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Pakistan's Afghan Refugees: Implications and Prospects (U)

A Research Paper

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OF 11-1988
October 1982



Refugees lined up to receive relief donations
at the camp. The refugees are women, children
and the elderly.



Upham Park
admission 25

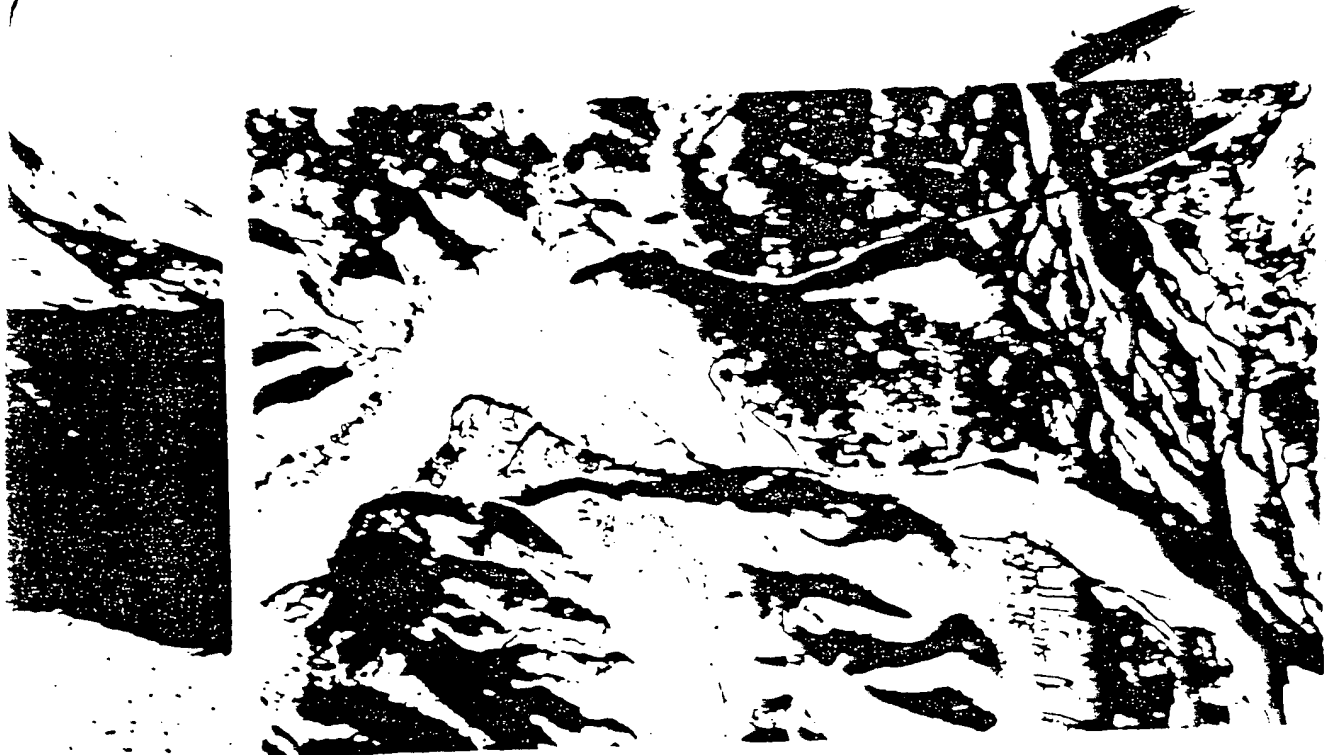


Afghan Pashtun. Exemplifies the strong and adaptable character of Pashtun tribesmen. (U)



Afghan refugees holding mud-walled compound in refugee village north of Peshawar. (U)





1. View of Kurrum valley. H. 32, N. 70, 1911, 551, 555.



2. Two men in traditional dress standing in the Kurrum valley. H. 32, N. 70, 1911, 551, 555.

Afghan Refugees: Implications and Prospects

The movement of more than 2.5 million Afghan refugees into Pakistan's western borderlands poses difficult problems for the government of Pakistan. Barring a political solution to the situation in Afghanistan that would motivate the refugees to return to their homeland, Pakistan is saddled with the world's largest refugee population in a region that lacks a resource base to support the influx. Should economic conditions deteriorate in the regions where the refugees are concentrated, or if aid to the refugee population is reduced, we believe that the attitude toward the refugees would change from toleration to resentment as they become job and resource competitors. Insurgent use of refugee encampments as safe havens risks Soviet-armed intrusions into Pakistani territory, but, in our opinion, the government may fear as much the penetration of Soviet agents into refugee groups or Pakistani tribes for subversive meddling in politically volatile frontier politics.

