

Pakistan and the Nuclear Deterrent

Colonialism did not die with the British Empire. It is highly significant that the children of colonialism in Pakistan played such a crucial global role in ensuring that the colonialism of the Soviet Union, following their invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, was after a bitter struggle reversed. This outcome of immense historical significance could never have been undertaken without the foreign policy buttresses which Mr Bhutto put in place in the 1960s and 1970s. He provided the diplomatic sinews for Pakistan to resist the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. It was the first defeat of the Red Army since 1942. With the Soviet forces out, the legitimate interests of Pakistan were to avoid a civil war in Afghanistan and to bridge the Sunni-Shia cleavage.

In the preface to his extremely perceptive book *The Myth of Independence*, written in November 1967 Zulfikar Ali Bhutto made two statements "that the policy of close relations with China, which I formulated and put into operation, is indispensable to Pakistan; that in dealing with Great Powers one must resist their pressures by all means available, when they offend against the nation's welfare."

Bhutto understood well and often said that the foreign policy of a nation is a manifestation of its sovereignty, that if one cannot freely conduct foreign policy, then one is not independent and that the main driving force must be to maintain one's independence and territorial integrity. To achieve that, he recognised the realities of interdependence to overcome the isolation which was Pakistan's greatest weakness.

In a speech to the National Assembly on 26th November 1962, he spoke confidently of the three phases which Pakistan's foreign policy had undergone in the first 15 years of independence.

Phase I: Establishing the credentials of Pakistan's statehood, though he recognised Pakistan was still isolated, he argued that "taking advantage of that isolation, India, without completely satisfying its gargantuan territorial appetite, swallowed up Hyderabad, Junghedh and a good part of Kashmir".

Phase II: Establishing solidarity with the Islamic world. Here he admitted progress had been mixed. The Arab world never forgetting "the blunders committed by Pakistan during the Suez crisis", the one flaw he acknowledged in Pakistan's policy. Also, some Arabs failed to understand the difficulty facing Pakistan over Algeria in alienating France who had "always given Pakistan unequivocal support" in the Security Council. The forces of nationalism he saw as clashing with Islamic resurgence, ensuring that Pakistan's

isolation remained. But he never forgot the Palestinian cause.

Phase III: Establishing links through pacts with the West. In 1953 came US military assistance to Pakistan. Then pacts with Iran, Turkey and Iraq in 1955. This ended Pakistan's acute vulnerability and though controversial "was a turning point in our history. The critical and dangerous period of our isolation was over and we were now aligned with nations prepared to come to our assistance in the event of Communist aggression against us."

Phase IV: of Pakistan's foreign policy was establishing close links with China. Pakistan developed those relations with China with the determination to forestall being isolated because of India's close relationship with the Soviet Union. A relationship which India ran effectively in tandem with non-alignment. Isolation had been threatened too if the US ever achieved its objective of linking India and Pakistan into confrontation with China. For Bhutto, such alignment with India against China in his own words in *The Myth of Independence* was "abhorrent". China was the country that had given proof of its friendship by coming to Pakistan's assistance when faced by Indian aggression. "It would be catastrophic for Pakistan to be dragged into such an alignment". He ensured Pakistan never was.

By far and away the most difficult decision, a momentous decision that Bhutto took was in January 1972, when he summoned together Pakistan's leading scientists and told them he intended producing a nuclear bomb. The profound nature of that decision remains with Pakistan today. It is in many ways the **Phase V** of Pakistan's foreign policy.

When Prime Minister Nehru, himself a trained scientist, created the Indian Atomic Energy Commission, he must have sensed that such a sophisticated nuclear establishment would not only develop the new technology for civil power, but that it would create the option to develop a bomb. When China defeated India in the Himalayas during the winter of 1962/63 the pressure for a weapons programme started in the Indian Parliament. When China exploded its first nuclear bomb in October 1964. Nehru having died a few months earlier, the Indian Atomic Energy Commission was authorised to start work on a nuclear device.

In 1966 China tested a nuclear armed missile. Bhutto said publicly that "If India builds the bomb, we will eat grass or leaves, even go hungry, but we will get one of our own". That was of course political rhetoric - but what I suspect is that it was also what many or even most thought.

By 1972 it was perfectly understandable why Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had decided to go forward with a bomb. Primarily, I believe, because of China, not Pakistan. The intelligence about India's decision was probably available to Pakistan. After the dismemberment of Pakistan and the perceived threat in late 1971 from India to the West, it was almost

inevitable that Bhutto would respond. Intelligence probably told Mrs Gandhi of his decision. So it was not all that surprising that she authorized a “peaceful nuclear explosion” in May 1974 to warn China first and foremost, but also Pakistan. Unfortunately, that explosion so shocked Pakistan that it triggered even more intensive activity and the decision to buy a nuclear plant from the French that separated plutonium from spent nuclear fuel.

