



I. Perennial Issues in Pakistan's Foreign Policy

Zia's death in August 1988 made political change inside Pakistan a certainty. It had less immediate effect on the country's foreign policy. Pakistanis had been anticipating a new round of elections and an expansion of the political process. They were less certain about the course of the country's foreign policy. Although domestic questions were subject to new interpretation, Pakistan's external needs pointed to a continuation of relationships and programmes already in train. Pakistan's foreign policy may not have been cut into granite, but the foundation upon which it rested remained a predictable element in an uncertain environment.

The Chairman of the Pakistani Senate, Ghulam Ishaq Khan, in accordance with Pakistan's constitution, was sworn in as acting President when word reached Islamabad about the crash of Zia's aircraft. Marking the end of still another military phase in Pakistan's political history, Ghulam Ishaq established a date for national elections, and in October, Pakistan's High Court permitted the political parties to contest the polls. Subsequently, Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party won 92 of the 205 seats in the National Assembly and with help from several smaller parties Benazir emerged with the needed majority to form a new government. In December she was declared the country's new Prime Minister. Her party, however, did not fare as well in the provincial legislatures. Only in Sind was the PPP a clear winner. In the Punjab, the largest and most prosperous of Pakistan's four provinces, the opposition Islamic Democratic Alliance (IDA) led by Nawaz Sharif, won the electoral contest.

Benazir was a popular favorite but she did not dominate the political scene. Shortly after she became Prime Minister, Ghulam Ishaq Khan won the presidential elections, Benazir having withdrawn her candidate before the polling. Ghulam Ishaq was a durable civil servant, closely identified with Zia. So too was Sababzada Yaqub Khan, who Benazir retained as her Foreign Minister. The coming of still another Bhutto heralded a dramatic shift in national political

activity, but it was also clear that foreign policy, for the foreseeable future, would not be Benazir's exclusive preserve.

II. The Parameters

Pakistan's foreign policy is an extension of its national security requirements. Threats to the country's existence are real and significant and its foreign relations have been fashioned to maximize the chances of survival. The American connection is an obvious case in point. At the time of independence, Pakistan appeared to have only two options in countering a perceived Indian threat. It could seek assistance from Moscow, or it could strive to establish rapport with Washington. It chose Washington because the Americans had more to offer in the way of material support, but also because of shared values. The men who guided Pakistan in its early years were educated in the western tradition. Their experience was also in that cast. The Soviet Union was not an appealing, let alone a familiar alternative. But in choosing the United States, Pakistan also picked sides in the Cold War.

Pakistan was also a Third World country, and as such it looked for affinities with other Third World states. Here too, but only after 1949, there were two 'Third World superpowers' and again Pakistan was forced to choose between them. In so far as Pakistan's primary need was to avoid the grasp of its Indian neighbour, it could not embrace that power without succumbing to its influence. So Pakistan selected China, and the Asian behemoth became the non-western anchor of its foreign policy.

The third leg of Pakistan's foreign policy triad was its association with the states of the Muslim Middle East. This association was hammered into shape not from security needs, but from filial identities born of common religious experience. The need for community is very strong in Pakistan, and the country found communion as well as material opportunity among states with shared tradition. As a larger Muslim nation, it also found a leadership role waiting to be filled. By assuming that role Pakistan provided itself with a sense of purpose and strength that it could not find in isolation, or in its relations with other states. Moreover, it reinforced the notion that Pakistan's ethos was intertwined with a larger destiny that was yet to unfold.

This pattern of relationships, fashioned from both real and imaginary needs by successive Pakistani governments, is what the new government of Benazir Bhutto inherited in December 1988. And Benazir placed her stamp of approval on the matter soon after taking office. In the first six months of her administration she visited the

United States, China, and several states in the Middle East, notable among them, Saudi Arabia. In each of these visits she reiterated her government's determination to sustain agreements and commitments made by her predecessors. In assuming this posture Benazir was compelled to face down critics within her own party who called for a change in policy towards the United States. Although irritated by the character of this assault, at no point did she indicate willingness to comply with their demands. The United States, she publicly gestured, remained the linchpin of Pakistan's security and development, and she held to the course charted by those who went before her, including the one followed by Mohammad Zia ul-Haq.

III. The American Connection

Benazir's state visit to the United States in June 1989 was long on ceremony but thin in substance. US-Pakistan relations had undergone refurbishing shortly before Zia's death and the decision had already been taken to perpetuate the programmes developed at that time. Prime Minister Bhutto had earlier indicated her support for a continuation of the American connection and she repeated that intention after assuming her high office. Ms Bhutto was not given to the drama that motivated her father. Her public statements were all measured presentations, bereft of emotion and calculated to explain the points of argument.

