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Comment **The Islamization**
& Opinion **of Pakistan's**
foreign policy

Pakistan was founded in 1947 to provide a homeland for the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent, a homeland in which they could live free from the domination of the Hindu majority of the region. The design of the founding father of Pakistan, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, was to create a Muslim country in which a Muslim majority would be free to exercise its religion, live according to its customs, and develop its culture, but also one in which minorities would enjoy equality of rights and citizenship. His purpose was not to create an Islamic state, but Pakistan has over the years diverged from the course on which Jinnah set it and assumed most of the formal characteristics of an Islamic state. In recent years this reality has become increasingly evident in Pakistan's foreign policy, in part reflecting domestic forces, in part a reaction to external events. This in turn will render far more difficult all future international efforts to control nuclear weapons proliferation in south Asia and to foster a peace process aimed at improving Indo-Pakistan relations and resolving the Kashmir problem.

IDEOLOGICAL EVOLUTION

In the course of a long and prominent career in the Indian independence movement, Jinnah slowly, and at times reluctantly, came to the conclusion that a united India could not fulfil the aspirations of its Muslim citizens. He became con-

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vinced that the Muslims needed a country of their own and went on to become the dominant force in the movement to create a separate and independent Pakistan carved out of what was then British India. Jinnah's vision of Pakistan was of a country composed principally of Muslims but essentially secular and democratic in its constitution and political institutions. He made this clear in a speech on 11 August 1947, three days before independence, when he told members of the Constituent Assembly that: 'You are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other places of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed – that has got nothing to do with the business of the State.' He went on to suggest that ideally 'Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the State.'

But Jinnah did not long survive the birth of Pakistan, and the government quickly came under pressure from the *ulema* (religious scholars) to give the new nation a more Islamic character. This was the starting point of what was to be a prolonged national debate over the difference between a Muslim state and an Islamic state and which Pakistan should be. The definitional question was answered in more or less complex ways, depending on whether it was examined in political or in legal and religious terms. The distinguished Pakistani scholar and politician, Khurshid Ahmad, put it quite simply: 'A Muslim state is any state which is inhabited and ruled by Muslims. An Islamic state, on the other hand, is one which opts to conduct its affairs in accordance with the revealed guidance of Islam and accepts the sovereignty of Allah and the supremacy of His law, and which devotes its resources to achieve this end.'

¹ Quoted in I. Ahmed, *The Concept of an Islamic State in Pakistan* (Lahore: Vanguard Books 1991), 79.

² K. Ahmad, 'Why Muslims want an Islamic state,' in *Muslim* (Islamabad) 25 March 1994, 7. For a more complex and juridical approach to the problem of definition by a former chief justice of Pakistan, see M. Munir, *From Jinnah to Zia* (Lahore: Vanguard Books 1980), 97-159.

The question of whether Pakistan should become an Islamic state was answered incrementally by the actions of successive governments over four decades. Already in 1949 the prime minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, secured the adoption by the Constituent Assembly of what has come to be known as the objectives resolution. The resolution began the process of substituting the concept of divine sovereignty for that of the sovereignty of the people and stipulated that in the new state 'the principles of democracy, freedom, equality, tolerance and social justice as enunciated by Islam shall be fully observed.'³ These tendencies were carried forward in the 1956 constitution, which also decreed that the name of the country should be the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, that the president had to be a Muslim, and that the laws of the country should be brought into conformity with the injunctions of Islam.⁴ This latter task was eventually entrusted to an Advisory Council of Islamic Ideology created by President Ayub Khan in 1962.

Other landmarks in the process of Islamization were to follow. In the early 1970s Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto enacted a law banning the sale and consumption of alcohol. In 1979 President Zia Ul Haq issued the Hudood Ordinances which prescribed Islamic punishments (stoning to death, cutting off of hands) for certain crimes and which were severely detrimental to women's rights in cases involving rape, adultery, and extra-marital sex.⁵ Finally in 1991 the government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif secured the passage through parliament of the Shariah Act which stipulated that 'the injunctions of Islam, as laid down in the Holy Quran and Sunnah, shall be the supreme law of Pakistan.' The act also called upon the govern-

3 Government of Pakistan, *Debates of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan*, vol v (Karachi 1949), 100-01.

