Zulfi Bhutto’s Foreign Policy:
Vocalization for Self-reliance and Vivification of Integrity

Omer Farooq Zain
Professor, Department of International Relations,
Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Pakistan
Email: omer_farooqzain@yahoo.com

Abstract
History is replete with charismatic leaders who rendered a yeoman service to their people and the country. Each leader had a goal, a vision and a cause for which he fought against forces pulling him apart. Of all those who emerged as leaders of new nations after World War II, Mr. Bhutto was among the most impressive. He led his country to become a complete sovereign player on the global chessboard. The whole focus of his extraordinary talent and approach was to bring security, economic stability and social cohesion to the people of Pakistan. In pursuing these objectives, Bhutto had staked out as tough a fight as Sukarno, Zhou enlai, Nkrumah and Jawahar Lal Nehru faced in their respective countries. Pakistan’s economy, politics, socialization and foreign policy had been ravaged by political upheavals and the war of 1971 but Mr. Bhutto waged a multi-pronged strategy against all those challenges. Only an immensely popular and brilliant man like Mr. Bhutto could have held Pakistan during those critical years, maintaining the territorial integrity of the country and initiating a nation-building, state-building process. In particular, Mr. Bhutto’s foreign policy aimed at benefiting Pakistan by developing ties with resourceful Muslim countries and neutral powers. Mr. Bhutto’s major task was on two interrelated levels: Feeding, clothing and providing shelter to the down-trodden majority of Pakistan, and containing the role or influence of America and its allies in Pakistan politics. Zulfi Bhutto impressed statesmen, policy makers, journalists, social activists, scholars and common men around the globe as being firmly dedicated to retaining people’s basic rights by fighting against imperial, dictatorial and interventionist devices of global power-brokers. In writing about Zulfi Bhutto’s foreign policy, it is tempting to include some of its profound impacts on Pakistan which are contributing a great deal to our survival even now.

Key words: Charisma; Interventionist; Bhuttoism; Power-brokers; Ceasefire line

I. Foreign Policy: Pakistan’s experience in the early years
In broad terms, foreign policy is the central theme of a process in which a nation considers not only the goals it is attempting to achieve but also certain basic factors of existence in the international sphere that affects its status. Therefore, the geographic — strategic situation of a country, its population potential, economic endowment, ideological environment and global trends constitute a framework for foreign policy. In particular, political-military implications of a country’s strategic location and acquisition
of power become a guiding light in the formulation of foreign policy. Foreign policy is directed by the government, which acts as the instrumentality of the state (Brian, 1999: P.259). The objectives of foreign policy represent the composite desires and wishes of the articulate groups within a state that are interested in some phase of international relations. National security and economic development are generally constituted as factors underlying the selection of the goals of foreign policy. Furthermore, on the traditional account of foreign policy formulation, the most significant task is recognizing and articulating the “national interest” insofar as it affects a particular issue (Karan, 2003: P.17). Thus, every country pursues her foreign policy in accordance with its changing demands or strategic interests.

As far as Pakistan’s foreign policy is concerned, Pakistan was trapped into “Pactomania” just after its inception. Pakistan had been living in a gloomy and hostile environment as the small countries of the world were suffering from a tight bi-polar system around them. In the early years, Pakistan’s foreign policy objectives had revolved its power relationship with India and Indo-Pak disputes. The search for material and diplomatic support against angry India took Pakistan to Western defense alliances i.e., SEATO and CENTO and became a major cause of Pakistan’s participation in the classical military stand-off, the “cold war”. The basic motivation in joining defense pacts and standing beside U.S.A was to secure a position of strength vis-à-vis India (Kenedy, 1988: P.37). Economic development was, of course, another objective of paramount importance as Pakistan’s severely limited financial potential in the early years proved to be a serious curb on her economic progress. Indigenous capital, public or private and foreign investment for growth was insufficient but with the only alternative, foreign aid was available conditionally. Therefore, Pakistan’s foreign policy was closely tied up with the urgency of economic development and security concerns. However, Mr. Bhutto as the foreign minister in General Ayub Khan regime tried to give a different sense of direction by cultivating close ties with all the stake-holders of world politics (Bazaz, 1976: PP.19-21). A significant development of far-reaching international repercussions in the close vicinity of Pakistan was the 1965 war with India, giving Mr. Bhutto an ample opportunity to exercise his wit and skill to serve Pakistan’s interest. The all out military, financial and moral support of Muslim, and in particular, Arab countries, during that hour of trouble, was Mr. Bhutto’s charisma.

