

I.B. TAURIS

EMPIRE AND TRIBE IN THE AFGHAN FRONTIER REGION

Custom, Conflict and British
Strategy in Waziristan until 1947



WAZIRIS TRIBESMEN OF WAZIRISTAN, N.W.F.P.

HUGH BEATTIE

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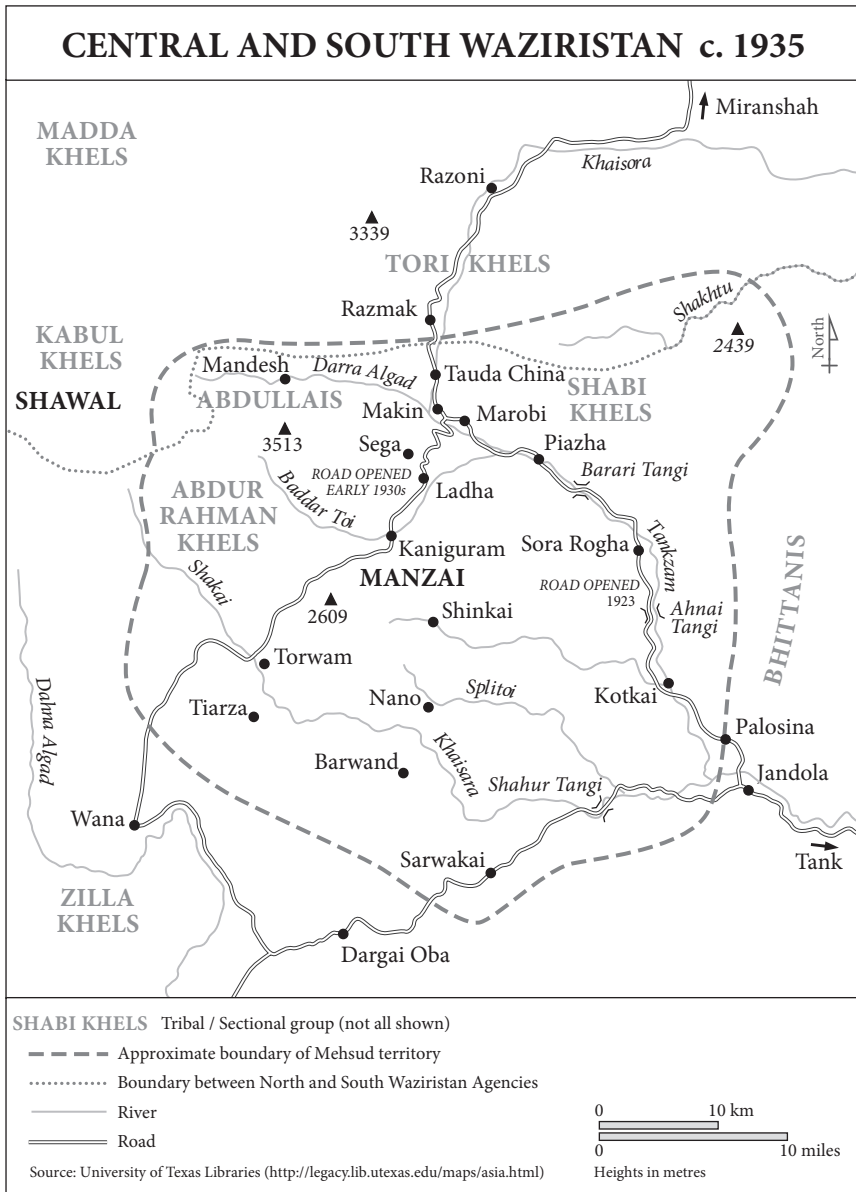
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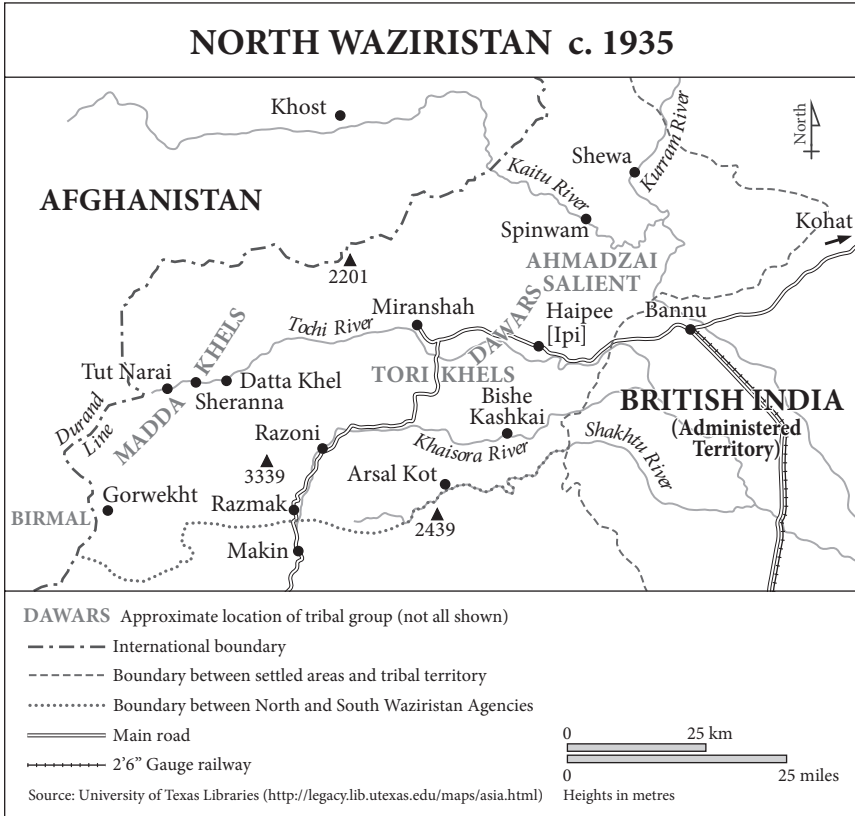
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Map 1 Waziristan in relation to western Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan (c.1935).



Map 2 Central and South Waziristan (c.1935).



Map 3 North Waziristan (c.1935).

Introduction

Waziristan, a mountainous region in western Pakistan, was described by former American president Barak Obama as ‘the most dangerous place in the world’; it has endured a number of invasions since the mid-nineteenth century and remains an unsettled borderland. This book explores its history from the early nineteenth century to the present day, and in doing so sheds light on the reasons for its continuing volatility. The principal focus is on the efforts the British made to gain control of it from 1849, when they arrived on its eastern border, until the creation of Pakistan in 1947.

