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THE U.S. AND PAKISTAN AT THE CROSSROADS

INTRODUCTION

Pakistani President Zia al-Haq's visit to Washington from December 6 to 9 comes at a crossroads in U.S.-Pakistani relations. Although the two countries have fallen into an awkward, mutually embarrassing strategic embrace, due to the repercussions of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iranian revolution, it remains to be seen whether recent improvements in bilateral relations can be maintained over the long haul. While both governments share a common view of long-term Soviet ambitions in the region, their views diverge on the strength of the Indian threat to Pakistan, the desirability of Pakistan obtaining a nuclear capability, and the timetable for the restoration of democracy in Pakistan. American proposals to contain the southern expansion of the Soviet bloc by using Pakistani territory to improve the logistical readiness of the U.S. Rapid Deployment Force and to aid the Afghan freedom fighters have clashed with Pakistan's nonaligned foreign policy and its reluctance to antagonize the Soviet Union, newly installed as its next-door neighbor.

Many of these policy disagreements are, at least in part, outgrowths of past episodes in Pakistani-American relations and should be examined in that context. Americans must realize that foreign relations are a two-way street. If Washington expects Islamabad to play a greater role in containing Soviet adventurism in Southwest Asia, to forego its nuclear option, and to renew its experimentation with democracy, Washington must convince Islamabad that the U.S. is a reliable ally sensitive to Pakistan's national interests and anxieties. At the same time if Pakistan expects Washington to help underwrite its security, it should make greater efforts to accommodate American strategic interests in Southwest Asia and to understand U.S. interest in the promotion of human rights and democracy. Washington thus should make a concerted effort to persuade President Zia to replace his benign neglect

of the Afghan freedom fighters with a more forthcoming approach to their grievous problems. In addition, the U.S. should press for greater Pakistani cooperation, if only in the area of logistics, with U.S. contingency efforts to shield the Persian Gulf from Soviet military domination. This is not too much to ask from a country that, should the Administration's aid pledge be approved, would become the third largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid.

U.S.-PAKISTANI RELATIONS IN PERSPECTIVE

The history of Pakistani-American relations has been a rocky one replete with misunderstandings, distrust, and mutual disappointments. Much of the chronic tension that has clouded relations between the two countries is derived from the fact that Washington and Islamabad were drawn together for substantially diverse reasons. While the United States was looking for a local ally to contain the Soviet Union, Pakistan was looking for a powerful patron to help restrain its archrival India. As a result, Islamabad has periodically been disappointed by the lack of U.S. support against India and Washington has been disappointed, especially in recent years, by what it perceives to be Pakistani foot-dragging vis-a-vis the containment of the Soviet Union.

During the height of the Cold War, Pakistan was considered to be America's "most allied ally" in Asia. It joined the Central Treaty Organization and Southeast Asia Treaty Organization alliances and signed a 1959 bilateral defense agreement with the U.S. that required the U.S. government to "take such appropriate action, including the use of armed forces, as may be mutually agreed upon" in the event of aggression against Pakistan. Islamabad allowed the United States to establish several military bases on its territory, such as the airbase at Peshawar from which Gary Powers took off on his ill-fated U-2 reconnaissance mission in 1960.

Since the United States began arming Pakistan in 1954, it has adopted eight different arms supplies policies for South Asia, a diplomatic record that is not likely to inspire confidence in the constancy or reliability of U.S. foreign policy. The Pakistanis were disillusioned when Washington extended emergency arms assistance to India during the Chinese-Indian border war of 1962. They were outraged when the U.S. embargoed both sides during the 1965 Indo-Pakistani war, an action that hurt Pakistan more than India, since the United States was at that time Pakistan's preeminent source of arms. The 1965 embargo permanently scarred Pakistani-American relations and led the Pakistanis to question the value of their ties with the United States. Because of displeasure over the embargo, Islamabad closed down American military bases in Pakistan and drew closer to the People's Republic of China, its enemy's enemy to the north.

Pakistani-American relations improved moderately during the Nixon Administration. President Yahya Khan was instrumental as a go-between in the early days of the Nixon-Kissinger diplomatic opening to Peking. In December 1971, the outbreak of the third Indo-Pakistani War triggered the "tilt toward Pakistan" that led the United States to dispatch a carrier task force to the Bay of Bengal in order to deter Indian attacks on West Pakistan. The subsequent coming to power of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, an outspoken critic of U.S. foreign policy, placed a chill on bilateral relations that persisted long after General Zia's bloodless coup against Bhutto in July 1977.

