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Ethnicity, Territory and Federalism: The Wali Khan–Samad Khan Rift and the Politics of Balochistan, 1957–1970

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ABSTRACT

In Pakistan, the One Unit scheme was opposed by the National Awami Party (NAP) that brought together a wide range of regional and progressive political forces united by their opposition to centralized rule in the country. Abdul Wali Khan and Abdus Samad Khan Achakzai were two of the most prominent Pashtun leaders who held a political partnership despite being active in different localities. However, their cooperation was put to a test upon the abolishment of One Unit in 1970 when Balochistan re-emerged as a province, but with the Pashtun-majority areas of Balochistan having not been resolved. The present article explores the reasons behind the split between Wali Khan and Samad Khan and also places it in the context of ethnicity, territoriality and federalism in Pakistan. It relies heavily on the author's personal recollections, newspapers from the time, archival sources, political biographies, and secondary sources, and contends that this division is not a personal rivalry or ideological divide. Instead, it was a result of the clash of visions of Pashtun territorial representation and the NAP's efforts to reconcile Pashtun political demands with its balancing act with Baloch nationalist leadership. The case illustrates how resistance to centralization might bring together regional nationalist movements, but fail to resolve competing demands for boundaries, ethnic quotas, and regional organization.



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Introduction

One Unit was abolished in 1970 that resulted in a significant reorganization of the federal system of Pakistan. In 1955, One Unit was introduced which brought together the provinces and princely states of West Pakistan for administration, creating a constant opposition to One Unit from regional political groups who felt it was harmful to the autonomy of provinces and regional representation. In 1957, the groups coalesced into the National Awami Party (NAP) demanding abolition of the One Unit and provincial autonomy, which included Pashtun, Baloch, Sindhi and leftist political groups (Afzal, 2012; Mazari, 2000). Yet, in spite of this opposition to the centralization, NAP included political actors with notions of ethnicity, territory, and provincial reorganization that were not always compatible.

Abdul Wali Khan and Abdus Samad Khan Achakzai's political ties exemplify these tensions. Both were products of anti-colonial political traditions and had protested against British rule via Indian National Congress movements. Wali Khan's politics emerged out of Khudai Khidmatgar movement in the North-West Frontier Province while Samad Khan's politics were organised through Anjuman-i-Watan later Wror Pashtun in Balochistan. Their political paths intersected with their opposition to One Unit and later in NAP where regional autonomy was a common ground for cooperation. But in 1970 the former provinces came back and the political landscape in which this alliance had grown changed. The restoration of Balochistan, in particular, led to the raising of the question as to how to accommodate the large Pashtun population in Balochistan into the new provincial system.

This conflict of opinion resulted in the revelation of rival interpretations of Pashtun political territoriality. Samad Khan insisted that there should be political recognition of Pashtun majority territory with the abolition of One Unit and Wali Khan called for the restoration of Balochistan with cooperation with prominent Baloch leaders in NAP. There are two different explanations for the later rupture: contemporary and reflective. The

disagreement was said to arise from the opposition of Samad Khan to the incorporation of Pashtun areas into revived Balochistan, while details favorable to Samad Khan highlighted NAP's earlier promise to restructure provinces along ethnic lines (Tareen, 2006; Wali Khan 1998). The conflict thus extended beyond being just about two political leaders; it became an issue of territorial representation and the extent of inter-ethnic political alliances.

Previous studies have explored NAP in the context of provincial autonomy, regional nationalism, leftist politics and opposition to the central government. Research on Baloch and Pashtun nationalism also has covered the issues of centre-province relations and ethnic mobilization in Pakistan. However, the split between Wali Khan and Samad Khan has been comparatively less discussed as a separate issue pertaining to regional nationalism in politics. This article questions the reason for their split after the abolition of One Unit, when they were opposed to centralisation. It suggests that the split was caused by tensions over ethnic and territorial representation and political strategy in NAP. The differences were not an outcome of the restoration of Balochistan but rather an outcome of the restoration of Balochistan, wherein they were exposed because opposition to One Unit was a political goal that bound them together. This episode can thus be explored to gain insights into NAP's internal politics and the challenges of balancing ethnic demands, provincial boundaries, and federalism in Pakistan.

