

## The Siege of Chitral as an Imperial Factor

BY

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In March of 1895, a small contingent of 300 British Indian soldiers under the command of Dr. George Robertson was besieged in the fortress of Chitral, a post so remote that few in Britain or even in India ever heard of it. Yet, the subsequent relief of the beleaguered garrison was to become a *cause celebre* in Calcutta and London, and the course of these dramatic events was to prompt a complete re-examination of frontier policy in those northern reaches of the Indian sub-continent where the borders of Russia, China, Afghanistan and British India came together.

In the last half of the 19th Century, the Government of India was determined to obtain a secure and stable frontier—one based upon a natural barrier consisting of the highest mountains in the world, the Himalayas to the northeast and the Hindu Kush to the northwest. Fear that the Russian legions advancing through Central Asia might soon cross the passes of the Hindu Kush and debouch into the plains of India, added urgency to British policy deliberations. Although the Russophobe, H. C. Rawlinson, had in 1868 conceded that Russian expansion to the north of the great barrier mountains constituted a form of 'manifest destiny', and that:

Her present position is another illustration of the old doctrine that, when civilization and barbarism come in contact, the latter must inevitably give way,<sup>1</sup>

the successive "guardians" of India, especially the men of the military hierarchy, were never convinced of the innocuity of the Russian intentions. Lord Roberts, the Commander-in-Chief in India,

1. H. C. Rawlinson's Memorandum on Central Asia, 20 July 1868; Parl. Papers, Afghanistan (1878-79), C. 2190, pp. 32-39.

stated in 1891, when the Russian border had become virtually continuous with the British:

My firm belief is that we shall some day lose India unless the Home authorities recognize the extreme danger of having Russia as a near neighbour, and determine, after making suitable arrangements for the protection of England and our Colonial possessions, to put forth the whole of our strength for the defence of this country whenever the occasion arises.<sup>2</sup>

The strategic importance of Chitral in this respect was that it guarded the southern approaches to the passes of the Hindu Kush, between the eastern end of Afghanistan and the northwestern frontier of Kashmir. As early as 1877, the Government of India was urging the Maharaja of Kashmir to obtain political control over Chitral.<sup>3</sup> This seemed easily accomplished, since overtures for allegiance had already been made in the previous year by the Mehtar of Chitral, Aman-ul-Mulk. This Mehtar, who was able to rule for more than 30 years over a ruthless country where neither life nor law was respected, was described by Capt. Frank Younghusband as:

a strong, astute ruler, who, by the force of his character, by intriguing, murdering those of his rivals whom he could ensnare with his wiles, and by fighting the remainder, had consolidated a number of small states, incessantly at warfare with one another, into the Chitral of the present year (1895).<sup>4</sup>

But even Aman-ul-Mulk became alarmed over the increasing power of Afghanistan to the west and made haste to align himself with Kashmir and the British, putting aside former animosity, if any. Though the British flatly warned the Amir of Afghanistan not to attack the tribal areas to the east, and the British missions under Sir W. Lockhart (1885) and Colonel A. Durand (1888) were well received in Chitral, the relationship was never cordial. Aman-ul-Mulk, for his part, chose to stay aloof, continuing various intrigues

2. Roberts to Lansdowne, 29 April 1891, Lansdowne Papers series VII, vol. 5, part I, no. 454.

3. Govt. of India to Sec. of State, # 17, 11 June 1877; PP/1, no. 1.

4. Capt. F. E. Younghusband & Capt. G. J. Younghusband, *The Relief of Chitral* (London, 1895), p. 3.

to keep his rule unfettered, while the Government of India preferred to deal with the Mehtar indirectly through Kashmir, at one time rejecting his offer for direct allegiance.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, this shallow relationship was disturbed only sporadically by overtures made by the British for the construction of a direct road between Chitral and Peshawar, a British outpost 200 miles to the south, a subject which was to play an important role in the debates on future policy in 1895.