A strong concern of the United States is the prospect of an increase in opium poppy cultivation and heroin production in the tribal areas in Pakistan, where the refugees can be used as cheap labor. Should international support or Pakistani Government funding for the refugees decrease, an increase in Afghan opium in the tribal bazaars is likely because of the need to finance refugee subsistence and insurgent objectives.

Who Are They?

Since the spring of 1978, more than 2.7 million Afghans have been registered as refugees in Pakistan. Registration records indicate that 80 to 90 percent of them are Pushtun tribesmen, about a third of the estimated 6.5 to 7 million Pushtun ethnic community members in Afghanistan. (About half of Afghanistan's pre-1978 population was classified as Pushtun.) Many of the refugees brought livestock with them; most of them are farmers or farm laborers, some are pastoral nomads, and a lesser but significant number are professionals and the well-to-do.

300 New Towns

The Afghan refugees have doubled the number recorded in the 1981 census for Pakistan's western borderlands. To deal more effectively with the massive numbers, Pakistani relief officials group refugees where possible into camps averaging 5,000 to 7,000 persons, or 1,000 families each. Approximately 300 refugee tented villages (RTVs) have been established, most of which are in the formerly rural Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

The majority of the camps are clustered in six areas near major points of entry into Pakistan: the Bajaur-Dir area, the environs of Peshawar, the Kurram River valley, and the Gumal River valley in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP); and the Pishin-Quetta and the Chagai Hills areas in Baluchistan. Where

Refugees as Guests

The Pakistani Government publicly stresses the transitory nature of the refugees' stay in Pakistan by referring to them as guests, by encouraging the use of tents, and by discouraging activities that would place the refugees in competition with the local population. At the same time, the building of mud-walled structures by the refugees is quietly permitted to overcome the need to constantly replace tents that, buffeted by the elements, tatter in less than a year. Camp populations are also being dispersed to resettlement areas in NWFP districts away from the border both for security reasons and to alleviate the strain on overburdened resources in the frontier areas. Refugee businessmen and entrepreneurs, such as truckers, have been allowed to pursue commercial activities, except in ethnically sensitive areas of Baluchistan.

The Ethnic Factor

The Afghan refugees are largely confined to Pushtun ethnic areas in the North-West Frontier Province and Baluchistan, where they share kinship ties and a system of cultural values with the people among whom they live. Although

little open resentment of the refugees, some discontent has been voiced from elements of those groups affected by the refugee presence, namely:

- A narrow segment of the middle class pinched by rising prices caused by an increased demand for consumer items, food, and housing.
- Lower economic class groups with incomes in the range of Pakistani Government support payments to the refugees.
- Those tribesmen in direct competition with the refugees for water resources and grazing areas.
- Shiite tribesmen in conflict with Sunni Afghan refugees in the crowded Kurram valley.

We believe that ethnic homogeneity has been a key factor in the relatively low level of friction to date between the refugees and the local inhabitants. Movement of the refugees into non-Pushtun areas of Punjab and Sind, as seems inevitable, risks outbreaks of violence and the likelihood of exacerbating sensitive interethnic group relations in the domestic politics of Pakistan.

Resource Pressures

The refugee camps are located in areas that have been experiencing heavy native outmigration over the past decade. The probable cause, according to academic sources, is the continuing degradation of the natural environment in an area where traditionally 80 percent of the tribesmen have been dependent on some form of subsistence agriculture. More specifically, they pinpointed increased erosion and lowered agricultural productivity resulting from overgrazing, overcutting of the region's tree growth for firewood, and poor farming techniques.

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¹ Pakistani relief officials admit that the number of registered refugees is higher than that for those present in the camps, but they assume that overregistration roughly balances the number of unregistered refugees. UN refugee officials concede that a true number will never be known because of multiple entries, refugee movement, *purdah* restrictions (the sequestering of women), and hostility to all forms of official probing and census taking.

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We believe it unlikely that large numbers of refugees can be sustained in these resource-poor regions without continuing government subsidies or some form of economic development. Tribal landholding patterns preclude the sale of land to farmers among the refugees, and grazing space in the largely barren land—where large areas are required to support small herds—is limited, leaving little to accommodate refugees.

