

## **Ancient Regions, New Frontier**

### **The Prehistory of the Durand Line in Baluchistan**

JAKOB RÖSEL\*

#### **Abstract**

The prehistory of the Durand Line is complicated, involving new forms of tribal allegiance-building, tribal and localised state-building and, finally, regional empire-building. A new tribal as well as mercantile religion and civilisation, Islam, gave rise to new patterns of trade and a new crossroads and commercial centre: Kalat. With the decline of the Mughals a Kalat state based on a local dynasty and two tribal federations emerged as a semi-independent state. The British Empire ultimately strengthened and enlarged, balanced and controlled this tribal and regional state. Thanks to the British the Khan of Kalat controlled most of present-day Baluchistan. From the 1870s the construction of this imperial state served new geostrategic designs: the Khan of Kalat conceded control over the Bolan Pass as well as Quetta to the British Empire. It was this imperial bridgehead, called British Baluchistan, which served as the cornerstone for a forward border policy and, ultimately, the Durand Line.

#### **Keywords**

Frontiers, imperialism, British India, Baluchistan, Durand Line

#### **Introduction**

A frontier, border or boundary can have various forms and functions. The actual artefact is only the empirical, spatial manifestation of versatile social or political, cultural or economic intentions, designs or strategies. Borders serve an offensive or defensive function. They are inclusive or exclusive. They can operate as the exoskeleton of an emerging state. They can either create or fail to create and demarcate ethnic loyalties or political identities. Borders can be coterminous with the myriad social and psychological boundaries which define our individual and collective life or not. Most im-

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\* Jakob Rösel, Institut für Politik und Verwaltungswissenschaft, Universität Rostock; jakob.roesel@uni-rostock.de

portantly: no border functions without openings – by design or by default. Do the gaps, entrance points and gates represent the failure or the success of power. They not only impede, but channel, determine or create contact and the exchange of cross-border traffic. Finally, one and the same border will be perceived and valued differently not only by insiders and outsiders, but also by various social groups.

These observations are not trivial. They are important for the exotic business of colonial frontier-building. Clear-cut geographic and bureaucratic frontiers were concepts and artefacts beyond the political imagination and technical resources of most South Asian polities and states. But when the British began to plan, negotiate and construct these artefacts, they had to impose them on societies, tribes and states which defined and organized their boundaries and identities, their exchanges and competition, and their mobility in completely different terms and routines. In one of the most bizarre and volatile cases of frontier making, the fabrication of the Durand Line, a frontier emerged which was and is characterized by three traits. There was and is no consensus on the operation and the legitimacy of the frontier between the adjoining governments or the affected border tribes. There was – and still is? – no clear-cut and enforceable border on the ground: the border resembles a series of widely different gaps, connected by an abstraction. Finally, the Durand Line emerged as a result of unforeseen and constantly changing threats, chances and options. It was loaded with strategic anticipations and colonial ideology. Probably even before the withdrawal of the British authorities, the Durand Line could be perceived as anachronistic and counterproductive, a monument to the Great Game, out of touch with the nation-building and development constraints of the new state of Pakistan. This article will examine the background – Islamisation –, the major building block – the Khanate of Kalat – and the shifting perspectives on empire and frontier-building that together determined and finally facilitated the emergence of the Durand Line. I will briefly describe the Islamic conquest, which gave rise to new patterns of trade, networks of tribal affiliations and a tribal and dynastic polity, the Khanate of Kalat.

I will then demonstrate how the decline of the Mughal Empire and the accession of Nadir Shah enabled the Khanate to embark on a course of sub-regional state-building. As a result, the Khanate could provide the advancing British Empire with the political base, a supposedly independent, friendly and traditional state, through which much the greater part of Baluchistan and the remaining tribal areas could be politically controlled. Of still greater importance was the creation of a strategic enclave, British Baluchistan, centred on Quetta. Only on the basis of this bridgehead, railway junction and cantonment could the project of a forward border, isolating and containing

the cross-border tribes to the east, be realistically pursued. Thus, the Durand Line emerged not so much as the predictable outcome of border engineering, but as the belated and largely unexpected outcome of regional British state and empire-building.

Part One of this study is based on the valuable collection of H. M. Elliott, as edited by G. Dowson (1877 / 1985): *The history of Sindh as told by its own historians*. It also relies heavily on the exhaustive study by A. Wink. Regional, state-, empire- and frontier-building are analysed on the basis of the numerous British gazetteers and memoirs. In addition, the paper is indebted to the important study on the Khanate of Kalat by M. Axmann.

## **I Alliance-building: Islamic conquest**

No religion has ever expanded as fast as Islam, the new creed professed by Muhammad. In just 80 years following Muhammad's death in 632 AD, the victorious armies of Islam had conquered the Mashreq and the Maghreb and in 711 conquered most of Visigothic Spain. In 712 an Islamic force led by Mir Qasim, the cousin and son in law of Al Halaf, governor of Iraq and Basra, reached Sindh, and in the same year Qutaiba progressed far into Central Asia, stopping at the same longitude on which lay the subdued Hindu/Buddhist kingdom of Sindh (Wink 2002: 7–24).

