Chapter Five

Road and Rebels: A Contested Frontier in Chitral, c.1870-c.1897

Introduction

On one afternoon of late July 1897, when some British officers were playing polo on the ground near a small village not very far from their fortified garrison at Malakand, they seemed completely unaware of the simmering discontent in the people around them which was about to boil over. In a matter of few hours, a gathering of about five hundred people led by a ‘mad fakir’ named Sadullah (also called mullah mastan or fakir sartor) appeared before the firangi post and began violently attacking it and nearly captured the post at Chakdarrah. It became plainly clear over a night to the British, that this was not merely a local disturbance. In tandem, there were uprisings among the tribes of Bajour, among the Mohmunds north of Peshawar, as well as among Afridis in the Khyber and in the people of Samana range to the west of Kohat, thus bringing the whole of Tochi, Swat and Kohistan valleys in its span. The whole of the north-west frontier was in blaze. A contemporary commentator on British frontier affairs in India wrote:

1 Frontier and Overseas Expeditions from India Compiled in the Intelligence Branch, Army Headquarters, India, volume I, part one, reprint of 1907-11 (Delhi, 2004), pp. 366-7.
2 The Rising on the North-West Frontier Compiled from the Special War Correspondence of the "Pioneer" (Allahabad, 1898), p. 56.
Never previously had there been a semblance of unity of action amongst the different tribesmen. There surely must have been a strong feeling of resentment and injustice which brought so many different tribesmen for the first time to combine in opposition to what they evidently considered invasion of their country.3

The uprisings lasted for an unprecedented period of six months; around three thousand tribesmen lost their lives during this period of contestation.4 But the fact that these events began with an attack on the Malakand and Chakdarrah posts in the Swat valley was not a mere coincidence. A less than two years before, these new fortifications were brought up to garrison British troops to maintain and protect the new road from Peshawar to Chitral which had been forced open up after an arduous military expedition in 1895, through the territories of largely opposing tribes in Swat and Bajaur. In this chapter we will address the following questions: what led to the making of this road and why was it important for the British? Who were the players involved in this project? Who supported, who opposed? And how did they justify their actions?

Why Chitral?

Our main concern here is to see what arguments were stated in favor of opening up the road from Peshawar to Chitral and how was this ‘opening up’ to be accomplished. In the late nineteenth century, two issues overran the debate between the British government of India and the authorities in London, they were over the question of frontier defense and the cost involved in it. In this respect, the little known region of Chitral remotely located in the high mountains of the Hindu Kush had progressively acquired an alarming importance in the British scheme of things vis-à-vis its frontier defense, in particular against the Russians. The chief reason for this alarm was the presence of few easy passes in the Hindu Kush leading to Chitral. Over two decades of explorations had proved that Russian infiltration was possible through these passes whose influence had progressively grown closer to Hindu Kush Mountains as far as the Pamirs by the last decade of the nineteenth century. The vulnerability of the ‘gate

3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
ways' to Hindustan had kept the entire military set up of on the north-west frontiers in anxiety and in readiness for war.⁵

The Chitral 'game' began in the 1870s when on both sides of the Oxus River, regular explorations were being conducted by the British and their Russian counter part. While the geographical objective was to ascertain the source of the river, the main thrust behind the project was to arrive at possible boundary defined by the river which could demarcate the British and the Russian sphere of influence. Both sides arrived at a consensus in 1873, by which river Oxus was fixed as the northern boundary of the buffer state of Afghanistan.⁶ At the time of this agreement, the British assumed Lake Victoria in the centre of Pamir region to be the source of the river. However, later in the same year, the British officers attached to the Kashgar mission found that to the east of Lake Victoria there was a broad belt of accessible no man's land on the Pamirs between the Afghan and Chinese outposts through which Russia could advance without difficulty from the north right up to the Hindu Kush passes which opened up in Chitral.⁷

While the British authorities at home and those in India greatly vacillated in their opinion on the pursing of a 'forward policy'⁸ of war on its frontiers, the Chitral issue was put into cold storage for some time. The debacles of the Afghan wars (1878-81), had proved beyond doubt the British inability to maintain a military and political presence in Afghanistan and in the process gave strength to the advocates of 'non-interference'⁹ theory on India's north-west frontiers. Just when it seemed that the 'great game' had lost much of its sheen, the ghost of Russian invasion rose like a giant waking up from a slumber. In 1883, alarm was once again caused by the report of Russian activities on the Pamirs.⁰ Two years later the Russians attacked a small village on the outskirts of Afghanistan at Penjdah bringing the two nations on the brink of war.¹¹ The impact of the 'penjdah crisis' was far reaching, the immediate one

⁷ S.S. Thorburn, Asiatic Neighbours (Edinburgh, 1894), pp. 100-10.
⁹ For a debate on 'forward policy' of S. Roberts, the Commander-in Chief of India 1885-93, see Johnson, “Russians at the Gates
¹⁰ Ibid.
¹¹ Ibid, p. 714.
being that a small British attachment that had been sent to delimit the boundary of the Russo-Afghan frontier in 1885, was withdrawn. This year also coincided with Sleigh Roberts – the chief advocate of the ‘forward policy’, taking up the army’s command in India. In a series of developments over the next eight years, Roberts directed the extension of railway lines to as far as Peshawar, increased manpower in the army and carved out new routes in the north-west frontier- all in the name of defense. As a result, Gilgit was annexed in 1889, a British garrison was placed there ostensibly as an instrument of ‘pacifying’ disturbances among the tribes, but it was also suppose to serve as the closest military support base to Chitral. Two years later, a military expedition was sent to Hunza and Nagar and a British residency was established. In such scheme of things, the take over of Chitral seemed just a matter of time; however, the greatest difficulty was the establishing of a communication line with Chitral, for the simple reason- that there was no ‘road’ to Chitral that allowed the passage of British troops.

After the ‘Penjdah crisis’, a two pronged exploration in the Hindu Kush was promoted. The first in this series was the Lockhart Mission; the second was the explorations carried by Ney Elias. Both projects only confirmed the vulnerability of Chitral from Dorah and Borghi passes to Russian intrusion; though debate continued as to whether such intrusion could threaten British interests on the frontier. By the 1890s, there was a growing consensus among the official circles that if Indian troops were stationed in Chitral for its defense, it would be impossible to support them from Gilgit, for that route remained closed by snow for half the year. What then was the alternative? In the following discussion we will see why the route through the Swat and Dir valleys leading up to Chitral was seen as the solution to the problem of defending the Chitral frontier.

The Road(s)

The Peshawar –Chitral road was seen as the master key to lock all fears of invasion from the north-west, for this road was the shortest and the most viable route to reach Chitral from the Indian frontier and could be turned into a military route in case of war.
On the road to Chitral


But this route had never been a military route. The secretary of state himself acknowledged in 1895, "it was a commercial route of some importance," to which the British did not have access. Starting from Peshawar- the last British frontier post on
the north-west, it was a stretch of about 180 miles to Chitral. The route passed through several passes from the Malakand to Lowarai, the last one being as high as ten thousand feet and closed by snow for several months. The route was also intervened by two rivers which were unaffordable for half the year. There was no road as such, no cart could move on it and the wheeled transport could not be rolled over it. The commissioner of Peshawar division reported in 1895, that “the difficulties are great, the road is little but a mountain track crossing scores of bad places where a gathering of armed peasants could stop a battalion.”

Passing through the fertile valleys of Swat, Dir, Bajaur and Panjkora, one could reach Chitral if one survived the raiding attacks of the local tribes.

