Shirts, a brave, promising and inconvenient popular movement.

☞ Of all the peoples on the subcontinent, few have more infallibly impressed outsiders than the mountaineers known to the British as the Pathans, today the Pashtuns or Pushtuns. After 9/11, Americans were dazzled by the interim Afghan leader, Hamid Karzai, with his confident if wary expression, his regal cape and bold karakul hat made from the skin of a sheep fetus. The pity is that Americans did not get to know such notable Pashtuns as the guerrilla commander Abdul Haq, slain in a treacherous 2001 ambush in Afghanistan, and Sayd Bahauddin Majrooh, a poet and philosopher assassinated in 1987, almost surely on orders of a U.S.-assisted Afghan rival. These friends of freedom were drawn from the same gene pool that gave Afghanistan (where Pashtuns form the dominant ethnic group) its great warrior-emperors, as well as its poets, smugglers and assassins.

That the Pashtuns were indomitable was confirmed by Britain's defeat in the First Afghan War (1838–1840), a humiliating debacle that ended an unbroken succession of victories by the Raj's armies. In

1846, having concluded they could not change or pacify the Pashtuns, two British political officers, Henry Lawrence and Harry Lumsden, struck on the idea of recruiting them. Thus originated the Queen's Own Corps of Guides, an elite irregular force whose colors and emblems—crossed tulwers (or curved sabers) and the slogan “Rough and Ready”—became the most celebrated in British India. Initially, Lumsden startled his superiors by garbing the Guides in a dun-colored local fabric called khaki (from Persian for dust) instead of the regulation scarlet. The shock wore off, the use of khaki proliferated, and the Guides proved their military worth, becoming the prototype for Britain's Special Forces and America's Green Berets.

The British romance with the Pashtuns deepened after the Second Afghan War (1878–1881), which ended in a standoff. Despite the recurrent raids and counterraids on the frontier, the scuffles that inspired reams of Kipling's verse, there followed an interlude of relative calm during the eighteen-year tenure of Sir Robert Warburton as warden of the Khyber Pass, beginning in 1879. Warburton's mother happened to be an Afghan princess—a niece of the renowned Emir Dost Mohammed—and thus he spoke the languages and understood the mores of Pashtun tribes. It was Warburton who established the Khyber Rifles, still garrisoned by Pakistan on the far side of the pass. As a biographer notes, his camp became the rendezvous of mutually hostile clans, and he traveled with no weapon but a walking stick: “Able to converse freely with the learned in Persian, and with the common folk in the vernacular Pushto, he succeeded by his acquaintance with tribal life and character, in gaining an influence over the border Afghans which has never been equaled.”

Warburton's era was drawing to an end in 1897, when an uprising broke out in the Swat valley on the North-West Frontier, threatening a British garrison on the

Malakand pass. General Sir Bindon Blood, a commander famous for his “butcher and beat it” raids, mobilized a British field force of three brigades. Among the officers flocking to the Malakand field force was a young subaltern, Lieutenant Winston Churchill. It was his first military engagement, and he doubled as a correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph*. As he wrote to his mother, Lady Randolph Churchill, “The danger & difficulty of attacking these active fierce hill men is extreme. They can get up in the hills twice as fast as we can—and shoot wonderfully well with Martini Henry rifles. It is a war without quarter. They kill and mutilate everyone they catch and we do not hesitate to finish their wounded off. I have seen several things wh[ich] have not been very pretty since I have been up here—but as you will believe I have not soiled my hands with any dirty work—though I recognize the necessity of some things. All this however you need not publish.”

☞ Still, it is too facile to stereotype the Pashtuns, who now number some 12 million or more, most inhabiting the squat stony villages straddling the Durand Line, which nominally demarcates Pakistan from Afghanistan. No foreigner has ever subdued them, and Islamabad’s writ effectively ceases where the so-called Pashtun tribal areas begin. They are indeed devout Muslims, and central to their way of life is a code of honor so exacting that vendettas persist for generations. It is no less the case that mobs in Peshawar screaming “Death to America!” after 9/11 were recruited from Pashtun clans, with names resounding like a drumroll: Afridi, Khattak, Oraksai, Bangash, Wazir, Mahsud, Yusufzai.