Pakistan's shaky economy was too dependent on American aid (\$3.6 billion between 1982 and 1987). The United States government had provided Pakistan with \$576 million in economic and military assistance in 1988 and the Bush administration had asked for another \$621 million for 1990. Moreover, the Washington-based World Bank had committed another \$3.2 billion in assistance for 1989-90 through the Pakistan Aid Consortium.¹ Benazir's June visit also provided the occasion for announcing Congressional approval for the 60 additional F-16s Pakistan had requested in the new six-year \$4.02 billion aid agreement entered into in 1987. The new Prime Minister could not ignore any of these vital statistics.

Given the honour of addressing a joint session of the U.S. Congress, Benazir zeroed in on the key issue threatening Pakistan's future relations with the United States, i.e., American concern that Islamabad had or was on the verge of developing a nuclear weapons capability. Benazir reiterated her government's long-stated policy not to engage in a nuclear arms race. Her government's sole objective

¹ Thomas P. Thomson, *Pakistan and the United States*, New York: The Asia Society, 1989, p. 7.

live, she endeavoured to assure the American legislators, lay in promoting the peaceful uses of atomic energy. Pakistan she noted, continues to support a policy calling for the creation of a nuclear-free South Asia and it stands by its offer to enter into an agreement with New Delhi that would give substance to that desire. Pakistan, she said, 'will not provoke a nuclear arms race' in the subcontinent.¹

Benazir's description of her country's nuclear programme contradicted the report issued by William Webster, the American director of the Central Intelligence Agency. Just before Ms Bhutto's arrival in Washington, Webster told the US Congress that 'Pakistan was engaged in developing a nuclear capability.' He went on to note: 'what creates problems for the United States is whether that capability has reached a point that it implicates the various arrangements that apply to other assistance and relief for Pakistan.' Renowned to this latest CIA report, John Glenn spoke for a number of Senators and Congressmen when he insisted the Congress already had sufficient cause to cease its aid programme to Pakistan. If not for the continuing situation in Afghanistan, he asserted, the law would be duly observed.² Congressional scrutiny of Pakistan's nuclear programme has always been a sore point in Islamabad where the matter is considered solely in the context of national jurisdiction. Moreover, Pakistani public opinion looks with favour on Pakistan's admission to the nuclear club and American interference is not only abhorred, it is also seen as pro-Indian and an affront to Pakistani sovereignty.

Benazir may have come along at precisely the right moment. Perhaps no other Pakistani leader can bridge this difficulty with the United States. With the war in Afghanistan in a transitional stage and US-Soviet relations at a turning point, American military assistance to Pakistan will be subject to reappraisal. Pakistan's nuclear programme, in the foreseeable future, may cause the Congress to invoke the Symington amendment. But before doing so, American legislators will have to gauge the impact of a cut-off in arms and other deliveries on Benazir's administration. Bhutto's emergence as Prime Minister of Pakistan has been acclaimed by American officials and well-wishers as a victory for democracy. As the first woman leader of a Muslim state, the young Ms Bhutto has captured the fascination and affection of a broad section of the American public. Her declarations with reference to a democratic Pakistan is not lost on American officials. She is a lady that few American Congressmen are

prepared to challenge, nor would they knowingly embarrass or destabilize her government. Ms Bhutto's assurance that her country is not producing atomic weapons, although less than convincing in the light of reports to the contrary, is nonetheless politely received in Washington, and the American arms agreement, in the short term, remains intact.

If the Pakistani military establishment continues to hold important cards in the Pakistan political contest, no one at the present time serves military interests more or relates to the United States Congress and Government better than Benazir Bhutto. Another Pakistani leader would not receive the reception prepared for Benazir in Washington. Nor would another leader come away with the same results.

United States and Pakistan foreign policies will continue to diverge, to follow independent channels of opportunity. Harmony of interest has never been essential for their relationship. The United States is a global superpower, while Pakistan will remain a regional middlepower. Pakistan's region of involvement extends into central and southwest Asia, given its concern with developments in Afghanistan, Iran, and the Arab Gulf states. The United States has less real interest in south or central Asia, but plays an even larger role than Pakistan in southwest Asia. Moreover, in the latter, Pakistan's objectives diverge sharply from that of the United States. Whereas Washington is committed to the defense of Israel, Islamabad will not recognize the Zionist state and stands with the Arab nations in pressing the objectives of the Palestinians. American policy in the Persian Gulf, and with particular reference to revolutionary Iran, is also different from that expressed in Pakistan. Pakistan is a near neighbour who often finds kind words for Tehran, speaks reverently about Iran's revolution, and engages in lucrative trade with the Shiite nation. It cannot share Washington's view that Iran is a source of major mayhem in the contemporary world. Nor will it join the United States in its effort to contain the excesses of the Iranian revolution.

