

JIBAS (The International Journal of Islamic Business, Administration and Social Sciences) (Quarterly) Trilingual (Arabic, English, Urdu) ISSN: APPLIED FOR (P) & (E)

Home Page: <http://jibas.org>

Approved by HEC in Y Category

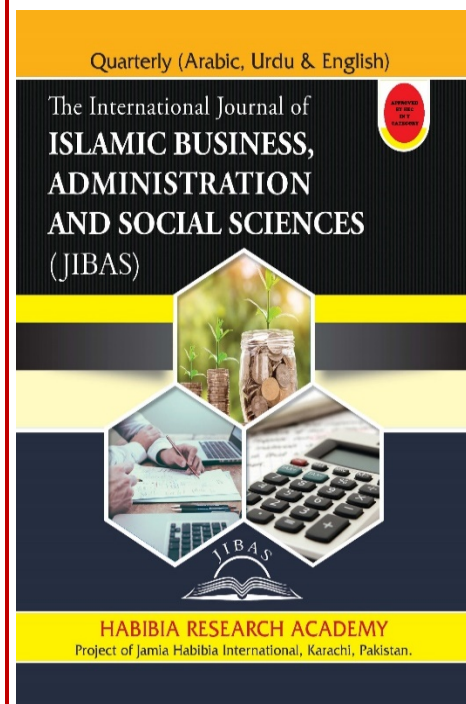
Indexing: IRI (AIU), Australian Islamic Library, Euro Pub.

PUBLISHER HABIBIA RESEARCH ACADEMY

Project of **JAMIA HABIBIA INTERNATIONAL**, Reg. No: KAR No. 2287 Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860 Govt. of Sindh, Pakistan.

Website: www.habibia.edu.pk,

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



TOPIC:
THE KHYBER RIFLES:
PASHTUN GUARDIANS OF THE BRITISH RAJ

AUTHORS:

1. Dr. Muhammad Daniyal Khan, Lecturer Department of History, University of Peshawar, Email ID: daniyalkhan@uop.edu.pk
2. Dr. Farzana Gul Taj, Assistant Professor Jinnah College for Women University Of Peshawar, Email ID: fgtaj@uop.edu.pk
3. Bushra Manzoor, Ph.D. Research Scholar Area Study Centre (Russia, China & Central Asia) University of Peshawar, Email ID: itzmebush@gmail.com

How to Cite: Khan, Muhammad Daniyal, Farzana Gul Taj, and Bushra Manzoor. 2024. "THE KHYBER RIFLES: PASHTUN GUARDIANS OF THE BRITISH RAJ". *International Journal of Islamic Business, Administration and Social Sciences (JIBAS)* 4 (3). 19-34

URL: <https://jibas.org/index.php/jibas/article/view/76>.

Vol. 4, No.3 || July –September 2024 || P. 19-34

Published online: 2024-09-04

QR. Code



THE KHYBER RIFLES:**PASHTUN GUARDIANS OF THE BRITISH RAJ**

Muhammad Daniyal Khan, Farzana Gul Taj, Bushra Manzoor,

ABSTRACT:

The British Imperial Government established militias in the Tribal Belt, consisting of local tribesmen for military service during times of need. These militias were formed to purchase tribesmen's loyalty and ensure peace and tranquility in the unstable area. The Khyber Rifles, an irregular force made up of various Afridi tribes from Khyber, were formed in the 19th century to guard and secure the Khyber Pass. The Khyber Rifles was a model for other tribal militias and scouts in the Tribal Belt, supporting Viceroy Lord Curzon's Tribal Policy of satisfaction and pacification. The Khyber Rifles effectively used the warrior prowess of the tribesmen to further the British's interests. They served as a model for other tribal militias and scouts in the Tribal Belt.

KEYWORDS: Khyber Pass, Militia, Tribal Belt, British Raj, Resistance

INTRODUCTION:

The British Imperial Government raised militias in the strategic Tribal Belt consisting of the local tribesmen for performing military service during times of need, as opposed to regular professional force and full-time military personnel. These militias were supposed to serve in their territories for a limited time, supported by the regular army during military expeditions in the Tribal Belt. The British concluded that enlisting local tribesmen in militias would serve their strategic interest of purchasing tribesmen's loyalty-which was seen as essential for the success of their policy in the Great Game-as well as guarantee peace and tranquility in the unstable area after launching more than forty punitive expeditions against tribesmen.

Originally formed by the British, the Khyber Rifles were an irregular force made up of various Afridi tribes from Khyber that used their weapons to defend the historic Khyber Pass. This legendary force served not only in Khyber but also in other regions, winning accolades for its valour and fighting prowess. The Khyber Rifles served as a model for the formation of other militias in the Tribal Belt, specifically supporting Viceroy Lord Curzon's Tribal Policy of satisfaction and pacification.