Regional Economic Impact

The influx of international relief supplies, government support funds, and remittance income from Pakistani Pushtuns working in the Gulf countries have blunted the economic impact of the refugees in the borderlands. One out of every two low-income households in the North-West Frontier Province, according to a

The Northwest Frontier Region: Historical-Geographic Overview

In the North-West Frontier Province, which shelters four-fifths of the refugees, the lands adjacent to the Afghan-Pakistani border are tribal territory. Administratively, the region—the Federally Administered Tribal Areas—is divided into agencies according to geographic and cultural criteria. Tribal law—the *Rushdunwali* Code—based on indigenous customs and traditions, governs these agencies except within 300 meters of roads and for small areas taken under government establishments, such as military posts, where Pakistani law is in force. The Pakistani Government is represented in each agency by a political agent, who is not only an administrator, but also, in essence, an ambassador to the tribes.

Official policy toward the tribal territories stresses gradual assimilation, avoiding the use of force or confrontation. Government controls spread through the mechanism of development: schools, hospitals, extended electric lines, tube wells, and irrigation projects, and especially road work. As the road network expands, so does the area subject to central government jurisdiction. Road improvement in the borderlands is pushed as much for political as for military or economic reasons.

In some agencies the tribesmen have more diligently guarded their autonomous status and, in particular, have resisted road construction. It was only during the last decade, for example, that the political agent for the Mohmand Agency was allowed to remain for several weeks at a time in the tribal territory. The

Tirah, the mountain homeland of the Afridis, is still *terra incognita* to Pakistani officials. Even in these areas, however, resistance to integration measures is crumbling under the younger tribesmen's desire for development benefits. Many of the Pakistani migrant workers in the Gulf countries are tribesmen from these areas. Returning home with new appliances, even televisions, they need the electric power to operate them, and are willing to accept the government control that this development entails.

The Pakistani border control system in tribal territory is a legacy of British-Indian policy developed to deal with the aggressive, militant, and frequently hostile *Rushdun* tribes. The border arbitrarily bisected *Rushdun* tribal territory, cutting across their traditional trade and migration routes. The British made little effort to control tribal movements through the hundreds of passes along the border, except at the two major crossings—the Khyber and Shojal Passes—that lead, respectively, to Peshawar and Quetta. Rather, they chose to monitor tribal movements at checkpoints (military posts) established some distance from the border at places where narrow valleys and defiles broadened into small basins and trails merged. Adequate for their original purpose, the locations of the posts do not provide the Pakistani Government today with the capability to closely observe and/or to control movement through the border passes, many of which are traversed and accessible only by men on foot.

Islamic Nationalist Insurgents near Parachinar, preparing for vehicular travel across the border



The Kurram Valley: Strategic Area for Insurgency

The upper Kurram valley—one of the most sensitive sections of the Afghan-Pakistani border—is a major area of support for the Afghan insurgents in nearby dissident areas in Paktia, Lowgar, Wardak, and Nangarhar Provinces as well as for the resistance bands in more distant areas in Afghanistan. Protruding into Afghanistan, the valley provides relatively easy access by motorable road to Kabul. Reliable sources indicate that during the winter months, when many of the passes along the northern part of the

border can be blocked by snow, the Kurram valley route is frequently used by insurgent groups with destinations in the regions north of Kabul. The valley is saturated with refugee encampments.

The Kurram valley is one of the few areas where religion is generating friction between the largely Sunni refugees and the local Turji and some of the Bangash tribesmen who are Shia. At least 100 people have been killed in incidents sparked by religious controversy since late last year.

World Bank economist, receives remittances that can quadruple family income. Afghan refugees are increasingly replacing unskilled laborers leaving the region—some have been observed on road projects near the environs of Islamabad.