4 See S. Mahmud-un-Nasir, *Constitutional History of Pakistan* (Lahore: Mansoor Book House 1980), 51-6.

5 For a discussion of the substance and in part of these ordinances, see A. Jahangir and H. Jilani, *The Hudood Ordinances: A Divine Sanction?* (Lahore: Rhotas Books 1990).

ment to ensure the Islamization of the judiciary, the economy, and the education system.⁶

ACTORS AND FACTORS

These various measures, taken cumulatively, provide the legal framework for a full-fledged Islamic state. That Pakistan has not yet reached that state is attributable to a number of social, economic, and political factors. Most important among these is that the national institutions responsible for implementing the various Islamic laws and decrees have been dominated by Western-educated or Western-oriented élites, whose religious zeal is tempered by liberal traditions, pragmatism, and a sense of moderation. The current president, prime minister, and chair of the Senate all attended the University of Oxford, while the chief of the army staff is a graduate of the Canadian Army Staff College; none of them seems to be particularly committed to the process of institutional Islamization. Similarly, the judiciary and the bar are steeped in the traditions of British Common Law and have been reluctant to call for or to impose the harsh punishments of the Hudood Ordinances; and where they have been decreed, they have only rarely been carried out. Even after securing the passage of the Shariah Act, Nawaz Sharif did his best to circumvent the Islamic prohibition of *riba* (interest) because it was inconsistent with his efforts to modernize, liberalize, and deregulate the economy and, especially, with his endeavours to attract foreign investment into Pakistan.

These and a host of other examples which could be cited suggest that while Pakistan may in law be an Islamic state, in practice it has some way to go to become one in the full sense of the term. But this begs a question: if most of Pakistan's leaders were not particularly enthusiastic about Islamization, why did so many take the initiative to bring it about, or at least acquiesce in it? In grappling with this question, one thing seems

⁶ Government of Pakistan, *Gazette of Pakistan* (Islamabad: 1991), 186-91.

clear: they were not responding to the expressed demands or wishes of a majority of Pakistanis. Over the last 25 years, Pakistanis could have voted in four different general elections for religious parties which advocated the creation of an Islamic state. None of these parties ever came close to winning a majority of the popular vote or of seats in the National Assembly. Their best showing was in 1970 when they collectively won 21.6 per cent of the popular vote; their worst was in 1993 when they secured less than 8 per cent of the popular vote and only 3.5 per cent of the seats in the National Assembly.⁷

The fact is that the religious parties, and the religious scholars, leaders, and clergy who adhere to them, were able to exercise an influence out of all proportion to the popular support they enjoyed because of the volatility and instability of Pakistani politics. Political leaders, even those with no particularly strong religious inclinations, very often found it desirable to manipulate or placate the religious parties in order to secure their hold on power. After all, these parties were able to mount vocal campaigns or mass demonstrations on short notice either for or against the government. The largest of the religious parties, the Jamaat-I-Islami, has traditionally been one of the most highly organized political forces in the country with thousands of full-time workers and well structured chapters in schools and factories; the second largest party, the Jamiat Ulema-I-Islam, has also at certain times in its history enjoyed an organized and disciplined following.⁸ Such parties have been able to make their weight felt in times of political crisis or instability and have repeatedly been able to extract concessions from the national political leadership of the day in exchange for offers of support

7 For statistical tables comparing the results of the various elections see *News* (Islamabad), 13 October 1994, 3. See also the article by Kamran Khan, 'Election 1993: Pakistan says good-bye to religious politics' in *ibid*, 12 October 1993, 1.

8 The history and organization of the principal religious parties are outlined in A.H. Shahbaz, *Pakistan Political Parties* (Islamabad: Islamabad Press Service 1990), 108-56.

or benevolent neutrality. Or, as forcefully expounded by a former chief justice of Pakistan: 'Unscrupulous politicians manipulated these religious forces for their own ulterior motives. Consequently the fanatical elements became a political force in their own right, and over the years managed to impose their dogmatic ideology over Pakistan. This way the purpose for which Pakistan was created was defeated and it came under the domination of medieval forces.'⁹

While Pakistani leaders and élites may often display considerable discomfort with this Islamic political ideology, it has become sufficiently firmly established in the affairs of the state that few choose to challenge it overtly for fear of being labelled un-Islamic by political opponents, by the media, or by the *ulema*. The influence of the ideology and of its proponents has long been evident in domestic politics but has in recent years become increasingly evident in the foreign policy of Pakistan.

FOREIGN POLICY ORIENTATIONS

Pakistan's foreign policy was from the start dominated by two principal preoccupations: to secure the political and military support necessary to defend itself against India and to be able to prosecute its interests in its relations with India, especially in trying to achieve a resolution to the Kashmir problem; and to obtain the financial and technical assistance required to foster socio-economic development. To Pakistan's Western-oriented and pragmatic policy-makers of the early years, both of these preoccupations dictated close relations with a number of Western countries, chiefly the United States for security assistance and certain Commonwealth countries (Britain, Canada, Australia) for economic development assistance under the Colombo Plan.

