

Custom and Conflict in Waziristan: some British views Hugh Beattie

Waziristan makes an interesting contrast with other parts of the North-West Frontier region such as the Swat valley. On the whole land in Waziristan is less productive than in Swat, its ownership is less concentrated, and society is, or was, more egalitarian. Nor, it appears, has Waziristan ever had a ruler like the Wali of Swat. Nowadays, unlike Swat, it forms part of Pakistan's Federally-Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). This chapter looks briefly at some of the ways that in the later 19th and earlier 20th centuries British officials imagined the Frontier tribes. It goes on to focus on Waziristan, exploring two contrasting understandings of the socio-political organisation of the Mahsuds in particular, and at the way they were associated with different strategies for controlling them. In conclusion the chapter draws a few comparisons and contrasts between the situation in the early 20th century and the present day.

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Nowadays most of Waziristan is in Pakistan, though the Afghan district of Birmal is usually considered to be part of it as well. About sixty miles across at its widest point, Waziristan extends roughly in the shape of a parallelogram from the Gumal river in the south about ninety miles north as far as the Kaitu river and across it to Thal. On the east it is bordered by Bannu and Tank and to the west it extends through Birmal to the Afghan plateau and the provinces of Paktia, Khost and Paktika. The southern half is mainly mountainous, while the northern half is more open with wider valleys separated by ranges of lower mountains¹. It is inhabited largely by Pashtuns, usually thought of as being divided into 'tribes' or 'tribal confederations' on the basis of supposed shared descent from a common ancestor.² The principal ones are the Mahsuds (or Mehsuds), the Darwesh Khels Wazirs (referred to from now on simply as Wazirs), Bhattanis and Dawars. The Bhattanis live to the east between the administered areas and the Wazirs and Mahsuds. The Dawars live in Dawar in the lower Tochi valley. The Mahsuds live in the centre, and the Wazirs in an arc extending across the north and north-west towards the bottom left-hand corner of the parallelogram. The Wazirs are further divided into Utmanzais and Ahmedzais, and the Mahsuds into three main groupings, Alizais, Bahlolzais and Shaman Khels. Reportedly its population is now more than 800,000, but it was much less than this in the mid-19th century, perhaps as low as 100,000.³

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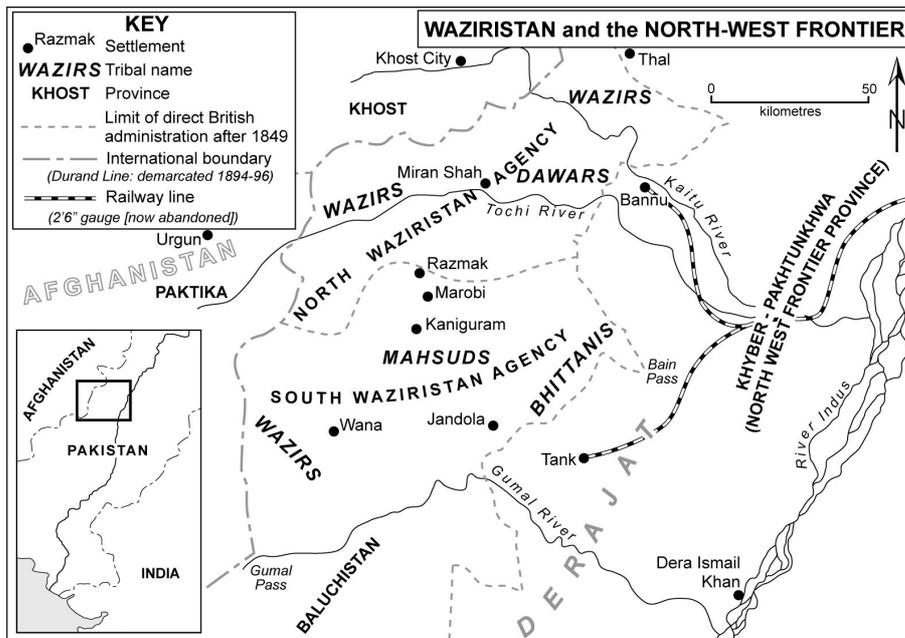
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¹ Lal Baha, *NWFP Administration under British Rule*, Islamabad: National Commission on Historical and Cultural Research, 1978, p.33

² The Barakis or Urmurs live, or lived, at Kaniguram in central Waziristan (see Mariam Abou Zahab (Ch. 3) and Shah Mahmoud Hanifi (Ch. 4)). They may have left as a result of recent fighting in the area.

³ *Economist*, Dec. 30, 2009



The GOI and the 'tribes'

During the First Anglo-Afghan War (1839-42), the British Government of India (GOI) had dealings with the Afridis who lived around the Khyber Pass (and to a limited extent with the Orakzais and Shinwaris). However, it only began to come into sustained contact with the other tribal groups living along the North-West Frontier after 1849, when it annexed the Punjab. Though they did not all take part in these activities, men from some of these groups had a tradition of raiding in the settled areas to the east and to looting caravans passing to and from Afghanistan. This might not have mattered so much. However, the border along which these groups lived was regarded by the GOI as a particularly strategic one, and the majority view came to be that the stability of British rule in India required the establishment of British influence over it. The question of how best to achieve this therefore became increasingly important. Until the 1920s permanent military occupation was not a practical proposition for various reasons, so it was a matter of trying to influence the behaviour of its inhabitants by other means. As well as the intermittent use of force, these included encouraging them to trade in British territory, enlisting them in various military units, paying them allowances, and sometimes offering them land in which to settle in British territory. To facilitate this, the British had to try and understand the culture and social organisation of this stateless society. As a result a complex discourse developed which comprised a number of debates and incorporated different, even contradictory, ideas and models. British administrators who dealt with Waziristan made a significant contribution to this.