The Khyber tribesmen made up the majority of the fabled Khyber Rifles, which were established in the 19th century to guard and secure the vital Khyber Pass. The British policy of establishing a strong footing in the Tribal Belt placed strategic importance on the Khyber Pass. However, the British devised a cunning plan: why not enlist the native tribesmen and offer them the promise of paid employment with the Government of India along with the ability to carry

weapons without consequence, in place of posting regular troops on what they call them as the treacherous and hostile cliffs that tower over the road?

Considering that the Pakhtuns could easily outrange British breech-loading Sniders with their long-barrel matchlocks, they knew every sniper's nest above the pass like the back of their hands. And so the motley crew that would eventually become the Khyber Rifles, the defenders of the Khyber Pass, was created. In the Tribal Belt, this indigenous force effectively used the warrior prowess of the tribesmen to further the interests of the British. Because Khyber Rifles provided the Imperial Government with such invaluable services, it was the model for other tribal militias and scouts that were established to preserve peace and tranquilly in the Tribal Belt, to mention few as Samana Rifles, Kurram Militia, and Waziristan Militia.

The strategic component of Viceroy Lord Curzon's new Frontier policy was the creation of likewise militias and scouts trained and established after the Khyber Rifles. These indigenous forces played a leading role in the new Frontier security policy's successful implementation.

KHYBER AS MONARCH OF PASSES

C.G. Robertson refers to the well-known Khyber Pass, which is situated in the southern region of the Hindu Kush, as the "Monarch of Passes". It climbs 3,600 feet above sea level and is a desolate, rock-strewn wasteland that is scoured by ice-spindrift blasts in the winter and scorched by temperatures that soar beyond 110F in the summer.¹ Scholars claim that Khyber is a word of ancient Hebrew origin signifying 'fortification'. This has yet to be linguistically substantiated, but some scholars point out that the Hebrew word 'herev' meaning 'sword' is a noun derived from the verbal root 'HaRav' which means to attack and thus could have a kinship with the modern Khyber.²

The historian Charles Allen writes, "The Pakhtuns say that when Allah created the world, He had a pile of rocks left over, out of which he created Afghanistan some fifty miles west of Peshawar, that pile of rocks is cut by a dark ravine out of which a river debouches onto the plain. This is the mouth of the Khyber Pass, although the pass suggests a high crossing point over a mountain range, this is really a trail that leads up the bed of a river which has cut itself a deep, narrow defile of more than twenty miles through the mountains. Although only one of several fissures in the mountain chain which provides India with a natural defensive wall to west and north, the Khyber has always provided the subcontinent with its main invasion and trade route."³

However, the word "pass" implies a high point where a mountain range crosses, but in reality, the trail leads up the riverbed, which has carved out a deep, narrow ravine that spans more than twenty miles into the Himalayas. While the Khyber is merely one of the mountain

chain's fissures that offers India a natural defensive wall to the west and north, it has historically served as the subcontinent's primary conduit for invasion and trade".³

Things are happening in the Khyber Pass that are historical. Even before the first Persian carpet merchants brought their wares across the rocky desert tracks of Afghanistan, the armies of Central Asian conquerors, from Alexander the Great to Babur, the first Mughal Emperor of India, used the Khyber as an invasion route. Since the commencement of trade in the region, the Khyber was a natural entrance point for camel caravans riding the Silk Road from Persia, China, and the thriving marketplaces of Central Asia to the Subcontinent. These ancient hills have witnessed countless processions marching down their valleys over the ages, as well as armies and traders, the opulence and commotion of battle, and the quiet caravan of the traders.⁴

During his travels in 1931, Crocker stated, "Their rocky walls have witnessed the weary feet of countless thousands of beasts of burden bearing the commerce of Bokhara, Afghanistan and Peshawar through the mountain passes and the tramp of the legions". More than just a border, the Khyber Pass is a line on a map guarded by individuals who do passport checks and maintain a barrier.⁵ It is truly a frontier, an ancient zone of contested ground, long disputed and never entirely at peace, incorporated intermittently into empires and states but remaining unmastered by even the most powerful.⁶

KHYBER PASS'S STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE TO BRITISH INDIA

Up to its division in 1947, British India's borders were impenetrable to seaborne attacks for about 150 years. Regarding land invasions, Burma served as a barrier against all invaders, including the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II, and proved to be an efficient killing field.