British interest in Waziristan reflected what they took to be its strategic significance. As they saw it, to protect their Indian empire they needed to keep Russia out of Afghanistan, and this meant controlling Waziristan. In 1849 the region was more or less independent. By 1914 a combination of force and bribery had enabled the British to establish a tenuous control of it. This weakened during the First World War and largely broke down in the early summer of 1919, when the outbreak of the third Anglo-Afghan war led to the collapse of the militias the British had set up to help them manage it. In response, at the end of the year a large British force began to fight its way into central Waziristan, and a few years later the British established a large military base at Razmak. During the interwar period they tried to open up Waziristan and extend their control of it by pursuing a policy of what they called peaceful penetration: sending regular troops and irregular scouts to visit as many parts of it as possible, coupled with limited efforts to provide education, health care and economic assistance. This was not very successful either, and it was much more expensive than the previous strategy; a major insurgency broke out in 1936, and the costs of trying to control Waziristan continued to rise. By 1947 raiding from Waziristan into the towns and villages to the east was worse than it had been in 1849.

Why did Britain fail to get a firm grip on it? This book attempts to answer that question. There were several reasons. In the first place financial constraints limited the amount that could be spent both on the use of force and on more peaceful means of winning its people over. Second, there was Waziristan’s

location on the border with Afghanistan. Afghans thought they had a stronger claim to it. Even after the demarcation of the Durand Line in the mid-1890s divided the North-West Frontier into British and Afghan spheres of influence, the Afghan government continued to maintain and develop links with people whose homes were on the British side of the line. Third, the region's mountainous topography made it difficult to access. The culture of its 'tribal' inhabitants, who greatly valued their independence and their individual autonomy and were reluctant to submit to any authority, whether internal or external, was also very important. In addition to exploring these issues, the book examines the roles played by poverty and religion in the encounter, including the importance of suicidal violence, looks at some British and North-West Frontier understandings of violence, and draws some comparisons between aspects of British and French colonial strategy. In shedding light on Britain's experience of Waziristan, this book engages with some significant aspects of British imperial history. It also contributes to our understanding of subsequent developments along this frontier, because, although much has of course changed since 1947, there are some significant continuities.

Earlier scholarly discussions of Waziristan's recent history consisted of chapters in books dealing with the British period on the North-West Frontier as a whole, and they tended to concentrate on shifting British policy and on the military encounters. Examples include William Barton's *India's North-West Frontier* (1939, London), Sir Olaf Caroe's *The Pathans 550 B.C.-A.D.* (1957, Oxford), Colin Davies's *The Problem of the North-West Frontier 1890-1908* (1932, Cambridge), Major-General James Elliott's *The Frontier 1839-1947: The Story of the North-West Frontier of India* (1968, London), and James Spain's *The Pathan Borderland* (1963, The Hague). *Frontier Legion: With the Khassadars of North Waziristan* (Ferring, 2003), written in 1950, by Frank Leeson, describes his experiences as a tribal police officer in northern Waziristan in 1946-7.¹

Brian Robson's *Crisis on the Frontier: The Third Afghan War and the Campaign in Waziristan 1919-20* (2004, Staplehurst) is a more recent study that also focuses on military history. Books that deal specifically with Waziristan include Alan Warren's *The Faqir of Ipi and the Indian Army* (2000, Karachi) and Andrew Roe's *Waging War in Waziristan* (2010, Lawrence, Kansas); Warren's study in particular contains much original research. Other recent work that has some discussion of Waziristan includes David Omissi's *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force 1919-1939* (1990, Manchester).

Researchers have also begun to go beyond the military aspects of the encounter to explore the changing nature of the British frontier administration and British

imperial culture. Their publications include *The Edge of Empire: The British Political Officer and Tribal Administration on the North-West Frontier 1877-1947* (2011, Farnham) by Christian Tripodi and Brandon Marsh's *Ramparts of Empire: British Imperialism and India's Afghan Frontier, 1918-1948* (2015, Basingstoke).² When security was less of a problem, social anthropologists carried out field research in several frontier locations, and their work has informed subsequent scholarship. These include several publications by Akbar S. Ahmed, notably *Millennium and Charisma among Pathans* (1976, London), *Pukhtun Economy and Society: Traditional Structure and Economic Development in a Tribal Society* (1980, London) and *Resistance and Control in Pakistan* (1983, London). Fredrik Barth's study of political organization in Swat, *Political Leadership among Swat Pathans* (1959, London), has become a classic. Among other valuable contributions are David Edwards's *Heroes of the Age: Moral Fault Lines on the Afghan Frontier* (1996, Berkeley) and Charles Lindholm's *Generosity and Jealousy: The Swat Pukhtuns of Northern Pakistan* (1982, New York) and *Frontier Perspectives: Essays in Comparative Anthropology* (1996, Karachi).

More recently, there has been a renewed interest in the history and culture of the frontier people and religious and political developments in the North-West Frontier Province in the British period, as researchers have begun to investigate a range of archival sources.³ For instance in my earlier study *Imperial Frontier: Tribe and State in Waziristan* (2002, Richmond), I looked in detail at the first thirty-five years of the British relationship with Waziristan, exploring not only the ways in which the British tried to manage relations with it but also the ways in which people responded to them, showing how in this early period there was much more to British strategy on the Waziristan border than simply the use of force. Other examples include Robert Nichols's *Settling the Frontier: Land, Law, and Society in the Peshawar Valley 1500-1900* (2001, Karachi), Sana Haroon's *Frontier of Faith: Islam in the Indo-Afghan Borderland* (2007, London) and Mukulika Banerjee's study of the Khudai Khidmatgaran, *The Pathan Unarmed: Opposition and Memory in the North-West Frontier* (2000, Oxford/Santa Fe). Benjamin Hopkins and Magnus Marsden's *Fragments of the Afghan Frontier* (2012, London) covers aspects of the modern history and society of the frontier and Afghanistan, as does their edited volume *Beyond Swat: History, Society and Economy along the Afghanistan-Pakistan Frontier* (2013, London). Elizabeth Leake's *The Defiant Border: The Afghan-Pakistan Borderlands in the Era of Decolonization, 1936-1965* (2017, Cambridge) breaks new ground in exploring in depth the relationship between developments along the frontier and in Afghanistan and Pakistan from the mid-1930s to the 1960s.

