

Published:  
March 12, 2025

## **Role of Sir Roos-Keppel Conflict, Confrontation and Compromise During World War First: A Historical Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the pivotal role of Sir George Roos-Keppel during the First World War, focusing on his administration in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and his efforts to manage conflict, confrontation, and compromise amid global and regional tensions. As Chief Commissioner and later Lieutenant Governor, Roos-Keppel operated at a critical juncture of imperial strategy and tribal autonomy. Faced with the dual challenges of maintaining British control over the volatile frontier and preventing Afghan-German-Turkish influence among the

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Pashtun tribes, Roos-Keppel adopted a nuanced policy that combined military preparedness with diplomatic engagement. When First World War started in Europe, Roos-Keppel was on his official leave in England and the post of Chief Commissioner was in the hand of Mr. J.S. Donald, who retained the post up to 28 January, 1915 when Roos-Keppel again resumed his duty. Another threat to the Indian British Government was from Afghanistan, because the Italo-Turkish and the Balkan wars already developed a belief in Afghanistan and India that the Western World trying to vanish Islam from the surface of earth. The study explores how Roos-Keppel navigated tribal unrest, resisted pan-Islamic agitation, and utilized traditional tribal institutions such as jirgas to mediate disputes. His fluency in Pashto and deep understanding of tribal dynamics allowed him to negotiate compromises that averted wider rebellion and ensured a relatively stable frontier during the war. By blending colonial administrative authority with localized customs, Roos-Keppel exemplified a model of conflict resolution rooted in cultural intelligence and pragmatic governance. This historical analysis argues that his leadership during World War I not only protected British strategic interests but also left a lasting imprint on frontier policy in South Asia.

**Keywords:** Role of Sir Roos-Keppel, Conflict, Confrontation, World War: Historical Analysis

## Introduction

Keep on as good terms as possible with the tribes that are behaving well, freely to use force in crushing any incipient outbreak, to encourage and support the people of the districts in resisting the trans-border raids and generally to carry on as well as possible until the cessation of other preoccupations enables us to initiate a very definite policy of setting our house in order.

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Roos-Keppel 13 April, 1916.<sup>1</sup>

When First World War started in Europe, Roos-Keppel was on his official leave in England and the post of Chief Commissioner was in the hand of Mr. J.S. Donald, who retained the post up to 28 January, 1915 when Roos-Keppel again resumed his duty.<sup>2</sup> According to him, when the War started the people of NWFP were least bothered about it. In his views, there were some people who even did not hear the name of Germany and had no idea of her might. It is impossible for them to take interest in an event which is beyond their understanding.<sup>3</sup> After the entry of Turkey to the War, brought great changes in the mind of Frontier People. There are rumor in circulation and generally believed stories that the Kaiser and the German nation had embraced Islam and it is the time of great 'Islamic Renaissance.' The irreconcilable tribal *mullahs*, at once started to preach the message of *jihad* among the tribes. The mullahs from Afghanistan arguing that it is the moral duty of every Muslim to support the Sultan of Turkey 'the *Khalifa*' of Islam. They believed that, the War is an opportunity for Afghanistan to invade India with the help of Turkey and Persia. These *mullahs* assumed that the Indian armed forces left for Europe and the rest of forces would be left very soon. This is the reason that, the Government

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<sup>1</sup> Christian Tripodi, *Edge of Empire: The British Political Officer and Tribal Administration on the North-West Frontier 1877-1947* (London: Ashgate publishing Limited, 2011), 110-111.

<sup>2</sup> General Report on Border Affairs in the North West Frontier Province for the year 1914-15 (Confidential), Miscellaneous Record II, S. No. 764, Provincial Archives Peshawar, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

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called their retired army personal back on employment.<sup>4</sup> Another threat to the Indian British Government was from Afghanistan, because the Italo-Turkish and the Balkan wars already developed a belief in Afghanistan and India that the Western World trying to vanish Islam from the surface of earth. When First World War started, so many Afghan considered it an opportunity to support Turkey, against the Allied Powers. The Viceroy Lord Harding, also realized the gravity of the situation and demanded a strong army in NWFP.<sup>5</sup> The German Plan was also to divert the war front from Europe to Middle East and South Asia. The German Foreign Minister Max Von Oppenheim, was working on such a plan to stir up *Jihad* in the area to sweep the British influence. With these intentions, the German made preparation and a team (also including Turks) under the command of Niedermayer and Hentig, was set up in January 1915. In August the Mission entered Afghanistan. They made promises to help them with the German troops, guns and other military equipment. They also promised with the Afghan authorities in Herat that, in the case of German victory the new borders of Afghanistan would be Mumbai in the South and Samarkand in the North.<sup>6</sup> Despite these promises, firstly, the Afghan Government was reluctant to allow the Mission to travel Kabul,

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<sup>4</sup> General Report on Border Affairs in the North West Frontier Province for the year 1915-16 (Confidential), Miscellaneous Record II, S. No. 765, Provincial Archives Peshawar, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher M. Wyatt, *Afghanistan and the Defense of the Empire: Diplomacy and Strategy during the Great Game* (London: I.B. Tauri's 1939), 196.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 204-205.