Under the Carter Administration, the deterioration of America's relationship with Pakistan accelerated. Carter's proclivity for the normative, rather than the security, aspects of foreign relations downgraded Pakistan's importance as an ally. The self-righteous, moralistic tone of U.S. diplomacy chafed against Pakistani sensibilities, long since rubbed raw by what was perceived to be Washington's patronizing attitude toward Islamabad. Moreover, the Carter Administration's obsessive courtship of India left the Pakistanis with the impression that they were being taken for granted. Significantly, Jimmy Carter was the first American President to visit India without also going to Pakistan.

Washington's opposition to Pakistan's clandestine nuclear weapons program became the single most disruptive issue in the U.S.-Pakistani relationship. Pakistan's conventional military inferiority, its lack of an indigenous defense industry, and its inability to secure a reliable source of foreign arms supplies prompted efforts seek a nuclear option to deter India, which had already detonated a "peaceful nuclear device" in 1974. When Pakistan refused to give up attempts to acquire a French-built nuclear reprocessing plant, President Carter announced in June 1977 that he would withhold the sale of 110 A-7 Corsair long-range fighter-bombers that had been approved by both the Nixon and Ford Administrations. In August 1978, Carter succeeded in pressuring the French into cancelling the sale of the reprocessing plant, much to the displeasure of the Pakistanis. When it became apparent that Islamabad was continuing its quest for a nuclear capability, the United States, in April 1979, suspended all aid to Pakistan except for food supplies as required under the terms of the Symington Amendment to the 1961 Foreign Assistance Act, which prohibited aid to countries that were developing nuclear weapons. Although the Pakistanis took this in stride, they were later incensed at the special treatment accorded to India when Washington opted in 1980 to continue the export of uranium to India's Tarapur nuclear reactor despite India's ongoing nuclear program.

In November 1979, Pakistani-American relations reached their nadir when an enraged mob of Pakistanis, incited by false Iranian radio reports of U.S. complicity in the seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, sacked the U.S. embassy and killed two Americans. The Soviet invasion of neighboring Afghanistan in December 1979 led to a thaw in Pakistani-American relations. But Islamabad

remained cool to American offers of military aid as it had bitter memories of past U.S. attempts to use such aid to force Pakistani compliance with U.S., foreign policy goals perceived to be incompatible with Pakistan's fundamental security interests. In March 1980, President Zia jolted Washington by rejecting as "peanuts" the Carter Administration's offer of \$200 million in military aid and \$200 million in economic aid.¹ Islamabad made it clear that such sums would not buy significantly greater security for Pakistan, only greater animosity from the Soviet Union.

THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION AND PAKISTAN

Upon entering office, the Reagan Administration set about restoring Pakistani trust in the reliability and durability of the American commitment to Pakistan's independence and territorial integrity. The Administration arduously negotiated a six-year \$3.2 billion aid package evenly divided between economic and military assistance. The Administration avoided the Symington Amendment by supporting legislation exempting Pakistan from the amendment for the duration of the aid package.² In addition, it agreed to sell 40 F-16 fighter bombers to replace the increasingly obsolescent warplanes of the Pakistani Air Force.³

U.S. military assistance was designed to fulfill two objectives: to give the Pakistanis the military capability to repel limited cross-border threats posed by Soviet backed Afghan forces, and to dissuade Moscow from thinking it could coerce or subvert Pakistan with impunity. Although the aid would not give the Pakistanis the resources necessary to defeat a massive Soviet attack, it would deter such a direct Soviet threat by raising the costs of potential aggression and demonstrating a strong American commitment to Pakistani security.

Opponents of the aid package to Pakistan have developed three main arguments against it: U.S. aid would upset the balance

¹ For a more detailed analysis of why Islamabad rejected the Carter aid package, see James Phillips, "Pakistan: The Rising Soviet Threat and Declining U.S. Credibility," Heritage Foundation Background No. 122, June 4, 1980.

² In the event of a Pakistani nuclear explosion, all U.S. economic and military aid would be suspended. The President could delay suspension for thirty days if he certified that doing so would be detrimental to U.S. national security interests. However, Congress would have to pass a joint resolution in support of the President's waiver or the aid ban would be reimposed at the end of the thirty days.