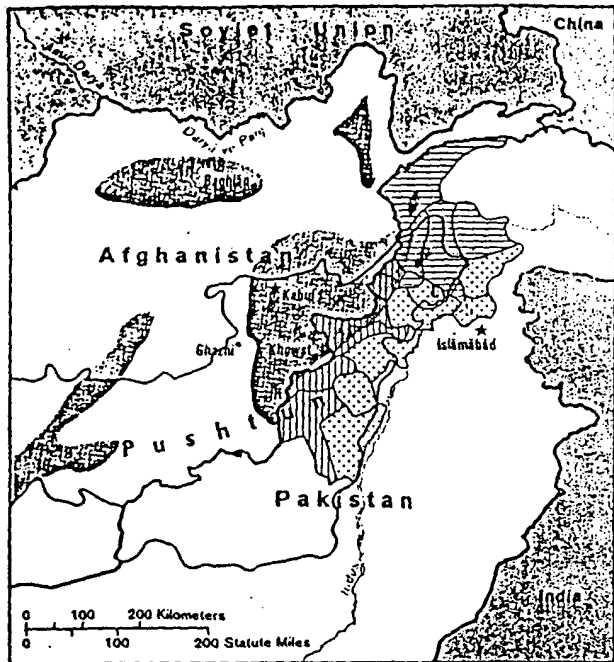
An increase in poppy cultivation would also undermine State Department assistance programs to encourage crop substitution and rural development and endanger the limited progress already achieved.

A lessening of support funds for refugee programs or a decline in remittance income would have a substantial negative economic impact in the tribal borderlands. We believe this is a growing danger because most of the Pushtuns working in the Gulf area are in Saudi Arabia as unskilled construction laborers. As the construction phase slows, perhaps hastened by declining oil revenues, worker demand will shift to more technically qualified maintenance personnel who may be recruited from the larger pool of qualified workers in the Punjab and the Sind. Fewer unskilled jobs in the Gulf will increase pressures on the local job market and on scarce resources in the borderlands. The tolerance for the refugee presence will probably deteriorate as the perception grows that the refugees will continue to receive government payments and so become job and resource competitors.

Strategic Risks

The support of the insurgency in Afghanistan by groups using refugee encampments in Pakistan constitutes a rationale for Soviet incursions into the country. Reliable sources assert that the Pakistani Government will seek ways to restrain cross-border insurgency support by the Afghans from reaching a level that might prompt Soviet military intervention. The US Embassy reports that there is growing concern among those Pakistanis who, having drawn an analogy with the Palestinians, believe that these well-armed groups could become a troublesome security problem in the borderlands. We believe that refugee support activities can be moderated but cannot be halted completely, because of the lack of close border control and the widespread sympathy for the refugees' objectives among their ethnic kindred in Pakistan. Dispersement of the refugee camps to other locations away from the border would dilute their attractive-

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Opium poppy area
Pushtun tribal territory

Settled Area
Merged Area
Tribal Area

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The Narcotics Connection

Opium poppy is the most lucrative cash crop grown in the Afghan-Pakistani borderlands. Pushtun tribesmen are experienced traders and smugglers of opium and their movement into the processing of opium into morphine and heroin in 1981 and 1982 has made Pakistan one of the major heroin-producing countries in the world. Drug enforcement officials indicate that an opium glut exists in the tribal bazaars. If the glut ends in the next year or two, as they expect, we believe that the tenfold increase in profits offered by heroin combined with the availability of hundreds of thousands of refugees as cheap labor—many of whom come from poppy growing areas in Afghanistan—makes refugee involvement in opium poppy cultivation in the tribal agencies inevitable. Alternatively, if support for either the refugees or the insurgents decreases, an increase in opium from poppy growing areas in Afghanistan can be expected to flow into the tribal bazaars in Pakistan to help fund the refugees' subsistence and the insurgents' objectives.

Government efforts to control poppy cultivation in the settled Areas of the NWFP do not extend into the tribal frontier agencies.