In this book I have drawn on some of the work on the frontier that has been published since the turn of the century, as well as on the records and personal correspondence in the British Library, the Cambridge University Library and the Cambridge South Asian Studies Library, to discuss developments in Waziristan over the whole period from the early 1880s to 1947 in more detail than any previous studies. I have tried to read the sources 'against the grain,' but of course they have their limitations, not just because of their inherent bias but because they focus on some aspects of the encounter at the expense of others. Nevertheless, in going beyond 'state-centred national histories,' the book is a contribution to the kind of 'connected history' advocated by Potter and Saha and the study of borderlands and their characteristic features.⁴ Chapters 1 to 4 look at the geography, society and culture of Waziristan and review the wider political context in the early nineteenth century before the British arrival in 1849, going on to examine some of the key developments during the second half of the century. These include the impact of the Second Anglo-Afghan War, reactions to the implementation of the forward policy and the demarcation of the Durand Line, and the new approach introduced by the viceroy, Lord Curzon. Chapters 5 to 8 take the story up to the early 1920s, looking at the part played by an influential mullah, Muhiy-ud-Din, the so-called Mullah Powindah, the deteriorating British position during the First World War, and developments after it. Chapters 9 to 11 explore the policy of peaceful penetration and its failure, the insurgency led by Mirza Ali Khan (the 'Faqir of Ipi') and the recrudescence of raiding along the border, British withdrawal and the challenges posed by it and the partition of India. The final chapter reviews the key points that emerge from the discussion as a whole.

Waziristan and early British contacts

Waziristan

Waziristan, 'land of the Wazirs', is part of what came to be called by the British the North-West Frontier, and most of it is now in Pakistan. To the west this rugged mostly mountainous region borders the Afghan provinces of Paktika and Khost; to the east is the Derajat.¹ Southern Waziristan has the higher mountains (to the west rising to 3,513 metres – approaching 11,000 feet), as well as deep valleys and narrow gorges cut by rivers flowing east to the Indus. In northern Waziristan, the mountains are lower and valleys are more open. Some parts are still forested, others arid and treeless. The climate is harsh with cold winters and hot summers.

In 1849 when the British arrived on its eastern border, rivers, gorges and mountains and its highly independent people made travelling through it difficult, but it was neither insulated from external influences nor very far from major urban centres. Makin in central Waziristan, for example, is about 140 miles from Kabul, and about the same distance from Peshawar. In modern times the North-West Frontier has not always been a political border. During the seventeenth century, for example, Waziristan and the rest of the mountainous area between the Kabul River to the north and the Gumal River to the south formed a semi-independent enclave encapsulated within the Mughal Empire. Similarly in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the Durrani rulers, initially based in Kandahar and then in Kabul, had ruled much of the territory along the borders of Waziristan, but not Waziristan itself. It was the rise of the Sikh kingdom in the early nineteenth century and its conquest of the Punjab that began to turn the region into a frontier zone.²

The people

In the mid-nineteenth century the majority of those living along the North-West Frontier were Pashtuns, who belonged to descent groups 'composed of lineages (Pashto – *zai* "sons of") that traced their origin to Qais Abdurashid, the putative common ancestor of all Pashtuns.'³ The British generally regarded these groups as 'tribes' (or sometimes clans).⁴ In Waziristan they included Darwesh Khel Wazirs, Mehsuds (or Mahsuds), Dawars and Bhattanis. Bhattanis were supposedly descended from Qais's second son, Bitan, while one version of the origins of the Darwesh Khel Wazirs, Mehsuds and Dawars was that they were descended from Karlanri, an adopted son of Qais's third son, Ghurghusht. Mehsuds and Darwesh Khel Wazirs (as well as the Gurbaz Wazirs) however were believed to share a common ancestor in Karlanri's grandson Sulaiman, while the Dawars traced their origins back to another grandson, Shitak.⁵

The Darwesh Khels (referred to from now on simply as Wazirs) inhabited an arc of territory extending from Wana in the south-west to the Kurram River and Upper Miranzai in the north-east. They were further divided into Utmanzais and Ahmadzais. The Mehsuds were divided into three main groupings, Alizais, Bahlolzais and Shaman Khels. They lived in the centre and south of Waziristan, but apart from the Manzai Alizais these larger groupings did not have separate territories of their own.⁶ To the east of the Mehsuds, between them and the plains (the Derajat) lived the Bhattanis. To the north the Dawars lived in the Tochi valley. To the south-west, around Wana, lived Dotani Ghilzais. There were also small colonies of Hindu and Sikh traders and moneylenders. In addition at Kaniguram there was a settlement of people known as Urmurs, or Barakis, who spoke a separate language, Urmuri.

To the east of Waziristan lay the Bannu district whose inhabitants were mostly either Pashtu-speaking Bannuchis (Karlanri Pashtuns) or Punjabi speakers known as Jats. Between Bannu and Tank lived Pashtu-speaking Lohani Marwats (who also claimed descent from Qais's second son, Bitan). Most people in the Tank district to the south of Bannu were Marwats and Kundis (also Pashtu-speaking Lohanis). To the south of Waziristan itself was the Gumal River, and south of it lived Miani and Sherani Pashtuns. To the south-west and west the population consisted mostly of Ghilzai Pashtuns (also claiming descent from Bitan), including Dotanis and Kharoti and Suleiman Khel Ghilzais. To the north-west, in Khost, lived other Pashtun tribal groups; the Mangals and the Zadrans were the largest; others included Gurbaz Wazirs, Tannis and Muqbils. To the north were Zaimukhts, Turis, Bangash and Khattaks (all supposedly descended from Karlanri).⁷

Settlement and economy

Some Mehsuds were transhumants, some nomadic, but the majority appear to have been settled and lived in small settlements. The better-off lived in walled compounds with defensive towers, the poorer in scattered huts or caves (Figure 1.1).⁸ Mehsud occupations were diverse, and included agriculture, horticulture and pastoralism, as well as mining, small-scale industry and trade. For example, they mined and smelted iron near Makin and Kaniguram and sold it in the Tank market. In the mid-nineteenth century there were also a number of workshops, mainly at Makin and Kaniguram (and also some at Shakai and Babar) where agricultural implements, knives and cooking utensils were made. Waziristani people also sold timber, nuts, wool, skins, honey and charcoal in Tank and Bannu. Some areas, Manzai for example, were less agriculturally productive than others, and those living in them were often very poor. They included some of the Shingi, Abdur Rahman Khel and Jalal Khel Bahlolzais, and men from these sections sometimes raided the settled areas to the east or attacked the caravans of the trading nomads (Powindahs) in the Gumal Pass