³ The Pakistanis recently refused to take delivery of the first six F-16s on the grounds that they were not equipped with state of the art electronic software. Although it is an embarrassment, this dispute is likely to be resolved quickly.

of power on the Indian subcontinent; it would weaken restraints against the development of a Pakistani nuclear bomb; and it would imply unqualified American support for President Zia's martial law regime, thereby repudiating traditional American policies of promoting democracy and human rights. These critics have not correctly assessed the situation.

Given the limited nature of the U.S. arms package and India's overwhelming preponderance of military strength, India would continue to possess a superiority of three to one in armed forces, two to one in tanks, and three to one in combat aircraft.⁴ Before the U.S. arms package was concluded, India's military edge was being expanded further by massive Indian arms purchases: a \$1.6 billion arms deal with the Soviet Union in 1980 along with orders for 150 modern Mirage 2000s from France and 85 Jaguar aircraft from Britain.⁵ In spite of the fact that Pakistan keeps fifteen of its seventeen army divisions along the border with India, a Pakistani attack on India would be almost suicidal, especially in view of India's lead in nuclear weapons development. The issue is not so much a question of upsetting the Indo-Pakistani military balance as of restoring a semblance of balance in southwest Asia, given the Soviet buildup in Afghanistan.

The U.S. aid package would also provide Washington with greater leverage to defer, if not deter, Pakistan's drive to test a nuclear weapon. By strengthening Pakistan's conventional forces and giving it a reliable security partner, the Administration hopes to reduce Islamabad's motivation for attaining a nuclear capability. The \$3.2 billion aid program is also a giant carrot that the Pakistanis know will be withdrawn if they should detonate a nuclear device. Especially in view of the evident failure of U.S. sanctions to slow the momentum of the Pakistani nuclear program in the late 1970s, the Reagan Administration's carrot and stick approach is a reasonable attempt to forestall a destabilizing nuclear arms race on the subcontinent.

The question of what U.S. aid to a nondemocratic nation implies with respect to support for that nation's political system is admittedly a difficult one. Nonetheless, there has been a clear consensus under all administrations, since the initiation of the U.S. foreign and military aid programs, that there are times when American security and foreign policy interests require providing aid to nations whose political systems do not meet the high standards the U.S. imposes upon itself.

⁴ House Foreign Affairs, Proposed U.S. Assistance Committee Print, November 20, 1981, p.8.

⁵ See Anthony Cordesman, "U.S. Arms Sales to Pakistan: This Time Can We Start With a Few Facts?" Armed Forces Journal Interest, December 1981, p. 26.

Therefore the real question becomes: Is the Pakistani political system so odious that it falls beyond the bounds of what the U.S. can legitimately support? The answer is emphatically "no." While the present Pakistani political system is not democratic, and some human rights abuses have clearly occurred, it is not a system that is so totally antithetical to commonly accepted moral and political standards that it calls for an end to, or even a reduction of, U.S. aid.

The Zia regime should not be examined in a historical vacuum, but should be seen in the context of Pakistan's political history, which has been dominated by personalities rather than institutions. The untimely deaths of Pakistan's first two leaders after gaining independence in 1947 precluded the establishment of channels for the peaceful transfer of power. As a result, Pakistan has been ruled by authoritarian martial law regimes for approximately two-thirds of its 35 year history. The country's two disputed general elections resulted in civil strife that led to the secession of Bangladesh in 1971 and the military coup against Bhutto in 1977.⁶

General Zia promised to restore democracy after coming to power in 1977, but has since indefinitely postponed elections and sought instead to build his legitimacy by reforming Pakistan along Islamic lines. He has used the Army and Islam--the two forces binding Pakistan together--as well as the external threat of the Soviet Union, to cement his hold on power. In April 1979 his chief rival, former President Bhutto, was executed for his alleged role in the murder of a political opponent. Bhutto's party, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) is now confined to an underground existence by a ban on political activities and is led by Bhutto's wife and daughter. Bhutto's sons have fled to Afghanistan where their terrorist organization, Al-Zulfiqar, has received the support of the Soviet puppet regime. A recent wave of political assassinations, believed to be coordinated by Al-Zulfiqar, has only served to discredit the PPP and extend martial law restrictions on political life.

