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Title

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Pak Afghan Draft Agreement of 1976

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Abstract

The draft Agreement of 1976 represented a tentative move towards settling long standing disputes between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Initiated by Pakistan's Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Afghanistan's President Sardar Daud, the negotiations focused on settling key issues, including the recognition of the Durand Line as the official border and the cessation of hostile propaganda. Despite progress made during Bhutto's visit to Kabul and Daud's reciprocal visit to Pakistan, the subsequent political upheavals, including Bhutto's ousting hindered the long-term success of the agreement. This article focuses on the main challenges in achieving lasting peace and diplomatic resolution between Pakistan and Afghanistan, especially considering their history of conflicts, mutual distrust and external influences. It also looks at how these issues have impacted the stability of their agreements. Additionally, the article explores the potential of strategic dialogues and efforts to improve international relations.

Key Words: *Pak-Afghan relations, Bhutto and Daud's reciprocal visits, peace agreement, coup d'état, failure to achieve lasting peace*

Introduction

Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan had remained strained since Pakistan's inception, primarily due to the Durand Line and the Pashtunistan issue. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's main achievement in the Muslim World, apart from the 1974 Islamic Summit was the improvement of relations with Afghanistan.¹ After the 1971 war, Bhutto made an unplanned visit to Kabul on January 11, 1972. He abandoned all the protocol customs during the visit to Afghanistan. After reaching Kabul, Bhutto and Zahir Shah talked in a friendly atmosphere. Bhutto thanked Zahir Shah for remaining neutral during the Indo Pak war of 1971. They analyzed the international situation along with recent developments in the subcontinent and brought under discussion matters of common interest. Bhutto returned to Islamabad from Kabul that same evening.²

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Similarly, although he was hesitant at first to recognize Sardar Daud's Government in 1973, he later fostered good relations with Afghanistan. The main reason was that Pakistan could not handle threats from India and Afghanistan simultaneously.³

In August 1974, Iran's foreign minister Abbas Ali Khalatbary visited Kabul and suggested that initiating a lower level, possibly even unofficial dialogue between Pakistan and Afghanistan could help prevent the situation from further deterioration. He proposed that regular lower-level talks could pave the way for a high-level meeting. Ishan Sabri Chaylayangil, the Foreign Minister of Turkey, also supported the idea. Bhutto was approached regarding this matter and he gave his approval. Gradually the idea started to gain the attention of the Afghans who thought that during these unofficial meetings they could at least convince Pakistan to halt military actions in Baluchistan. Additionally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs felt that these unofficial talks could help discuss any issues and possibly lead to improved political relations leading to a political rapprochement between the two countries.⁴ In January 1975, Daud was officially invited to Pakistan to meet with Bhutto, with the goal of improving bilateral relations, restoring normalcy and promoting reconciliation in the region. However, to everyone's surprise Daud declined the invitation.⁵

In early 1975, US Senator Charles Percy facilitated a meeting between Mohammad Naim, Afghanistan's delegate, and Aziz Ahmed, Pakistan's Minister for defense and external affairs in Katmandu where the three men had gathered for the burial ceremony of the King of Nepal. During this meeting Naim and Aziz exchanged cordial views and agreed to recommend to their respective governments the cessation of hostile radio propaganda. Both governments expressed their willingness to accept the suggestions put forward by their representatives.⁶

On February 8, 1975, Hayat Mohammad Khan Sherpao, the NWFP Home Minister, a PPP activist, and a close ally of Bhutto was killed in a bomb explosion at Peshawar University, which further worsened relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Bhutto blamed the NAP for the attack which led to the party's being banned and its leaders arrested on February 10, 1975. In response the Afghan Government stopped holding back anti Pakistan propaganda and the planned unofficial meeting between the officials of Afghanistan and Pakistan in Kabul was canceled.⁷ Despite this, Pakistan continued to seek normalization and proposed talks between its Foreign Secretary and Afghanistan's Deputy Foreign Minister, hoping to arrange a meeting between the two governments if Afghanistan set no preconditions. However, on March 11, 1975, Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister

Wahid Abdullah announced from New Delhi that Afghanistan's precondition for talks with Pakistan's Foreign Secretary was the lifting of ban on the NAP. Pakistan viewed this suggestion as interference in its internal affairs. A spokesperson for Pakistan's Foreign Office called Wahid Abdullah's stance entirely unacceptable, labelling it yet another blatant instance of Afghanistan's meddling in Pakistan's domestic matters.⁸

Again, on October 31, 1975, Bhutto announced on the radio that he intends to visit Kabul for talks if it focusses on Pak Afghan relations and not on Pakistan's internal issues. Afghanistan welcomed the proposed visit if it was not meant to mislead global public opinion about the true reasons for the rift between the two countries. It seemed that the two countries still needed to resolve their conflicts before the beginning of talks. To complicate the matters further, Bhutto claimed without proof that Afghanistan had mobilized its troops, leading Pakistan to declare its readiness for any situation. Consequently, all progress towards negotiations came to a halt.⁹

On February 8, 1976, during an interview to "Asian Shimbun" (Tokyo) in Peshawar, Bhutto stated that Pakistan would not oppose Afghanistan joining the RCD if Afghanistan resolved its disputes with Pakistan. He added that continuing to press these issues would only worsen Afghanistan's difficulties.¹⁰ In April 1976, Herat, Helmand, Kandahar and some other regions suffered severe destruction from earthquake, heavy rains and flood resulting in significant loss of lives and property.¹¹ Bhutto conveyed his sympathy for the tragedy in Afghanistan, stating that the sufferings of our brothers have deeply affected both Pakistani people and him. In response, Pakistan provided \$ 1 million worth of food and relief materials with approximately 450 trucks mobilized to deliver aid to the affected regions.¹² The generous aid offered to alleviate the sufferings from a severe earthquake and floods in northern Afghanistan positively influenced public opinion there. These efforts persisted for over a year, until early June 1976,¹³ when Daud extended an invitation to Bhutto to visit Kabul to address what the Afghans referred to as "the only political difference" between Pakistan and Afghanistan.¹⁴ In fact Daud also sought to resolve the long standing Pashtunistan dispute, which had strained Pak-Afghan relations. His change in stance was influenced by foreign pressures, including a shift in Soviet policy in the mid-1960s when the USSR softened its approach to Pakistan to counter Chinese influence.¹⁵ Daud was concerned that the worsening of the situation could endanger the security of both nations and hinted that some countries likely the USSR opposed close Pak Afghan ties. He emphasized that Afghanistan's priority was economic development, as the nation's independence rely on

prosperity, which in turn requires regional peace and security.¹⁶ Bhutto writes about Daud's invitation in these words:

... Daud of Afghanistan was watching the developments like a hawk. He knew that I had effectively controlled the situation in NWFP and Baluchistan. As soon as he was convinced that I had mastered the crisis, the realist that he was, he invited me to Kabul to settle the political differences between Pakistan and Afghanistan. He had exhausted the other alternatives. He knew that I had not only overcome the internal crisis but that I had also neutralized foreign interference, both potential and actual. The die was cast. I responded to his invitation for talks with sincere spontaneity.¹⁷

Bhutto's Second Visit to Afghanistan and the formulation of the Draft Agreement of 1976