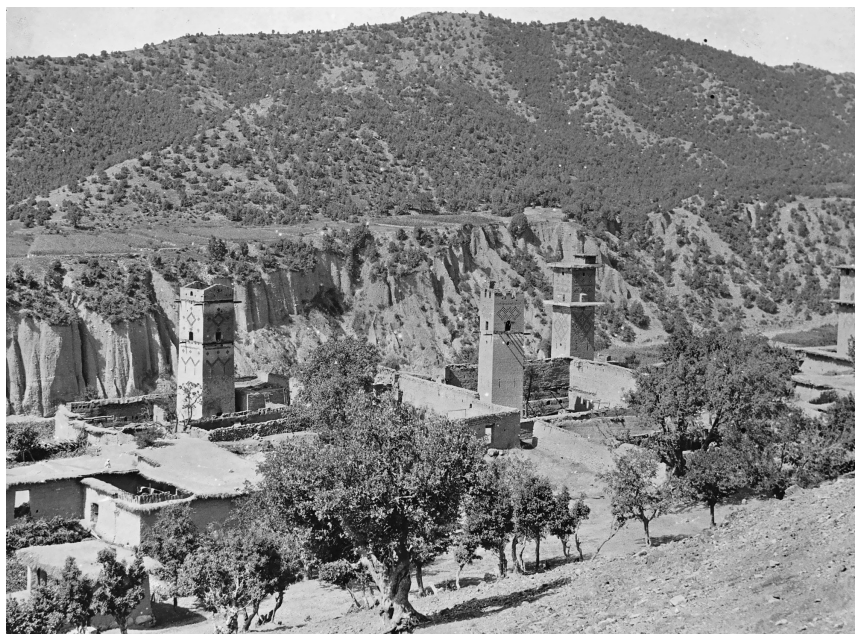


Figure 1.1 Houses at Kot Handgar (Langar) Khel village, Waziristan, 1930. Their defensive towers are clearly visible. Holmes, Randolph Bezzant (1888–1973). Credit: British Library, London UK@British Library Board. All Rights Reserved/Bridgeman Images.

to the south.⁹ Nevertheless, it seems that few if any Mehsuds (or Wazirs) relied solely on raiding to help them survive.

As regards the Wazirs, many of them were pastoral nomads who moved from summer pastures to winter ones in the autumn and back again in the spring. Their summer pastures and cultivation included the Shawal and Shakai valleys in the mountains of western Waziristan near the present-day border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. In the winter they moved with their flocks to several different places including the Wana district, Birmal, Baddar, Spinwam, Shewa, Miranzai and Bannu. Some lived in tents all year round, and others spent part of the year in houses. Often they grew a spring crop before leaving for higher ground in the early summer. There were permanent villages, for instance in the upper Tochi valley, the Shaktu valley and Dawar; the largest Wazir settlement appears to have been the Madda Khel settlement of Sheranna in the upper Tochi. Some Wazirs were traders and carriers. The Manzar Khel Wazirs, who lived to the north of Miran Shah, mined iron ore in the Ghoreshti Nala behind the Darweshta Sar mountain from which they manufactured horseshoes and nails for sale.¹⁰ Dawars were mostly farmers and horticulturalists. Bhattanis, some of whom were also nomadic, combined pastoralism and agriculture. They also traded in Bannu, Kulachi and Tank. Nowadays Waziristan's population is estimated at over 800,000.¹¹ It is very hard to say with any certainty what it might have been in the mid-nineteenth century, but it was probably less than 100,000.¹²

Political and social organization

Wazirs and Mehsuds are or were often thought of as typical *nang* Pashtuns (*nang* meaning honour) who were able to live according to supposedly traditional Pashtun values, by contrast with those living in the plains, who paid land revenue to the state, whom Ahmed calls *qalang* Pashtuns – from *qalang*, meaning rent or tax.¹³ Traditional values included upholding honour; individuals, families and groups had to maintain their honour and avoid anything which could lead to them being shamed. This was central to Pashtun custom (*riwaj*) or Pashtunwali. Men were supposed to be as self-reliant and independent as possible and not to take orders from others, or allow any challenges or insults to go unanswered. Male honour depended partly on women behaving modestly and avoiding all contact with men other than their close relatives. Hospitality was also highly valued.

From the point of view of both the British and the rulers of Afghanistan, Waziristan was 'a recalcitrant landscape' with 'fugitive, resistant inhabitants': 'mob rule prevails', as one official put it.¹⁴ It makes more sense, however, to envisage it not as a violent free-for-all, but as a society in which there were no strong leaders and no hereditary leadership, and in which social order was maintained in other ways, including the threat of retaliation and the availability of customary procedures for mediation and reconciliation – among them tribal councils or *jirgas* and appeal to the authority of religious intermediaries. There were men referred to as *maliks* (from the Arabic *malik*, king or prince) among all the different groups, who had some influence. But particularly among the Mehsuds this influence was usually limited, and not inherited: 'any man through the display of courage or wisdom may become a Malik irrespective of birth', it was reported.¹⁵ Decisions affecting the group as a whole were usually reached in these *jirgas*, which could appoint men to act as a kind of police force and enforce their decisions, or call for men to fight against enemies (known as *chalweshitis*).¹⁶

So far the people of this stateless region, Mehsuds, Wazirs, Dawars, Bhattanis and so on, have been referred to as if they were straightforwardly divided into distinct tribes or tribal groups that predated the encounter with the British and Afghan states. In fact things were more complicated. It seems that people did identify themselves as belonging to different groups on the basis of what was understood to be shared patrilineal descent. At the same time this shared descent was potentially the basis for a whole range of groups of different sizes, depending on how far back up the genealogical tree one went. It appears therefore that people identified with different groups according to the circumstances. It was not necessarily clear to outsiders which the important level or levels were, and exactly what their importance was.

In addition there were factions and networks which crossed genealogical boundaries. According to segmentary lineage theory members of the same genealogical segments should form political groups to compete with distantly related segments, but this does not appear to have happened very often in Waziristan. This was partly due to the existence of an institutionalized rivalry between patrilineal first cousins (*tarburs*), known as *tarburwali*. In the case of the Mehsuds in particular it was also due to the fact that members of different sections sometimes lived together in the same area, rather than having a distinct territory of their own. Other factors which influenced people's social and political behaviour and identities included generational tensions (between *mashars* – elders, implying better-off and *kashars* – young men, the poor) and matrilineal kinship. It is an obvious point, but it would be wrong to think of any

of these groups as comprised of people who all thought and behaved in the same way. As everywhere, there appears to have been in Waziristan 'a multiplicity of inconsistent voices and values, varying according to gender, class, age, ideological persuasion and so on'.¹⁷

The resulting lack of cohesion was particularly noticeable among the Mehsuds. At the same time, however, both Wazirs and Mehsuds did see themselves as sharing an identity. This was based on the idea of a thread or link – *sarishta* – connecting them, which was associated with the concept of *nikat* (from the Pashtu word for grandfather – *nika*). *Nikat* was a tariff according to which both benefits acquired from outsiders and losses suffered at the hands of outsiders were to be shared in fixed proportions, first between the Mehsuds and the Wazirs, and then in the Mehsud case, for example, between the three main divisions – Alizais, Bahlolzais and Shaman Khels – and then between the smaller ones.