Because of the lack of any sense of urgency, both Lord Lytton and Lord Dufferin had made only half-hearted, and consequently abortive, attempts at opening up such a road during their viceroyalties (1876-1880 and 1884-1888, respectively). But when the first serious attempt was made by Lord Lansdowne's Government in 1889, it was the attitude of Umra Khan, the ruler of Jandol—a state situated along the proposed route—which was to hold the construction of the road in abeyance.<sup>6</sup> This aggressive and ambitious chief, styled the "Napoleon of Bajaur," was later to play a major role in the events of 1895. Admired by almost all Englishmen who came in contact with him, Umra Khan was considered to be a "gentleman to the last,"...there being none "in the world more admirably courteous."<sup>7</sup> He was of the Pathan tribes in the areas of Swat, Bajaur and Dir, peoples more closely related to the Afghans to the west than the Chitralis to the north, who were of Aryan stock. And, as was typical of these peoples, Umra Khan was a devout Muslim:

Though not a fanatic, he is very sincerely religious. He is a diligent student of the Koran, and prays long and often. He never fails to put on clean clothes at sunset to pray in.<sup>8</sup>

In 1881, Umra Khan had seized power in Jandol from an older brother and had immediately initiated a struggle for the control of adjoining areas, especially Dir and Bajaur. After cunningly

5. Govt. of India to Sec. of State, # 103, 15 July 1881; PP/1, no. 5.

6. Sec. for Govt. of India, Foreign Dept., to Resident in Kashmir, 5 August 1889; PP/1, no. 9, encl. 2.

7. Sir George S. Robertson, *Chitral, The Story of a Minor Siege* (London, 1898), p. 150.

8. H. C. Thomson, *The Chitral Campaign* (London, 1895), p. 265.

playing one chief against another, by 1890, Umra Khan finally defeated Muhammed Sharif of Dir, the most important of the local tribal chiefs.<sup>9</sup> But then, impressed with his own power, Umra Khan unwisely occupied Asmar, an outpost which was reputedly in Afghan territory. As Lord Lansdowne wrote in 1892, Abdur Rahman, the Amir of Afghanistan

...has always nursed the project of placing himself at the head of a great Mahomedan Kingdom, and bringing under his dominion all the tribes and chiefships adjoining Afghanistan.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, Umra Khan's incursion at Asmar only intensified the growing enmity of the Amir, and in early 1892 an Afghan force under Ghulam Haidar Khan, the Afghan Commander-in-Chief, advanced upon and seized Asmar, as Umra Khan beat a hasty retreat.<sup>11</sup>

The situation was becoming more and more critical from the British point of view. At a time of international complications in the Pamirs,<sup>12</sup> it seemed imperative to the Government of India to retain the strict stability of the northern frontier. When a skirmish finally occurred between Afghan and Jandoli forces, both the Amir and Umra Khan were specifically warned to desist from all aggression.<sup>13</sup> The Government of India was greatly disturbed, too, over Aman-ul-Mulk's various intrigues; though he was told not to participate in the tribal struggles as early as April 1890, the Mehtar first offered to help Umra Khan, crush the Khan of Dir,<sup>14</sup> but later when it was rumoured that Umra Khan was planning to attack Chitral itself, the Mehtar immediately began intrigues to restore the Khan of Dir to his throne.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, it was specu-

9. Peshawar Confidential Diary, 11 July 1890; SPD.

10. Lansdowne to Kimberley, 23 August 1892; Lansdowne Papers, Letters to and from the Sec. of State (1892), no. 41; private letter.

11. Memorandum on the Northwestern Frontier, April 1892; SPD.

12. Loud protests were then being made by the British and Chinese Governments over the presence of a Russian expedition in the disputed territory.

13. Viceroy to Amir, 28 June 1892, and Viceroy to Mehtar of Chitral, 29 June 1892, encls. 2 & 3 respectively of #149; SPD.