In 1870, the Survey of India had sent for the first time a trained local explorer- a pathan sapper, later known as ‘Havildar’ to survey the same route. Starting on the 12th August from Peshawar, the Havildar covered this journey in eighteen days. The explorer noted that the route from Dir to Chitral was a ‘dangerous’ one due to its vulnerability to the raiding attacks from the tribes of Kafirs, the proof of which they left along the road side – “the tombs of martyrs” and he himself alluded to one such attack on his party. To prevent this attack there was a custom among the traders to collect in large numbers and move in large groups. Before the Havildar took on his journey to Chitral, the only ‘native’ who had preceded him was Mahomed Amin of Yarkand but he had not been promoted by the Survey of India.Nearly a decade before he had accomplished a journey from Jellalabad to Yarkand through Chitral, Badakshan, and Pamir, as a guide to the German explorer Adolf Schlangintweit, whose story we have already narrated in the previous chapter. The findings of Amin’s explorations were published in R. Davies’s ‘The Report on the Trade and Resources of the Countries on the North-Western Boundary of the British India’ in

12 Telegram no. 214 confidential, dated Peshawar, 11th May 1895, from F.D. Cunningham, Commissioner and Superintendent, Peshawar Division, to the Offg. Chief Secretary to Government, Punjab in Foreign Department, Secret F (henceforth FDSF), Pros. July 1895, no. 979 (NAI).
13 FDSF, July 1895, no. 979 (NAI).
15 Ibid.
16 G.S.W. Hayward, ‘Route from Jallalabad to Yarkand Through Chitral, Badakshan, and Pamir Steppe, Given by Mahomed Amin of Yarkand, with Remarks by G. S. W. Hayward’ in PRGS, volume 13, no. 2 (1868-69), pp. 122-130.
1862. George Hayward, the British explorer who himself ended up in Chitral after the visits of the pundits remarked that Amin’s routes are taken from verbal information supplied to the Punjab Government by a Yarkand merchant, I believe they are to be relied on...if, as is stated, the pass at the head of the Chitral valley is so easy that laden carts can traverse it, this route must then be considered as not only the most direct road from Peshawar to Yarkand (and Badakshan), but also as the easiest for trading purposes.17

Hayward’s observations on Amin’s report were later confirmed by Munphool Meer Moonshee who was sent to Chitral by the Survey of India a year before Havildar’s journey, thus exposing Chitral’s trading connection in a seemingly remote region of high western Himalayas. However, pundit Moonshee did not take this direct route to Chitral from Peshawar, instead he took the much longer one through Kashmir, Gilgit and Mastuj upon which we would soon deliberate. On reaching Chitral, Munphool too advocated the idea of connecting India’s north-west frontier from Peshawar to Chitral, for the route through the country of Yaghistan (Bajour, Swat and Dir), though “dangerous” was the “shortest, directest, and the easiest of all lines of communication,” in use and “linked western Turkistan through Badakshan and Eastern Turkistan through the Pamir steppes.”18 From Munphool’s observation we also note that Chitral was located on the two caravan-routes between India, Badakshan, and Yarkand and caravans of small merchants passed through the town of Chitral Kashkaro annually between Peshawar, Yaghistan and Afghanistan, on the south-east and south-west, and Badakshan, Kunduz, Balkh, Turkistan, and Kolah, principality in Bukhara, on the north-west, and Eastern Turkistan on the north-east.19

Munphool reported that trade in Chitral was mainly carried through barter (“marchah”). The traders from Afghanistan, Peshawar, Swat and Bajour valleys as well as from the Hindu merchants could be seen trading in Chitral. Main commodities exchanged were salt, grocery, Bajour iron, hortal (orpiment), Chitral woolens mainly blankets and chogas, falcons, and Indian and English piece goods. To this description,

17 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
Munphool added a cautionary note that the trade between Yarkand and India, or Afghanistan, through Chitral, was confined to "certain adventurous Afghans only; natives of Yarkand seldom or never take this route." But he himself testifies to the presence of various trading communities on this route for instance, the merchants from the north-west brought horses, those from Badakshan brought salt, cotton cloth, degchonas (iron cans, cast after Russian style) in return for slaves and local woolens from Chitral; and traders from Bukhara and Khokand sold cloaks of Russian broad-cloth and silks. Apart from the above mentioned good, the exports from Chitral were few due to a heavy transport charge which negated "every thing which had not got high value in proportion to its weight."

Jos Gommans while briefly discussing trade in the north-west of Hindustan, points out that in the eighteenth and nineteenth century the importance of this route grew as an alternative trade route for merchants of Kashgar, Yarkand and Bokhara who preferred to travel through Swat and Dir when there were 'disturbances' in Kokand or Eastern Turkistan. When the Chinese authorities did not allow caravan to pass through these places to reach India via Ladhak, the Kokan merchants could find Indian goods at Sarikol where traders reached from Peshawar via Chitral. Besides, mules and oxen for carriage purposes could easily be used here and in comparison with the passages through the Khyber, the passes were relatively easy to pass the 'cost of protection' were also relatively less.

In addition to the "direct route" from Peshawar via Dir and Swat, there was another way to reach Chitral from the frontiers of British India. This was a six hundred miles stretch starting from Kashmir and passing through Gilgit, Punial, Yasin, Mastuj and Koragh. This line crossed three passes with 11,400 feet, 13400 feet, and 12400 feet in height. The first two of these were closed by snow for six to seven months every year. From Gilgit this stretch was reduced to 220 miles to Chitral but it presented great difficulties of terrain, climate and supplies. Pundit Munphool, and George

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20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 FDSF, July, 1895, no. 983 (NAI).
26 Ibid.
Hayward, the story of whose murder in Chitral, we have narrated in the previous chapter, both traveled through this route between 1869 and 1871. The difficulty of finding coolies for carriage is attested by the latter. Perhaps the most interesting description of the problem is given by George Robertson, the British political agent in Chitral in 1895.

The difficulties of travel in this mountain land are great. All baggage and stores must be carried on the backs of coolies or ponies. Food is so scarce that a fat man has never yet been seen in the country; even the upper classes look underfed, and the most effective of bribes is a full meal. The hill tracks, which form the main lines of communication, are seldom easy; they are often difficult, sometimes dangerous. Being narrow, and frequently high above the river, whither the ground drops away in a steep or precipitous fall, good nerves are necessary to ride along them in comfort.27

If the stretch from Gilgit to Chitral was a difficult one, the passage from Kashmir to Gilgit was no less. The problem of carriage was perpetual. For all purposes of travel, one had to rely on the system of porterage based on forced Baltistan labour which had been institutionalized by the Dogra rulers of Kashmir after they had annexed Baltistan in 1841. It may be noted that in 1889, a garrison of British troops was stationed in Gilgit basically to negate Russian influence on the frontier. The transport of baggage and supplies from Kashmir to sustain this agency was forced through the impressment of the Balti coolies. Throughout Kashmir, the work on Gilgit road was known as the “journey of death,” and several begaris lost their lives while carrying supplies for the Gilgit Agency.28 According to the official estimate the troops in Gilgit Agency required 62,000 maunds of supply per annum of which only 11,000 maunds were locally produced. Thus 51,000 maunds had to be sent up to Gilgit with in 120 working days when the passes were opened. This required about 15,000 pack animals and forced coolies.29 We get a glimpse of the coolies’ response to this forced subjection of labour from a contemporary account:

27 George S. Robertson, Chitral the Story of a Minor Siege (London, 1898), p. 3.
29 See Henry Brackenbury’s Note, dispatch no. 662 F. in FDSF, July, 1895, no. 956 (NAI).
They are, of course well paid for their work, but they hate having to do it at all. Money too is of very little use to them, what they value is food and clothing. What they say is very true: ‘we can’t eat rupees, and you take us away from our farms often when we are most wanted, and we shall suffer in consequence from want of food when the winter comes on.’ In Gilgit and Kashmir the people have been accustomed for many years to the ‘begar’ system under the Kashmir Govt. and though they do not like it they have grown to accept it as inevitable, but in Chitral they have not, and their dislike to it is so great that I was told they said, “It is better to fight and be killed at once than be carrier of loads from village to village for our lives.”

To force the Baltis to carry load beyond the Gilgit Agency was an even harder task, since there was no constructed road beyond Gilgit as it was from Kashmir via Bunji and Astor. In Chitral’s neighboring territory of Kafiristan, nearly all porterage was done by women. In the Kunar valley too, “in peace time and in the winter,” a large number of women could be seen carrying walnuts, ghee and other articles. But despite these difficulties, peddlers though few in number still entered Kafiristan bringing in all kinds of goods from Chitral bazaar, Badakshan, and Peshawar. These included black woolen robes, coarse cotton, silk garments, small trinkets, salt, cotton cloths, needles, thread, beads, brass thimbles, iron and other metals, gun powder and matchlocks in return for ghee, walnuts, honey, goats, sheep, hides and wool. It still remains to be seen how with the acute difficulty of carriage on this route, the vibrancy of trade was sustained.

Thus we see that the route through the Swat and Dir valleys had a clear advantage over the one from Gilgit. Distance and terrain were important determinants; moreover, the former was also a more active trade route. But the access to this route depended solely on the people through whose territories it passed. Therefore it was a matter of grave concern for the British authority to ascertain the consent of the local tribes for converting this route into a cart road. But will the people let the army pass through their territory? Will they let the telegraph line be laid and postal system to be established? And will they not consider it as an infringement on their territory? We will now discuss how these questions were addressed by the British state.