Religion

Apart from the Hindu and Sikh traders and moneylenders, the people of Waziristan were Muslims, usually Sunnis. Men with religious authority included mullahs (Persian, from the Arabic *mawla* – someone educated in theology and Islamic law), who had acquired some knowledge of the Qur'an and the hadiths in a local seminary or *madrasah*, led prayers and performed rites of passage for the villagers among whom they lived. Sometimes they helped mediate conflicts. They may have represented a different source of authority to that of the maliks but were not usually outsiders. There were many small *madrasahs* in Bannu, Dawar and Kaniguram.¹⁸

There was some overlap between the ordinary mullahs and various Sufi or quasi-Sufi figures, whose authority was based mainly on the spiritual power they were believed to develop through prayer and meditative exercises and self-discipline, including fasting and periods of retreat (which could last up to forty days) known as *chillas*. This enabled them to look beyond the veil of ordinary existence into the unseen or unknown (*al-ghaib*) and perform miraculous feats (*karamat*) (strictly speaking God was able to perform these feats through them). So, for instance, they could control the behaviour of birds and animals, feed large numbers of people, cure illness, render enemy bullets harmless and influence the weather.

Some Sufis were wanderers. Others settled down and established permanent bases, lodges referred to as *khanaqas*. Traditionally the Sufi master (*pir*) had

disciples who took an oath of allegiance (*bai'at*) and entrusted themselves, body and soul, to him. He would preside over a mosque, where visitors and followers could sleep, and a *langar*, or kitchen, where they would be fed. Famous examples from the frontier during the British period included the Akhund of Swat (1794–1878) and the Hadda mullah (d.1902). Well-known Sufi teachers attracted disciples – *khalifas* and *sheikhs* (deputies), *murids* (disciples), and *talibs* or *taliban* (from *talib-ul-ilm* – seekers after knowledge). As we shall see, these *talibs* were to be a problem for the British. One report referred to them as 'half students, half secular priests, [who] swarm in the mosques leading an idle life and ever ready to incite their clansmen to mischief. They are ignorant and fanatical in an extreme degree.'¹⁹

Religious authority could be inherited as well, and there were also sacred lineages, for example of Sayyids, whose authority was based on their sacred descent (initially from the Prophet Muhammad himself). They sometimes had hereditary links with particular tribal sections, whose members made regular offerings to them (*shukrana*) in return for the blessings they were believed to bestow. They might, for example, heal the sick by reciting verses from the Qur'an over them. Examples in Waziristan included the so-called Kaniguram Sayyids, who lived at Kaniguram, the Shondakas and the Michan Khels (they were referred to as pirs rather than mullahs). During the later nineteenth century the Kaniguram Sayyid Sultan Akbar Shah, for instance, had links with the Shaman Khels, and another Kaniguram Sayyid, Rahmat Badshah, with the Bahlolzais.²⁰

The political position in 1849–50

We have seen that in the early nineteenth century Waziristan was more or less independent, inhabited by stateless people. The founder of the Durrani Empire, Ahmad Shah Durrani (c.1722–72), had established his authority over much of the territory surrounding Waziristan (including Bannu and Tank) in 1748. Waziristan was thus largely encapsulated within his empire, but Dawar seems to have been the only area over which he had some control. His successors continued to claim authority over it, and they did have some limited influence because they shared a religious and to some extent a cultural identity with its inhabitants and had links with some of the leading men.

British contacts with Waziristan began before the annexation of Punjab in 1849. After the British had defeated the Sikh state in 1846, they sent a resident to the court at Lahore to supervise the administration of the Sikh empire.²¹ The resident

dispatched several ambitious young British army officers to the north and west of it to supervise the collection of revenue. Among them were Herbert Edwardes, who was sent to the Derajat, and Reynell Taylor, who went to Peshawar. When the Second Anglo-Sikh War began, following a rising in Multan in April 1848, anti-British Sikh troops took control of the forts at Bannu and at Lakki between Bannu and the Indus. In October 1848 Reynell Taylor besieged the Lakki fort, which surrendered on 10 January 1849 (as did the Bannu fort a few days later).

After they had annexed Punjab in 1849, the British incorporated Bannu into the new administrative structure they created, and it initially formed part of what was called the Leia Division (Leia is a town to the south-east on the east bank of the Indus). They based a deputy commissioner there, who was responsible to the commissioner in Leia, who in turn answered to the Board of Administration in Lahore. They also set up the Punjab Irregular Force to police the frontier, and along the southern part they built cantonments at Kohat, Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan, Asni and Dera Ghazi Khan, with outposts near the border. They also raised several police regiments and recruited irregular levies.

Tank, however, retained some independence. The British appointed Shah Nawaz Khan, the grandson of its former ruler, as its tax farmer, and left him in charge of that section of the border. Shah Nawaz Khan had connections in Waziristan. His mother was a Mehsud, and he was married to the sister of an influential Mehsud, Yarik Khan Langar Khel Alizai.²² He not only faced the problem of dealing with the Mehsuds but also encountered opposition from an influential group living in British territory. These were referred to by the British as the Multani Pathans, and the British appointed some of them to posts in the new frontier administration, particularly in Bannu.²³ As a result after 1849 two factions, one associated with the Multanis and the other with Shah Nawaz Khan, competed for influence in the administered areas along the Waziristan border. Each was ready to try and use its links with the transborder tribes to discredit the other. This sometimes involved misrepresenting British intentions to the tribes, even colluding with them to arrange raids and robberies.²⁴

Waziristan and the British in the 1850s

In January 1849, just before Taylor arrived there, one of the Afghan amir Dost Mohammed Khan's sons, Sardar Muhammad Azem, the governor of Khost, had briefly occupied Bannu. The amir himself had occupied Peshawar in December 1848, and in February 1849 he had sent his cavalry to join the forces of the