By now, in the west and in the east, a first saturation point had been reached. Over the next two centuries, the conquests were consolidated. The road to Sindh did not lead to Al-Hind. In the north, the Hindu Kush and its surviving Hindu kingdoms to the east, in the Kabul and Khyber region, constituted a formidable barrier to further advancement. Only in the tenth century did a new dynasty of manumitted Turkish warrior slaves force the Hindu Shahis from Kabul to Peshawar and finally into the Punjab. Under Mahmud of Gazni this new dynasty systematically plundered the Indus Valley and the Punjab and in this way prepared for the final assault on Hindustan. Thus, for three centuries after Muhammad's death, Baluchistan, foremost its Makran coast and the west-east trade route in its immediate hinterland, was an important moving frontier, raiding and trading zone as well as an area of peripheral and unstable alliance-, but not of state-building. As the early Arab travellers and geographers make clear, the Makran coast and its hinterland were no longer the hostile, deadly and isolated areas traversed by Nearchos and Alexander. Since the beginning of intensive monsoon overseas trading in the first century AD, the ethnic composition of the coast and the major caravan trading centres had changed: Arabs from Oman and Muscat had migrated either seasonally or permanently to the Makran

coast, traders from Iran as well as Hindu Jats from Sindh could be found in the small oasis and trading towns along the caravan route leading from Las Bela in the east to the Kech valley in the west and on into the harbours opposite Ormuz Island (Wink 2002: 129–144).

The first raiding expeditions organized from Basra, and soon from south-eastern Iran, in particular Seistan, in the decades immediately before Mir Qasim's conquests encountered a very mixed population: Azadi tribesmen from Oman, pirates from all directions, Iranian traders as well as heretics. Parties and sects who had lost the struggle for control of the early caliphate found refuge in the east. As the composition of these raiding forces demonstrates, regional multi-ethnic commandos conquered local multi-ethnic trading centres (Dowson 1877 / 1985: 414–433).

Much later, in British colonial times, the Makran hinterlands' tribal structure was described as fragmented, stratified and focused on sedentary, urban aristocracies. This urbanised tribal elite dominated the trading centres. In addition, these elites controlled the cash crops of the Makran Hinterlands based on Karez irrigation, oasis gardening and date palm groves. We do not know if the conquerors in the seventh century encountered such aristocracies or created them. But the existence of such tribal and urban aristocracies would explain the ease with which successive Muslim governors not only established local control and taxation, but could impose tribute on the various hinterland tribes as well as control the caravan trade. The new conquerors progressed along the old and lucrative land and sea routes. Already before the conquest of Sindh in 712, they had advanced along a further important trade route in the direction of the Bolan and Khojak passes. This trade route started in Sonmiani and Las Bela, at and near the ocean. Crossing the Kandahar passes, it passed through Khuzdar and Kalat, important caravan and trading stations as well as important crossroads (Dowson 1877 / 1985: 385ff.).

Not only the Indus Valley could be reached from these way stations. Of still greater importance was the Kachhi, a highly fertile river plain to the west of the Indus plain. When in summer the monsoon rains fell on the Suleiman and Pab Range to the west, the water rushed through more than seven otherwise dry wadis into the Kachhi plain. The Kachhi itself, without any monsoon rainfall, thus harvested the monsoon precipitations of the highlands to the west. For more than 4,000 years – as excavations show – the local peasants stored this bounty and turned the otherwise dry Kachhi into a breadbasket, not only for themselves, but also for the highland tribes to the west along the trade route. Water, collected with the help of earthen dams built across the wadis, was so abundant that three crops per year could be sown (Swidler 1979: 102ff.).

Very soon Arab raiding parties attracted by these way stations and this irrigation zone tried, initially without success, to establish control over the inland route and the Kachhi.

Compared to other fringe areas of early Islamic conquest, there is, interestingly enough, no shortage of documents for the Muslim advance into Baluchistan and the conquest of Sindh. This is because trade along the Persian Gulf was central to Arab and now Muslim concerns. Of still greater importance, was the trade with the Hindu Buddhist kingdom of Sindh and its important *entrepôt* of Dewal, named after its temple. Besides the reports of Arab travellers, the conquest of Sindh is described in the remarkable Chach Namah, which is in all probability based on pre-Islamic, Brahminical or Buddhist sources (Fredunbeg 1900 / 1990). The Islamic reports and the Chach Namah leave no doubt about the original Buddhist foundation of the Sindh state (Fredunbeg 1900 / 1990: 16ff.).

