

GEOGRAPHIC SUPPORT PROJECT

THE DURAND LINE



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THE DURAND LINE

The Durand Line is named after the British Col. Mortimer Durand, who in 1893 successfully negotiated a frontier agreement between Afghanistan and India. This Line was unchallenged as the legal political boundary until 1947 when, with the partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan, Afghanistan rejected the Line as a boundary. The Afghan rejection is based on the premise that the Durand Agreement, which established the Durand Line, lapsed when the British transferred control to Pakistan in 1947.

The Durand Agreement did not describe the Durand Line as a boundary. In explanation of this fact Sir Olaf Caroe, a noted authority on the problem, remarks as follows:

It is true that the Agreement did not describe the line as the boundary of India, but as the frontier of the Amir's [Abd-ur-Rahman] domain and the line beyond which neither side would exercise influence. This was because the British Government did not intend to absorb the tribes into their administrative system, only to extend their own [British], and exclude the Amir's, authority from the territory east and south of the line. In the international aspect this was of no account, for the Amir had renounced sovereignty beyond the line.*

* Caroe, Olaf. The Pathans; 550 B.C. - A.D. 1957; London, 1958, p. 382.

The Durand Line does not extend the full distance of the boundary between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The western terminus of the line is the junction of the Iran-Afghanistan-Pakistan borders (see accompanying map). The eastern terminus is the junction of the Afghanistan-Pakistan-Jammu and Kashmir borders. From the eastern terminus of the Line eastward to the junction of the Afghanistan-China-Jammu and Kashmir borders the boundary is undefined by any agreement. Most of the Durand Line has been demarcated on the ground. The entire stretch between the western terminus of the line and a point northwest of Pārachinār, as well as a small sector in the vicinity of the Khyber Pass, are demarcated; the remainder is undemarcated.

Of and by itself the Durand Line has been the source of only minor disagreements between Afghanistan and Pakistan. While Afghanistan has unilaterally rejected the Line as a boundary and Pakistan still recognises it, the Line continues to function as a typical boundary in this part of the world. The boundary situation is further complicated by the fact that a major territorial and ethnic problem area -- Pushtunistan -- lies astride the Durand Line. Afghanistan would be happy to carve a new state, created out of the Pushtun tribal lands lying in Pakistan east of the Durand Line, while retaining those Pushtun areas in Afghanistan west of the Line. In spite of protestation to the contrary, it is possible that Afghanistan may want to annex such a newly created state. The minimum area of Pushtunistan would embrace most if not all of the lands of the Pushtun tribes now residing in Pakistan -- the very area over which Afghanistan renounced sovereignty in 1893. The maximum area would include, in addition, all of Pakistani Baluchistan. An independent Pushtunistan

would weaken Pakistan and place a new state at a principal gateway to the Indian subcontinent.

Friction over the Pushtunistan issue has occurred along several sectors of the Durand Line, both demarcated and undemarcated, on one or both sides of the Line. Over the years the chief area of concern has been the Mohmand tribal area where the Durand Line divides the Mohmand clans owing allegiance to Afghanistan from those owing allegiance to Pakistan (before 1947 to British India). Prior to 1947, Britain had offered to rectify the Line in this area in a manner that she felt was favorable to Afghanistan. At the time, Afghanistan rejected the offer and since then has had no interest in redefining and demarcating a line that she no longer recognises as a boundary.

Conclusion

The Durand Line has been a legal boundary for 67 years. Of itself the Line appears to offer little opportunity for leverage against either country. On the other hand the complex Pushtunistan problem, mentioned only briefly in this report, might offer a variety of opportunities for pressure.



