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## Afghan Rebel Gateway

# *Peshawar: Many Lured by Intrigue*

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PESHAWAR, Pakistan—Rudyard Kipling described this dusty frontier capital near the Khyber Pass as a "city of evil countenances." Other cities lived, Peshawar lurked. Even the shadows here had shadows.

In his 19th-Century stories and ballads, Kipling painted Peshawar as a place peopled by tribal warriors, smugglers, soldiers of fortune, spies—the playground for the great game of espionage between imperial Russia and its enemies.

Peshawar (pronounced pesh-AH-wur) has not changed. It is still murky with intrigue and corruption. Cold black eyes peer out of the narrow alleys of Qissa Khani, the centuries-old "storytellers' bazaar."

Last month, the provincial governor was forced to resign after his son was charged with running large shipments of heroin between Peshawar and New York. Among its many vices, Peshawar is one of the world's heroin capitals.

### **Thriving Drug Commerce**

According to U.S. drug enforcement agents based here, as much as half of the American supply of heroin passes through this city in Pakistan's North-West Frontier province, only 35 miles from the Khyber Pass that leads from Afghanistan.

The opium poppies from which heroin is made are grown in Afghanistan and remote areas of northern Pakistan. Big-time drug dealers have added the Mercedes-Benz to the traditional Peshawar street chaos of Land Rovers, camel carts and horse-drawn carriages.

Kipling's fearsome tribal warriors—Pathans and Afridis and Ghilzais—still strut through the streets. They are, for the most part,

inarticulate men who express themselves in the ancient Peshawar way, by firing their rifles into the air.

Not long ago when a cocktail party was interrupted by a burst from a Kalashnikov rifle, Mohammed Gailani observed that "some-one is celebrating a new baby or they are happy for some reason."

### **Rebel Stronghold**

Gailani is an American-educated commander with the National Islamic Front of Afghanistan, one of more than a dozen *moujahedeen* rebel groups based here. Over the last decade and a half, the population of Peshawar has nearly tripled, to an estimated 700,000 people. Afghan refugees live here, and their *moujahedeen* leaders use the city as a base for carrying on the war against the more than 100,000 Soviet troops in Afghanistan—and often against one another in the streets of Peshawar.

There are soldiers of fortune and adventurers here too, drawn irresistibly to the war.

And spies. Except for Berlin, this might be the spy capital of the world. It is field headquarters for the largest covert CIA operation since the Vietnam War. According to published reports, the CIA poured more than \$400 million into Pakistan last year to support the Afghan resistance.

The war has given military analysts their first opportunity since World War II to study Soviet weapons and tactics. The analysts were delighted last year when deserting Afghan officers landed at an air base near here in the latest-model Soviet MI-24 helicopter.

They were not so pleased, however, when an American-supplied Afghan rebel base was blown up near Badaber, the site of the old CIA air base from which Francis Gary Powers took off in 1960 in a U-2 spy plane that was shot down deep inside the Soviet Union. In the Badaber explosion, 12 imprisoned Soviet soldiers were killed and the force of the blast scattered weapons across the countryside.

The explosion was heard in Peshawar, 20 miles away, where such sounds are not unusual. There are bombings here perhaps every other week, and Soviet secret agents and their colleagues in the Afghan secret police are usually blamed.

Many of the bombings are proba-

bly the work of one of the rebel groups. There is fierce competition among the groups for U.S. money and equipment, not all of which makes it into Afghanistan.

The Saudi Arabian, Chinese and Japanese governments also provide military support for the rebels, reportedly about \$200 million worth a year. As in all wars, there are fortunes to be made.

The rebel groups are also divided by natural animosities that go back to tribal divisions in Afghanistan. The 350,000 or so refugees who have lived in Peshawar since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 include royalists seeking the return of King Mohammed Zahir Shah, who is in exile in Rome; Maoists; Farsi-speaking Shia Muslims; obscure Sufi sects and dozens of tribes speaking dozens of languages and dialects.

### **Diners Take Care**

Peshawar is a place, like Beirut, where it is unwise to sit near a window. When a bomb disrupted dinner last month at Lala's Grill, a popular restaurant at a hotel front, the only people hurt were those sitting near windows.

A few days after the bombing, Lala's was patched up and waiters were hustling platters of mutton, a river fish called *tikka*, spiced quail and Russian salad. The place was crowded with its usual cast of unusual characters—Afghans in turbans the size of bed sheets, French nurses, mysterious characters in dark glasses studying maps, local politicians, even tourists. Peter Lorre and Sidney Greenstreet would feel right at home.

Lala's is the gathering place for the flotsam of the war zone—reporters and would-be reporters, dope dealers and would-be dope dealers, rebel commanders and would-be rebel commanders. And there are the war freaks.

"There are plenty of Walter Mitty types," Theodore C. Mataxis, a retired U.S. Army officer who is here promoting the rebel cause, said the other day, "and a lot of young men who drift in here and want to grab the elephant by the tail. They are on their way to Afghanistan to test themselves. They want to see how they will react under fire."

Among the regulars at Lala's, past and present, have been:  
—Tanaka, a Japanese martial

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arts champion who recently went into Afghanistan to teach mujahedeen rebels how to kill Soviets with their bare hands. He was stricken with dysentery and had to come out before completing his mission. Still, there are several photographs scattered around Peshawar that show him leaping high in the mountain air to demonstrate his lethal kick, with an Afghan rebel looking on uncomprehendingly.

#### 'Freedom Fighters' Varied

—Lech Zontak, deceased, a Polish-Australian with a fierce hatred for Communists, particularly Polish Communists. According to Aaron Einfrank, a reporter for Radio Free Europe who knew him, "Lech had a dream of bombing the Polish Embassy in Kabul," the Afghan capital.