From essentially modest beginnings, these relationships with the West became highly institutionalized. Pakistan entered into

⁹ Muhaamad Munir as summed up in I. Ahmed, *The Concept of an Islamic State*, 164.

a series of bilateral security agreements with the United States and eventually became a member of the Baghdad pact and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and a key component of United States policy of containment of the Soviet Union. Similarly, but at a later stage, a consortium of Western countries – including the United States, Britain, Canada, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Netherlands, and other West European countries – became Pakistan's principal source of development assistance. The realities of the Cold War and of the sub-continent – especially India's growing ties to the Soviet Union – also led Pakistan to enter into and develop ever closer relations with China; these were eventually to become another pillar of Pakistani foreign policy.

Thus it is difficult to discern any influence of Islamic ideology in the main elements of Pakistani foreign policy over the first 25 years of its existence as an independent state. (Pakistan's forthrightly pro-Arab stance on the Palestine question was not essentially different from that of many non-Muslim Third World countries, including India.) Indeed, it was not until Zulfikar Ali Bhutto came to power at the end of 1971 following the secession of East Pakistan that any elements of Islamic ideology began to appear in Pakistan's substantive foreign policy.

Although he was an Oxford-educated socialist, Bhutto frequently invoked the concept of pan-Islamism in his foreign policy, most notably in his endeavours to develop further Pakistan's relations with the Arab states of the Persian Gulf region. His primary motive in strengthening ties with these countries was to diversify Pakistan's sources of financial and political support at a time when he thought the country had become overly dependent on the United States and precisely when the Gulf states were beginning to deploy the wealth accumulated as a result of spectacular increases in the price of oil. At the level of public diplomacy, these initiatives culminated in Pakistan's hosting the Islamic summit in Lahore in 1974, which, among other things, produced a ringing declaration of support for Pakistan from President Muammar al-Qaddafi of Libya ('our strength is

your strength, our resources are your resources').¹⁰ In more concrete terms, these initiatives eventually resulted in agreements covering economic assistance to Pakistan, the temporary migration and employment of hundreds of thousands of Pakistanis in the Gulf states, and the stationing of Pakistani army units in Saudi Arabia to help train and reinforce the Saudi army.

'THE ISLAMIC BOMB'

But it was over Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme that Bhutto most explicitly invoked Islam and Islamic solidarity in Pakistan's foreign and security policy. Spurred on by India's detonation of a nuclear device in May 1974, Bhutto redoubled Pakistan's efforts to acquire what he referred to as 'nuclear capability.' He at first explained the policy primarily in terms of Pakistan's security requirements vis-à-vis a hostile India, and went so far as to suggest that the threat posed to Pakistan by India's nuclear capability was sufficiently great that if necessary Pakistanis would 'eat grass to produce the bomb.' Later in his political testament, written shortly before his execution, he gave the policy a broader, Islamic significance. After recounting his efforts to develop Pakistan's nuclear programme and to overcome both foreign and domestic opposition to it, he wrote: 'We were on the verge of full nuclear capability when I left the government to come to this death cell. We know that Israel and South Africa have full nuclear capability. The Christian, Jewish and Hindu civilizations have this capability. Only the Islamic civilization was without it, but that position was about to change.'¹¹

¹⁰ On Bhutto's overtures to the Gulf states, see A. Malik, 'Pak-Arab ties: an overview,' in *News*, 1 March 1994, 6; and R. Syed, 'ZAB global scenario: not a failure,' in *Muslim*, 31 December 1993, 7.

¹¹ Z. A. Bhutto, *If I am assassinated* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House 1979), 137-8. With this passage Bhutto all but gave birth to the term 'Islamic bomb' to describe Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme. It is therefore astonishing that so many Pakistani commentators not only object violently to its use, but also attribute its inception to Western hostility and discrimination towards Islam and Pakistan. See, for example, M. Jawed, 'The bogey of fundamentalism' *Pakistan and Gulf Economist* (Karachi), 5 February 1994, 11.