14. Memorandum on the Northwestern Frontier, April 1890; SPD.

15. *Ibid.*, April 1892; SPD.

lated that Aman-ul-Mulk was intriguing with the Amir, and perhaps even with the Russians.<sup>16</sup>

The British were in a serious predicament: three powerful but mutually hostile rulers were dominating the northwest frontier and the British needed the friendly allegiance of all of them. Abdur Rahman and Aman-ul-Mulk for the security of the north west frontier, and Umra Khan for the shortest road connection to the vital passes of the Hindu Kush. As time went on, an uneasy balance of power slowly began to develop among the rulers, only to be shattered abruptly when Aman-ul-Mulk died of natural causes on 30 August 1892.

The death of the old Mehtar signalled the start of a typical bloody struggle for the throne among his sons. Afzul-ul-Mulk, the second legitimate son, was on the spot and immediately seized power at Chitral while Nizam-ul-Mulk, the presumably legitimate heir, was at Yasin, acting as governor. As a result, Nizam-ul-Mulk had to flee the country and was granted asylum at the British Agency in Gilgit to the east. Afzul-ul-Mulk killed off all possible rivals for the throne in Chitral, consolidated his position with the help of the popularity he had among the Chitralis, and asked for recognition from the Government of India as the new Mehtar.

It had always been the British policy on the northern frontier in areas where they had only nominal control, to recognize whoever was in power at the time in a state, as its proper ruler. Indeed, the British Agent at Gilgit was directed not to involve himself in the struggle for the throne in Chitral.<sup>17</sup> Though Nizam-ul-Mulk was still under British protection, Afzul-ul-Mulk's accession was regarded as satisfactory. Hoping to be able to exert a greater influence over him than his father, the Government of India promptly sanctioned the dispatch of a British officer to Chitral to confirm British recognition of the new Mehtar.<sup>18</sup>

But already, the awe and esteem with which the power of Chitral was once held, were gone. Umra Khan occupied the Chi-

16. *Ibid.*, August 1892; SPD.

17. Govt. of India to Sec. of State #192, 19 October 1892; PP/1, no. 13.

18. Govt. of India to Kimberley, #193, 19 October 1892; SPD.

trali fort at Narsat in October 1892, and in November, the Amir was to become involved in the complete overthrow of the new Chitral regime: Sher Afzul, a brother of the late Aman-ul-Mulk who had been exiled to Kabul by him, suddenly emerged from Afghanistan with a small force, and by successful intrigues seized Chitral, killing Afzul-ul-Mulk.

Sher Afzul reportedly said that he was 'a servant of the Amir's,'<sup>19</sup> and though he was popular among the Chitralis,<sup>20</sup> his connection with the Amir of Afghanistan no doubt prejudiced the British against him. Without the sanction of the Government of India, Colonel A. Durand, the British Agent at Gilgit, provided Nizam-ul-Mulk with men and arms to support his claims, as soon as it was learned that he would "carry out all orders of Government" if he were created Mehtar. Nizam-ul-Mulk was able to oust Sher Afzul by early December with the added support from the men of the upper Chitrali valleys, and Sher Afzul hastily fled back to Kabul. The Government of India was quick to complement Durand's action:

In taking this measure without the sanction of Government [the Viceroy wrote to London], Colonel Durand acted from a conviction that immediate and decided action in anticipation of orders could alone avert a serious crisis.<sup>21</sup>

Lansdowne's was certainly an exaggerated view of the situation but was illustrative of how easily swayed the Government of India was by the alarmist views of local frontier officers.

Surgeon-Major George S. Robertson was sent to Chitral in 1893 to recognize the new Mehtar and conclude an agreement with him. From his first reception Robertson thought that the state of affairs was highly unsatisfactory. Attributing Sher Afzul's defeat to a mistaken impression among his men that a full British force was approaching Chitral, Robertson described Nizam-ul-Mulk and his position in less than flattering terms:

19. Peshawar Confidential Diary, December 1892; SPD.

20. This is amply corroborated by the books on the siege by F. E. & G. J. Younghusband, Robertson, and Thomson, *op.cit.*