Whereas, Pakistan’s foreign policy after Mr. Bhutto’s departure from the Ayub government went into a deep decline leaving behind a specific military-dominated mindset for the pursuance of national interests. With the civil-war in East Pakistan and the worst management of that secessionist issue, many of our partners began showing indifference in their gestures (Laporte, 1973: P.45). The failure of Pakistan foreign policy was evident as the country lagged behind fateful events in East Pakistan, lost the initiative due to political and military blunders, chased shadows and met her doom. India’s contribution in creating dissension in East Pakistan could not be projected by Pakistani diplomats despite overt evidences of intervention. On the other hand, Pakistani establishment failed to determine the actual scale and temperament of Pak-U.S relationship at that time. The U.S foreign policy during the 1971 catastrophe was narrowly-based, aimed at achieving specifically designated and short-term objectives. The cancellation of export license for $3.6 million worth of military equipment to Pakistan was an act to please India, who had been insisting on a complete embargo on the shipment of weapons (Danish, 1994: P.71). As the Pak-U.S relationship reverted to the
uncertain care of the U.S government, Pakistan could not stop India from intervening into its internal affairs. Pakistan’s internal and external failures started the fire and the smoldering ashes were fanned and fuelled by a hostile India resulting in the dismemberment of Pakistan.

II. Bhutto’s Foreign Policy: A Paradigm Shift

There is no denying the fact that the policy of defense alliances failed to guarantee Pakistan’s integrity rather than making it a powerful player in the South Asian affairs. Mr. Bhutto took over in the post-breakup era in an environment where the Soviet Union retaliated to Pakistan’s participation in anti-communist pacts by endorsing India’s military adventure in the East Pakistan, its stand on Kashmir problem and siding with Kabul on the Pukhtunistan issue (Gulraj, 2002: PP.11-14). Pakistan was endangered by the Indo-Soviet collaboration on the one hand and American-led Western double standards on the other. Under that complex international situation, marked by radical changes in Super power’s priorities, Mr. Bhutto decided for an exit from defense alliances. He was of the opinion that when the popular masses are guided by a progressive idea, they can be a powerful creator of history. Therefore, he created and adopted an altogether different idea after acquiring the confidence of oppressed and humiliated masses of Pakistan. Sooner Mr. Bhutto came to be acknowledged by his counterparts around the globe for his courage and wisdom which gave post-1971 Pakistan a new dimension for survival (Satish, 1998: P.112). Although he was facing unremitting hostility of a conservative opposition inside the country and the Western wrath abroad, yet his deep commitment with the country was bringing about a historic turn in the fulfillment of a just cause and desires of the people.

In order to build an independent national economy, Mr. Bhutto said explicitly that modernization and scientization of the national economy constitute the strategic line that must be consistently followed in the making of foreign relations with neutral countries. Mr. Bhutto believed in self-reliance for it has remained a fundamental principle of an independent sovereign state. He thought of a self-reliant state whose armed forces could be capable of defending the country from the enemies at home and abroad, and an economic self-sufficiency which could address the deprivations of the poor masses. Implementing the agenda of self-reliance, Bhutto preferred to establish diplomatic ties with traditional opponents and regional heavy weights thus removing their pre-conceived notions about Pakistan’s role in world affairs (Mehrunnisa, 2001: P.69).

Close and cohesive bilateral ties with former Soviet Union and China helped Pakistan building its infrastructure and industrial sector. The defense production base and rebuild facilities were also substantially expanded. The Pakistan Aeronautical Complex at Kamra, Heavy Forge and Foundry, Heavy Mechanical Complex, Heavy Re-build Factory at Taxila and Pakistan Steel Mill at Karachi are considered to be the gifts of Mr. Bhutto’s successful diplomacy. Above all, he initiated a series of bilateral negotiations with key regional players keeping in view Pakistan’s strategic composition in the world and its geographical proximity with international routes. In turn, the armed forces hardly over got it so good under a civilian democratic government both in the conventional and nuclear as under Bhutto. Under him the Pakistan army embarked on an ambitious modernization programme acquiring some of the most advanced weapons especially in the offensive / strike modes like the up rated US M47/48 and Chinese T.59 medium tanks; M.113 armored personal carriers; Anti-tank guided weapons and a large
assortment of artillery pieces etc. For the Navy, the sophisticated British Sea King (anti
Sub-marine) helicopters, 14 Shanghai and Hachuan Class fast attack boats were added to
the existing fleet. The Air Force got the lion’s share in terms of several Mirage III RP
transport including 11 – 130 B, Falcon-20 and F-27 etc. Overall, a paradigm shift in
Pakistan’s foreign policy under Mr. Bhutto contributed a great deal towards country’s
progress and strategic position in the South Asia.