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In administering the people they conquered Europeans often found it convenient to privilege some identities rather than others. In areas where political structures were weaker this sometimes involved the foregrounding of some kind of 'tribal' identity. In dealing with the North-West Frontier British administrators undoubtedly placed a

great deal of emphasis on what they referred to as the ‘tribal constitution of society’.¹ They saw that the inhabitants of Waziristan for instance did identify themselves as belonging to different groups – Wazirs, Mahsuds, Bhattanis, Dawars and so on – membership of which supposedly depended on shared patrilineal descent from a common ancestor. They appreciated that this identity had some significance. The problem was to work out what it meant in practical terms, and whether they could make any use of it.

Recognising that the groupings, which they referred to as tribes, were in genealogical terms further subdivided, British administrators began to draw up intricate tables and charts, listing different subdivisions and showing the supposed relationships between them. However, they did not necessarily agree about the terms they used to refer to these subdivisions. The Derajat Commissioner, Reynell Taylor (Political Officer during the Ambela expedition in 1863 referred to in Chapter 2), for instance, referred in 1861 to the different ‘sections’ of the Mahsuds.² A little later, with reference to the Frontier tribes in general, the Kohat Deputy-Commissioner, Trevor Plowden, used the terms ‘divisions’, ‘clans’, ‘sections’ and ‘sub-sections’. Sir Denzil Ibbetson, the administrator and author of *Outlines of Punjab Ethnography* (1883) referred to ‘clan’ and ‘sept’.³ Another administrator, and legal historian, Sir Charles Tupper, suggested that ‘we should speak of the tribe of a race, the clan of a tribe, the section of a clan, the branch of a section, and the house of a branch ... generally, *zat* or *kaum* would be translated ‘race’ or tribe’; and *got*, ‘tribe’ or ‘clan’ according to circumstances ... Thus, we should have the Massozai section of the Zaimusht tribe of the Afghan or Pathan race ...’.⁴

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Inconsistent use of these terms did sometimes lead to misunderstandings. More important, however, was the question of how far these tribal groups were, or could be turned into, corporate ones. If they were indeed corporate, then their members could justifiably be regarded as responsible for each other’s actions, and it would be legitimate and effective to punish some for the crimes of others, in other words to impose collective punishments.⁵ According to Ibbetson for instance, ‘(t)he frontier tribe whether within or beyond our border has almost without exception a very distinct corporate existence’.⁶ As he saw it, ‘(t)he territorial distribution of the frontier tribes in the fastnesses of their native mountains is strictly tribal. Each clan of each tribe has a tract allotted to it; and within that the families or small groups of nearly related families either leader a semi-nomad (sic) life, or inhabit rude villages round which the fields which they cultivate and the rough irrigation works which they have constructed’.⁷

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¹ Griffin, Frontier Memo, no. 150, Feb. 1878, India Proceedings (IP) P1216, India Office Records, British Library (IOR BL).

² Commissioner Derajat Division (CDD) to Punjab Government (PG), no. 91, 11 July 1861, in no. 219 March 1862 IP P204/59, IOR BL.

³ Quoted in H. Beattie, *Imperial Frontier Tribe and State in Waziristan*, Richmond: Curzon, 2002, p.173.

⁴ Charles Tupper, *Customary Law of the Punjab*, Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1881, p.4. Even the word caste was used occasionally (see e.g. Political Agent Wana (PA Wana) to Chief Commissioner NWFP (CC NWFP), no. 759, 25 Sept. 1907, Reg. 2063, L/P&S/10/43, IOR BL).

⁵ They could also be made collectively responsible for the security of the area in which they lived.

⁶ Denzil Ibbetson, *Outlines of Punjab Ethnography*, Calcutta, 1882, p. 61.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

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One difficulty with this model was that, as those British officials who dealt with Waziristan recognised, there was not always the close correspondence between clan and a particular territory suggested by Ibbetson. In the Mahsud case in particular, people from different sections might live quite close to each other. So for example it was noted in 1901 that '(t)he Mahsuds do not live each clan collected within its ring fence as do Afridis, Mohmands and others, but the clans, sub-sections and smaller divisions live intermixed in an extraordinary way'.¹ Another problem was that tribal responsibility was not an idea with which the tribes themselves were necessarily familiar or happy. As Taylor commented in 1860, the Mahsuds were 'unused to the idea of being bound to control every member of the tribe and be responsible for his acts'.² At the same time, it is worth noting that one respect in which the Wazirs and Mahsuds do seem to have seen themselves as having a kind of overall tribal identity concerned the distribution of benefits acquired from, and any losses suffered at the hands of, outsiders. Associated with the idea of a thread or link - *sarishta* – linking the different groups was *nikkat* (from *nikka* - grandfather). *Nikkat* was a tariff according to which profits and losses were to be shared in fixed proportions both between Wazirs and Mahsuds, and then between the three main Mahsud divisions, Alizais, Bahlolzais and Shaman Khels, and their sub-sections.³

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Having agreed that it was appropriate to impose some kind of collective responsibility, the next question for the officials was which segmentary 'level' should be regarded as the critical one.⁴ Some wanted to focus on smaller subdivisions. Others wanted to extend this responsibility quite widely, to members of whole sections or tribes. However, in the Mahsud case in particular, because of 'the intermingling of tribes' referred to above, it was very difficult to impose responsibility on one section rather than another.⁵ British policy was inconsistent here. After 1861 the local officials tended to argue that it would be better to demand collective tribal responsibility from the Mahsuds rather than from each of the three main sections – Alizais, Bahlolzais and Shaman Khels. However this was resisted by the Punjab government until 1876 when Charles Macaulay, the Dera Ismail Khan Deputy-Commissioner, was given permission to impose a blockade on the tribe as a whole.⁶

