

Chapter 3

Trilateral Relations among Afghanistan, Pakistan and the United States.

3. 1 USSR-Afghanistan Axis vs U.S.-Pakistan Axis

In 1979, there were a number of incidents in the Gulf region that were of great significance for U.S.-Soviet rivalry for supremacy and for Islamic states at large. The Islamic revolution took place in Iran in February 1979, and on November 4 of that year, the U.S. embassy in Tehran was stormed and occupied. On November 20, anti-government rebels in Saudi Arabia occupied the Kaaba, the Grand Mosque's central courtyard in Mecca.

On the following day, in Pakistan, those who claimed the Mecca incident had been plotted by the United States set fire to the U.S. embassy, souring U.S-Pakistan relations. From Moscow's standpoint, these developments in the international arena provided the Soviet Union with a golden opportunity for the military intervention in Afghanistan.

But the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan cannot be explained by merely saying that Moscow took advantage of the predicament of the United States whose influence was severely curtailed in the Middle East and Southwest Asia in the wake of the Iranian revolution. It is fair to add that the Soviet Union went into Afghanistan also for its self-defense. The Soviet Union feared that the Iranian revolution in February 1979 and the political instability in Afghanistan following the 1978 "revolution" might spread to destabilize the Central Asian region, its "soft belly."

Dumbfounded by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the United States began making advances to Pakistan in a complete about-face¹⁵ in its policy to that country. The then Pres. Carter proposed military and economic assistance totaling "\$400 million over the next two years." But Chief Martial Law Administrator Gen.Zia, well aware of the sudden rise in his country's geopolitical status, turned down Pres. Carter's offer flat. After nine months of negotiations with the Reagan administration that was installed in January 1981, Pakistan was able to raise the U.S. assistance to "\$3.2 billion over five years." On top of that, the United States agreed to a package of military and economic aid

worth \$4.02 billion¹⁶ for the six years of fiscal 1988-1993. The United States also agreed to provide to Pakistan a total of 40 F-16 fighter-bombers, even by changing its plan to send those warplanes first to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Thus, in order to counter the Soviet-Afghan Axis¹⁷, the U.S.-Pakistani Axis¹⁸ was formed. From the U.S. point of view, however, this "alliance without a treaty" was designed to draw Pakistan into its Persian Gulf strategy.

On the other hand, Pakistan found its "alliance without a treaty" with the United States useful in defense against India. Because of this variance between the United States and Pakistan about its main thrust, the U.S.-Pakistani Axis had something jerky about it.

It is interesting to note that the inflow of massive U.S. assistance to Pakistan was coincidental with Pakistan's push for the "new political system" and the "Islamization" policy. It was also during those years that the ISI's enhanced influence made it look like a state within a state.

3. 2 End of Cold War and Changes in U.S.-Pakistani Relations

"National interests" are a self-centered proposition, and sometimes could be very cruel to other countries. As the Soviet Union completely withdrew from Afghanistan in February 1989 and the U.S.-Soviet Cold War came to an end at the end of 1989, the U.S. policy toward Pakistan took another 180-degree about-face. The United States unilaterally suspended in October 1990 the above-mentioned six-year \$4.02 billion package of military and economic aid,¹⁹ mainly due to Pakistan's efforts to develop nuclear arms. The United States had sort of turned a blind eye to Pakistan's nuclear development program during the Cold War. But as Pakistan's geopolitical value declined sharply with the end of the Cold War, the U.S. policy toward Pakistan turned harsh, which in turn deepened Pakistan's distrust in the United States.

In the meantime, Pakistan began approaching Central Asian countries that became indepen-

dent following the collapse of the Soviet Union. One of the reasons behind the move was to open up trade opportunities with the Central Asian countries. Also, energy resources abundant in Central Asia are of great importance to Pakistan. Turkmenistan, bordering Afghanistan in the northwest and its northeastern neighbor Uzbekistan are very large oil producers, and Turkmenistan is said to have one of the world's largest reserves of natural gas. Pakistan was planning to become a major transit point and export base for Central Asia's energy resources by laying a natural gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Pakistan via Afghanistan. To meet the goal, Pakistan found it necessary to stabilize Afghanistan's security situation and install an Afghan government friendly to Pakistan. That is why the successive Pakistani governments since the end of the Cold War tried to intervene in domestic political affairs of Afghanistan.

Pakistan, of course, was not the only participant in the "New Great Game"²⁰ involving oil and natural gas resources in Central Asia. American and Argentine companies were also in fierce competition for those resources.²¹

The theory of "strategic depth" that involves Afghanistan as Pakistan's strategic hinterland in its confrontation with India has already been mentioned discussed above.

3.3 Alterations in Pakistan's Policy toward Taliban

Pakistan began to distance itself from the Taliban after the terrorist attacks in the United States in September. Actually, however, Pakistan had already been keeping the Taliban at arm's length before the attacks, because its relations with Afghanistan began to undermine its national interests.

First, there was the problem of the "Talibanization" as mentioned above.

The second problem is smuggling, which has existed since before the emergence of the Taliban. Most imports into landlocked Afghanistan are landed at Karachi Port. So, Afghanistan and Pakistan have in place the Afghan Transit Trade Agreement (ATTA).²² Under this agreement imports into Afghanistan can go through the Karachi Port cus-

toms duty-free to be carried to Afghanistan. But 60-80% of goods imported "for the Afghan market" actually flow back into Pakistan to be sold cheap in the black market.

The smuggling trade, which increased under the Taliban's rule, is causing many Pakistani firms handling competing products to go bankrupt, prompting the Pakistani government to suspend the ATTA in September 2001. It is also said that the smuggling across the border with Afghanistan is hurting Pakistan's tariff income that usually accounts for about 30% of the government's revenue.

The third problem is narcotics. This problem also goes back to the pre-Taliban years. Immediately after establishing their presence in Afghanistan the Taliban started burning poppy fields managed by regional warlords. However, in order to raise money to fund the civil war, the Taliban themselves grew dependent on poppy cultivation and opium and heroin smuggling. Narcotics are being smuggled into Pakistan, which reportedly has several millions of drug addicts in the country.

Fourth and most importantly, there is a border problem. This is a very serious and dangerous problem that might present a major challenge to Pakistan's state system or its survival. Since Pakistan became independent in 1947 no government in Afghanistan has ever recognized its border with Pakistan (see Section 3, Chapter 2).

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Notes:

15. Until then the United States had been very critical of Pakistan following the 1977 military coup d'etat and the 1979 execution of former Prime Minister Bhutto.
16. see Note 19.
17. From a broader perspective, it can be described as the "Soviet-Afghan-Indian Axis."
18. Similarly, it can be described as the "U.S.-Pakistani-Chinese Axis."
19. Of the six-year assistance package for fiscal 1988-1993, the committed amounts up to September 1990 were actually disbursed but the total sum and other details are unknown.
20. See Ahmed Rashid, op. cit., *Taliban*, Kodansha
21. Ditto.
22. Ditto. The trade system based on the ATTA is called the "Afghan Transit Scheme (ATS)."