21. Govt. of India to Sec. of State, #233, 28 December 1892; SPD.

He is heedless, silent, and stupid. His intellect, never very strong, is often clouded by "Churrus" smoking, and drink.... He is cowardly and miserly, equally afraid to punish his enemies and reluctant to reward his friends. When the Mission reached Chitral, it found the successful claimant of his father's throne scared and trembling, his followers downcast and sulky, while the defeated faction swaggered about everywhere, self-confident if sullen, and with all the snider rifles plundered from the fort arsenal paraded openly in their possession.<sup>22</sup>

So unpopular was the new Mehtar that Robertson later stated that he (Robertson) was

compelled to actively and energetically support Nizam-ul-Mulk in his government, yet without ever appearing to interfere in the internal affairs of the state.<sup>23</sup>

If Robertson was ill disposed towards Nizam-ul-Mulk, he thought little better of the Mehtar's subjects:

There are few more treacherous people in the world than Chitralis, and they have a wonderful capacity for cold-blooded cruelty, yet none are kinder to little children or have stronger affection for blood and foster relations when cupidity or jealousy do not intervene. All have pleasant and ingratiating manners, an engaging light-heartedness, free from all traces of boisterous behaviour, a great fondness for music, dancing and singing, a passion for simple-minded ostentation, and an instinctive yearning for softness and luxury which is the mainspring of their intense cupidity and avarice. No race is more untruthful or has a greater power of keeping a collective secret. Their vanity is easily injured, they are revengeful and venal, but they are charmingly picturesque and admirable companions. Perhaps the most convenient trait they possess, as far as we are concerned, is a complete absence of religious fanaticism.<sup>24</sup>

Robertson departed from Chitral in the middle of 1893, leaving Capt. Frank Younghusband there as an agent for the Government

22. Robertson to Resident in Kashmir, 18 March 1893; SPD.

23. Robertson to Resident in Kashmir, 17 June 1893; SPD.

24. Robertson, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

of India.<sup>25</sup> Despite Robertson's lack of faith in Nizam-ul-Mulk's government, the relative stability of the northwestern frontier was maintained for the next year and a half. The principal reason for this happy state of affairs was the timely conclusion of the Durand Agreement with the Amir of Afghanistan (12 November 1893) which specifically stated that:

The British Government thus agrees to His Highness the Amir retaining Asmar and the valley above it, as far as Chank. His Highness agrees, on the other hand, that he will at no time exercise interference in Swat, Bajaur, or Chitral, including the Arnawai or Bashgal valley.<sup>26</sup>

Since this agreement also provided for a complete demarcation of the Indo-Afghan border, it was not to the Amir's interests to be involved in border disturbances before the demarcation was carried out. Umra Khan, too, was temporarily pacified when the Government of India agreed to let him purchase arms in India in return for a promise of non-aggression. The British hoped to be able to maintain a relatively stable northern-western frontier during the period of critical negotiations with Russia which were finally to culminate in the Pamirs Delimitation Agreement of 1895. Meanwhile, Capt. Younghusband was to be retained in Chitral throughout 1894 by the Government of India, for

....we are convinced that to withdraw our political officer from Chitral while the Pamir question is still unsettled, would be premature and unwise.<sup>27</sup>

High hopes notwithstanding, frontier peace was again shattered on the first day of 1895, when Nizam-ul-Mulk was assassinated at the instigation of Amir-ul-Mulk, another son of Aman-ul-Mulk, generally believed to be a semi-idiot. Lieutenant B. M. E. Gurdon, who had replaced Younghusband in Chitral only a month before, consequently found his position compromised, and Robertson immediately set out from Gilgit with a small escort.

25. Peshawar Confidential Diary, 24 July 1893; SPD.

26. The Durand Agreement, 12 November 1893; PP/2.

27. Govt. of India to Sec. of State, # 99, 12 June 1894; PP/1, no. 21.

The rapid progress of events that followed does not seem to leave much doubt that Amir-ul-Mulk was part of a general conspiracy involving both Umra Khan and Sher Afzul, and that he later became afraid of Umra Khan's real intentions. Umra Khan immediately began advancing northward on the pretext of waging a religious war against the animist Kafirs,<sup>28</sup> and Sher Afzul, too, appeared on the scene with the clamorous support of most of the Chitralis. Forces still loyal to Amir-ul-Mulk were soon in quick retreat, and by the beginning of March, Robertson had to retire for protection into the fort of Chitral, on the outskirts of the town, a British officer having already been killed in a skirmish.