32 Ibid. pp. 540-1.
The interest of the British state in the strategically located region of Chitral and the commercial route leading to it from Swat and Bajour were not new in themselves. During the seventeenth century the Mughals had increasingly involved themselves in the affairs of the local people in Swat, who were interested in keeping the routes open for commerce. The Mughals made alliances with the local tribes against each other making use of the internal conflicts in order to maintain a balance of power with in them, so that no single powerful tribe may be in a position to appose them or harm their interests.\(^{33}\) We also know from few studies, that a large number of Yusafazai clans migrated to north India in the seventeenth and eighteenth century from Swat and Bajour, and became part of the Mughal administration and military labour market.\(^{34}\) We will see that it was the former tendency of the Mughal state that the British authorities tried to emulate- namely a policy of alliances and balance of power.

The regions of Swat, Dir and Bajour were inhabited by various clans of the Akozai- ‘a powerful tribe of Yusufzai pathan, and a cognate tribe of Tarkarni.\(^{35}\) These fertile valleys were divided into a number of khanates under hereditary Khans or chiefs, or by the nominees of the feudal chiefs.\(^{36}\) Though we cannot say with certainty what was the nature of governance of khans over their khanates but one can safely assume that the khans had some nominal influence over the tribes of their region by virtue of collection of revenues. The tribes paid one tenth of the produce of their land as revenue known as ushar. The ruling chief was also entitled to keep personal servants (tiarkhor), “who received food, clothing, and wife.” In addition, they kept fighting men (maltaris), partially trained, who performed policing duties. An official report states that the rule of the khan did not interfere with the communal system of government by jirga or the village council. The jirga addressed “all matters related to the village”, this in main included administering of justice and control of revenues.\(^{37}\)

\(^{35}\) Frontier and Overseas Expeditions, pp. 324 and 501.
\(^{36}\) Ibid, pp. 519-20.
\(^{37}\) Ibid. Each village was originally represented in the jirga of its khel, each khel in that of its subdivision, and each sub-division in the jirga of the whole tribe. In each village there were two or more political parties (dalla) each represented by its own jirga. The party who by numbers or influence were the stronger were in power, and their jirga ruled all matters concerning the village.
In contrast to the khans of Swat and Bajour valleys, the chief or the mehtar of Chitral had far greater autonomy and belonged to the sole ruling family in Chitral. Not only did he own state lands but also had the right to grant them (meharbani lands), to people. The tribes of Chitral arranged in certain social hierarchy performed services for the mehtar. The adamzadas served as the chief’s body guards when the mehtar and his family were on village tour. They also provided him with chast and ashimat i.e. cooked and uncooked food. The yuft or the middle class formed the largest part of the Chitrali population and they generally did military service or forced labour (begar) on land. In addition to ashimat, the mehtar received from them phangi- a collective payment by tribes which consisted of goats, sheep, and ghee. The fakir miskin or the lowest strata of the Chitrali population did not pay ashimat, instead they carried loads from one village to another, performed begar on mehtar’s on land, cut trees for him in winter and harvest crops in summers.38

It goes without saying, that the Khans of Swat and Bajour valley along with the mehtar of Chitral were crucial to the British project of road building. Here I would take up the example of the most powerful chief in the Swat valley, Umra Khan and compare it with the mehtar of Chitral to bring out firstly, a contrast in the way the British related with two regions, secondly, to show how the fate of these two men were intertwined and thirdly, how both of them were implicated in the campaign that was undertaken to ‘open up’ the Peshawar-Chitral road in 1895.

Mehtar: The ‘Loyal’ Chief

The history of the British relation with the mehtar of Chitral Aman-ul-Mulk, remained largely a history of political treaties and alliances till his death in 1892. The British relation with Chitral goes back to 1870, when explorer George Hayward, “the first intrepid Englishman who pushed his way into these mountain recesses, never returned to tell the tale of what he saw…”39 for he was murdered in Yasin, the subordinate neighbor of Chitral by its governor Mir Wali. Incidentally, after a brief

38 Scott, Notes on Chitral, pp. 9-14.
interval of this incident, Mir Wali was reinstated as the Governor of Yasin by the Chitral mehtar. When these reports reached the British authorities, they asked the Maharaja of Kashmir to intervene, since the British had no direct relation with Chitral. Following this, the Kashmir ruler Ranbir Singh sent two messengers to remonstrate along with a written protest.40

In response to this development, the mehtar sent his envoy to Srinagar promising to punish the ‘perpetrator’ and proposed a treaty by which he could have direct friendly relations with the British government. At this time the British authorities did not encourage the mehtar, the explorations in Chitral were still in nascent stage. But having received no satisfactory reply from the British, the mehtar pushed for the same treaty in 1876. At the same he wrote to the Kashmir ruler that “it was for the interest of the government of Kashmir that his power should be maintained,” indirectly suggesting that he did not want any interference in his region from Kashmir.41 The mehtar was, however informed that he should form a subordinate alliance with Kashmir to bring himself “with in the circle of British Empire.”42 The same year Ranbir Singh was asked to enter into negotiations with Aman-ul-Mulk to make Chitral a feudatory of Kashmir.43 In addition, Major Biddulph was sent to Chitral to enter into relations with its ruler, so that Chitral’s external affairs could be controlled, especially the security of its northern passes. Biddulph’s mission could not accomplish much, but it did expedite a negotiation between the Kashmir ruler and Chitral. Thus after two years of persuasion by the British, Aman-ul-Mulk finally concluded a treaty with Kashmir in 1878, acknowledging the suzerainty of Kashmir and accepted a subsidy of rupees 12,000 a year. Aman-ul-Mulk, on this occasion wrote to the Maharaja- “I have of my own accord entered into an alliance with, and tendered my allegiance to you.”44

40 FDSC, July 1877, nos. 34-60, para 429, B (NAI).
41 Ibid, para 445.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
44 FDSC, July 1877, nos. 34-60, para 445, B (NAI).
In 1881, Aman-ul-Mulk wrote to the Viceroy, asking that he might be admitted into direct political relations with the British government. This year, as we know, the British Agency at Gilgit had been withdrawn, and with a Liberal government in London, the ‘forward policy’ on the frontiers of India was discouraged. In response to the mehtar’s request, he was only reminded that “the arrangements between his state and Kashmir were recognized and upheld by the British government.” But at the same time, his subsidies were doubled through Kashmir and presents in cash were made to him for his services concerning the protection of frontier posts against the attack from the Yasin chief. However, the next year again, the mehtar repeated his demand for a direct relation through his agent whom he sent to Calcutta. The mehtar seemed well aware of the strategic importance of Chitral for the British authorities.

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45 FDSC, July 1881, no. 393 (NAI).
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
who had by now sent two local explorers – Havildar and Pundit Munphool Moonshee and a British officer in his region and wanted treaty with the British on his own terms.

The official correspondence regarding Chitral for the early 1880s do not show any discussion on the Peshawar Chitral road, though the idea of this road had already been floated by the by Pundit Moonshee way back in 1870. But after the much hyped ‘Penjdaah crisis’ of 1885, things suddenly began to change. The new commander-in-chief, apart from many other plans of frontier defense, S. Roberts, pursued seriously the idea of carving out routes in the north-west frontier region. William Lockhart was sent on a mission in 1885-6 to Chitral and its neighboring regions to “enter into more definite and complete relations with the mehtar, and to report upon the defenses of the country.” 48 Lockhart spent more than a year surveying the passes and routes in the Hindu-Kush and also tried to obtain from the Chitral mehtar a promise of allowing the British army passage in his territory in case of a Russian attack through the passes. In fact, one of the recommendations of the Lockhart mission was to open up the road from Peshawar via Dir to have a direct entry to the vulnerable region of Chitral. This recommendation was “well received”, but the authorities on Peshawar frontier could not act on them because as yet, they did not have the consent of the Swat chiefs, neither a promise from the mehtar of Chitral. Though the latter had agreed to “assist British troops in repulsing any enemy from the north,” but in return the mehtar conveyed to the Foreign Secretary that “he wished to have an agreement engraved on copper” that the British government would “never interfere” with the territories in his possession. 49

While putting his requests “under consideration”, the British authorities again lavished the mehtar with various presents and five thousand rupees in cash. However for the first time, the mehtar was given arms and three mountain guns 50, perhaps in anticipation of the increased Russian activities along the Chitral passes.