Literature Review and Analytical Framework

The National Awami Party (NAP) has a significant role in scholarship on regional nationalism, provincial autonomy and opposition politics in Pakistan. Himayatullah Yaqubi's *National Awami Party: Nature and Direction of Politics, 1957-1975* is a detailed study of the party's political development, ideology, leadership and intra-party conflicts. His account is especially important as it relates to Abdul Wali Khan and Abdus Samad Khan, and the differences between them in the

political reorganization of Pashtun areas after the abolishment of One Unit. The differences in territorial and ethnic issues continued to exist in NAP, but it was able to unite the regional and progressive political factions around common demands, foremost of which was provincial autonomy and opposition to central authority (Yaqubi, 2021).

Scholars of Pakistan's federal and party politics have discussed the wider political context in which NAP makes sense. Afzal (2001, 2012) Places NAP in the broader struggle for provincial autonomy and political representation and provides an important interpretation of the Wali Khan–Samad Khan disagreement Mazari (2000). From the perspective of a political actor, the variety of regional and ideological interests within opposition politics also shows up in Wali Khan's stance; a stance that he suggests was shaped by political calculation as well Talbot (2012).

The regional context for the conflict is provided by scholarship on Baloch and Pashtun nationalism, which illustrates how issues of territory, political power and relationship with the centre started to play a key role in the development of Baloch nationalism Axmann (2009). From the Pashtun point of view, interprets Samad Khan's resignation from NAP as a principled response to the party's lack of action on their pledge to reorganisation along ethnic lines within provinces (Tareen 2006, 2017). In contrast, Wali Khan's autobiographical account interprets the breakup as a clash over the restoration of Balochistan and the role of its Pashtun population in the province (Wali Khan, 1998).. These testimonies of participants and partisans are useful historical sources but their interpretations must be critically compared with contemporary political and archival evidence.

This article examines the rupture through the connected notions of ethnicity, territoriality and federalism. Ethnicity is considered as a potential source of political identity and collective claims to representation, and territoriality as a politics of translation of such claims into politically recognised geographical units. Federalism is the institutional space where these rival territorial

claims were negotiated. As such, the split between Wali Khan and Samad Khan highlights a core paradox of NAP: while its opposition to the central government may bring together Baloch and Pashtun nationalists, its commitment to provincial autonomy does not guarantee consensus on the boundaries of the provinces or the representation of various ethnic groups. When One Unit was abolished, this brought differences which a common struggle against centralization had previously suppressed.

Research Methodology

The present study is of qualitative historical nature which focuses on the political split between Abdul Wali Khan and Abdus Samad Khan in the National Awami Party (NAP) focusing on the events surrounding the abolition of One Unit in 1970. The study is based on primary and secondary sources, including archival material, contemporary newspapers, published works on NAP, Baloch and Pashtun nationalism and Pakistan's federal politics, as well as autobiographical writings of Wali Khan and Samad Khan. Political developments and public positions are reconstructed from contemporary newspapers, and later interpretations of the dispute from autobiographical and political writings.

Due to the varied political views in the sources used, the study does not regard them as "the truth" but rather uses source criticism and comparative reading to identify the specific sources. For instance, the above mentioned explanation of rupture is considered in relation to Wali Khan's retrospective explanation and Samad Khan's political stance, as well as the interpretations by the writers of the Pashtun nationalist view. These accounts are then contrasted with the work of Himayatullah Yaqubi, Rafiq Afzal, and other scholars in the field of the regional politics of Pakistan. This triangulation allows to differentiate between the immediate political disagreements, and the later interpretations of the conflict.

The analysis is thematic by ethnicity, territorial representation, federalism and coalition politics.

The study considers split not as an individual issue but a part of the evolving federal system in Pakistan and the competing territorial interests that emerged in NAP during the end of the One Unit system.

Historical Background and the Formation of NAP, 1955–1958

The establishment of the One Unit scheme in 1955 brought about an important change in the political dynamics between the state of Pakistan and the regional political movements of West Pakistan. The scheme was to achieve administrative uniformity between the eastern and western parts of the country by merging the provinces of Punjab, Sindh, the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), Balochistan and princely states into a single province called West Pakistan. To regional political elites, One Unit, however, meant the imposition of a more centralized rule on the provinces, at the cost of regional identity, autonomy and political representation. This opposition thus became a common political platform for Baloch, Pashtun, Sindhi and progressive political parties which had different regional interests and ideological orientations (Afzal, 2012; Mazari, 2000).