Different approaches to controlling the Mahsuds and the Mullah Powindah

For the first 30 or 40 years after 1849, collective tribal responsibility was seen as vital in Waziristan because the British thought of the people as being particularly 'democratic or anarchical'.⁷ A typical comment was that:

'The social condition of the tribes is anarchic. The so-called maliks are only men who have got a little more property, better arms and stronger family connections than their neighbours. But any half-starved tribesman thinks himself the equal of

¹ CDD to PG, telegram, 10 May 1901, in 1902 [Cd.1177] East India (north-west frontier). Mahsud-Waziri operations. *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers Online*, p. 193.

² CDD to PG, no. 34, 22 March 1861, in no. 215 March 1862 IP P204/59, JOR BL.

³ See e.g. Akbar Ahmed, *Resistance and Control in Pakistan*, London/NY: Routledge, 1991, p. 18.

⁴ Individual British officials and politicians did often condemn this collective responsibility as unjust and uncivilised. See e.g. Beattie, *Imperial Frontier*, p. 126.

⁵ Johnson, *Mahsud Notes*, L/P&S/20 B.307, JOR BL.

⁶ Beattie, *Imperial Frontier*, p. 123.

⁷ CDD to PG, no. 598, 7 June 1889, in Governor General in Council (GG) to Secretary of State for India (SofS), no. 13, 28 Jan. 1890, L/P&S/7/59, JOR BL.

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any one of these maliks, and where the tribe is collected in any numbers it at once becomes apparent that these so-called headmen, instead of possessing any influence to control the others, dare not give offence even to the poorest clansmen'.¹

The Mahsuds especially were regarded as 'extremely democratic in their ways. If ten men are wanted to do a bit of business, a hundred will come'.²

The fact that there were no real leaders helped to make the Mahsuds especially difficult to handle. In 1879, for instance, they came down in force and looted and burned the town of Tank. However in the later 1880s Richard Bruce, who had previously worked with Sandeman in Baluchistan, thought he had found the answer. In the 1870s and 1880s Sir Robert Sandeman had successfully extended British influence into Baluchistan by paying allowances to selected chiefs and backing them with force when necessary.³ In 1888 Bruce took over as Deputy-Commissioner Dera Ismail Khan, and suggested that it would be possible to apply Sandeman's approach to Waziristan.⁴ Claiming that before 1849 the Mahsuds, like the Baluchistan tribes, had had effective chiefs, he argued that British policy was responsible for their anarchic condition. By changing this it would be possible, he said, to recreate an oligarchy of influential men through whom the tribe could be managed. After the Russian takeover of Merv in 1885, the threat of a Russian invasion of India had again begun to concern many British officials. To enable it to meet a possible Russian advance as effectively as possible, in 1887 the GOI had written to the Punjab government calling for independent tribal territory between India and Afghanistan to be brought under British control.⁵ Bruce's proposals seemed to offer the prospect of achieving this aim in Waziristan and he was given permission to take them forward.

He therefore identified men who seemed to him to have some authority among the Mahsuds, however informal, and tried to form them into what he called a 'manageable representative jirga on a sound basis'. At a meeting in 1889 with what he called 'a large and thoroughly representative tribal assembly', it was agreed that Rs. 1,264 would be distributed to fifty-one maliks. In return for this men were to be provided for

¹ Deputy Commissioner Dera Ismail Khan (DC DIK) to CDD, no. 421, 23 Oct. 1887 in Richard Bruce, Memorandum on Waziristan, in GG to SofS, no. 13, 23 Jan. 1890, L/P&S/7/59, JOR BL.

² CDD to PG, no. 598, 7 June 1889 in Bruce, Memo., L/P&S/7/59, JOR BL. Commenting on the difficulty of trying to control them by paying allowances to influential men, H.D. Watson, the Political Officer at Wana, suggested that Mahsud men 'attain to prominence and notoriety so rapidly that it is quite possible that a year or two later men without allowances will have risen, whose recently acquired influence makes itself felt in their sections and who will commit offences until their claims are satisfied, as their predecessors did' (PO Wana, Note on the present state of the Mahsud tribe and our relation therewith, 14 May 1900, HofCPPs 1902 [Cd. 1177], p.136).

³ See e.g. T. Thornton, *Colonel Sir Robert Sandeman: His Life and Works on Our Indian Frontier*, London: John Murray, 1895. Sandeman's approach contrasted with that adopted at this time with some of the Pashtun tribes to the north. In the case of the Afridis for example, the GOI wanted to keep the Khyber pass open, but not to extend British influence over the tribe as a whole. So the tribesmen were only made responsible for the security of the pass, with allowances being paid to the representatives of their different sections. These representatives were selected by the tribesmen themselves, and they arranged for levies to escort caravans through it, and the levies themselves also received a payment from the government (Baha, *N-W.F.P. Administration*, pp. 52/3, R. Christensen, *Conflict and Change among the Khyber Afridis*, PhD thesis, Leicester University, 1987, pp. 213-4).

⁴ Bruce, Memo., in L/P&S/12/3265, JOR BL.

⁵ CDD to GP, 28 Feb. 1894 [C.8713][C.8714] *Military Operations on the North-West Frontiers of India, vol. 1 Papers regarding British relations with the neighbouring tribes on the north-west frontier of India, and the military operations undertaken against them during the year 1897-1898*, p.9.

