

# Negative Impact of the Black Hole in Af-Pak Border on the "One Belt, One Road" Strategy

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## 1. *The Formation of the Black Hole in Af-Pak Border*

In the late 19th century, Britain decided to develop the British Empire with a focus on India. Meanwhile, Britain and Russia were in Great Game. In order to prevent Russian from expanding southward to India, British strategists proposed the establishment of the Indian "Scientific Border", namely: to move the traditional Indian border from the foothills of the Hindu Kush Mountains and the Himalayas north to the mountains to give India "scientific" protection strategically and militarily. The border was set up by different section. They decided to start with the aforementioned strategy from the Afghanistan-India border areas. Those mountainous areas were the homeland to Afghanistan Pashtuns and Baloch people.

At first, the British attempted to push forward by military force, but were stubbornly resisted by Pashtuns. After many futile attempts to conquer, London decided to launch large-scale invasion to force the king of Afghanistan to accept unequal treaties and achieve their goals. In 1879, they launched the second war on Afghanistan, and successfully forced the king of Afghanistan to accept "the Treaty of Gandamak." However, the outbreak of large-scale Pashtun uprising against the British threw Britain into plight. To get out of this dilemma, the British decided to play a trick on the map, namely: to help pro-British king come to power in Afghanistan, and force him to accept the Afghanistan-India border on map, and then make boundary demarcation. In 1880, they announced Rahman king of Afghanistan and got in alliance with him. After that, the British government supported Rahman while making terrain reconnaissance to set up the Durand Line. When everything is ready, Britain forced Rahman to accept the "Durand Agreement" in 1893. In this way, the British has made tremendous strategic progress. However, when they implement the demarcation, Pashtuns revolted again and got behind-the-scenes support from Rahman. To quell their anti-British sentiment and prevent from being taken advantage of by Russia, Britain has no better solution but to give multilateral financial comfort. Then the

## Introduction>>

At present, China advocates the construction of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to promote the strategic development of the "One Belt, One Road" Initiative. When we gradually increase investments, it is necessary to guard against falling into the Black Hole in Af-Pak border. The Black Hole is left over by British-built India "Scientific Border" which has led to a series of negative consequences including the Pashtunistan Issue, the Soviet Union and America's failure in the Afghanistan War and the rise of Taliban, thus deserving our close attention.

Durand Line has become a hot potato, which the British did not want to give up and they made attempts to strengthen its legal validity, including the establishment of the Northwest Frontier Province (now Pakistan's KP province and FATA), keeping signing agreements, and legal succession of Pakistan. Therefore, the Durand Line became a legal international border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Basically, however the Durand Line does not exist in real life. The British only set demarcation in the desert inhabited by Balochi and sparsely populated areas, while in the Pashtun- inhabited areas, demarcation cannot be made. Moreover, the British signed an agreement after the establishment of the Northwest Frontier Province to quell anti-British sentiment of local residents by promising to give the latter high degree of autonomy and that the British army and law will not be admitted into local areas. Meanwhile, the Afghanistan government got united with the Pashtun to seek financial assistance. This situation has not changed substantially since the Pakistani government took over the Durand Line. Even now, Pakistan army and the law are not admitted into KP province and FATA.

In theory, the Durand Line is an international border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, but in real life, it doesn't exist. The disconformity between theory and reality naturally led to huge security hole in Af-Pak border. Just like the Durand Line hole in the Pashtun settlements, the sovereign subject of international law is intercepted by the theoretical Durand Line outside the hole, while the Pashtuns and their "friend" is not constrained and could shuttle freely inside and outside the hole. Accordingly, this hole is a paradise asylum for anti-government forces. Coupled with the fact that the founding of Pakistan was based on the Durand Line, it must close the door to further discussion of this issue; therefore the security holes cannot be filled and became a black hole.

## ***2. Lessons from History***

The black hole has a far-reaching influence. First, the Pashtoonistan Issue and on-going contradictions in Af-Pak border arise from the black hole. When the British retreat, the Pashtuns in Northwest Frontier Province required a referendum to determine their future status: belonging to Pakistan, Afghanistan or independent. This was supported by the Afghan government but strongly opposed by Pakistan and Britain. The Pushtuns

launched an uprising against the rule of Pakistan. When the latter made a military strike, the Pushtuns crossed the Durand Line and took refuge inside Afghanistan while Pakistani forces cannot launch cross-border attack for they must comply with the Durand Line as Af-Pak border. As a result, the Pakistani government accused the Afghan government of providing shelter for them; while the latter countered that they did so because the Pashtun people were treated unfairly. Thus, the thorny Pashtoonistan Issue emerged and had an impact even to the present day.