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but lastly, it was permitted and the Mission entered to Kabul in September 1915. Amir Habibullah Khan along with his family members avoided to meet the Mission. His brother Nasrullah and his son Inayatullah were urging to join the Central Powers in the support of Turkey. The *Amir* met the Mission on 16 of October 1915. The Mission also brought a letter of Anwar Pasha, the war minister of Turkey in which he requested the Afghan help. The *Amir* make them realized that, he already declared his neutrality in the war, and it would be very early to break his promises with the British Indian Government. In these circumstances, the Amir Habibullah was facing considerable pressure from his own court. Roos-Keppel informed the Central Government that, in Afghanistan the people denouncing Habibullah as *kafir* and the British Agent. He further explained that, there are also rumors from the Afghan army that, if the *Amir*, would not lead them in *Jihad*, they will chose other to lead them. As the *Amir's* brother Nasurullah Khan, who openly supported the cause of Central Powers. Inayatullah, the eldest son of *Amir* and Nasurullah, sent a letter to the tribal *mullahs* and Maliks and called for Jihad against the British in the coming summer.<sup>7</sup> In these circumstances, Roos-Keppel's primary task was to safeguard the British interest in those areas where the British administration was weak, and was the possibility of resentment in future against the British Indian Government. Keeping in mind this threat, he conducted a survey of tribal agencies

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<sup>7</sup> Christopher M. Wyatt, *Afghanistan and the Defense of the Empire: Diplomacy and Strategy during the Great Game*, 206.

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and was confident that at the major parts of the Province, the Government interest were secure. But he feared that, possible encounter may be from the Black Mountain tribes of Hazara region, from upper Mohmands and from the Afridis of Khyber due to their past relation with the Government. Apart from the above, the Mehsud having unending hostilities towards Government.<sup>8</sup> Roos-Keppel was right in his grievances and really some resistance were showed by few elements in the aforementioned tribes, which is describe in the subsequent paragraphs.

### **The Black Mountain Tribes During the First World War**

The Black Mountain tribes having an old rivalry with the British Government. The man who firstly started a Jihad Movement in the area was Syed Ahmad Shaheed Barailvi. The aims of his follower was to protect the Muslim interest from the atrocities and innovations of the Sikhs and British rulers.<sup>9</sup> The British Indian Government launched several expeditions in the area, firstly in 1852 than in 1853, 1863, 1868 and 1888. So, this was a fear felt by Roos-Keppel from the Black Mountain tribes during the World War First. To control the Black Mountain tribes, a detachment of Gurkhas Regiment was stationed at the foot of mountains in Ogai

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<sup>8</sup> Christian Tripodi, *Edge of Empire*, 110.

<sup>9</sup> For detail see Altaf Qadir, *Sayyid Ahmad Barailvi, His Movement and Legacy from the Pukhtun Perspective* ( New Delhi: SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd, 2015).

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(Presently Batagram District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). Roos-Keppel informed the secretary of State for India in these words;

The Black Mountain tribes, from whom trouble may be expected from time to time were kept in order by our good friend the *Nawab* of Amb. The Mada Khel section showed some signs of restlessness but the Nawab conducted a short and victorious campaign against them and forced them to surrender, unconditionally. The Nawab also kept in check the Hindustani Fanatics (the follower of Syed Ahmad Barrailvi) and when some outlaws living with them slipped through and murdered two British officers in Baragali, he succeeded in effecting their arrest in his own state and handed them over to the district authorities for punishment.<sup>10</sup>

Over all except from some minor developments the Hazara region was peaceful and the government was successful in maintaining the peace in this critical juncture of War.

### **The Afridis during the First World War**

The former Political Agency of Khyber, is bound in the North by Kabul river and Safed Koh, from the Eastern side by Peshawar in the South by Aka Khel and

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<sup>10</sup> General Report on Border Affairs in the North West Frontier Province for the year 1917-18 (Confidential), Miscellaneous Record, S. No. 766, Provincial Archives Peshawar, 4.

