SOUTH ASIA SCAN

THE PASHTUN QUESTION IN PAKISTAN

IQBAL SINGH SEVEA

NUS
National University
of Singapore

iSAS
Institute of South Asian Studies

South Asia Scan

South Asia Scan

The Pashtun Question in Pakistan

Iqbal Singh Sevea

Issue No. 10
January 2021

About the Institute of South Asian Studies

The Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) is dedicated to research on contemporary South Asia.

It was established in July 2004 as an autonomous research institute at the National University of Singapore. The establishment of ISAS reflects the increasing economic and political importance of South Asia, and the strong historical links between South Asia and Southeast Asia.

The Institute seeks to promote understanding of this vital region of the world, and to communicate knowledge and insights about it to policymakers, the business community, academia and civil society, in Singapore and beyond.

Contents

Executive Summary

Since 2018, the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (Pashtun Protection Movement) [PTM] has organised a number of rallies, marches and *dharnas* (sit-ins) in which tens of thousands of protesters have participated. The PTM is a loosely organised movement that positions itself as a body fighting to end alleged military harassment and official discrimination against the Pashtuns in Pakistan, and for the constitutional rights of the community. The PTM also challenges the Taliban militants active in Pashtun areas, who it argues have been propped up by the Pakistani military. Undergirding these protests and demands is the long-standing issue of the socio-political position of the Pashtuns in Pakistan and disquiet within sections of the community with the forms of regulation and governance implemented in Pashtun territories.

The emergence of the PTM has ushered in a new dynamic into Pashtun politics. While there have been various movements demanding Pashtun autonomy and secession since the birth of Pakistan, none of these were able to generate a mass following. The PTM's ability to mobilise the masses – despite heavy censorship and security crackdown – also distinguishes it out from similar movements in Balochistan and Sindh. Moreover, the organisation is disrupting the mechanisms that the establishment has employed to stifle dissent in areas such as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. In particular, the movement is challenging the sources of 'traditional' authority that have been propped up by the state and the corresponding networks of patronage employed to regulate Pashtun areas. The PTM has also shifted the focus of Pashtun politics away from the question of provincial reorganisation towards issues of constitutional rights. Furthermore, its use of new media has posed a challenge to the establishment's powers of censorship. The extensive use of new media also reflects the PTM's appeal amongst new demographic groups – the youth and, significantly, women.

The organisational structure and methods of the PTM may well serve as a model for other protest movements. Indeed, the fact that the PTM moves beyond a solely ethno-nationalism platform and speaks in terms of constitutional rights may open the space for collaboration between the PTM and other groups, like the Baloch, who also claim to be fighting for their socio-political rights. What is clear at the moment is that the mass support the PTM enjoys has alerted established political parties to the need to engage with it. The fact that the PTM is currently in discussions with the newly-formed opposition coalition, the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), and has drawn support from parties like the Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party

(PMAP) demonstrates a recognition of its potential influence. It may also provide the PTM with a voice in regional and central politics. While it has not joined the PDM, the PTM has supported its call for the ouster of the Imran Khan government. Thus, the Pashtun question in Pakistan may come to be inextricably linked to the battle between a seemingly united opposition on the one hand and the incumbent government that currently enjoys the support of the military on the other.

This South Asia Scan examines the factors that have led to the marginalisation of sections of the Pashtun community and the recent re-emergence of Pashtun political mobilisation. It also surveys opposition amongst some sections of the Pashtun community to being a part of Pakistan in 1947 and the subsequent emergence of demands for a separate Pashtunistan. It then traces the rise of the PTM and draws attention to key aspects of the movement and its potential impact on domestic politics in Pakistan.

Introduction

On 20 September 2020, thousands of Pashtuns gathered at Wana in South Waziristan, Pakistan, to protest against what they described as military oppression and official discrimination against the Pashtuns in Pakistan. In particular, they called for the military to be held accountable for extra-judicial disappearances of Pashtuns in the name of anti-terrorism campaigns and for the Pashtuns of the 'tribal areas', which were formerly part of the FATA, to be granted full political rights. The protestors also expressed fear that the military was allowing sections of the Taliban to re-establish their presence in North and South Waziristan. This protest is but one of many mass rallies, marches and *dharnas* that have been led by the PTM over the past two years. The PTM is a loosely organised movement that emerged in January 2018. It positions itself as a body fighting to end military harassment and official discrimination against the Pashtuns, and for the constitutional rights of the community.

Undergirding these protests and demands is the long-standing issue of the socio-political position of the Pashtuns in Pakistan and disquiet within sections of the community with the forms of regulation and governance implemented in Pashtun territories by the Pakistani establishment. These rallies and marches, which are tellingly described by the PTM and its supporters as 'Long Marches', model themselves upon and appropriate the symbolism attached to the non-violent struggle for freedom from British imperialism led by the much revered Pashtun leader, Abdul Ghaffar Khan (1890-1988). Indeed, the leader of the PTM, Manzoor Pashteen, is widely likened to Abdul Ghaffar Khan.[1] The comparisons with Abdul Ghaffar Khan are particularly interesting given that Abdul Ghaffar Khan had opposed the demand for Pakistan but continued to fight for the socio-political rights and autonomy of the Pashtuns after the emergence of the independent state of Pakistan.

Yet, despite the tens of thousands of Pashtuns who have partaken in such protests, the 'Long Marches' and the demands being raised by the protesters have largely not been covered by the media in Pakistan. This is due to the powerful role that the military is allegedly playing in censoring media

---

1. See, for instance, Aurangzib Khan, "Manzoor Pashteen: Leading the Fringe to the Center", *Herald*, 19 February 2019. https://herald.dawn.com/news/1398800. Accessed on 13 October 2020.

coverage.[2] Furthermore, the military controls access to the tribal areas – where many of the protests have taken place – and is accused of shuttling in journalists and officials on sanitised tours of the region.[3] The military is also accused of using violence to stamp out the protests and selectively deploying aspects of the Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance and Anti-Terrorism Act to arrest individuals associated with the PTM and/or partaking in the protests. For instance, the PTM accuses the military of killing 13 protesters when soldiers opened fire on peaceful protesters on 29 April 2019 in Kharqamar, North Waziristan.[4]

On its part, the Pakistani establishment accuses the PTM of being a proxy of Afghanistan and India. It is alleged that the PTM is being propped up to destabilise Pakistan. The former chief spokesperson for the Pakistani military, Major General Asif Ghafoor, echoed this official narrative when he described the PTM as a movement that was being manipulated by the "enemies of Pakistan".[5] The establishment also presents the PTM as a movement that poses a law and order problem, and accuses it of fermenting violence against the state. In the wake of the above-mentioned incident at Kharqamar, for instance, various leaders of the PTM were arrested under charges of attacking a military checkpoint and initiating the skirmishes that left 13 protesters and one soldier dead.[6] The official narrative from the military presented the PTM

---

2. The media coverage of the Pakistani elections of 2018 provides important insights into allegations that the military directly censors media coverage. In the lead up to the elections, news outlets such as GEO TV and *Dawn* complained that their coverage of the elections was being curtailed. The management of *Dawn*, Pakistan's largest English language daily, stated that the circulation of its paper was restricted in the wake of it having covered an interview with Nawaz Sharif in which he was widely seen as being openly critical of the military. In a report released on 23 July 2018, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan substantiated these allegations. The report stated that the Commission's investigations revealed that "[s]ales and distribution agents have corroborated the *Dawn* management's complaint of unlawful interference with the distribution of their newspaper … in at least 20 targeted cities and towns." The report also found that GEO TV's coverage was disrupted on a number of occasions. In addition to this, journalists and media houses were found to have received "press advice" detailing issues that they should not report on. See http://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/curbs-on-freedom-of-expression-in-pakistan-summary-of-hrcp-fact-finding-exercise/. Accessed on 13 October 2020.

3. Madiha Afzal, "Why is Pakistan's military repressing a huge, non-violent Pashtun movement?", Brookings Institute, 7 February 2020. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/02/07/why-is-pakistans-military-repressing-a-huge-nonviolent-pashtun-protest-movement/. Accessed on 9 February 2020.

4. "As Death Toll Rises, Pashtun Lawmaker Calls for Waziristan Protest", *Gandhara*, 27 May 2019. https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/pakistan-as-death-toll-rises-pashtun-lawmaker-calls-for-waziristan-protest/29965861.html. Accessed on 29 May 2019.

5. Major General Asif Ghafoor's press conference, 4 June 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BtLiJC IrYPM. Accessed on 5 June 2018.

6. Farooq Awan, "PTM Mob Attacks Army Checkpost in Waziristan", *Daily Times*, 27 May 2019. https://dailytimes.com.pk/401480/ptm-mob-attacks-army-checkpost-in-waziristan/. Accessed on 27 May 2019.

as running amok[7] and instigating public disturbances with a view towards exerting pressure to secure the release of arrested "terrorists".[8] Ali Wazir and Mohsin Dawar, two leading figures of the PTM, were detained and charged for leading the attack and firing on the checkpoint. It is worth noting here that on 14 October 2020, the state officially dropped the charges against the two.[9] Over the past two years, a number of those partaking in PTM protests have been arrested under charges of sedition and terrorism. Notably, Gulalai Ismail, a prominent human rights activist and member of the PTM, fled Pakistan after being charged under the Anti-Terrorism Act for making "anti-state" statements and "hate speeches".[10] Pashteen has himself been detained under charges of sedition for allegedly questioning the creation of Pakistan, challenging its sovereignty and, more generally, making derogatory statements about the country.[11]

Tensions between sections of the Pashtun community and the state of Pakistan are not new. As this South Asia Scan will demonstrate, demands for the creation of an autonomous province incorporating the Pashtuns of the tribal areas, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly known as the North-West Frontier Province) and parts of Balochistan, and even secession, have been made by some Pashtuns since the emergence of Pakistan. These have taken multiple forms – from the non-violent strategies of Abdul Ghaffar Khan to the militant campaigns launched by the Faqir of Ipi against the Pakistani state. There are, however, new dimensions to the mass protests that have been witnessed over the past two years. The military is now being directly and publicly criticised. This is clearly reflected in the fact that a popular slogan used by the PTM and its supporters is "*ye jo deshat gardi hai, is ke peeche vardi hai*" (the uniform is behind this terrorism).[12] This slogan is, of course, a play on a popular song celebrating the contributions of the Pakistani military to the state: "*ye jo jurat mandi hai, is ke peeche vardi hai*" (the uniform is the cause of this courage).

