

# Durand Line: A Divisive and Contested Border - Insights at the World Council for Public Diplomacy Conference

*Gaining a Comprehensive Understanding of the Historical Significance and Ongoing Impact of the Durand Line on the Pashtun People*

BRUSSELS, BELGIUM , February 20, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- For more than a century, the Durand Line has been a source of contention between Afghanistan and Pakistan due to its treatment of the Pashtun people. In her talk on the Durand Line's history and influence, Zhaly Walli addressed a conference in Brussels hosted by Andy Vermaut of the World Council for Public Diplomacy and Community Dialogue. It was in 1893 when the British Empire erected this boundary between Afghanistan and British India. There has been a long history of bloodshed, strife, and instability

amongst Pashtun communities on both sides of the border because of this division. The international world recognizes the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, but the Afghan government and many Afghan citizens believe that the Pashtuns living in Pakistan are Afghan people who are being occupied illegally. The Durand Line is still a controversial topic with many unsolved problems, and this conference was a great opportunity to learn more about how the border has affected the Pashtun people.

Zhaly Walli spoke at the conference organized by Andy Vermaut of the World Council for Public Diplomacy and Community Dialogue on 17 february 2023 in Brussels. In her presentation, she provided a comprehensive overview of the history and impact of the Durand line, which has been a controversial issue for over a century. Zhaly Walli began her presentation by highlighting the map of the Durand line and expressing her gratitude to the organizer for making this event



The Durand line was initially meant to determine each other's sphere of influence between Afghanistan and British India, but it was not supposed to serve as an internationally recognized border. (Photo Serge Jansen)

possible. She then delved into the brief history of the Durand line, explaining how it divided the free nation of Afghanistan into two entities and continues to be an open wound to this day. She discussed the fact that the original treaty was imposed upon the Afghan nation by the English diplomat, Henry Mortimer Durand, in 1893, and the original copy of the treaty has never been provided with the signature of Amir AbdulRahman Khan. She went on to explain that the Durand line was initially meant to determine each other's sphere of influence between Afghanistan and British India, but it was not supposed to serve as an internationally recognized border. The British wanted to ensure that Afghanistan should never form a threat to British India, and to achieve their goals, they bribed the Pashtuns of that region with subsidized weapons and money.



The Afghan government and many Afghan civilians feel that the Pashtuns residing in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) are Afghan nationals who are being unjustly occupied by Pakistan. (Photo Serge Jansen)

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In Pakistan, the Pashtuns are divided by hundreds of tribes, and each tribe is controlled by the chief of that tribe, who is mostly appointed and controlled by the Pakistani establishment.”

*Zhaly Walli*

#### Impact of Durand Line

Zhaly Walli also discussed the impact of the Durand line on Pashtuns on both sides. She noted that the divide and rule policy was the slogan of the British Empire, and they were afraid of the unity and prosperity of any nation. The English have continuously interfered in the domestic affairs of Afghanistan, and they have always had a destructive role in the country's political and social systems. In her presentation, Zhaly Walli also discussed the fact that the Pashtuns on both sides of the Durand line face pain, agony, and suffering despite being one nation and one family. She noted that Pashtuns were not allowed

to have education in their native language, and it was strictly forbidden to speak their mother tongue publicly. In Pakistan, the Pashtuns are divided by hundreds of tribes, and each tribe is controlled by the chief of that tribe, who is mostly appointed and controlled by the Pakistani establishment.

Zhaly Walli's presentation ended with several questions that Pashtuns have faced for ages but have never had answers to. These include the binding bilateral agreement of the Durand line, the legal status of the treaty after the 12th of November 1993, and whether the Durand line was

the magic trick of the viceroy or a long-term project for a country in the make. Overall, Zhaly Walli's presentation provided a powerful and informative insight into the controversial issue of the Durand line and its impact on the Pashtuns on both sides. It called for an urgent need to address this issue and provide answers to the questions that have been left unanswered for over a century.