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Ourakzai territories and the West by Durand Line, an international boundary with Afghanistan.<sup>11</sup> The Famous Khyber Pass is situated in Khyber, which was a historical route of invader into India. The main tribe of Khyber is the Afridis with six sub clans i-e Kambar Khel, Kamrai Khel, Kuki Khel, Malik Din Khel, Sipah Khel and Zakka Khel.<sup>12</sup> The first connection of the British came with the Afridis in the First Anglo Afghan war of 1839-1842. From 1849 to 1898 the British Indian Government launched eight punitive expedition against the Afridis tribes in which the government received 1287 casualties. Up to 1908, only four expeditions were sent against the Zakka Khels clan.<sup>13</sup> The Zakka Khels of the Bazar Valley in Tirah were the most important and powerful clans among the Afridis. Their inhabitants run from Safed Koh to Peshawar border. The first agreement of the Government with the Zakka Khels, come during the Indian Mutiny of 1857. When two chiefs of the Zakka Khels Adalat Khan and Bostan Khan agreed on the condition that, they would be allowed free access to the settle territory. In return, they would not join with the enemies of the government. Up to the second Anglo Afghan War of 1878-80, the British and the Afridis relations were cordial. In 1878, when the British Indian forces lift for Afghanistan and were passing from the Afridis areas the Zakka

<sup>11</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer of N.W.F.P.*, (Lahore: Sang-i-Meel Publications, reprint, 1991), 231.

<sup>12</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer of N.W.F.P.*, (Lahore: Sang-i-Meel Publications, reprint, 1991), 232.

<sup>13</sup> C. Collin Davies, *The Problem of The North West Frontier, 1890-1908* (London: Curzon Press, 1932), 136.



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Khels attacked them and eventually, the Government sent two expeditions in 1878 and 1879 respectively.<sup>14</sup> Under the Treaty of Gandamak, the British Indian Government took the control of the Khyber Pass and created the Agency of Khyber in 1879. On 17 of February 1881, the Afridis clans along with Loargi Shinwaris of Landi Kotal, agreed to take the responsibility of the protection of the Khyber Pass and would not keep any relation with Afghanistan. In return, the Government recognized their independence under this agreement tribal levies *Jazailchis*<sup>15</sup> was raised paid from the Government treasury for the protection of Khyber Pass. The Government also granted allowances of 87540 annually, conditioned with the peaceful conduct of the Afridis. In the uprising of 1897-98, in different parts of the Frontier areas, the Afridis were suppressed under the Tirah Expeditionary Force commended by Sir William Lockhart.<sup>16</sup> In October 1898, the Government agreed with the Afridis to settle their dispute through a representative *Jirgah*, which was successful until 1908. In this agreement, it was also decided that, the Afridis would not connect any foreign relation; and would keep the Khyber pass open for the caravans. They would not show any offences in the Pass and would obey the terms of the agreement. The Government also restored their former allowances and a

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>15</sup> Later on under the Curzon Scheme of Frontier defense, the *Jazalchis* were renamed Khyber Rifles under the command of British officers.

<sup>16</sup> Collin Davies, *The Problems of North West Frontier Province*, 137-38.

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reward of three months were granted to the *Jirgah*.<sup>17</sup> From 1902-1909, Multan Khan an Afridis from Zakka Khel clans, was a constant headache for the British authorities. He thoroughly attacked the settle districts of Peshawar, Kohat and usually looted the Hindus and Sikhs shopkeepers and killed a number of British subjects.<sup>18</sup> Roos-Keppel who at that time was the Political Agent of Khyber Agency, remarked in the following words;

Every man, woman and child in the clan looks upon those who commit raids, murders and robberies in Peshawar or Kohat as heroes and champions. They are the crusaders of the nation; they depart with the good wishes and prayers of all, and are received on their return after a successful raid with universal rejoicings and congratulations. . . . Year after year the evil has grown, and each year the necessity for punishing the Zakka Khel has become more pressing. Circumstances, larger questions of policy, and the natural dislike of Government to strong measures, have saved the clan from the punishment which it so richly deserve.<sup>19</sup>

In January 1908, the gang of Multan Khan attacked a Hindu banker Chela Ram, and looted one lac of rupees from his house. A deputation of Hindus approached to

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>18</sup> Muhammad Azam, *Dray Nangiali, Kamal Khan, Multan Khan aw Ajab Khan Afriday* (Peshawar: Hamid Press, 1973), 36-63.

<sup>19</sup> Collin Davies, *The Problem of The North West Frontier Province*, 145-149.

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the local authorities for justice. After a lengthy discussion, the Government decided to send an expedition against the Zakka Khels. The results of this expedition was that, Major General James Willcocks compelled the Zakka Khel on terms. The exemplary conduct of Khyber Refiles and other Afridis clans, the active support of Roos-Keppel, the Political Agent were the main causes of this success. On February 1908, a *Jirgah* of the Afridis elders accepted the responsibility for the Zakka Khel future good conduct and the next day the forces evocated the Bazar valley. After the Zakka Khel expedition, the relation of the Government and Afridis were free of strain for some time.<sup>20</sup> When the First World War started, Roos-Keppel great concern was for the Afridis, the most organized and largest nearly 60,000 fighting men at that time. Although, they were showing some friendly relations after the Zakka Khel expedition of 1908. There was a possibility that, the Afridis who having not only fighting power and a great influence, their non-cooperation can drew the neighbor tribes. Then this widening coalition was beyond from the Government control within limited military resources. The British Indian Government estimated the total fighting men in the frontier some 400,000 which was two times more than the Indian forces. A part from the above strength, the Khyber Pass is also located in the Afridi's area of influence. The extension of the Afridis, area was a real threat for Peshawar. In these circumstances, the greatest

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<sup>20</sup> Lal Baha, N. W. F.P. *Administration Under British Rule 1901-1919* ( Islamabad: National Commission on Historical and Cultural Research, 1978), 65.