Although Pakistani human rights have increasingly been circumvented by the defensive Zia regime, Pakistan's human rights situation is vastly more palatable than the situations in nearby Iran and Afghanistan. The United States should urge the Zia regime to improve its human rights record but should realize that democratic institutions will have little chance to take root in Pakistan until subversive and ethnic separatist movements in Afghanistan have been neutralized. Washington would be wise to focus more on this goal than on the immediate development of Western style democracy, meanwhile quietly seeking to encourage democratic evolution over the long run.

⁶ See William Richter, "Persistent Praetorianism: Pakistan's Third Military Regime," Pacific Affairs, Fall 1978.

COMMON INTERESTS

The United States has a major geopolitical interest in halting the Soviet advance toward the Persian Gulf, the world's energy heartland. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan is disturbing because of Afghanistan's pivotal geographic location.

While Pakistan shares the American goal of containing the southern thrust of the Soviet empire, it has become a frontline state that is cautious about overtly provoking the Soviets. Because of Pakistan's vulnerability to Soviet coercive and subversive pressures,⁷ Islamabad has been reluctant to give material assistance to the Afghan freedom fighters or allow an American military presence to be reestablished on Pakistani territory. Instead, Pakistan has zealously safeguarded the nonaligned character of its foreign policy and has sought to independently extend security assistance to conservative Persian Gulf states in the form of military advisers, pilots, and possibly even a Pakistani "rapid deployment force."⁸ It has consistently eschewed involvement in the logistical infrastructure of the U.S. Rapid Deployment Force. This is not to say that Pakistan has not pursued actions that parallel U.S. interests with respect to Afghanistan. It has provided a sanctuary for Afghan refugees, and it has pursued a diplomatic campaign, including the promotion of successful U.N. resolutions, calling for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan.

The Administration should make every effort to convince President Zia during his visit of the need for greater Pakistani cooperation in security affairs. While Pakistan's nonaligned foreign policy would seem to rule out the establishment of U.S. bases on Pakistani territory, there is a genuine need for cooperative security planning on a contingency basis. Not only would this not jeopardize Pakistan's nonaligned status, but it would be indispensable in the event of stepped-up Soviet cross-border raids. An end to Islamabad's cold shoulder to the Afghan freedom fighters should also be pursued. At minimum, the Pakistanis should be pressed to ease their tight restrictions on aid to the Afghans and to treat all Afghan groups in an evenhanded manner, without favoring a few at others' expense.

A promising area for U.S.-Pakistani cooperation lies in joint efforts to reduce the flow of raw opium and refined heroin from remote areas in Pakistan and Afghanistan to the United States. President Zia has exhibited a genuine desire to halt the illicit drug traffic. Until he issued his February 1979 order prohibiting the possession and production of such narcotics, opium production was a traditional and legal cash crop in certain tribal areas.

⁷ For a more detailed analysis of the Soviet threat to Pakistan, see James Phillips, "The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan," Heritage Foundation Backgrounder No. 108, January 9, 1980.

⁸ See Shirin Tahir-Kheli and William Standenmaier, "The Saudi-Pakistani Military Relationship: Implications for U.S. Policy," *Orbis*, Spring 1982.

Although Islamabad's efforts have cut back the production of opium poppies, Pakistan has been unable to totally eradicate such profitable enterprises in the tribal no-man's-lands of the Northwest Frontier Province. American law enforcement training programs have been established to aid this effort and should further reduce the flow of drugs from the region.

CONCLUSION

Although the U.S. Congress cleared the way for the aid package to Pakistan by modifying the Symington amendment for the length of the assistance program, Congress has failed to follow through by approving a foreign aid appropriations bill. In the absence of such legislation, foreign aid to Pakistan, as with many other countries, is likely to be pegged to a continuing resolution at FY 1982 assistance levels. Since the first installment of the \$3.2 billion program was due to be transferred in FY 1983 (\$275 million in foreign military sales credits and \$175 million in economic support), this will probably be reduced to FY 1982 levels (no foreign military sales credits and only \$100 million in economic support) unless a substantial reprogramming of foreign aid can be accomplished in the near future.

Such a large reduction in aid for Pakistan would seriously strain Pakistani-American relations by undermining the perceived credibility of the Reagan Administration to live up to its commitments. And it would reopen the question of U.S. reliability in the minds of many Pakistanis. Unless Congress moves to remedy the situation and provide Pakistan with the promised levels of security assistance, the Reagan Administration's efforts toward a working relationship with this strategic country and a policy of containing Soviet adventurism in Southwest Asia will be severely compromised.

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