After the conclusion of the Lockhart Mission in 1887, the officers on the frontiers were informed by the Viceroy’s office that,

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49 FDSF, May 1886, no. 166 (NAI).
50 FDSF, May 1886, no. 760 (NAI).
The time had come for establishing on the North-West Frontier of Kashmir an effective political control which would enable us to watch the passes of the Hindu-Kush and country beyond, and a military organization to check, in the event of war with Russia, any demonstration towards the passes not backed by a respectable force.\textsuperscript{51}

The following year there were uprisings on the Gilgit frontier, in Hunza and Nagar, which the Kashmir officials were unable to suppress.\textsuperscript{52} As a result of these 'disturbances', British officials, Dr. George Robertson and Captain Durand were sent to visit Gilgit, Chitral and neighboring places in 1888, and after their visit, they recommended to the Secretary of State to reconstitute the Gilgit Agency, which had been withdrawn in 1881.\textsuperscript{53} Along with this, they also proposed that the subsidies which the mehtar of Chitral till now drew from Kashmir be raised from rupees 16,500 to rupees 18,000, in addition to the cash of rupees 6000 from the British government. In return, the mehtar was asked to "secure the opening up of the road from Peshawar to Chitral, to improve certain roads in his country until they were passable for laden mules, and to fortify certain positions which Captain Durand was to indicate to him."\textsuperscript{54} The mehtar "readily agreed" to these conditions, but afterwards, the Gilgit Agency reported:

it is more than doubtful if he is sincere in his professions. He has undoubtedly written to the chiefs whose territories lie between our borders and those of Chitral, urging them to comply with the wishes of the Government, but at the same time he has sent verbal messages, advising them to object to the road being open to the passage of troops. This is mainly due to his naturally suspicious character; but once the Peshawar authorities succeed in coming to terms with the chiefs concerned, he will most likely acquiesce in the arrangement. Still he must be carefully watched for he is a master of intrigue.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{51} FDSF, January 1888, nos. 115-118 (NAI), see demi-official from Captain A. Durand to Mr. Plowden, dated 18\textsuperscript{th} October, 1887.
\textsuperscript{52} FDSF, July 1888, nos. 63-8 (NAI).
\textsuperscript{53} FDSF, July 1889, nos. 44, 47 and 50 (NAI).
\textsuperscript{54} FDSF, December 1889, no. 248 (NAI).
\textsuperscript{55} Extract from Gilgit Agency Report, 1889, enclosure no. 10, in House of Command East India (North-West Frontier) Correspondence relating to Chitral presented to Parliament by Command of her Majesty [ hence forth HCEIC] (London, 1895).
However, the fact was that the Peshawar authorities were finding it difficult to come to terms with the chiefs of Swat valley concerning the issue of road. Their main concern was the khan of Jandol, Umra Khan, the most powerful chief in the valley whose ‘hostile attitude’ had kept the proposed opening up of the road in abeyance. 56

The mehtar of Chitral was also involved in conflict over land with the Jandol khan, and both had territorial ambitions in each other’s territory, therefore, the mehtar had followed a consistent policy from the mid 1880s of supporting the rival chiefs of Jandol khan in the neighboring valley. But the British was trying to maintain a balance of power among the chieftains. In 1889, the Gilgit Agency accordingly reported:

Although a sanction of 1000 snider carbines was made for the mehtar, but seeing that he was “in hostilities with Umra Khan in favour of the Khan of Dir and planning an attack on neighborhood territories of Tangir and Darel... on a larger scale than usual...500 carbines were promised to the mehtar’s gratification. The grant is quite sufficient to strengthen him very materially and to him a better chance of holding his own against Umra Khan should they quarrel...at the same time the possession of an extra 500 rifles is not enough to encourage him to enter heedlessly into hostilities either against Umra Khan or the people of Tangir, or to make him too independent.57

In 1891, after Russian movements were reported on the Pamirs, Captain Durand from Gilgit proposed greater intervention in Chitral affairs.58 Following which, the British government decided to further raise the cash subsidy given to mehtar from rupees 6000 to rupees 12,000 per annum. In addition, mehtar’s sons Afzal-ul-Mulk, Nizam-ul-Mulk and Shah-ul-Mulk were given subsidies of rupees 1000 to 1500 per annum. This subsidy was made “contingent to good behavior and the mehtar and his sons were to accept the advice of the British agent on all matters....”59 “All matters”

56 Extract from the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, to the resident in Kashmir, dated 5 August, 1889, enclosure no. 9 (HCEIC).
57 Extract from Gilgit Agency Report, 1889, enclosure no. 10 (HCEIC).
58 Copy of dispatch from Secretary of State to the Government of India, no. 40, dated 13 November 1891, enclosure no. 12 (HCEIC).
59 Extract from the Deputy Secretary to the Government of India Foreign Department, to the resident in Kashmir, dated 1 October, 1891 (HCEIC).
included the extension of telegraph line to Chitral, help in conducting surveys and explorations and a consent to the permanent residence of a British officer in Chitral.

British authorities were making all the efforts to keep their loyal ally— the mehtar happy, who had till now gradually acceded to all the demands made by British office by means of assurances, money, and arms. But all their calculations in the ‘Chitral game’ were unexpectedly disturbed on the 30th August 1892, when Aman-ul-Mulk, the mehtar of Chitral for more than three decades, died “very suddenly” of heart failure while presiding over his darbar. The political crisis in Chitral seemed temporary as Afzal-ul-Mulk, the mehtar’s son took over the mehtarship, but it was not be. Just when the British government of India was preparing a political mission under George Robertson to show support to the new mehtar, news was received at Gilgit that Aman-ul-Mulk had been murdered by his uncle Sher Afzal who had “surprised his nephew in the Chitral fort one night early in November 1892.” Soon after this “oriental interlude”, Sher Afzal, “a fugitive soldier of fortune at the court of the Amir of Kabul” fled to the Amir’s territory anticipating an attack from his nephew Nizam-ul-Mulk who eventually usurped the mehtarship. Aman-ul-Mulk had lasted two months as a mehtar, Sher Afzal, not even a month, the new mehtar Nizam-ul-Mulk was here to stay but not for long. On the first day of January 1895, Nizam-ul-Mulk was shot dead while out hawking by his half brother Amir-ul-Mulk, a young boy of about nineteen. All the rivals of the mehtar who had keenly observed the events of last three years, found this as a good opportunity to lay claim to the territory of Chitral. Sher Afzal now came back with an open support from the powerful Khan of Jandol, Umra Khan and warned the British agents that they had no right to interfere in the affairs of Chitral. But things were to get even more precarious in Chitral. By the end of January, Umra Khan attacked and occupied Kila Drosh, the southern fort of Chitral region, which prompted George Robertson, the agent at Mastuj, to rush towards Chitral with his body troops in order to defend the British resident in Chitral.

60 FDSF, October, 1892, nos. 400-440 and January, 1893, no. 14.
61 FDSF, January 1893, no. 12 (NAI).
62 Robertson, The Story, p. 28.
63 FDSF, July 1895, no. 946 (NAI), see ‘Speech of the Viceroy in the Legislative Council in the discussion upon the financial statement, March 28, 1895.
Soon, Robertson found himself besieged and locked in Chitral fort by Umra Khan and his men.  

**Khan: The ‘Rebel’ Chief**

Early in 1895, the political crisis in Chitral took British authorities in London and in Calcutta by storm, but their immediate concern was how to rescue their representatives who were besieged in Chitral fort by few thousand armed guerilla tribesmen of Bajour valley unified under the chief of Jandol, Umra Khan. The Khan had been the foremost obstacle in the ‘opening up’ of the Chitral-Peshawar road and now he was threatening British imperial interests in Chitral. But who was Umra Khan, what were his antecedents and why did he choose to directly appose the British, these are some issues we will address here.

The birth date of Umra Khan is not certain but most sources place it close to about 1860, a cause of worry for the British, for in 1895, they were faced against someone still young and ambitious. He was the fifth of the six sons of Aman Khan, the Khan of Jandol also known as the Khan of Barwa- one of the four division of Bajaur. In 1879, when Aman Khan died, his eldest son succeeded him. At a time when fratricidal wars were not uncommon among brothers to secure succession, Umra Khan sought refuge in British controlled territory close to Peshawar. For sometime he resided with his kinsmen there. According to a British newspaper report, the spirit of adventure led him to visit Baghdad and from there he went to a pilgrimage to Mecca only to return emboldened by the dream of becoming a great chief of his native country.

In 1881, he made his way back to Jandol with a “stolen snider rifle and ammunition” from the army regiment in Peshawar. H.C. Thompson’s account of the Chitral campaign informs us that on his arrival Umra Khan plotted the murder of his brother. He placed himself with few men dressed in burka outside the Khan’s fort at Barwa.