7.   Sultan M Hali, "PTM Running Amok", *Pakistan Today*, 30 May 2019. https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2019/05/30/ptm-running-amok/. Accessed on 1 June 2019.

8.   "PTM's Ali Wazir handed over to CTD", *The Nation*, 28 May 2019. https://nation.com.pk/28-May-2019/ptm-s-ali-wazir-handed-over-to-ctd. Accessed 28 May 2019.

9.   Sirajjudin, "KP government withdraws Kharqamar case against PTM leaders, others", *Dawn*, 14 October 2020.

10. "Anti-state speeches: PTM Activist Gulalai's name blacklisted", *Dunya News*, 27 May 2019. https://dunyanews.tv/en/Pakistan/493419-Anti-state-speeches-PTM-activist-Gulalai-Ismail-blacklisted. Accessed on 1 June 2019.

11. "Pakistani rights activist arrested on charges of sedition, protests threatened", *Reuters*, 28 January 2020. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pakistan-arrest-activist-idUSKBN1ZQ22R. Accessed on 28 January 2020.

12. See, for instance, a video of Manzoor Pashteen leading a gathering in repeating "*ye jo deshat gardi hai, is ke peeche vardi hai*", YouTube, 20 April 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHkL9PU7o9k. Accessed on 11 November 2020.

The PTM is also threatening, for the first time, to galvanise Pashtuns from across tribes and socio-economic backgrounds in the name of Pashtun political rights. Till now, the fractured nature of the Pashtun community and the state's ability to allay opposition through patronage and detention have prevented figures like Abdul Ghaffar Khan and the Faqir of Ipi from being able to give shape to a mass movement in the name of Pashtun rights. Notably, on the one hand, the Pakistani state was able to prevent Abdul Ghaffar Khan from developing such a mass movement by detaining him and co-opting other leaders. On the other hand, those who had taken to militant struggle like the Faqir of Ipi did not have a broad support base. The PTM protests are also attracting new demographic groups, in particular the youth and women. The public participation of women in mass protests, both as leaders and supporters, coupled with their active support for the PTM on social media, is promising to reshape social structures and strictures. Moreover, the political mobilisation of the youth and women is destabilising the three-pronged approach taken by both the colonial state and Pakistan to limit political participation to the *maliks* (tribal leaders); entrench the tribe as the primary socio-political unit; and legitimise the *jirga* (council of elders) as the primary source of decision making. The PTM is seeking to expand political participation and also substantially reshape the political landscape by destabilising existing networks of state patronage, legitimacy and co-option.

The implications of this fragmentation of authority are discussed in greater detail below. Suffice it to note here that the attempt to govern large swathes of the Pashtun areas bordering Afghanistan through the *maliks* led to the cementing of the latter's position and the system of tribal authority through state patronage. The PTM poses a threat to this system of regulation. At the same time, the PTM is challenging, on the one hand, political parties such as the Awami National Party (ANP) and the PMAP, which have long claimed to represent Pashtun interests, and, on the other, national political parties like the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam and Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz), which have a presence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The political equation in Pashtun areas may also be impacted by the fact that the PTM is participating in ongoing conversations with the recently launched opposition coalition, the PDM. The PDM is aiming to bring various political parties together with a view to toppling the Imran Khan-led PTI government. This may provide the PTM with a much-needed voice at the centre; something that it has lacked thus far.

This South Asia Scan examines the factors that have led to the marginalisation of sections of the Pashtun community in Pakistan and the recent re-emergence of Pashtun political mobilisation in opposition to the state. As a means of providing the broader context, this Scan begins by tracing the forms of regulation and governance implemented both by the colonial state and Pakistan in Pashtun areas. It will be shown that assumptions about the nature of the Pashtuns and geo-strategic interests resulted in novel forms of political regulation being implemented in the tribal areas. These areas were not fully incorporated into the governmental framework of British India. Likewise, in Pakistan, full constitutional and political rights were not extended to these areas. Furthermore, both the colonial state and Pakistan sought to govern the tribal areas by entrenching traditional leaders and imposing a paternalistic system. Thus, the current political protests are as much against the state as they are against officially sanctioned forms of socio-political authority within the community. This Scan also surveys opposition amongst some sections of the Pashtun community to being a part of Pakistan in 1947 and the subsequent emergence of demands for a separate Pashtun province and homeland, Pashtunistan. It then traces the rise of the PTM and draws attention to key aspects of the movement and its potential impact on domestic politics in Pakistan.

The Pashtuns of Pakistan

The Pashtuns are an ethnic group that chiefly resides in parts of north-west Pakistan, and south and eastern Afghanistan. Provisional results from the census conducted in 2017 indicated that there are more than 33 million Pashtuns in Pakistan.[13] It is worth noting here that Pakistan had not conducted a state-wide survey between 1998 and 2017 largely due to concerns that such an exercise may exacerbate regional and ethnic contestations, as statistics are integral to the distribution of state resources to individual provinces. Given the dominance of the province of Punjab and the Punjabis in Pakistan, a number of provinces and ethnic groups have complained that their numbers have been consistently underreported. The official results of the 2017 census exercise have not been released due in part to concerns raised by Pashtun and Sindhi leaders over the apparent over-estimation of Punjab's population vis-à-vis other provinces. The figure of 33 million has been disputed by Pashtun leaders who feel that it under-represents the numbers of the community and view the process of enumeration itself as an official tool to entrench the domination of Punjab over other states. They assert that the census of 2017 had not taken into account the number of Pashtuns who had been displaced by military operations against militants and moved to cities in Punjab and Sindh.[14] Despite the controversies surrounding the figures in the 2017 census, we can glean from it and various other estimates that the Pashtuns constitute the second largest ethnic group in Pakistan and make up at least 16 per cent of the country's population.

Geographically speaking, the Pashtuns are an ethnic group that is divided by the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. This border is often referred to as the Durand Line as it was a demarcation negotiated in 1893 between the colonial diplomat, Henry Mortimer Durand (1850-1924), and the Afghan *amir* (ruler) Abdul Rahman (1844-1901). The primary aim of the line was to delineate the spheres of influence of the British in India and the Afghan *amir*. Pakistan inherited the boundary when it emerged as an independent country in 1947. Afghanistan does not, however, recognise the legitimacy of this border. Afghanistan's former president, Hamid Karzai, stated in 2017 that

---

13. See Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Government of Pakistan. http://www.pbs.gov.pk/content/population-census. Accessed on 23 October 2020.

14. See, for instance, Izhar Ullah, "Census 2017: FATA lawmakers dispute census count", *The Express Tribune*, 26 August 2017. https://tribune.com.pk/story/1491331/census-2017-fata-lawmakers-dispute-census-count. Accessed on 2 August 2020. Also see Bushra Gohar, "There were nearly 2 million registered IDPs from North Waziristan alone. How can FATA's population be just 5 million? Fudged figures?", 26 August 2017, 1:20 pm. Tweet.

"Afghanistan hasn't and will not recognize the Durand Line."[15] Likewise, Ashraf Ghani, the current president of Afghanistan, has condemned the attempts by Pakistan to build a fence along the border as an "undeclared war of aggression".[16] The Durand Line and Afghanistan's dispute with of its legitimacy have resulted in the Pashtuns often seeing themselves as a community whose 'original' homeland was illegally divided. In Afghanistan, the Pashtuns are the largest ethnic group and have long held the reigns of political power. This explains, in part, why Afghanistan has ideologically and politically supported Pashtun causes in Pakistan.

The Pashtuns of Pakistan primarily reside in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the tribal areas, which were formerly part of the FATA. The FATA had been a vestige from the colonial period. The British had carved out a number of 'tribal areas' or 'agencies' in areas that today fall in northwest Pakistan. These included Khyber, Orakzai, North Waziristan and South Waziristan. Colonial ethnographic assumptions of the tribal nature of the Pashtuns, coupled with their strategic interests of developing a buffer between India and Afghanistan, led to these tribal areas being regulated by a distinct legal and political framework – one that was apparently more akin to the governance of tribal societies. This model of governance was essentially maintained by Pakistan until 2018 when the areas of the FATA were formally incorporated into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. There are also a sizeable number of Pashtuns concentrated in the north-eastern part of the province of Balochistan. It is estimated that they constitute 38 per cent of Balochistan's population. In addition to this, according to figures provided by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there are 1,425,603 registered Afghan refugees in Pakistan.[17] The bulk of these are Pashtuns and many of them have been born in Pakistan to parents who fled the unrest in Afghanistan.

The Pashtuns are generally described as a distinct ethnic group bounded by a shared ancestry, culture and homeland, structured along tribal lines. Amin Saikal has described the Pashtuns as the classic example of an "ethnic-based nation". Drawing upon Anthony Smith's definition of the 'ethnie', he argues that the Pashtuns constitute an ethnic group that shares "a collective proper name, a presumed common ancestry, shared historical memories,

15. Naveed Siddiqui, "Afghanistan will never recognize the Durand Line: Hamid Karzai", *Dawn*, 5 March 2017. https://www.dawn.com/news/1318594. Accessed on 4 June 2018.

16. Ismail Dilawar and Kamran Haider, "The Fence Driving a Wedge Between Pakistan and Afghanistan", *Bloomberg*, 1 November 2017. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-10-31/the-fence-driving-awedge-between-pakistan-and-afghanistan. Accessed on 20 October 2020.

17. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Fact Sheet: Pakistan (31 August 2020).

one or more differencing elements of common culture, an association with a specific 'homeland' and a sense of solidarity for significant sectors of the population."[18] In addition, Pashtun tribes are widely said to be held together by their adherence to a shared religion – Islam – and commitment to a 'tribal code'. The Pashtunwali, which is founded upon the notions of *nang* (honour), *melmatsya* (hospitality) and *badal*[19] (reciprocity), lays stress on the need for decisions to be made by the *jirga*.[20] The Pashtunwali is presented as a fixed – and archaic – code that determines the behaviour of the Pashtuns. Despite the problematic nature of the term 'tribe', the category continues to be used by observers to describe Pashtun socio-political organisation and has long informed official approaches towards the regulation and governance of the Pashtuns.

Crucially, the use of the term 'tribe'[21] and the image of an ethnic group bound together by a traditional unchanging social code give rise to images of a self-contained community that maintains a distance from official state institutions. With regard to the Pashtuns, the use of the term 'tribe' also carries implications of untamed, fiercely independent and restive groups that potentially pose a threat to central state authority. Since 11 September 2001, policymakers, security analysts, commentators and popular writers alike have extensively spoken about the Pashtuns in terms of tribal structures, tribal codes and their propensity to indulge in violence. Indeed, the term 'tribe' has been used in ways that signify both the cause of the troubles in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and the cure. In the case of the former, the Pashtuns are seen as restive and fiercely independent. In the latter perspective, the tribes are seen as the solution to political and religious turmoil. This is clearly exemplified by United States (US) Army Major Jim Grant who argued that its policy relating to the Pashtuns in Afghanistan needed to focus not on individuals but on tribal groups, as the socio-political structure of the Pashtuns was essentially distinct from western notions of citizenship and individual rights.[22]

Such presentations reflect the lasting impact of the writings of British colonial officials and scholars. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, British colonial scholars and administrators produced a sizeable number of works on the

---

18.   Amin Saikal, "Afghanistan and Pakistan: The Question of Pashtun Nationalism?", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 30 (2010), pp. 5-17.

19.   *Badal* is often mistranslated as revenge. It actually signifies a complex notion of reciprocity.

20.   See, for instance, discussion in Abubakar Siddique, *The Pashtun Questions: The Unresolved Key to the Future of Pakistan and Afghanistan* (London: Hurst & Company, 2014).

21.   A B M Mafeje, 'Tribalism', *Oxford Companion to Politics of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, New York, 1993).

22.   Jim Grant, *One Tribe at a Time: The Book that Changed the War in Afghanistan* (New York: Black Irish Entertainment, 2014).

history and culture of the Pashtuns. The confrontation between the British and the Russian Empire in Central Asia, popularly known as "The Great Game", spurred the former to bolster the boundaries around India by "settling" the "tribally inhabited regions" between British territories in India and the territories of the Afghan *amir*. The aim was to demarcate these regions as the de facto Indian frontier and pay Pashtun communities allowances to ensure the safety of the frontier.[23] British and Russian strategic and diplomatic jostling had sparked the first of a series of wars between the British and the forces of the Afghan *amir* in 1839. Following this, the British sought to map and collect ethnographical information about the "tribally inhabited regions" and expand roads and telegraph lines to these areas. While the latter ensured the movement of information and soldiers, the former provided the British with information on how best to govern and regulate relations with the Pashtuns.

The genesis of the image of the restive, independent and tribal Pashtun can be traced to the writings of the East India Company official, Mountstuart Elphinstone (1779-1859). In 1809, Elphinstone was the first British envoy to the Afghan court. He also wrote a number of works on the Pashtuns that have been credited with pioneering ethnographical work on the community. In his highly influential *Account of the Kingdom of Caubul and its Dependencies in Persia, Tartary and India*, he described the Pashtuns as a people whose socio-political life centred upon the tribe.[24] He further postulated that the tribes were largely isolated from one another and that they fiercely asserted their independence from any central authority. Thus, the power of the sovereign often did not extend onto the individual tribes.[25] It is important to note here that Elphinstone essentially based his depictions of the tribal nature of the Pashtuns on his understanding of the clans in Scotland.[26] Concomitant with such ethnographic works was the emergence of colonial theorisations of race and racial characteristics. The writings of a number of colonial scholars and officials spoke in terms of ingrained racial traits and mapped these onto the body. For instance, figures like Robert Orme (1728-1801) had argued that dietary conditions and race had resulted in certain communities in South Asia being masculine and capable of engaging in warfare.[27] In this binary of 'martial

---

23. For a detailed discussion, see Sana Haroon, *Frontier of Faith: Islam in the Indo-Afghan Borderland* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 1-33.

24. Mountstuart Elphinstone, *Account of the Kingdom of Caubul and its Dependencies in Persia, Tartary and India* (Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, London, 1815), pp. 148-159.

25. Ibid., pp. 158-179.

26. Discussed by Nivi Manchanda, "The Imperial Sociology of the 'Tribe' in Afghanistan", *Millenium: Journal of International Studies*, vol. 46 (2), pp. 169-173.

27. See, for instance, Robert Orme, *A History of Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan* (London; John Nourse, 1763).

races' and 'non-martial races', the Pashtuns were listed as a community that had inherited martial characteristics. They were, however, it was claimed, undisciplined.

Such depictions have detracted from an understanding of the complex ethno-linguistic communities that came to be labelled under the rubric Pashtun. The people who inhabited the region from Kandahar to the Peshawar valley were not a pure and distinct race but a complex population of pastoralists, farmers and local notables integrated into local and imperial hierarchies of political, social and economic power and status.[28] Far from being an isolated genealogical group, Pashtuns had circulated within imperial and merchant networks connected by Silk Road pathways, Persian and North Indian trade routes and Indian Ocean sea lanes, for a thousand years.[29] The elites were integrated into the wider Persian cosmopolis that stretched from Persia and Central Asia to Southern India.[30]

Indeed, it was only in the 18th century that a broadly defined Afghan/Pashtun identity developed. This occurred when a variant of the Pashto language came to be adopted for official purposes by the elites in place of Persian. However, far from being a marker of homogeneity, the term Afghan would encapsulate regional dialects and variations of the Pashto language, differing interpretations of Islam, varying notions of authority and an array of socio-political and economic arrangements. The first attempt to shape a broad 'Afghan' identity by proposing a common genealogy of the community, stretching back to a Companion of the Prophet Muhammad, called Qays 'Abdur Rashid Afghan and narrating tales of the past glories of the 'Afghans', was the 17th century manuscript, *Tarik-i Khan Jahani* (The Khan Jahan's History).[31] Significantly, the term used in the text is Afghan and not Pashtun. It is also worth noting here that this manuscript was actually written for diasporic Pashtuns who had settled in central India and would only reach the Pashtuns of the frontier regions in the 19th century.[32] In fact, the Pashtun/

---

28. For a more detailed discussion, see Robert Nichols, "Reclaiming the Past: The *Tawarikh-i Hafiz Rahmat Khani* and Pashtun Historiography" in Nile Green (ed.), *Afghan History Through Afghan Eyes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) and "Pashtuns", *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia: Asian History*, pp. 1-24. https://oxfordrecom.libproxy1.nus.edu.sg/asianhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277727-e-181?rskey=E1opqG. Accessed on 1 August 2020.

29. Ibid.

30. See Rustam Ali Bijnori, *An Eighteenth Century History of North India: An Account of the Rise & Fall of the Rohilla Chiefs in Janbhasha*, Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui (ed.) (Delhi: Manohar Publications, 2005).

31. For an insightful discussion on the Tarik-i Khan Jahani, see Green, op. cit.

32. Ibid.

Afghan identity developed within and in line with the heterogeneity of the people who resided in the areas between Kandahar and the Peshawar valley. Some scholars have suggested that the Pashtunwali was developed and adopted as a means to bind these heterogeneous groups.[33]

---

33. Fredrik Barth, *Political Leadership among Swat Pathans* (London: Athlone Press, 1959) and *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (Boston, MA: Little Brown, 1969).

Governing and Regulating the Pashtuns

The assumptions and generalisations on the Pashtuns discussed in the previous section had important administrative and military implications. Colonial officials drew upon the above described ethnographical studies to propose the best way to administer the community. Sir George Campbell (1824-1892), who served as the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, which was the political and economic centre of colonial India at that point, for instance, argued that because the Pashtuns were a "turbulent" people "bred from infancy to the use of arms" who have a "passion for independence" and "are intolerant of … any form of rule", the British should not attempt to formally incorporate them into the British empire.[34] He went on to assert that if they had been like the people of the hill tracts of Kashmir, Kangra, Shimla, Kumaon or Nepal, he would have advocated incorporation into the empire. Instead, a system of informal alliances was preferable.

This section explores the structures put in place by both the colonial state and the state of Pakistan to regulate and govern the Pashtuns. Apart from demarcating a swathe of Pashtun tribal areas into their sphere of influence with the drawing of the Durand Line, the British also incorporated a large number of Pashtuns when they annexed the province of Punjab in 1849. At that time, Punjab included sizeable parts of the areas populated by the Pashtuns; these included the valley of Peshawar. It will be shown that the Pashtuns were essentially divided into two groups – the settled and the tribal. A separate province – North-West Frontier Province – was carved out for the former and they were integrated into the colonial state's administrative and political framework. The latter were, however, regulated under a separate system. This has resulted in the marginalisation of a broad section of the Pashtuns of the area. It is no surprise that the latter areas are at the heart of the recent Pashtun protests.

