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SOUTH ASIA: A LOOK AHEAD

In anticipation of Pakistan President Bhutto's state visit next week, the following is a brief review of the status of negotiations in South Asia and a look ahead.

ABSTRACT

The stage appears set for resumed negotiations between India and Pakistan on the exchange of POW and civilian detainees shortly after Bhutto's visit to Washington. The prospects are uncertain, with the immediate question remaining that of Mujib's intentions regarding POW trials. Moreover, Bhutto must take Chinese interests into consideration: whereas Moscow is not exerting appreciable influence in New Delhi or Dacca, it is clear that Peking plays a significant role in Pakistan's decisions.

For the longer term, the question of stability in South Asia will depend largely on Bhutto's intentions toward India. Already possessing a credible military deterrent against India, Bhutto recently has exerted public pressures for resumed military assistance from the US which suggest that he is investigating the option of

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a renewed confrontation. His assessment of the US response to his approach will have an important influence on his future relations with India.

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As of today, 18 months since the end of the war and just one year since the Simla Agreements, the only progress toward a resolution of the problems resulting from the 1971 crisis has been the withdrawal of Indian and Pakistani troops along the international border and the delineation of a new line of control in Kashmir. However, the stage has lately been at least partially set for a new phase in negotiations to deal with the exchange of POW and civilian detainees. A satisfactory exchange would pave the way for further progress on such matters as:

- the exchange of diplomatic representatives (including Pakistan's recognition of Bangladesh);
- negotiations over the division of assets and liabilities between Pakistan and Bangladesh;
- normalization of relations between India and Pakistan, including overflights, transit, and trade.

The question of establishing a new modus vivendi among the three South Asian powers, including some understanding on Kashmir, however, remains well over the horizon.

Preparations for Next Phase

Islamabad and New Delhi have tentatively agreed to resume talks following Bhutto's return from the US; the date and venue have not yet been determined. All three governments have indicated that they would like to reach an agreement over the exchange of detainees. India and Bangladesh demonstrated their interest with their April 17 proposal, which was followed by a series of high-level Indian-Bangalee negotiations over a joint response to Pakistan's subsequent counterproposals. Pakistan demonstrated its interest via a series of private letters to Indian Foreign Minister Swaran Singh which indicated more flexibility toward the proposal than Pakistan's public position does -- including hints of flexibility over the war trials and Bihari issues.

Prospects Uncertain

Yet the prospects for the next phase of negotiations are highly uncertain. It appears possible that an agreement can be reached over a swap of most of the POW's in India for the Bangalees in Pakistan, that the Bihari question may be negotiable, and that Bangladesh and India may agree to address the Bihari repatriation question as a separate issue.

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Less certain are Mujib's intentions regarding war crimes trials and Bhutto's level of tolerance for such trials. Despite clear signs of Indian efforts to persuade Mujib to limit -- if not forego -- the trials, no information on Mujib's intentions is available; and although Bangladesh has not yet published the names of the prisoners to be tried, or the charges, and has not yet introduced enabling legislation to permit the trials, the Dacca authorities claim to have documentary evidence directly linking senior Pakistani Generals Niazi and Farman Ali to the terrorist squads which murdered large numbers of Bangladesh's civilian elite during the last days before the surrender. Thus it appears that Mujib has not yet made any final decisions on the nature and scope of the trials to be held.

Bhutto's position is equally obscure. Although he has repeatedly stated that any trials would foreclose the prospects for normalization of Pakistan's relations with India and Bangladesh, he has also indicated a potential tolerance for limited trials. On July 10 he put through the National Assembly a resolution approving recognition of Bangladesh at an appropriate time without specific conditions regarding the trials. Bhutto is clearly keeping his options open.

The Balance of Outside Influence

Despite the close association between India and the Soviet Union since the signing of the Indo-Soviet treaty and the subsequent crisis, there is no evidence that Moscow is exerting appreciable influence on New Delhi's domestic or foreign policy decisions. Rather, there is ample evidence -- such as the Indian restrictions on the Soviet cultural centers last year and a number of subsequent Indian positions at the UN -- that India has ignored strong Soviet pressures for support, even on issues of limited interest to India, and has been decidedly unhelpful to Moscow. To Soviet chagrin, moreover, Indian spokesmen -- notably Mrs. Gandhi herself -- have repeatedly included Moscow in warnings against superpower agreements detrimental to smaller powers, and have told the Soviets, as they have told us, not to become involved in South Asian disputes.

In contrast, there are signs that Pakistan's China alliance has a significant influence on Pakistan's foreign policy decisions. Peking's posture on the question of Bangladesh's UN membership evidently had a strong influence in breaking Islamabad's moves toward recognition of Dacca last summer; Bhutto's recognition of the Sihanouk government-in-exile can only have been the result of Pakistani sensitivity to Chinese interests; and there can be no doubt that Pakistan's and Iran's new alliance and joint allegations of Soviet mischief open new areas for China in its competition with the Soviet Union.

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Bhutto's Intentions

While Mujib's intentions regarding trials are the key to the prospects for a more stable situation in South Asia for the immediate future, the long-term prospects for stability depend primarily on Bhutto's intentions toward India. Here the picture is not promising. In the past 18 months, Bhutto has avoided a posture of confrontation with India, but has also ruled out conciliation and has thus far successfully fended off Indian and Bengalee proposals for a normalization of relations. Moreover, he has kept alive the option for a future resumption of the confrontation with India.

In the summer of 1972, Bhutto was reported to have said privately that he intended to reorganize and rearm Pakistan to preserve the option of reviving the confrontation with India in the future. At this point, Bhutto may have been attempting to reassure his government that there had been no sellout at Simla. In his July 6 interview with American journalists, however, in which he demanded military "parity" with India and spoke of potential military superiority over India, he was not speaking to a domestic audience. In contrast to his private assurances to us that he recognizes the unalterable power balance in South Asia and hopes to reduce Pakistan's defense expenditures, the 1973-74 budget introduced last month provided for the same high level of defense expenditures as last year's budget (\$451 million).

Pakistan's Military Expansion

In the last 18 months, Pakistan's military capability has not only been fully restored to that existing on the eve of the 1971 war but has actually been improved in some areas, notably air defense and ground forces. Since the war, Pakistan has improved its ratio of ground forces vis-a-vis India from 1:4 to 1:2.7 (i.e., from 284,000 to 400,000 men), not including some 56,000 POW's still in India. Pakistan already matches India in armor and has maintained the same ratio in artillery as in manpower. Whereas India has a clear edge in number of aircraft, Pakistan's receipts of 60 new MIG-19's from China and its French Mirages have provided a substantial improvement in Pakistan's air defense. More significant, the Chinese TU-16's now available to Pakistan in case of conflict would make important Indian military and industrial targets vulnerable to air attack for the first time. While still vulnerable to naval blockade, Pakistan already has a formidable defense capability sufficient to constitute a credible deterrent against Indian attack. In case of actual hostilities, moreover, Pakistan could expect substantial support from Middle Eastern countries, particularly in air defense.

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Bhutto's Quest in Washington

Given Pakistan's present military capabilities and Bhutto's continuing search for substantial new arms supplies, particularly from the US, it seems clear that Bhutto will determine what posture to adopt toward India in the light of the outcome of his Washington visit. In addition to a general reaffirmation of US support, he appears determined to seek a specific and public affirmation of a US security commitment to Pakistan which would in effect apply to any conflict against India, and which would hopefully lead to a resumption of substantial deliveries of lethal arms. Bhutto's assessment of the US response to his approach will have an important influence on his intentions toward India and thus on future developments in South Asia.

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