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64 Ibid.
When the Khan came out oblivious of the danger, Umra Khan shot him dead with the rifle concealed underneath his clothes. He then occupied one of the upper rooms of the fort with his accomplices. For few days, among confusion and fear, no one dared to oppose him. Finally the turmoil was brought to an end by Umra Khan’s mother who helped him to be acknowledged by people as the new Khan of Jandol in place of his brother.\(^\text{67}\)

The Mehtar Aman-ul-Mulk and his successors


With his accession, Khan put an end to fratricidal wars and made his brothers part of his military ambitions. He now raised a small troop of hundred men well drilled; some of them were deserters from the Indian regiments, armed with snider and martini. He also raised a small cavalry of about eighty horsemen – the only cavalry in

the whole of Swat or Bajour. Incidentally, this proved to be a great help for him as the “hill tribes had a great dread of cavalry.” In addition, he bought ammunition through people who brought it from Kabul and Hazara for sale. The first two years of his Khanship, he was constantly at war with his neighbors and this remained more or less the case throughout the next decade. Among these were Mahomed Sharif, the Khan of Dir and Safdar Khan, the Khan of Nawagai who proved to be his most difficult opponents for they were on favorable terms with the British authorities in Peshawar.

Umra Khan had spent two years in Peshawar before beginning his political career and must have gauged the regimental strength of the army. He also needed to acquire arms and ammunition in his efforts to constantly wage _jehad_ on his neighbors. In 1885, Khan for the first time petitioned the Commissioner at Peshawar for the permission to purchase cartridges from the British. Not receiving any positive response, he wrote again five months later to the authorities in Peshawar:

> You are aware of the ill-feeling and the feuds existing among us Afghans, and that we are constantly at war, hostile operations cannot be successfully carried out without the necessary materials. Some of these we have, but others are wanting. I therefore beg that you will help me always in obtaining what I have said...consider me one of your servants, and let me know if any service can be done in Swat and Bajaur.

He was trying to keep very clear disposition of friendliness towards the British territory in Peshawar with the knowledge that the British influence and help could go long way in furthering his ambitions of territorial expansion. From time to time he addressed the Viceroy of India through his agents or by letters to the Commissioner and Superintendent at Peshawar informing of the affairs in Bajaur.

Precisely at this time Umra Khan was also pursuing a war against the neighboring Khan of Dir who was friendly to the British and this caused the Commissioner at

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68 Ibid.
69 'Letter from Colonel W. G. Waterfield, Commissioner and Superintendent, Peshawar Division to the offg. Secretary to Government of Punjab, dated Abbottabad, 5th September 1885. See Foreign Department Proceedings, Frontier (hereafter FDPF), October 1885, No. 7 (Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh, henceforth PSAC).
70 'Translation of a letter, dated 26th August, from Umra Khan of Jandol, to the Commissioner and Superintendent, Peshawar Division'. See FDPF, October 1885, No. 7 (PSAC).
Peshawar to abstain Umra Khan from having access to ammunition.\textsuperscript{71} In private the commissioner wrote to the Secretary to the Punjab government, “it may be advisable to tell him that the government cannot in the case of feuds among chiefs help against each other.” Though, this did not stop Umra from merging Dir into his own territories. Despite Umra’s repeated appeals for arms and ammunition, the authorities in Peshawar did not give a definite answer and chose to defer the decision until a more suitable occasion. This response was in keeping with the general frontier policy of the British of maintaining a balance of power among its subordinate allies.

The desperate chief now sent his agents to Bombay to purchase arms but since there was a very clear policy in the British territory of checking the movement of arms from India to an independent territory, his men were arrested and their was money confiscated.\textsuperscript{72} Three months after their arrest, Umra wrote to the British representatives calling for the return of his men and property and warning them that the he will block the timber trade from Peshawar that passed through his territory. However, the pressure tactics didn’t seem to work for Umra, as his men remained locked in Bombay jail.\textsuperscript{73} There is no doubt, the Khan of Jandol was deeply incensed with the British.

As we have mentioned above, after the conclusion of the Lockhart mission in 1887, the British authorities at Peshawar were trying to negotiate on the issue of road opening with the Swat and Dir chiefs. To open these negotiations, Durand was asked to visit territories of Dir and Jandol. But this scheme did not materialize, Gilgit Agency reported with “great regret” that Umra Khan of Jandol, though had expressed his desire for the meeting, but did not encourage it. “He wanted a ‘definite pledge from the government’ for favour that he may avail of from the British in return for help rendered in opening the road through his territory.”\textsuperscript{74} But it turned out that Durand had received no specific instructions to placate the wishes of the khan. The agency further reported that

\textsuperscript{71} 'Letter from Colonel W. G. Waterfield, Commissioner and Superintendent, Peshawar Division to the Offg. Secretary to Government, Punjab', No. 71 C, dated Abbottabad, 5\textsuperscript{th} September 1885. See FDPF, October 1885, No. 7 (PSAC).
\textsuperscript{72} Statement of confidential agent of Umra Khan made at Peshawar on 18\textsuperscript{th} November 1888 before Assistant District Superintendent of Police, Peshawar in FDPF, January 1889, no. 4 (PSAC).
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{74} Extract, Gilgit Agency Report, 1889, enclosure no. 10 (HCEIC).
Umra Khan is the most important man between Chitral and Peshawar, that he wishes to be treated with direct, without intermediaries, and that a meeting between him and a British officer deputed by government and able to offer definite terms would probably lead to useful results.\textsuperscript{75}

But perhaps Umra’s greatest fear was from the Amir of Afghanistan who had for long been making plans to invade the independent valleys of Swat and Bajaur. The Amir had also sent letters to the Chitral mehtar asking him to become his subordinate ally. The mehtar by virtue of being under the protection of the Maharaja of Kashmir openly dismissed such propositions\textsuperscript{76}, but in comparison to Chitral, the small khanates of Dir and Swat seemed vulnerable. However, the British intervention in these regions changed the power equation. Through out the latter half of the 1880s, the British were sending letters to the khanates assuring them of their independence against the Amir’s designs on their territories.\textsuperscript{77} But a relentless Amir still managed a subordinate alliance with the khan of Dir, though he remained unsuccessful against the khan of Nawagai, Safadar Khan and Umra Khan who pledged a joint resistance against him. Between 1885 and 1888, Umra wrote repeatedly to Peshawar authorities declaring that he did not wish to choose an alliance with the Amir since it may be contradictory to his friendly relations with the British.\textsuperscript{78}

Umra’s insecurities against the Amir of Afghanistan allowed the British authorities to revive the failed negotiations on the opening up of the Peshawar Chitral road. To appease him and his brothers, they invited to Peshawar to receive robes of honour and gifts. Accepting the invitation, Umra Khan wrote:

\begin{quote}
If my brother goes to the British territory the whole of independent territory will rise against me, and at the same time when friendship between the whole of independent
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{76} Letter from F. Henvey, officer on special duty in Kashmir to the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, Simla, no. 354, dated Srinagar, 12\textsuperscript{th} July 1881, FDPF, November 1881, no. 10 (PSAC).

\textsuperscript{77} Translation of a letter dated 11\textsuperscript{th} April 1888 from W. G. Waterfield, Commissioner and Superintendent of Peshawar to Umra Khan of Jandol, FDPF, May 1888, no. 27 (PSAC).

\textsuperscript{78} ‘Translation of a letter from Umra Khan, Khan of Jandol, to the Commissioner and Superintendent, Peshawar Division, dated 28\textsuperscript{th} October 1888’. See FDPF, January 1889, No. 5 (PSAC).
British Government is openly declared and becomes known to the public, all the Chiefs of independent territory will be compelled by necessity to make their submission to the British government. Further, when my brother waits on you his visit will undoubtedly pave a way for you to have intercourse with this independent territory and you may visit it...for my continuance (in the Khanship) and existence and the establishment of further authority, I beg to ask for a clear agreement to three requests...

(i) A large number of firearms and ammunition may be given me, so that as far as possible I may remain safe from hostile tribes. If the Government would not grant these as a present, never mind, and let me buy them.

(ii) When this country becomes accessible to the British Government and is left open for intercourse and communication, no intention should ever be entertained to injure or occupy this independent territory. I myself will make over my country to the British Government, and no interference is advisable hereafter to be made with me and others.

(iii) By my exertions all the Chiefs of Bajaur and Swat will wait on the British Government, and it is advisable that all such Chiefs should be placed under me and my authority. Those who may be well disposed towards me should be honored by the Government, and those who incur my displeasure should be considered as if they had incurred the displeasure of the Government.79

The ceremonies conferring khillats and gifts on Umra Khan’s brothers in Peshawar eased the tension between him and the British but the issue of fire arms and that of his validation from the British as the superior chief in the valley were out rightly rejected. This occasion was also used by the authorities in Peshawar to propose a telegraph line passing from Peshawar to Chitral through the khan’s territory, which was eventually opened in 1891.