By the same token, but in reverse order, the United States refuses to encourage Pakistan's hatred for India. Washington continues to look on New Delhi as a positive influence in the Third World. It ignores India's aggressive display in Sri Lanka or its bullying tactics with Nepal and Bangladesh. It has never come to grips with India's role in the dismemberment of Pakistan, or the protracted rivalry between Islamabad and New Delhi that has already spanned three wars. Washington's military aid to Islamabad is only incidentally visualized as balancing the power equation in the subcontinent. More

¹The New York Times, 8 June 1989.
²The New York Times, 19 May 1989.

deflecting Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme and not adding to Islamabad's deep strike capability. The knowledge that American-supplied weapons were used by Pakistani forces in their 1965 and 1971 wars with India, and that they would be used again in any future contest, has not been seriously weighed since the Carter administration. Washington would prefer to believe that Pakistan and India have fought their last war with one another. Few Pakistanis, or Indians, for that matter, would share that conclusion. Pakistan's policy with China also differs from Washington's. Islamabad has strong ties with China, and Washington's complaint with Beijing following the crushing of the 'democracy movement' in June 1989, is not echoed in Islamabad. Pakistan will not cooperate with United States efforts aimed at sanctioning China. It will not hold Beijing to the same 'democratic' test that Ms Bhutto applies to Pakistan. Pakistan will not seek to influence China's domestic experience and it finds the United States attempt to do so counterproductive and strategically inopportune.

Irrespective of such differences, Pakistani ties with the United States are secure. Although the relationship has been tedious and strained, it has also been long and durable. Washington will not forget the 1979 razing of the American embassy, or the destructive attacks on American installations in Pakistan during the Suez crisis of 1956, in the aftermath of the 1965 Indo-Pakistani war, or the February 1989 assault on the American Center in Islamabad. The latter was caused by the publication in Britain and the United States of Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*, and in the ensuing riot six demonstrators were killed. In a public statement following the incident, Benazir, with an eye to her upcoming trip to the United States, acknowledged the sensitivities of the religious community but she also stressed her concern for the right of free speech. In a delicate situation at home, Benazir signalled Washington that such untoward events will happen but that they were not a measure of US-Pakistan relations. Washington has generally followed that same principle in its relations with Pakistan and the two countries appear destined to sustain their curious intimacy that now spans more than three decades.

7. The Indian Problem

Although Pakistan is the recipient of advanced weapons from the United States, it cannot expect Washington to come to its assistance in a future conflict with India. Nor does Washington like to con-

469

template American-supplied weapons being used against India. But Washington aside, Pakistan is its own agent in Indian affairs and since the Simla Accords of 1972, Islamabad has given serious attention to moderating differences with New Delhi. That effort will continue but there is little expectation in Islamabad that improved relations will dispel the threat of war that hangs like a stationary cloud over the subcontinent. Both countries have internal problems that they cannot successfully address and which are likely to intensify with the passage of time. The question challenging their respective capitals therefore is whether they will continue to exploit each other's weakness, and hence give credence to their self-fulfilling prophecies about the inevitability of war between them.

Soon after becoming Pakistan's Prime Minister, Benazir hosted the fourth annual meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. The SAARC conference provided the new Prime Minister with the opportunity to exchange views with the head of state of each of the member nations, including Rajiv Gandhi. The event marked the first time since 1960 that an Indian Prime Minister had come to Pakistan on an official visit. The two Prime Ministers, by their own account, struck a cordial note, and their deliberations were crowned with some noticeable success. The leaders signed a cultural exchange agreement to facilitate movement of students, journalists, scholars, artists, and musicians between their two countries. They also agreed to a uniform arrangement on cross-border taxation. They significant, however, was the formalizing of an agreement not to attack each other's nuclear installations, an issue that had been awaiting final signature for several years.

The latter agreement in no way dispelled India's concern that Pakistan was on the threshold of joining the nuclear club and that this development posed new strategic problems for India. Nor did it deflect Indian intention to expand its own nuclear programmes. Although New Delhi had also publicized its decision not to construct atomic weapons, it had successfully tested a missile delivery system in spring 1989, and reports had been leaked about the production of thermonuclear weapons, i.e. hydrogen bombs. All indications forced the conclusion that both India and Pakistan had accelerated their atomic weapons programmes.

With a view to Pakistan's denial that it is engaged in a nuclear weapons programme, it can only be speculated as to why Islamabad believes it necessary to have such weaponry. First and foremost is Pakistan's perceived need for balance in its dealings with India.