III. Indo-Pak bilateral ties in the Post-1971 era

After four months of debacle at Dacca and the ceasefire on 17 December, 1971,
both India and Pakistan sought to maintain peace despite the fact that their conflicts
possessed all the classical elements of war, i.e. competing territorial claims, an arms race,
mistrust and insecurity, domestic and regional compulsions. The rivalry was further
reinforced by military establishments and their stalwarts, in particular, religious factions
on both sides. Both the countries were victim to the post-colonial South Asian history
which was a tragic story of disharmony, disbelief and unlimited antagonism due to their
partnership with global competitors (Tariq, 1983: P.28). In the changed situation, Mr.
Bhutto did not pursue the policy of confrontation with India as Pakistan had lost the
status of an effective bargaining power. Therefore, both the neighbours held bilateral
talks in Simla where Mr. Bhutto and Mrs. Indra Gandhi agreed to initiate a process of
bilateral cooperation by deciding exclusive contentious matters. Mr. Bhutto proved to be
successful in bringing back 93,000 POWs in captivity, large tracts of occupied territory
and the withdrawal of armed forces to their respective territories and to a position where
they were bound to respect the ceasefire line in Jammu and Kashmir (Ghulam, 1989:
P.82). It was under those prevailing circumstances that Pakistan was compelled to come
to terms with India. Talking peace with India was a pressing need of the time, so was a
just and honourable settlement based on the principles of sovereign equality and
territorial integrity of Pakistan. Mr. Bhutto had inherited a dismembered, defeated,
militarily and economically weak Pakistan which was least likely to pose a threat to
India. Therefore, in that summit level dialogue, Pakistan emphasized the step by step
approach and sought to hold it up till the major issues were addressed.

Despite three major Indo-Pak wars and centuries’ old historic antagonism, Simla
agreement was the first concrete move towards normalization of relations, bilateralism,
non-interference and trade or business exchange between the two competitors of the
South-Asia.

Mr. Bhutto’s rational and logical arguments convinced the Indian leadership to
resort to peaceful means of settling disputes and abstention from the use of force in
accordance with the UN charter. On Kashmir, Mr. Bhutto resisted Indian pressure and
refused to accept the ceasefire line in Kashmir as the international border. It will not be
out of place to point out that the last para of the Simla accord makes a mention of Jammu
and Kashmir as one of the “questions” for the “final settlement” of which both countries
have agreed to “meet again at a mutually convenient time in the future” (Azfar, 1987:
P.111). The Simla agreement not only opened the way for cohesive bilateral relations but
made the Indian leadership realize that remedial measures were necessary for both
countries to adjust themselves to the new political and strategic environment by putting
the remaining aspects of East Pakistan crisis behind. By winning back the territory
Pakistan had lost to India, arranging repatriation of POW’s, taking a firm stand on the
disputed status of Kashmir and leveling the playing field between India and Pakistan via
summit level dialogues, Mr. Bhutto proceeded to rebuild his country with remarkable success (Abdul, 2007: P.53).

IV. Bhutto’s Priorities in Pak-U.S. Relations

In the cold war environment, Pakistan and USA were such fast friends whose relations seemed to have put aside all the bi-lateral differences for a “great cause”. But that friendship suffered a tremendous setback when the USA decided to give weightage to India in acquiring unconventional war capability in the post-1971 period. Any study of Pak-U.S ties during Bhutto’s era is not complete unless an insight into Pakistan’s nuclear programme is taken. Pakistan’s nuclear programme, started in the mid-1950s, aimed at acquiring scientific knowledge and technology for peaceful uses in agriculture and health. It also envisaged the construction of power plants in due course to meet the energy needs of its developing economy. The Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission obtained a small five megawatt research reactor from the United States in 1962 and a 120 megawatt nuclear power plant from Canada in 1972. However, Indian obsession of acquiring nuclear technology to develop weapons forced Pakistan to reconsider the nature of its nuclear program taking cognizance of the emergent threat to Pakistan’s security, and the potential for blackmail in an asymmetrical nuclear situation, Mr. Bhutto said in 1965, “If India makes an atomic bomb, then we will also do so, even if we have to eat grass….. An atom bomb can only be answered by an atom bomb.” But his rhetoric was matched with official action only when he assumed the charge as the prime minister (Jahangir, 1991: P.75) Mr. Bhutto allocated unprecedented resources for PAEC to embark on an expanded programme, with a dual-use potential, for which nuclear equipment and technology was then not subject to stringent export controls or intrusive external inspection. Therefore, Mr. Bhutto approached France to provide material and expertise for the construction of a reprocessing plant. Washington reacted on that contract by first offering to sell 120 aircraft to Pakistan and then pressuring France to cancel the deal. The U.S attitude of accepting India’s hypocritical claim that its test explosion in 1974 was for peaceful purpose and blaming Pakistan for causing irreversible contamination by its nuclear programme, was witnessed with anger in the entire Pakistan. Mr. Bhutto commented on that situation by saying that “It is vital for Pakistan to give the greatest possible attention to nuclear technology, rather than allow itself to be deceived by an international treaty limiting this deterrent to the present nuclear powers” (Oriana, 1976: P.231).