In 1889, there was a local uprising in Gilgit against the Maharaja of Kashmir and two years later, there were uprisings in Hunza and Nagar. The frontier officials became

79 'Translation of a letter from Umra Khan, Khan of Jandol, to the Commissioner and Superintendent, Peshawar Division, dated 28th October 1888'. See FDPF, January 1889, No. 4 (PSAC).
occupied with affairs of these regions, and the issue of Peshawar Chitral road was temporarily in abeyance. In the meanwhile, Umra Khan continued to fight wars in his neighborhood and increase his territorial influence.

In 1888, Umra Khan succeeded in annexing several large villages in Utman Khel territory, and in obtaining the allegiance of the Shamozaists and Salarzais. The following year he was again at war with the Khan of Dir, and succeeded in capturing two forts, together with a number of the Dir levies and their arms. Next year, 1890, being joined by the Khans of Nawagai and Asmar, he followed up his successes by completely defeating the Khan of Dir, occupying the chief town, expelling the chief, and setting up in his place his own brother, Muhammad Shah. In 1891, fighting continued. A powerful combination was formed against Umra Khan. He was, however, victorious, first over the Nawagai Khan’s force of 10,000 to 15,000 men, then over the Swatis under the leadership of Mian Gul, and finally over the Mohammands, who at the instigation of the Amir, had been persuaded to help the ex-Khan of Dir. However, the efforts of the latter and his allies to obtain a direct assistance of Afghanistan were not successful.  

Till the developments of Chitral in 1892, when the mehtar died suddenly of a heart attack, Umra Khan had established his authority throughout Bajour with the exception of Asmar which was an issue of contention with the Amir of Afghanistan. His reputation as a ruthless conqueror was well spread. “His white triangular banner with a blood-red hand was feared by all in Swat, Boner and Yaghistan.”  

He had a strong fort built in Barwa, the capital of Jandol. From this district alone Umra Khan’s estimated revenue was half a lac of rupees, and the merchandise passing through the region with a value of about two lacs a year. His territory had abundance of water, was irrigated and largely cultivated. He was popular in Jandol, for unlike his grandfather Faiz Talab Khan, he did not exercised tyranny. The well being of the people in Dir and Jandol is testified elsewhere as well. Thompson writes:

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80 FDPF, October 1885, No. 7; January 1888, No. 11; October 1889, No. 15 and July 1892, Nos. 7-14 (PSAC).

81 Thompson, The Chitral Campaign, p. 260.

The tribesmen are all free Pathans, not slaves like so many of the Chitralis, and their chief, like the Norman lord, is merely *primus inter pares*. They pay no rent for their land, but have to render homage to their khan upon his accession, and if he goes to war one member of each household must go with him. An old *lumberdar* in the Janbatai valley explained it to me thus: “When the summons comes, taking with me my sword and blanket, I must go forth to fight for my khan, the Khan of Dir.”

And then again on his journey in Bajour during the harvest time he noticed that “every villager as he worked in his field was armed with sword and gun, which he kept handy by him’ and on being asked from one of them who their chief was? He replied, “we have none- we are all equal.” And to administer justice, “we each avenge our own wrongs.”

The British authorities were feeling the alarm at the growing powers of the Khan of Jandol, but they did not intervene on behalf of other khanates. For they did not want to hinder the telegraph line project through Jandol which had just began to function in 1892. Coincidently, the same year the *mehtar* of Chitral died and soon after this event, Umra immediately occupied the district of Narsat, a ‘disputed’ region under the control of Chitral. The khan’s meddling up in Chitral roused strong objections from Peshawar and he was particularly warned to stay away from Chitral affairs. The spring of the following year Umra brought Painda-Sultan Khels under his subjection and shortly afterwards invaded Bash-Kar region of Kafiristan who owed their allegiance to the *mehtar* of Chitral. This time his invasion evoked a strong reaction from the British government and the Amir, who wrote to Umra that “if he did not comply with the instructions of the government, an attack will be made on him.”

Umra Khan by this time had grown very bitter both against the Afghan Amir and the British. The Indo-Afghan boundary commission which had been surveying in the neighborhood regions of Amir’s territories since 1885, had forced Umra Khan to give

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83 Thompson, *The Chitral Campaign*, pp. 258-60.
84 Ibid.
85 Confidential letter from R. Udny, Commissioner and Superintendent, Peshawar Division, to the Officiating Chief Secretary to Government, Punjab. See FDPF, April 1894, No. 1 (PSAC).
86 FDSF, July 1895, no. 983 (NAI).
87 Ibid.
88 Extract from the Peshawar confidential diary no. 16, dated 24th August 1894 in FDSF, January 1895, no. 408 (NAI).
up the occupation of Asmar early in 1894, instead its claim was given to the Amir,89
“although it had always been held that the Amir of Kabul must never be permitted by
the Government of India to hold territory on the left bank of the Kunar river.”90

An incensed Umra Khan wrote back to the commissioner at Peshawar:

I have no concern either with the Amir or the British government, if, however, the
Amir seeks an unreasonable and untrue excuse to attack me and the British
government have consented to satisfy him, he is welcome. I will not run away from
the country; I have been born in it and will die in it. I shall be glad to die as a martyr,
and my grave will be built in Barwa...what is meant by the sentence that if I do not
comply with the instructions of the government, an attack will be made on me? What
concern have I with government? What request of mine has government sanctioned?
What allowance has been given me?...if the question relates to Narsat and Harnawai,
my forefathers have retained uninterrupted possession over these countries, and there
is no reason that the mehtar of Chitral, whose possession dates from a short period,
should have preferential right to them...91

Two months after this correspondence, Umra Khan built a fort in the village of
Barikote to prevent raids into villages of his territories from Chitral. He blocked the
Peshawar Chitral road92 and forbade his people to export any merchandise to Chitral
and Badakshan, more especially as Chitral depended entirely on piece goods and salt
exported via Bajour.93

By blocking the Chitral Peshawar road, Umra had also blocked the timber trade which
passed into the British territory. From a hesitant ally, Umra had become a clear
opponent of the British. He made this very clear when in the following month of
November 1894, he stopped the British postal service passing through his territory.
He assembled the local jirga in Jandol and declared:

90 Ibid.
91 Extract from the Peshawar confidential diary, no. 16 dated 24th August 1894, FDSF, January 1895,
no. 408 (NAI).
92 FDPF, February 1895, no. 71 (PSAC).
93 Peshawar Confidential Diary, no. 20, dated 24th October 1894, FDSF, January 1895, no. 487 (NAI).
The hopes entertained by me that the British government would do me favours have not been realised. That government has neither granted me arms and ammunition nor permission to buy them. No subsidy has been fixed for me, the agreement has been withdrawn, and no satisfactory reply given to my letters. Under these circumstances I do not see why I should not stop the postal service between Peshawar and Chitral which has been opened through my country. 94

Umra Khan’s invasion of Kila Drosh, the fort in southern part of Chitral, soon after the murder of the mehtar Nizam-ul-Mulk in January 1895, was seen by the British as an extension of the this hostility and an unjustified intervention in the internal affairs of Chitral. However, Umra Khan claimed that he had been invited by the young Amir-ul-Mulk for support. Umra Khan also claimed the right to intervention in Chitral by virtue of having married the daughter of the old mehtar Aman-ul-Mulk (sister of Amir-ul-Mulk). 95 But the fact remained that his actions had now threatened British imperial interests in Chitral at a time when the Russians were at the gates of the northwest frontier. The calculations on which the existing arrangements supporting the British presence in Chitral depended were disturbed.