To the north, the Himalayas stood as a formidable deterrent to invasion, the logistical nightmare of an army marching across this frozen mountain wasteland at any time of the year, and extremely difficult to open supply lines and communications. Only to the west was the empire vulnerable which was teeming with hostile tribesmen. The North-West Frontier was, in fact, the only corner of an empire that the British never succeeded in pacifying. An army advancing across this freezing mountain wasteland at any time of year would present a logistical nightmare and make it very difficult to open supply lines and communications. To the north, the Himalayas posed a powerful obstacle to invasion. The empire, full of hostile tribesmen, was vulnerable only to the West. In actuality, the North-West Frontier was the only area of the Empire that the British were never able to stabilise.⁷ When the army defeated the Sikhs decisively, the Khyber Pass started to dominate British India's concerns. With the acquisition of Punjab, the government found itself, at least on paper, ruler and master of the untamed North-West Frontier and the mainly unexplored

Tribal Belt, which was 300 miles long and 100 miles wide and situated between the Durand Line and the managed boundary. From Lord Auckland to Curzon, British rulers sought to extend India's boundaries and saw the Frontier as the weak, exposed side of the Raj.

Their problem was coming up with a plan to appease these vicious borderland tribesmen. The British government realised that strengthening the North-West Frontier was imperative to maintaining the integrity of India's the most remote and unstable border, especially the crucial passes that could be used as entry points by the hostile forces. The North-West Frontier was an important component of Britain's colonial strategy. The government was compelled to admit that anyone who travelled even a mile or two into this no man's land was unlikely to return alive. This was because the vast, unexplored tribal terrain served as a buffer against many of the British foes.⁸

Thirty-six years after Britain's disaster during its withdrawal from Kabul (1838-42) the British Army in 1878 crossed the Khyber again, but this time, precautions were taken to ensure that the British soldiers would not be vulnerable to an ambush while travelling. No one questioned the necessity of garrisoning the Khyber Pass due to its critical strategic value, regardless of the sacrifices involved. An idea started to gain traction in the late nineteenth century, partly due to the near-death experience Major-General Sir Samuel Browne's column encountered in Pass during the start of the Second Afghan War, when the army nearly met with tragedy in skirmishes with Afghan regulars.

The strategists of the army concluded that the Afridi tribesmen, who were trained and commissioned and who enjoyed nothing more than to fire a rifle, could handle the task of guarding Khyber Pass without the need for British troops. To safeguard trade routes between Central Asia and British India and to create a safe buffer against Afghanistan, the new Frontier Strategy was developed, employing local tribesmen.⁹

FORMATION OF KHYBER RIFLES: TURNING POACHERS INTO GAMEKEEPERS

Unlike the native fighting forces the British had encountered east of the Indus, the tribal Pakhtuns proved to be a different kind of enemy. These hill tribesmen were not simply bought off, much less persuaded to support the Raj, and they were also not going to be kept down for very long by military force. Ultimately, the British discovered that the tribesmen's allegiance could be gained in part by purchasing them and in part by placing highly skilled officers in their positions who were conversant in their native tongue.¹⁰

Ian Hay observed on his travels in the North-West Frontier Province in 1930, "The British Government, with its usual uncanny instinct for turning poachers into gamekeepers, has diverted them into the paths of usefulness by giving them a regular job, of which they are inordinately proud, and the rudiments of discipline" noted Ian Hay during his travels in the North-West Frontier Province in 1930. They work only during the day, or until the Khyber

Pass closes, which happens at dusk in Kensington Gardens.¹¹ The Khyber Rifles was the first indigenous force established by the British to protect India's most vital frontier, which was unstable and exposed to threats. Very few people will be familiar with the Kurram Militia, the Gilgit Scouts, or the Zob Militia.

However, the term “Khyber Rifles” is a different story, and if it sounds familiar to you, it's probably because the corps was associated with the famous Pass they defended. Because of the turbulent past of the Khyber Pass, the oldest of the Frontier Corps is well-known to many people. Veteran frontiersman Lieutenant Colonel Henny Crocker once said that the Khyber Rifles were originally thrust into the public eye by Talbot Mundy's gushing 1917 novel, *King of the Khyber Rifles*. The most dripping prose was a jezailchi (musket-carrying tribesmen) of the Khyber Rifles, hook-nosed as an asprey, black-bearded, with white teeth glistening out of a gap in the darkness of his lower face.¹²

The Khyber Rifles was the original native levy raised by the British to guard the most critical gap in India's vulnerable and volatile North West Frontier. Few will have heard of the Zob Militia, the Gilgit Scouts or the Kurram Militia. But the name ‘Khyber Rifles’ is another matter, and if it strikes a familiar chord, this is almost certainly because of the corps association with the historic pass they guarded. This oldest of Frontier Corps is to many a household name because the history of the pass is steeped in history and strife. The veteran Frontier man Lieutenant Colonel Henny Crocker once remarked that ‘if the romance of the East is to be found in India, then surely the romance of India centres in the Khyber Pass’.¹³ When it appeared like war with Kabul would break out in 1878, Colonel Robert Warburton, Political Officer Khyber, took the initiative to start talks with the Afridi tribes who had demonstrated a willingness to work with the British. On November 20, 1878, an agreement was reached wherein the tribal maliks granted their men permission to defend the Khyber Pass within the boundaries of their various clans and prevent their fellow tribesmen from “molesting the high way” in exchange for a monthly allowance of 6,550 rupees.¹⁴

