

After Bhutto: 'arc of crisis' in S. Asia

In the dark of night, at 1 a.m. Pakistani time, on April 4, the foremost political leader in that south Asian nation, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was legally murdered by the military regime of General Zia ul-Haq. The shocking death of Mr. Bhutto, carried out despite worldwide appeals to the regime to halt the execution, has opened the floodgates of chaos and instability in this region. The fears expressed by many world leaders that Bhutto's death would bring turmoil to Pakistan and beyond are fast being realized. The question is—after Bhutto, what next?

The code words for the situation prevailing in this region—that stretches from the Middle East and Iran across the vast subcontinent of Asia into Southeast Asia—are Zbigniew Brzezinski's now famous phrase, "an arc of crisis." With Iran in the midst of political upheaval and disintegration of all semblance of central government, the Iranization of Pakistan now promises to spread the chaos.

The Pakistani regime is under the domination of extreme reactionary Islamic elements, led by the Pakistani branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Jamaati Islami. The country is now heading for confrontation with neighboring Afghanistan, whose government is accused of being "un-Islamic." The Islamic regime in Pakistan is also likely to create tensions with its historic nemesis, India. There are strong fears in India of a Chinese-directed "encirclement" through the Islamic regimes in both Pakistan and Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan).

These regional tensions will be coupled with the disintegration of Pakistan itself. It is unlikely that the Army, traditionally the stronghold of the dominant Punjabi population, will be able to retain the loyalties of secessionist, pro-autonomy forces in the other three major provinces of Baluchistan, the Northwest Frontier (Pukhtoonistan), and the Sind.

A chaotic breakdown of Pakistan and an Afghan-Pakistan border war poses a serious threat to India, where anti-Muslim and Hindu chauvinist elements already make up a large section of the present government of Prime Minister Morarji Desai and the

ruling Janata (Peoples) party. The Hindu chauvinist Jan Sangh party (part of the Janata) and its militia arm, the fascist-oriented Rastriya Sevak Sangh (RSS) are already in a bid for power. According to informed Indian sources, these forces desire the ouster of Desai, in favor of Jan Sangh leader and Foreign Minister Vajpayee.

The Hindu chauvinist elements in India feed off the Islamic movements around them, thus setting up multiple scenarios for regional wars and the undermining of the viable nation-states of the area. This is the aim of the "arc of crisis" geopolitics of the Carter Administration and its allies in London, who in particular have a detailed knowledge and direction of these centrifugal movements in their old colonial jewel, the former British Raj.

A shaky Junta

The Pakistani junta is a shaky entity that has held onto power so far only by taking the desperate step of physically eliminating its major political opponent—without any visible support for itself among the masses of the poor and angry Pakistani populace.

The reaction of the Pakistani people to the death of their popular leader was a brief outburst of public outrage. Tens of thousands of Bhutto supporters went into the streets in every city, town, and village across the country. While the junta has managed to quickly suppress the demonstrations, with some deaths already reported and thousands of arrests, the mass outrage is only a warning shot of the unrest in the population.

The regime must now try to destroy the ghost of a martyred Bhutto. Its fears were amply demonstrated in the extraordinary measures taken around the execution. Bhutto was murdered in secret, his body flown in secret to his home town of Larkhana in the Sind, and buried without even the presence of his wife and daughter, who were held under house arrest in Rawalpindi in the north.

Signals of the direction the junta will take emerged in the days following the Bhutto killing. The first was a report of an incursion by Pakistani soldiers into

neighboring Afghanistan, resulting in a clash with Afghan troops that left seven Afghans dead. The Afghan government, closely allied to the Soviet Union, denounced the Pakistanis, while the Soviets, in a high-level commentary in Pravda, charged Pakistani collusion with the United States, China, Egypt, and other states in arming and training Afghani "rebels."

Hoax of U.S. protests

Meanwhile, the U.S. State Department made a show of announcing a suspension of some \$85 million in economic and military assistance to Pakistan, earmarked for the next two years. The State Department claimed it took the action in response to reports that Pakistan is secretly building a uranium enrichment plant that would give it the capability to manufacture nuclear weapons. The Pakistani junta loudly replied that "Zionist circles" are behind the charge, and that it was "unfair" and "discriminatory" relative to U.S. response to the Indian nuclear policy. The entire episode has in fact proven useful to both U.S. and Pakistani designs in the region.

The U.S. move was *not* taken as a result of breaking intelligence but by its own admission, the timing of the State Department announcement was due to imminent press revelations of the Pakistani efforts. The information concerning Pakistani nuclear weapons capability has in fact been widely circulating for several weeks at least, and Indian sources reported two weeks ago that the Indian government has intelligence that Pakistan in fact has a nuclear device that it intends to test in the near future—in part to divert attention from the Bhutto killing. Those sources report that the device was obtained with the direct aid of Great Britain, through private companies there, and West Germany and Belgium.

While the State Department has covered up the role of our British "allies," it has been reported that Desai sent a letter to Prime Minister Callaghan protesting British nuclear assistance to Pakistan. Desai also sent a letter to President Zia of Pakistan. Indian sources report that the U.S. protest is viewed as a "hoax." The protest has given the Pakistanis a cover for further "Islamic" aggression, while disassociating the United States from the junta. The action also added confusion to the situation in a way that encourage further division in the subcontinent.

Adding it all up, examining the background which led to the Bhutto killing and the situation as it quickly unravels—as we do in the section which follows—a clear picture emerges of a major trouble spot in a world already full of them. All the major powers are involved—from the United States, China, Britain, to the Soviet Union—and the stage is set for a confrontation of global proportions.

—Daniel Sneider

1. The plot against Afghanistan

Afghanistan has become the touchpoint of tension in the Asian subcontinent. Over the past months, reports have mounted of armed revolts inside Afghanistan by reactionary Islamic tribalists. Using bases in Iran and Pakistan, these fundamentalists have declared a "holy war" against the government of President Noor Mohammad Taraki. The Taraki government, which came to power in an army-led revolution last April, has denounced the "black reaction" and the "feudal reactionaries," who have been trying to overthrow the government, while pinning Pakistan and the Khomeini circles in Iran for their complicity.

The destabilization of the Taraki government has brought stern warnings from the Soviet Union, Afghanistan's neighbor and treaty ally. In numerous articles over the past weeks, the Soviets have charged the involvement of foreign powers, including "British and American secret services," the Chinese, Egypt, Iran, and Pakistan, in the plot against the Afghan government. The Soviets have made clear they will tolerate no attempt to reverse the Afghan revolution.

The crisis around Afghanistan reached a critical point with the February 13 assassination of U.S. Ambassador Adolf Dubs by Islamic terrorists in Kabul. The U.S. reaction—blaming the Soviet Union and the Afghan government for "overreaction" in the incident—began to set the stage for confrontation. Ironically, responsibility for the Dubs murder has since been claimed by a Maoist Afghan group known to be receiving arms and training from China in camps located in Pakistan.

Since February the Afghan exile movement of Islamic fundamentalists has emerged as the frontpiece of the anti-Taraki operation. The exiles are known to be operating out of base camps in the Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan, which borders Afghanistan and whose tribal Pathan population stretches across into Afghanistan. The exiles have recently formed an Afghan Liberation Front. Its main components are the Jamaati Islami (the Muslim Brotherhood) and the Hezbi Islami (Fundamentalist Islam party). At the camps, the guerrillas are being armed and trained by Chinese, U.S., and British intelligence operatives with assistance from the Pakistani regime.

A "Holy War"

The Pakistani connection and a similar linkage into Iran, which borders Afghanistan on the west, are run