Second, it has caused the Soviet Union and America's failure in the Afghanistan War and the rise of the Taliban. In 1979, the Soviet invaded Afghanistan, the Black Hole in Af-Pak border showed its power again. Anti-Soviet forces rapidly across the Durand Line to hide in Pakistan's Pashtun region, where they received training and foreign aid, but the Soviet Union must comply with the Durand Line as the international border and they could not launch cross-border hit. Naturally, this black hole became a paradise asylum for anti-Soviet forces. Afghan Taliban developed and expanded here. In 1982, the Soviet Union recognized that they would not win this war and should make early withdrawal. But when discussing the withdrawal plan, they again found that the Af-Pak border issue has become a major obstacle to make smooth withdrawal. Because Afghanistan gave priority to preserve its sovereignty and territorial integrity including the Durand Line, which need to get the Pakistani government involved. However, it is impossible for the two sides to make peace talks. Meanwhile, the United States didn't not support the early withdrawal of the Soviet Union and continue to pin down the Soviet Union by supporting the Taliban through the Pakistani government. Moscow bogged down because it could not win or Retreat. In 1986, the Soviet Union has been dragged exhausted, and at the CPSU Central Committee meeting, Gorbachev cannot help shouting out: "We have been in fight with Afghanistan for six years and we have to fight for 20--30 years if nothing will be changed..... Why did we keep fighting endlessly yet admit that our troops were unable to control the situation....." In 1989, the Soviet Union chose to completely withdraw from Afghanistan, thus the Black Hole was left over completely.

The power of the black hole erupted in America's War on Afghanistan. Although related archives have not been unveiled, we can tell from the development tracks of the war that the United States almost repeated the

mistakes made by the Soviet Union. The Black Hole became a paradise shelter for anti-American forces (the Taliban and al-Qaeda). To this end, the Obama government made Af-Pak strategy to make cross-border strikes, which ended in abortion due to lack of cooperation from the Afghan and the Pakistani governments. Moreover, when the US-Pakistan alliance strike against the Taliban in Afghanistan (mainly Pashtuns), the thorny Pashtunistan issue was activated and anti-Pakistan forces, namely the Pakistani Taliban, grew in the Black Hole. There was no hope to win for the United States and it should retreat. When discussing the withdrawal plan, they also faced the same plight with the Soviet Union. So the outside world saw rounds of peace talks between Afghanistan and Pakistan. In 2014, the United States chose to withdraw incompletely, namely to give financial support to post-war reconstruction of Afghanistan and maintain a certain number of US troops in Afghanistan. The US withdrawal plan did not touch the Af-Pak Issue. We cannot tell it is left over intentionally or otherwise due to the plight. Thus, the Black Hole was again left over completely.

### ***3. The impact on China and Countermeasures.***

After the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, we advocate the construction of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to promote the development of the grand "One Belt, One Road" strategy. History repeats itself: the main area in which the British built northwest "Scientific Boarder" became a must-pass area for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The Black Hole will affect the construction of the Corridor with no doubt. It can be seen from the disputes over the choice of "West line or East line". KP and Balochistan adhere to the "West Line", which is unsafe for us. And the Pakistani government has weak control over this area. If local population is incited by foreign forces to revolt against us, we will fall into passive trap as the Black Hole is a paradise shelter for them. We prefer "East Line", but the above-mentioned provinces were opposed to it. They have boasted: If we give up the "West Line", Pakistan Economic Corridor can hardly enjoy a bright prospect. If we adhere to the "East Line", it will undoubtedly cause their discontent. The foreign forces will take the opportunity to incite their anti-Pakistan sentiment. By then, we will have no more options than the following: (1) interrupt the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor; (2) support the Pakistani government to combat separatist forces; (3) provide financial comfort. The first

option means the failure of the China- Pakistan Economic Corridor. The second option is a bottomless pit, as history has repeatedly proved that the Black Hole is a paradise asylum for anti-government forces. If they get assistance from foreign forces, we will have to repeat the mistakes made by the Soviet Union the United States and the only difference is the swapping of roles between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The third option also is a bottomless pit, for we need to reassure financial comfort to two governments and peoples, and the bid should outperform our competitors, otherwise we will suffer from one trouble after another.

In view of this, since many projects haven't been in operation, we recommend to (1) increase research on the Af-Pak area with a start from the original archives; the two countries are Siamese twins with complicated contradictions. We can't be deceived by the external Af-Pak border. Moreover, the two countries are veterans in international political bargaining and they are good at seeking the benefits in game between major powers and we should learn from the experience of Britain, Russia and America. (2) conduct research on border issues and find out the actual control of Pakistani government to its borders. (3) gain in-depth understanding of American's Af-Pak policy and beware of the traps set by the former. (4) If the study found that serious risks in China- Pakistan Economic Corridor we should prepare counterplans. Never leave a single mistake uncorrected to cause even greater disaster. In an important period of international order changes, we should plan ahead as possible as we can and make fewer mistakes.

*Translated by Yang Chaonan*