The next day, General Sir Samuel Browne initiated hostilities with Afghanistan by forcing the Khyber Pass during the army's initial assault on Kabul. Browne's force consisted of twelve infantry battalions, one cavalry brigade, five field gun batteries and four sappers columns. The indigenous combatants, who were a mix of Khyber Afridis and Peshawar valley residents, formed a Corps of Jezailchis shortly after Browne's columns entered Afghanistan. This group numbered roughly 250 men. They were irregular, unshaven, and unkempt, with no uniform but a red tag sewn onto the back of the pagri.¹⁵ They were armed with the jezail and were at first known as the Khyber Jezailchis.¹⁶ Its responsibilities included protecting convoys and fending off assaults on the pass. This was the first time in

recorded history that a foreign military command had taken possession of a pass that had eluded centuries-long attempts by some of the strongest fighting armies on the globe.¹⁷

There was never any question about the soundness of Warburton's initiative, especially when the Khyber Rifles had to deal with the full brunt of an armed uprising by their Afridi kinsmen in later years. 'We need the Khyber Pass to remain open to us',¹⁸ remarked General Sir William Lockhart, who led a punitive expedition into Tirah following the 1897 tribal insurrection.¹⁹

According to Lockhart, the pass serves as a vital commerce route connecting Afghanistan and British India. However, the General argued with great foresight that its military importance much outweighed its commercial value. "Irregular troops raised locally should guard the Khyber Pass defile." It is imperative to keep in mind that when conducting military operations in Afghanistan, the amicable disposition of the frontier tribes will hold far more significance than the complete protection of anyone pass, no matter how significant. In any event, the pass would be secure if the attitude was friendly.²⁰

The last British governor of the North-West Frontier province, Olaf Caroe, relates that when the Khyber Rifles were established in 1878, the government was terrified of Russia's planned 1,000-mile advance eastward via Central Asia. India's border with Afghanistan needed to be secured and sending in more troops was the apparent temporary solution. However, it was also essential to win over the Pakhtun tribes, whose allegiance was to Kabul rather than the British. Viceroy Lytton proposed a plan aimed at strengthening the districts' ties with their trans-border neighbours and granting the central government more direct authority over Frontier administration and policy.²¹

Despite being a relatively small area compared to the entire empire, the Frontier remained Britain's imperial headache. Following the Afghan expeditionary force's uneventful return to India in September 1880, the army decided to withdraw its troops from the garrisons they still held in Ali Masjid and Landi Kotal. This decision was made if satisfactory arrangements could not be made to maintain the Pass open under the independent and exclusive charge of the tribes.²²

The maintenance cost was met by the British government, which paid 87,160 rupees a year for them.²³ Previously, the native levies received subsidies for things like guns. The leaders of the tribes in question were to be the only ones in charge of recruiting and dismissing the levies; they were to submit these arrangements to the Political Officer at Jamrud. Captain Gilbert Gasiford, a former member of the Punjab Frontier Force, served as the first Commandant of the Khyber Rifles, or the Jezailchis as they were still known in 1887. When Sardar Muhammad Aslam Khan assumed command of the corps, the situation drastically changed, and the corps was renamed the Khyber Rifles in 1887.²⁴

The dependable corps was granted permission to operate anywhere on the Frontier, not just in their own Khyber, making it the only Pakhtun militia. Around 550 men made up the body at the time, together with the customary Jemaders, Subadars, and subordinate officers. The Jezailchis had only been in existence for four years when their allegiance to the British was put to the ultimate test. In 1882, the Jezailchis had the opportunity to face up against their own relatives when they faced off against the Zakka Khel clan of Afridis. Warriors from the Zakka Khel tribe ambushed a caravan travelling from Kabul in February 1882 as it lumbered near Ali Masjid, its designated rest stop. As soon as the robbers surged into the road, two companies of Jezailchis met them with a barrage of long-barrelled rifle fire, which quickly forced the raiders to retreat to their mountain fastness before they could seize the waggon.²⁵ The Afridi recruits did not hesitate to initiate combat against their fellow tribesmen; but, their indigenous leaders chose to assign Jezailchis from the same Zakka Khel tribe to carry out the task. Following this field operation, the government was happy to confirm that “long trains of travellers and pack animals, convoys of treasure and stores of ammunition for Kabul have come and gone through the pass with safety. The pass has since been guarded by Jezailchis, and the agreement made with the Khyber Afridis has been found to work satisfactorily.”²⁶

A group of 350 men from the Khyber Rifles participated in the Black Mountain campaign in 1888. The Hazara Field Force expedition plan notes, “His Honour (the Governor General) does not doubt that these men would prove very useful.”²⁷