"He wanted to form an international brigade of East Europeans to fight against the Communists in Afghanistan," Einfrank said. "It was a good idea, but Lech was the only member." Last fall, Zontak was killed in action.

—Ahmed and Kareem (not their real names), two American Black Muslims who sympathize with the rebel cause and came here to fight. Unfortunately, their fighting was not always limited to the battlefield. Christian Destremau, who is based in Peshawar with a French aid group, said he ran into Ahmed and Kareem in Afghanistan when he was visiting the big rebel base at Zhawar, in Paktia province.

"They accused me of being an infidel," he said, "and the next thing I knew I was on the ground and one of them was kicking me."

Destremau said he had not made the dangerous trip into Afghanistan to be beaten up by two Americans. He said the Afghan fighters, who have a high standard of hospitality, finally stopped the attack.

—Mataxis, an amiable, decorated veteran of World War II, Korea and Vietnam who retired from the U.S. Army in 1972 as a brigadier general. He is known affectionately in the Peshawar expatriate community as "General Ouzo," presumably because his name resembles a well-known brand of the Greek liqueur.

Mataxis, 69, bald and extremely fit, is the field representative here for the Committee For a Free Afghanistan, a Washington lobbying group that supports the rebels. Because of his extensive knowl-

edge of weapons and guerrilla tactics, he is often consulted by rebel commanders. Before retiring from the Army, Mataxis served as a consultant to the Singapore Defense Ministry and as commandant of cadets at Valley Forge Military Academy in Pennsylvania.

"I feel very sorry for the Afghans and what has happened," he said. "I'm of the school that says the Russians are driving through (Afghanistan and Pakistan) to get to the warm water of the Arabian Sea. I thought rather than sitting around grousing at the club, watching the pine cones fall, I would try to do something to help."

Mataxis coordinates a program that provides humanitarian aid (seeds and medicine, for example) to rebel groups. He also arranges publicity visits to the United States for rebel leaders.

"Politically, we don't have much trouble here," he said, recalling that this was not the case during his two tours in Vietnam. "This is a good war—mother and apple pie and all that—defending the poor Afghans against the Russians."

In fact, this once-remote outpost at the fringe of the British Empire is now a favorite stopping point for Western VIPs, particularly American congressmen. Ever since Zbigniew Brzezinski, national security adviser to President Jimmy Carter, came here and pointed a rifle toward Afghanistan, word has gotten around that this is a good show if you are on official business anywhere near Pakistan.

#### Lots of Host Duties

Vice President George Bush came in May, 1984. Officials at the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad say they are occasionally alerted that President Reagan is on the verge of visiting. Rep. Charles Wilson (D-Tex.), a strong supporter of covert funding for the Afghan rebels, arrived with a girlfriend, who slogged through the mud in white, high-heeled boots.

The American consul in Peshawar, Alan W. Eastham, finally had to ask for time off after hosting VIP delegations for nine straight weekends.

Visitors come to Peshawar by helicopter. An embassy officer who is familiar with the routine said, "Some don't even bother to go to the capital at Islamabad. They have it timed so they can do the whole tour in four hours."

The dignitaries arrive at a model Afghan refugee camp at the edge of

Peshawar with magnificent hills serving as a backdrop. They are taken into a large tent for a meeting with the elders of the camp.

The ranking VIP makes a speech in English, though none of the elders speak any English, and often the translation is widely at variance with the speech as delivered. On one occasion, for example, "we support your fight against communism" was translated as "we support your holy battle against the infidels."

Afterward, the elders give the dignitaries rousing cheers and one of them rises to respond. Usually this person throws in a request for more weapons, but this is not generally translated for the visitors.

When Vice President Bush was here, Gov. Fazle Haq of North-West Frontier province, a wily politician, insisted that the elder's remarks be prepared by the governor's office to ensure that it contained no request for guns.

The elder chosen to greet the visitor could not read, and he spent hours memorizing the speech as it was read to him. When he rose to recite it, many of his listeners smiled broadly, for he chanted it as though reading from the Koran. There was no request for weapons, though, and Fazle Haq nodded with pleasure.

After meeting with the elders, visitors are usually flown by helicopter to the regimental headquarters of the Khyber Rifles, where they watch tribal dancers and are served lunch on the regimental silver. Finally, they are taken to a place outside the town of Landi Kotl, where they can survey the world's most famous pass and imagine that they are Tamerlane or Genghis Khan or Alexander the Great, even though those historic invaders used a different pass, for the Khyber passage was not completed until the end of the 16th Century.

This is what is known as the "Peshawar Package Tour."

"We have a lot of drawing cards," a U.S. official based in Peshawar said—"drugs, the war, refugees, even the Pathan people themselves. That's why this town has more important visitors than most foreign capitals."

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### **Locals Used to It All**

About the only people who are not particularly impressed by the bizarre goings-on in Peshawar are the locals. The businessmen, in particular, pay little attention to politics or the war.

The hottest items in any Peshawar bazaar are smuggled goods. Among the best buys now in the Bara Market at the edge of town are Soviet-made refrigerators and air-conditioners, brought across Afghanistan by truck and camel.

If pressed, a Peshawar merchant will tell you, "Japanese are better."

Michael Close, who is British, has taught English and history at Islamia and Edwardes colleges here since 1947, and he says he finds Peshawar a "fairly unattractive place."

He prefers the countryside. What he does find exciting, he confided, is the American West, which he visited last year. He showed a visitor a photograph of a deputy sheriff standing in front of his patrol car in Bighorn County, Wyo. The deputy is wearing a cowboy hat and boots.

"Can you imagine meeting a real sheriff?" Close said. "I was very impressed."