The idea that Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme should be seen in Islamic or pan-Islamic terms was not exclusive to Bhutto and certainly did not die with him. It was appropriated by some of the leaders of Pakistan's religious political parties. Thus as recently as 1993, the deputy leader of the Jamaat-I-Islami urged the government 'to announce in unequivocal terms that it had the right and the will to make the nuclear bomb' on the grounds that a bomb in the hands of 'the Muslim world would guarantee world peace'¹² Of equal importance, the religious parties, especially the Jamaat-I-Islami, took the lead in supporting Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme on the domestic political front and in resisting the efforts of the United States and other Western countries to contain it. For example, a convention of the Pakistan Islamic Front adopted a resolution in 1993 calling upon the government to incorporate the nuclear programme in the country's constitution so that no government would be able to limit or abrogate a programme essential to 'the defence of the country, peace in the region and a solution to the Kashmir issue.'¹³ Similarly, the leaders of religious parties and the media under their influence have not hesitated to question the patriotism of or to brand as traitors all government leaders suspected of willingness to 'cap' the nuclear weapons programme, thus further complicating the task of finding some form of nuclear non-proliferation regime for south Asia.¹⁴ In this respect at least, one element of Bhutto's Islamic foreign policy has had an enduring effect.

ZIA AND THE AFGHAN WAR

If Zulfikar Ali Bhutto embraced Islamic elements in the enunciation of his foreign policy, he did so somewhat haphazardly and in response to specific opportunities. His successor, General Zia Ul Haq, on the other hand, did so on the basis of strategic

¹² Professor Ghafoor Ahmed quoted in *News*, 12 December 1993, 1.

¹³ Report datelined Lahore in *Muslim*, 30 November 1993, 1.

¹⁴ See, for example, the editorial entitled 'Surrendering the nuclear programme,' in *ibid*, 25 September 1993, 1.

calculation and some degree of personal conviction. This was particularly evident in his formulation of Pakistani policy in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan at the end of 1979.

Shortly after deposing Bhutto in a military coup in 1977, Zia promised to hold general elections within months and to make way for an elected civilian government. He reiterated this promise on several occasions in the early months of his regime, but progressively began to distance himself from his promise. In the face of both domestic opposition and international opprobrium (especially strong following the execution of Bhutto), Zia turned to Islam to try to give his regime some legitimacy. On the domestic front, he claimed to have a special mission to transform Pakistan into a truly and fully Islamic state. On the international front, he sought to play a prominent and constructive role in the affairs of the community of Muslim nations, as represented by the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC); events in Afghanistan provided him with an excellent opportunity to do so.

For Zia the entry of Soviet forces into Afghanistan presented Pakistan with a stark strategic dilemma: 'To the east were 800 million hostile Hindus while now to the west, the Red Army had occupied Afghanistan, so the likelihood of Pakistan being squeezed out of existence between the two enemies was a real possibility.'¹⁵ After reviewing all aspects of the situation with his military and intelligence advisors, Zia decided that Pakistan should support a guerrilla campaign against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan with money, arms, training, and operational guidance; 'it would be a Jihad against Communist infidels, it would be Pakistan's first line of defence in the west, and it would regain for him [Zia] some of his lost international esteem.'¹⁶ But Pakistan's economy was particularly weak, and it was evident to Zia that the country had neither the financial resources nor

¹⁵ M. Yousaf, *Silent Soldier* (Lahore: Jang 1991), 39.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

the matériel to support guerrilla operations in Afghanistan effectively, on a scale which would have a real impact on the occupying Soviet forces; he would have to seek help from abroad.

In the first instance Zia turned to the United States which had reacted strongly to the Soviet invasion and was canvassing options to counter it. His ambition was not only to secure support for the Afghan war, but also to obtain the restoration of United States economic and security assistance which had recently been suspended because of American concerns over Pakistan's nuclear programme. In putting forward a massive demand of \$2 billion to Washington, Zia portrayed Pakistan and himself as the logical successors to Iran and the deposed shah as the principal defenders of Western interests in the region and as the most effective instruments for resisting Soviet expansion in south-west Asia. While Zia certainly did not get all he wanted from the United States, he did manage to forge a close association which saw Pakistan become Washington's closest ally in the region and the main conduit for military and financial assistance to the Afghan guerrillas. With a number of ups and downs this close partnership was to endure until the death of Zia and the conclusion of the Geneva agreements on the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1988.

But with the example of the fate of the shah still very much in mind in early 1980, Zia was painfully aware of the political dangers of being seen to be too closely associated with the United States and of being viewed as a puppet of Western interests. Therefore, at the same time that he approached Washington, he launched a campaign to secure the support of the Muslim world against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. To a meeting of the foreign ministers of 37 Muslim countries, which he convened in Islamabad at the end of January 1980, Zia spoke of the invasion as an unprecedented attack on the Muslim world by a superpower and portrayed Pakistan as the leader or front-line state in a *jihad* to defend Islam. In this and subsequent endeavours, he was highly successful not only in identifying his