Permanent separation of Pashtuns  
The conference organized by Andy Vermaut of the World Council for Public Diplomacy and Community Dialogue provided a valuable platform for this important discussion. Andy Vermaut explains: "Pakistan and Afghanistan are separated by 2,640 kilometers of the Durand Line. In 1893, the British Empire enforced the Durand Line on Afghanistan in order to demarcate British India from Afghanistan. Since its establishment, the line has been a contentious subject, and the Afghan government views it as an unlawful boundary. In 1893, British diplomat Henry Mortimer Durand negotiated the Durand Line with Afghan monarch Amir Abdur Rahman Khan. This agreement enabled the British to establish their control in what is now the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan, then known as the North-West Frontier Province. In 1901, the British annexed the territory to British India. The Afghan people were furious and embarrassed because Durand had negotiated with Khan without their or their government's permission. It was seen as an arbitrary act of aggression against the Afghan country, resulting in the permanent separation of Pashtuns and other ethnic groups on both sides of the border. The Durand Line was intended to establish a buffer zone between British India and Afghanistan to thwart any prospective Afghan invasion. The pact allowed the British to maintain colonial power and control over the subcontinent, furthering their economic and geopolitical interests in the area. The Durand Line was formed across Pashtun land, separating Pashtuns residing in Afghanistan and those living in Pakistan into two distinct groups. Pashtuns are the biggest ethnic group on both sides of the border, and



There have been requests from the Afghan government and certain Pashtun activists to renegotiate the Durand Line and establish a new boundary that more accurately represents the interests of the Pashtun people.



The whole seminar was devoted to the Durand Line's historical inaccuracy. (Photo Serge Jansen)

the Durand Line has had a severe influence on them. "

Are Pashtuns Afghan nationals?

Pashtuns had a long history of being together and had their own tribal laws and judicial systems, but the Durand Line separated them into two nations, resulting in ongoing conflicts. The deal was made under duress, with the Afghan government being threatened with war if they did not cooperate. The Afghan government did not receive a copy of the accord or the treaty in the local language, and neither the Afghan parliament nor the Afghan people accepted the treaty. The monarch of Afghanistan signed the pact under duress, and he never acknowledged the Durand Line as a genuine boundary. Since its construction, the Durand Line has generated a tremendous deal of violence between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Afghanistan has never acknowledged Pakistan as a genuine state and has never recognized the Durand Line as an international boundary. The Afghan government asserts that the Durand Line is unlawful since it was established by the British. The Afghan government and many Afghan civilians feel that the Pashtuns residing in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) are Afghan nationals who are being unjustly occupied by Pakistan. Several Pashtuns on both sides of the border have called for the reunion of the Pashtun homeland, while others have advocated for the establishment of an independent Pashtun state. In the continuing battle between the Afghan government and the Taliban, the Durand Line is a key aspect. Many Pashtuns believe that the Afghan government does not represent their interests, and many Pashtuns see the Taliban as a viable option. There have been requests from the Afghan government and certain Pashtun activists to renegotiate the Durand Line and establish a new boundary that more accurately represents the interests of the Pashtun people. Some Pashtuns, who believe they have been unjustly split by the Durand Line, have begun to promote the notion of a unified Pashtun nation. Notwithstanding the debate surrounding the Durand Line, the international world has acknowledged the line as an international boundary. The Durand Line is recognized by the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as the United Nations and other international organizations, but this has to be revised," says Andy Vermaut.

Border of instability

Afghanistan and Pakistan continue to argue over the Durand Line, with both governments accusing the other of supporting terrorism and cross-border attacks, as Andy Vermaut explains. "Some Pashtun on both sides of the border believe that their respective governments have disregarded and abused them, and this has contributed to tensions related to the border issue. The Durand Line is a significant landmark in Pashtun history and has had far-reaching effects on the region. The border has been a source of instability and bloodshed, and the people of Pashtun have long felt that they have been treated unfairly."

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