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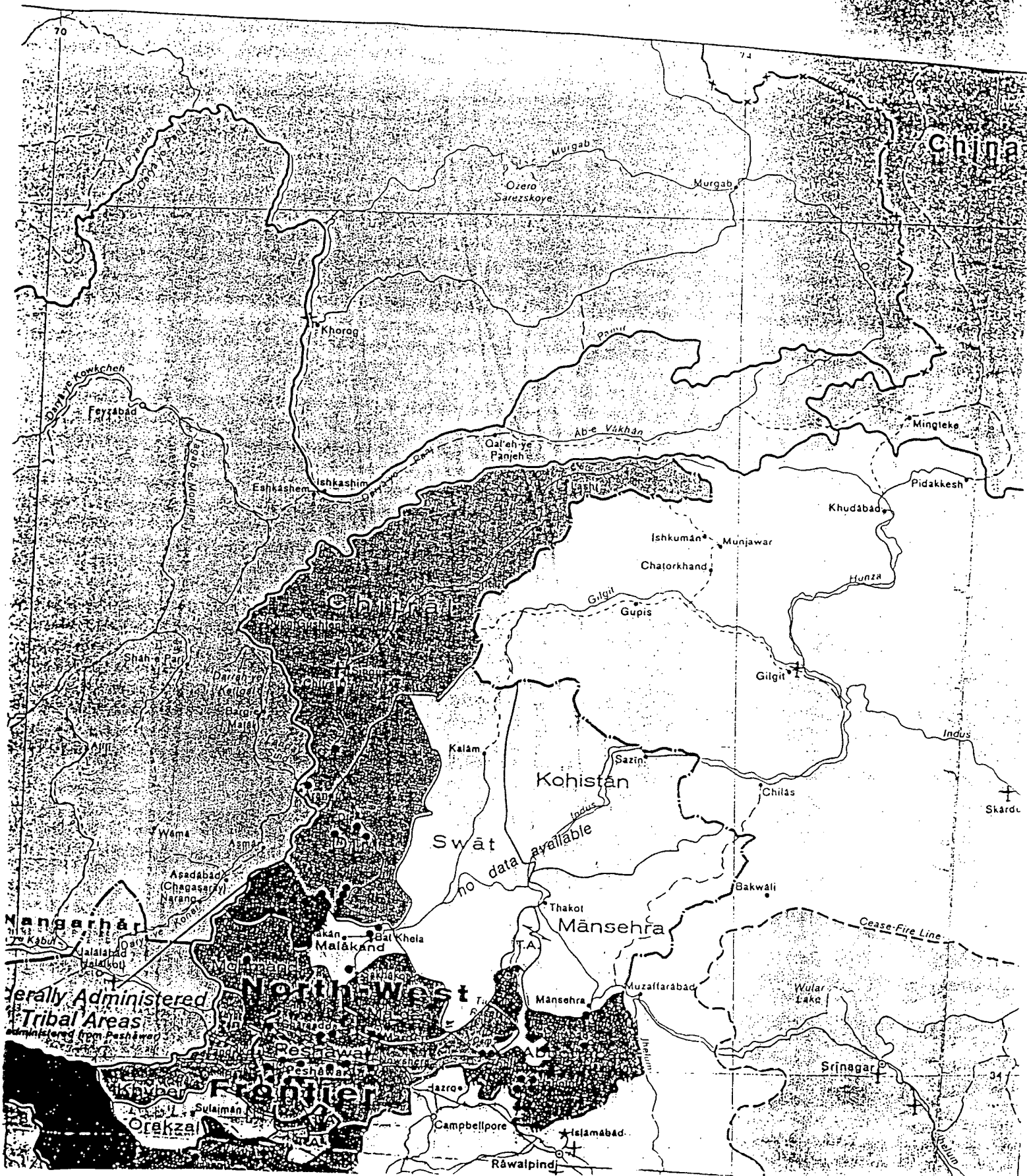
Pakistani Apprehensions