Abstracting from the politics of One Unit, there were Pashtun political movements opposed to it, such as the movement of Abdul Wali Khan and Abdus Samad Khan. Wali Khan was a successor of the political tradition of the *Khudai Khidmatgar* movement headed by Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Samad Khan's politics had matured in the anti-colonial struggle in Balochistan, first in *Anjuman-i-Watan* and then in *Wror Pashtun*. Both had political bases in different regional contexts, but opposed One Unit, which meant centralization. Political issues of particular interest to Samad Khan included Balochistan's constitutional status, and the political representation of its Pashtun population, while the leadership of *Khudai Khidmatgar* focused on reestablishing provincial autonomy, both in former NWFP (Tareen, 2010; Yaqubi, 2021).

Many regional and progressive groups in West Pakistan united under the banner of Pakistan

National Party (PNP) in their quest for a wider opposition front. These included the political elements of Khudai Khidmatgars, Wror Pashtun, Ustaman Gal, Azad Pakistan Party and Sindh Awami Mahaz (Mazari, 2000). In the meantime, there was a growing political tension within the Awami League in East Pakistan regarding foreign policy and Pakistan's adherence to the western security commitment. Those who did not agree with this orientation, including Maulana Abdul Hamid Bhashani, left the Awami League and joined the regional and leftist political groups of West Pakistan and formed the National Awami Party at Dhaka in 1957. The new party united political parties of both wings of Pakistan under one roof as the opposition.

NAP's political programme was a reflection of the concerns that had united these various groups. It demanded the abolition of One Unit, provincial autonomy, representative government and an independent foreign policy. Furthermore, the party also backed the reorganization of the constituent units of West Pakistan on the basis of ethnicity or language, which would later prove to be extremely important in the dispute between Wali Khan and Samad Khan (Yaqubi, 2021). At the time of its creation, however, opposition to One Unit proved to be a kind of common ground to hold differences over territorial consequences of this reorganization. The political collaboration was disrupted after martial law was declared in October 1958 and political activities were banned, regional leaders arrested. Samad Khan was jailed most of the period of Ayub Khan, and organizational activities of NAP were curtailed. However, this unresolved issue of ethnicity versus territory versus provincial autonomy lived on within the party's politics and resurfaced when political activity grew in the last years of Ayub Khan's regime.

NAP, One Unit and Competing Territorial Visions, 1958–1969

In October 1958, the party's organizational growth was hindered and the political activity of its regional leaders was curbed by the imposition of martial law. Abdus Samad Khan was arrested

immediately after the military coup, and spent most of Ayub Khan's tenure in jail, and Abdul Wali Khan was also imprisoned before being released in 1959. However, opposition to One Unit was a significant part of regional politics. The demands did not merely consist of a restoration of the former provinces, but were tied to the issues of provincial autonomy, ethnic identity, and political power distribution in the federation (Talbot, 2012; Yaqubi, 2021).

A political opposition to Ayub Khan started to grow in the 1960s, and NAP became an important element of the larger democratic movement. The party joined the Combined Opposition Parties which were in favor of Fatima Jinnah against Ayub Khan in Presidential Election 1965. Increasingly, internal ideological differences came to influence NAP. The Sino-Soviet split was the reason why the international communist movement was split and had an impact upon leftist politics in Pakistan. Maulana Abdul Hamid Bhashani was linked with pro-China tendency within NAP while pro-Soviet tendency was generally identified with Wali Khan faction. These disagreements eventually led to a split in the party, and in 1967 Wali Khan became president of NAP-Wali. The split showed the ideological diversity in NAP, but it didn't take away the territorial issues which had been there from the very inception of NAP (Yaqubi, 2021).

With the collapse of Ayub Khan government and the resurgence of political activity in 1969, these questions became more prominent. After getting out of the prison Samad Khan restarted his political activities and again worked with Wali Khan and Baloch leadership of NAP. The opposition to One Unit was strong, but when they agreed to its abolition, it did not imply they agreed to either the territorial system that would replace it, or the timing of the change. Samad Khan saw the Pashtun dominated regions of Balochistan as a part of a wider political and territorial Pashtun problem and demanded political link up of the Pashtun regions. Despite his backing of the Pashtun rights and the idea of provincial autonomy, Wali Khan was forced to work in a larger coalition under the umbrella of the NAP, which included some influential Baloch leaders

like Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo and Khair Bakhsh Marri. The territorial goals of these two nationalist camps thus began to overlap more and more in the same political party.