Yet this is scarcely the whole story. Forgotten is the paradoxical fact that the foremost Pashtun leader in the struggle against British rule was a dedicated pacifist, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, once famous as the “frontier Gandhi.” His followers, nicknamed the Red Shirts, had first to swear, “I shall never use

violence. I shall not retaliate or take revenge, and shall forgive anyone who indulges in oppression and excesses against me.” For upwards of two decades Ghaffar Khan and his Khudai Khidmatgar (“Servants of God”) fought alongside Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress Party for a united, democratic and secular India.

Nearly everybody who has looked into this history has been fascinated, moved and astonished. Mukilika Banerjee first heard of the Red Shirts in the 1990s while a graduate student in New Delhi. Impressed and curious, she settled on the frontier, learned Pushto, and managed to interview seventy surviving ex-Servants of God for her study, *The Pathan Unarmed*. She found that Ghaffar Khan’s pacifism derived from his concept of jihad, or holy war: “Nonviolent civil disobedience offered the chance of martyrdom in its purest form, since putting one’s life conspicuously in one’s enemy’s hands was itself the key act, and death incurred in the process was not a defeat or a tragedy: rather the act of witness to an enemy’s injustice.... In his recruiting speeches, therefore, [Ghaffar Khan] was offering to each and every Pathan not the mere possibility of death, but rather the opportunity of glorious sacrifice and martyrdom.”

Like her incredulous predecessors, Banerjee discovered that Ghaffar Khan, starting in the 1920s, managed to recruit a nonviolent army of 100,000 followers, who shared a uniform frugally stained with brick dust. The army’s power was confirmed in 1930, when its general strike paralyzed Peshawar, the provincial capital, for five days, its supporters having braved arrest and torture by the Raj’s police. Initially, because they were deemed so intractable, Pashtuns were denied even the limited franchise granted in the early 1900s elsewhere in British India, but this changed with the passage of the 1935 Government of India Act. In successive elections, the Red Shirts prevailed, forming provincial governments under Chief Minister Dr. Khan Sahib (as he

is usually styled), the British-educated physician brother of Ghaffar Khan. Meanwhile, Ghaffar, standing six feet, three inches, instantly recognizable with his nobly nose and homely features, became an arm-in-arm companion to Mahatma Gandhi, who pronounced the Red Shirt movement a miracle. Notwithstanding his pacifism and his liberal views on secularism and women's rights, Ghaffar Khan became a Pashtun folk hero, acclaimed as Badshah Khan, or khan of khans.

This is documented in a recent book by the Indian historian Parshotam Mehra, *The North-West Frontier Drama, 1945–1947*. Combing through long unexamined records, the author found that in 1932, the NWFP, with a population of just 3 million, accounted for 5,557 convictions for civil disobedience compared with 1,620 in the Punjab, which had five times as many inhabitants.

Muslims constituted so overwhelming a majority on the frontier that the Muslim League's cry of "Islam in danger" failed to resonate. This helps explain why a movement allied with Gandhi's Hindu-led Congress took root. No less important, Ghaffar Khan had tapped into a sense of frustrated common identity among Pashtuns living on both sides of the Afghan border. He and his movement talked of a "Pashtunistan," an independent or quasi-autonomous Pashtun homeland, the content of the idea varying from time to time. It was this aspect of the movement that most troubled the British and, even more, the Muslim League. It led to Ghaffar Khan's encounter with another important if forgotten figure, Sir Olaf Caroe.