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irregular military service.¹ In 1890 the Mahsud maliks among others were given further subsidies for providing levies to maintain the security of the Gumal Pass in particular.² The maliks were also supposed to control the rest of the tribe and hand over wanted men to the government.

It appears that Bruce did not choose his maliks very carefully. A few years later the Wana Political Agent, F.W. Johnston suggested that most of them had actually been nominated by Azim Khan Kundi, a landowner living in British territory, who since the early 1870s had been an influential intermediary between the Mahsuds and the government.³ Nevertheless for three or four years the policy seemed to work. The security of the Gumal Pass improved, and when a British official was killed by Mahsuds in 1893 the maliks handed over the five men responsible to the authorities. However in revenge three maliks were killed by the men's relatives; the other maliks left for British territory. It proved impossible to capture the murderers. The Punjab Government recommended a punitive expedition, but the GOI would not allow one. After this episode the remaining maliks cooperated only reluctantly with Bruce and did not do much to help him.⁴

At the beginning of this chapter the point was made that Waziristan appears to have differed from Swat in various significant ways. However, as in Swat, the obvious alternative to maliks or khans was religious leadership. Islam was central to Pashtun identity in Waziristan (if for most people in the form of 'an unthought Geertzian 'religiousness'' as Marsden puts it in Chapter 6). Opposition to the British could easily be presented as resistance not just to external interference but also to Christian intrusion, and therefore a religious duty. So the more assertive British policy in Waziristan, as elsewhere on this border, helped religious leaders to play a more important political role than they had done before. Those with some influence in Waziristan at this time included Lala Pir, based across the Durand Line in Khost, and Mullah Hamzullah, who had links with the Wazirs living in north Waziristan. However the most prominent was Muhiy-ud-Din, a (Sultanai) Shabi Khel Alizai Mahsud; the British referred to him as the Mullah Powindah.⁵ After studying at a madrasa in Bannu, he had built up a following of *shajikhs (disciples) and taliban (religious students)*. He set up his headquarters at his home in Marobi between Razmak and Kaniguram, and became the major rival to the Maliks.⁶

The Mullah first attracted the GOI's attention in the autumn of 1894. The British effort to secure control of the Gumal Pass was followed by the demarcation of the Durand Line in the mid-1890s, designed to delimit Afghan and British spheres of

¹ CDD to PG, no. 715, 9 July 1889, in PP3396 IOR BL.

² Howell, *Mizh*, pp. 12-13, 105. *As Mariam Abou-Zahab notes in Chapter 3, this was traditionally regarded as belonging to the Mahsuds, but actually lay outside their territory.*

³ F. Johnston, 'Notes on Wana', in R. Nichols (ed), *Colonial Reports on Pakistan's Frontier Tribal Areas*, Karachi: Oxford, 2005, p. 49.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13, C. Davies, *The Problem of the North-West Frontier 1890-1908 second edition*, London: Curzon, 1975, p. 126.

⁵ They all had links with Amir Habibullah's younger brother Nasrullah Khan (see e.g. Tochi Political Diary week ending 22 Sept. 1907, register 2063, L/P&S/10/43).

⁶ Beattie, *Imperial Frontier*, p. 155, Howell in O. Caroe, *The Pathans 550 B.C.-A.D. 1957*, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 471. *So conflict between maliks and mullahs, resembling that in contemporary Waziristan to which Mariam Abou-Zahab draws attention in Chapter 3, was already evident by the 1890s.*

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influence along the Frontier. Bruce was appointed to mark out the new boundary in southern Waziristan with an Afghan counterpart. It was also decided to establish a garrison of regular troops at Wana. In November 1894, supported by 2000 soldiers, Bruce began to set up camp there. Only a few days later the Mullah Powindah organised a night attack on the troops by as many as 2000 men, mostly Mahsuds, and the British force was withdrawn. This was followed by another British punitive expedition into Waziristan in 1895, after which the North and South Waziristan agencies were set up with their headquarters at Miran Shah and Wana respectively.

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At this point Bruce, admitting that he had got things wrong the first time, drew up another list of maliks, 270 of them this time. He divided them into five classes, and paid each class at a different rate, according to how much influence he judged them to have.¹ Bruce left the Frontier in 1896, and his successor Anderson continued with his policy, without it would seem much success. Some Mahsuds continued to rob and murder in the Tank and Bannu districts; they began to intimidate and even try to assassinate the local officials. In July 1899 for instance there was an attempt to kill the South Waziristan Political Agent.² The maliks may have been, as Anderson reported 'sensible responsible men', but it was clear that Bruce's system - the so-called 'maliki system' - was not working.³ Even had they been willing to try, it would have been almost impossible for the maliks to have controlled their fellow tribesmen. In fact their ability to do so decreased as they grew closer to the British; 'in some cases it would seem that by becoming our men whatever little influence they would otherwise have with the tribe is weakened'.⁴

In 1900 Anderson was replaced as Commissioner by William Merk, who had experience of working with others groups without chiefs or leaders, the eastern Mohmands and the Afridis.⁵ In the summer of 1900 Merk wrote to the Punjab Government outlining and advocating a new approach to the Mahsuds. Once upon a time, he suggested, more or less correctly it would appear, general jirgas of the whole Mahsud tribe, the *ulus* (*wolus*), had been held, and had kept order by appointing *chalweshtis* or tribal militias to enforce the tribal will. Now *chalweshtis* were no longer appointed, and there was 'political paralysis'. Like Bruce, he accepted that '(c)ontact with a settled Government like our own' had had 'a disintegrating effect' on them.⁶ However, it was not earlier British attempts to manage the Mahsuds, as Bruce had argued, but Bruce's own attempt to deal with them through maliks that was to blame.⁷ The Mahsuds, he maintained, constituted 'an independent little republic', in which some men had some influence but 'little real power'.⁸ Bruce, he said, had failed

¹ See e.g. Howell, *Mizh*, p. 18. Reportedly the second, third, fourth and fifth grade Maliks were nominees of the first grade ones, and were unable to exert any influence over the rest of the tribe (Political Officer, Southern Waziristan, State of the Mahsud Tribe and relations therewith, 17 July, 1900, HofCPPs 1902 [Cd.1177], p. 14).

