

Sixty Years of Pakistan's Foreign Policy

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A country's foreign policy, in the classical sense, is supposed to stay in lockstep with its political progression. By this yardstick, Pakistan's foreign policy has, indeed, kept as tortuous a course as its political meandering, stumbling from crisis to crisis. Another definition of a country's foreign policy says that it ought to reflect the national aspirations, goals and interests of its people. Foreign policy *gurus* have long argued that a country's foreign policy should, ideally, be a distillate of its ideology and, taking a lead from this national font, morph itself into an instrument of national strength, international respect and global recognition for its ideological bedrock.

Let us analyze Pakistan's foreign policy performance and progression against this backdrop. For facility, we may divide it into various phases, starting with the earliest one that commenced with the birth of Pakistan as a sovereign state.

First phase: Seeking unwarranted alliances

Pakistan was born in a highly unusual and tumultuous ambience. Its birth was attended by a gruesome religious-communal frenzy in which Hindus and Muslims shed a lot of each other's blood, thus leaving grievous scars of hostility on each other's psyche. Pakistan, the junior, weaker and less-privileged of the two new states emerging from the maelstrom of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent received, additionally, a much larger influx of refugees than was the case with the larger Dominion of India. It was a case, veritably, of double jeopardy and twin dilemma for the infant state of Pakistan, whose psychological impact was devastating, almost traumatic. It suddenly found itself saddled with a larder of challenges, which would be enough to test the mettle of a long-established state, much less one struggling to find its feet under daunting conditions.

The war triggered, virtually on the day after its birth, with India on the issue of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir could have only added to the sense of insecurity, which came creeping into the new nation's psyche, right behind the trail of blood from the Partition's mayhem. The death of the new nation's founding father, Mohammad Ali

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Jinnah, 13 months after the birth of Pakistan, was another devastating blow to the nation's already fragile morale. Insecurity spiralled into alarm.

The psychological trauma surrounding Pakistan's infancy as a nation became the backdrop for its hectic search for security alliances that its leadership deemed ineluctable to instil some sense of security and protection in the nation's heart. Pakistan was perceived as too weak and too under-equipped to stand up to a much larger, stronger and resourceful India all by itself. The search was quickly out to balance the inequality of power, vis-à-vis India, by finding partners who would be able to extend a security umbrella over Pakistan's head and make up for its perceptible handicap.

There could be little argument with the quest for security. However, it led Pakistan to the wrong door and laid the foundations of a foreign policy short on strategic and long-term interest but long on ad hoc and short-term tactical advantage. The keel for what subsequently mutated into Pakistan's hopelessly West-oriented and West-dependant foreign policy was laid by Liaquat Ali Khan's decision to accept the American invitation to pay an official visit to Washington and disregard an earlier invitation from the Soviet Union for a similar visit.

Much has been written in Pakistan's foreign policy annals as to why Liaquat Ali opted for Washington and ignored Moscow. Spin doctors toeing the establishment line have argued, vociferously, that it was a decision driven by pragmatism and national interest. Pakistan needed an early injection of military assistance to narrow the gap with a much stronger India; the US was the only power capable at that stage, so close on the heels of the end of World War II, to furnish that kind of material help to Pakistan. The Soviet Union, as the argument goes, was still licking its wounds of a war that had exacted a horrendous toll of 20 million of its people, and did not have the wherewithal to come to Pakistan's assistance. Another argument, an obvious after-thought concocted much later as Pakistan dug itself deeper into the hole of dependence on the West, contended that entering into an alliance with the world's prime communist and atheist power would have flown in the face of Pakistan's founding ideology of adherence to Islam and Islamic precepts. Both lines of reasoning were deceptively calibrated, deeply flawed and obtuse.

Granted that the US had come out of the war relatively unscathed and had the means to oblige a Pakistan pleading for military assistance. But how convincing, or realistic, is the assumption that the Soviet Union did not have the means to oblige Pakistan on that front? The Soviet Union

was known to be the principal source of weapons to the communists of China making the last Herculean effort to oust the Western-backed Koumintang from the mainland. The Korean War broke out in 1950 within five years of the end of World War II—and the Soviet Union pumped military assistance at a robust scale and pace to the Korean communists, as well as China, to keep the Americans at bay for three long years of a bleeding confrontation.