Sikh general, Chattar Singh, in fighting against the British at the Battle of Gujrat.²⁵ They were defeated, and apprehensive that the British might punish him for his involvement, in 1850 the amir and Sardar Muhammad Azem wrote several letters to Taylor, in which they tried to sound out British intentions towards them.²⁶ The governor general, Dalhousie, instructed Taylor that he should tell them that they should write to him if they wanted to know, and the correspondence petered out. After that, there do not appear to have been any more contacts with Kabul until 1854 when the Peshawar commissioner, Herbert Edwardes, with Dalhousie's permission, began informal talks. In 1855 Edwardes and another of the amir's sons, Ghulam Hyder Khan, held formal negotiations in Peshawar that resulted in a treaty. After this the British were allowed to appoint an Agent at Kabul; the first was one of the Multani Pathans, Nawab Foujdar Khan.²⁷ A second treaty was negotiated in 1857, and there was some cooperation between the local British officials and their Afghan counterparts along the border in Miranzai and the Kurram district to the north of Waziristan.²⁸

Border or frontier situations

During the 1850s British resources were severely stretched by the task of establishing an administration in Punjab. Any threat to India from Russia (or Afghanistan) seemed to have evaporated, and they did not regard the Waziristan frontier as having any strategic importance. Besides there was the difficult terrain and the independent ethos of Waziristan's people. The policy pursued until the later 1880s was therefore one of relatively limited interference with it, often described as the close or closed border policy. This meant that, at least in theory, only in exceptional circumstances were British officials allowed to cross the border into independent territory. At the same time, however, the fact that some transborder tribesmen carried out plundering raids along the border meant that the tribes could not simply be ignored. Moreover, to a greater extent than the Durrani and Sikh rulers, the British believed that they had a duty to maintain security throughout their territory and were convinced that failure to do so would be seen as weakness by their imperial subjects. They could not simply leave the border villages to defend themselves but had to assume responsibility for them and try to keep them safe. This meant that they had to begin to grapple with the problem of establishing a relationship with Waziristan.

One way empires have responded to challenging borders and frontiers has been to create and support client states to manage independent peoples beyond them – a form of indirect rule. The Roman and Sassanian empires, for example, had maintained client kingdoms on the northern borders of Arabia partly to help them manage the Bedouin Arabs.²⁹ On the North-West Frontier, where possible, the British did rule indirectly through client states, such as the Khanate of Kalat in Baluchistan. To the north of Peshawar the British began to support the nawab of Dir in the late nineteenth century and in the twentieth century recognized the grandson of the Akhund of Swat as the ruler of Swat.³⁰ They also supported the Mirs of Chitral. Indeed Afghanistan itself under Abdur Rahman and Habibullah had some features of a client state. The appointment of Shah Nawaz Khan as tax farmer of Tank (he was made a nawab in 1859) is an example of this strategy.

Another approach taken by empires was to try and turn looser associations into political units by organizing them into more formal groups.³¹ In much of Algeria, for instance, the Ottomans consolidated smaller groups into larger ones and appointed local chiefs as leaders. In some regions they allowed local chiefs, sometimes Sufi *pirs* or *sheikhs*, to retain some autonomy and in return for their cooperation rewarded them with administrative appointments, honours and money. Another strategy was actually to move difficult groups from one place to another; in early modern Iran, for example, rulers or would-be rulers wanted to control people as much as they did territory.³² The Safavids for instance moved Kurdish tribes from the border of western Iran to the east.³³ They also appointed chiefs and constructed tribal confederacies, thereby indirectly creating ‘the whole tribal system by controlling its terms of existence through print and propaganda.’³⁴ Similarly during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Afghan government (GOA) moved Pashtun groups (including both Ghilzai farmers and pastoral nomadic Durrani) from eastern Afghanistan to the north, to help consolidate its control there.³⁵ As regards Waziristan the British were never strong enough to move people by force in any numbers. Instead they tried either to turn the loose groupings they encountered, in theory at least based on shared patrilineal descent, into more organized groups, or to create leaders or a stratum of more influential men who could manage these groupings for them.

Other ways of controlling recalcitrant border populations included the construction of defensive barriers. The question of building a wall along the frontier was raised during the early twentieth century, but never taken very seriously. Another possibility was the use of force, and it was often used by the British. It was deployed in various ways, usually accompanied by the imposition of some sort of collective ‘tribal’ responsibility. As well as punitive expeditions,

it included *barampta* – finding and seizing in British territory men, animals and property belonging to a group on which it was desired to put pressure. Another technique was to bar people living across the border from visiting British territory (a kind of reverse blockade known as *bandish*). In time this could reduce people to starvation. The British usually imposed fines before lifting blockades or releasing the men, animals and property they had seized.

Forms of soft power have played an important role too. We have seen that some at least of the transborder people were accustomed to trading in British territory. The British did their best to encourage this along the Waziristan border. They hoped that it would increase people's dependence on British territory, and by exposing them to the 'civilizing' influences they would encounter there, encourage them to become more peaceable and productive.³⁶ Later they began to provide land for them to settle on. Another possibility would have been to pay the Mehsuds and others protection money, 'blackmail', to keep out of British territory.³⁷ In their early years on the frontier, however, the British refused to consider this; payments were only be made to transborder people in return for service, for example by providing irregular soldiers.

Relations with the Mehsuds

For the first few years after the annexation of Punjab, British officials themselves did not have much contact with the Mehsuds. On the Tank border, Shah Nawaz Khan was left to manage relations with them. His principal Mehsud contacts were two Alizais: his brother-in-law, Yarik Khan Langar Khel Alizai, and Jangi Khan Salimi Khel Alizai (who was referred to in contemporary British reports as their leading man). Although he maintained friendly relationships with some Mehsud men, the nawab also had to deal with raiding by others. It seems to have been Bahlolzais who were mostly responsible, principally Mamia Khel Shingis, Abdur Rahman Khel and Jalal Khel Nana Khels, and Abdullai and Malikshahi Aimal Khels. Some raids were almost certainly provoked by the Multani Pathan faction to discredit the nawab and show that he could not manage the border properly.

