

QUESTION OF SECURITY AND STRATEGY

TALKING POINT

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IMPACT INTERNATIONAL: In Pakistan, the Middle East and the West, everyone seems to be outraged at the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. But how substantial are the dangers to the security of the southwest Asian region?

KHURSHID AHMAD: There is no doubt that the present situation is alarming and portentous, but it would be too simplistic to assume that this threat has appeared like a bolt from the blue on the 27 December 1979. Russian encroachments in Afghanistan did not begin on that date. Soviet influence over the Zahir Shah's regime, its involvements in the Daud takeover (1974), in Taraki's so-called coup d'etat (1978) and then Amin's drama of Taraki's overthrow are important elements in the making of the scenario. Afghanistan was accepted by the West as Russia's political hinterland. The December invasion was made possible because the world, including the Third World and the Muslim world, was not worried enough about the systematic liquidation of Afghanistan's independence.

In the first phase, the Soviets brought up and carried on with unrepresentative but pro-Russian dictatorships. As those who were opposing these secular communist regimes were Islamists, the 'world' had no sympathy or support for them.

Why this should be so?

It seems that when there is a choice between Islam and Communism, the western countries tend to side with their own communist half-brothers and forget

about all the lip-service to the 'will and wishes of the people'. However, another factor which helped to precipitate direct Russian intervention was the panicky arrogance with which America reacted to Iran's quest for genuine independence. There may be two opinions as to how not to treat the 'diplomatic spies', but there must not be two opinions about the American handling of the Iranian revolution.

Till the very last moment America tried to support the stooge-regimes of Shah and Shahpur Bakhtiar. Even after the success of the revolution and its formal recognition, the new popular republic was not accepted in good grace. There was no evidence of any sincere readjustment and efforts to build a new equation with Islam and its socio-economic and political ethos. Instead, American policy, supported by her European allies, has been to unseat the Islamic revolutionary forces and engineer some kind of a counter-revolution.

So while the US government and the western media were busy in unleashing forces of hatred against Iran and the Muslims in general, the Soviets decided to accept the invitation to walk into neighbouring Afghanistan.

So what is the final shape of power relations today?

Stark and cruel. In spite of the international chorus of rejoicings on *detente*, 'multi-polarity' and 'end of colonialism', it is difficult to ignore the sad and crude reality that the big powers continue to look upon the world in terms of their respective areas of influence. The Russian approach is as steeped in this neo-imperialist framework as that of the other superpower. Russian military operations in Hungary and Czechoslovakia and its efforts to build its power-bases in Cuba, Ethiopia, Angola, South Yemen and Afghanistan are mere details of this framework.

Despite the so-called Vietnam debacle, American policy has undergone little objective changes, as we see it in Latin America, in

its use of Israel and Iran (under the Shah) as bastions of its influence and now the concern to make Pakistan as the demarcation line between the Russian and American 'areas of influence'.

Where do you go from here?

First and foremost is the question of protection of smaller countries from aggression against their independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. This is the principle on which the entire edifice of the U.N. rests, and on which the process of peace-keeping operates. When Russia blatantly violated this principle in Czechoslovakia and shamefacedly advanced the Brezhnev doctrine of 'limited sovereignty' it was not effectively challenged and rebutted. India violated the sovereignty of Pakistan in 1971 and the world's response was lukewarm. Tanzania invaded Uganda and still holds it under its suzerainty yet the western world blesses this aggression.

The world would have to discard its double standards and protect this principle with consolidated might, if the sovereignty and independence of the smaller nations are to be protected. Because violation of the sovereignty of one country is like violating the sovereignty of all. The Qur'an has expounded the principle that murdering one man is like murdering the entire human race.

Obviously Russia seeks to push to the Arabian sea and towards the energy sources in the Middle East, first, to threaten the essential supplies of the West and secondly to care for its own future needs. This neatly fits into the Russian/Communist dream of world domination. These aspects are being highlighted in the West and do contain quite a large grain of truth.