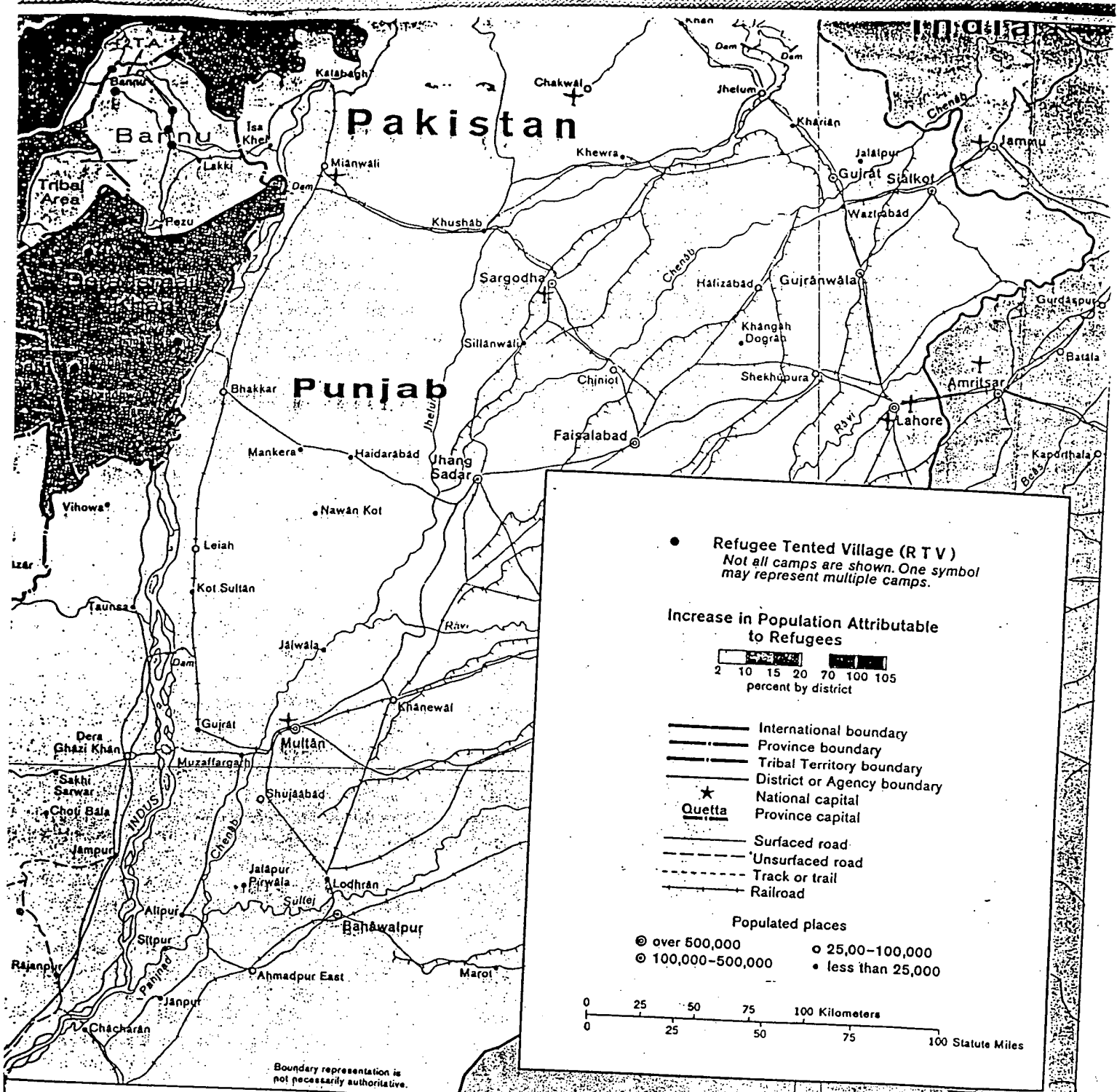
Pakistani officials fear the Soviet use of Afghan refugees and/or Pakistani Pushtun tribesmen for subversive activities in the politically volatile borderlands. They are apprehensive that should the refugees lose faith in an eventual return to their homelands, they may become active in NWFP tribal politics, rekindling agitation for an autonomous Pushtunistan on Pakistani territory. Their presence in large numbers in the borderlands would threaten government efforts to integrate the tribal areas into the political life of Pakistan.

Cold Realities

The introduction of numerous sophisticated weapons among refugee groups and local tribesmen in the wake of the Afghan insurgency has made Pakistan's peacekeeping efforts in the borderlands more difficult. Warfare is almost a sport among the Pushtun. In a tribal society that traditionally settles disputes with guns, intertribal clashes are likely to escalate out of control quickly. On another level, a disquieting factor for the Pakistani military in any future confrontation with armed Pushtun tribesmen is the experience and confidence that the Pushtun have gained in combating technologically superior Soviet forces.

We believe that the refugees are facing a prolonged-to-indefinite stay in Pakistan, despite the effort of the government to characterize them as "temporary guests." The refugees are reluctant to return to their homeland permanently as long as the current Afghan Government is in power. Even if conditions in Afghanistan were to become conducive to repatriation, it is unlikely that all of the refugees would return, particularly the landless laborers among them. The longer the refugees stay in Pakistan, the more likely that a larger number will take up permanent residence in Pakistan. Many Afghans have established new lives in Pakistan, among them businessmen, professionals, and the thousands of students enrolled in Pakistani universities. We believe that the economic and political implications of a continuing Afghan refugee presence loom as the major concern of the Pakistani Government in its relations with Afghanistan.