² Davies, *The Problem*, pp. 122/3

³ CDD to GP, Annexure 1, 30 March 1900, HofCPPs 1902 [Cd.1177], p. 63.

⁴ GP to GOI Foreign Department (FD), no. 997, 6 Aug. 1896, L/P&S/7/88, IOL.

⁵ GP to GOI FD, 17 Aug. 1900, enclosure 12 in no. 2, Foreign Department (GOI FD, 18 Oct., 1902, HofCPPs 1902 [Cd.1177], p. 119. Merk was converted to the idea that Bruce's 'maliki system' was not suited to Waziristan by John Lorimer, who had been Political Agent in the Tochi, and was then a member of the Viceroy Lord Curzon's Secretariat (Howell, *Mizh*, p. 29).

⁶ GP to GOI FD, 17 Aug. 1900, enclosure 12 in no. 2, FD GOI to SofS, 18 Oct., 1902, HofCPPs 1902 [Cd.1177], p. 122.

⁷ CDD to GP, note, 24 July 1900, *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁸ CC NWFP to GOI FD, no. 1579-N, register 1811, in L/P&S/10/44, JOR BL.

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to understand that behind the maliks were ‘the many yeomen who constitute the real republic, and with whom obviously the ultimate power rests’.¹ Presumably by referring to the Mahsuds as yeomen, Merk meant to suggest that they were mostly small independent farmers like those of pre-Enclosure England. Making another European comparison, he also suggested that, because of their ability to disrupt any settlement, individual tribesmen possessed something like the *liberum veto* of pre-partition Poland.² In any case, he said, ‘with a democracy of this kind, it is fatal to deal with individuals, however powerful they may be’.³

According to Merk, ‘in a democratic republic, like that of the Mahsud community ... [the old tribal jirga] was the natural, and indeed the only possible, governing agency.’⁴ His aim therefore was to revive ‘internal self-government’, by paying allowances to the heads of families, rather than just to a relatively small number of maliks.⁵ Whereas under the ‘Maliki system only a few individuals, perhaps small sections, [were] ... concerned in restrictive action’, the Mahsuds as a whole would be held collectively responsible for any crimes committed by any of their members.⁶ In this way he hoped gradually to rebuild the tribal jirga and regenerate a sense of tribal cohesion.⁷

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Merk was therefore given permission to abandon Bruce’s maliki system and to reintroduce tribal responsibility. Firstly he wanted the Mahsuds to pay compensation for raids and various fines. The maliks refused to take any responsibility for this; ‘they abdicated’.⁸ As no progress was being made, Merk imposed a blockade on the tribe in December 1900, aimed at preventing anyone from entering or leaving their territory. An agreement was reached in May at a large jirga held at Jandola but soon broke down. Rivalry between the Mullah Powindah and the maliks made a settlement difficult. ‘The two, Mulla and Maliks, just balance each other. I do not think we find this phenomenon anywhere else on the frontier’ commented Merk, ‘two political parties of about equal strength, and a tribe now leaning to one, now to the other’.⁹ To increase the pressure on the Mahsuds, a series of surprise attacks by small bodies of troops was launched in the autumn of 1901. A number of Mahsuds were killed or taken prisoner, towers and mills destroyed, animals slaughtered or taken away, and grain and fodder seized. ‘The pressure of the offensive blockade rapidly matured’, Merk said, ‘what had been silently growing – the authoritative tribal jirga’.¹⁰ In January 1902 the leading men and others finally submitted. They actually appointed *chalweshtis* to collect a fine of Rs.25,000. Merk was optimistic, reporting that ‘We have now the jirga in full strength and successfully at work in its task of controlling

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¹ Ibid.

² Com. on Special Duty (CSD) to CC NWFP, 20 March, 1902, in No. 28, HofCPPs 1902 [Cd.1177]), p. 288 .

³ Ibid. Harold Deane agreed that Mahsud society was divided into ‘innumerable petty groups which admit the leadership of no single large Malik, [which] itself necessitates representation by numerous smaller men’ (CC NWFP to GOI FD, no. 1142, 9 Nov. 1906, register 2033, L/P&S/10/42, IOR BL).

⁴ CSD to CC NWFP, 20 March 1902, enclosure in no. 28, CC NWFP to GOI FD, 27 March 1902, HofCPPs [Cd.1177], p. 286.

⁵ Note, CDD to GP, 24 July 1900, Ibid., p. 131.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ CSD to CC NWFP, 20 March, 1902, Ibid., p. 286, also tel., CDD to PG, 10 May, 1901, Ibid., p. 193.

⁸ CSD to CC NWFP, 20 March, 1902, Ibid., p. 287.

⁹ CDD to CC NWFP, 18 May, 1901, Ibid., p. 201.

¹⁰ CSD to For. Sec. (FS), 20 March 1902, no. 817 B, Ibid, p.287.