It was only in the very last decades before the Islamic conquest that a Brahminical Minister, Chah, carried out a *coup d'état*. But he could not and would not eradicate the century old Buddhist tradition and organisation of the state. Buddhist, and later Hindu, temples, rites, corporations and castes were widespread. They existed in the Kachhi, on the periphery of the Sindh Kingdom and in the delta, and they survived well into the Middle Ages: after the fall of Mir Qasim, Sindh was ruled for centuries by the only superficially Islamised local tribal dynasties of the Samma and the Sumra. From being a centre of Islamic advance and conquest, Baluchistan and Sindh reverted to a backwater: Afghanistan and the Kabul region became the strategic base from which the Punjab was plundered, *Mula-sthana*, the sun temple in Multan, finally destroyed and Al Hind finally conquered. Still, Islam brought a new civilisation and world economy into the deserts and mountain ranges of what would only in British times be called Baluchistan. Arab geographers rejected any overarching concepts; instead they spoke of regions such as Med and Makran, or of trading towns including their various hinterlands and tribes: Kech, Turbat, Panjgur, etc. This was not only geographic, but political and Islamic realism. It was the tribal dynasties in Sindh, the tribal oligarchies and aristocracies in Makran and the shifting tribal federations in the deserts which constituted the prevalent forms of control. These networks of social and tribal allegiances facilitated the diffusion of a superficial, top-down Islam. They furthered the caravan trade and cultural exchange. They afforded the only means to collect tribute, demand loyalty and negotiate peace. In addition, they constituted a formidable vehicle to organise revenge, plundering expeditions or a *jihad*. Most important of all, these networks of regional allegiances left enough room for the constant movement of either whole tribes or factions of marauders:

whole, or parts of, tribes moved from Sindh or the Rajasthan desert to the west and from the Iranian deserts to the east into the wastelands of Chagai and Kharaan or the hinterland of Makran. There was, thus, constant movement into, through and out of these webs of alliances. It is in this context that we have to imagine, at an unknown date, the advent of Kurdish-speaking tribes, the Baluch tribes, which much later lent their name to the whole area, Baluchistan.

## II State-building: the Khanate of Kalat

Kalat, “fort”, has long been an important way station lay on the caravan route to the Indian Ocean, to the Bolan Pass and to the Kachhi and the Indus Valleys. The local Jat population cultivated the surrounding oasis and the irrigated fields of Karez. Kalat’s peasants interacted with the regional tribes up and down the Sarawan and Jhalawan caravan routes. Again, during their seasonal movement, their *transhumance* cycle, these tribes exchanged goods with the Kachhi peasants during their winter stay in the area. (Scholz 1974) Thus, Kalat was typical of the newly Islamised regional political centres: it was a centre sustained by social and tribal alliances, loyalties and exchanges. It was not a state. All this changed with the advent of powerful Baluch tribes in the fifteenth century, as recorded in the famous ballads of Chakhar and Rind. According to these legends, the Baluch intruders battled it out with the local Brahui tribes and the resident Jat population. In the end, two new, but only loosely affiliated tribal federations emerged: the Sarawan and the Jhalawan federations. The local Jat population was largely subdued, and the Baluch intruders and these two Brahui federations emerged, resulting in a precarious and local centre of power, a polity, but not yet a state.

One of the tribes, the Mirwaris, claiming Arab descent, would henceforth rule Kalat and the Jat farmers. In addition, they claimed a vague suzerainty over the two tribal federations. Yet these Mirwari rulers were unable to consolidate their power. The region became dependent on the new Mughal Empire; Kalat was regarded as a part of the Kandahar *sarkar* and occasionally ruled by a Mughal appointee. It was only with the weakening of Mughal power in the west that the Mirwaris emerged from the shadows: one Mirwari, Mir Ahmed (1667 to 1696), now controlled Kalat and established a new dynasty, the Ahmedzai. The entrenchment of the Ahmedzai dynasty created a paradox: constant palace intrigues and fights over succession involved not only the Ahmedzai, but the whole Mirwari tribe. The bloody succession struggles secured the rule of the Ahmedzai, but fragmented and destroyed the Mirwari tribe. The Ahmedzai rulers were, therefore, seldom

able to count on the loyalty of the Sarawan and Jhalawan confederations. In addition, the two configurations were divided by vendettas and competition. There was no unified control over caravan routes. The Khanate lacked a reliable income through tribute or tolls. Lacking its own troops, it had to rely on the doubtful loyalty of the two federations. All these problems could have been solved if the Ahmedzai rulers could have secured a tax and power base: the Kachhi (a regional breadbasket). But this unique resource base was traditionally controlled by the Sindh government. By now, Sindh Mughal rule had been replaced by the rule of a dynasty of Pirs, powerful saints and landlords, the Kalhoras (Aitken 1907: 105–113).

The fifth Ahmedzai ruler Mir Abdullah (1716 to 1730), attempted to wrest the Kachhi from Kalhora control, but he and many of his warriors were killed in battle. However, his successor, Mir Muhabbat, profited from a unique chance: in 1739, on his way to attack and plunder the weakened Mughal Empire, Nadir Shah invited Mir Muhabbat to join the plundering expedition, an offer he could not refuse. As a reward, the Khan of Kalat received complete control over the Kachhi when the Kalhora rulers succumbed to Nadir Shah. The generous gift counted as “blood money” to compensate the Khan for the killing of Mir Abdullah and his men. Now the Ahmedzai could realistically hope to build a state. However, it was only under the successor of Mir Muhabbat, Nazir Khan the Great, that the golden opportunity of grabbing the Kachhi and augmenting power in Kalat was turned into a golden age by integrating and consolidating the Kalat state. Again, it was a new and promising constellation in international politics which contributed to regional state consolidation: Nasir Khan ruled for 44 years (1751–1794), he thus lived and fought in the epoch in which the Mughal Empire entered terminal decline. Three new powers fought for the spoils, the Mahratta Confederacy, the East India Company, by now a Bengal-based military power, and Shah Ahmed Abdalli of Kandahar, the founder of the Durrani dynasty. It was the great fortune of Nasir Khan that for much his life he was a valuable ally and partner of Shah Abdalli (1747–1772) and his new predatory state (Gazetteer of Baluch 1903 / 1984: 14ff.).