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immediate priority of Roos- Keppel was to maintain good relations with the Afridis.<sup>21</sup> His concern for this tribes was of central importance for the stability of the Frontier. He implemented a policy of pragmatism. In this policy, he was fully supported by the native political officer Sir Sahibzada Abdul Qayum Khan, who was considered a best political officer in India. Roos-Keppel adopted a simple policy to bribe the Afridis and made them pro-British. In this connection, he requested the Viceroy Lord Harding, to double the allowances of the Afridis which he accepted. By doing this, Roos-Keppel informed Harding that, the Afridis are having good relation with the Government and are ready for such a job to attack Mohmands or Mehsuds voluntarily in their support. Then he assure Lord Harding that, as you safeguarded relations with Afghanistan as I do it with the Afridis.<sup>22</sup> In 1915, Roos-Keppel called a representative *Jirgah* of the Afridis tribes in the famous Victoria Hall in Peshawar, where he publicly announced to increase their allowances on the condition of their loyalty. This announcement was received with great satisfaction and Roos-Keppel hoped that, the behaviors of the Afridis would be friendly in the future.<sup>23</sup> In 1914, there were about more than two thousand Afridis in the Indian army but June 1915, over six hundreds of them deserted in

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<sup>21</sup> Christian Tripodi, *Edge of Empire*, 110-111.

<sup>22</sup> Christian Tripodi, *Edge of Empire*, 110-111.

<sup>23</sup> Lal Baha, *N.W.F.P. Administration Under British Rule*, 85.

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the supports of Turkey.<sup>24</sup> Although, the majority of the deserted army personal belonged to the Afridi tribes but they did not show any active hostility towards the British Indian Government. Their only grievance against the government, was the demand of the increase of their allowances. The governmental allowances for the other tribes were conditioned with their friendship. But here the case of the Afridis, were different because their allowances were granted in lieu of the tolls of the Khyber Pass. Roos Keppel told the Foreign Secretary of India that, the Afridis demand having a moral claim to an increase in their allowances. The government sanctioned it on first February 1915, and doubled the allowances which were formally eighty thousand.<sup>25</sup> The most serious attempt to mobilize the Afridis in the War was made in Tirah where two Turkish missionaries, Farid Bag and Nizam Bag, with the collaboration of Mir Mast Afridi,<sup>26</sup> were busy to mobilize the whole Afridi tribe for a holy war. This Turkish band enlisted about 400 Afridis recruits, in which many of them were those who deserted from the Indian army. These development divided the whole Afridis clan into two factions i.e. the ‘Sarkar Party’ and the ‘Kabul party.’<sup>27</sup> During 1917, when the Government sent an expedition against the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>25</sup> General Report on Border Affairs in the North West Frontier Province for the year 1915-16 (Confidential), Miscellaneous Record II, S. No. 765, Provincial Archives Peshawar, 1-2.

<sup>26</sup> Mir Mast was from Qambar Khel clan of the Afridi tribe and was deserted from the Indian Army in France and then he joined the Turkish mission.

<sup>27</sup> Javid Iqbal, “*Khyber Pass its Geography and History*” ( PhD diss., Area Study Centre University of Peshawar, 2005), 275.

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Mehsuds of South Waziristan, these Turk missionaries in Tirah along with their Afghan supporters and the Indian revolutionaries in Kabul<sup>28</sup> made struggle to induce the Afridis for the support of the Mehshuds. But they were not much successful, only one man, Malik Khan Bahadur Yar Muhammad Khan offered his services for the Turks in Tirah. They also visited Jalalabad and offered his services to Nasurullah Khan and declared himself the leader of Anti-British party among the Afridis. This was his reaction because he had been removed from the *Maliki* on the unanimous request of his clan Malikdin Khel. But the loyal Kuki Khel along with the other Afridis clans made a *Lashkar* under Malik Zaman Khan and attacked the Village in Tirah in which the Turks and their Afghan Supporters were residing. The two Turks were arrested and were sent to Kabul where on the order of the *Amir* they were re-arrested. This act made the Afridis extremely unpopular in Afghanistan.<sup>29</sup> In the retaliation of their enthusiastic services the Government of India sanctioned a bonus allowance of one year for the entire Afridi tribe. Roos Keppel informed the Secretary of the Government of British India that, the attitude

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<sup>28</sup> In August 1915, the famous Indian freedom fighters Molvi Barakat Ullah and Mehendra Pratab reached to Kabul where they were joined by *Mulana* Obaidullah Sindhi. They formed a provisional Government of India, this was the 'Silk Letter Plot' which was discovered by the Government of India in August 1916. This group made an alliance with the Turko German Mission in Kabul and demanded from the Amir of Afghanistan to kept close contact with the *Mujahiddeen* in the tribal area.