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the tribe'.¹ In March they agreed to accept full tribal and sectional responsibility and the blockade was raised.²

Merk now drew up a plan for the distribution of Rs.54,000 equally between the three sections - Alizais, Bahlolzais and Shaman Khels; an additional Rs.7,000 was set aside for the influential men.³ The new allowances were distributed on 5 April 1902 'among the heads of families according to houses', 1,565 men in all.⁴ However these arrangements were soon modified because Johnston, the Political Agent at Wana, drew attention to several difficulties. These included the fact that Merk's scheme had not included most of 'Bruce's maliks' nor a large class of men he called *mu'tabars* ('elders'). Johnston also thought that it was impractical and expensive to distribute the allowances in the way that Merk had envisaged.⁵ Certainly these large jirgas, attended by thousands of men, must have been difficult to organise.

Johnston was therefore allowed to modify Merk's arrangements. Each tribal section was to elect *wakils* (representatives), who would include Bruce's maliks (the 'old maliks') and *mu'tabars*, and they would distribute the allowances of Rs.54,000 to the rest of the tribe. In return for this the *wakils*, 1,334 of them in all, would receive a share of the special payments set aside for influential men, and these were raised to Rs.16,000. However it appears that the number of men through whom allowances were paid was only reduced to 1,334, and it began to grow again.⁶ This new system remained in operation for two or three years. Some officials, including the Chief Commissioner of the newly-created North-West Frontier Province, Sir Harold Deane, thought it worked as well as could be expected.⁷

In 1905, however, a new Political Agent, L. M. Crump, took over responsibility for relations with the Mahsuds, and a further change was made. Crump argued that Bruce had been right all along, and the 'old maliks' were after all the tribe's 'natural leaders'.⁸ Dealing with the Mahsuds through these large jirgas was, he said, inefficient and expensive, and he persuaded the government to allow him to adjust the allowances again. They continued to be distributed to the tribe as a whole, but the number of *wakils* who received an extra payment was reduced to around 300 men. These men were to form what he called 'a wieldy jirga for working purposes'.⁹ These changes, which were introduced against the advice of the Chief Commissioner, had an unsettling effect. As Deane commented, the 1,200 or so men affected would not only be upset to lose their 'a small but steady income', but would also be even more annoyed to lose 'the prestige that being in receipt of an allowance gave them'.¹⁰

¹ Ibid., p. 288.

² Ibid., p. 286.

³ Beattie, *Imperial Frontier*, p.158. This was described as having been the system adopted with Orakzais, Afridis, Mohmands, and the Black Mountain clans (CSD to CC NW FP, 20 March, 1902, Ibid., p. 289).

⁴ Baha, *N-W. F.P. Administration*, p. 39, Political Agent (PA) Wana to CC NWFP, no. 693, 18 Sept. 1906, register 1756, L/P&S/10/43, IOR BL.

⁵ PA Wana to CC NWFP, no. 693, 18 Sept. 1906, register 1756, L/P&S/10/43, IOR BL.

⁶ By 1906 the number of Wakils had increased to 1,588 (CC NWFP to GOI FD, No. 1142, 9 Nov. 1906, register 2033, L/P&S/10/42, IOR BL).

⁷ CC NWFP to GOI FD, no. 1142, 9 Nov. 1906, register 2033, L/P&S/10/42, IOR BL.

⁸ PA Wana to CC NWFP, no. 693, 18 Sept. 1906, register 1830, L/P&S/10/43, IOR BL.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ CC NWFP to GOI FD, no. 1142, 9 Nov. 1906, register 2033, L/P&S/10/42, IOR BL.

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Indeed in November 1907 the Mullah Powindah sent a petition on behalf of ‘the poor people of the Mahsud tribe’ to the Chief Commissioner in which he called on the government to send Crump away.¹ Hardly surprisingly, Crump’s arrangements were no more successful than Johnston’s. In fact a malik commented in 1909 that, ‘their country was now a regular hell and in utter chaos and confusion ...’² Either the British should occupy Waziristan themselves, he continued, or they should withdraw from Wana, in which case they should allow the Amir of Afghanistan to occupy it. In 1908 Crump left and in 1910 the government reverted to Johnston’s system, to ‘the principle of internal distribution by the republic itself’.³ There were no major revisions until after WWI.

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Ultimately, none of these different approaches was very successful, and the British supplemented the system of allowances and political agents with a form of military occupation. This followed the insurrection which broke out in May 1919, towards the end of the brief Third Anglo-Afghan War. In December a large British force advanced into Waziristan to crush it, but it took nearly two years to force all the Mahsuds to surrender. New roads were constructed and a permanent garrison of as many as 15,000 troops was located at Razmak, in a commanding position on the border between Utmanzai Wazir and Mahsud territory. However, even this did not pacify Waziristan for very long. In particular it did not prevent the Faqir of Ipi emerging to lead a major rebellion in northern Waziristan, in which some Mahsuds played a part, in the later 1930s.⁴

There were other reasons for the problems experienced with the Mahsuds than the British officials’ failure fully to appreciate the complexities of their socio-political organisation (and to pursue a consistent policy). Firstly, a division between a minority of better-off *mashars* (elders) and a larger group of poorer *kashars* (young men) was already becoming apparent in the 1880s.⁵ The injection of new resources widened the gap. During the 1900s in addition to paying allowances, the British also for a time recruited Mahsuds for the South Waziristan militia, and the Indian Army. Men were also employed on public works, such as the railway line from Kalabagh to Bannu, and the branch line to Tank, and on road-building. Often this employment was organised by Mahsud contractors. As a result some men became considerable wealthier than others, and this exacerbated existing tensions.