Even in pre-Islamic times, Kalat was probably viewed as a dependent caravan station, in all probability dependent on the (Rai) Hindu kingdom of Sindh. Even when the Ahmedzai rulers shook off an in all probability symbolic Mughal suzerainty, they had to defer to the Ghilzai, who ruled Kandahar and the Bolan region, and later to the Safavids and Nadir Shah. This dependent relationship is equally evident at the beginning of Shah Ahmed Abdalli’s reign and raiding expeditions into India. Shah Abdalli plundered the Indus Valley and the Punjab at least ten times. The Kalat ruler and his men eagerly joined in the pillaging, but Nasir Khan was in no

position to refuse assistance and loyalty to the new ruler: Abdalli had imposed a treaty of allegiance on Kalat. It stipulated an annual payment of 2,000 rupees to the Abdallis and the maintenance and provisioning of 1,000 soldiers at Abdalli's court in Kandahar. Yet, Nasir Khan's newly inherited power and resource base was such that he could seek a more equal relationship. After refusing to appear at the Kandahar court, he secured Abdalli's consent to a new treaty. This treaty outlined, for the first time, *de facto* independence for Kalat: Kalat would provide a fighting force "only when the Afghans fought outside their kingdom" (Swidler 1979: 90). In addition, these fighters and the Khan would be provided with money and munitions. In other words, plundering India became more attractive for Nasir Khan. "The treaty was sealed by a pledge of loyalty from the Khan to Kandahar and the marriage of the Khan's niece to Ahmed Shah Abdalli's son." (Swidler 1979: 90)

Only from the time of Nasir Khan were the terms Khan and Khanate routinely employed. This political autonomy was not the result of clever diplomacy, but of Nasir Khan's shrewd construction of a viable state. The basis for the new state was the 100 mile-wide Kachhi plain. All its fields, water resources, villages and Jat peasants now fell to the Kalat state:

"One half of the territory went to the Khan as crown lands, while the other half was divided among the tribes of the fighting force from Sarawan and Jhalawan, given by the Khan in two categories: gham (literally sorrow, obligation) lands and jagir, revenue free grants. Ghamlands were allocated by the Khan proportional to the number of fighting men supplied by each tribe with the stipulation that these tracts be used to raise crops to support the men of the fighting force in the fields. As community property of each tribe, they could not be alienated or subdivided by anyone. One twelfth of the income was collected by tribal chiefs and submitted to the Khan as revenue just to remind the tribes of the conditions for its use. Ghamlands could be confiscated by the Khan for failure of a tribe to meet its quota obligations or for any other form of insubordination." (Swidler 1979: 90)

In addition, the jagirs were distributed in accordance with the rank of the recipient within his tribe. Sardars, tribal chiefs, would get the most fertile areas with Karez irrigation. Furthermore, lands were allotted according to the rank of the tribe: the leading tribes would get land upstream, the lower ranking tribes downstream, where water would be scarce. In addition: "The tribes of Jhalawan received only lands bordering the mountains ... because they were not adequately represented in the decisive battles in Kachhi." (Swidler 1979: 89) The resources from the Kachhi provided the sticks and carrots to rank the tribes, to control the two federations and to establish an administration. In each tribal federation, one tribe was made responsible for the recruitment of fighters; all tribes were ranked. There was now a common



Jhalawan and Sarawan regiment, in addition to a special regiment under the Khan's command. The new Kalat bureaucracy was comprised of a prime minister, or *wazir*, always a Hindu from the Persian-speaking Dewar community; a revenue officer, or *wakil*, in charge of crown lands, tribute and blood compensation; and a superintendent, or *darogha*, for Kalat and the crown land cultivators in Kachhi. In addition, a shaghasi was in charge of organising state ceremonies, foremost the all-important durbars, at which the tribal chiefs were now seated by their new rank. There were two consultative councils. One comprised the close Ahmedzai kinsmen appointed by the Khan and the two chiefs of the federations. These members had to reside permanently at Kalat, as did one twelfth of the two tribal forces, forming the Gham-i-Lashkar.

The second council comprised elderly tribal leaders. They could only advise the Khan. Freed from Abdalli interference, in full possession of the Kachhi breadbasket and secure in his control of Kalat, the Sarawan and the Jhalawan federations, Nasir Khan, could now expand his state to the south and to the east, into those areas which lay outside of Abdalli and Kalhora control. After nine expeditions he forced the Gichki tribal aristocracy in Makran to yield to him one half of their revenue collections. At the same time, he imposed a symbolic allegiance upon the marauding tribes of the interior in the Kharan and the Chagai areas. Thus, on the basis of ceremony and tribute and the exchange of brides and gifts, the Khan created an artificial state. It reached far and wide beyond the Kalat core area and foreshadowed the later province of Baluchistan. The state Nasir Khan was impressive, but not strong. It broke apart immediately under the struggles of succession among the Ahmedzais (Axmann 2008: 18–25). But Nasir Khan created a myth and a structure upon which the new imperial rulers of India could build decades later. This was the myth of a sovereign state, free from Afghan suzerainty, and in control of most of the lands from Karachi to Iran, from the Bolan and Khojak passes to the Indian Ocean. Equally important was the tripartite structure of two federations and a rudimentary city-state. These elements could be recombined and manipulated to resemble a balanced, traditional, functioning state.