But there is also an important ideological dimension to the problem. The Russians, I think, are not simply seeking access to warm waters, they also want to pre-empt and suppress the Islamic resurgence around them. Muslims constitute about one-fourth of the Russian population. The Islamic revolution in Iran, the emergence of Islamic revolutionary resistance to the left secular dictatorship in Afghanistan and the prospects of Islamic rule in Pakistan are seen as a potent threat to communist

hegemony in Central Asia. Obviously they are not afraid of the military power, they are concerned about the ideological dimension of Islam as a comprehensive and moral social order.

But is the western perception of Islam any different?

Unfortunately not. There is no welcoming of Islam as a force against atheistic communism. On the other hand they seem eager to drown this force in the murky waters of cold war.

If this is your appreciation, how do you think the challenge of the situation can be met? Particularly what is your reaction to the American response to these developments and her offer of military and economic aid to Pakistan?

I would be very explicit with you. It is my considered opinion, which is based not merely on study and reflection spread over a long period, but also on first hand handling of the socio-economic problems of Pakistan as Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, that the strategy of 'growth through foreign aid' has miserably failed in Pakistan, as also in Turkey and in a host of other countries. If anyone thinks that by repeating the exercises on which the country staked its fate in the late fifties and early sixties, the Pakistani nation can face this challenge, I am afraid he is sadly mistaken. If history has any lesson to teach it is very clear: *no repetition of the earlier strategies that have failed to deliver the goods*. There is no sense in swinging from one extreme to the other. We had to pass through a very painful process to disengage ourselves from the American connection of the past and there seems no justification to turn back towards that broken reed.

I also feel that security cannot be achieved by tying oneself to the apron strings of a world power. Much water has flown down the Indus, as it has all over the world. The bi-polar world of the fifties has now given way to a world in which two world powers co-exist with other poles represented by China, Japan and Western Europe. Third World is also seeking its independent destiny. The Muslim world is trying to

come of its own. Pakistan has gradually moved towards non-alignment and it would be a step backwards to reverse this process.

From the viewpoint of practical politics too mere world power patronage has not provided enough protection to smaller countries. Vietnam is not the only example of this. Taiwan, Cambodia and Iran are not irrelevant. Israel, in spite of its special relationship with the United States, refused to base its strategy on American guarantees as sketched in Nixon-Kissinger proposals. Turkey hinged its existence on its alliance with the US and NATO, but when the moment of truth came in Cyprus, Turkey was abandoned even at the cost of weakening the most strategic plank of NATO. Less is said about Pakistan's own experience of US commitments of the past, the better. In view of all these considerations efforts to seek security, primarily and mainly by administrative commitments of a world power cannot be considered as a safe choice.

What about the 'Carter Doctrine'?

In the first place, the objectives of the United States in confronting Russia in West Asia and those of Pakistan may not converge. America is using the present situation to seek military presence in the area and ensure its hold on the supply of essential raw materials for the West. The so-called 'Carter Doctrine' of containing Russian expansionism has its own ambiguities and uncertainties. The Truman Doctrine of containment was materialised through military alliances and an international development strategy. Although this approach paid dividends in Europe the strategy in Third World miserably failed. How far a Carter Doctrine is going to be different from its predecessors no one is caring to clarify. And what would be 'mortality rate' of commitments once American media turns against a people or rediscovers the value of the lives of American boys if their lives are threatened in other lands? What about big powers wishing to dictate their own values and system upon the people they claim to protect?

Ruling out direct alignment with the US and accep-

tance of foreign aid strategy what options are left to a country like Pakistan, tightly cornered by an aggressive superpower?

That is a very important question. I am not opposing external assistance and cooperation altogether but am against adopting big power aid as the mainstay of security and development. In fact 'aid' is a misnomer. The element of grant in what goes as foreign aid is almost non-existent. Pakistan has to acquire military and other technology from other countries and we are eager to get it at a reasonable price. Pakistan did not boycott American supplies. America unilaterally discontinued essential supplies and the nation realised the risks in depending on one major source alone.