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Tapper rightly reminds us in the next chapter that we should always expect to find ‘beside and within ... cultural boundaries ... a multiplicity of inconsistent voices and values’. However, it does seem that many Mahsuds regretted the loss of much of their independence, and the fact that non-Muslims were responsible for it rubbed salt in the wound. These feelings were expressed and exploited by the Mullah Powindah. The rise of the Mullah was a significant new development in Mahsud politics. Before the 1890s factional groupings had existed in the tribe. They had however been ‘secular’

¹ Translation of a petition in Persian from “Mulla Sahib and the poor people of the Mahsud tribe”, 7 Ramzan, 1325 AH (15 Oct. 1907), register 2197, L/P&S/10/43 IOR BL.

² In Monthly Memo. for June 1909, letter from India, register 1105, 29M, L/P&S/10/44 IOR BL.

³ CC NWFP to GOI FD, no. 1579-N, 1 Dec. 1910, register 1811, in L/P&S/10/44 IOR BL.

⁴ See e.g. A. Warren, *Waziristan The Faqir of Ipi and the Indian Army The North West Frontier Revolt of 1936-37*, Karachi: Oxford University Press.

⁵ Mariam Abou-Zahab refers to contemporary divisions between *mashars* and *kashars* in South Waziristan in Chapter 3.

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ones, organised by different would-be leaders without any claim to religious authority. In fact at one stage the British also paid the Mullah an allowance, and gave him some land in British territory. Though he accepted this, he continued to encourage the Mahsuds to resist the British and to try and increase his influence vis à vis the maliks.¹ He encouraged his supporters to assassinate British soldiers and officials. Deane actually referred to ‘the system of Mahsud terrorism’ and the climate of fear this created in the administered areas.²

Thirdly, Waziristan’s frontier location obviously made it more difficult to control. In response to the British forward policy the Afghan government increased its efforts to promote its influence in Waziristan by paying its own allowances to maliks and religious leaders. The Mullah Powindah several times visited Kabul, obtaining money and ammunition from the government.³ This naturally contributed to tribal disunity. Afghanistan also provided a base for Mahsud outlaws who towards the end of the 19th century began to carry out raids into British territory.⁴

If we want to understand the way the relationship between the Mahsuds and the British (and the Afghan government) developed in the early 20th century these factors should not be ignored. Nevertheless it remains the case that the difficulties the British encountered in getting a grip on the Mahsuds were partly due to their particularly unstructured political organisation. Other frontier groups, the Afridis and some of the Mohmands for instance, had little in the way of institutionalised political authority, but this ‘democratic’ tendency was most marked among the Mahsuds (the Afridi maliks for example were stronger than the Mahsud ones).⁵ In Waziristan there was certainly nothing like the relatively enduring bloc organisation which developed in Swat, the hereditary chiefs of some of the other Mohmand groups, the khanate which emerged in Dir in the 19th century, or the state which was created in upper Swat between 1917 and 1926 by the Miangul Abdul Wudud.⁶

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Bruce and Merk both recognised that contact with the British had had a significant impact on Mahsud political organisation.⁷ Bruce, however, failed to appreciate the extent to which most of the Mahsuds (and some of the Wazir groups as well) valued their independence, not just from the British (or the Amir of Kabul), but from each other. For his part Merk overestimated the Mahsuds’ willingness, and in the changed circumstances of the early 20th century their ability, to recreate the system of jirgas that appears to have existed for much of the 19th century. As noted above, during the 20th century some men did become much better-off than others and this did give them

¹ See e.g. Baha, 1978, p. 37.

² CC NWFP to GOI FD, 2 Jan. 1902, no. 6 in GOI FD to SofS, no. 3, 30 Jan. 1902, HofCPPs 1902 [Cd.1177], p. 256.

³ Howell, *Mizh*, p. 22

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁵ R. Christensen, *Conflict and Change*, pp. 212-4.

⁶ See e.g. F. Barth, *Political Leadership among Swat Pathans*, London: Athlone Press, 1959, p. 128, ‘Swat Pathans reconsidered’ in *Features of Person and Society in Swat Collected Essays on Pathans Selected Essays of Fredrik Barth*, vol. 2, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981, p. 165, Baha, *N-W. F.P. Administration*, p. 67, C. Lindholm, ‘Models of Segmentary Political Action The Examples of Swat and Dir, NWFP, Pakistan’ in S. Pastner and L. Flam (eds) *Anthropology in Pakistan: Recent Socio-Cultural and Archaeological Perspectives*, Cornell University Press, 1982, p. 23

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⁷ They might be said to have refused to ‘recognise any leader, indigenous or imposed, and [maintained] a diffuse form of organisation’ (R. Tapper, ‘Introduction’, 1983, p.54).

a certain amount of influence in the tribe. However, as late as 1945 the Report of the Frontier Committee pointed out that among the Mahsuds 'so kaleidoscopic is the structure, so loose the organisation that an infinite variety of alliances is possible, negotiations with them are difficult and treaties seldom binding'.¹