### **III Building empire: British Baluchistan and the Durand Line**

State-building in Kalat was facilitated by benign neglect. The aging Shah Abdalli had accomplished all his objectives.

“Death approached and Ahmad Shah designated his second son Timur Shah as his heir. Ahmad Shah went to the Sulaiman Mountains, east of

Kandahar, to die in peace and in agony: Maggots developed in the upper part of the nose and they dropped into his mouth when he ate or drank. Peace came in October 1772.” (Dupree 1997: 340)

After his death, the emergent Abdalli dynasty was paralysed by internal feuds, similar to the succession crisis in Kalat.

At the turn of the century, the East India Company and Great Britain had emerged in India as the paramount military force; Kalat was now confronted in India and on the ocean with two threatening and formidable powers. In the Punjab, Ranjit Singh was constructing an infantry and artillery-based military state. Not only in Europe, but on the high seas Great Britain was fighting the Napoleonic Empire. For the first time, British and Company interests had to concentrate on the west, on Ranjit’s empire beyond the Sutlej and still further west the unknown wastes of Baluchistan, Afghanistan and Persia. There was the danger of intrigue, alliance-building or even intervention by imperial and revolutionary France. Now, for the first time, Company servants posing as Muslim traders were sent to Baluchistan to collect information on its caravan routes, its rulers and markets: Grant in 1809 and Pottinger in 1810 delivered first-hand information on the Makran and on the no-man’s-land of the interior. It was through Pottinger’s idealised account of Kalat as a once powerful, centralising state that Calcutta formed a first and misleading conception of the political affairs of Baluchistan (Pottinger 1816 / 1886: 289–295).

With the fall of Napoleon, the fears of foreign intervention subsided; however, they were never completely laid to rest. In the following decades, they were replaced by concerns about Russia’s intentions. Yet, till the end of the 1830s, the Company’s troops and diplomats were occupied with the task of containing Ranjit Singh’s sprawling empire and on securing contact with the Sindh Talpurs. These amirs had replaced the Kalhoras and they feared Ranjit Singh’s advance to the south. Thus, in 1838–1839, after two decades of internal consolidation, the Company embarked on its greatest military gambit: the attempt to place a royal exile, Shah Shuja Abdalli, on the Kabul throne. The attempt led to the Kabul catastrophe (1841–1842), the worst military disaster the British ever suffered in India. Putting the unfortunate exile on the Kabul throne involved two armies, one marching through the Punjab, the other through Sindh and Baluchistan. The Company troops thus operated hundreds of miles away from Company territory among unknown, suspicious and mostly hostile rulers and their fighters. Governor-General Auckland’s folly has often been described. Of greater interest is a side event of this disastrous intervention. In order to secure their march through the Bolan Pass to Kandahar, the British troops negotiated a treaty of passage with the Khan of Kalat. But the Khan has lost all control over the tribal

confederacies. On their difficult advance and retreat to and from Kabul, the British officers, convinced of the Khan's power, doubted his motives. They attacked and killed him. They replaced him with a puppet ruler and meddled in the affairs of the Khanate.

Just months later, a Sarawan rebellion carried a Nasir Khan, the second (1842–1857) to the Masnad. It was with him and his long-lived successor, Mir Khudadad Khan (1857–1893), that the British transformed and manipulated the Kalat state. All those events and policies took place in a radically transformed strategic context. The disastrous retreat from Kabul convinced the British leadership that to secure and defend its frontiers the Company had to advance into Sindh, and soon afterwards into the Punjab. In 1843 an expeditionary force under General Napier defeated the Sindh Amirs despite their friendship treaty with Britain – “peccavi”, “I have Sinned/Sindh”. In 1839 Ranjit Singh died, leaving his military empire in disarray. In two fierce Anglo-Sikh Wars (1845–1846 and 1849) the Company annexed the collapsing Sikh state (James 1997: 99–118).

The Company was now in charge of a perfectly unknown, unmarked and unruly frontier stretching north from Karachi on the Indian Ocean all the way into the hill-states north of Peshawar and the Khyber. The 1000-mile frontier at the western confines of the subcontinent presented the administration with a huge challenge: the British were now in contact with nearly 100 tribes which were not yet controlled and had never been conquered. These tribes interacted with a dozen tribal states. Most of these tribes and states were unexplored and elusive. Company administrators could not learn the un-masterable art of frontier maintenance from the defeated Talpur Amirs and the defunct Sikh empire. Ranjit Singh's control had hardly extended to the foothills of the mountains west of the Indus plain: his border maintenance had consisted of raids and punitive expeditions to force the Plains-Pashtuns and their honoraries, the Arabs, to pay tribute; the Singh cavalry never ventured into the hills. The Plains-Pashtun and the Nang-Pashtun were thus harassed from two sides, on the one by a predatory government and on the other by the hill tribes. To try to protect its subjects and its officials from the raids of the hill tribes, the Ranjit Singh government employed age-old methods. In the case of attacks, the marauding tribe would be excluded from the markets in the plains, they had to hand over hostages, and the whole tribe would be held responsible and have to pay fines or blood money. All tribesmen which could be seized would be imprisoned and fined. It was from these ancient Mughal practices that the very first British administrators distilled their frontier regulations. It was evident that attempts at control could only extend to the foot of the hills and into the few accessible valleys. The long-standing tax districts were grouped