The native troops' valiant defence of the pass against raiders and militants from their tribes has earned the Khyber Rifles recognition from the government in the ten years since the organisation was established. The Foreign Department now wanted to see as many Khyber Rifles served as possible used for the Black Mountain Expedition by their offer of duty.²⁸ The government also determined that it was time to elevate the Khyber Rifles to the rank of a corps with the necessary equipment in the final days before launching the expeditionary force on the march. The command to do so emanated from the exalted offices of Government House, where Lord Dufferin, impressed by what he had seen during his tour of the Khyber in the company of Roberts, heartily approved the request for breech-loading Sniders to be issued to the Khyber Rifles, in replacement of their antiquated muzzle-loading Jezails. Moreover, arrangements for the issuance of Sniders and fifty rounds as well as one blanket per man were also made.²⁹

The order to proceed came from the high offices of Government House, where Lord Dufferin, greatly impressed by what he had witnessed during his tour of the Khyber with Roberts, enthusiastically approved the request to replace the Khyber Rifles' outdated

muzzle-loading Jezails with breech-loading Sniders. In addition, plans were made to issue fifty bullets, one blanket for each guy, and Sniders.

By the Viceroy's instructions, the Khyber Rifles, who had borne the title for less than a year, stepped out of their rag-tag shalwar kameezes into regulation issue khaki tunics and gaitered plus fours, topped by the celebrated red-tagged pagari. The Khyber Rifles gained glory and distinction in its first Black Mountain Campaign fought alongside Indian and British Army regulars. Six men of the corps were awarded Indian Orders of Merit, the most outstanding recipient being Subadar Major Mirsal Akbar Khan, who was decorated for several extraordinary and reckless acts of bravery under fire. Another Khyber Rifles Officer, Jemadar Muhammad Ghalli, received the Indian Order of Merit (IQM) for conspicuous acts of gallantry on five occasions.³⁰

Owing to their exceptional performance in the last campaign, the Khyber Rifles were called upon once more for the Black Mountain Campaign in February 1891. Once again, praise from high places testified to the bravery and devotion of the corps. On February 4, 300 soldiers of the Khyber Rifles, led by Sir Aslam, marched down from Jamrud Fort to Peshawar in order to travel towards the troublesome region. The General and all of the troops have gained the respect and confidence of your Khyber Rifles due to their excellent behaviour.³¹

Colonel John Ommaney, the Peshawar Division Commissioner, wrote to Warburton, saying, "You should be proud of the excellent work you did in the Khyber to manage the Afridis, which ultimately led to their volunteering and excellent performance".³² "Their rapidity of movement over the hills and familiarity of the tactics pursued by the enemy has proved them to be troops of the very best material for the class of fighting in which we have recently been engaged", said General McQueen, the commander-in-chief of the expeditionary force. "They have had good discipline, and neither I nor the column has heard of any instances of wrongdoing".

The Pakhtun uprising that spread over the Khyber and adjacent regions in 1897 proved to be the worst threat to British rule on the Frontier in history. Weeks passed while the war drums had been beating and tribesman after tribe had taken up arms against the government. Winston Churchill had firsthand combat with the tribesmen during the campaign in Malakand, and then again in early August when the uprising extended to the Mohmand region. The greatest danger to British power on the Frontier in history was the Pakhtun revolt that swept over the Khyber and surrounding areas in 1897. The war drums had been banging for weeks, and tribe after tribe had turned to violence against the government. During the struggle in Malakand and again in early August when the insurrection spread to the

Mohmand district, Winston Churchill engaged in close-quarters fighting alongside the tribesmen. .³³

The greatest danger to British power on the Frontier in history was the Pakhtun revolt that swept over the Khyber and surrounding areas in 1897. The war drums had been banging for weeks, and tribe after tribe had turned to violence against the government. During the struggle in Malakand and again in early August when the insurrection spread to the Mohmand district, Winston Churchill engaged in close-quarters fighting alongside the tribesmen.³⁴

“There was considerable reason to fear that rising Khyber Afridis would be followed by a rising Kohat Pass Afridis, and the Jawakis, and to have committed our only available troops to the Khyber would have left the Peshawar valley open to attack from the south and south-east”, stated an official military memo outlining the reasons not to send reinforcements to the Khyber Rifles.³⁵

Lockhart himself was a force to be reckoned with, voicing strong opposition to the official spin. The best mercenary troops in the world may be expected to waver in such trying circumstances, and I think it highly creditable to the Khyber Rifles that when left to their resources, they fought as well as they did. “However loyal and well-disciplined irregular native troops may be, they can hardly be expected to fight against overwhelming odds of their own kinsmen, after their British Commandant has been withdrawn.”³⁶

The Khyber Rifles were in disarray, with the soldiers dispersed throughout the Khyber villages, even though the corps was not formally dissolved following the fall of Landi Kotal. When the British regained control of Khyber Pass in March 1898, the Khyber Rifles were formally reconstituted. When the tribal revival was put down in 1898, Zakka Khels was the only member of the Khyber clan to have steadfastly refused to accept Lockhart's terms of submission. The British had a lot of difficulties with this Afridi clan. The government chose to deploy a punitive expedition to the Bazar Valley in 1907 to take out Zakka Khel.