As noted above, colonial consolidation in British India and strategic manoeuvring during the Great Game resulted in attempts by the British to demarcate the boundary between British India and the domains of the Afghan *amir*. The British viewed the highland areas stretching from the south of the terrains of the Maharaja of Kashmir through Khyber to South Waziristan as the natural frontier of India. This was largely based around the assumption that the Pashtun tribes living in these areas were isolated groups that had remained autonomous from any political authority. However, far from being

---

34. George Campbell, *Afghan Frontier: The Substance of a Speech Not Delivered* (London: Edward Stanford, 1879), p. 2.

autonomous, the highland Pashtun groups had long established ties of service, tribute and patronage with the Afghan polity. A number of them had received allowances from and paid revenue to the Afghan *amir*.[35] These relationships are clearly reflected, for instance, in the relations between the Afghan *amir* and the Khan of Lalpura, a dominant leader of the Mohmand tribe who held extensive lands east of Kunar. While colonial officials and ethnographers described the Mohmands as an independent tribe, more sophisticated research has shown that Lalpura was granted the status of a small state by the *amir* in return for carrying out stipulated duties. These included collecting taxes from a set number of villages and tolls from the Khyber Pass on behalf of the *amir* as well as providing military service when necessary.[36]

The assumption that the highland tribes were isolated, independent and had always been autonomous from the Afghan polity lay at the heart of colonial attempts to demarcate a border. However, it caused consternation to the Afghan *amir* who asserted his claims over these groups and laid the basis for the ongoing border dispute between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The link between colonial ethnography and cartography was further evidenced by the fact that Durand, who was tasked with negotiating a border with the Afghan *amir*, insisted that the border must take into consideration the integrity of individual tribes. Hence, tribal genealogies that had been drawn up were consulted to demarcate the extent of areas settled by members of particular tribes.[37] On his part, the *amir* insisted that the British did not understand the terrain and pushed back on the idea of demarcating areas along tribal lines. Eventually, the *amir*, who had only recently come to power with the support of the British, had little choice but to accept the border proposed by Durand. Thus, in 1893, the British and the Afghan state agreed to the Durand Line as a border demarcation. In line with this, the Afghan state accepted that it had no claims on Pashtun areas such as Waziristan and Chitral which now fell in the British sphere of influence.

After the demarcation of the Durand Line, the colonial state turned its attention to developing mechanisms to regulate the Pashtuns of British India. The Pashtuns were essentially divided into two groups – those residing in the settled districts of the province of Punjab and those in the 'autonomous tribal areas' along the Durand Line. The tribal area was divided into agencies – Khyber, Kurram, Malakand, North Waziristan and South Waziristan, which

---

35. For a more detailed analysis, see Christine Noelle-Karimi, *State and Tribe in Nineteenth-Century Afghanistan: The Reign of Dost Muhammad Khan (1826-1863),* (London: Routledge, 1997).
36. Haroon, op. cit, pp. 14-17.
37. Ibid., pp.16-25.

were to be indirectly ruled. It is important to note that such a demarcation of a separate tribal Pashtun region was not a depiction of a pre-existing political landscape but an instrument of change and regulation. It was essentially a sociological division – one grounded in the assumption that the nature of the highland community was inherently different from that of the Pashtun peasantry of the agricultural areas in Punjab.[38] Subsequently, in 1901, the Pashtun areas that were part of the province of Punjab – namely, the districts of Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan, Hazara, Kohat and Peshawar – were carved out into a separate province, the North-West Frontier Province.

The colonial state claimed to put in place a system of governance that was suited to the nature and socio-political structure of the Pashtuns. This involved reinforcing the centrality and autonomy of the tribe; emphasising the authority of tribal leaders; and putting in place a paternalistic system of regulation. Essentially, legal and political institutions that were implemented in other parts of British India were not introduced in the tribal areas. Also, the tribal areas were not incorporated into the federal framework developed in British India. Instead of having a governor or even the basic rudiments of a representative system, the tribal areas were governed by a Political Agent who was vested with unlimited powers over governance, judgement and punishment. To aid him in regulating the tribes, the Political Agent worked with the *maliks*. Thus, this system of governance effectively served to fix and entrench the position of the *maliks*. The colonial authorities used tribal genealogies to identify tribal leaders and allocated large allowances to them. Not only did the *maliks* now gain unmatched economic resources, but their claims to leadership were also fixed in perpetuity.

The paternalistic form of regulation and the lack of a system of representation or recourse for the people are best reflected in the legal system implemented to govern the Pashtuns. In 1901, the colonial state introduced the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR). The FCR was part of a series of draconian laws implemented in the Pashtun areas on the assumption that they were lawless tribesmen who were prone to crime and fanaticism.[39] The FCR allowed for collective punishment to be meted out to the tribes under the 'collective responsibility clause'. It also denied the accused the rights to appeal, a *wakeel* (lawyer) and *daleel* (argument). Furthermore, the FCR enabled the authorities to detain individuals for up to three years without charges.[40]

---

38.   Ibid., pp. 21-30.

39.   Mark Condos, "License to Kill: The Murderous Outrages Act and the rule of law in Colonial India, 1867-1925", *Modern Asian Studies*, 50, 2, 2016, pp. 479-517.

40.   Willard M Berry, *Aspects of the Frontier Crimes Regulation in Pakistan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1966).

Upon its formation in 1947, the independent state of Pakistan chose to continue the system of governance and regulation that the colonial state had implemented in the tribal areas. The tribal areas were grouped together as the FATA and administered directly by the federal government of Pakistan. The continuities with the colonial system are clear from the fact that the FATA was excluded from the constitution of Pakistan. The governance of the region remained in the hands of the Political Agents, who, like their colonial counterparts, held extensive powers. These Political Agents were now appointed by and reported to the President of Pakistan. The system also continued to vest immense authority in the hands of the *maliks* who were recognised by the state as the natural custodians of customs and social order. In fact, the state of Pakistan continued the practice of paying an allowance to the *maliks*. In addition, the *jirga* was officially recognised as the supreme authority and sole legitimate decision-making body within the tribe. Until 1997, the *maliks* were the only ones who could vote. While universal adult franchise was finally granted in 1997, political parties remained prohibited till 2003.

The FCR continued to be implemented in the FATA until 2018 when the region was merged with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The continuation of the colonial system in the FATA stymied the socio-political and economic development of the region and contributed to the marginalisation of the Pashtuns in Pakistan. The impact that it had on Pashtun political mobilisation is discussed in detail below. Suffice it to note here that since 1947, a number of Pashtun figures had called for the abolishment of the FCR and reform of the socio-political structure. They argued that the FCR and the structure of governance implemented in the FATA resulted in extremely low rates of literacy, high rates of corruption and a lack of economic development. There were also demands amongst some sections of the Pashtun leadership for the merger of the FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In 2018, the Pakistani authorities finally agreed to integrate the FATA into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In line with this, the FCR was rescinded and, in its place, the FATA Interim Governance Regulation of 2018 was passed. This regulation essentially lays out how the FATA will be regulated in the two-year interim period till its full merger with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Key facets of the regulation include replacing the Political Agent with a Deputy Commissioner whose powers are more in line with the constitution of Pakistan and the reorganisation of the tribal areas into districts. However, the regulation is less clear when it comes to issues related to the judiciary and has left an element of uncertainty on the future of the areas that are part of the FATA. For instance, there are no details on the future role of the Supreme Court as a body of adjudication and the Deputy Commissioner continues to hold an extraordinary amount of powers.

Pashtunistan, Marginalisation and Militancy

The prominent Pashtun leader, Khan Abdul Wali Khan (1917-2006), pithily reflected both the complex identities inhabited by individuals in Pakistan and the challenge confronting the state in integrating various ethnic groups into a national community when he asserted that he has "been a Pashtun for four thousand years, a Muslim for 1,300 years and a Pakistani for just over forty."[41]

This section examines the factors that have contributed towards Pashtun marginalisation in Pakistan and the emergence of the demand for Pashtunistan. It first looks at the opposition amongst some sections of the Pashtun community to joining Pakistan in 1947. It then analyses the rise of demands for the creation of Pashtunistan and the rise of militancy. Lastly, it examines concerns amongst the Pashtuns from the tribal areas and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa over their social, political and economic marginalisation in Pakistan.

Upon the emergence of Pakistan in 1947, the regions in which the Pashtuns resided generally showed little enthusiasm for the new state. The Muslim League, which was at the forefront of the demand for Pakistan in 1946, had a weak institutional presence and limited influence in the North-West Frontier Province. This is reflected in the fact that in the provincial elections of 1946, the Muslim League only managed to win 17 seats while the Indian National Congress won 30.[42] The opposition to the Muslim League and the demand for Pakistan were spearheaded by Abdul Ghaffar Khan. In 1929, he had established the Khudai Khidmatgars, a social reform and political organisation that was committed to using non-violent means of protesting against the colonial authorities.[43] Abdul Ghaffar Khan and the Khudai Khidmatgars played an important role in politicising the Pashtun ethnic identity. It has already been noted above that far from being a homogeneous political community, the Pashtuns were divided along familial and socio-economic lines. Thus, both Abdul Ghaffar Khan and the Khudai Khidmatgars were essentially attempting to build a Pashtun political front and define Pashtun political interests. Such a politicisation of the Pashtun consciousness was linked to a celebration of Pashtun culture and an opposition against the Punjabis and Punjabi domination.[44] Three issues were central to Abdul Ghaffar Khan and the

---

41. Quoted in Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History* (New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2009), p. 1.
42. At this stage, the Muslim League's support in the North-West Frontier Province was largely limited to the urban pockets and non-Pashtun communities.
43. Mukulika Banerjee, *The Pathan Unarmed: Opposition and Memory in the North-West Frontier* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011).
44. Talbot, op. cit., pp. 83-86.

Khudai Khidmatgars' political programme: non-violent struggle for freedom; Hindu-Muslim unity; and the assertion of Pashtun rights in a future political framework.