<sup>29</sup> General Report on Border Affairs in the North West Frontier Province for the year 1917-18, 3.

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of the Afridis was a great concern for us but in spite of all attempt they had shown no signs of wavering in their allegiance.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Mohmands during the First World War**

The Mohmands were the allies of the Afghanistan Government since the time of Ahmad Shah Abdali. After him, the Afghan Amirs regularly paid allowances to the Mohmands tribes through their chiefs selected by the Afghan Amirs. Apart from this, the Mohmand's two sub-tribes the Tarakzai and Halimzai, having a large *jagir* on the Peshawar border which was annexed by the British, when they took the control of Peshawar in 1849. To recover this lost *jagir*, they started a hostile attitude towards the British Indian Government. In this connection, the British undertook punitive expedition in the Mohmand territory in 1851, 1852 and 1854. In the Indian Mutiny of 1857, the Mohmands enthusiastically took part in the trouble to recover their lost *jagir*. This time the British Government used political tactics and promises to restore the lost *jagir* to them. Thus in 1859, the Government returned the *jagir* of the Tarakzai Mohmands. In 1864, the Mohmand attacked the fort of Shabakadar and the Government launched their fourth expedition. During the Second Anglo-Afghan War, the Mohmand constantly attacked the British line of troops for Afghanistan and again the British were compelled to send a punitive expedition in

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

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1880. The Durand Line Agreement of 1893, divided the Mohmands between the British Indian Government and Afghanistan . This division was not acceptable to the Mohmands and again they wholeheartedly took part in the uprising of 1897.<sup>31</sup>

The Mohmands were generally quiet, after the disturbance of 1897-98. When the Government launched an expedition against the Zakka Khel Afridi clans in 1908. The *mullahs* in the Mohmands considered a best opportunity to attack the British and they started to organized a Mohmand *Lashkar*, but it was very late because the *Lashkar* failed to give assistance to the Zakka Khel.<sup>32</sup> Realizing the gravity of the situation in Mohmand, the Government alert their forces and on 23 April 1908, Major General Willcocks pulled back a mixed Afghan and Mohmands *Lashkar* at Sardar Ghari and Matta. In May 1908, the Government invited a Mohmand *Jirgah* , but the Mohmand *maliks* refused to come. The Viceroy of India Lord Minto instructed Willcocks to march against the Mohmands. This was purely a punitive expedition and less than a month, the Mohmands agreed to surrender before the Government terms.<sup>33</sup> In September 1908, Roos-Keppel received a Mohmands *jirgah* in which the *maliks* presented a list of demands including the increase of allowances and the release of Mohmands prisoners. The Government then restored their allowances which were stopped from long time. After this, the

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<sup>31</sup> Lal Baha, *Administration of NWFP under British Rule*, 67-69.

<sup>32</sup> Lal Baha, *Administration of NWFP under British Rule*, 67-69.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 74.



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Mohmand remained peaceful till the start of the First World War.<sup>34</sup> Due to the aforementioned developments, Roos-Keppel was aware of any possible revolt and opposition from the Mohmands during the War. After the start of the First World War, the first attack launched by Mohmands in November 1914, when Malik Muhasal from the Koda Khel section of the Mohmands attacked Kangra village in the Peshawar District (Presently in Charsada). In January 1915, the same leader attacked Shakangarh and killed five villagers and wounded four. In February the Halimzai, Tarakzai, Isa Khel and Burhan Khel *Jirgah* met with the acting Chief Commissioner Mr. J.S Donald. After the *Jirgah*, reports were received from the Mohmands that, the Mahasal is in difficulty to organized a *Jihadi Lashkar* for next attack. Roos-Keppel then reported that, five more attacks were occurred at the beginning of January 1915. Some *mullahs* in Mohmands visited Gandab and burnt the houses of those who were the supporters of Government. The leading *mullahs* were the Chaknawar *Mullah*, the Babra *Mullah* and several other trying to prepare the people for jihad. Mir Sahib Jan Badshah an Afghan subject persuaded Muhasal that, he received order for *jihad* from the *Amir*, which the *Amir* strongly denied. The Chaknawar *Mullah*, continued his efforts at Hazarnao and Chardeh in Afghanistan side to organize a *Lashkar* and attack the Mohmand area belonged to

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 76.