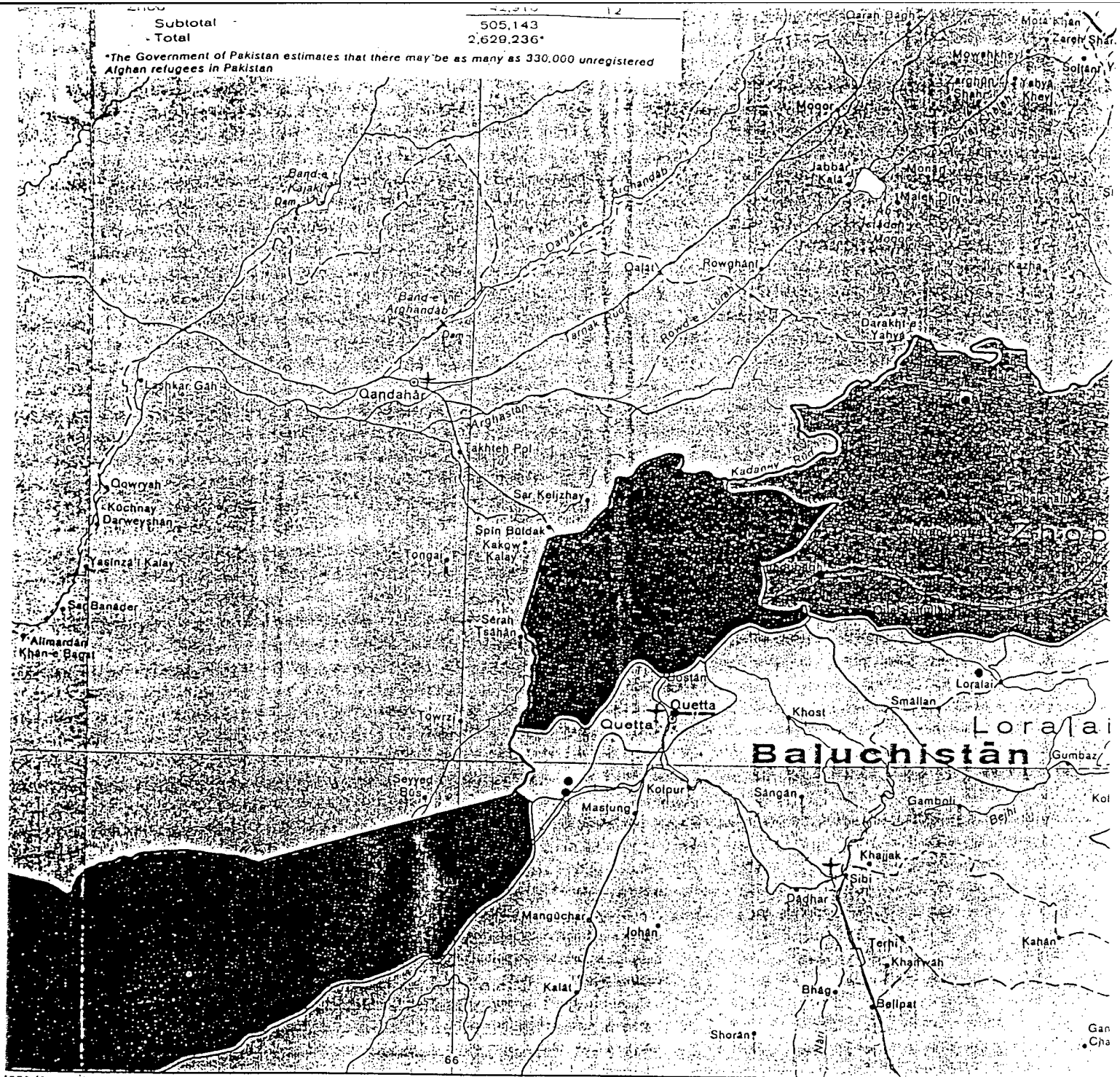


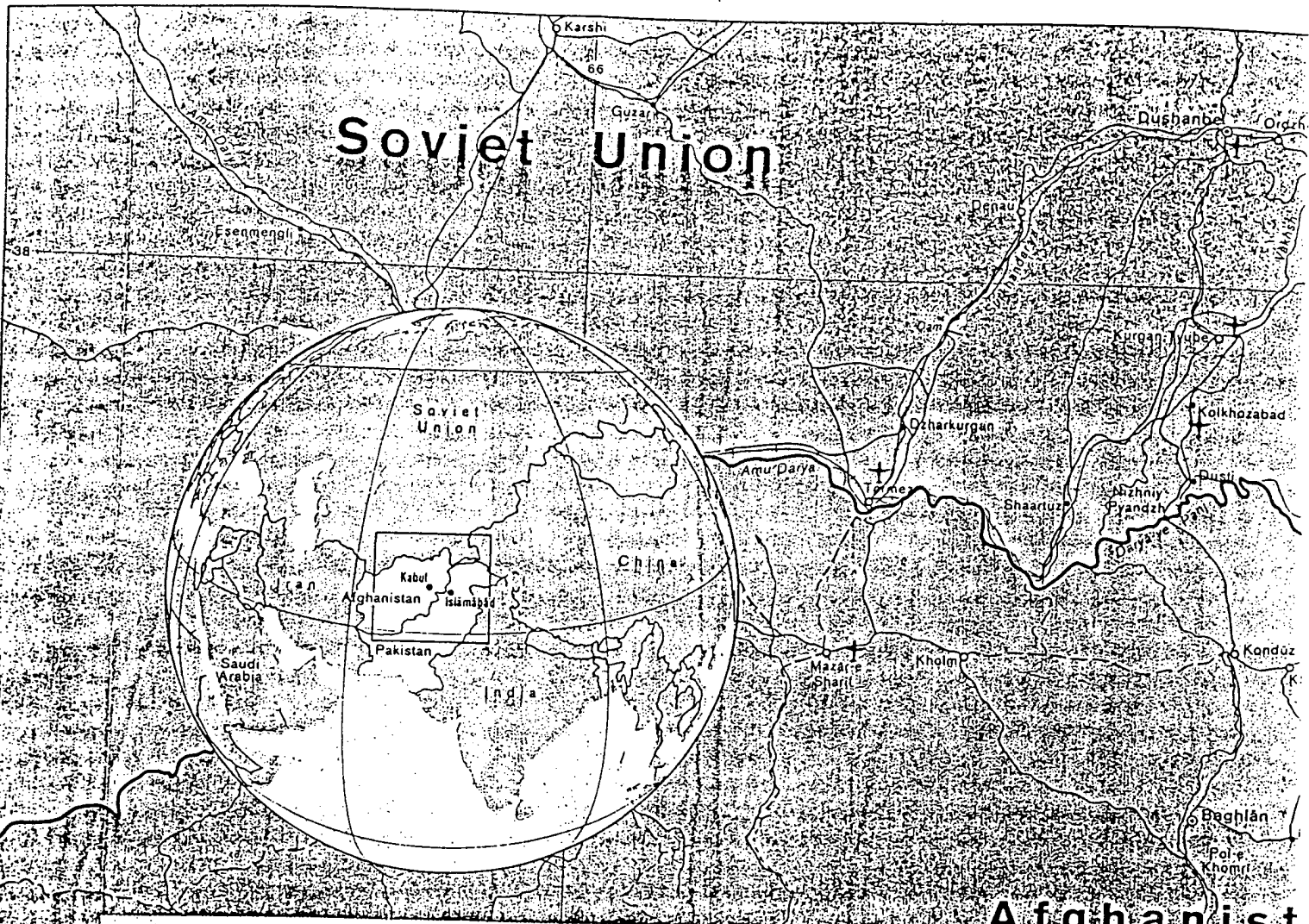


Subtotal
Total

505,143
2,629,236*

*The Government of Pakistan estimates that there may be as many as 330,000 unregistered Afghan refugees in Pakistan





Political Divisions in Pakistan

	Refugees	Percent of district population
North-West Frontier Province		
Malākand Division		
Chitral	23,157	11
Dir	99,411	13
Malākand	N.A.	N.A.
Swāt	N.A.	N.A.
Hazara Division		
Abbottabad	215,439	19
Kohistān	N.A.	N.A.
Mānsehra	61,602	6
Peshāwar Division		
Kohāt	149,397	20
Mardān	261,675	18
Peshāwar	325,100	14
Dera Ismāil Khan		
Bannu	59,793	9
Dera Ismāil Khān	116,421	18
Subtotal	1,311,995	
Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)		
Bājaur	203,085	71
Khyber	27,452	10
Kurrām	303,758	105
Mohmand	24,285	15
North Wazīristān	209,146	89
Orakzai	10,205	3
South Wazīristān	34,167	11
Subtotal	812,098	
Baluchistān Province		
Chāgai	103,332	86
Loralai	26,276	7