On its part, the Muslim League reached out to and attracted the large landholders and canvassed on the need to maintain Muslim unity. The appeal to coalesce around a broad religious identity did not make much headway. The Muslim League was, however, successful in winning over a number of the large landholders. The fact that Abdul Ghaffar Khan and the Congress provincial government had encouraged the non-payment of rents by tenant farmers as a source of civil disobedience against the colonial authorities had alienated the larger landholders. In addition, the Muslim League assured the tribes that the future state of Pakistan would maintain the allowances that the colonial state paid them and that Pakistan had "no desire whatsoever to interfere, in any way, with the traditional independence of the Tribal Areas."[45] The leader of the Muslim League and the first Governor-General of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948), assured "internal freedom" to the tribes in exchange for pledges of loyalty to the new state of Pakistan.[46]

When the Cabinet Mission was dispatched from Britain to India in March 1946 to work out a plan for decolonisation, there was no political consensus amongst the Pashtuns in support of the demand for Pakistan. In fact, there was uncertainty with regard to how the Tribal Areas, given that the region did not have full provincial status, would be apportioned in the forthcoming constitutional debates. Olaf Caroe, who was the Governor of the North-West Frontier Province between 1946 and 1947 – the period during which the question of Partition was being discussed both at the centre and the provinces – recorded that in his conversations with the Afridi and Shinwari tribes in March 1947, he found the tribes were generally ambivalent to the question of potentially joining India or Pakistan. He further asserted that if they were put into a position of having to decide their political future solely on the basis of their religious affiliation, they would opt to join Afghanistan.[47] The leaders of the Afridis reportedly told Caroe that they will neither deal with the Congress nor the Muslim League but "may deal with a government representing both sides" and that they "own the Khyber Pass and will bargain on that basis."[48]

---

45. Quoted in Haroon, op. cit., p. 176.

46. Mohammad Ali Jinnah, *Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah Speeches and Statements as Governor General of Pakistan 1947-1948* (Islamabad: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Directorate of Films and Publications, 1989), p. 239.

47. Quoted in Haroon, op. cit., p. 176.

48. George E Jones, "Indian 'Redshirts' Go Into Peshawar; Frontier City Quiet but Tense - Afridi Tribesmen Block Road in Khyber Pass", *The New York Times*, 20 March 1947. Accessed on 13 April 2020.

However, the acceptance by the Congress of the plan to partition India proved to be a pivotal development. It was now decided that there would be a referendum in the provinces asking people to vote on joining India or Pakistan. Abdul Ghaffar Khan then called for the creation of Pashtunistan – a separate political entity for the Pashtuns.[49] When the option of Pashtunistan was not included in the referendum, Abdul Ghaffar Khan called on his supporters to boycott the referendum.[50] As a result, the voter turnout for the referendum was only 55.5 per cent with most voters opting for Pakistan. It is also imperative to note that this referendum was only held in the North-West Frontier Province; the Pashtuns of the Tribal Areas did not get a chance to vote.

Upon the formation of Pakistan, Jinnah assured "internal freedom" to the Tribal Areas in exchange for pledges of loyalty to the new state of Pakistan.[51] As noted above, the new state of Pakistan essentially continued the colonial approach towards governing the Pashtun areas. The Tribal Areas were now reconstituted as the FATA and the regulatory norms and legal framework developed by the colonial state were retained.

Given the post-colonial realities, Abdul Ghaffar Khan would now focus upon calling for political re-organisation of the Pashtun areas and official recognition of Pashtun socio-cultural rights. He now called for the formation of a separate province for the Pashtuns. This province, which was to be called Pashtunistan, was to include the FATA, the North-West Frontier Province and Pashtun areas of Baluchistan. He spelt out his new political vision of Pashtunistan in a speech in the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan in Karachi, Sindh, on 5 March 1948 where he stated:

> "What does Pathanistan mean? I will tell you just now. You see, that the people inhabiting this Province are called Sindhis and the name of their country is Sind. Similarly, the Punjab or Bengal is the land of the Punjabees or Bengalees. In the same way, there is the North-West Frontier. We are one people and ours is a land. Within Pakistan we also want that the mere mentioning of the

---

49. See Safoora Arbab, 'Nonviolence, Pukhtunwali and Decolonization: Abdul Ghaffar Khan and the Khuda'I Khidmatgar Politics of Friendship' in Ali Usman Qasmi (ed.), *Muslims Against the Muslim League: Critiques of the Idea of Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 220-254.

50. For a detailed study of Abdul Ghaffar Khan's political manouevering during this period, see Erland Jansson, *India, Pakistan or Pakhtunistan: The Nationalist Movements in the North-West Frontier Province, 1937-47* (Uppsala: Historiska Institutionen vid Uppsala Universitet, 1981).

51. Mohammad Ali Jinnah, *Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah Speeches and Statements as Governor General of Pakistan 1947-1948* (Islamabad: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Directorate of Films and Publications, 1989), p. 239.

name of the country should convey to the people that it is the land of Pakhtoon. … We want Pakhtoonistan and want to see all the Pathans on this side of the Durand Line joined and united together in Pakhtoonistan."[52]

This assertion of Pashtun unity was made in response to his concerns over the socio-economic and political marginalisation of the Pashtuns in Pakistan. The political and economic dominance of the Punjabis, coupled with the fact that Urdu was declared as the national language of Pakistan in 1948, led Abdul Ghaffar Khan to assert the importance of provincial autonomy and the rights of linguistic groups.

It is worth noting here that Urdu was promoted as a national language as it was seen as a language that would lessen the threat of provincialism in the new state. Languages like Bengali, Pashto and Punjabi, which were spoken by large segments of the population but associated firmly with specific regions, were seen as posing a threat to the cohesion of the newly formed state. Unlike languages like Sindhi and Punjabi, Urdu was not associated with any region or province. In fact, Urdu was the native language of a small minority of Pakistan's population. According to the census report of 1951, only some 3.4 per cent of Pakistan's population spoke Urdu as their native language.[53] Furthermore, Urdu was controversially associated with the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent and presented as being intrinsically linked to 'Islamic culture'.[54] Both of these points are clearly reflected in a speech made by Jinnah in support of the new state's language policy at the Dacca University on 24 March 1948. Jinnah stated:

> "Our enemies, among whom I regret to say, there are still some Muslims, have set about actively encouraging provincialism in the hope of weakening Pakistan and thereby facilitating the reabsorption of this Province into the Indian Dominion. … Let me restate my views on the question of a State language for Pakistan … only one *lingua franca*, that is, the language for inter-communication between the various provinces of the State, and that language should be Urdu and cannot be any other. *The State*

---

52. Mehrunnisa Ali (ed.), *Pak-Afghan Discord: A Historical Perspective: Documents, 1855-1979* (Karachi: University of Karachi, 1990), p. 121.

53. Rounaq Jahan, *Pakistan: Failure in National Integration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), p. 12.

54. For communalisation of these languages and socio-political mobilisation, see Christopher King, "The Hindi-Urdu Controversy of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh and Communal Consciousness", *Journal of South Asian Literature*, 13 (1/4), pp. 111-120; and Francis Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 69-80.

language, therefore, must obviously be Urdu, a language that has been nurtured by a hundred million Muslims of this sub-continent, a language understood throughout the length and breadth of Pakistan and above all, a language which, more than any other provincial language, embodies the best that is in Islamic culture and Muslim tradition and is nearest to the language used in other Islamic countries."[55] (Emphasis added)

In response, Abdul Ghaffar Khan asserted the need for the full autonomy of linguistic groups in Pakistan. In the case of the Pashtuns, this required a reorganisation of the provincial boundaries. In this, Abdul Ghaffar Khan found common cause with other proponents of linguistic and provincial rights such as Syed Ghulam Murtaza Shah (1904-1995), a Sindhi leader who raised concerns over the marginalisation of Sindhis and the Sindhi language in Pakistan. Abdul Ghaffar Khan's demand for Pashtunistan was perceived as a threat to the unity of the state and he was consequently imprisoned for a number of years on charges of sedition. His detention and the subsequent crushing of the Khudai Khidmatgars essentially weakened the potential mobilisation in the support of the demand for Pashtunistan. There were, however, other Pashtun figures and movements which resisted the Pakistani state. Equally, there have been differing visions of Pashtunistan.

For instance, the religious and military leader from Waziristan, Mirza Khan Wazir (1897-1960), popularly known as the Faqir of Ipi, waged a guerrilla campaign against the new state and called for the creation of an independent state of Pashtunistan. Notably, in 1948, the Faqir of Ipi led his forces to occupy Datta Khel in North Waziristan and soon after that declared the formation of an independent Pashtunistan. This uprising was crushed, in part, by the use of Pakistani Air Force bombers.[56] Similarly, in 1949, another movement, Sarishta, which was made up of young members of the Afridi tribe, declared the creation of Pashtunistan. Such movements notwithstanding, the demand for Pashtunistan did not result in a large scale mass movement or insurgency. In fact, through the detention of Abdul Ghaffar Khan, suppression of individuals and groups that challenged the authority of the state and the co-option of the *maliks*, the Pakistani establishment was able to thwart the emergence of a united political front between the Pashtuns of the North-West Frontier Province and the FATA.

---

55.   Mahomed Ali Jinnah, *Jinnah: Speeches and Statements, 1947-1948* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 155-158.

56.   For more on the Faqir of Ipi's political positioning, see Haroon, op. cit., pp. 185-194.

Afghanistan has consistently ideologically supported calls within Pakistan for the creation of Pashtunistan. It is also alleged to have supplied logistical and financial support to groups and individuals demanding for Pashtunistan.[57] From the perspective of successive governments in Afghanistan, the emergence of a Pashtun political entity that is closely aligned to Afghanistan provides the country with an opportunity to resolve two key issues. Firstly, it would open the door to the redrawing of the Durand Line. Secondly, it could provide direct access for landlocked Afghanistan to the Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean.[58] Mohammed Daud who served as the Prime Minister of Afghanistan between 1953 and 1963 and its President between 1973 and 1978 was an ardent supporter of the demand for Pashtunistan. For instance, on 29 March 1954, he publicly criticised Pakistan for acting against the interests of the Pashtuns on Radio Kabul when it initiated the 'One Unit Scheme'. This scheme, which merged all the provinces in West Pakistan into a single administrative unit, was promoted, in part, as means of erasing linguistic and ethnic differences in the state, provoking opposition amongst various factions. Following Daud's speech, anti-Pakistan protests broke out in Kabul, Jalalabad and Qandahar. The Pakistani flag at the Kabul Embassy was desecrated and a flag of Pashtunistan was hoisted on the embassy.[59] This incident resulted in both the countries recalling their ambassadors and suspending diplomatic relations till 1957. While supporting such a demand on the Pakistani side of the Durand Line, it has, as could be expected, been silent on the implications of the demand on Pashtun areas in Afghanistan. The emergence of an independent united Pashtun homeland could involve Afghanistan ceding sovereign claims over areas within its borders.