According to Yaqubi, Wali Khan and Samad Khan raised the issue of provincial reorganization based on ethnicity in 1969. In this report, Wali Khan said the question of new provinces could be put to Yahya Khan after the abolition of One Unit, and Samad Khan advised him to look into the political status of Pashtun areas in the new constitutional framework (Yaqubi, 2021). The exchange is important because, despite the fact that it happened after the formal restoration of the provinces, it indicates that there was a disagreement over territorial reorganization from the beginning.

The transition from Ayub Khan to Yahya Khan consequently changed the basis of NAP's internal politics. After the military government decided to abandon One Unit and restore the provinces, a position which was once a common cause for the Baloch and Pashtun nationalists, it became a bone of contention regarding representation and boundaries. For Samad Khan the conclusion of One Unit was the chance to settle the Pashtun territorial issue; for Wali Khan, provincial restoration was about balancing with the regional coalition of NAP. The outlines of the later break-up were therefore already in place by 1969: it was not a matter of contesting the centralized rule, but of the possible ways ethnicity and territories would be handled in the federal order which would succeed it.

The Abolition of One Unit and the Wali Khan-Samad Khan Rift, 1969-1970

In 1969, the political change from Ayub Khan to General Yahya Khan in the country changed the situation of the demand of provincial autonomy by the National Awami Party (NAP). One of the main demands around which the regional nationalist forces had mobilized since the mid-1950s was met by Yahya Khan's decision to dismantle One Unit and reestablish the former provinces. The change was especially important for Balochistan since it got full provincial status in

the reconstructed federal system. But the settlement also revealed an unsolved issue – if the restoration of Balochistan compensated for the political and territorial aspirations of its Pashtun population sufficiently. This came to be a major controversy between Abdul Wali Khan and Abdus Samad Khan and eventually led to Samad Khan's resignation from NAP (Yaqubi, 2021).

In this context, Wali Khan's retrospective narration introduces the restoration of Balochistan as the immediate context of the split. He remembered that he had been pressing for the abolition of One Unit and also demanded the right of Balochistan to become a full-fledged province. Baloch leaders like Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo, Khair Bakhsh Marri, Akbar Khan Bugti welcomed the decision, according to Wali Khan (Wali Khan, 1998). But not Samad Khan, he recalled that he had protested against a territorial set up of the Pashtuns inside a Baloch majority area (Khan, 2004). In response to this, Wali Khan pointed towards the deprivation of both Baloch and Pashtun in politics and stressed on the need of their continued cooperation. As a retrospective account by one of the principal actors, this narrative is valuable but cannot by itself establish either Samad Khan's motives or the full causes of the split.

The interpretation that attaches itself to Samad Khan's tradition of politics gives more weight to principle and earlier NAP's programme. Shukat Tareen (2006, 2017) believes that Samad Khan thought that if Balochistan is restored there should also be a settlement of Pashtun territorial issue as NAP promises to reorganize the political units according to ethnic and linguistic boundaries. From this angle, what was at stake was not the Baloch provincial autonomy but whether Pashtun demands for territorial representation were being dealt with on the same principle of ethnic autonomy that NAP had raised against One Unit. In the same way, the territorial issue of the Pashtun is something that was raised before the final abolition of One Unit, thus the issue was present before the immediate confrontation in 1970 (Yaqubi, 2021)

This controversy relating to representation in politics was also apparent in the Round Table Conference of 1969. Samad Khan's involvement later became an issue as Balochistan had a Baloch NAP leader and Wali Khan was seen as a Pashtun political player. For Samad Khan, whose political base was among the Pashtuns of Balochistan, there was a basic question to be answered – could Pashtun interests in Balochistan be adequately represented by the Baloch provincial leadership or by a Pashtun leader whose primary political base was in the former NWFP? It was thus an intraparty matter of representation and not just a clash of personalities (Tareen, 2017).

The conflict was further complicated by political strategy. Afzal (2001) states that Wali Khan had good grounds to keep the cooperation with Baloch leadership of NAP. Backing the territorial reorganization that would jeopardize the unity of the newly re-established province of Balochistan would risk losing Bizenjo, Marri and other Baloch allies whose support was critical to NAP's standing in national politics. Wali Khan's policies can thus be seen as an effort to balance Pashtun nationalism with a wider regional alliance. Samad Khan looked at the issue from another political perspective: the issue of ethnic representation was inextricably linked to the status of Pashtun majority areas in Balochistan.