The first British punitive expedition into Mehsud territory took place in March 1860. As many as 1,500 Mehsuds had tried to invade British territory in February. British cavalry intercepted them and drove them back, killing many of them. To punish them, the governor general, then viceroy, Lord Canning, decided that a punitive expedition should take place as soon as possible. Led by

Brigadier Neville Chamberlain, commander of the Punjab Irregular Force (1854–63), nearly 7,000 troops left Tank on 16 April 1860 and moved into Waziristan, halting at Palosina, about 20 miles from Tank. Here Mehsuds attacked them killing sixty-three soldiers.³⁸ In retaliation the troops destroyed some villages in the Khaisara valley, returning to Palosina before moving up the Tank Zam to Makin, which comprised four large villages and several small ones and a large number of defensive, mud-brick towers. They set fire to and blew up many of the houses. Taylor commented that ‘this was probably the first page in the chapter of Muhsood civilisation.’³⁹ In mid-May the troops moved out of Mehsud territory and returned to British territory via the Khaisora valley to the north.⁴⁰ After British troops left their territory, the Mehsuds remained blockaded in their hills and banned from visiting British territory. They were able to hold out for some time and continued to carry out minor raids along the border.

The difficulty of controlling Waziristan in the absence of any institutionalized political authority has already been mentioned. British officials saw that people identified themselves as Wazirs, Mehsuds, Bhattanis and Dawars on the basis of supposed patrilineal descent from a common ancestor. In the absence of a leader or leaders, this ‘tribal’ identity seemed to offer a way of getting a grip on them, by making those who shared it collectively responsible for each other. But this kind of accountability was not something to which the Mehsuds themselves were necessarily accustomed; in 1860 Reynell Taylor, for instance, commented that they were ‘unused to the idea of being bound to control every member of the tribe and be responsible for his acts.’⁴¹ Their usual response was to try and limit responsibility to as few people as possible (‘dividing in order not to be ruled’).⁴² In June 1861, therefore, when they tried to reach a settlement with the British, the Mehsud representatives would not accept that all the Mehsuds should be responsible for each other, only members of the subsections, Shingis for example. Negotiations broke down on this point, and an agreement was not finally reached until the autumn, when the Mehsuds agreed to widen this collective responsibility to include at least those who belonged to the same main sections (Alizais, Bahlolzais and Shaman Khels).⁴³

During the mid-1860s the Mehsuds continued to carry out raids. Frederick Graham, the deputy commissioner, believing that this was mainly due to their poverty, proposed a small settlement and militia scheme for them. After difficult and lengthy negotiations twenty families were given land in British territory, and twenty-five men were given service in the frontier militia. Ultimately the scheme did not achieve very much. This was partly because it was on such a small scale, although Graham intended to give the Mehsuds more positions in the militia

when the opportunity arose. Relations with the Mehsuds remained difficult in the later 1860s. In 1867 there was a recrudescence of raiding, kidnapping of Hindus and murder.⁴⁴ In 1868, for example, Shaman Khels and Zilla Khels massacred some sixty Hindu pilgrims from Tank at a shrine of Shiva near Murtaza in the Gumal Pass. In response new military posts were built nearer the border, but it remained vulnerable to raids.⁴⁵

The Wazirs and North Waziristan

At the end of the 1860s the position on the North Waziristan border with Bannu was also precarious, but to understand this we need to return to 1849 when Bannu, unlike Tank, came under direct British rule and Reynell Taylor was appointed its first deputy commissioner. We saw above that some of the Wazirs, both Ahmadzais and Utmanzais, had begun to spend the winter in Bannu and grow crops and pasture flocks there.⁴⁶ The Punjab Board of Administration instructed Taylor to do his best to maintain good relations with them, and he was largely successful in doing so and persuaded them to pay revenue on the land they were occupying in Bannu.

Edwardes and Taylor even tried to persuade a Sudan Khel Ahmadzai Wazir malik, Swahn Khan, to act as the official representative of the Wazirs who were using land in Bannu, and manage them on their behalf. But Swahn Khan was well aware that other men would object if he cooperated with the British; if he did, he said, they would kill him, and he refused to take on the role. A small Ahmadzai Wazir group, the Umarzais, provided the only real problem for the British on this part of the border during the first few years after annexation. Following a dispute over payment of revenue, they attacked one of the Bannu villages in 1849. They killed six people and damaged property worth three or four thousand rupees. They were barred from British territory but stayed in the hills north of Bannu, in what the British came to call the Ahmadzai salient, a rugged desolate area to the north of Bannu and a traditional outlaw hideout, for more than three years. Reynell Taylor's successor, John Nicholson, attacked them in December 1852, and in 1853 they were allowed to return to British territory and resume cultivation of their land.⁴⁷

After this the Bannu border was relatively quiet until November 1859 when a gang of Kabul Khel and Hatti Khel outlaws killed a British officer, Captain Robert Meham, travelling from Bannu to Kohat. They fled into the hills and took refuge with some Kabul Khels, who were camped in an area in the

north-east of Waziristan not far from Upper Miranzai. The British demanded that the tribe surrender the actual murderer and the leader of the band to which the murderers belonged. They refused to do so. In response the British dispatched an expeditionary force to try and capture the wanted men. The troops spent nearly three weeks in independent territory, killing twenty or thirty men and seizing a large number of animals (many of which they slaughtered and ate on Christmas Day 1859). But they did not catch the wanted men. Taylor persuaded the Bannu Ahmadzai Wazirs that they should take action themselves. In mid-January as many as a thousand of them, mostly Hatti Khels, set off to capture them, and one of them was caught and hung.⁴⁸

To have induced these Wazirs to take this kind of action shows how much influence Taylor had been able to build up in Bannu. It is clear that the policy of encouraging the pastoral nomadic Wazirs to spend the winter with their flocks in the Bannu district had been relatively successful. Minor raiding continued to occur, and to try and improve security along the Bannu border, during the 1860s Taylor's successors began to emphasize a form of collective responsibility they called pass responsibility. Some of these Wazir groups usually spent the summer in or round the entrance to one of the passes that led into Waziristan from Bannu. In return for ensuring the security of 'their' pass, their maliks were given the right to nominate some men to serve in the frontier militia, and their land in Bannu was subject to a lighter revenue assessment.⁴⁹

In the later 1850s and for most of the 1860s the arrangements seemed to work reasonably well, but a crisis blew up in 1870. Men from the small Muhammad Khel tribe were failing to uphold their pass responsibility. The local officials (some of them Multanis) responded by imposing unusually heavy and frequent fines on them. They also treated the tribe's elders disrespectfully. On 13 June 1870, without any warning, Muhammad Khels attacked a detachment of ten men from the Fourth Sikh Infantry on the way to the Kurram outpost to the north-west of Bannu. They shot and killed six men and wounded a seventh before cavalry drove them off. The Wazir maliks in Bannu handed in a petition to the authorities complaining about the way they had been treated by the officials. All the Wazirs with land in Bannu seemed discontented, and the arrangements for managing them that had been in operation since 1849 seemed about to collapse. However, the local officials were able to play on the rivalries between the different Wazir groups and factions, and the crisis passed. The Muhammad Khels remained in the hills across the border, and by the summer of 1871 they were starving and in September they surrendered.⁵⁰