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British Government.<sup>35</sup> In the beginning of April 1915, the Chaknawar *Mullah*, managed to arrange some three thousand followers to attack the British territory. Similar efforts were being made by the *mullahs* in Tirah and Orakzai but without any success. However the Chaknawar *Mullah*, invaded the British territory with the help of four thousand Mohmands, a few miles away from Shabkader. They occupied a Village known as Hafiz Kor. A British contingent was sent from the Shabkadar Fort, under the command of Major General Young. For some time they resisted, due to which the shells fire done considerable damage to the houses. On the next day they retreated from Hafiz Kor.<sup>36</sup> The Babra *Mullah*,<sup>37</sup> a more important as compare to his contemporary Chaknawar, refused to join him in the attack because he had received orders from the *Amir* of Afghanistan to remain neutral. The Chaknawar *Mullah* strongly condemned the act of the Babra *Mullah* hand accused him to get bribed from the British to create dissensions among the Mohmands. This accusation made Babra's position dubious in the mind of people

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<sup>35</sup> General Report on Border Affairs in the North West Frontier Province for the year 1914-15 (Confidential), Miscellaneous Recort II, S.No. 764, Provincial Archives Peshawar, 4.

<sup>36</sup> General Report on Border Affairs in the North West Frontier Province for the year 1915-16 (Confidential), Miscellaneous Record II, S.No. 765, Provincial Archives Peshawar, 2.

<sup>37</sup> The actual name of Babra Mulla was Syed Amir Jan and was born in 1855 an a Village Lebnai, in the Charmung tehsil of the tribal District of Bajaur. He belonged to the Salarzai tribe of Bajaur. He completed his religious education in Asmar, Afghanistan. When he return from Afghanistan so, he stayed for a long time in Babra in Charmang, that why he is popularly known as the Babra Mullah. Throughout his life he invited the people of Malakand, Bajaur and Muhmands for *jihad* against the British Government. He died in December 1927.

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as all of the *mullahs* of Muhmand and Bajaur were preaching *Jihad* and Babra *Mullah* remained neutral. There were also rumors that, the Turkish and the German forces had been reached to the western border of Afghanistan. These rumors exalted the unrest prevailing situation in the tribal area. The Babra *Mullah* who had for some time opposed the fighting now defiantly joined the war party. He proclaimed and announced a Holy War against the British in the coming June of 1915. But those days the Muhmands were quarreling among themselves and the Babra *mullah* failed to raise a *Lashkar*. Most of the Khans in Bajaur had a strong desire for *jihad* the epidemic of cholera intervened in their designs. The majority waited to the end of cholera, only one *Mullah*, the Gujar *Mullah* of Jandool raised a *Lashkar* and started journey towards Chakdara, through the Panjkora Bridge. The Dir levies fought well and prevented the Gujar *Mullah Lashkar* to cross the river. The Khan Sahib Muhammad Yar Khan, the Assistant of Political Agent in Dir State with the help of small levies, suddenly attacked the *Mullah Lashkar* and killed him. Some were captured and the *Lashkar* dispersed.<sup>38</sup>

### **The Mehsuds during the First World War**

A few months before from the start of First World War, the Mehsud killed Major Dodd, the Political Agent of Wana, Captain Brown the second command of South Waziristan militia and Lieutenant Hickie of the Royal Artillery and three other men

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

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of Frontier Constabulary. The assassinator was the personal orderly of Major Dodd. The investigation were carried out and it was found that the accident was the result of tribal planning against the Government. In May the Chief Commissioner interviewed a Mehsud *jirgah*. The Mehsud *Maliks* were willing to hear the terms offered by the Government. The Government demands from the *jirgah* was to surrender three relatives of the assassinator and the suspension of the Mehsud allowance. British Indian Government passed the rest of year with great satisfaction and the Mehsuds remained quiet and peaceful. The son of *Mullah Powindah* and his secretary Fazal Din and Abul Hakim tried their best to prepare the tribes for a uprising. In this connection they visited Khost, Kabul and with the support of some afghans they targeted some Isolated areas of Bannu and Dera Ismail Khan. The Government sent Frontier Constabulary from Bannu and a Brigade from Tank. This convinced the tribes that the Government is ready to encounter any possible threat.<sup>39</sup>In the beginning of 1915, the Mehsuds and Wazirs were peaceful, although there were a large number of forces in momentum. In May 7<sup>th</sup>, the Mehsud surrendered two brothers of Sarfaraz Khan from Bohlolzai clan, who murdered Major Dodd. But this inclination proved a short one when in October the Mehsud sent an ultimatum to attack the Sarwakai Fort and the Gomal posts and ultimately

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<sup>39</sup> General Report on Border Affairs in the North West Frontier Province for the year 1914-15.