Providently, Pakistan had embarked on an alternative route for production of fissile material. On Mr. Bhutto’s initiative Dr. A. Q. Khan built a uranium enrichment plant at Kahutta with his team of dedicated scientists and engineers facing forbidding technological difficulties and obstacles, as the USA and other nuclear suppliers even refused export of non-nuclear components. Under these circumstances, the graph of anti-Americanism was at its height and the nuclear issue equated with Mr. Bhutto’s response to USA became a fertile source of anti-Americanism (Walter, 2004: P.97). Pakistanis felt betrayed by the Americans often in the service of Indian interests. Pakistan’s nuclear capability and its further enrichment turned out to be a vital concern to US policy makers. Mr. Bhutto, on the other hand, was not acceptable for the US administration because he did not allow USA to be brought to a position where she could dictate Pakistan on matters of strategic significance. Mr. Bhutto in his historic tenure, refused to enter into mutual defense or economic arrangements on the pattern of previous regimes. The era of Zulfi Bhutto’s premiership is known for a revamped foreign policy to claim Pakistan’s prestigious position in the comity of nations by rejecting big power’s commands. Mr.
Bhutto’s independent foreign policy set alarm bells ringing in the west. The US Secretary of States, Dr. Henry Kissinger who tried to dissuade Bhutto from acquiring nuclear capability but failed later on, warned him explicitly by saying “We will make a horrible example of you” (Richard, 1982: P.214). The USA virtually moved against Mr. Bhutto from all corners but he stood his ground and decided to confront.

Mr. Bhutto believed that in order to achieve socio-political and socio-economic progress, a neutral and peaceful foreign policy could serve Pakistan’s interest. Therefore, he established close contacts with China, Soviet Union, East-European countries and Latin-American states. Mr. Bhutto achieved quite a number of goals without American assistance what Ayub Khan and Yahya Khan failed to do with the all out support of USA. But America’s reaction to those developments came following the political crisis of 1977 when the opposition of Bhutto launched an agitation campaign against election results. The slogans of “Carter Zindabad” near the American Center, Lahore, vociferously raised by anti-Bhutto religious activists on May 4, 1977 were overt evidence of US hatred towards Mr. Bhutto (Kreisberg, 2000: P.86). It would be fair to note that Mr. Bhutto’s quest for nuclear deterrent vis-à-vis India, brought him to meet an end, whose screenplay was written at the Pentagon. Although Mr. Bhutto wanted to pursue Pakistan’s strategic interests without coming into confrontation with USA or any other major power, however, under the pretext of securing her own strategic superiority, the USA manipulated and dabbled in the affairs of Bhutto government. Mr. Bhutto’s priorities for his country in the Pak-U.S relations, therefore, turned out to be his fate which was no exception.

V. Bhutto’s vision of Unity among the Muslim Countries
During his tenure, Mr. Bhutto hoped to join the Muslim countries in the revival and reconstruction of “Muslim Ummah”, a strong socio-political, socio-economic alliance of all the Muslim nations. Among the Muslim countries, Mr. Bhutto visited Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Syria, Libya, Egypt, Turkey, Morocco, Algeria, Malaysia, Jordan and United Arab Emirates, in search of diplomatic and material support. Through cooperation in the fields of trade, education and technological expertise Pakistan managed to bridge the gap between herself and these important Muslim countries besides helping in gaining the trust of these countries. The image of Pakistan built as being a western ally was very disturbing for the Muslim countries. Pakistan under the conscientious leadership of Mr. Bhutto took all diplomatic measures to remove this image by initiating a long discourse on Muslim unity. That change occurred due to neutral stance taken by Pakistan’s western allies during the entire East Pakistan episode and the Indo-Pak war of 1971. It was that realization of being betrayed by its western friends which made Pakistan takes all possibly available measures to gain back the lost trust of the Muslim states and to re-cultivate harmonious relations with all shades of Muslim opinion. That was, of course, the first step in the history of Pakistan by any leader aiming to create a balance in its foreign policy. Mr. Bhutto’s vision in foreign policy rediscovered a path to progress. He believed that by joining hands, the independent Muslim states could protect mutual security, defend legitimate causes and promote freedom and international peace (Craig, 1984: PP.101-102).