The Government of India learned of these events on the 7th of March and ordered the immediate mobilisation of a division of the Field Army under General Robert Low for the relief of the besieged garrison from the direction of Peshawar.<sup>29</sup> On the same date, a final warning was sent to Umra Khan,<sup>30</sup> and a proclamation was issued to the local peoples of Swat and Bajaur, announcing the intentions of the Government of India, assuring them that there would be no permanent occupation of territories through which Low's force might march, and that friendly treatment would be given to all those who did not oppose the advance of the troops. This proclamation, too, was to play a significant role in the debates which followed late in 1895 on future policy in regard to Chitral.

Meanwhile, the truly critical nature of the British position in Chitral was realized when a small force under Lieutenants Fowler and Edwardes met disaster at the hands of Muhammed Isa, Sher Afzul's lieutenant.<sup>31</sup> On the 22nd of March, orders were sent to Colonel J. G. Kelly, then the senior military officer at Gilgit, to

28. Sec. for Govt. of India, Foreign Dept., to Peshawar Commr., 14 March 1895; SPD.

29. Though the Government of India and the Home Government were to differ decisively in regard to the future policy to be followed in Chitral, there was never any question about the relief of the beleaguered British garrison, e.g., Sec. of State to Viceroy, telegram, 8 March 1895; PP/1, no. 25: "I am prepared to approve such action for securing safety of Robertson and party as you may deem necessary."

30. Vide footnote 28.

31. The two officers themselves, however, were to live by the grace of Umra Khan, e.g., Robertson, *op. cit.*, pp. 120.151.

march on Chitral. "His orders permitted him to make such dispositions and movements as he might think best, provided he undertook no operations which did not offer reasonable prospects of success."<sup>32</sup> At one time, the Government of India even toyed with the idea of requesting aid from the Amir of Afghanistan, but the suggestion was soon dismissed,<sup>33</sup> probably in view of the possible involvement of the Amir in the conspiracy. The demarcation of the Afghan border, as was prescribed in the Durand Agreement, was postponed to a more 'convenient' season for similar reasons.<sup>34</sup>

The relief of Chitral came quickly. The Malakand Pass into Swat was taken by General Low on the 3rd of April, the same day that Colonel Kelly crossed the snow clogged Shandur Pass into Mastuj Valley. Umra Khan's main force was soon in retreat. Sher Afzul's forces, too, were terror-stricken when they learnt of Kelly's success, such a feat at that season of the year having previously been thought quite impossible. As a result, there were few remaining obstacles to the British advance on Chitral, and Colonel Kelly was able to reach the garrison in the fort by the 18th of April, just 27 days after he had left Gilgit. It was said that both Sher Afzul and Umra Khan quickly fled to Kabul.<sup>35</sup>

The Chitral Campaign became the subject of much acclaim in the British press and in the literature of the day. The Indian Army was said to never have taken part in a campaign "so rapid, brilliant, and successful" since Lord Roberts' famous march from Kabul to Kandahar, and Colonel Kelly's march itself was compared to Gourko's march over the Balkans. Younghusband wrote:

Just on the brink of a disaster the British forces came out triumphant; and once again in our fair island's story it was shown that British officers, even though they had not a single British soldier by them, and had only to trust to their own stout hearts and strong right arms, and to the influence they could exercise over men of subject races, and to the feeling

32. Govt. of India to Sec. of State, # 66, 17 April 1895; SPD.

33. Viceroy to Sec. of State, telegram, 26 March 1895; HC.

34. *Vide* footnote 33.