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attacked were made over troops and Militia.<sup>40</sup> A part from this the Mehsud frequently attacked the settle District of Dera Ismail Khan. In 1916, the Mehsud attacked Dera Ismail Khan, 129 times in which they killed 35 and wounded 42 citizen. They captured 70 men for the sack of many. Other valuable property which they looted including camels, horses , cattle and 29 rifles were the worth of Rs,146012. Even they burnt the haystack and their houses.<sup>41</sup> Roos-Keppel remarks in these words; “citing the history of Dera Ismail Khan as one long tale of rapine and outrage that in the Northern half the people were endeavoring in despair to sell their property and leave the country.” He further added “the insecurity of life, property and honor in the districts bordering on Waziristan made it difficult to understand why the people had not moved *en masse* across the Indus, and he referred to the supper-human but fruitless efforts made by the Government.”<sup>42</sup>

### **The Role of Roos-Keppel in Military Recruitment**

In January 1915, the total number of man power in the military services from NWFP were higher than of any province of British India. Their number in various branches were 18,228. The cis-frontier soldiers were 10,056 while the rest of 5,437

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<sup>40</sup> General Report on Border Affairs in the North West Frontier Province for the year 1915-16, 6.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Diwan Chand Obhari, *The Evolution of North west Frontier Province* (Peshawar: Saeed Book Bank, n.d.), 93.

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were from trans-frontier territory. One hundred and twenty five were serving in the ‘Imperial Service Troops’ and 2,610 were attached with the transport services.<sup>43</sup>

When the First World War started and Turkey joined the War so, the Government was informed that the trans-frontier soldiers are not willing to go on field services and a large number of them deserted from the army, majority of whom were the Afridis, Mohmands and Mehsuds. In March 1916, this number reached to more than 22 percent of the total serving soldiers from the trans-frontier. The Viceroy informed the Secretary of State, that 180 soldiers from the 26<sup>th</sup> Punjab Regiment, 77 from Guides Regiment and 215 mostly the Afridis in the Baloch Regiment refused in Rangoon to serve in East Africa. More than 700 deserted from Militia in Tirah and similar situation was in Waziristan and Mehsud militias.<sup>44</sup> In the above mentioned discouraging circumstances Roos-Keppel informed Viceroy;

At the time when these desertions began the bazaars were full of blood curdling stories of the Germans, of whom the people have never heard before and who seemed to their rumour fed imaginations to be a race of Ginnis sprung into existence in a single night, fully armed with superhuman and unheard means of warfare, with power of sailing in the air and dropping tons of explosives on any spot, of burrowing

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<sup>43</sup> <http://www.iiu.edu.pk>.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

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underground and destroying whole cities with one explosion and of sinking all ships at will; more in fact than it was possible for any human being to content with. Old friends of mine, native officers and country gentlemen have said to me, Sahib, we and our companies have fought with the *sarkar* in the mutiny, in hundreds of frontier expeditions, in Afghan wars, in China and in Egypt, but we were then fighting against men and we are ready to do this tomorrow, but everybody said at first that in this war, even if we escaped the almost certainty of being drowned on route, we were sure to be killed in unheard of ways by explosives and by poisonous fumes which we have not been taught how to deal with and to which we can make no reply. All our women were mad with terror at these stories and hung round the necks of reservists and recruits imploring them not to go to certain death in an unknown country where they would not even have a grave.<sup>45</sup>

Due to the active co-operation of Roos-Keppel, the districts recruiting committees achieved considerable success and after July 1917, only in a short period the Government enlisted 11,188 men from NWFP, in which 1607 were from trans-frontier as the labor crops with the Military Department.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

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**Table 3.1**

S. No	Category	Numbers
01	Combatants	7,184
02	Non Combatants	1373
03	Labors Crops	2631
Total		11,188

*Figure shows the new recruitment.<sup>46</sup>*

Before the War 1.3% of the NWFP male population were serving in the army (about one man in every 31 men of the age required). This proportion raised to 1.5 percent. It means that, one man out of 18 was working with the military at the end of the war.<sup>47</sup> When First World War started in Europe so, very soon its effects were realized in NWFP. Being a frontier province adjacent to Afghanistan where the *mullahs* and the German agents tried to prepare the people within Afghanistan and across tribal areas for jihad against British Indian Government. Roos-Keppel identified those areas from where there was a possible threat of rebellion. Due to the Government past relation full of enmity with Black Mountain tribes a detachment of Gurkhas Regiment was stationed at the foot of mountain in Ogai. Similarly the strategic importance of Khyber Pass and the might of the Afridis tribe

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 14-15.