After occupying Kila Drosh on 26th January, Umra Khan reached Chitral only to find out that he was up against the British army under the political agent George Robertson, who had locked themselves up in the fort in order to defend the newly claimed mehtar, Shuja-ul-Mulk, a boy of fourteen. While Umra Khan decided to carry on the war with his ally Sher Afzal, the British authorities decided to send a punitive expedition against the Jandol chief and to relieve their besieged army in Chitral. The most interesting result of this whole affair for us here is that this expedition was now used to ‘open up’ the Peshawar Chitral road. The Viceroy in a speech made in Legislative council just before the expedition, stated: “Umra Khan’s hostility gave additional justification to this step.” 96

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94 Extract from the Peshawar Confidential Diary no. 22, dated 23rd November 1894, FDSF, January, 1895, no. 436 (NAI).
95 Thompson, The Chitral, p. 260.
96 FDSF, July, 1895, no. 946 (NAI).
SHUJA-UL-MULK


146
The 'Opening Up'

This campaign will leave a permanent impression by inflicting losses upon those who have opposed our advance and will make an example of Umra Khan the 'bold filibuster' who has presumed on the forbearance of the British government...its success will greatly augment our prestige...the task of every British officer in Chitral and north of Peshawar will be simplified for years to come.97

The 'bold filibuster' Umra Khan fled to the Amir’s territory with his family when the British army reached his territory. There was no way they could make an example of him. His brothers returned only to rule parts of their territory. Five years later Umra died in Kabul while in exile, but during this period there was no pressure on Amir to hand him back to the British authorities. This was in contrast to the events preceding the expedition. The expedition itself, from the beginning was made to look like a mission against a single man. In March 1895, The London Times wrote, “Umra Khan has been the cause of the latest ‘little war’ expedition to Chitral.”98 The official proclamation declared:

To all the people of Swat and the people in Bajaur who do not side with Umra Khan:

Be it known to you, and any other persons concerned, that, Umra Khan, the Chief of Jandol, inspite of his often repeated assurances of friendship to the British Government, and regardless of frequent warnings to refrain from interfering with the affairs of Chitral, which is a protected state under the suzerainty of Kashmir, has forcibly entered the Chitral valley and attacked the Chitrals. The government of India have now given Umra Khan full warning that, unless he retires from Chitral by the 1st of April, corresponding with the 5th day of Shawal 1312 H., they will use force to compel him to do so. In order to carry out this purpose, they have arranged to assemble on the Peshawar border a force of sufficient strength to overcome all resistance and to march this force through Umra Khan’s territory towards Chitral.

97 Speech of the Viceroy in the Legislative Council in the discussion upon the financial statement, dated 28th March, 1895 in FDSF, July 1895, no. 946 (NAI).
98 Cited from ‘Umra Khan of Jandol’ in North Otago Times, volume xxxvii, Issue 8146, 29th March, p. 3.
The sole object of the Government of India is to put an end to the present, and prevent any future, unlawful aggression on Chitral territory, and, as soon as this object has been attained, the force will be withdrawn. The Government of India has no intention of permanently occupying any territory through which Umra Khan’s misconduct may now force them to pass, or of interfering with the independence of the tribes; and they will scrupulously avoid any acts of hostility towards the tribesmen so long as they on their part refrain from attacking or impending in any way the march of the troops. Supplies and transport will be paid for, and all persons are at liberty to pursue their ordinary avocations in perfect security.\textsuperscript{99}

We may notice that there was no mention of the road in the proclamation, though what the expedition actually accomplished was the making of the Peshawar-Chitral road. We may also note that the army that traveled through this route did not relieve the besieged garrison in Chitral, it was relieved by the army marching from the much criticized Gilgit route.\textsuperscript{100} But the former contested against the local uprisings, cleared passes, made bridges, blasted rocks and performed tasks which were needed in ‘opening up’ the Peshawar – Chitral road.

The “force of sufficient strength assembled at the Peshawar border” as mentioned in the proclamation was a leviathan of fifteen thousand soldiers, nineteen thousand camp-followers and around thirty eight thousand pack animals.\textsuperscript{101} Hurriedly assembled with in two weeks from the date of mobilization (15\textsuperscript{th} March), nearly half of the animals were sent to Peshawar by railway line which had recently been constructed. For twenty one days, the north-western railway ran 14 up trains per day between Saharanpur and Mian Mir, 11 between Mian Mir and Rawalpindi, and 14 between Rawalpindi and Peshawar, altogether pumping up 28,000 slaughter cattle and transport animals with more than 13,000 tons of stores and supplies.\textsuperscript{102} Nearly 8000

\textsuperscript{99}FDSF, July 1895, no. 315 (NAI).
\textsuperscript{100}The army under Colonel Kelly marching from Gilgit reached Chitral on the 20\textsuperscript{th} April 1895, only to find that the siege had already been raised, and the besiegers had “melted away into the mountains.” See H. L. Nevill, \textit{Campaigns on the North-West Frontier}, reprint of 1912 (Delhi, 1984), p. 188.
\textsuperscript{101}‘Report by Major G. V. Kemball’ in \textit{Reports on the Mobilisation of Chitral Relief Force 1895, part II}, [henceforth RMCRF] in the library of the United Service Institution of India, Delhi, [hereafter LUSI], (Calcutta, 1898), pp. 265-8.
\textsuperscript{102}Ibid.
animals were arranged from various districts of Punjab, 10000 were on a permanent footing and the rest were either purchased or hired.\(^\text{103}\)

Just a week before the army began its march to ‘open up’ the road, the Quarter-Master General warned the Military Department stating that the issue of the road will involve a large expenditure. Besides, there was the political question- “the effect of making such a road on the tribes. To them a permanent cart road would imply occupation of the country...it is a matter of extraordinary difficulty unless the tribesmen help.”\(^\text{104}\)

While the question of ‘consent of the tribes’ was certainly important, the army also contemplated using the local population for making the road.\(^\text{105}\) For instance, Henry Brackenbury, the officer of the Intelligence Department suggested the army to rapidly get in touch with the Swatis and employ them on the road by taking “special means to enlist and pay them as to doing service.”\(^\text{106}\) But the commissioner in Peshawar soon reported, “Making of road...will not affect Swatis. They are too well off to labour.”\(^\text{107}\)

To resolve the first issue, of keeping the people quiet, the Peshawar authorities frantically engaged them selves in fixing alliance with the prospective khans. Safdar Khan of Nawagai who “openly declared himself a friend of Government”\(^\text{108}\) on receipt of the proclamation on 30\(^{th}\) of March, just three days before, the agents at Peshawar had fixed for him an allowance of 12,000 rupees per annum, 1000 stands of arms sniders, with 200 rounds of ammunition per rifle, to keep the road open.\(^\text{109}\) The same allowance was fixed for Muhammad Sharif Khan of Dir, “to help the brigade pass through Bajaur.”\(^\text{110}\) Umra Khan’s old rivals were now coming handy.

\(^{103}\) Ibid.

\(^{104}\) Notes in the Military Department, from Quarter-Master General, dated 24\(^{th}\) March, 1895 in Proceedings of Chitral Relief Force, Military Department, 1895, no. 1765, A (NAI).

\(^{105}\) Demi official from Lieutenant General Henry Brackenbury, dated 16\(^{th}\) March 1895, FDSF, July 1895, nos.1-433, p. 20 (NAI).

\(^{106}\) Ibid.

\(^{107}\) Telegram from the Deputy Commissioner, Peshawar to the Foreign Secretary, Calcutta, no 49, dated 20\(^{th}\) March 1895, FDSF, July 1895, no. 172 (NAI).

\(^{108}\) Telegram from the Quarter Master General in India to the Foreign Secretary Calcutta, no. 3-F, dated, Moghal Serai, 30\(^{th}\) March 1895 in FDSF, July 1895, no. 295 (NAI).

\(^{109}\) Telegram from the General officer Commanding, CRF, to the Foreign Secretary Calcutta, no. 508, dated Nowshera, 27\(^{th}\) March 1895, in FDSF, July 1895, no. 260 (NAI).

\(^{110}\) Telegram from the General Commanding CRF to the Foreign Secretary, Calcutta, no. 510, dated Nowshera 28\(^{th}\) March, 1895 in FDSF, July 1895, no. 270 (NAI).
In the lower Ranizai too, the jirga decided to not to oppose the march of the army through their territory, with the condition “that people shall in no way be interfered with, and shall be liberally paid for damages to crops.” However in Swat the jirga meeting resulted in half hearted decision to oppose the troops. It was known that “khan and leading men” who were in British favour, “were powerless to guide people generally against the advice of mullas.” News kept pouring of the talib-ul-Ilms wandering in Swat and Bajour valleys, and that mullas were working against the British but we do not find evidence of uprisings led by religious men. A common feature of the local opposition was that there were no leaders, people opposed in a disorganized way.

The march of the army caused uprisings particularly at Malakand pass, Khar, Chakdarrah, Panjkora and Mamugai. The basic mode of resistance was to roll down boulders and stones from the heights of the passes. On some occasions they also used firearms protecting themselves under breastwork of stones and wood (sangars). Around the Malakand, the ‘tribes’ prepared ‘watch fires’ on hills to see the movement of the British army. The Malakand pass was taken by the army on 3rd April. The officer in command reported to the Foreign Secretary that they were opposed by about three thousand people including mullahs, sheikhs, their followers, upper Ranizais, Utman Khels, Adamzais and sympathizer of Umra Khan from across the Swat, “But they were facing a very well armed artillery and maxim guns causing great loss of men to the population.” The upper Ranizai were made to “submit” and they were sent to collect supplies and the Swat khans were asked to influence people in British favour.