35. For accounts of the relief of Chitral, see Govt. of India to Sec. of State, # 66, 17 April 1895; SPD, as well as the books on the siege by F. E. & G. J. Younghusband, Robertson, and Thomson, *op. cit.*

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of loyalty they could evoke from them, have been able uphold the honour of the race; and the story of the defence and relief of Chitral will be handed down to posterity as one of the most brilliant chapters in the annals of Indian military history.<sup>36</sup>

The dramatic course of events in Chitral necessitated a prompt re-examination of British frontier policy in the region. In early years, the question of future policy they had already begun to bother the Liberal Ministries of Gladstone (his fourth, 1892-1894) and Rosebery (1894-1895).<sup>37</sup> Kimberley, the Secretary of State for India, had sanctioned Younghusband's retention in Chitral in 1893 merely as a temporary measure, and it was only on the insistence of the Government of India, prompted by advice of local officers, that he continued there throughout 1894.<sup>38</sup> During the siege itself, Henry Fowler, Kimberley's successor, cautioned the Government of India against committing itself to any definite future policy in regard to Chitral.<sup>39</sup> When the British *de facto* occupation necessitated a final decision from Rosebery's Government, it solidly advocated withdrawal, *contrary* to the recommendations made by the Government of India under the viceroyalty of Lord Elgin.

The arguments for occupation or withdrawal rested mainly on four points: (1) the feasibility of opening a direct road from Feshawar to Chitral at the expense of the Government of India—was generally agreed that the Chitral garrison could not be maintained by the Gilgit road, a tortuous route over great distance; (2) the possibility of Russian invasion upon withdrawal; (3) the potential loss of prestige among the indigenous tribes should the British depart; and (4) the possible "breach of faith" which,

36. F. E. & G. J. Younghusband, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

37. The Liberal Party in England at this time was the embodiment of an emerging "metropolitan" temperament, a temperament which did not share the sense of urgency and danger of the frontiersman at the outskirts of empire. The growing feeling was that the nation did not have any enemies except those that its leaders made beyond the island's shores. Consequently, though the fact of empire was accepted and appreciated, there was little enthusiasm for more acquisitions.

38. Sec. of State to Govt. of India, # 34, 1 September 1893; PP/1, no. 19.

39. Sec. of State to Viceroy, 30 March 1895; HC.

virtue of the March Proclamation, would result from permanent occupation.

Interestingly enough, a third alternative to occupation or evacuation was proposed by two members of the Council of India, General H. Brackenbury and Sir C.H.T. Crosthwaite: they introduced the possibility of granting suzerainty over Chitral to the Amir of Afghanistan.<sup>40</sup> The idea had already been rejected in 1893 by Kimberley, Amir's hostile attitude, especially in 1895, precluded any possibility of such a decision being adopted. It is to be remarked, however, that Robertson himself saw no other proposal leading to a stable frontier,<sup>41</sup> and that before the siege had begun, Robertson even advocated making Sher Afzul Mehtar of Chitral in spite of his connection with the Amir.<sup>42</sup>

Lord Elgin was quick to advocate the occupation of Chitral. As early as the 18th of April, the same day Colonel Kelly reached the Chitral garrison, Elgin asked for permission to sound out the intervening tribes on the possibility of a Peshawar-Chitral road, to be held by tribal levies, being opened.<sup>43</sup> In a fuller statement of policy, the Government of India pointed out that Chitral 'has not for the last twenty years been able to stand alone,' for fear of Afghan aggression and because of internal anarchy. Furthermore,

Chitral left to itself must, we feel assured, fall into the hands of Russia whenever she, after her frontier is advanced to the Oxus, chooses to take possession of it.<sup>44</sup>

It was argued that Pamirs Agreement (11th March, 1895), already concluded, would define the relative positions of England and Russia, assuming the Amir's 'concurrence' but "it is neces-

40. Minute by Lt.-Gen. H. Brackenbury, 4 May 1895; HC. It is to be noted that the impracticality of opening a Peshawar-Chitral road was assumed by both men.