In the early 1970s, Afghanistan's vocal support for Pashtunistan resulted in Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (1928-1979) setting up an 'Afghan Cell' in the Foreign Office to counter Afghan propaganda and establish ties with groups within Afghanistan which could help to develop Pakistan's influence in Kabul. In the 1980s, the military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq (1924-1988) consciously provided support and arms to Islamists groups like the Hizb-i-Islam that were involved in the Afghan jihad against the Soviet Union. This was done partially with the aim of promoting an Islamic consciousness that could override the bonds of a transnational Pashtun ethnic identity, thus eroding Afghan support for the demand for Pashtunistan. At the same time, Zia-ul-Haq extended funding and patronage to sections of the *ulema* (Muslim

---

57.   Saikal, op. cit.

58.   Ibid.

59.   S M M Qureshi, "Pakhtunistan: The Frontier Dispute Between Afghanistan and Pakistan", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 39, No. 1/2 (Spring-Summer, 1966), pp. 99-114.

clerics) in the Pashtun areas. This was done with a view towards legitimising his military regime, galvanising religious-based support for his involvement in the war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, and undermining Pashtun political opponents. State patronage enabled religious figures such as Samiul Haq (1937-2018) to attain political prominence and develop an extensive network of *madrasas* (Muslim educational institutions) in the North-West Frontier Province and the FATA. It is important to note that this marked a unique development. Previously, authority and prestige were embedded largely within tribal networks. This was especially the case in the FATA where the FCR and system of governance implemented clearly placed the *ulema* in a subordinate position to the *maliks*. The *ulema* had no official role in the legal structure nor did they have a voice on the *jirga*. Their position had been dependent upon the patronage of the *maliks*. Funding from the federal government gave them an independent source of revenue, which in turn provided them with a new source of authority.

Subsequent regimes in Pakistan continued this policy of funding religious networks and groups to both delegitimise Pashtun political mobilisation in its various forms and exert geo-strategic influence in Afghanistan. The Taliban was one such group. Though the Taliban was initially made up of Pashtun refugees from Afghanistan, it soon drew support from the regions of the FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. With support from Pakistan, the Taliban gained control over much of Afghanistan between 1994 and 1998.[60] The Taliban was, however, a movement that lacked ideological and organisational unity. In time, sections of the Taliban began to split off. A number of splinter groups now turned their attention to "Islamising" parts of Pakistan. In time, Pakistan witnessed the rise of Taliban inspired movements such as the Tehrik-i-Nazaf-i-Shariat-i-Muhammadi (TNSM), which took control over much of Swat, a district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in 2007. Initially led by Sufi Muhammad (b. 1933), who had mobilised thousands of volunteers to cross over into Afghanistan to fight against the US, the movement came to prominence when his son-in-law, Fazullah (b. 1974), assumed leadership over the movement following Sufi Muhammad's arrest. Popularly known as 'Maulana Radio' because of his extensive adoption of the radio to provide religious instruction, Fazullah intensified the TNSM's attacks on state and military institutions in his quest to control Swat.

---

60.   For a detailed study of the rise of the Taliban and its relations with Pakistan, see Rashid Ahmed, *Taliban Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

In the FATA, militant groups that had splintered off from the Taliban coalesced under the title of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). While nominally supporting the activities of the Taliban in Afghanistan, members of the TTP were primary concerned with destabilising the authority of the Pakistani state and establishing what they defined as the socio-legal structure of Islam. Pakistani authorities initially tried to negotiate with such groups. For instance, in 2009, the state signed an agreement with the TSNM to allow the implementation of *Sharia* law (Islamic law) in parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in return for it agreeing to abide by a ceasefire. However, as attacks on civilians and state authorities expanded, the military launched an intensive military campaign in parts of the FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This, in turn, led to intensified attacks by militants on military, police and government institutions. Militants in South Waziristan even laid land mines in regions where they held a presence.

In June 2014, the Pakistani military launched Operation Zarb-i-Azb, an extensive military operation to weed out militancy in the FATA that involved nearly 30,000 soldiers. This campaign resulted in thousands of Pashtuns being arrested without trial and almost a million people being internally displaced.[61] This has been a major cause of the recent mass protests amongst the Pashtuns. Such military operations have not only served to further alienate sections of the Pashtun community from the state but also contributed to ethnic tensions. The military campaign against the TTP in the Swat Valley in 2009, for instance, resulted in numerous civilian deaths and injuries and the destruction of the main city of Swat, Mingora. The fact that the military is dominated by Punjabis further served to accentuate the sense of marginalisation of the Pashtuns by the majority ethnic community.

The Pashtuns have also long complained about their areas being economically marginalised and neglected in the state's infrastructural and development plans. Many from the erstwhile region of the FATA have long felt that the region has been economically ignored by the state. In terms of social development indices such as literary and poverty rates, the FATA has remained one of the most neglected areas in Pakistan. An official report by Pakistan's Planning Commission on multidimensional poverty from 2016 reported that 73 per cent of the FATA's population lived in multidimensional poverty.[62] Other studies have found that there is only one health facility for every 4,200 people and one doctor for every 7,800 people.[63] Similarly, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

---

61.   A report by the Human Rights of Commission of Pakistan from 2017 listed that there were 868 new reported cases of people being abducted that year.

62.   Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform, *Multidimensional Poverty in Pakistan*, 2016.

63.   Imtiaz Ali, "Mainstreaming Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas: Reform Initiatives and Roadblocks", Special Report, United States Institute of Peace, p. 3.

remains underdeveloped in terms of infrastructure and is the second poorest province of Pakistan. Though the province is rich in natural resources, the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa feel that they have not benefitted from their own resources and have been calling for higher royalty rates to be given to the province.[64]

Since the merger of the FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, there is a growing dispute over the Pakistani state's access to revenue from the mines and minerals from areas that were previously part of the FATA. Previously, natural resources in the FATA were decreed to belong to local tribes. In November 2019, however, a bill declaring that all mines and minerals in regions previously part of the FATA were now the property of the government was passed in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly. Despite vociferous opposition, this bill was pushed through the Assembly without a debate.[65] While the established political parties were generally silent on such issues, the PTM linked economic and political grievances within a wider narrative of Pashtun displacement. Pashteen asserted that the natural resources belonged to 'indigenous Pashtuns' and pointed to a wider conspiracy to politically and economically disenfranchise the Pashtuns. It is worth noting here that the PTM's stance on economic marginalisation has won it support amongst a section of the traders which has been demanding compensation from the government for losses that resulted from military operations.[66] Of particular concern to the establishment is the fact that the PTM's stance on economic marginalisation mirrors that of groups in Balochistan that are resisting what they view as the exploitation of their natural resources.

---

64. Zahid Gishkori, "Natural Resources: Lawmakers Demand Higher Royalties", *The Tribune*, 15 April 2011. https://tribune.com.pk/story/149845/natural-resources-lawmakers-demand-higher-royalties. Accessed on 9 November 2020.

65. "KP Assembly speaker kills debate on demands for grant, finance bill", *Dawn*, 27 June 2019. https://www.dawn.com/news/1490711/kp-assembly-speaker-kills-debate-on-demands-for-grant-finance-bill. Accessed on 29 June 2019.

66. Iqbal Singh Sevea, "Analysing the Crackdown on the Pashtun Movement in Pakistan", ISAS Brief No. 742, Institute of South Asian Studies, 4 February 2020. https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/papers/analysing-the-crackdown-on-the-pashtun-movement-in-pakistan/.

New Dynamics: The Pashtun Tahafuz Movement

Despite the sense of socio-economic and political marginalisation amongst sections of the Pashtun population, the state had been successful through the use of censorship and co-option in preventing the emergence of a mass movement. The rise of the PTM and the new dynamics that it has introduced into Pashtun politics is, however, posing a threat to established mechanisms of dealing with the regions of the FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

This section analyses four important ways in which the PTM may reshape established mechanisms and forms of Pashtun politics. Firstly, it reviews the forms of protests and mobilisation deployed by the PTM. The movement's astute use of the new media is discussed. Secondly, the movement's conscious departure from the demands for provincial reorganisation towards a political agenda centred on constitutional rights and human rights discourse is explored. Thirdly, the fact that the movement poses a challenge to established power structures within the Pashtun community is highlighted. Lastly, the section draws attention to the potential for the PTM to build a broader alliance with non-Pashtun groups like the Balochi movements who are making similar demands from the Pakistani establishment.

The PTM came into being in response to the public outcry following the murder of Naqeebullah Mehsud in January 2018. A Pashtun shopkeeper and aspiring model with an active social media presence, Mehsud was accused by security agencies of having links with the terrorist groups Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. After 10 days of detention, he died in what many describe as a 'fake encounter'. For many Pashtuns, his detention and death came to symbolise the plight of thousands of their brethren who have been detained without trial and remain unaccounted for as a result of the military's campaign against militancy in the provinces of the FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Following Mehsud's funeral, Pashteen launched a protest march from Dera Ismail Khan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan. Pashteen left Dera Ismail Khan with 29 others on 26 January 2018. As the march made its way through key Pashtun areas like Bannu, Kohat and Peshawar, thousands joined in. Upon reaching Islamabad, a 10-day sit-in was held. A subsequent sit-in in Peshawar on 10 April 2018 drew a 60,000-strong crowd.[67] Mehsud's death proved to be the catalyst that brought various individuals and Pashtun factions together into a

---

67. Iqbal Singh Sevea, "The Pashtun Protection Movement in Pakistan: The Taliban, the Military and the Fragmentation of Authority", ISAS Working Paper No. 298, Institute of South Asian Studies, 12 June 2018. https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/papers/298-the-pashtun-protection-movement-in-pakistan-the-taliban-the-military-and-the-fragmentation-of-authority/.

loosely organised movement. Since this protest march, the PTM has organised a number of mass rallies and *dharnas*, which have drawn in hundreds of thousands of people.