It must be realised that the solution to the dangers that beset us are not short-term. The problems are basic and their solutions are possible only in the framework of a long-term national policy. We would like to have friendly relations with America and other Western countries and have mutual economic and technological cooperation but not to develop a relationship of obligate dependence. We expect cooperation from others if they see that their own objectives converge with ours. But we do not believe that being small is a dirty word and smaller countries have no right to equal independence, sovereignty and national honour and the right to live according to their own values. We should seek a new framework of relationship with other countries, including big powers. We want to diversify our sources of supply and to acquire, not just finished products, but technologies that should enable us to produce what we need.

Secondly, we believe that the right course for Pakistan and other Muslim countries is to seek collective security and build collective self-reliance. The mainstay of this arrangement have to be Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and the Arab world. There are geopolitical and economic factors, even compulsions, which point towards an integrated Muslim world as a third force in the world. A strategy for human and physical resource development is needed to really develop this region into an independent bloc. The possibilities of having a mul-

tilateral defence force of the Muslim countries also deserves to be examined and pursued. A common fund to finance economic and military requirements of the area is also a pressing need.

Thirdly, the real strength to meet an external challenge of this type with which Pakistan is confronted can come only through effective mobilisation of the national resources within the country and through genuine reconstruction of the society on Islamic principles. It is through the active participation of the people in the processes of society and through giving all these processes an effective ideological orientation that the hidden sources of vitality can be discovered and harnessed. The present situation make it imperative that we abandon the stratagem of house-top declarations of Islamisation and adopt an all-comprehensive strategy of genuine Islamisation by purging national life of anti-Islamic values and practices and establishing the Islamic social and economic order ensuring freedom, justice, moral uplift, military mobilisation of the people and the common man's participation in all areas of decision-making and programme implementation. This calls for a new type of national mobilisation and ideological reconstruction. And it is through this programme that the nation can be prepared to meet the challenge facing it.

But we are talking about a collective security for the Muslim world. Security in fact is collective.

Yes, a similar strategy is needed for the ideological development of other Muslim countries. This would enable the Muslim world to become a contemporary model of the Islamic culture and civilization and function as a third force.

You almost seem to exclude cooperation with the non-Muslim states?

On the contrary, within the framework provided by the strategies outlined above, Pakistan, as indeed other Muslim countries, should build a network of international cooperation with other countries, particularly China, Japan, Europe, America and the Third World. We should

actively seek — and I am sure it would come — a sympathetic understanding of our approach to the problems of humanity and our vision of the future. Instead of becoming a fuel for the cold war, let us adopt a set of policies that may give us a place of respect in the world. I would not exclude the possibilities of dialogue with Russia and other communist countries. But we must guard and preserve, the flexibility and manoeuvrability which we have acquired at a great cost.

You suggested that Pakistan and Iran be the cornerstone of this collective self-reliance model. Yet what are the chances of its adoption in view of the US-Russian rivalry in the area?

I rate the chances of the successful adoption of this strategy immense. My worry, however, is that there are interested parties which are trying to drive Iran towards Russia and to even use some Muslim government to alienate Iran from some other Muslim countries. This is very mischievous and Muslims must be aware of its sinister implications. There are suggestions that let Afghanistan be the border line for Russian influence and Iran and Pakistan the frontier of American influence. Even some kind of US-Russian understanding on these lines is being hawked about. But it is both impudent and sinister. The forthcoming Islamic Foreign Ministers Conference must address itself to this problem. And Pakistan has a vital role to play in this respect.

There is also an immediate situation.

As to the immediate situation, international pressure on Russia should be strengthened to the point where it withdraws its forces from Afghanistan. Greater the pressure, less are the chances of escalation of Russian influence in the area. All moral and material aid should be given to the Islamic fighters in Afghanistan. And a multilateral Islamic defence force should be created to protect the vital frontiers of the Islamic world. Pakistan and Iran constitute the fortresses of Islam and the whole Muslim world should unite to defend them. ■

emerge on the world crisis map overnight, but it is also a fact, sad and painful at that, that the OIC, had hitherto failed to see and recognise that there did exist an actual and potential problem in Afghanistan. Some uncharitable critics have remarked that even in the present crisis, but for the strong US reaction the OIC might not have acted at all. Nevertheless the 42-member organisation took one full month to hold an emergency meeting — two weeks after the 152-member UN general assembly had met and voted, 104 to 18 with 18 abstentions, calling for immediate, unconditional and total withdrawal of 'the foreign troops' in Afghanistan.