41. Resident in Kashmir to Sec. for Govt. of India, Foreign Dept., telegram, 29 April 1895; SPD.

42. Resident in Kashmir to Sec. for Govt. of India, Foreign Dept., # 46, 6 March 1895, encl. no. 49; SPD.

43. Viceroy to Sec. of State, telegram, 18 April 1895; HC.

44. Govt. of India to Sec. of State, # 89, 8 May 1895; SPD.

sary to take into account the possibility of a collapse of existing arrangements in Afghanistan."<sup>45</sup>

The divergence of opinion between Elgin and his Liberal colleagues at home was notable. Rosebery could not view the Pamirs Agreement with the same pessimism as the Government of India and he was little inclined to spend Government funds to retain a road designed to guard against an unanticipated Russian invasion.

The final decision of the Home Government was conveyed to India on the 13th of June,<sup>46</sup> but before withdrawal could be implemented, the Rosebery Ministry fell, and the Conservative Ministry under the Marquis of Salisbury was soon to reverse the decision. In reply to proposals made by the Government of India, the new Home Government approved the permanent occupation of Chitral with the following provisions: (1) there was to be no augmentation of the Indian Army; (2) the garrison for both Gilgit and Chitral was to consist of two native regiments; (3) the Chitral headquarters was to be at Kila Drosh, some miles south of Chitral and (4) the road between the Swat River and Kila Drosh was to be held by tribal levies.<sup>47</sup> With few alterations, this was to be the method of British control in Chitral for the next few years. As to the future of the Mehtarship, it was decided by the Government of India that Shuja-ul-Mulk, another son of the late Aman-ul-Mulk and yet quite young, was to become Mehtar over the Katur country, and that a governor and native headmen were to be appointed for the Kushwakt country. And of course,

The Government of India will provide guard for Mehtar during minority, and will control foreign relations as usual in protected States in return for security from aggression.<sup>48</sup>

The Liberals were irate over this reversal of their frontier policy. Sir W. Harcourt, the former Chancellor of the Exchequer questioned the need for the added expenditures, in the House of Commons. Salisbury's reply was swift and effective. He informed

45. *Vide* footnote 44.

46. Sec. of State to Viceroy, telegram, 13 June 1895; PP/1, no. 40.

47. Sec. of State to Viceroy, telegram, 9 August 1895; PP/1, no. 53.

48. Viceroy to Sec. of State, telegram, 18 August 1895; PP/2.

the Liberals that it was under their aegis that Chitral had been occupied, that

to retire from Chitral is not a course of action that can be carried out in isolation, and it would involve with it the abandonment of the existing post at Gilgit,<sup>49</sup> ...

and that

Chitral indeed has been the scene of one of the most heroic actions which of recent years have rendered British arms illustrious, ...

and

it would be a serious blow to our prestige if, having once gone to those territories, we were to abandon them.<sup>50</sup>

The polemics in the House of Lords were unusually heated. Lord Rosebery pointed out that: (1) the mountain barrier in which Chitral is located was practically impervious to any large army; (2) the Pamirs Agreement for the delimitation of the northern frontier had been concluded with Russia, and British occupation of Chitral would only be looked upon by Russia with suspicion; (3) the March Proclamation included the following words:

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.<sup>51</sup>

The occupation of Chitral, then, would be a breach of faith with the people in whose area the campaign had taken place; and (4) the financial condition of India was such that it could ill afford

49. It must be noted that the scheme of frontier surveillance based upon a British Agency at Gilgit had been used for years, and though the scheme had not been very satisfactory, the sudden abandonment of the Gilgit Agency in correlation with the withdrawal from the newly occupied Chitral would never have been contemplated by the Government of India.

50. *Hansard*, 15 August 1895.

51. Sec. to Govt. of India, Foreign Dept., to Chief Sec., Punjab Govt., telegram, 14 March 1895; SPD.

another vast source of expenditure. Rosebery appended one more point, that it was now, more than ever, necessary to "concentrate" military might, in view of the past French activity on the Mekong, as well as the two great powers to the north, Russia and China being conterminous. Salisbury's rebuttal was to the following effect: (1) there was to be no increase in the total military expenditure of India; (2)

We entirely deny that anything we have done, or intend to do, can be the very harshest construction, be construed to break the promises into which we have entered;

and that (3)

... we held the abandonment of Chitral to be ... most unwise as a question of moral strategy, ...