Censorship of the media by the establishment has ensured that these protests and rallies have largely not been covered by mainstream Pakistani media, especially television news channels. This was succinctly highlighted by the Pakistani journalist, Omar Quraishi, who noted that when a PTM rally which attracted huge crowds was taking place in Swat on 30 April 2018, leading television channels "gave five hours of uninterrupted ad-free coverage" to a rally organised by Imran Khan who, at that time, was contesting in the elections and was widely believed to be supported by the military, "but not even 30 seconds to the huge PTM *jalsa* [rally]".[68] Similarly, in February 2019, the popular Pashto language channel, Khyber TV, blocked the telecast of an interview with Pashteen due to pressure from the military.[69]

In the face of such censorship, the PTM and its supporters have made extensive use of new media such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. Members of the PTM have proven to be adept at uploading and circulating images, videos and speeches. The PTM's use of social media has allowed it to challenge the established authorities and, to some extent, evade state censorship. In fact, Mehsud's death attracted the attention it did due in no small measure to the fact that he had an active social media presence. The popularity of the PTM is itself the result of the rapid expansion of smartphones and internet subscriptions in Pakistan. These new forms of media have not only diluted the centrality of television news channels but also the efficacy of mechanisms of media censorship. The supporters of the PTM employ new media to circulate videos of speeches by PTM leaders and recordings of Pashtuns allegedly being harassed by the military, and provide information and visuals on PTM rallies. Dawar, a leading figure of the PTM, has acknowledged the centrality of new media in facilitating the emergence of the PTM:

> "I was a political worker before popular access to social media. I remember larger protests that were ignored by most newspapers. It is now much easier to reach the masses, to tell them about issues and events. The impact is huge. If there were no social media, there would be no PTM. ... Social media helped PTM's cause. It is the basic political tool for PTM to spread our message.

68.   Fazal Warraich, Twitter, https://twitter.com/fazalwarraich?lang=en. Accessed on 7 June 2018.

69.   Qurratulain Zaman, "A movement of millennials in Pakistan is dubbed the Pashtun Spring", *DW Akademia*, 9 April, 2019. https://www.dw.com/en/a-movement-of-millennials-in-pakistan-is-dubbed-the-pashtun-spring/a-48222538. Accessed 20 April 2019.

A whole new generation of political activists are trained in this process. We faced mainstream media censorship, they curtailed our physical mobility, there are legal cases against anyone who has even served PTM volunteers a cup of tea."[70]

It is worth noting here that the establishment has attempted to respond to the PTM's use of new media by arresting some of its members under the Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act of 2016.[71] It is also alleged to have blocked specific sites and launched a concerted media campaign to depict the PTM as a group of traitors.

Through social media and its protests, the PTM has denounced the Imran Khan-led government, the Pakistani military and even the Pakistani state for "humiliating" and persecuting the Pashtuns. Addressing a rally on 16 March 2018, Pashteen called on the Pashtuns "to publicly identify the place that has destroyed us". As the crowd cheered on, he asserted that "[i]t is GHQ [General Headquarters], which ruined us!"[72] Such a direct reference to the GHQ of the Pakistan military marks a rare open critique of the military in Pakistan. Indeed, the PTM members regularly accuse the military and the Inter-Services Intelligence agency of not only carrying out human rights abuses in Pashtun areas during its campaign against militants but also of fanning the militancy in the first place. Various leaders of the PTM have stated that the Pashtuns have been caught in the middle of the military's "good Taliban, bad Taliban" policy. They have also called for an end to what they describe as atrocities carried out by the military in Pashtun areas, the release of all political prisoners, the clearing of land mines in the FATA and an end to racial profiling and official discrimination against the Pashtuns.

At the heart of the PTM's appeal is its evocative claim to represent and protect the "pride of the Pashtuns". In the words of Saira Bano Orakzai, a Pashtun intellectual and vocal supporter of the movement, the PTM is striving to "restore [the] dignity of Pashtuns"[73] and is a "manifestation of the trauma and sorrow the Pashtuns living in Pakistan's war-torn tribal regions have had

---

70.   Quoted in Zaman, op. cit.

71.   See, for instance, "Pakistan: Immediately and Unconditionally Release Muhammad Hayat Khan Preghal", Amnesty International, 24 September 2018. https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ASA3391512018ENGLISH.pdf.

72.   "[English Subtitle] Manzoor Pashteen on GHQ behind Pashtun Sufferings", YouTube, 16 March 2018. www.youtube.com/watch?v=eg3rfrTk7X0. Accessed on 3 June 2018.

73.   Saira Bano Orakzai, "Restoring Pashtun Dignity in Pakistan", *Daily Times*, 23 March 2018. https://dailytimes.com.pk/218319/restoring-pashtun-dignity-in-pakistan/. Accessed on 4 June 2018.

to face."[74] Like many others, Orakzai sees the movement as part of a much longer tradition of resistance on the part of the Pashtuns against oppression from external forces. It is thus no surprise that the leaders and supporters of the movement have often drawn reference to figures like Abdul Ghaffar Khan and the Faqir of Ipi. The song associated with the PTM, *Da Sanga Azadi Da* (What Kind of Freedom is This?) further alludes to how the present issue of rights is linked to historical assertions of Pashtun rights and autonomy. Such statements have, no doubt, made the military and the Pakistani government nervous about the aims of the movement and its links with Afghanistan.

The FCR was projected as symbolising wider official and institutional discrimination against the Pashtuns. Over the years, a number of Pashtun figures called for the abolishment of the FCR and the reform of the socio-political structure. For instance, Shaukat Aziz, a student leader and prominent figure in the 'Go FCR Go' movement has stated that "[u]nder the FCR, we have neither freedom nor protection" nor is there "progress, development, employment opportunities, peace and the rule of law."[75] In the FATA, the FCR was popularly referred to as the "Black Law". The PTM's mobilisation on the issue of FCR was, in part, the factor that resulted in the Pakistani establishment merging the FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This marked a significant reversal on the part of the establishment's stance on the issue. While this was considered earlier, the military was not keen on the merger and there was no consensus in parliament. The merger is now being promoted by the establishment as a means of mainstreaming the regions that were previously part of the FATA. It also sees this as a means of deflating support for the PTM. While the PTM has welcomed the end of the FCR, its leaders have stressed that the merger does little to improve the position of the Pashtuns. Dawar has stressed that the PTM's struggle was to ensure the Pashtun's "right to live" and that the new provincial structure would not necessarily usher in full socio-political recognition and rights.[76] Furthermore, PTM leaders have warned that the FATA Interim Governance Regulation that replaced the FCR did not guarantee that a new political framework would be developed.[77] They argue

74.   Saira Bano Orakzai, "Pakistan's Defiant Pakhtuns", *Daily Times*, 17 May 2018. https://dailytimes.com.pk/240941/ pakistans-defiant-pakhtuns/. Accessed on 4 June 2018.

75.   Said Alam Khan, "Go FCR Go", *The Nation*, 30 January 2017. https://nation.com.pk/30-Jan-2017/go-fcr-go. Accessed on 3 June 2018.

76.   Mohsin Dawar, "Pashtuns' struggle for rights cannot be silenced through violence", *Aljazeera*, 12 June 2020. https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/6/12/pashtuns-struggle-for-rights-cannot-be-silenced-through-violence/. Accessed on 13 April 2018.

77.   See Sudha Ramachandran, Hamsini Hariharan and Shibani Mehta, "Impact of the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement on Pakistan's Political Landscape", *Strategic Assessment 2018-03*, Takshashila Institution.

that substantive change would only be ushered in when the Pashtuns are accorded full constitutional and human rights.

While it draws upon the legacy of historic struggles for Pashtun freedom or autonomy, the PTM has consciously sought to frame its demands within the framework of constitutional rights and human rights discourse.[78] Pashteen has repeatedly stressed that the PTM is demanding for rights already embedded within Pakistan's constitution, "We want our issues resolved through the Constitution and according to the country's laws."[79] Such an equation of their demands with constitutional rights is significant for a number of reasons. It could be seen as a strategic attempt to counter allegations that the PTM is an anti-Pakistani movement. It also allows the PTM to distance itself both from the demand for Pashtunistan and Afghanistan.[80] Afghanistan views the PTM as a conduit through which it can continue to support Pashtun secessionism and its leaders have expressed support for the movement. Ashraf Ghani, for instance, publicly expressed his concern over the detention of Pashteen in January 2020 and stressed the need to "support and encourage peaceful civilian movements for justice" like the PTM.[81] On its part, the PTM leadership is wary of being seen as a proxy for Afghanistan and has been careful to not speak in terms of a transnational Pashtun identity. More importantly, the PTM is itself calling for a transformation of the political structures and mechanisms of governance and regulation in the Pashtun areas. The provincial reorganisation of Pashtun areas is not the aim. Indeed, it is seen as a distraction. After all, the PTM is opposed to the structures of socio-political authority within the Pashtun community that have been propped up by the state authority.

It is in line with this that the movement has repeatedly rejected calls for them to partake in a *jirga* to resolve their issues. The PTM stresses that the issues they have raised need to be dealt with at the constitutional and state level rather than within the 'social' or 'internal' realm. The *jirga*, in the words of Pashteen, is an institution where two aggrieved parties bring their dispute for adjudication. Issues between citizens and the state are handled at the

78. Sher Shah Atif, "Manzoor Pashteen: Our Protest is non-violent and constitutional", *Aljazeera*, 9 April 2018. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/4/9/manzoor-pashteen-our-protest-is-non-violent-and-constitutional. Accessed on 13 April 2018.

79. "Our demands are constitutional: PTM", *The News*, 30 April 2018. https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/310779-our-demands-are-constitutional-ptm. Accessed on 3 June 2018.

