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Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)**Pakistan's Relations with the United States under Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (1971-1977)****Muzakir Khan**

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Email: fazal.muhammad@kust.edu.pk**Abstract**

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto continued to serve as Pakistan's Foreign Minister and was a virtuoso. He continued to serve as Pakistan's Foreign Minister and was instrumental in formulating foreign policy, wherein he dealt with foreign affairs with other countries very smoothly. He had followed the policy of interdependence and bilateralism in Pakistan's foreign policy. He had withdrawn his membership from SEATO and CENTO. He had stayed away from the Western countries' multilateral alliances and pacts. He had to deal with the post war issue. The research paper achieved the following objectives: to evaluate Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's contributions to the development of foreign policy towards the United States, as well as the role of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto in the process of foreign policy formulation with reference to Pakistan-United States relations from 1971 to 1977.

Keywords: SEATO, CENTO, Bilateralism, foreign Policy

Background of the study

Pak-US relations continued to flourish in the 1950s, but it faced a decline as the US didn't stand by its words and its inclination increased towards India. Throughout the 1962 border conflict between China and India, the US provided India with a lot of military support. Pakistan manifested its concern over this aid, but the US didn't take any notice of Pakistan's concern. American attitude became instrumental towards Pakistan. Pakistan perceived that it had felt betrayed as an ally of the US. In 1963, the US ignored Pakistan's concerns and gave full military assistance to India (Amin., 2021). Pakistan's security was threatened, but the US adopted a cold attitude and left Pakistan disillusioned. When the Indo-Pak war broke out in 1965, India used American weapons against Pakistan. The US further made the situation worse by eliminating military equipment, which greatly affected Pakistan's position, as it relied on the US for the induction of weapons to a great extent. Consequently, Pakistan withdrew from SEATO and CENTO in 1972 and 1979, respectively and joined the Non-Aligned Movement (Saqib, 2015).

Pakistan's relationship with the United States has been one of the most significant facets of Islamabad's foreign policy since the country's inception in 1947, shaped by Cold War imperatives, regional rivalries, and shifting global strategic priorities (Amin., 2021). The foreign policy of Pakistan is guided by the vision and principles set by the founding father of the country, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who said that: *Our foreign policy is one of friendliness and goodwill towards all the nations of the world. We do not cherish aggressive designs against any country or nation. We believe in the principle of honesty and fair play in*

national and international dealings and are prepared to make our utmost contribution to the promotion of peace and prosperity among the nations of the world. Pakistan will never be found lacking in extending its material and moral support to the oppressed and suppressed peoples of the world and in upholding the principles of the United Nations Charter.

This bilateral relationship first gained prominence during the early Cold War period, when Pakistan entered into defence pacts such as SEATO and CENTO to secure American military and economic assistance amidst regional instability and the perceived threat from the Soviet Union. However, the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war and the subsequent secession of East Pakistan marked a turning point, creating strains that influenced the relationship throughout the 1970s (Khan, 2012).

The period since 1974 is particularly crucial because it encompasses major strategic realignments in South Asia, the transformation of superpower interests after détente, and Pakistan's own evolving role in the Cold War's later phases. In the mid-1970s, the United States was recalibrating its priorities in South Asia, balancing its relations with India and Pakistan, responding to emerging energy crises, and managing its strategic competition with the Soviet Union (Raza, 1997). During this time, Pakistan's geographic and geopolitical importance made it an indispensable player in Washington's regional strategy, especially as tensions in Afghanistan and South Asia simmered.

A central phase in understanding this historical trajectory involves the foreign policy of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1971–1977). Bhutto assumed leadership after Pakistan's defeat in 1971 and sought to restructure Pakistan's foreign policy to enhance its strategic autonomy. Driven by a vision of an independent foreign policy, Bhutto was critical of Pakistan's reliance on external powers and aimed to diversify diplomatic relations beyond the United States to include the Soviet Union, China, and the broader Third World (Amin, 2021). His policy reflected an attempt to challenge the dominance of superpower influence in Pakistan's international affairs, emphasizing national sovereignty and the interests of developing nations (Amin., 2021).