The argument of Pakistan being motivated and decisively swayed by its Islamic ideology to shun the godless communists was as specious as it was disingenuous and amounted to making a mockery of the Islamic precepts it supposedly strove to promote by rejecting Soviet overtures. It was a travesty of Islam's pristine universalism and myopically ignored the example set by the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) himself when he entered into treaty commitments with the Jews of Medina in the interest of ushering in an ambience of peaceful coexistence even with those who had refused to accept his divine message. Pakistan itself, subsequently, made light of its supposedly robust religiosity and religion-dictated foreign policy orientation by cultivating the closest possible relations with China, as much communist and godless as the shunned Soviet Union.

Not only that seeking security with a putative superpower, 10,000 miles from Pakistan, whose interest, at that stage in South Asian affairs was, at best marginal, made absolutely no sense to the strategic interest of Pakistan. Also, it did not augur well for Pakistan to seek security in arms and weapons only and ignore the far more crucial task of anchoring it in sound national institutions that would withstand the disappearance, by force or nature, of national icons like Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan. Liaquat Ali could be excused for being Anglophile by his feudal moorings and upbringing. Much of the leadership of the League was, like him, Anglophile and may have had insufficient or precious-little awareness of the other superpower next door in the Soviet Union.

It is a tragic fact of our history, however, that Pakistan's powerful military-bureaucratic elite had started seeking political power even in the new nation's teething period. The Rawalpindi conspiracy, hatched together by Bonapartist military officers and some left-leaning intellectuals belonging to the communist movement in Pakistan, was symptomatic of non-political forces coveting political power by any means. The unravelling of the Rawalpindi conspiracy did not, apparently, discourage these forces; they remained fixated on their mission of subverting political leadership. Their ploy sought to get Pakistan embroiled in the emerging East-West rivalry. The post-Rawalpindi conspiracy power barons, however, seemed to have calculated, rightly as

far as their parochial interest was concerned, that a Pakistan tied to American global security interest and dependent on its largesse, would be a Pakistan in thrall to them. History proved them right. But that 'initial sin' launched Pakistan's foreign policy on an elliptical curve from which it has not, to date, found a way to climb down to reality and pragmatism. The adventurism, begun early in Pakistan's infancy, has remained shorn of the sophistication expected in maturity.

Establishment apologists may dismiss it out of hand as a flight of fancy but it is not too farfetched to reason that had Pakistan not rebuffed and deflated the Soviet Union's friendly overtures so unceremoniously, the foreign policy curve of Pakistan would have developed far more smoothly than it did under its unnatural and unequal relationship-bondage, to be more precise-with the US. Cultivating the superpower closer to home would have made more eminent and rewarding sense than courting a power so distant from the shores of Pakistan, in a physical as well as metaphysical sense. Pakistan would possibly not have encountered the rough ride it did on its core dispute on Kashmir with India if it had not incurred the Soviet wrath. India, in the event of a friendly relationship between Pakistan and the Soviet Union, could not have bottled up Kashmir the way it did, with impunity, because of the *carte blanche* given to it by Moscow. It is entirely possible that there would have been no invasion and occupation of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union if Moscow did not have such strong-and from Pakistan's point of view totally unwarranted-reservations about a Pakistan hopelessly tied to Washington's apronstrings.

But going back to the 'first sin' argument, Liaquat Ali's decision to cultivate Washington over Moscow, as a friendly superpower, did not, in his mind, amount to surrendering Pakistan's will or sovereignty as his successors so readily did, to Washington's global policy of networking against the communist bloc. The US national archives pertaining to the early period of Pakistan, recently declassified and opened to public scrutiny under the Freedom of Information Act, suggest that Liaquat Ali was not prepared to grant military base facilities to the US on Pakistan's soil. Some of the reports, written in anguish, from the American ambassador in Karachi vouch for that impression which gives good reason to cynics to argue that Washington could have had a hand in Liaquat Ali's broad-daylight murder in Rawalpindi through a hired Afghan assassin. Afghanistan's hostility to Pakistan, in that period, lends grist to the conspiracy theory surrounding Liaquat Ali's murder.