80. See video released by Manzoor Pashteen on the constitutional basis of the PTM's demands. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWCiPCt992k. Accessed on 3 June 2018.

81. "Pakistan cautions Afghan president against 'interfering' in internal matters", *The Tribune*, 27 January 2020. https://tribune.com.pk/story/2145347/1-pakistan-cautions-afghan-president-interfering-internal-matters. Accessed 9 November 2020.

constitutional level and not by the *jirga*.[82] The PTM is thus rejecting the mechanisms and forms of traditional political authority that have governed the FATA since 1901. As noted above, the colonial state and the state of Pakistan have both promoted the *jirga* as the forum for resolving Pashtun political issues. The PTM's challenge to established forms of authority within the Pashtun community and the fact that it accuses the *maliks* of being complicit with the Pakistani state in the underdevelopment of the FATA differentiate it from earlier protest movements. The *maliks* have responded to the rise of the PTM by presenting themselves as mediators between the movement and the military authorities. They have constituted an *Aman* (Peace) Committee and invited leaders of the movement to attend a *jirga*. On its part, the PTM has rejected these tribal elders as pro-government and pro-status quo figures who have been associated with the TTP.

Looking ahead, the PTM's ability to mobilise the masses even in the face of opposition from the establishment is likely to impact upon politics in the Pashtun areas. The established political parties that have long claimed to represent the Pashtuns are already having to respond to the PTM. For instance, the ANP and PMAP have both felt the need to recalculate their political alliances and orientations vis-à-vis the military in the light of the emergence of the PTM. Despite claiming to fight for the socio-political rights of the Pashtuns, both the ANP and PMAP are political parties that have aligned themselves at various times with the establishment and have acquiesced both to the military's action in the FATA and its policies in Afghanistan.[83] The ANP has a strong support base in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and has governed the province from 2008 to 2013. Although it initially supported the PTM, the ANP has now denounced the movement and has warned its workers against participating in PTM activities.[84] Clearly, the ANP is concerned about the PTM's potential influence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the impact this may have on its support base and relations with the establishment. On the other hand, the PMAP, which has its support base amongst the Pashtuns of Balochistan, has staunchly supported the PTM. For the PMAP, the PTM may prove to be a means of winning influence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Imran Khan's PTI, which has a strong presence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and is believed to be close to the military, has condemned the PTM and has instead supported the Pakistan

---

82. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uQLB5qodExY. Accessed on 8 June 2018.

83. See, for instance, Mohammad Taqi, "Pakistan's Pashtun Rights Movement is Alive and Kicking", *The Wire*, 2 February 2020. https://thewire.in/south-asia/pakistans-pashtun-rights-movement-is-alive-and-kicking. Accessed on 29 February 2020.

84. Mansoor Ali, "Politics in Pakistan has always been unpredictable", *The Nation*, 10 February 2020. https://nation.com.pk/10-Feb-2020/politics-in-pakistan-has-always-been-unpredictable. Accessed on 1 November 2020.

Zindabad Movement (PZM). The PZM is a movement that was launched to demonstrate support for the military and counter the PTM. The political equation in the Pashtun areas may also be impacted by the fact that the PTM is participating in ongoing conversations with the recently launched opposition coalition, the PDM. This may provide the PTM with a much-needed voice at the centre; something that it has lacked thus far.

Furthermore, the fact that it moves beyond an ethno-nationalism platform and speaks in terms of constitutional rights may open the space for collaboration between the PTM and other groups claiming to fight for their socio-political rights. Partly due to tensions between the Baloch and Pashtuns in east Balochistan where the Pashtuns are the majority, the two communities have not been able to form a sustainable united front. After all, the demand for Pashtunistan implied that Pashtun areas in Balochistan were to be cut away. However, the PTM's condemnation of military campaigns, calls for an investigation into disappearances and opposition to the alleged economic exploitation of economic resources are demands that a number of Baloch have made. The fact that the PTM is attracting support from beyond the Pashtun community is already reflected in the fact that the Awami Workers Party, a socialist political party which does not seek to be associated with any specific ethnic group or province, has expressed support for the PTM and has taken part in its rallies and *dharnas*.[85]

---

85. See, for instance, "AWP demands release of PTM chief, others" on the Awami Workers Party's official website. https://awamiworkersparty.org/awp-demands-release-of-ptm-chief-others/. Accessed on 10 November 2020.

Conclusion

The emergence of the PTM has ushered in a new dynamic into Pashtun politics. While there have been various movements demanding for Pashtun autonomy and secession since the birth of Pakistan, none of these were able to generate a mass following. The PTM's ability to mobilise tens of thousands of people at its rallies and *dharnas* marks it out from previous Pashtun movements and also from similar movements in Balochistan and Sindh. Moreover, most of the previous movements continued to be led by, linked to or drew legitimacy from the traditional Pashtun elites and authorities. Abdul Ghaffar Khan had himself been from an influential landlord family in the Peshawar Valley. In contrast, the PTM is not only openly challenging the militants and the Pakistani military but also disrupting the authority of the *maliks*. The mass mobilisation of the Pashtun youth has caught the *maliks*, the military and the Pakistani state by surprise. As noted above, the FCR and the system of Political Agents have for decades served to entrench the social and political position of the *maliks*. The fact that universal adult franchise was only granted in 1997 and political parties remained prohibited till 2003 has meant that mass political mobilisation of the sort being witnessed currently is a novel development.

The PTM has also shifted the focus of Pashtun politics away from the question of provincial reorganisation towards issues of constitutional rights. It blames the *maliks* and, albeit implicitly, the established Pashtun political parties of perpetuating a system that disenfranchised the Pashtuns. In line with this, it has stayed clear from the demand for Pashtunistan and also called on people to not be distracted by the recent merger of the FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Overall, the PTM is also disrupting the mechanisms that the establishment has employed to stifle dissent in areas such as the FATA, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. Its use of new media has posed a challenge to the establishment's powers of censorship. Despite attempts by the authorities to clamp down on digital media, members of the PTM continue to use mediums such as Facebook and Twitter to highlight the activities of the movements and alleged human rights abuses. For instance, the hashtag *#DaSangaeAzadiDa*, which references one of the songs adopted by the PTM, was widely used to distribute information on Pashtuns who were "missing" as a result of military operations. At PTM rallies, protestors often come armed with flags, banners and smartphones. The extensive use of new media also reflects the PTM's appeal to new demographic groups. It has attracted wide support amongst the youth and, significantly, women.

While it remains to be seen if the PTM's organisational structure and its methods will provide a model for other protest movements, it is clear that its mass support has alerted established political parties to the need to engage with it. The fact that the PTM is currently in discussions with the newly formed opposition coalition, the PDM, and has drawn support from parties like the PMAP demonstrates a recognition of its potential influence in the electoral sphere. It may also provide the PTM with a voice in regional and central politics. While it has not joined the PDM, the PTM has supported its call for the ouster of the Imran Khan-led government. Thus, the Pashtun question in Pakistan may come to be inextricably linked to the battle between a seemingly united opposition on the one hand, and the incumbent government that currently enjoys the support of the military on the other.

About the Author

Dr Iqbal Singh Sevea is an Associate Professor of History at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. He is currently a Visiting Associate Professor at the Institute of South Asian Studies, and the Department of History, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, at the National University of Singapore.

Dr Sevea's research focuses on modern and contemporary South Asia, and modern Islam. He is the author of the book, *The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal: Islam and Nationalism in Late Colonial India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012). He is currently completing his second book entitled *Islamic Political Thought in Modern South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming, 2021).

Dr Sevea's publications include articles on state ideology and popular culture in Pakistan; political Islam; the spread of transnational Islamic movements across the Indian Ocean; conceptions of bodily piety in South Asia; and Muslim education in South Asia. Before joining the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Dr Sevea was an Assistant Professor and Coordinator of the Contemporary Islam Programme at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

Dr Sevea obtained his PhD from the University of Oxford.

About South Asia Scan

Understanding contemporary South Asia – a dynamic region with growing weight in the international system – is our mission. The Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) at the National University of Singapore offers continuous assessment of the developments in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka and their implications for Asia and the world.

Launched in January 2019, South Asia Scan is an important addition to the bouquet of publications from ISAS. It is prompted by the need for a timely, substantive and accessible review of key social, political, economic and strategic changes in South Asia.

South Asia Scan will be published periodically as our scholars look deep into this very complex region and provide perspectives on the unfolding structural transformations within South Asia.

Past Issues

1. Dipinder S Randhawa, E-commerce in India: Opportunities and Challenges, *South Asia Scan: Issue No. 1*, Institute of South Asian Studies (January 2019).

2. Rani D Mullen, Afghanistan: Time for Peace?, *South Asia Scan: Issue No. 2*, Institute of South Asian Studies (April 2019).

3. Jivanta Schottli, Oceanic Opportunity: Maritime Cooperation between India and Europe, *South Asia Scan: Issues No. 3*, Institute of South Asian Studies (September 2019).

4. Touqir Hussain, United States-Pakistan Relations: New Opportunities and Old Challenges, *South Asia Scan: Issues No. 4*, Institute of South Asian Studies (October 2019).

5. Amit Ranjan, The Maldives: Politics of an Island Nation, *South Asia Scan No. 5*, Institute of South Asian Studies (December 2019).

6. Diego Maiorano and Ronojoy Sen, The 2019 Indian General Election and its Implications, *South Asia Scan: Issue No. 6*, Institute of South Asian Studies (January 2020).

7. Ren Yuanzhe, Exploring Unknown Shores: China's Small State Diplomacy in the Indian Ocean Region, *South Asia Scan: Issue No. 7*, Institute of South Asian Studies (May 2020).

8. Christian Wagner, India as a Regional Security Provider in South Asia, *South Asia Scan: Issue No. 8*, Institute of South Asian Studies (June 2020).

9. John Vater and Yogesh Joshi, Narendra Modi and the Transformation of India's Pakistan Policy, *South Asia Scan: Issue No. 9*, Institute of South Asian Studies (August 2020).