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111 Telegram from the General Commanding CRF to the Foreign Secretary, Calcutta, no. 511, dated Nowshera 28th March, 1895 in FDSF, July 1895, no. 271 (NAI).
112 Ibid.
113 Telegram from the General Commanding CRF to the Foreign Secretary, Calcutta, no. 513, dated Nowshera 29th March, 1895 in FDSF, July 1895, no. 282 (NAI).
114 Telegram from the General Commanding CRF to the Foreign Secretary, Simla, no. 320, dated Shergarh 2nd April, 1895 in FDSF, July 1895, no. 270 (NAI).
115 Telegram from R. Low to Foreign Secretary Simla, no. 21-J, dated, Daragai 3rd April 1895 in FDSF, July 1895, no. 347 (NAI).
116 Telegram from General Commanding CRF to Foreign Secretary Simla, dated Malakand pass 5th April 1895 in FDSF, July 1895, no. 414 (NAI).
The Bridge over Panjkora River

Three days after Malakand was taken over, the army was again faced by about five thousand Swatis at Khar blocking the route, though “they were easily dispersed by firing”, but gathering of men kept on appearing, sometimes carrying flags to show opposition.  

As we mentioned above, the local population could not be employed for making road. The construction work was performed by the Indian corps of sappers and pioneers, who also served as fighting troops. In addition to several minor bridges, six pantoon and suspension bridges were constructed over Swat and Panjkora rivers. Through out the expedition the postal service remained permanently active. Twenty one field offices and one base post was established on the route. The mail service was carried by a Tonga as far as Dargai and from there it was maintained by native runners trained and supervised by the Postal Department. The postal runners were recruited from the ‘tribesmen’ who kept the communication of the route intact covering the distance from Nowshera to Chitral in less than 77 hours with ‘satisfactory regularity’. More importantly they were able to travel at night without escort.

The parcel service was carried on mules under military escorts, reaching Chitral in a week’s time. As far as telegraph was concerned, 26 offices were opened on the postal line which was kept perpetually busy. In April, a total of 21,433 messages were sent, an average of 714 per day. In May this number rose to 44,589 messages, an astonishing 1,438 messages a day. All this went into keeping the Peshawar - Chitral road open.

The army under Robert Low more popularly known as the ‘relief of Chitral’ reached Chitral on the 15th of May 1895, making and opening up the contested route in forty five days. Now that the road stood occupied and made, the question was – should it be retained? If yes, then how?

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117 Telegram from General Commanding CRF to the Secretary to the Government of India, Military Department, no. 528, dated Khar, 6th April 1895 in FDSF, July 1895, no. 414 (NAI).

118 ‘Report by Chaplain Church of England’ in RMCRF (LUST), pp. 21-6.

119 Ibid.

120 Ibid.
The Aftermath

More than two decades of engagements with Chitral that included explorations, political missions, alliances, and treaties had come to this- that it was taken by force; Umra Khan providing the immediate cause for it. Though one may be tempted to conclude that it was a logical outcome of the former developments, since the 'theodolite' was generally followed by 'guns', but the case of Chitral presented a curious example of imperial anxiety. The 'road' had been 'opened up' but the home government in England looked hesitant, its chief concern being the financial cost of holding such a road.

On the other hand, congratulatory dispatches were being typed in India over the success of the expedition and the relief of the besieged fort. In the pervading euphoria of success strong views were emerging among the circle of the frontier officials that the road should be kept open and maintained either by British garrisons or through subsidies and alliances with local chiefs. The Viceroy’s official warning before the expedition, that the Government of India was to “above all things to avoid any step which may lead to any extension of the frontiers of British India, or any interference with the independence of the tribes”121 was now forgotten. We may recall that the ‘proclamation’ issued against Umra Khan had promised the ‘tribes’ that “as soon as the objects has been attained, the force will be withdrawn.”

However, the frontier officials saw things differently now. Justification for retaining this road poured in from all corners. For instance, Henry Brackenbury, the chief officer of the Intelligence Department was of the opinion that the cost of keeping the route open must be incurred because of its strategical and political importance. In his dispatch of May 1895 to the Foreign Department, Brackenbury wrote: “it will be little short of madness” not to have a direct road open into Chitral in case it was to be held by troops, for the Gilgit route had proven disadvantages of distance, terrain and expenses and with no direct road, the troops will not have a line a retreat in case of a Russian attack.122 He further added that the tribes were already learning that “our presence in their country means money in their pockets, Swat and Dir are selling

121 FDSF, July 1895, no. 946 (NAI).
122 FDSF, July 1895, no. 957 (NAI).
supplies” and the khans have become “our staunch friends and ally.” The supply question too seemed to have been resolved; the successful march of the army through Dir and Swat had indeed proved that the troops could depend on the harvest of the green valley.

Francis Younghusband, the former political agent in Gilgit and Chitral had more to add to this opinion in his note:

If our influence is established by the opening of the road to Peshawar, an immense boon will have been conferred upon the people of the country by the access we shall have given them to the markets of the Punjab.

As the British authorities in India deliberated over the question of how the road could be held, the decision of the home government came. On June 13th 1895, nearly a month after the ‘opening up’, the Secretary of State for India telegraphed the Viceroy that no “military force or European Agent shall be kept in Chitral... Chitral should not be fortified...no road should be made between Peshawar and Chitral...all positions beyond our frontier should be evacuated as speedily as circumstances allowed.” But within few days of this decision the home government fell. The new government reconsidering the question of Chitral, telegraphed to India on 9 August 1895, the new instructions, according to which the British troops were to be stationed at Malakand pass leading into Swat, and other posts up to and leading to Chitral were also to be held, and a road was to be made through the country.

Acting with great alacrity, the very next day of the arrival of the home government’s decision, the British government in India ordered for garrisoning of the Malakand pass and Chakdarrah, and to settle with the Swatis and the khan of Dir for the safeguarding of the road through their territories. It is worth repeating here the agreement made with the tribes of Swat:

123 FDSF, July 1895, no. 972 (NAI).
124 FDSF, July 1895, no. 983 (NAI).
125 The Rising, pp. 54-5.
126 Ibid.
We, the Khans and Khan Khels of Thana and Khans and Maliks of Alladand, Matakani in Upper or Bar Ranizai and Maliks of Dargai, Skhakote, Kharaki,...all Maliks of Sam Ranizai, do hereby of our own free will agree that we will fully protect the Peshawar-Chitral road which Government, desires to keep open, that we undertake to be responsible for that part of the road which lies through our country, that when ever government troops or supplies pass through our country we will protect them in every way as well as also traders and c. that we (viz. those who formerly levied tolls and others) will not levy any tolls or taxes...we will give such land as may be required by government for posts and camping-grounds, that we will store fire wood, grass, bhussa, and c., at every camping ground, and will furnish such supplies which our country can afford, on payment at the current rates. That we will give any number of armed men (sepoys and sowars) that may be required by the British government for the protection of road, and c., in our country...that if British officers come to our country for shooting, and c., they will be fully assisted and protected by us.127

The same arrangement was made with the khan of Nawagai and khan of Dir in return for an annual allowance of rupees 6000 and 15,000 respectively. The Khan of Dir was also presented with rupees 25,000 for his services during the ‘opening up’ of road.128 In addition to these agreements, men from the Malizai, Yusafzai, Tarkanri, Utman Khel, and other Pathans were employed to protect and hold the posts at Chakdarrah, Sarai, Sado, Robat, Warai, Darora, Dir, and Koland. Of these Chakdarrah along with Malakand was fortified with British garrison. A political agency of Dir and Swat was established with head quarters at Malakand.129

Conclusion

I have striven to answer the question- why the project of road building remained central to the British imperial interests on the Chitral frontier, how this project was initiated and finally how it was brought to fruition. When the first British explorer George Hayward was murdered in his aloofness in 1870, on the borders of Chitral, perhaps it was not even imaginable that two and half decades later about 30,000

127 Appendix xxi, Translation of Agreement in FDSF, November 1895, nos. 183-218 (NAI).
128 Frontier and Overseas Expeditions, p. 552.
129 Ibid.
British and Indian men would land at the same place. We have seen in this chapter that it was the ‘opening up’ of the Peshawar-Chitral road that brought about the occupation of Chitral in 1895. This road was seen by the British not only as an instrument of frontier defense but also as a medium of furthering trade, and ‘improving’ relations with the frontier ‘tribes’. On the other hand this ‘road’ to the tribes meant an intrusion in their spaces and an infringement of their territory. Umra Khan’s rebellion followed by a fragmented tribal opposition to the British army’s making of road were only symptoms of a bigger problem which eventually manifested itself in the well organized tribal uprisings in 1897, throughout the north-west frontier.