It has always been hard to keep the issue of supplying nuclear reactors apart from the technology that would allow the making of nuclear bombs. The threat of proliferation of nuclear weapons meant that the nuclear suppliers group began to meet secretly in London at the end of 1974 alarmed by the failure to check nuclear weapons development. Sensitive equipment and technology were to be henceforth rigidly controlled. In 1977 under great pressure from the US, the Soviet Union and Britain, France suspended assistance to Pakistan's plutonium separation plant. Here I have to record my personal ambivalence. From 1977 to 1979 I did everything in my power to block Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme. I chaired a Cabinet Committee to coordinate our efforts to clamp down on the exports of technology and equipment. I worked with France, West Germany, the US and even the Soviet Union to stop the programme in its tracks. We slowed it down, but never stopped it. Yet, even then, I remember occasionally asking myself what I would have done in Bhutto's place, even though he was by then in prison.

Every single word of this analysis I used on 3 April 1989 in Karachi sitting next to Benazir Bhutto, only recently herself appointed Prime Minister. On the platform with me was the former Foreign Minister of India, Sardar Swaran Singh, his very presence itself a tribute to the Bhutto family. It was a time when hopefully a new process had been started by the son and daughter, Rajiv and Benazir, of the two signatories to the famous 1972 Simla Agreement between the two Prime Ministers, Mrs Indira Gandhi and Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

Sadly the intervening years has shown that much went wrong. There has been little progress not only in Pakistan/India relations but a deterioration also in Pakistan's relations with the democratic countries of the world. In large part it is because of what went wrong in Afghanistan from the time that the US, UK and NATO were seen by Pakistan as a threat and not a partner in stabilizing that country. Today, in 2015, there is a chance to turn the page for Pakistan to reach out to establish a new relationship with India, China and Iran.

In the outline agreement reached two days ago in Geneva between Iran and the US, UK, Russia, China, France and Germany, we can see the relevance of Pakistan's history and its possession of nuclear weapons. Hopefully, the Non Proliferation Treaty will in a few months be

not only vindicated but offer hope of constraining nuclear arms development for the future. We all know that Saudi Arabia was a major financial backer of Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme and few doubt that if Iran were to develop nuclear weapons, then Saudi Arabia would call in a commitment, moral or otherwise, from Pakistan to supply them immediately with nuclear warheads. There are other countries too that would attempt to join Israel in the Middle East as nuclear weapons states in the region.

Iran has taken much criticism from Saudi Arabia and Israel because of its potential to develop nuclear weapons but given the fact that UN inspectors established in 1991 that Saddam Hussein, then President of Iraq, was developing a nuclear weapons programme and the 8 year war between Iraq and Iran, it is not surprising that secretly Iran began to develop the potential to become a nuclear weapon state. It is hard to escape the conclusion that were it not for the presence of China in particular as well as Russia, throughout the years of negotiations with Iran there would have been no agreement.

President Obama's brave decision to seek reconciliation would not have been sufficient, given the fear of the Iranian Government that they risked an attack from the US and Israel. This level of cooperation between the Permanent members of the Security Council started after the fall of the Berlin Wall and in 1990 with the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq. There has been a breakdown of that relationship with disastrous consequences starting in 2010 over the no-fly zone in Libya. Russia and China abstained, allowing action under UN authority but they felt let down by the UK, France and the US going their own way and exceeding their UN authority. As a result there has been no agreement in the Security Council over how to grapple with first the devastating civil war in Syria and now the self-proclaimed Islamic State covering both Iraq and Syria.

Let us hope that Iran does accept an unparalleled degree of intrusive nuclear inspection in a few months' time. Then, as a consequence, sanctions must be lifted even if the US Congress blocks any action urged on by Israel. Iran will hopefully accept President Obama acting as far as he is able over sanctions using his Executive authority.

Rapprochement with Iran is the most far-sighted American foreign policy since Nixon and Kissinger flew to Beijing to forge a new Chinese-US relationship. Pakistan played an important role in this when in November 1970 it was the bearer of an authoritative personal message to Richard Nixon from Chou En-lai who emphasised that he spoke not only for himself but also for Chairman Mao.

Remembering Bhutto's foreign policy, we should reflect on his saying "There are no permanent enemies." Now is the time for Pakistan to seize the opportunity of helping China, Iran, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan ensure a peaceful Afghanistan. There are many signs in China today as I saw in my very recent visit to Beijing that President XiJinping is giving diplomatic attention to his highest economic priority which is to revive the Silk Routes and also build an outlet to the Indian Ocean in Myanmar and in Pakistan. China is building links between Kashgar in their Xinjiang Province with the aim of eventually coming through Pakistan to Gwadar's deep seaport. It is hard to conceive of a more ambitious project. It may take over two decades to build but China is doing the same through part of the Himalayas through Myanmar. China, with its own problems with ethnic Uighur Muslim separatists, will want to see Pakistan deal with the Taliban in their own country and not fermenting the Taliban in Afghanistan. Slowly, almost imperceptively, China is becoming a global player and as it does so, it is developing the diplomatic strength to stabilise countries with which it wishes to build economic links. When tankers sail through the straits of Hormuz, they increasingly turn left to China and as a consequence, China has a real interest in peaceful stability in all the oil producing states in the Gulf.

Pakistan and China have built up over five decades strong military and economic links in a way that Bhutto foresaw. Now is the time for Pakistan to work with Afghanistan and capitalise on their already good relations with Saudi Arabia and help the Saudis to improve their relations with Iran. The days of the US or Russia, let alone Britain, playing a decisive role in these countries are over.