From June 7 to 11, 1976, Bhutto conducted an official visit to Afghanistan. The discussions held were open and constructive, focusing on improving relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The goal was to resolve their political and other differences in a manner that preserved the friendly atmosphere and achieved a just solution based on peaceful co-existence. Both sides also agreed to temporarily halt any negative propaganda in their media.¹⁸ He further stated that an equitable, balance and mutually beneficial settlement should be achieved all at once. Bhutto agreed to free the NAP leaders and dismiss the charges against them in exchange for Afghanistan recognizing the Durand Line. He proposed that the negotiations be continued in Pakistan in August 1976.¹⁹ Daud emphasized that Afghanistan could never relinquish its interest in the wellbeing and protection of the rights and identity of the Pashtun People. At this moment Bhutto cut off Daud, stating that "the government of Pakistan recognizes as legitimate the interest of Afghanistan in the welfare and preservation of the rights of the Pashtuns living in Pakistan." He then added with a smile, "we want you to be interested in the welfare of all the peoples of Pakistan, not only in that of Pashtuns." In response, Daud replied without a pause, "please let me first be concerned about the welfare of our kith and kin. The turn of other Pakistani nationalities will come later."²⁰ During that visit Daud also brought up the matter of the NAP leaders who were accused of having separatist motives. He remarked that "while nobody can know what is in a man's heart, to us none of the ones with whom we have spoken, including Wali Khan, said that they wished to separate from Pakistan." Daud informed Bhutto that Pashtuns and Baluch's acceptance of the Pakistan's Constitution and participation in the national elections demonstrated their commitment to securing their rights within the boundaries of Pakistan. He further noted that the success of Pashtuns and Baluch

leaders in the provincial elections was a clear proof that they had the support and confidence of their people.²¹

Daud asserted that Afghanistan had no desire to see Pakistan weakened or destroyed. A strong Pakistan, he said was in Afghanistan's best interest. He reminded Bhutto that when you took over the office of the President of Pakistan and visited Kabul in 1972, you personally expressed Pakistan's thanks to the King for Afghanistan's restraint during the events of 1965 and 1970 and reaffirmed your commitment to fostering friendly relations between the two nations. Daud criticized that Pakistan had never made a genuine effort to understand Afghanistan's stance, which had consistently been dismissed as a threat to Pakistan's integrity. He believed that new areas of consensus between the two governments could have been identified if there had been a sincere attempt. Daud emphasized that a bold and innovative approach was necessary to move beyond narrow nationalistic views and acknowledged that Bhutto had ultimately managed to overcome these challenges.²² The discussions resulted in the Afghan side requesting Pakistan to release the NAP leaders being tried in Hyderabad, in exchange for Afghanistan recognizing the Durand Line as the international border. Bhutto on Pakistan's behalf demanded that both actions would be implemented together as part of a combined deal.²³ Bhutto writes about this agreement:

.... my single most important achievement which I believe will dominate the portrait of my public life is an agreement, which I arrived at after an assiduous and tenacious endeavor spanning over eleven years of negotiations . . . the agreement of mine, concluded in June 1976, will perhaps be my greatest achievement and contribution to the survival of our people and our nation.²⁴

At a banquet he hosted in honor of Daud, Bhutto genuinely stated that "whatever stands between us, whatever there is, call it by any name, or words, they are not important." He started his speech with a couplet of Ghalib, a noted Urdu poet, that he has to face so many difficulties, and problems that he no more minds them.²⁵

Before Bhutto's departure from Kabul a joint communiqué was issued. The communiqué indicated that the two countries would resolve their political differences according to the principals of peaceful co-existence²⁶ and would stop negative propaganda opposed to each other in the media and broadcasts. The joint communiqué announced that Bhutto invited Daud for an official visit to Pakistan which he accepted. However, the exact timing of the visit would be decided soon through mutual agreement.²⁷

Bhutto described his visit to Afghanistan as a vital national mission. He emphasized that Afghanistan is not only a neighboring country but also shares deep geographical, historical, cultural and regional ties with Pakistan. Expressing regret over the unstable relations between the two nations since Pakistan's inception, Bhutto noted that the relationship has gone through ups and downs, sometimes strong and sometimes tense. He questioned that how long this instability would last, pointing out that both Pakistanis and Afghans want friendly relations. He then posed the question that what steps can be taken to improve these relations. Bhutto reflected on the events of the past four and a half years and said, "we have passed through trials and tribulations. Blasts were taking place every now and then causing harm to the poor people."²⁸

