

## A nationalist's view of Pakistan's security dilemma

by Susan Maitra

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### **Pakistan's Security: The Challenge and the Response**

by Air Chief Marshal Zulfikar Ali Khan (ret.)  
Progressive Publisher, Lahore, Pakistan, 1988  
156 pages, hardbound, Rs. 150.00

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As preparations are under way for Benazir Bhutto's visit to Washington on June 5, her first as prime minister of Pakistan, one would hope that some in positions of power in Washington have given fresh thought to the U.S. relationship to this important South Asian nation. But as of this writing, no such re-thinking appears to have occurred. It looks as if Miss Bhutto will be subjected to a grilling-and-threatening routine over the alleged Pakistani bomb, following which some F-16s may be granted to the supplicant ally. Press hype and flowery rhetoric from both official and congressional quarters about the "revival of democracy" will paper over the continuing travesty of America's relationship to Pakistan.

It ought to be evident to anyone with even rudimentary knowledge of the tortuous history of U.S.-Pakistan ties—not to mention Pakistan's present predicament—that to put the relationship on a viable and durable footing will require on the U.S. side an act of deep and unflinching reflection on postwar foreign policy in general, and policy toward the Persian Gulf and South Asia in particular. The slim volume under review here could give such an undertaking the necessary focus.

Precisely because it is neither a study of U.S.-Pakistan ties nor intended for an American audience, but is instead the effort of a senior Pakistani military man and nationalist to assess his country's national security concerns in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the book is a powerful—and often startling—antidote to the hollow formulas of the U.S. State Department and National Security Council on what has been described as the United States's "most allied ally" in West Asia. In short, the book provides a perspective notably absent in most Western nations—namely, that of Pakistan's sovereign national interest.

American officials certainly won't like what they read, and can be expected to grab the nearest pretext for dismissing this little book. The layman would certainly be shocked and perplexed by the frank portrayal of U.S. policies as they look to others. (For instance, the Rapid Deployment Force: "How this force could have met a Russian threat was not explained. Russia, because of its proximity to the area, could have moved 200,000 troops in the time it would have taken the Americans to deploy 20,000 troops in the area, the name of the force notwithstanding.")

They are advised to reconsider the contents and honestly pursue the questions raised in this book. It is not the product of some freelance scribbler, professional critic, or communist agent. On the contrary, these are the considered views of a nearly 60-year-old, distinguished senior military officer of Pakistan who happens to be a top adviser to the Bhutto government and Prime Minister Bhutto's ambassador-designate to the United States.

Born in 1930 and commissioned in December 1950, Zulfiqar Ali Khan belongs to the first generation of Pakistani military men who were fully educated and trained within Pakistan. Air Chief Marshal Khan took over as Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force in 1974, and remained in command until July 1978, the first graduate of the Pakistan Air Force Academy to have reached the highest appointment in the Air Force. This generation of military officers—which also includes the present Pakistan Army Chief of Staff Gen. Aslam Baig—has a straightforward nationalist perspective that is impatient with the baggage of the Anglo-American colonial ties.

His book is a collection of essays written by ACM Khan and originally published in the English- and Urdu-language press of Pakistan during 1984 and 1985—long before the signing of the Geneva Accords, the removal of the Junejo government, the demise of Gen. Mohammad Zia ul-Haq, and the elections which brought the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Benazir Bhutto to power. In 1984-85, the combined pressures of the events in and around Pakistan—the fall of the Shah of Iran, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the continuing tension with India, coupled with mounting internal social and economic disintegration—had already begun to take their toll. If at that time, these essays were meant to pose the “tough questions” needed to stimulate a balanced assessment of the national security issues facing Pakistan, they can be taken today as invaluable glimpses into the thinking that informs the policies of the new Bhutto government.

### A ‘frontline state’

One might readily agree that the jargon characterizing Pakistan as a “frontline state” following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan hides more than it explains. But one has to take a good look at the Afghanistan crisis through Pakistani eyes to begin to get a real sense of the cynicism of the superpower game.