☞ Caroe was typical of his generation of Indian civil servants, specifically those Britons who came of age during the Great War who were dubbed the "Guardians" by his colleague and historian of the Raj, Philip Mason. By the time Caroe entered the elite Indian Civil Service in 1919, by way of Win-

chester and Oxford, he and his cohort did not need to be warned that the empire was mortal. Even as the empire reached its territorial zenith between the two wars, its Guardians began peering anxiously down the road, glancing sideways at America and thinking hard about the possible decline to come. Like Curzon, Caroe was by instinct a Russophobe, the more so in the unnerving wake of the Bolshevik Revolution. During the 1920s, when Soviet forces retook Central Asia and the Caucasus, Comintern leaders ominously threatened to set the East ablaze. Caroe's first postings were on the Punjab, the North-West Frontier and Baluchistan, where the young political officer witnessed the gathering nationalist uprising among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. A stint on the Persian Gulf added to his stock of knowledge about Islam, oil and great power rivalry. When he moved on to New Delhi, becoming British India's foreign secretary during World War II, Caroe began to implement his strategic views. To preempt contested borderlands, he quietly extended India's frontier eastward into Tibet by recalling the Raj's official compendium of treaties and reissuing a new edition, under the old date, that included a frontier agreement repudiated by China, thereby sowing the seeds for India's 1962 border war with Beijing.

At the end of World War II, in what seemed a well earned coda, Caroe was named governor of the North-West Frontier Province. The match had an emotional resonance. Like other political officers, Caroe adhered to the Forward School, believing that Britain and its imperial charges needed to take the initiative against potential adversaries. Along with other frontiersmen, he had striven to erect a firewall against the Soviet Union. And the idea of a separate Muslim state was already in the air.

While researching his biography of Jinnah, Stanley Wolpert came upon this clairvoyant testimony to a parliamentary committee in 1933 by Sir Michael O'Dwyer,

who had been Caroe's chief as governor of the Punjab, saying that if the Hindu majority "endeavors to force its will on provinces with a Muslim majority, what is to prevent a breakaway of the Punjab, Sind, Baluchistan, and the NWF, *as already foreshadowed* and their possibly forming a Muslim federation of their own?" (Wolpert's emphasis.) Had O'Dwyer actually read Rahmat Ali's obscure, recently published Cambridge pamphlet, or, as Wolpert asks, "Could he perhaps have helped inspire it?"

An essential component of the Forward School mystique was the "martial races" thesis—the conviction that the best fighters in the Indian army came from the mountainous north (e.g., the frontier Pashtuns, the Nepalese Gurkhas, the Punjabi Sikhs and the highland Rajputs). "The notion of 'martial races' drew sustenance from a variety of elements in the cultural baggage of late Victorian England," writes Thomas R. Metcalf in *Ideologies of the Raj*. "As the Aryans had once conquered northern India, it was assumed that those races descended from them possessed superior military capabilities." Some even claimed that the blue eyes and fair hair found among Pashtuns proved they retained intact genetic traces of Alexander the Great's armies. The Pashtun delight in sports and their high-spirited camaraderie on the frontier also argued for their superiority vis-à-vis the supposedly effeminate Bengali shopkeepers and pen-pushing civil servants.

Caroe admired the Pashtuns to the point of idolatry. The scholarly crown of his retirement years was a 521-page treatise, *The Pathans, 550 B.C.—A.D. 1957*, whose general tenor is signaled in the first paragraph: "This is a book I was bound some time to write, having had the fortune to spend half a lifetime among Pathans." What follows is a full-scale history, including elaborate pull-out maps indicating tribal areas, translations of the Pashtun bard Khushal Khan Khatak and photographs meant to underscore the kinship between Alexander the Great and

contemporary Pashtun militiamen. Caroe dedicated his book to the first president of Pakistan, General Iskander Mirra, who also was the first (in 1958) to dissolve parliament and impose martial law, paving the way for the dictatorship of Field Marshal Ayub Khan, the initiator of Islamabad's strategic ties with Washington.

