

Pakistan: Ideology and Foreign Policy

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Ideology is an important determinant of foreign policy. It purports to embody the truth, a world-view, and aspirations for the future. These major elements of an ideology serve as a screen through which policy-makers observe the international system and its dynamics. Ideological postulates not only have a deep impact on the interpretation of developments at the international, regional, and national levels but also shape the responses to these developments. Since all ideologies are self-justifying, purporting to contain an ultimate truth and a state's most cherished goal(s), they are used as evaluative criteria by both leaders and followers.

The ideological approach causes problems when other factors, impinging on foreign policy (e.g., geopolitics, human and material resource constraints, and power politics) conflict with the dictates of ideology. The compulsions of the two sets of factors do not always converge. The perceptual framework derived from an ideology can distort the hard realities existing in the world and undermine a realistic appraisal of the concrete situation. There may also be periods when environmental variables are not conducive to the pursuit of certain elements of an ideology, or there may be a need to play down ideological tenets.

The policy-makers in a state which is identified very closely with an ideology are constantly engaged in an effort to harmonize the imperatives of ideology and the concrete realities of international politics: each of the two sets of factors are important in their own right. The inability to do so often brings forth either the charge of neglect (and betrayal) of cherished ideological principles, or that of non-pragmatists and the pursuit of a one-dimensional foreign policy.

The latter pertains mostly to the state's role in international politics while the former often has greater implications for domestic politics.

There has always been a strong ideological imprint on the foreign policy of Pakistan. The close association of Islam with the establishment of the state and the emotional fervor which the developments in the wider Muslim world generated amongst the Muslims of South Asia in the pre-independence period¹ led Pakistan to project an Islamic identity in foreign policy and forge close ties with other Muslim countries. The first Prime Minister of Pakistan (Liaquat Ali Khan) clearly outlined the relationship between ideology and foreign policy: "... Pakistan came into being as a result of the urge felt by the Muslims of the sub-continent to secure a territory, however limited, where Islamic ideology and the way of life could be practised and demonstrated to the world. A cardinal feature of this ideology is to make Muslim brotherhood a living reality. It is, therefore, part of the mission which Pakistan has set before itself to do everything in its power to promote closer fellowship and cooperation between Muslim countries."² This spirit was also reflected in all the permanent constitutions of Pakistan which underlined the need of strengthening "the bonds of unity among the Muslim countries."³

The Initial Enthusiasm and Disappointment

Pakistan moved aggressively to champion the cause of the Muslims anywhere in the world and to promote Muslim brotherhood. It supported Indonesia, Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria against their colonial rulers and identified with their struggle for independence. Similar support inside the U.N. and outside was extended to Libya, Sudan and Eritrea. It supported Egypt's right to nationalize the Suez canal and always upheld the Arab and the Palestinian cause in their struggle against Israel.

Pakistan also endeavored to lay down the infra-structure for a permanent organization representing all Muslim countries. It organized several conferences of Muslim countries during the first decade of independence. These included the International Islamic Conference (1949), two sessions of the World Muslim Conference (Motamar-e-Alam Islami, 1949, 1951), the Congress of Ulema-i-Islam (1952), and the International Assembly of Muslim Youths (1955).⁴ When it came to Pakistan's efforts to organize a government-level conference of the

Muslim states for the purpose of creating a permanent international Muslim organization, the response of other Muslim states was discouraging. Some states ignored the proposal; others extended a cautious approval; still others did not favor the idea of such an organization. Only a small number of countries expressed willingness to cooperate with this venture. This proposal never materialized.

The initial enthusiasm shown by Pakistan for the pursuance of its ideology in international relations was unrealistic and did not fully take into account the political realities obtained in the Muslim world in the fifties. The decision-makers in Pakistan took several years to realize why their efforts did not get a positive response from several Muslim, especially Middle Eastern, states despite the fact that Pakistan did not identify with their concerns and problems.

Islam did not play the same strategic role in the nationalist movements of most Middle Eastern states as was the case in Pakistan. For most of them it was a straight struggle against a colonial ruler. They were not a minority community and did not feel that their social, political and economic interests were threatened by a non-Muslim majority. Thus, Islam did not appear prominently in their struggle for nationhood. It was not the *raison d'être* of their state and nation. The intensity of the Hindu-Muslim conflict in South Asia in the pre-independence period conditioned the perspective of the Muslim League leaders in such a way that they did not fully appreciate the various forces shaping political dynamics in the Middle East in the fifties. There were personality, dynastic, territorial and ideological conflicts in the Muslim world which made the achievement of unity and harmony as desired by Pakistan rather a difficult goal. Moreover, Pakistan's efforts to promote unity in the Muslim world created a suspicion that perhaps Pakistan was aspiring for the leadership of the Muslim world. Pakistan could not remove this doubt about its intention in the minds of several key political leaders of the Muslim world. Gamal Abdul Nasser in particular was not favorably disposed toward the concept of Muslim unity. He felt that any such forum would be detrimental to his concept of Arab nationalism and Arab socialism and that his leadership within the Arab world (not to speak of the Muslim world) would be threatened. Discussing Egypt's relations with other countries, Nasser talked of three circles as the "theatre" of activity.⁵ The first circle comprised the Arab world which was the most important area of activity. The second circle included Africa. Other Muslim countries came in the third and the least important circle.⁶

Others interpreted Pakistan's efforts as steps designed to undermine the Arab League.