together: all-important Peshawar, Kohat and Hazara under a commissioner, Dera Ismael Khan and Bannu under a deputy commissioner. The five old districts thus formed the backbone of the future North-West Frontier Province created half a century later (Spain 1979: 1–23).

In the Amir's territory, a comparable situation prevailed. Already in 1842, General Napier attempted to defeat the Bugtis. In classical Mughal style, he enlisted the assistance of the Marris, the Bugti's archenemies. The expedition of some 7,000 men was a failure. From now on, Captain General John Jacob was in charge of the upper Sindh frontier and the border of Baluchistan. Through negotiations and demands for bail and hostages, he contained the plundering expeditions of the Brahui and Baluch hill-men. The town of Jacobabad between the Indus plain and the Kalat-controlled Kachhi commemorates his endeavours. Thus, after the sudden expansion of the Company's Raj to the western borderlands and mountain ranges, only one option, one strategy, one policy was possible and reasonable: the policy of a close border. This policy was all the more reasonable when a few years after these territorial aggrandizements the Indian Mutiny shook the very foundations of British power. Only 10 to 15 years later was the British Raj, which had succeeded the Company, willing, and the British government forced, to ponder the question of the western borderlands and frontier in new strategic, pragmatic and ethnographic contexts (Rawlinson 1875 / 1980; Hopkirk 2001: 295–464).

The regional starting point and a major concern was the Kalat state. During their disastrous march to and from Kabul, the British had not only attacked and killed the ruling Khan, they had dismantled the whole kingdom by handing over to Shah Shuja Abdalli, their protégé and favourite for the Kabul throne, the all-important areas of Kachhi and Sarawan. It was only after 1841 that these core areas were returned and the son of the killed Khan was installed as ruler. Still, despite Kalat's former autonomy, thanks to Nasir Khan the Great, the British continued to treat Kalat as the vassal of Kabul. Only in 1854 was a new treaty negotiated with the Khan by the resourceful General John Jacob. It underwrote Kalat's independence *vis-à-vis* Kabul, and from then on, political agents were deputed to Kalat from upper Sindh. Even before the outbreak of the Mutiny Jacob and the Sindh government realized that Kalat might play a useful role in the unfolding Great Game. Yet, it would take a further 20 years before Kalat was turned into a major building block for securing the western borderlands of the empire. For two decades the political agents, still wedded to the belief that the Khan was or could be an undisputed autocratic ruler, had created instability in the state (Axmann 2008: 28ff.).

Through subsidies and polite advice they had persuaded the Khan to enlarge his bureaucracy and infringe on the customary rights of the Sardars and the two federations. The results were tribal insurrections and palace intrigues. All this changed in the 1870s. The British and Indian publics were now convinced of a Russian threat. In the short space of seven years, from 1866 to 1873, Russia had annexed the Khanates of Bukhara, Samarkand and Khiva. A “Russian Turkistan” was established, its moving frontier threatened to cross the Amu Darya. The Great Game entered a new phase. The change in perceptions had changed the policy debate. By now it was legitimate, pragmatic and *en vogue* to debate an alternative to the close border policy with only a string of friendly allies just beyond the mountain ranges closing the Indian plains. A “forward border” policy would take into account new geostrategic concerns and principles. In addition, this policy could build on experiences and practices of how to deal with the hill tribes, in case a future border were to be pushed into and over the western mountain ranges. These two theories and schools were by now openly accepted, and in the 1870s these debates focused *inter alia* on the future of crisis-ridden Kalat. Could Kalat be managed and improved to play the part of a reliable alley beyond the upper Sindh border? Or could the Khanate be turned into a building block for a future forward policy and strategic frontier *vis-à-vis* Afghanistan? The strategic debate not only converged on Kalat, it crystallized briefly in one man, Colonel Robert Sandeman, and his so-called doctrine (Thornton 1895 / 1971).

Sandeman, attached to the Sindh government, had for some years cooperated with the Marri and Bugti tribes. He had not persecuted them with futile and costly campaigns, as General Napier and subsequently the Khan of Kalat had done. Instead, he had treated the Sardars as his equals and had persuaded the tribes to organize levies, paid and provisioned by the colonial government. Sandeman had introduced the principle of collective responsibility *vis-à-vis* the British; inter-tribal *jirgas* were presided over by him and he gave new honorary titles, gifts and Khilat investitures to the Sardars. With his policy of cooperation, Sandeman pacified this hostile tract. After years of strategic and bureaucratic disputes between the Sindh and the Punjab government, and after political debates with the new Governor-General and the Calcutta establishment, Sandeman was finally sent to Kalat to implement his system of cooperation with tribes on a far wider scale. Years of bureaucratic squabbles, strategic debate and official hesitation finally culminated in the Mastung treaty of 1876. It implied a complete turnaround from the counterproductive policy of establishing an autocratic ruler. Instead, Robert Sandeman transformed Kalat into a “theatre state” – dis-

creetly but completely managed by the British. According to Axmann, the transformation operated at three levels (Axmann 2008: 31).