Throughout the campaign, the Khyber Rifles were crucial. “This corps, which is composed mainly of Afridis, including about 350 Zakka Khel, had to take part in an expedition against a people to whom the men were bound not only by race and religion but by the closest ties of blood”, said Roos-Keppel, the Commandant of the Khyber Rifles, acknowledging the services of the men in the corps. During the voyage, brother-on-brother and son-on-father conflicts did occur frequently. Many people viewed the experiment with scepticism and trepidation, but it was well worth it because the Khyber Rifles were praised for their eagerness and desire during the mission; not a single man left, and not a single firearm was lost.³⁷

An outbreak of hostilities on the North-West Frontier was sparked by the First World War. The primary catalyst for the uprising was Turkey's participation in the European war on Germany's side. The third Anglo-Afghan War broke out in May 1919 as a result of tribal attacks on Frontier militia outposts that began as early as November 1914. The Khyber Rifles fought alongside the British troops at the beginning of the war, but by May 10th, the men of the Khyber Rifles were duped by Afghan propaganda about stories of valiant Pakhtun victories on Frontier. .³⁸ Roos-Keppel had to state, "The Khyber Rifles have behaved very badly, and you can imagine how it distresses me to have to say this as I practically made them and am their Honorary Colonel," as a result of the recruits starting to defect in huge numbers.'³⁹

After the end of the war, Roos-Keppel wrote, 'The militia system grew up as a cheap expedient to relieve regular troops from irksome and arduous duties in a country where services are unpopular. The militia outposts were situated in remote tribal areas, kilometres away from the closest regular troop postings over inhospitable and treacherous terrain. The militiamen could hardly have been expected to remain loyal to the British Government in the face of the cry of jihad in Afghanistan and the heightened anti-British sentiment in tribal territory, especially in the absence of regular troops to support them during the Afghan war.' The first thirty-five years of this unique and original native levy of the North-West Frontier was brought to an inglorious end on 19 May 1919.

The Khyber Rifles Corps was dissolved, and it wasn't reestablished until the end of World War II. The Khyber Rifles, which had been dissolved just 25 years prior, were not much like the resurrected unit that surfaced following World War II. Following 1947, the Khyber Rifles assumed roles as the Pass's secondary defence line. They were to be used to support the Pakistan Army in the case of an invasion, in a similar fashion to how the British had used the original Jezailchis as a temporary army.

In April 1948, four platoons of the Khyber Rifles under the command of Major Aziz Khan arrived in Kashmir. The experience of fighting under the command of Pakistan regulars in Kashmir enhanced the profile of Khyber Rifles and prepared the corps for more sophisticated duties, well beyond its original role as guardians of the Khyber Pass.

CONCLUSION

The official British response to the hardships of life in the Khyber was predictably pragmatic. "The Afridis, those lean but muscular men, with long, gaunt faces, careful shots and skirmishers, patiently awaiting the chance of an easy shot at the enemy" were the Pakhtuns who gave the Indian Army its most severe headache. The largest and most aggressive of the Frontier tribes, the Afridis, became the core of the Khyber Rifles when

Warburton established the Khyber Rifles on November 20, 1878, the first local corps to be established in the tribal area.

The tribesmen offered to serve in the Khyber Pass because they could fire their weapons without being detected if they joined the Khyber weapons, which also offered them an income. It was British policy in the final decade of the 1800s to pull out its forces from places of advance and concentrate them in British territory behind them as a support system and safety net. As a result, two battalions of the enlarged Khyber Rifles took the place of all regular forces in Khyber who had been pulled out of their advanced positions. The only militia that distinguished itself while serving outside of Khyber was the Khyber Rifles. The British officers had heaped praise upon the troops of Khyber Rifles for their services.

Thus, until the start of the third Anglo-Afghan War in 1919, the British Government relied on the Khyber Rifles, the forerunner of all other militias and scouts in the Tribal Belt, to act as the indigenous defenders of the renowned pass. More than 142 years ago, Robert Warburton came up with the concept of converting poachers into gamekeepers, and Pakhtun youth still swarm to the ranks of the illustrious Khyber Rifles.

1 C.G. Robertson, *Kurram, Kabul & Kandahar: A Brief Record of Expression in three Campaigns under General Roberts* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1979), 171.

2 Jules Stewart, *The Khyber Rifles From the British Raj to Al Qaeda* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2005), 39.