Britain and Waziristan 1870–93

To try and prevent any recurrence of the problem experienced with the Muhammad Khels, the Government of India (GOI) introduced some changes to its frontier administration. It was decided that British officials should take more responsibility for managing the border and rely less on intermediaries. To help them they were to be given extra staff and left in their posts for longer; they were also required to learn Pashtu.¹ The introduction of the Frontier Crimes Regulations in 1872 was another important development. In 1861 the GOI had promulgated a new Indian Penal Code and in 1866 had introduced a chief court in Punjab to take on the role performed since 1849 by the judicial commissioner. After the Muhammad Khel difficulties, the officials decided that these legal changes had adversely affected law and order along the border, and that the Indian Penal Code and the Chief Court's procedures were not suited to a frontier district like Bannu. As a result they introduced a set of special rules in the border areas, known as the Frontier Crimes Regulations. These legalized the use of several traditional methods of tribal management such as *barampta* (seizing some people and their property to put pressure on others) and *bandish* (blockade). They also introduced new arrangements for the trial of alleged offenders in cases in which it was difficult for the prosecution to provide evidence of a sufficiently high standard for an ordinary court. They could be tried by a jirga of local men selected by the official responsible.² These rules remained in force more or less unchanged in Pakistan's Federally-Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) after 1947. British officials also set up a separate border police under the control of the civil officers. Finally, they reviewed arrangements for the security of the passes leading into the Bannu district and introduced some modifications to them.³ After this relations between the Wazirs wintering in Bannu and the government improved.

The Nawab's party, Afghanistan and the 1879 Tank raid

As well as their links with influential men and faction leaders in British territory, some Mehsuds had connections with different members of the Afghan ruling family. As a result rivalry in Kabul came to be linked with rivalry in Waziristan. The Mehsud Umar Khan Salimi Khel Alizai was in touch with Sher Ali Khan, while Nabi Khan Shingi Mehsud had links with Dost Muhammad Khan's son, Azem Khan, who had, it will be recalled, briefly occupied Bannu in January 1849 and corresponded with Taylor in 1850.

Amir Dost Muhammad Khan died in 1863. He had designated a younger son, Sher Ali Khan, to succeed him, but Sher Ali's half-brothers Azem Khan (and Azem's son Abdur Rahman Khan) and Afzal Khan resisted him.⁴ In 1865 Sher Ali drove them out of Kabul, and they took refuge in Waziristan with Nabi Khan Shingi. In 1866 Afzal Khan expelled Sher Ali and took over as amir, and Azem Khan invited Nabi Khan to Kabul and found work for him there. Afzal Khan died in 1867, and Azem succeeded him, but Sher Ali regained the throne and retained it until 1878 when he was forced out by the British. Azem Khan tried to escape to Iran but died on the way.⁵ Sher Ali imprisoned his rivals' protégé Nabi Khan, but he escaped and returned to Waziristan.⁶

In the early 1870s the relationship between the Mehsuds and the British remained difficult. Many British officials argued that the Tank border was much more violent than anywhere else along the frontier, and that this was unacceptable.⁷ In 1872 the government took responsibility for security in Tank away from the nawab and gave it to the new Dera Ismail Khan deputy commissioner, Charles Macaulay, and he set up a new police force for the Tank district.⁸ Macaulay regarded the Shaman Khels and the Bahlolzai sections as more troublesome than the Alizais, and in 1873 he successfully negotiated agreements with representatives from both, based on paying hostages to live in British territory.⁹ He also reached a settlement with the Bhattanis in 1876 and persuaded them to take on responsibility for the security of the passes running through their hills. In return they were given paid service in the frontier militia. He made similar arrangements with other tribes living along or near the Tank border, the Mianis and Gorezais, as well as the Shahur Shaman Khels and Zilla Khel Ahmadzais. One important outcome of the negotiations with the Bahlolzais was that two men in particular began to play a more prominent role in dealing with the Mehsuds. One was Nabi Khan Shingi,

whose relationship with Afzal Khan and Azem Khan has just been mentioned. The other was a landowner living in British territory, a Kundi also named Azem Khan. He had taken part in the negotiations for a settlement after the 1860 expedition and begun to set himself as a rival to the nawab of Tank in dealing with the Mehsuds. Azem Khan Kundi was, Macaulay later commented, 'a man of little prejudice and strong reason', who belonged to 'a class of men who have gained and not lost by British rule.'¹⁰ As Azem Khan Kundi's influence grew, the nawab's influence declined, as did that of his principal Mehsud contact, the late Jangi Khan's son, Umar Khan Alizai.

Some Mehsuds were unhappy with the rise of Nabi Khan and Azem Khan Kundi. Nabi Khan had rivals among the other Shingi Bahlolzais, and some of them formed a network whose members tended to support the nawab rather than Azem Khan Kundi; they were often referred to as leaders of 'the nawab's party'. It is possible that the nawab conspired with them to try and discredit Nabi Khan and Azem Khan Kundi, and by doing so undermine Macaulay himself.¹¹

To help him cope with the nawab's party, in the same year Macaulay was given permission to impose tribal responsibility on the Mehsuds as a whole, including the Alizais, although he had had relatively few problems with them.¹² This meant that the Alizais had to accept responsibility for the activities of the nawab's party and to pay a share of any fines the British imposed on the Mehsuds for raiding. Umar Khan and Yarik Khan, and other leading Alizais, resented this. They tried to persuade Macaulay to change his mind, but were unsuccessful. We saw that Graham had introduced a small settlement scheme for some Mehsuds in the mid-1860s. At this point Macaulay was working on a much more ambitious plan to link a new settlement scheme with the pacification of the Gumal route that led into Afghanistan, used by thousands of trading nomads (Powindahs) each autumn and spring. In return for receiving land to settle on in the Tank valley, the Mehsuds would supply levies to keep the Gumal free from raiders.¹³

By the early 1870s, British's relations with the Afghan amir Sher Ali Khan were beginning to deteriorate. Fearful of another British invasion, he had begun to try and build up his influence with the frontier people. He invited the Wazir maliks with land in Bannu to visit him in Kabul and received them in some style, giving them ceremonial robes, and appointed a special officer, Mufti Shah Mahmud, to look after them. The mufti himself visited Birmal in western Waziristan later in 1875. The amir began to pay allowances to some of the Wazirs (indeed he may well have been doing so already).¹⁴ In 1876 the amir also invited some