As Khan describes it in 1984-85: “The position is now so adverse that when we are faced with the present problem of a serious confrontation with a superpower, we do not have a single friend who is likely to come to our assistance.” China could be counted on to issue strong words, but its intervention is unlikely. And, we are informed, there was never much illusion in Pakistan that the United States would intervene in the event of a move on Pakistan by the U.S.S.R., even though, as Khan notes in another context, the Soviet Union is very capable of striking Pakistan quickly and hard.

No sovereign nation in the world has had its border violated repeatedly and with such impunity as Pakistan's western border, and yet, “we are virtually helpless to stop it,” Khan writes. In forfeiting an independent role vis-à-vis the Afghan crisis to a “strategic alliance” with the United States, Pakistan gained neither a solution to the Afghan crisis nor even protection for itself. In fact, the United States was never seriously interested in Afghanistan, argues Khan. Compare

the Carter administration's loud public and private response to intelligence suggesting a possible Soviet move into Poland, and official silence even as late as November 1979, when American intelligence was quite certain the Soviet Union was about to invade Afghanistan.

In Khan's view, the United States only seized the opportunity of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan to shift attention away from the debacle in its policy in Iran—“the overriding regional obsession of Washington” in any case, he insists. (Indeed, in Mr. Khan's discussion of Iran, we find further insight into the nationalist's view of the superpower game, in this case the tragic hypocrisy of the U.S. Establishment's cultivation of the Shah of Iran. “Although Mosaddegh was not a communist, yet given Iran's geographic position on the borders of the Soviet Union and vast quantities of oil that it possessed,” he writes, “the United States was unwilling to risk that country with a nationalist leader.”)

### The Afghanistan debacle

As for the Russian motive? Khan dismisses all the stories about the Soviet quest for oil supplies or warm-water ports as bed-time stories for small children. The CIA-authored 1980 projection that the Soviet Union was running out of oil was abandoned in 1981, he writes, and the warm-water port tale turns out to be something of a *prima facie* fraud: The Soviets, after all, have four major bases in the Indian Ocean and hardly need plow through Pakistan to get to warm water. Khan finds the Soviet move into Afghanistan to have been a limited move in response to what it perceived as U.S. manipulations to create an Iran-style turmoil on its border. No Pollyanna when it comes to the Soviets, Khan has no illusion that should Pakistan grant the United States base rights or the equivalent, the Kremlin would refrain from striking Pakistan hard and directly.

Here is the way Khan summed it up in 1984-85: “The Americans saw in the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan an opportunity to embarrass the Russians at very little cost to themselves. They had long ago concluded that Afghanistan did not play a crucial role in their scheme of things in the region. Western military circles do not make a secret of their views that the Afghan resistance could never win. The barely disguised covert support which the United States provided to the Resistance Groups is only a means of putting the heat on the Russians. The American decision to send aid to the resistance movement has certainly raised the stake for the Russians. It is unlikely that the Russians would be willing to negotiate about Afghanistan itself, but their presence there could become a bargaining chip or a point of leverage for the United States; something to be traded for concessions in other areas as part of a diplomatic ‘package deal.’ If this were to happen, it will have, to say the least, little benefit for the people of Pakistan and Afghanistan.”

Indeed. Unless we want to invoke the crystal ball, we must acknowledge in hindsight that Zulfiqar Ali Khan knew

what he was talking about. Most of the breast-beating about Afghanistan that goes on in the West has nothing to do with what actually happened there or its impact on the two nations involved. A Soviet move on Pakistan was a *threat*—in defense against which the U.S. tie was irrelevant—but the problems caused by 3 million refugees were real and devastating—more serious than all the past conflicts with India, in Khan's view.

That fact is that the hallowed Geneva Accord and Soviet pullout are no solution, and weren't meant to be. U.S. involvement in Afghanistan never had anything to do with Pakistan's interests.