During Bhutto's era, Pakistan-US relations were marked by paradoxes of cooperation and contention. On one hand, Pakistan continued to receive significant economic support from the United States, which remained interested in maintaining ties for strategic reasons. On the other hand, issues such as nuclear proliferation, arms procurement, and differing alignments with global powers created friction in bilateral ties. For instance, American policymakers expressed reservations about Pakistan's burgeoning nuclear ambitions, which would eventually become a major source of tension in the late 1970s and beyond (Saqib, 2015).

The significance of Pakistan-US relations in the broader regional context cannot be overstated. Pakistan's geopolitical location, bordering China, India, Afghanistan, and Iran has made it a strategic crossroads of competing regional and global interests. For the United States, Pakistan served as a critical partner in advancing its security objectives in South and Central Asia, especially with respect to balance of power considerations vis-à-vis India and the Soviet Union. The alliance offered the United States access to military bases, intelligence cooperation, and diplomatic leverage in regional conflicts, even as Islamabad sought to assert its own autonomy in international affairs. Given these contradictions and complexities, the study of Pakistan-US relations since 1974, with a special focus on Bhutto's foreign policy, is key to understanding how historical legacies continue to shape contemporary bilateral engagements. It provides insights into how Pakistan navigated superpower dynamics, pursued regional security objectives, and attempted to balance alignment with autonomy themes that remain relevant in today's multipolar geopolitical environment (Wolper, 1994).

Theoretical framework

In this regard, Allison's bureaucratic politics model (BPM) is used to separate how an individual plays a role in the creation of foreign policy. The individual thereafter cancelled his or her membership in CENTO and SEATO. He had established Pakistan's independent foreign policy and had friendly relations with every Muslim country without the interference of a superpower. According to this concept, the decision-makers ultimately gravitated towards the aggregated decisions despite having different perspectives and views when they first attended the forum for developing policy. Using this paradigm can help with a lot of things, including how decisions are formed and reached by the individual. Officials from a variety of ministries and organizations, primarily from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Security Agencies, participate in the decision-making process. This idea determines the role of bureaucrats from numerous ministries and groups.

With reference to Pakistan-United States relations during the Bhutto administration (1971–1977), this model is employed as a method to ascertain the influence of an individual in the formulation of foreign policy. The ties between Pakistan and the United States are a result of bureaucratic politics, which is involved in many decision-making processes. The "pulling and hauling" among the bureaucrats has led to these policy decisions. To differentiate the function of the individual in the policy-making process, this study used Allison's model to describe the role of the individual in the formulation of foreign policy.

Objectives of the Study

1. To evaluate Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's contributions to the development of foreign policy towards the United States.
2. The role of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto in the process of foreign policy formulation with reference to Pakistan-United States relations from 1971 to 1977.

Relations with the United States

Following World War II, the Soviet Union and the United States became the world's two superpowers. The two countries have used different approaches to carrying out their economic agendas. Between the United States and the Soviet Union, there existed an ideological war known as the "Cold War." While the US is a capitalist country, the USSR was a communist state. The management of production and its resources is the main objective of communist ideology. In contrast, business and product production are controlled by people in a capitalist economy. The Cold War resulted in tensions between the two superpowers on the political and military fronts (McMahon, 2021). When the Soviet Union seized control of Eastern Europe following World War II, the Cold War in Europe began. President Harry S. Truman was persuaded to view Pakistan as the most significant Muslim nation in the world and the most significant nation in South Asia by Secretary of State George Marshall when they met with him. The US first dreaded fulfilling its promise to Pakistan. Pakistan is asking the US for \$2 billion for economic and defence needs, which is sufficient to address Pakistan's needs.

A territorial dispute developed between India and Pakistan over the Kashmir problem, despite the United States giving Pakistan a tiny sum of money. The United States maintains its neutral stance and calls the two nations it has "strong friends." The United States has promised to address bilateral disputes without the intervention of third parties and to use bilateral negotiations to resolve the Kashmir dispute between Pakistan and India (Chaudhry, 2018). To counteract communism, Pakistan and the US formed a military defence pact in 1954. It was impossible for Pakistan to cooperate against communism. The upper classes in Pakistan supported feudalism because they were heavily impacted by the Western democratic system. By 1955, a small group of Pakistani military elites, including Governor-General Ghulam Muhammad Khan, Iskander Mirza, and General Muhammad Ayub Khan, held political control over

Pakistan. These individuals had received British management training. The country's economic growth as a result of its solid and close relationship with the United States is the main focus.