3 Charles Allen, *Soldier Sahibs* (London: John Murray, 2000), 37.

4 Stewart, *The Khyber Rifles From the British Raj to Al Qaeda*, 34.

5 Ibid.

6 Paddy Docherty, *The Khyber Pass: A History of Empire and Invasion* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2007), xxiii.

7 Stewart, *The Khyber Rifles From the British to Al Qaeda*, 41. See also Amanullah Khan, *The British Colonial Policies in the North West Frontier of India: 1849-1901*,

http://sbbwu.edu.pk/journal/FWU_Journal_july2020/14.%20The%20British%20Colonial%20Policies%20in%20the%20North%20West%20Frontier%20of%20India%201849-1901.pdf

8 Stewart, *The Khyber Rifles From the British Raj to Al Qaeda*, 12.

9 Ibid.

10 ANDREW M. ROE, *BRITISH GOVERNANCE OF THE NORTH-WEST FRONTIER (1919 TO 1947): A BLUEPRINT FOR CONTEMPORARY AFGHANISTAN?*

accessed on 12 March, 2024, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA437314.pdf>

11 *The North West Frontier*, accessed on 12 March, 2024, <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/north-west-frontier-india>,

12 Ibid

13 *The Second Anglo-Afghan War*, <https://resources.saylor.org/wwwresources/archived/site/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/The-Second-Anglo-Afghan-War.pdf>

14 Ibid. See also Latham Wilkinson, *North-West Frontier, 1837-1947* (London, United Kingdom: Osprey Publishers, 1977).

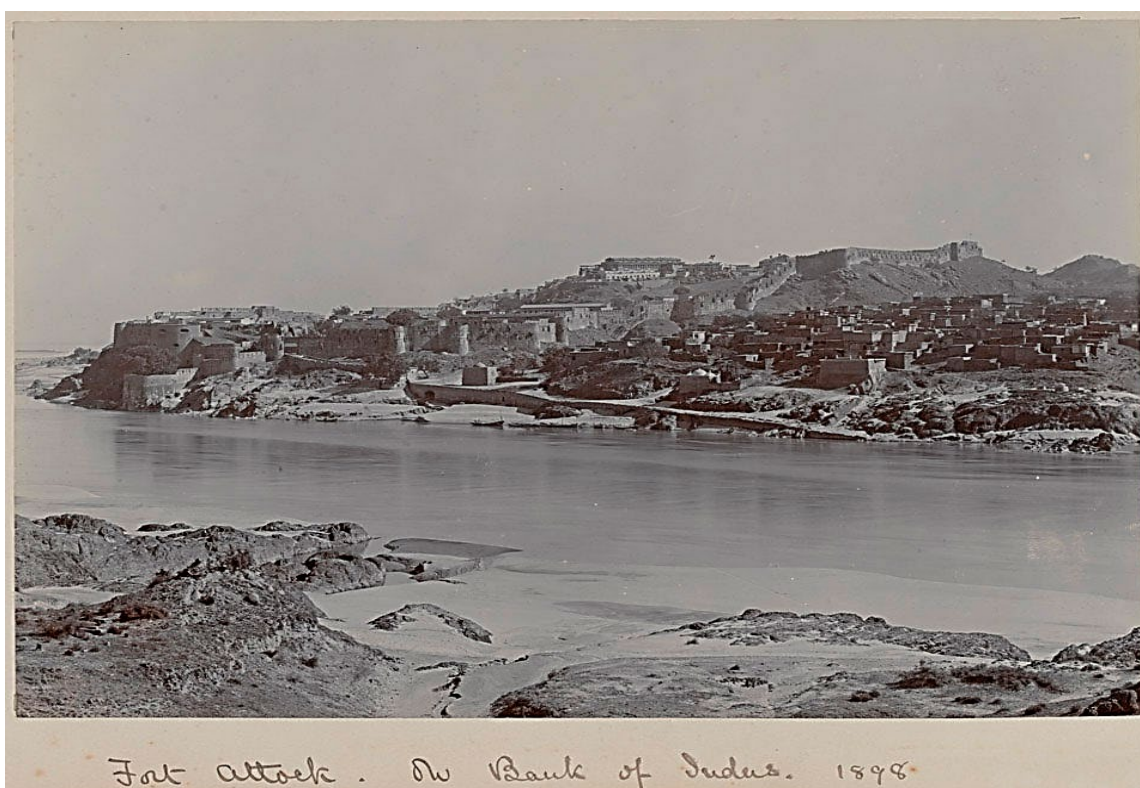
- 15 Charles Chenevix Trench, *The Frontier Scouts* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1986), 7
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Archibald Forbes, *The Afghan Wars, 1839-42 and 1878-80*, <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1015&context=afghanenglish>
- 18 *North-West Frontier*, <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/north-west-frontier-india>
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Olaf Caroe, *The Pathans* (London: Macmillan, 1958), 413.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Amina Iqbal, *A History of the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-1880)*, <https://www.paradigmshift.com.pk/second-anglo-afghan-war/>
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Amanullah Khan, *The British Colonial Policies in the North West Frontier of India: 1849-1901* http://sbbwu.edu.pk/journal/FWU_Journal_july2020/14.%20The%20British%20Colonial%20Policies%20in%20the%20North%20West%20Frontier%20of%20India%201849-1901.pdf
- 25 Ibid. see also Arthur Swinson, *The North-West Frontier: People and Events, 1849-1947* (London, Hutchinson Publishers, 1967).
- 26 See T. R. Moreman, *The Army in India and the Development of Frontier Warfare, 1849-1947*
- 27 Ibid
- 28 Black Mountain Expedition 1888, <https://www.britishbattles.com/north-west-frontier-of-india/black-mountain-expedition-1888/>. See also D. E. Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army 1860-1940* (London, United Kingdom: Macmillan Publishers. 1994).
- 29 Stewart, *The Khyber Rifles From the British Raj to Al Qaeda*,
- 30 *Black Mountain Expedition 1891*, accessed on June 12, 202, <https://www.britishbattles.com/north-west-frontier-of-india/black-mountain-expedition-1891/>
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Hugh Lewis Nevill, *Campaigns on the North- West Frontier* (London: John Murray, 1912), 104.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Malakand Rising 1897, <https://www.britishbattles.com/north-west-frontier-of-india/malakand-rising-1897/>
- 35 Ibid. see also L. James, *Imperial Rearguard: Wars of Empire, 1919-1985* (London: Brassey's Defense Publishers. 1988).
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 *Third Anglo-Afghan War*, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Anglo-Aafghan-Wars>
- 38 Javed Iqbal, *AN OVERVIEW OF BRITISH ADMINISTRATIVE SET-UP AND STRATEGY IN THE KHYBER 1849-1947* accessed on 09 April, 2024, <https://www.ipripak.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/art5javw11.pdf>
- 39 Ibid.