At the lowest, the tribal level, the already tested levy system was introduced. The tribe's Sardar or Tumandar would be formally in charge of the levy, but the actual payment, supervision and provisioning with badges and arms was done by a *wakil*, often a Hindu from outside, accountable to the political agent in Kalat. Levies had to guard the tracks, look out for strangers, guard frontiers and telegraph and railway lines. Constituting an intra-tribal elite with income, titles, Snider carbines and pensions, they were proud of their status. But when their work or loyalty was deemed insufficient, all these privileges were withdrawn. Such punishment hurt the status and authority of the Sardar.

It was at the level of the Sardars that the Sandeman doctrine, the policy shift, was most evident. Sardars became the mainstay of British power. They were rewarded with titles, invitations and carefully graded seating arrangements. They were addressed as equals, although the British never missed an opportunity to subtly play one Sardar off against another. Competition and feuds were contained, but not extinguished. Most important of all, the British now became discreetly involved in the process of selecting a Sardar. British authority, awards and money now tended to establish lines of succession, Sardari dynasties. Egalitarian tribes became stratified. Sardari and British interests converged. In later years, the Sardars would evolve into absentee lords, an increasingly urban class residing in Quetta. Here they would mix traditional folklore with Victorian, imperially supplied feudalism.

The upgraded Sardars had to be controlled; the Jhalawan and Sarawan tribal federations had to function. In addition to the lower-ranking councils, *jirgas* of the individual tribes, the British introduced general, inter-tribal *jirgas*. Here cases of inter-tribal blood feud, murder, robbery and abductions would be negotiated, punished and solved. The most important were the Shahi Jirgas. They met twice a year at Sibi and Quetta, Sandeman's winter and summer residences, respectively. In addition, a yearly Shahi Jirga, was organised in Fort Munro to settle interprovincial cases between the Punjab and Baluchistan. All three Shahi Jirgas turned into tribal *melas*, cattle fairs and immensely popular seasonal markets. The Sandeman system resulted in a heretofore unimaginable stratification of the tribes. The new, increasingly hereditary Sardari clans and their apex, the two tribal confederations, were managed indirectly through subsidies, titles, allowances and through the example, authority and advice of Sandeman, presiding over the Shahi Jirgas. An egalitarian tribal polity was turned into a feudal one; but where was the king? The new treaty transformed Mir Khudadad Khan into a largely

ceremonial figure and British pensioner. His subsidy of 50,000 Rs was raised to 1 Lakh. In addition:

“The Khan agreed to act in subordinate cooperation with the British Government; a British Agency was re-established at the Khan’s court with certain powers of arbitration; and the presence of British troops in Kalat was permitted. The construction of railways and telegraphs and freedom of trade were also provided for.” (Gazetteer of Baluchistan 1903 / 1984: 61)

The British administration now monitored and often interfered in regular administration. In case of disputes between the Khan’s Naibs and the tribesmen, “the disputed point was to be left to the arbitration of the British government”. “To assist in administrative control” an assistant for Sarawan was appointed and an assistant for Jhalawan was lent by the British government (Gazetteer of Baluchistan 1903 / 1984: 62).

The political agent coordinated everything. Important civil cases as well as criminal cases were heard by him; the latter were dealt with on the basis of tribal custom. Khudadad Khan, like Nasir Khan the Great before him, pretended to wield power, or at least sovereignty over the whole of Baluchistan: over the Chagai, Kharan, the whole Makran coast and the interior, Panjgur and, most importantly, over Las Bela, a small southern state. However, under British tutelage, the Khan lost direct control, while the British through their political agent strengthened their ties to the various Sardars and tribal aristocracies. These local elites knew that it was thanks precisely to the political agent of Kalat that they were awarded titles, subsidies for levies, etc. Las Bela, formally a tributary of Kalat, now functioned as a distinct state – under its political agent. Through their telegraph lines to Quetta and India and through the Makran to the Persian border, through the mail, the “dak” messengers and through the Sardars, the British were well informed about affairs in Baluchistan. It is therefore correct when the British officials write only ten years later:

“The agent to the Governor-General has practically taken the place of the Khan as head of the Baluch confederation. His Highness is still the nominal head, the Sarawan and Jhalawan chiefs still sit on his right hand and his left in the durbar as of old, and till he is invested by the Khan with the khilat or mantle of succession, a sirdar is not to be legitimised as the representative of his tribe. But in the essential questions of the nomination of sirdars, the summoning of jirgahs for the settlement of inter-tribal disputes, and the general preservation of peace in the country, the agent of the Governor General is recognised all over Baluchistan as having taken the place of the Khan, and his mandate naturally commands a great deal more respect and obedience than ever did that of his Highness.” (First Administration Report of the Baluchistan Agency 1886 in: Axmann 2008: 33)