All this lay ahead in 1946 when Caroe took up the reins as governor in Peshawar. His predecessor, Sir George Cunningham, at that point found little enthusiasm for joining Pakistan. In his diary, the outgoing governor quoted a Muslim visitor as saying that for "the average Pathan villager, a suggestion of Hindu domination was only laughable." The Muslim League's weakness was confirmed in March provincial elections. Though Muslim League candidates inveighed against the Hindu Raj, Dr. Khan Sahib's Congress Party nonetheless carried thirty of fifty legislative seats. As independence loomed, the North-West Frontier was India's only Muslim-majority province not governed by a Muslim League ministry. This put its last British governor in a delicate position. When Nehru proposed a tour of the frontier to rally his Congress allies, Caroe warned vainly against the trip on security grounds. On his arrival in September 1946, Nehru was greeted at the airport by thousands of jeering Islamic militants waving black flags and, as Caroe had predicted, the trip proved a humiliation. The stage was set for months of communal thuggery as Muslim gangs attacked Sikhs and Hindus in the province's Settled Areas (as they were formally known).

To the Khan brothers, the import was plain—that Sir Olaf was promoting the tumult to discredit them. On May 6, 1947, Ghaffar Khan accused Caroe of joining "an open conspiracy with the Muslim League to bathe the province in blood" by condoning "the murder of innocent men, women and children."

The charge was delivered in anger. Doubtless Dr. Khan Sahib's rattled provin-

cial government made its own overzealous mistakes, and I find it hard to believe that Caroe connived in murder. Yet he did have a record of surreptitiously promoting his strongly held views and leaving few fingerprints. Some thumb marks, however, survived. Tucked deep in State Department files in the National Archives in Washington is this report by a visiting U.S. official of his interview with Caroe in May 1947: “Sir Olaf indicated that the Foreign Office tended too much to look upon India as a peninsular unit like Italy.... He felt it did not sufficiently realize the great political importance of the Northwest Frontier Province and Afghanistan, which he described as ‘the uncertain vestibule’ in future relations between Soviet Russia and India.” Caroe expressed regret that his own government played down Soviet penetration of frontier areas like Gilgit, Chitral, and Swat, adding “he would not be unfavorable to the establishment of a separate Pakhistan [*sic*].”

Nehru and the Khan brothers thus had valid grounds for doubting Caroe’s impartiality when the viceroy took the unusual step of approving a plebiscite on the future of the frontier province—elsewhere the choice between India and Pakistan was made by provincial ministries or princely rulers. As a gesture to Congress, Mountbatten also determined that Caroe was “suffering badly from nerves” and asked him to request a leave as provincial governor until the transfer of power. Caroe complied. A deputy presided as the referendum took place on July 17, its one-sided judgment in favor of joining Pakistan marred by charges of fraud and intimidation and by a boycott that kept half the 5 million eligible Pashtun voters from the polls. On August 17, as Pakistan came into existence, Dr. Khan Sahib refused to resign as chief minister. He and his cabinet were peremptorily dismissed, and a Muslim League ministry installed. Dr. Khan Sahib was subsequently jailed and later made his peace with Islamabad, serving briefly as a Pakistani minister

before he was slain by an unforgiving Pashtun in 1957 in Lahore.

Of the leaders, the greatest loser was Ghaffar Khan. In newborn India he was all but abandoned by his former Congress Party allies, while in newborn Pakistan he was charged with sedition and promoting separatism. It made no difference that he took an oath of allegiance to the new state, or that he repeatedly insisted he sought autonomy for Pashtuns within Pakistan. He was repeatedly jailed or kept under house arrest until his death in Peshawar in 1988 at the age of ninety-eight. At his request, he was buried in the Afghan city of Jalalabad. His memory was honored by a cease-fire in the ongoing Afghan war as 20,000 mourners formed a cortege extending through the Khyber Pass into Afghanistan. Otherwise, the khan of khans was simply scrubbed from history—so wholly forgotten that even in the post-9/11 deluge of dispatches from Pakistan, the sole reference to Ghaffar Khan this writer noted in any American publication lay deep within a *New Yorker* article by the British journalist Isabel Hilton.