Mr. Bhutto’s championship of the Palestinian cause evoked appreciation in the Arab world. The Shahinshah of Iran gave a memorable welcome to Pakistani leadership by his enthusiasm and contributed much financial help for developmental projects in
Pakistan. Turkey, aware of Bhutto’s admiration of Kemal Ataturk, responded with unprecedented cordiality. Both Iran and Turkey, the participants with Pakistan in RCD, helped Mr. Bhutto in overcoming economic turmoil in the post-1971 debacle. Saudi Arabia, the cradle of Islam, extended diplomatic support and economic assistance to help Pakistan rebuild its military. Mr. Bhutto undertook a whirlwind tour of Islamic countries in the Middle East, Africa and Asia which turned out to be a major factor in bringing the Muslim countries on one platform. The Lahore summit was a memorable event for the people of Pakistan as for the first time leaders of fraternal states met together to demonstrate mutual solidarity on all issues of common concern (Hadi, 1989: P.152). The sagacious king Faisal captured the mood of Muslim people all over the world with tears of joy in his eyes as he offered Friday prayers along with the highest level congregation ever-assembled at the Badshahi Mosque (Selig, 1978: P.12). As mentioned earlier, Pakistan under Mr. Bhutto was very active diplomatically in resolving the disputes faced by the Muslim countries. The Islamic summit conference unanimously agreed with the role of Pakistan for safeguarding Muslim interests. Thus came a stage when Pakistan was heading the Muslim block on the world forums. In response, the Muslim countries extended maximum support to Pakistan in bringing its potential on the scene.

VI. Conclusion

In the making of Muslim alliances at different levels, Mr. Bhutto used his art to a great effect (Henry, 1979: P.143). He never gave his Muslim counterparts the impression of wanting personal gains but for his own country he never hesitated to even beg from them. Mr. Bhutto feared that since the emergence of a Muslim block as a competitor to the West was in the making, the Muslim countries might be made target by the “distributors of the world markets”. He called on the Muslim leadership to struggle against the West-dominated system which was exercising its power ruthlessly and cruelly. Mr. Bhutto was a central character in a key event regarding oil politics in the middle-east, known as the “oil boom”. He was, of course, an architect of oil blockade or oil embargo to the West for it was he who proposed that strategy as a counterweight. The overtly defined mission of Bhutto was to disrupt the political and economic order led by Western capitalist block, whose conspiracy schemes served as barriers in the path of Muslim political, economic and social growth. As a result of Bhutto’s efforts in putting the Muslim leadership on a right track, Muslims all over the world found themselves more energetic than ever before. Recognizing the role played by Mr. Bhutto for Islamic unity, Muslim, particularly the Arab Countries have a great regard for him considering the magnitude of the tasks that he undertook with all zeal and zest.
bringing the Muslim nations into close and cordial connections. He did not confine himself to approaching only Muslim countries to react against Western capitalist block, but pioneered a new phase of revolutionary struggle from a steadfast third world–based standpoint. Mr. Bhutto discovered the truth of deterrence in the course of the struggle against bigoted champions of world peace and bogus human rights contractors, while hewing out a difficult path for economic liberation and progress.

Mr. Bhutto led to success the revolutionary struggle at different stages and the work in all fields of diplomacy, infrastructure and defense. In this regard, he himself gained a wealth of precious experience and generalized it by steadily contributing this spirit in his writings in a profound manner. History defines Mr. Bhutto as a capable charismatic leader who managed to conform his policies to the unchangeable flow of history. The fatalistic historians believe that history makes the man but Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was one such person who made a history by challenging a world order during his protracted struggle.

Some leaders need power to give purpose to their lives but Mr. Bhutto lived for a purpose so compellingly strong that they crave power in order to advance that purpose even now.

References