After the failure to build an autocracy, the British and Sandeman had therefore created a “theatre state”: a state with authentic oriental trappings, a state which operated as a stage for the performance of traditional political roles, ceremonies and rituals. It radiated tribal traditions and consensus. It leaned on feudal pomp and Oriental circumstance, but British interests and resources drove the backstage machinery. The “theatre state” allowed the British to control an unknown and unruly territory the size of Britain with a minimum of risk, money and personnel. In 1891, the total number of levies for example amounted to 2000 tribesmen – 1000 horsemen, 500 footmen, 300 native officers, 70 pensioners and 70 clerks. The levies cost four lakh rupees. Fifty-five received allowances; the number was later raised to 95. The whole colonial British establishment amounted to less than 20 officials. It was not for nothing that the British built this “theatre state”. It was not built for a close border policy – providing an ally –, but for a forward policy: the treaty followed an external, empire-building, as well as an internal, state-building logic. The Khanate of Kalat, Baluchistan, was meant to serve as the basis from which a bridgehead and eventually a forward frontier could be constructed. Already in 1877, one year after the Mastung treaty and one year before the second Afghan war (1878 to 1880), Sandeman persuaded the Khan to cede Quetta to the British. With Quetta the British controlled the Bolan Pass to the South, the Khojak Pass to the North and access to Kandahar. The Khan received 80,000 Rs per annum for this cession (*Gazetteer of Baluch 1903 / 1984: 20ff.*).

The second Afghan war resulted in the treaty of Gandamak. The government of the Kabul Amir ceded to the British a large chunk of territory that intruded like a wedge to the south in the direction of the Indus Plains. This territory included the future districts of Chaman (northwest of the Khojak), Pishin (south of the Khojak, north of Quetta), Sibi (at the northern apex of the Kachhi Triangle) and Tal-Chotiali (east of Quetta). The districts were of great strategic importance. The British now controlled a broad corridor from south of Kandahar down to the entrance of the Kachhi and the Indus plains. The British, not the Khan, controlled the wedge. The already formalised “British (administered) Baluchistan (agency)” took shape, with Quetta at its centre and R. Sandeman as “Agent to the Governor-General”. The Gandamak treaty of 1879 already foreshadowed the Durand Line, which emerged between 1887 and 1895. In 1889, after tribal revolts northeast of the corridor, the British constructed a cantonment at Lorelai and annexed what now constituted the whole tribal northeast of Baluchistan (*Holdich 1901 / 1987: 200–240*).

The cantonment formed a small “Pashtunistan”, as the majority of these tribes were Pashtun. Fort Sandeman was established at the centre of



these agencies. At the same time a strategic branch line of the Indus Valley railway was built to Quetta and the two passes between 1880 and 1888. In 1903 the British leased a strip of land right through the Kachhi to ensure that the railway ran on British-controlled territory. A small feeder line was extended into the Zhob area. After the Durand boundary commission had delineated the western half of the Durand Line from Quetta to the Iranian border, in 1896 the British insisted on another lease of territory from the Khanate. The whole of the Chagai Mountains and deserts, south of the new border, north from Kharan, and from Quetta/Nushki right to the west, were added to British Baluchistan. Tribal levies supervised the new border. They investigated and notified the British of any incursions by the Helmand tribes or the Amir's troops.

Many years later, during and after the First World War, a railway was constructed along the frontier, parallel to a road and a telegraph line, to Nushki in 1905 and Zahedan, in Iranian Baluchistan, from 1917 to 1922. In the meantime, Quetta emerged as the greatest cantonment west of Rawalpindi. The original caravan station grew from less than 2,000 inhabitants to 40,000 in 1901 and 103,000 in 1931. As Quetta was being transformed into the genuine centre of Baluchistan, Kalat decayed. Even most Jhalawan and Sarawan Sardars now resided in Quetta. The traders and their trade relocated to Quetta and the railway. The railway replaced the old caravan route and Karachi harbour, Sonmiani. It was evident even to the hapless Khans that Quetta was the true capital and that the Khanate was a simple backwater. In 1901, the population of the Khanate, excluding Las Bela, was 470,000; in 1933 it had declined to ca. 300,000. It is equally evident that British Baluchistan, half the size of Great Britain, formed the basis of the Durand Line, at least to the west. To the west of Baluchistan the Durand Line could be directly controlled, supervised and defended. If necessary, Kandahar could be supplied with British troops via Chaman and eventually from Ghazni via Fort Sandeman and the Gomal Pass. The maintenance of the inaccessible and conflict-ridden Durand Line in the east was facilitated through the British bridgehead in Quetta and the easily controlled and tranquil Baluch-Afghan border (Axmann 2008: 34–38).

#### **IV Conclusion**

Empire-building beyond the Indus necessitated the creation of the “theatre state” of Kalat, the subsequent construction of the bridgehead of British Baluchistan and, finally, the creation of a new and difficult frontier. It was this tripartite structure that would shape events, conflicts and relations on

both sides of as well as across the border for the next hundred years, and still does today.

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