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Roos-Keppel tried to develop cordial relations with them by bribing their *maliks* and chiefs. This policy was successful and except a few minor accidents throughout the war the Afridis were quit. The Afghan Government had a strong influence on the Mohmands from the days of Ahmad Shah Abdali. This was the reason that after the British occupation of NWFP, the Mohmands constantly resisted it due to the loss of their *jagir* on the Peshawar border. They also took part in the uprising of 1857 and 1897-98. Due to a long history of strange relations with the British the Mohmands showed their anti-government design by attacking Charsada Tehsil of Peshawar District at the start of First World War. Roos-Keppel adopted a harsh policy towards the Mohmands by making hostages, blockades and suppressing them with the use of military power. Even they used aircrafts against the Mohmands in the history of Indo-subcontinent. Due to this policy Roos-Keppel was successful to constrain the Mohmands from the general uprising during the First World War. The above policy was also adopted towards Mehsuds tribes when the Mehsuds frequently challenged the Government authority by looting and attacking the government check posts. The Government launched 'Waziristan Field Force' and 'Bannu Moveable Column' to suppress the outlaws. To minimize threat from Afghanistan Roos-Keppel gave central importance to Kurram and changed its Political Agent on the request of local *maliks*. He also established an intelligence network throughout tribal agencies and Afghanistan. Special steps were taken to recruit the Pushtoon in British Indian Army to fulfill the War needs. To sum of this

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discussion overall the situation of NWPF during the First World War was satisfactory due to the efforts made by Roos-Keppel.

## Conclusions

Sir George Roos-Keppel's role during the First World War stands as a significant example of colonial statesmanship in a region marked by volatility, tribal autonomy, and geopolitical sensitivity. Confronted with the threat of external propaganda, internal unrest, and the potential alliance of tribal elements with the enemies of the British Empire, Roos-Keppel adopted a policy framework that balanced force with diplomacy, confrontation with compromise. His ability to engage constructively with tribal leaders, coupled with his knowledge of Pashtun language and customs, enabled him to maintain relative peace on the North-West Frontier at a time when many colonial regions were experiencing upheaval. Rather than relying solely on military suppression, Roos-Keppel employed a strategy of culturally informed governance, using traditional institutions like the jirga and tribal levies to manage conflict and build loyalty. The above policy was also adopted towards Mehsuds tribes when the Mehsuds frequently challenged the Government authority by looting and attacking the government cheek posts. The Government launched 'Waziristan Field Force' and 'Bannu Moveable Column' to

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suppress the outlaws. His approach helped contain the spread of pan-Islamic sentiment and German-Ottoman influence in the region, ultimately contributing to the broader stability of British India during a time of global crisis. In conclusion, Roos-Keppel's wartime administration reflects the effectiveness of adaptive colonial governance, rooted in both political pragmatism and local engagement. His legacy offers important insights into conflict management strategies in frontier societies and demonstrates how compromise, when guided by cultural understanding, can serve as a powerful tool for enduring peace and control.

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14. Ibid., 137.
15. Later on under the Curzon Scheme of Frontier defense, the *Jazalchis* were renamed Khyber Rifles under the command of British officers.
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17. Ibid., 138.
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24. Ibid., 84.
25. General Report on Border Affairs in the North West Frontier Province for the year 1915-16 (Confidential), Miscellaneous Record II, S. No. 765, Provincial Archives Peshawar, 1-2.
26. Mir Mast was from Qambar Khel clan of the Afridi tribe and was deserted from the Indian Army in France and then he joined the Turkish mission.
28. Javid Iqbal, “*Khyber Pass its Geography and History*” ( PhD diss., Area Study Centre University of Peshawar, 2005), 275.
29. In August 1915, the famous Indian freedom fighters Molvi Barakat Ullah and Mehendra Pratab reached to Kabul where they were joined by *Mulana* Obaidullah Sindhi. They formed a provisional Government of India, this was the ‘Silk Letter Plot’ which was discovered by the Government of India in August 1916. This group made an alliance with the Turko German Mission in Kabul and demanded from the Amir of Afghanistan to kept close contact with the *Mujahiddeen* in the tribal area.
30. General Report on Border Affairs in the North West Frontier Province for the year 1917-18, 3.
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34. Ibid., 74.
35. Ibid., 76.
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37. General Report on Border Affairs in the North West Frontier Province for the year 1915-16 (Confidential), Miscellaneous Record II, S.No. 765, Provincial Archives Peshawar, 2.
38. The actual name of Babra Mulla was Syed Amir Jan and was born in 1855 in a Village Lebnaï, in the Charmung tehsil of the tribal District of Bajaur. He belonged to the Salarzai tribe of Bajaur. He completed his religious education in Asmar, Afghanistan. When he returned from Afghanistan so, he stayed for a long time in Babra in Charmang, that why he is popularly known as the Babra Mullah. Throughout his life he invited the people of Malakand, Bajaur and Muhmands for *jihad* against the British Government. He died in December 1927.
39. Ibid.
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