☞ A further twist in the quixotic saga of the Frontier Gandhi is that Afghanistan, whose cause he always defended, helped consign Ghaffar Khan to obscurity. His memory was clouded by the protracted dispute over the validity of the Durand Line. This boundary between British India and Afghanistan, with its erroneously authoritative name, was demarcated in 1894–1896 by Sir Mortimer Durand, a frontier officer known for his battlefield valor in Afghanistan, his knowledge of inner Asia, and his love of games. By agreement between the British Raj and the Afghan emir, Durand and his team of surveyors sought to end the uncertainty over control of contested Pashtun areas. But the tribes were not consulted, nor was the demarcation based on sound topography. The line became a nebulous buffer within a buffer. As a result, writes the Indian frontier historian Parshotam Mehra,

tribal brawls proved an enduring problem for the British: “[They] could neither abandon the frontier nor occupy the tribal areas and thus found themselves, for most part, engaged in an interminable war with the tribes. Afghanistan, however, got a measure of respite, for its rulers found it easy to maintain contact and exercise influence with the tribes in the British sphere, across the Durand Line.”

The resulting skirmishes and recurrent uprisings persisted through the 1930s and (with clumsy Axis encouragement) during World War II. In 1944, sensing the approaching demise of the Raj, the Kabul government sent a note reminding the British of Afghan interest in the fate of the Pashtuns. As Louis Dupree writes in his encyclopedic history of Afghanistan, the British replied that “since, in their opinion, the Durand Line was an international boundary, it should not concern the Afghans.” Later, leading up to independence, Lord Mountbatten tacked on a vague addendum: “Agreements with the tribes on the North-West Frontier will have to be negotiated with the appropriate successor authority.” Pakistan thus inherited the intractable British “problem.” In 1947 the Afghan king, Mohammad Zahir Shah (astonishingly, the same monarch who returned from exile to Kabul in 2002 as a symbol of putative continuity), notified the Pakistanis that his government viewed the Durand Line as an imperial anachronism, overdue for overhaul. Pakistan spurned the overture, and in riposte Afghanistan became the sole dissenter at the United Nations in opposing Pakistan’s accession to the world organization. Thus recommenced a quarrel that over time has proved calamitous for both countries.

Each made inflated charges and each promoted unrest across the disputed frontier. Both resorted to mutually crippling sanctions that closed ports and highways. Both embraced policies that were inconsistent or impenetrable. Pakistan, for example,

has favored a plebiscite to resolve the dispute with India over Kashmir but rejects out of hand a similar resolution for the Pashtuns, who are also divided by an arbitrary boundary. All seemed fair in a dispute waged without quarter: Pakistan’s Radio Free Afghanistan beamed incendiary words across the Khyber, while Afghanistan gave covert encouragement to the Waziri insurgent, Mirza Ali Khan, notorious on the frontier as the fakir of Ipi. During the 1930s he held off 30,000 British troops and turned to the Nazis for help during World War II before taking up arms against Pakistan; he was a tireless troublemaker until his last breath in 1960. Well-intended mediators soon came to dread entanglement in the flypaper of the “Pashtunistan” dispute.

Always there was the suspicion of perfidy and dark plots, as in the 1951 assassination of Pakistan’s first prime minister, Liaqat Ali Khan, the politician who had been to Jinnah what Nehru had been to Gandhi. A confirmed secularist, Liaqat Ali Khan was killed at a public meeting in Rawalpindi by an Afghan exile. Kabul denied all involvement, and its disclaimer was formally accepted. But the stain of doubt endured.

From this detritus of empire emerged a new alignment that persisted for decades. When Pakistan blocked Afghanistan’s access to the Western trading system, Kabul began looking north to the Soviet Union for favorable trade deals, development aid and military assistance. As the Cold War advanced, Afghans became expert at coaxing aid from rival suitors, obtaining U.S. help for roads and schools in the south and Russian aid in the north. Cautiously but not egregiously, Kabul tilted to Moscow in the 1960s. Its leaders turned to the international system for resources to expand the modern sector in their capital without confronting rural oligarchs. This equilibrium persisted even after the 1973 ouster of King Zahir Shah by his envious and ambitious cousin, Mohammed Daoud, who proclaimed a republic. (In the

Pashtun language, the same word doubles for enemy and cousin.)

