
The Legacy of Bhutto and Zia's Contending Visions and Security Policies

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The war perpetrated by the Pakistani army in 1971 against its own Bengali population came to an end only through New Delhi's intervention and the resulting loss of East Pakistan. The now-contiguous Pakistan that re-emerged in 1972, brought to power a new government dominated by civilians and led by the charismatic Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and a new army commander, General Zia ul-Haq. This essay examines Bhutto's and Zia's contending visions for the newly reconstructed Pakistan, their differing approaches to the Kashmir dispute, and the long-lasting consequences of their actions.



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Bhutto represented the idea of a secular Pakistan based on consensus and inter-ethnic cooperation, equitable and just laws, and national order derived from constitutional constraints on the arbitrary exercise of government power. In contrast, Zia was not only the legate of a military tradition that stressed the hierarchy of power, but he also believed that governance and spiritual belief were inextricably intertwined. Importantly, and the key to their interaction, both men were flawed expressions of national leadership. Each man assumed a role larger than his personality could manage, and each imposed a legacy on Pakistan that those who followed could neither evade nor ignore.

Bhutto emphasized the need to restore the primacy of civilian government that was lost with Mohammad Ali Jinnah's death in 1948, and certainly after the 1951 assassination of Pakistan's first Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan. All of the politicians who followed them had failed to address the central question of the country's democratic experiment: Could a state founded on religious sentiment adapt itself to the secular traditions and processes of the nation-state? Although Bhutto stood out from the other politicians, he was more inclined to arrogate power than promote the cause of limited government. He succeeded in developing a formidable political organization, but he came up short in demanding the subordination of the country's military establishment. Most critically, Bhutto failed to accept his role in the loss of East Pakistan, nor did he interpret accurately the impact of that loss on the country's armed forces, which, though humbled by the defeat, were not prepared to acknowledge him as their supreme leader.

Bhutto's apparent inclination to write off Kashmir, much as he did East Pakistan, by negotiating the Simla Accord with India in 1972 was more than the army was prepared to tolerate. In the immediate aftermath of the civil war, the army could only stand by as Bhutto consolidated his power, sought diplomatic arrangements with New Delhi, and managed the release of the 93,000 prisoners of war languishing in the now-independent

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Bangladesh. He also selected Zia ul-Haq — an officer who was not in the country during the civil war — to lead the army, and thus appeared to have eliminated all the higher ranking officers that might have challenged his authority. Zia, however, refused to be beholden to Bhutto and moved quickly to restore the shattered image of the army and reposition it as the watchdog of the country's national interests. Bhutto's flagging popularity within his own coterie and party gave Zia the opening needed to reassert the army's power. Nowhere was this power more quickly exercised than in reversing Bhutto's Kashmir policy. Zia's strategy went beyond reordering the army. Zia, who believed neither in self-government nor in democratic norms, strove to build an Islamic state that corresponded to his perception of Pakistan's needs.

In pursuit of this aim, Zia reorganized the army to include an array of clandestine services. Acknowledging India's superiority in conventional warfare, he made a commitment to irregular operations conducted by shadow organizations resembling guerrilla units but heavily schooled in religious zealotry and prepared to make huge sacrifices in the name of faith. Thus it was Zia who authorized the restructuring and expansion of the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI) and made it the central operating force in the revived army. Moreover, unlike Bhutto who seemed determined to bury the hatchet with India, Zia intended to use the ISI and its jihadist offspring to extend Pakistan's power into Indian-occupied Kashmir.

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Although Bhutto's diplomatic efforts had succeeded in bringing Islamabad and New Delhi into a formal relationship, his waning fortunes became evident in the aftermath of the 1977 elections. Bhutto was compelled to urge the army to quell street demonstrations and corral his opposition. Zia, however, had prepared for just such circumstances and used them to terminate Bhutto's rule and restore the army's position at the top of the political power structure. Believing that he had the support of the masses, Zia orchestrated the arrest, indictment for murder, trial, and hanging of the ousted Prime Minister. Thereafter, Zia launched a process of "Islamization" in the country, which, importantly, brought long-marginalized orthodox and obscurantist political organizations into the mainstream of Pakistani political life. Zia made it clear his objective was nothing less than a transformed country wedded to Islamic mores and traditions.