Territorial principle, representation and coalition politics thus interacted and created the disagreement. The system of One Unit, which served as a common enemy for the Baloch and Pashtun nationalists was abolished, however there was no mutually agreed territorial settlement. This can be seen from the central perspective as restoration of the provincial autonomy, and from the regional perspective as incomplete recognition of ethnic claims. Samad Khan later broke off his relationship with NAP and founded NAP-Pakhtunkhwa. The split was a sign of one of the basic weaknesses of NAP's regionalist coalition: consensus against centralisation was greater than consensus about how ethnic communities and territories were to be structured once the centralised system was broken down.

Discussion: Ethnicity, Territoriality and the Limits of Regionalist Coalition Politics

The split between Abdul Wali Khan and Abdus Samad Khan shows that the regional nationalist discourse in Pakistan is not solely a centre–province dichotomy. Although opposition to centralization was a key theme in NAP politics, regional movements also included actors who had specific interests in the region. These differences were temporarily muted by One Unit which gave Baloch, Pashtun, Sindhi and other regional forces a common institutional ‘enemy’. The abolition of this changed the political picture, and with the possibility of provincial restoration, it was no longer a question of opposition to centralization, but of the form of territorial autonomy.

When it comes to the territorial programme, the dispute also shows that shared ethnic identity did not automatically result in a common territorial programme. Both Wali Khan and Samad Khan were active in Pashtun nationalist politics, but the political arena in which they moved was different. The main political platform of Wali Khan was the former NWFP and Samad Khan represented a Pashtun constituency in Balochistan. But their conflict was not about the existence of Pashtun identity per se, but about how Pashtun identity could be translated into territorial and institutional representation. Wali Khan's political line was more focused on balancing Pashtun claims and the interests of Pashtun allies in NAP while Samad Khan's job had greater emphasis on resolving Pashtun majorities areas as part of the post-One Unit settlement (Afzal, 2001, Yaqubi, 2021).

This conflict exposes the limits of regionalist coalition politics. NAP might stand in for a number of ethnic movements, whose short-term goals were similar, such as provincial autonomy and resistance to One Unit. When territorial claims of constituent groups overlapped, difficulties arose. Provincial autonomy and ethnic autonomy were not the same thing in Balochistan: its restoration constituted political recognition for the leadership of Baloch nationalism, but not necessarily for Pashtun concerns with representation and

territory. The same federal arrangement may thus be considered political accommodation for one regional movement, but incomplete from another regional movement's point of view.

The breakup between Wali Khan and Samad Khan thus exemplifies a wider problematic in federal politics in Pakistan. Decentralization alone does not necessarily solve the political competition among ethnic groups within provinces, but it can help to minimize the conflict between centre and provinces. Federal arrangements are not only reliant on the centre-provincial division of power but also on the negotiation of territory, identity and representation within the provinces. The NAP experience, therefore, demonstrates that coalitions of regionalists based on opposition to centralization are still at risk if the agreement on autonomy is not paralleled by consensus on the territorial and political interpretation of this autonomy.

Conclusion

The rupture between Abdul Wali Khan and Abdus Samad Khan in 1970 was not merely a personal disagreement between two Pashtun leaders, nor can it be explained solely through ideological differences within the National Awami Party. It was a response to an underlying conflict between the accommodation of ethnicity, territory and political representation in the federal structure of Pakistan. Opposition to One Unit had given Wali Khan, Samad Khan and the Baloch leadership of NAP a common political goal. Its abolition, however, transformed the basis of their cooperation by bringing previously unresolved questions of provincial boundaries and ethnic representation to the forefront.

For Samad Khan, Balochistan restoration without a settlement of the Pashtun territorial question left a major evident omission in the settlement of the ethnic question. In contrast, Wali Khan acted in the interests of Pashtuns in a regionalist coalition where engaging Baloch leaders was politically relevant. It was thus not a difference in the commitment to Pashtun identity, but rather a difference in the ways of translating ethnic identity into territorial and institutional practices.

The episode has broader implications in the context of federalism and regional nationalism in Pakistan. The case of NAP shows that the issue of ethnic political questions is not solved by decentralization and provincial autonomy per se, if the territory of the provinces includes overlapping ethnic identity and representation claims. Not only did the abolition of One Unit solve a key grievance of the provinces against the centre, but it also revealed the faultlines of the regional coalition against One Unit. The Wali Khan-Samad Khan split therefore demonstrates what is always a difficulty in multi-ethnic federalism: political accommodation must be achieved not only by the delegation of power from the centre, but also by competing for territory, representation and competing ethnic interests within the provinces themselves.

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