In short, it seemed a vindication of Olaf Caroe's global strategy. Afghanistan was to all appearances a stable buffer, with Pakistan a solid firewall protecting the Persian Gulf. After returning to Britain in 1947, Caroe continued as an influential counselor on the region's affairs. He sketched his thoughts in an essay appearing in *Round Table* (March 1949), the imperial house organ. There he approvingly noted the formation of NATO, adding that the common interests linking the North Atlantic nations also converged in the Persian Gulf. He elaborated his thesis in *Wells of Power: The Oilfields of South-Western Asia* (1951), which called on Washington to take up its great power responsibilities and erect a "northern screen" around the Persian Gulf's oil fields, the prospective partners being Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan. He offered a paean to Pakistan as the potential leader with a special mission: "In politics, as in things of the spirit, a marriage of forces, themselves destined to perish, may generate a fresh force of greater power. It is not too much to hope that, through Pakistan, some new strength of this kind may animate the Muslim world."

Alas, Caroe's marriage came unstuck, and what he had assumed would be the glue—the appeal of Islam—proved over time its solvent. Under General Zia's military dictatorship, Pakistan bet heavily (with covert U.S. support) on evicting the Soviets from Afghanistan in the 1980s by arming an international Islamic brigade to do the job. From frontier training camps arose the Taliban and Osama bin Laden, and after 9/11 the United States turned to Pakistan as a critical ally in the war against the forces it helped father. The result was a shaky alliance with a nation deeply at odds with itself. Just how shaky became clear in October 2002 after national and regional elections meant to stabilize the rule of President Pervez Musharraf, the former army chief of

staff who had seized power three years earlier. The votes resulted in an unwelcome surge of support for a coalition of anti-American Islamic parties known by the initials MMA, whose leader, Qazi Hussain Ahmed, assured an exultant rally in Peshawar, "It is a revolution. We will not accept U.S. bases and Western culture."

The outcome was a sobering setback for the self-effacing and secular-minded General Musharraf, whose own career encapsulates the theme of this essay. He was born in New Delhi in 1943 to a father who was a diplomat in the colonial foreign office. At four years of age, he was among the millions of Muslims forced by partition to move west into Pakistan. "It was early August," his mother, Zarin, recalled in an interview with the *New Yorker's* Mary Anne Weaver, "and the communal riots had already begun. We fled for our lives. We took the last train out of Delhi for Karachi.... The train passed through entire neighborhoods that had been set to the torch. Bodies were lying along the rail tracks. There was so much blood. Blood and chaos were everywhere. The train journey took us three days, and we used to halt at night. We were terrified of the Hindus and Sikhs, who were massacring people in the trains moving west. We had no water, no food. It was summer and it was terribly hot. I had three small children. We could take nothing with us. We had to leave everything behind—our house, my father's house, my mother's house. We had to start over from scratch."

Young Pervez climbed upward like other bright Pakistanis via the armed forces, where he spent most of his career battling India. Now he faces a more ambiguous adversary in the form of an Islamist rising, especially in Baluchistan and the North-West Frontier. It is difficult to conjure a politically more difficult border area. Along the North-West Frontier, there are said to be 7 million Kalishnikovs, or one for every grown man. Peshawar is the hub of a thriving black market in drugs and weapons, its

slums and refugee camps the recruiting ground for jihadists who would happily kill every infidel anywhere. The flavor is suggested by Weaver's account in her recent book *Pakistan: In the Shadow of Jihad and Afghanistan*. She describes her visit to the largest *madrassa* (or seminary) in the frontier province, which is among the most militant in Pakistan. "What do you think of Osama bin Laden?" she asked the seminary's chancellor, Maulana Sami ul-Hag. "What do you think of Abraham Lincoln?" came the response. It is obvious that America's encounter with the Pashtuns, the remarkable people living on both sides of the Afghan frontier, has barely begun. ●

A Note on Sources

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