Under Zia's program of renewal, the army was given several additional responsibilities, the most important of which were oversight of the country's nuclear program and management of the Kashmir issue. Without emphasizing a shift in national security policy, Zia cited Kashmir as the *raison d'être* of the new Pakistan and gave the ISI broad power to assemble the jihadist organizations that would carry the fight to the Indian army in Kashmir while at the same time avoiding direct confrontation. New Delhi was reluctant to reignite major hostilities so long as the forays were limited and unlikely to change the balance of power in the region. This forbearance proved somewhat justified when the Soviet Red Army invaded Afghanistan in December 1979, compelling Pakistan to redeploy a substantial portion of its forces and intelligence service operations to the Pashtun areas in the country's northwest.

The Islamic zealotry stoked by Zia's Islamization policies were now applied to Afghanistan, where Islamabad sensed the need for a broader national security policy that not only protected Pakistan from Soviet machinations, but helped reinforce the country's defenses against any future Indian encroachment. The army had failed to prevent the loss of East Pakistan, but it was determined not to repeat that experience in the reconstituted Pakistan. Holding the Red Army at the Pakistani frontier was one strategy, but building new territorial defenses against a possible Indian thrust toward the country's heartland was equally important. Clandestine operations in Kashmir, therefore, were expanded to include Afghanistan. Therefore, what began as a supposed popular uprising in Kashmir designed to weaken India's claim quickly matured into a full-blown strategy that enlisted the services of the Afghan *mujahidin*.

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Pakistan survived, albeit in truncated form, following India's liberation of East Pakistan and the termination of the Muslim country's two-winged experiment. It survived again in the no less momentous conflict in Afghanistan. Zia's national security program was deemed to have succeeded in preserving what remained of the country, but the General left a questionable legacy. In the end, although Pakistan became the first Islamic nation to possess nuclear weapons, the country was more insecure and its future had become even more precarious. The jihadist program managed by the ISI in Kashmir assumed even larger significance in Afghanistan under the umbrella of restored civilian government. The protracted Kashmir dispute hardened prospects for a negotiated settlement with India, and Afghanistan was denied its anticipated tranquility even after the last Soviet soldier withdrew in February 1989.

Taking on a life of its own, the ISI was uninterested in solutions to vexing problems. By now too committed to its forward strategy in Afghanistan, the ISI strategized to produce an Afghan government not only tied to Islamabad, but inextricably linked to the larger Pashtun nation. Recognizing that Afghanistan would not easily fall within Pakistan's orbit, the ISI set in motion yet another irregular force, the Taliban. Sanctioned by Pakistan's civilian governments in the 1990s, the ISI provided its army of Taliban fighters with fresh recruits and arms. The Taliban conquered Kabul in 1996 and from there fanned out to the most remote areas of Afghanistan. By the next Pakistan army coup in 1999, the Taliban had taken on the mantle of Islamic crusaders. Jihadists were attracted from throughout the Muslim world, most significant among them al-Qa'ida and Usama bin Ladin. Interaction between the Taliban and al-Qa'ida was immediate and intimate, and in its initial phase the ISI, whether directly or indirectly, nourished both movements.

The Taliban and al-Qa'ida added new dimensions to the Afghan dilemma that no outsider could control. With al-Qa'ida and bin Ladin determined to formulate a far more ambitious agenda, the ISI hold on developments slipped away. Even after the United States-led coalition brought down the Taliban emirate in 2001, scattering its leaders and foot soldiers to the high mountains of Afghanistan and Pakistan, the struggle continued. Al-Qa'ida likewise remained viable, moving

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between Afghanistan and Pakistan and plotting its next operation. Of the two states, however, Pakistan continued to exhibit the greater dilemma. Its questionable nuclear security, its renegade ISI remnants, and its failed social and economic programs were especially worrisome. But arguably the greatest threat to the future of Pakistan was manifested in the same jihadist irregulars that the ISI and the Pakistan army had nurtured in the unending conflict with India. By continuing to nurture jihadists, Islamabad has opened the floodgates to all manner of dissidence. Moreover, the rapport that binds the Pakistani masses to the likes of Taliban and al-Qa'ida gives new dimensions to the definition of the failed state. Thus the Bhutto-Zia confrontation continues to frame developments and events in Pakistan — events that have brought South Asia to the abyss.