The United States promised to give Pakistan military assistance, but it never followed through. Pakistan and the US inked a contract in 1959 for the US to give Pakistan financial support. In 1957, the United States significantly aided Pakistan in the creation of an agricultural program. General Muhammad Ayub overthrew the government in a coup in 1958. He presided over Pakistan as its president. He received harsh criticism from the Pakistani populace, especially for breaking Pakistan's defence agreement with the United States following the 1965 Indo-Pakistani War. On the other hand, Pakistan has targeted US sanctions with the support of Islamic nations. The United States has halted all military and economic assistance to Pakistan. As a result, the Soviet Union supported India financially and militarily in its conflict with Pakistan. General Muhammad Ayub Khan hasn't left the US-led alliance in order to keep up his contacts with other nations.

The US cut off its financial and military assistance to Pakistan and India during the 1965 and 1971 wars. The Soviet Union provided financial assistance to India, which assisted it in its conflict with Pakistan and led to a dire situation between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Before the 1971 war, President Park's interest in India left little room for aggressive policy in the rest of the world, except to complement his policy towards India. Aside from links with the British Commonwealth of Nations and religious ties with several (generally conservative) Arab and Middle Eastern countries, President Park's interests and influence in the outside world were relatively small. Shortly after taking office, Bhutto launched a campaign to revitalise existing ties with various other countries and to scout new flag areas. This greatly increased Pakistan's contact with the rest of the world. Expanded, Bhutto has paid particular attention to relations with Arab countries, including more radical countries like Algeria and especially Libya, which have hitherto kept their distance from Pakistan. Connections with friends have not been neglected either. Bhutto has also campaigned vigorously to seize opportunities to extend Pakistan's political and economic influence into the new oil-rich Persian Gulf states. Bhutto's government continues a policy of close friendship with Iran and Turkey, but less enthusiastically than his predecessor, even as Pakistan finds it more difficult to achieve a more neutral image. Despite this, CENTO kept his membership and upgraded it. However, the desire to embrace Tehran and Ankara was only one of the reasons Bhutto remained in CENTO, citing membership as a bargaining chip with the United States, or at least as important. It was the desire to use Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey, which are featured regularly.

They are touted here as models for regional cooperation. But they have more form than substance. With East Pakistan gone, President Park's direct interest in Southeast Asia has largely disappeared. The Bhutto government has shown a tendency to follow China. Since the beginning of the East Pakistan crisis in early 1971, there has been a stalemate, as evidenced by expectations of withdrawal, recognition of North Vietnam, and recognition of the Sihanouk government. The Yahya Khan government believed that Britain was unfairly supporting India, and Bhutto tended to share this view. Since he withdrew, the relationship has been right but cool, and it shows no signs of changing anytime soon. Nevertheless, it has tried to maintain friendly relations with Kabul. Pax was satisfied with Kabul's correct behaviour during the war in December 1971 but later expressed concern about Afghanistan's official statements on the Pushtunistan issue. In it, Park acknowledges restrictions within Afghanistan but dislikes them, especially because they affect one of Pakistan's most politically sensitive regions. Awareness tries to ignore this issue, but the spectre of the Soviet Union lurking in the background is of far greater concern. One of the worst periods of its kind in Pakistan's history was the economic collapse of the late 1960s. At this point, GDP per capita started to decline and showed a negative trend (McMahon, 2021).

The political climate was unfavorable for Bhutto as the economy was weak. The government is clearly at a breaking point and is working on many issues simultaneously to get things sane and operational as quickly as possible. Giving basic rights to the underprivileged masses was a major theme of Bhutto's political campaigns, and he popularised the slogans "food, clothing, and shelter." At the heart of this slogan was his belief that the only way to fulfil his duty to the masses was to immediately address the unfair distribution of wealth that had long been prevalent in this country. It was basically based on socialist ideals and principles. "Islam is our creed," declared the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) in its 1970 election manifesto. Our economy is a socialist economy. People have the last word. In order to establish a socialist economic system, the Bhutto government nationalized many privately run enterprises. Private property was discouraged as the communist regime favoured building all national wealth to support public property. Bhutto also implemented major economic reforms in various industries to speed up the pace of the revolution. However, there is still considerable controversy as to whether these changes and policies helped the country's progress or posed another obstacle. It has been through the promotion of education, science, and technology. For example, for health promotion It can be observed that the national sector has several medical colleges and institutions. It was established during the Bhutto regime. This initiative is based on the number of students who choose medicine as their major (Baqai, 2016).