The UN vote too was a telling indication of the 'solidarity' of the OIC bloc. Of the OIC states although only South Yemen, apart from Afghanistan, voted against the resolution seven (Algeria, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, North Yemen, Syria and Uganda) abstained and four (Chad, Comoros, Libya and Sudan) absented themselves from the meeting. Sudan's absention was explained as an act of indiscipline on the part of its delegate who, it is said, has been recalled. The Libyans said they had absented because they wanted to protest against the world community's indifference when Uganda was similarly attacked by Tanzania early last year. Such a protest might have made sense if Tanzania had been aggressed against, but why punish the poor Muslims of Afghanistan?

Subsequent to the vote at the UN a conference of 'the steadfastness and confrontation states' (Algeria, Libya, South Yemen, Syria and the PLO) met hurriedly in Damascus and asked for the postponement of the Islamic foreign ministers' conference as well as to change the venue from Islamabad to Jeddah. Why? On 26 January, that is the day the conference is set to convene, was the date for 'normalisation' of relations between Egypt and Israel. It is impossible to understand this logic, unless one takes it to mean that 'we musn't "celebrate" two tragedies at the same time'!

'Foreign minister' Qaddumi of the PLO which aims at establishing a 'secular' state of mini Palestine with Islamic support and Muslim people's funds is reported to have said that 'the Soviet Union has given disinterested help to Afghanistan in its struggle against reaction and for independence' and argued that anyway they could not [afford to] oppose their 'friend', the Soviet Union. The assumption seems to be that probably after finishing their business in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, the Gulf and the Arabian peninsula, the Soviets would be able to divert all their friendly might to help establish that mini secular state, Begin willing! One would ignore the state-

ments of people like Hawatima or Habash, but since Mr Qaddumi happens to represent the main Palestinian movement Al-Fath, Muslim opinion is liable to ask itself whether these are the kind of people whom it can entrust the task of liberation of the sacred land of Palestine.

This brief review of the realities of Islamic solidarity is not to suggest any pessimism because once it is possible to recognise the negatives of a situation one can, with some hard work, overcome them. Supposing all those OIC states who did not support the withdrawal resolution at the UN either by voting against or abstaining and absenting plus half a dozen more did not join in any programme of unified political action to support the right of the Muslim people of Afghanistan to establish a sovereign, independent and non-aligned state of their own choice, even without these states the Russian superpower can be made to pack up from Afghanistan. What the Muslim leadership needs — and is unfortunately

short of — is faith and determination — as the Iranian leadership has shown despite aspects which one need not agree with. Given this faith and determination, the Muslim world can establish an equation of respectable and constructive relationship with both power blocs without becoming the ward or stooge of one or the other superpower.

It is also important that while addressing itself to the problem of Soviet annexation of Afghanistan, the conference should get over its inexplicable self-inhibition and also consider the plight and problem of the 50 million or more Muslims under Soviet rule who have been consigned to lead a life of rightlessness since the Bolshevik occupation of their territories hardly half a century ago. Perhaps the blatant military occupation of Afghanistan and a threatened Russian expansion further southwest and southeast are the price of indifference to the plight of their brethren in Central Asia that the Muslim world is today forced to pay. This is a problem which cannot be

solved by appeasement.

In any case, constraints and weaknesses notwithstanding, never before has the Islamic Conference been called upon to address itself to such a challenging task as it faces today. This is a challenge which it cannot afford to fail.

But insofar as the people of Afghanistan are concerned they should learn to recognise the Muslim world realities and try to fashion their strategy and their struggle on the basis of improvisation and mobilisation of their own local resources. In fact guerrilla warfare techniques have developed mainly in response to a situation of no or minimal external resources. They have already set a great example in unmatched valour and resistance and it is not insignificant that even after the arrival of the Soviet forces, they have been neither demoralised nor deterred. This assessment is not based on 'rebel' claims, but on the East German aid rushed to Kabul last week. This consisted of medicines, medical and nursing equipment and blood plasma. ■