### Sources of insecurity

Still, the indictment of U.S. policy is only in passing. (Even an exchange with the late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto concerning the deadly import of Henry Kissinger's threat over the nuclear reprocessing plant, is reported, as it were, in passing.) Khan does not hold the U.S. responsible for his country's predicament, and it is that predicament that is his main concern. "One does not need a great deal of political insight," he says, "to see that Pakistan cannot depend on an understanding with the United States to provide her with a false sense of security." Pakistan's own approach has been one of "opportunism," an attitude that reveals "an emptiness of vision and a distortion of values"—ultimately, a "form of political immaturity," he states.

In the final analysis, it is neither U.S. duplicity, Soviet troops in Afghanistan, nor the continuing belligerent tension with India that is responsible for Pakistan's security dilemma, Khan argues, and exaggeration of these factors will not be an effective source of policy. "An effective policy must address itself to the real source of insecurity, which has internal causes," he states. The shift of emphasis is critical.

Though convinced that India—with the fourth largest standing army in the world and the victor in three wars with Pakistan—remains Pakistan's foremost security problem, Khan is scathing when it comes to Ayub Khan's handling of East Pakistan in 1971, and states that far from master-minding the breakup of Pakistan, India merely took advantage of the "disarray" within Pakistan and the "recklessness and lack of prudence" in its policies. Such opportunities cannot ever be given again. It is imperative to improve relations with India, he says, on a sound and sovereign basis.

### New directions

In the process of defining Pakistan's real security interests, Zulfikar Ali Khan illuminates many harsh realities, but in the end he succeeds in identifying the moorings for a new direction for Pakistan national policy. First is the need for a democratic government—because, as Khan put it in 1984-85, "The military strength of a country is in direct proportion to the political support the government has." (Significantly, his critique of the Zia ul-Haq regime was strictly program-

matic: "If the policies of the military government were sound, in concept and in execution, we would not be beset with grave problems such as economic decline, political chaos, the breakdown of discipline and internal cohesion.")

Second, is the need to take independent action to resolve the Afghan crisis. In particular, Khan argues, "There is no short-cut to a dialogue with the Soviet Union and Afghanistan."

Third is the need for Pakistan's armed forces to be adequately equipped, well-trained, competently led, and "dedicated to their profession without any distraction." (Khan persuasively argues that one of the gravest problems with a military in power is that it necessarily becomes obsessed with its own self-justification at the expense of everything else, including competent military judgments and action.)

Finally, is the need for adopting a concept of *total defense*, that is, a notion of defense which recognizes that modern warfare encompasses the entire activities of a nation in peace or war. What Khan has in mind here is apparent from his searching report on the "great shame" that is education in Pakistan, which has the "dubious distinction" of being the least literate nation in the region, "perhaps a shade better than Afghanistan."

Contrary to the government official figure of 26% literacy, Khan insists actual literacy is less than 10%. "Was it because our rulers thought that there was a risk in educating the masses?" he asks. Mass illiteracy has certainly served that *status quo* of two decades of mostly military regimes based on a narrow feudal elite, Khan concludes, targeting in particular the cultural hypocrisy of educated Muslims who preach against the colonial heritage of England but make sure their sons get a seat in the private English medium-school.

Closely related in Khan's mind to "the mess we have made of education in Pakistan," is the economic crisis as a source of national insecurity. Education is a prerequisite for economic growth, he says, for productivity increases and the ability of the population to adopt new technologies. Pakistan has been "bartered away" through heavy foreign borrowing, he states, and now the country's economic goals are being dictated by its creditors in the U.S. commercial banks, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank.

The failure in these two areas vastly exacerbated the process of social breakdown fed by more than ten years of attempts to extinguish a political process in the country, and now virtually institutionalized in open warfare between rival ethnic groups and a surge of drug addiction and violence. The Afghan crisis, pushing 3 million refugees into Pakistan, only made this mix of backwardness and instability positively explosive.

One is left with no doubt that tackling backwardness and instability is the highest priority for the Bhutto government, but that progress on this front is viewed as integral to the solution of other national security problems confronting Pakistan.