Bhutto described his discussion with Daud as friendly and productive, without compromising the interests of either Afghanistan or Pakistan. He said, "some earnest and determined efforts have begun" to solve the problems between us. He said he does not know whether Daud would have appreciated these talks or not. However, he said that personally he felt that these were "more cordial and fruitful discussions." Daud while expressing optimism said, "undoubtedly, a long-standing and old political difference had existed and exists . . . and this cannot be resolved in one or two meetings or visits." However, he hoped that "with atmosphere created by Bhutto's visit we should be able to solve our problems."²⁹ Bhutto's visit to Kabul was seen as the beginning of a new period of tranquility, mutual understanding, peace and trust in the relations between the two countries.³⁰

While addressing the Command and Staff College in Quetta on August 2, 1976, Bhutto acknowledged that Pakistan's differences with Afghanistan are longstanding. He noted that both countries have long sought to resolve these issues and that the time has now come to engage in direct discussions and negotiations. For now, the bilateral talks have somewhat fostered a more favorable atmosphere for entering the second round of negotiations. We would welcome Daud as the leader of a great country in Pakistan.³¹

On April 28, 1977, while speaking to the joint session of National Assembly and Senate, Bhutto said:

.... My experience since 1958, of the problem was of help to me. It enabled me to establish a framework and to comprehend, understand, assess and take the steps forward one after the other. I say that settlement with Afghanistan is a mission, an Islamic mission and that I wanted to see it come true. I have faith in this mission and myself. I have the background and the experience and I have had contacts and talks with such Afghan leaders as Zahir Shah, Marshal Shah Wali

Khan, and their Prime Minister Mohammad Yousaf, Mohammad Hashim Maindawal and Nur Ahmed Etimadi.³²

Bhutto further said, “A Pashtun leader from Pakistan may not have been able to approach the problem with the same objectivity because some people in Pakistan would have been actively conscious of his being a Pashtun.”³³

Additionally, the United States maintained its active interest in the Shah of Iran’s efforts to reconcile between Kabul and Islamabad. In August 1976, Henry Kissinger visited Pakistan with the primary goal of advancing the reconciliation process and strengthening US influence in the region. He emphasized that Pakistan’s security, territorial integrity and independence were major priorities for the US. During his brief visit to Kabul, Kissinger expressed strong interest in the prospects for Pak-Afghan reconciliation. He reportedly offered substantial economic aid to Afghanistan in exchange for its willingness to either drop or at least put the Pashtunistan issue on hold. Kissinger’s visit to Pakistan was supervised by President Daud’s visit, during which Daud expressed optimism about resolving political differences with Pakistan and hoped for a fair and honorable settlement. These events raised hopes for progress in addressing Pak-Afghan differences.³⁴

Daud’s Reciprocal Visit to Pakistan and the finalization of the Draft Agreement of 1976

At the request of the President of Pakistan and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Prime Minister of Pakistan, Sardar Daud, Prime Minister of the Republic of Afghanistan undertook a four-day formal visit to Pakistan from August 20 to 24, 1976.³⁵ Daud accompanied by his delegates arrived in Pakistan on August 20, 1976. The initial round of discussions began between the delegates of the two countries in Rawalpindi where talks were connected to previous discussions held in Kabul.³⁶ Subsequent meetings between the two leaders and their delegations took place in Islamabad, Lahore and Murree all conducted in welcoming environment.³⁷

During the initial round of talks, the delegates were tasked with finalizing a formula for a simultaneous package agreement. From Rawalpindi the two leaders travelled to Lahore, where Daud received a warm welcome at Shalimar Garden. Thousands of Lahore residents gathered to honor him. Daud addressed the assembled crowd. He said:

... The wish of the government of Afghanistan and my person is that our political difference be resolved, and our relations be brotherly and friendly, and permanently based on good will. The government of Afghanistan and the government of Pakistan have the means of resolving this difference at their disposal. For the realization of this we have no way but understanding and serious

and direct negotiations through peaceful means. I am certain that on this path the grace of God will be with us. One cannot solve all difficulties in one or several talks, but every negotiation with good will and seriousness can be expected to take us one step closer to our objective.³⁸

The delegates eventually agreed on a formula requiring Afghanistan to recognize the Durand Line as the international border. In exchange, Pakistan would release the NAP leaders and declare a general amnesty. Aziz Ahmad Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, presented the formula to Bhutto at the Governor House in Lahore, where Bhutto expressed his satisfaction which was also confirmed by President Daud.³⁹

Bhutto aiming to normalize relations with Afghanistan, highlighted the need for an agreement with the Baluch and Pashtuns at this stage. He noted that although Daud had left the agreement to the Pakistani government and the Pashtuns and Baluch leaders, Pakistan would be pleased to include the Afghan government in the process. Daud responded by stating that Afghanistan desires the well-being of all parties involved in the talks. He stated that Afghanistan would publicly ratify the agreement once the Pashtuns and Baluch express their readiness and consent. He also offered to participate in a tripartite declaration of the agreement if all parties involved desired it.⁴⁰

Daud's visit aimed at normalizing Pak Afghan relations was productive. He halted Afghan media propaganda against Pakistan. By 1977, he was nearly finalizing a deal with Bhutto to expel all the Pashtuns and Baluch leaders who had sought shelter in Afghanistan and were involved in disruptive actions in Pakistan.⁴¹ Overall, the visits of the two heads of state led to a marked improvement in Pak Afghan relations.⁴² Transit trade resumed smoothly and India was allowed to send surplus wheat via land routes to Afghanistan. On March 2, 1977, air service between the two countries which had been suspended since early 1974, started again.⁴³ Restrictions on Pakistani tourists travelling to Afghanistan was also eased and Radio Kabul stopped its anti-Pakistan broadcasts. Moreover, after two years of representation by a charge d' affairs, Afghanistan appointed an ambassador to Islamabad.⁴⁴ Afghanistan did not observe "Pashtunistan Day" in 1976.⁴⁵ With the improvement in relations, the usual occasion for anti-Pakistan propaganda and false information in Kabul passed virtually unnoticed by the people.⁴⁶ Pakistan also ceased its propaganda against Kabul. After thirty years of strained relations, Pak-Afghan ties had never been as amicable as they were in 1977.⁴⁷

Significant Events Preventing the 1976 Draft Agreement's Execution

Daud and Bhutto had agreed in Lahore that a formal signing ceremony for the draft agreement of August 1976 would take place in Kabul.⁴⁸ Under the draft's

terms both sides had decided that Bhutto would visit Kabul in October or November 1976 to finalize the agreement with the Afghan President.⁴⁹ On January 6, 1977, it was agreed that Bhutto would visit Kabul at the end of March 1977, shortly after Pakistan's general elections. However, due to subsequent political developments in Pakistan, the visit to Kabul did not take place.⁵⁰

Bhutto made his third visit to Afghanistan on June 9, 1977. On his way back from Tehran, he stayed overnight in Kabul to meet Daud. At the time, Bhutto was facing significant challenges due to the rigging of the 1977 national elections and their conversation during the dinner was formal. Bhutto attempted to downplay the turmoil in Pakistan caused by the election controversy and expressed regret for the abnormal situation which had prevented him from releasing political prisoners. Daud listened attentively and advised Bhutto not to delay the release of the Pashtuns and Baluch leaders. Bhutto assured him that he remembers this crucial issue and would address it as an urgency once the situation in Pakistan stabilized.⁵¹ Just as Bhutto sought an opportunity to restore normalcy, General Zia ul Haq ousted him in a coup on July 5, 1977, leading to the imposition of martial law in the country.⁵² As a result, Bhutto's further discussions with Afghanistan came to an abrupt halt.⁵³