Liaquat Ali's elimination from the scene in Pakistan paved the way for a more cooperative and pliable government in Pakistan, one that was not

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given to dragging its feet on Washington's imperial commands and *diktats*. However, the real reason for Washington's star rising high on Pakistan's firmament—and staying there to date—was the ascendancy of the army in Pakistan's national politics in the wake of Liaquat Ali's demise. As far as Washington's regional and global interests, focused on Pakistan or in alliance with Pakistan were concerned, they became a done thing once Pakistan slipped under the military's sway. Pakistan's alignment under SEATO, in 1954, and CENTO (successor to the 1955 Baghdad Pact) followed swiftly and in quick succession to stamp the authority of the Pakistan Army as the country's ultimate power broker. That introduced in the annals of Pakistan the bizarre innovation of foreign policy being made subservient to its ruling elite's convenience and interest, rather than the classical concept of a country's foreign policy being subordinate to its larger national interest anchored in the people's power.

As the Pakistani Bonapartes craved for the country's political mastery, its foreign policy had to be tailored to fit their requirements. A powerful army was deemed essential to knock the fear of God in the hearts of Pakistan's teeming masses. For that purpose, it was deemed ineluctable that the armed forces must be equipped with modern weapons. Washington, in its Cold War frenzy, stepped in to fill that gap. The army fell for crumbs and signed on the dotted lines. The rest, as they say, is history. With the unwarranted dismissal of the emaciated civilian government in October 1958, and the imposition of the first of a series of martial laws in the country, the fig leaf that had been hedging the army pulling the strings from behind the scene dropped, and the total military takeover of all national institutions in the country became formal.

Military rule in Pakistan incorporated American interests in its national affairs in a more systematized and robust manner. General Ayub Khan—the 'swell guy' in the eyes of his American mentors—moved quickly to cement the ties with Washington with great élan and oblige his 'friends' (he insisted, in his ghost-written memoirs that they were not his masters) generously with concessions they had been seeking for years. Ayub Khan gave a free hand to Washington to set up military bases on Pakistan's soil, something they could not convince Liaquat Ali to do. The U-2 spy scandal in which the Soviets, in May 1960, shot down over their territory an American spy aircraft and publicly paraded its pilot, Commander Gary Powers, exposed Ayub Khan's dangerous ploy, besides incurring the public wrath of Nikita Khrushchev.

Ayub Khan also aspired for the title of Washington's most loyal ally in the region by launching in concert with Turkey and Iran, two other

lynchpins of the American security cordon around the Soviet Union, a supposedly economic-oriented regional association, called the Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD). But the move was inspired solely to lend greater teeth to American stranglehold over the region, stretching from the Mediterranean to the Arabian Sea, and bind it ever more closely with the American network of regional alliances aimed at the communist bloc.

All this pandering to American regional and global interests was going on in an autocratic Pakistan, at a time when the bulk of the newly freed Third World countries were organizing themselves zealously under the canopy of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), to chart a course of action in global affairs free of any constraints and limitations for their sovereignty.

Ayub Khan managed to get away with his haemorrhaging of Pakistan's foreign policy orientation because he was not accountable to any democratic calling or institution. Moreover, in what was destined to become a template for all subsequent Bonapartes of Pakistan, he had conflated his narrow parochial interest—the interest of Pakistan's highly tenacious and resilient ruling oligarchy made up of conniving feudals, military barons and power hungry bureaucrats—with that of Pakistan's national interest.

Since then, the interest of this ruling cabal has ruled the roost under successive military regimes, masqueraded as the core interest of Pakistan. Ironically, because of it, what was deemed from the inception of Pakistan as its real core interest—the so-called 'unfinished agenda' of the Partition of India—Kashmir, has become an unattainable target for Pakistan. Three wars with India, largely over Kashmir, have not dented India's resolve to hold on to its prized possession of Kashmir. Conversely, the five decades old status quo in Kashmir has chipped away Pakistan's earlier resolve to bend India and wrest concessions from it.

Pakistan became increasingly isolated on Kashmir as it slipped deeper into the quicksand of its military alliances with a neo-imperialist power. In the process, it lost irretrievably whatever little moral support it had garnered in the comity of nations on this dispute with India in the early years of the conflict.

Second phase: Brief interlude

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's rise to power, after the truncation of Pakistan in the dark shadow of the tragedy of December 1971, ushered in a period of course-correction in the foreign policy of the country. It was Bhutto who

managed to extricate Pakistan out of the anomalies of its defence alliances and attachments with the U.S. But the damage had been done by then; Pakistan's credentials had become suspicious in the eyes of those in the comity of nations that viewed military alliances with great mistrust. To date, Pakistan remains saddled with the stigma of its erstwhile military alliances with a neo-imperialist power.