Some subsequent developments

In the years since Britain withdrew from Waziristan in 1947, there have been enormous social, economic and political changes. Many people from the region have moved into the administered areas of Pakistan; many men have worked in the Gulf States, Mahsuds for instance have established truck and bus networks and a significant presence in Karachi in particular. However, although in 1947 regular troops were withdrawn from Razmak, the administrative arrangements remained largely unchanged, and the post-WWI allowance system was extended.² In military terms, during the 1970s the government began to pursue a cautious forward policy, partly in response to developments in Afghanistan. Razmak for instance was reoccupied by Frontier Scouts, as were forts like Datta Khel and Ladha.³ New Scouts' posts were established near the Durand Line. However the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the civil war which followed the Soviet withdrawal created new difficulties; for instance some 80,000 Afghan refugees camped near Wana.⁴ In fact the war in Afghanistan stimulated the local economy and brought money into the region, reducing people's dependence on government allowances, and contributing, it has been suggested, to the '(t)he state-condoned, increasing independence' of Waziristan (and other the Tribal Areas).⁵ Continuing a trend which, as we have seen, began in the British period, the influence of religious leaders has grown, with mullahs and madrasa-educated men playing an increasingly significant role since the 1970s. Events since 9/11 have created further difficulties. Hundreds of thousands of people have become refugees thanks to successive interventions by the Punjabi-dominated Pakistani army.⁶ The system of Political Agents and payment of allowances which developed since the late 19th century has been seriously weakened, and many pro-government maliks have been killed in recent years by the Tehrik-i-Taliban and members of al-Qaeda who fled to Waziristan in the autumn of 2001.⁷

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However, particularly since 9/11, some parallels with the British period have become apparent. These include, in the first place, the use of some traditional tactics by the Government of Pakistan in its attempts to deal with the Taliban insurgency in Waziristan. For example before its invasion of South Waziristan in 2009 the army imposed a blockade, and closed many businesses in the town of Tank on the edge of

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¹ 'Report of the Frontier Committee 1945', para. 4, L/P&S/12/3265, JOR BL.

² Warren, *Waziristan The Faqir of Ipi*, p. 262

³ Caroe, *The Pathans*, pp. 527-9.

⁴ *Economist* 2 Jan. 2010, p. 4.

⁵ Haroon, *Frontier of Faith*, 2007, p.204.

⁶ Selig. S. Harrison 'Pakistan's Ethnic Fault Line, The Washington Post, May 11, 2009. www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/05/10/AR2009051001959 (accessed Sept. 10 2011).

⁷ *Economist*, Jan. 2, 2010, p.4, M. Weinbaum and J. Harder, 'Pakistan's Afghan policies and their consequences'. *Contemporary South Asia*, vol. 16(1), March 2008, p. 32.

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the district.¹ The invasion itself recalls the last major British incursion when, as we have seen, a British army occupied central Waziristan for nearly two years (1919-21). Secondly, there are some resemblances between the current Tehrik-i-Taliban insurgency and the Mullah Powindah and other mullahs' resistance to the extension of British influence in Waziristan the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Thirdly, the rivalry between two competing elites in Waziristan today, the maliks and the mullahs, highlighted by Mariam About-Zahab (Chapter 3), reprises that between the Mullah Powindah and the maliks referred to by Merk in 1901. The murder of maliks in recent years recalls the killing of 'Bruce's maliks' by the Mullah's supporters in the 1890s. Moreover, recent suicidal attacks reportedly organised from Waziristan, particularly those aimed at Pakistani troops and army bases, recall the suicidal attacks by individual Mahsuds on British administrators and troops before 1914.

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Conclusion

To sum up, we have seen that British officials usually saw the people of Waziristan and the Frontier as a whole as belonging to tribes. They usually accepted that, where strong leaders were not in evidence, the tribes or their subdivisions formed, or could be turned into, corporate groups on which collective responsibility could be imposed. The British did not always agree about which level it was best to focus on. In the Mahsud case, sometimes the tribe as a whole was made collectively responsible, sometimes each of the three main sub-groups, Alizais, Bahlolzais and Shaman Khels. The need for the British to establish their authority over the particularly 'democratic' Mahsuds seemed to grow more urgent as fears of a Russian invasion of India from the north-west re-emerged towards the end of the 19th century. In the late 1880s Bruce persuaded the Punjab Government to allow him to introduce a different approach, one which did not rely in the same way on collective tribal responsibility. He argued that before 1849 the Mahsuds had accepted the authority of chiefs or maliks, and their unstructured and anarchic organisation was actually the result of contact with the British. It should be possible therefore to recreate maliks, and manage the tribe through them. However, his efforts to do so were unsuccessful. Twelve years later Merk suggested, somewhat more plausibly, that the Mahsuds had once formed a kind of democratic republic which had managed its affairs through jirgas. He tried to reconstitute this kind of organisation by paying allowances to a much larger number of men, and reimposing tribal responsibility. Particularly in the changed circumstances of the early 20th century, this was almost equally unrealistic. Ultimately neither the malik-centred nor the tribal approach was very successful, and the GOI supplemented the allowance system with a kind of military occupation.

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Although a great deal has changed in Waziristan since 1947, arguably developments in the later 19th and earlier 20th centuries still have relevance. The difficulties the British encountered were due partly to the value most Mahsuds attached to individual autonomy and freedom from both external and internal authority, and the resulting absence of strong leaders. Other important influences included growing economic inequality, the region's frontier location, and religious loyalties. Recently the Tehrik-

¹ See e.g. *Dawn*, 2 Oct. 2009. Similar tactics were used in Wana in 2004 for instance (Nichols, 2005, p.x). Things appear to have changed since the late 1970s when the Mahsuds were reported as basking in the government's favour and benefiting in various ways from this (see e.g. Ahmed, *Resistance and Control*, p. 77).

i-Taliban, one of whose founders was the late Beitullah Mahsud, has been the most prominent opponent of the GOP in Waziristan. However, as in the British period, resistance to the state is not driven simply by religious imperatives. As well as being a response to insecurity and economic hardship, it appears that for many it still expresses a wish, in the face of external pressures of various kinds, to maintain their distinct identity and determine their own future.

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