Nuclear Program of Pakistan during Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Era

After World War II, the world saw the emergence of numerous new nation-states. These recently established states were dependent on the developed world and were weak and fragile. The international community took a harsh stance towards these countries. International powers had an interest in keeping nuclear technology exclusively in their possession. The poor and weak nations were intimidated by this technology's destructive, annihilating, and all-around destructive capabilities. Its destruction in Nagasaki and Hiroshima brought everything into stark relief. Japanese people were strong, brave, and courageous during World War II, but they were no better than mice in the presence of this nuclear device. The newly emerging states came to understand that the New World Order is based on a skewed logic. In fear that results in servitude or rebellion, the newly emerging states opened their eyes. Bhutto made the decision to rebel in this circumstance. He was deeply pained by the strong nations' oppression (Baqai, 2016). The Indian nuclear test in May 1974 turned South Asia's geopolitical landscape upside down and later affected the fundamentals of US-Pakistan relations with regard to nuclear proliferation. The Bhutto administration's initial response was to ask the major nuclear powers for guarantees against potential nuclear blackmail from India. Unfortunately, Aziz Ahmed, the Foreign Minister of Bhutto, was unable to obtain the necessary guarantees from these states during his visits to London, Paris, and Washington. Numerous other bilateral initiatives, such as the creation of a nuclear-weapons-free zone and the bilateral signing of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), were also forwarded by Pakistan to India, but none of them was accepted by India (Hussain, 2018). Dejected and extremely disappointed, Bhutto made the decision to start Pakistan's nuclear option, which he believed was essential and consistent with the nation's geo-strategy. Dejected and extremely disappointed, Bhutto made the decision to start Pakistan's nuclear option, which he believed was essential and consistent with the nation's geo-strategy. From a bilateral standpoint, the fundamental driving force behind the RSC was the security quandary and the mutual mistrust between Pakistan and India. Pakistan was forced to take similar actions to deter the adversary due to regional security imperatives. Following the 1974 Indian nuclear test, Bhutto's initial diplomacy was very effective in thwarting US pressure on Pakistan's nuclear program. Thus, the issue of nuclear non-proliferation was crucial in PakUS relations during the 1970s (Khan D. Z., 2013).

Internal Turmoil and the 1977 General Elections in Pakistan

The general elections held in March 1977 proved to be a decisive and turbulent point in Pakistan's political history. The widespread allegations of electoral malpractice, nine opposition parties united to establish the Pakistan National Alliance (PNA), a coalition created specifically to challenge the rule of Z. A. Bhutto and his Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). The agitation launched by the PNA rapidly intensified, leading to prolonged protests and civil unrest across the country. This escalating crisis ultimately provided the pretext for the imposition of martial law by General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq on 5 July 1977, bringing Bhutto's government to an abrupt end (Tahir-Kheli, 1982).

While Bhutto's removal from office was largely linked to domestic political developments, most notably accusations of large-scale vote rigging by the ruling PPP, many observers have argued that external considerations also contributed to the deterioration of his position. Among these was the growing strain in Pakistan–United States relations over Islamabad's pursuit of a nuclear reprocessing facility. The disagreement significantly affected the dynamics between Bhutto and the administration of President Jimmy Carter. President Carter sought to persuade Bhutto to reconsider and ultimately abandon Pakistan's advancing nuclear programme. His administration expressed serious concerns about nuclear proliferation and warned that continuation of the programme could trigger punitive measures under the Symington-Glenn Amendment, which allowed the United States to terminate economic and military assistance to countries engaged in certain nuclear activities. Despite these warnings, Bhutto remained firm in his stance, presenting the nuclear initiative as essential to Pakistan's security and sovereignty (Raza, 1997).