which would have had a

... detrimental effect upon the tribes which lie between the occupied ground and the outer frontiers of India ...<sup>52</sup>

When the subject came up again in February 1896, the debate in Commons went along much the same lines. Sir W. Wedderburn, at one time a ranking member of the Indian Civil Service, formally proposed that the House might express its "regret" at the occupation of Chitral. In addition to the arguments already presented by his Liberal colleagues, Wedderburn informed the House of allegations made in the Anglo-Indian press to the effect that,

... the object of the expedition to Chitral was to show we had effective control over the mountainous regions, so that when the treaty with Russia was made, we might show we were in effective possession of those regions to put them within our sphere of influence.

If this were so, he wanted to know if the Pamirs Agreement was merely a delimitation of the respective spheres of influence between England and Russia, or whether it was an actual extension of the

52. *Hansard*, 15 August 1895.

northern boundary of India. The Liberals, ably led, again pressed their point, but the Conservative view was once more to prevail.

Speaking for his party Lord G. Hamilton, the Secretary of State for India, dwelt more on the "beneficial" aspects of occupation, and less on possible international complications, pointing out in passing, that had the British not preserved order in Chitral, it would have been an open "invitation to some other country to come in and perform the duties which they had abdicated . . ." Hamilton emphasized the favourable possibilities of commerce, saying, "Chitral was a much richer country than was anticipated," and he was quick to reiterate, "The result of their occupation was that the slave trade had ceased."<sup>53</sup> Throughout, Hamilton never tired of stressing that the consequence of withdrawal from Chitral would have been to "hand it over to anarchy."

As to the question of "breach of faith," the Secretary of State forcibly returned the Liberals' fire. He claimed, "The Proclamation was issued to the tribes who lived between the territory of Chitral and Peshawar," and it "had absolutely nothing to do with the people of Chitral, because our suzerainty and authority were already there asserted." He then informed the Liberals with satisfaction, "The heads of the intervening tribes petitioned the Political Officer, asking to be incorporated in British territory."<sup>54</sup> Then, in triumphant accusation, Hamilton said:

When all their tangible arguments in reference to occupation were annihilated, the supporters of the late Government fell back on breach of faith.

53. Thomson (*op. cit.*, p. 274) states: The bulk of the Chitralis are slaves, belonging, absolutely to the adamzodas or nobles, . . . It would be a very difficult . . . (act) to bring about the abolition of slavery altogether, for the land being entirely in the hands of the nobles, the slaves would starve if suddenly freed.

54. It is to be noted that according to the Final Report (October 1895, PP/2) of the Political Officer concerned, Major H. A. Deane, of the Chitral Relief Force, the chiefs of the intervening tribes who had aided the advance of General Low asked more specifically for British *protection*, from (I conjecture) tribes still hostile to the British. It is to be noted, too, that many chiefs, e.g., Muhammed Sharif, the Khan of Dir, owed their reinstatement to the British and really had little choice in the matter (Govt. of India to General Low, 15 August 1895; PP/2).

Finally, centering his attack on the Liberal Party itself, he accused the opposition of playing party politics and exclaimed:

It was not creditable to English politics that they should bring this charge of want of honour and breach of faith against a member of their own party (Lord Elgin), who was carrying out a policy which he believed to be consistent with national and Imperial interest.<sup>55</sup>

The question of breach of faith is a moot point. It was admittedly brought forth as a political manoeuvre by the Liberal Party. The indigenous tribes between Peshawar and Chitral cared little whether the British issued a proclamation to them or not, and could do even less if it were breached; so, the dispute over breach of faith was only academic in the final analysis, a question of interpretation and semantics. Either side of the issue could be supported with some justification.

The Liberals were, of course, soundly defeated in Parliament, and the permanent occupation of Chitral signified the beginning of a new period of frontier management. Never again was Chitral to achieve any semblance of independence. It was henceforth to be considered one of the stanchions to which the entire developing system of frontier defence in the north was to be secured. Six years after the memorable siege, the state was absorbed directly into British India as part of the newly formed North-West Frontier Province.

55. *Hansard*, 17 February, 1896.

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