The ideological imperatives also came in conflict with other foreign policy strategies and goals, i.e., the search for security and ties with the West. Pakistan suffered from a deep sense of insecurity because of the hostile regional environment, especially its acrimonious relations with India and Afghanistan. It entered into a security arrangement with the U.S. and joined two West-sponsored regional security pacts, SEATO and the Baghdad Pact. These strengthened Pakistan's defense arrangements but had negative consequences for Pakistan's relations with a number of Muslim countries. With the exception of Iran, Turkey, and Iraq (members of the Baghdad Pact) most other Middle Eastern states were critical of Pakistan's decision to join the West-sponsored security pacts. A conservative state like Saudi Arabia described Pakistan's participation in the Baghdad Pact as "a stab in the heart of the Arab and Muslim states."⁷ Others, especially Egypt, were more vocal in their criticism of Pakistan's pro-West policies. Many Arab states were convinced that Pakistan was promoting the cause of Muslim unity at the behest of the Western powers to neutralize those Muslim states (especially the Arabs) which did not see eye to eye with the Western states.

Pakistan was disappointed by the lukewarm and/or negative response to its proposal for Muslim unity although it continued to support the Islamic cause at international and regional forums. What hurt Pakistan most was that a neighboring Muslim country (Afghanistan) made irredentist claims on its territory. Further, some Muslim leaders, i.e., Nasser and Seokarno (late 1950s and early 1960s), found greater identity of views with Nehru and developed closer ties with India than with the leaders of Pakistan. Pakistan found it difficult to understand why a number of Arab states did not support Pakistan in its disputes with India—a non-Muslim state. These Arab states, on the other hand, evaluated Pakistan's ties with the West in the backdrop of their problems with the West and wondered how a Muslim state (Pakistan) could develop such close ties with their adversaries and still regard itself a friend of these Arab states.

These "disappointments" led the leaders of Pakistan to make a thorough and dispassionate appraisal of the operational problems they had to face in the course of their efforts to project ideology in foreign policy. They soon realized that discrepancies in the past ex-

periences (especially the colonial experience), and the present political dynamics and future political aspirations of the Muslim states made the Muslim world very heterogeneous. All these states did not operate in the same geopolitical milieu and ideological framework. These "hard realities" were not taken into account while devising foreign policy. An overzealous pursuance of ideology was thus bound to result in poor communication and misperceptions regarding their foreign policy goals and strategies amongst the Muslim states. Ayub Khan was correct in identifying the dilemmas of Pakistan's relations with the Muslim world in 1961:

The . . . Muslim countries have their problems with the colonial powers, and they have their problems mutually. . . . In the solution of these problems Pakistan is not in a position to exert a decisive influence. They do not always understand our point of view. Their quarrels are amongst themselves or with their previous colonial powers. Our quarrel is with the next door Asian power. This is the fundamental difference between our situation and theirs. At times when we find that other Muslim countries do not see things as we do, we ought to realize that their circumstances are different from ours.⁸

Pakistan's initial enthusiasm for the projection of ideology in foreign policy was replaced by a low key policy of cultivating close ties with other Muslim countries on a bilateral level by identifying a common religious and cultural heritage as one of the common denominators, not the only or the most important commonality. Pakistan extended support to the causes of the Muslim world, especially the Palestinian question, in the U.N. and other international forums. These efforts were appreciated and reciprocated by the Muslim states on a bilateral basis. Pakistan's ties with Iran and Turkey developed into a strong multilateral and multi-dimensional relationship and they worked together in CENTO and the R.C.D.⁹ Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Indonesia came out openly on the side of Pakistan during the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war although most other Muslim states either adopted a neutral posture or showed only a slight tilt towards Pakistan.

Transformation of Environment, Ideology and Other Goals

The late 1960s and the 1970s witnessed several changes in the international system in general and the Muslim world in particular.

These changes facilitated the projection of Islam in international politics by the Muslim states—something Pakistan always desired, and in fact, attempted to do in its early years of independence. Pakistan, once again, was in the forefront of the movement for bringing the Muslim countries on a common platform, and thus, making them a political force to reckon with. What facilitated Pakistan's active role was a clear shift in its foreign policy strategies. From a policy of alignment with the West, it moved towards a policy of bilateralism and non-alignment and played down its participation in the West-sponsored security arrangement. Thereafter, the states which had suspected Pakistan's bona-fides as the champion of Muslim unity now responded favorably towards these diplomatic ventures.

The most significant set of changes that reduced the gap between the environment and the ideological map of Pakistan's foreign policy were a number of developments which created a strong feeling amongst the Muslim states, more so in the Arab world, in favor of creating a common forum for all the Muslim countries. These developments included the 1967 Arab defeat and occupation of their territories by Israel; the burning down of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in 1969 in occupied Jerusalem; and the dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971 at the hands of a non-Muslim state. A strong feeling of insecurity was created in the Muslim world that if some steps were not taken to arrest these trends they might face greater problems in the future. This underlined the need of pooling their resources and harmonizing their strategies to deal with their common problems. Nasser dropped his opposition to the creation of an all-embracing Islamic platform, which made it possible to hold the first summit conference of the heads of state/government of the Muslim countries at Rabat in 1969.¹⁰ This was converted into a permanent body named the Organization of Islamic Countries (O.I.C.), with its headquarters at Jeddah. The 1973-1974 oil embargo and the ability to raise petroleum prices without evoking any retaliation from the West gave the Arab countries a sense of power. They realized that the mighty West was also vulnerable. The enhanced prices of petroleum brought enormous funds at their disposal, which they used to modernize their societies and to contribute to the economic development of other Muslim countries.

The transformed political environment was conducive to Pakistan's identification with, and pursuance of, Islam at the international level. Now, it was not merely an advocacy of an ideological