Daud expressed hope that following Bhutto's removal, General Zia ul Haq, the new president would resolve Afghanistan's dispute with Pakistan in a fair and honorable way. Zia ul Haq visited Kabul in October 1977 where Daud asserted that the differences between the two countries could be bridged and ultimately eliminated through mutual efforts.⁵⁴ After returning from Kabul Zia released the NAP leaders from Hyderabad jail.⁵⁵

Regarding Zia's visit to Afghanistan, Bhutto commented that Zia was relatively inexperienced in statecraft and foreign affairs back then compared to what he knows now. Experts took a backseat, allowing Zia to engage with the seasoned Afghan diplomat. The outcome was not surprising.⁵⁶ Bhutto added that relations with Afghanistan had reverted to their earlier state which was unfortunate as it seemed that the period of strained relations was near to an end.⁵⁷ In March 1978, Daud visited Pakistan and during one of his speeches, pointed out that the political issues with Pakistan remained unresolved. There was no joint communique issued during Daud's visit. It is possible that a new secret agreement, based on the principals of *quid pro quo* was finalized either when Zia visited Kabul or when Daud came to Pakistan in March 1978. This significant achievement might have made the issuance of a joint communique unnecessary.⁵⁸ However, the discussions were deemed useful and productive concerning bilateral issues, especially the political differences that had clouded relations with

distrust and uncertainty for thirty years. Developments over the past two years indicated that the long-standing issues regarding Pashtuns and Baluch tribesmen were no longer the prime focus. However, the Afghan leaders kept stressing the need to solve these problems.⁵⁹ Thereafter, on April 27, 1978, radical changes occurred in Afghanistan. Daud government was toppled and he along with many of his family members was killed. The new Afghan leaders stated that the issues concerning the Pashtun and Baluch remained unresolved and expressed their desire to resolve the dispute with Pakistan through peaceful means.⁶⁰

Conclusion

The Draft Agreement between Pakistan and Afghanistan stand as a significant moment in the history of both countries diplomatic relations. It was a commendable effort that sought to bridge the deep-rooted differences between the two countries. The agreement however, also exposed the deep-rooted challenges inherent in achieving lasting peace. While it showed that both nations were willing to engage in dialogue and negotiate their differences, the delicacy of the accord highlighted the fact that peace is not merely the absence of conflict but the presence of sustainable mutual understanding. For such peace to endure, it is not enough to sign a formal agreement. Rather it requires a stable political environment where both sides can continuously engage in constructive dialogue. This in turn depends on the gradual building of trust, something that cannot be achieved overnight but through consistent long-term efforts by all parties involved.

The collapse of the agreement offers a crucial lesson in the intricacies of international relations. Diplomatic breakthroughs, while significant are only the first steps in a much longer peace building process. The failure to maintain the momentum created by the 1976 Agreement shows that for peace to be durable, it must be underpinned by ongoing sincere efforts from all stakeholders. These efforts must not only address the immediate issues at hand but also tackle the historical grievances and underlying causes of conflict that have long fueled mistrust and discord between the two nations. Political stability both domestically and bilaterally, is essential for creating the conditions necessary for lasting peace.

While reflecting on the 1976 agreement, it remains a valuable point of reference for future diplomatic efforts between Pakistan and Afghanistan. It serves as a reminder that while challenges are inevitable in such complex and historically fraught relationships, they are not insurmountable. The path to lasting peace requires persistence, a genuine commitment to resolving differences and a forward-looking approach that prioritizes long term stability and prosperity for

both nations. As both countries continue to navigate their relationship in the present day, the lessons from 1976 emphasizes the importance of seizing opportunities for reconciliation and building a foundation for trust that can withstand the test of time.

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