Although he flaunted his credentials as a foreign policy ace with characteristic arrogance, Bhutto was also guilty of serious errors of judgment on foreign policy issues that made him look like an amateur. Bhutto's first mistake was the theatrical, almost petulant, manner of his decision to take Pakistan out of the Commonwealth. It was a decision taken in sheer pique, because the British government had hurt his 'higher-than-the Himalayas' ego. That was a crystal clear indication of how fragile Pakistan's foreign relations were in the hands of a feudal-socialist who, despite his protestations of being a democrat, brooked no interference in his feudal style of governance. The Commonwealth was the first litmus test of his sobriety as a leader, which he failed. The Commonwealth was not Britain alone but a multi-ethnic mosaic held together by the English language. Besides, despite its aura of an exclusive club, it was still the largest association of independent countries with a lot of common denominators binding them loosely. Because of Bhutto's knee-jerk behaviour, Pakistan was deprived of a considerable range of benefits and perks—for its nationals, if not for the government-enjoyed by the member states. It took 16 years, and Bhutto's own daughter, to rectify the error in the late 1980s.

Bhutto committed an even bigger wrong at Simla, in 1972, when he signed away, on proddings by Indira Gandhi, the international nature of the quarter-century-old Kashmir dispute. Up to that point, Pakistan had vigorously pursued a policy line on Kashmir that accorded the highest primacy to the skein of UN Security Council resolutions on the dispute. But at Simla, Bhutto buckled under pressure and agreed to the Indian demand to downgrade the dispute into a purely bilateral issue between the two countries, India and Pakistan. This virtually sounded the death-knell for any kind of UN role in the dispute. India has copiously capitalized on Bhutto's surrender at Simla and has since refused to allow any third party intervention in the Kashmir dispute, thus leaving Pakistan with practically no wiggle room to manoeuvre. This was an unfortunate sacrifice of Pakistan's core foreign policy interest, one that Bhutto had championed with great élan and zest as the foreign minister of Ayub Khan.

Bhutto fell for the Indian ploy because he was anxious to get the 90,000 Pakistani POWs freed from India. The canny politician in him told him that he would become an instant hero in the eyes of the Pakistan Army if he could get its officers and *jawans* released from their prison camps in India. So his personal interest was conflated with national interest. In fact, whatever was deemed an asset to feather his nest became, instantly, the national interest. Bhutto was no different in his lust for absolute power than Ayub Khan, the military soldier of fortune whom he so routinely demonized and denounced.

Third and ongoing phase: Client state?

Bhutto paid the price of whatever innovation and independence he had ushered into Pakistan's foreign policy. With a lot of help and input from its foreign friends and mentors in the US—the same global power that had shunned and ditched Pakistan every time its assistance was needed, in 1965 or 1971—the Pakistan Army quickly put the clock back to where it was before Bhutto turned it on its head. Bhutto's nemesis, the new Bonaparte of Pakistan, General Zia-ul-Haq had taken note of the fact that the maverick leader had been made a 'horrible example', in the words of that non-apologetic champion and promoter of American hegemonism in the world, Henry Kissinger, because of daring to thumb his nose at the greatest superpower of our times. He was determined not to repeat that mistake. Afghanistan gave him just the opening he was waiting for to get into the American orbit; Pakistan has stayed there ever since and shows no inclination or desire to get out of it, or move away from it.

Those arguing in defence of Zia-ul-Haq contend that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, in December 1979, galvanized Zia-ul-Haq's sense of pan-Islamism to rise in support of the Afghans. But that would be stretching Zia-ul-Haq's Islamism a little beyond reasonable limits. His Islamic brotherhood was taking him nowhere, even among his Arab brothers for whom he pretended to have a special niche in his heart. They were angry and annoyed with him, to the extent of not even standing on diplomatic niceties, because he had reneged on his 'solemn' commitment to them to not hang Bhutto. So, Zia-ul-Haq seized the Afghan jihad against the Soviets with both hands, more so because it offered him the God-sent opportunity to ingratiate himself with the Americans, who got their foot in the Afghan door only to kick the rival Soviet superpower in the teeth.

For Zia-ul-Haq, getting Pakistan entangled as a partisan into the superpower duel, fought on Afghan soil with no-holds-barred, was the perfect antidote to his erstwhile pariah status in the global community.