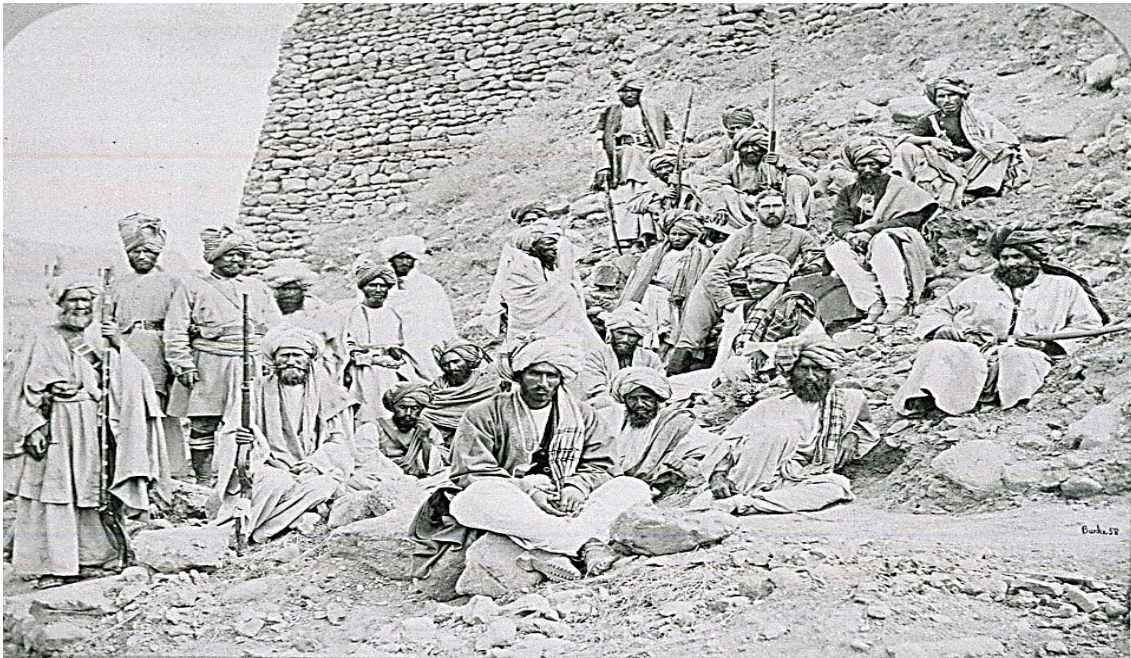
This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



A sentry of the Khyber Rifles stands guard on the frontier between British India and Afghanistan, 1946



Fort Attock. On Bank of Indus. 1898



Khyber Chiefs and Khans, Jamrud Fort, North West Frontier, 1878



61st King George's Own Pioneers, overlooking the Khyber Pass, 1919



Mountain Battery descending Springawi Pass, Afghanistan, 1879



British troops at Jatta Post in the Khyber, 1919