As tensions deepened, Bhutto and members of his inner circle began to suggest that Washington was sympathetic to, if not directly encouraging, the anti-government agitation led by the PNA. According to this narrative, elements within the opposition were believed to have conveyed assurances to the Carter Administration that, in the event of Bhutto's removal, Pakistan's nuclear option would be abandoned. Although concrete evidence of such understandings remained contested, these claims gained traction within political discourse at the time. Consequently, a segment of public opinion in Pakistan increasingly viewed the United States with suspicion. The perception took root that the Carter Administration favored the opposition alliance and tacitly supported political forces seeking to unseat an elected government. In popular discourse, the unfolding events were interpreted by some as an attempt to weaken a leadership that had resisted American pressure to cancel the nuclear reprocessing agreement with France (Borders, 1977).

US Aid and Assistance Programs

Economic cooperation between Pakistan and the United States during Z.A Bhutto administration was shaped by both strategic considerations and development needs. One of the most visible instruments of American support was the PL-480 "Food for Peace" program, formally known as the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act of 1954. Under this framework, the United States supplied surplus agricultural commodities, particularly wheat, to countries facing food shortages, often on concessional terms. Pakistan, dealing with post-1971 economic dislocation and food insecurity, remained a beneficiary of PL-480 shipments in the early and mid-1970s. Beyond food assistance, the United States extended broader economic aid packages through bilateral agreements and multilateral channels such as the World Bank consortium. During the early 1970s, aid was directed toward infrastructure rehabilitation, agricultural modernisation, and industrial support, especially after the economic losses associated with the 1971 war (Kux, 2001). Yet American assistance increasingly carried policy expectations. Issues such as fiscal management, governance standards, and Pakistan's nuclear ambitions became intertwined with aid discussions. By the mid-1970s, as concerns about nuclear

proliferation intensified, U.S. policymakers began linking continued assistance to Islamabad's willingness to curb sensitive nuclear activities (Spector, 2020). This marked a gradual shift from largely development-oriented cooperation to more conditional engagement.

Trade and Commercial Relations

Trade relations between the two countries in the 1970s reflected a modest but steady exchange of goods. Pakistan's exports to the United States primarily included textiles, cotton products, leather goods, and agricultural commodities, while imports from the U.S. consisted of machinery, industrial equipment, and agricultural inputs (Burki, 1980). The American market became particularly significant for Pakistan's textile sector, which benefited from access to Western consumers under preferential tariff arrangements available to developing countries. Pakistan also faced tariff and quota restrictions under evolving U.S. trade regulations, especially as domestic American industries sought protection from foreign competition (McMahon, 1996).

Commercial relations were not limited to trade flows. American private investment in Pakistan, although smaller compared to earlier decades, continued in sectors such as oil exploration, manufacturing, and consumer goods. U.S. multinational corporations maintained a presence in Pakistan's urban industrial centres, contributing to employment and technology transfer (Burki, 1980). Nevertheless, the broader investment climate was influenced by Pakistan's domestic political shifts, including nationalization policies introduced under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. While these reforms aimed to strengthen state control over key industries, they also generated uncertainty among foreign investors, including American firms (Kux, 2001).

Aid Suspension and Conditionality

A major rupture in economic relations followed the events of 1971 in East Pakistan. Allegations of widespread human rights violations during the conflict that led to the creation of Bangladesh generated significant criticism within the United States Congress and among the American public. In response, Washington imposed restrictions on certain forms of military and economic assistance to Pakistan (Kux, 2001). Although humanitarian aid continued in limited forms, the broader aid environment became more restrictive, signalling a growing role of congressional oversight in foreign policy decisions. The introduction of legislative measures such as the Symington Amendment in 1976 further institutionalized conditionality by mandating the suspension of assistance to countries pursuing unsafeguarded nuclear enrichment or reprocessing facilities (Spector, 1990). These measures directly affected Pakistan as its nuclear program advanced. Aid suspensions and uncertainties surrounding future assistance complicated Pakistan's development planning, particularly in areas dependent on foreign financing. Infrastructure projects, industrial expansion, and social sector initiatives faced delays or scaling back due to funding shortfalls (Burki, 1980).

Withdrawal from SEATO and CENTO

Pakistan's withdrawal from SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) and CENTO (Central Treaty Organization) in November 1972 was rooted in both ideological and strategic considerations. Bhutto, a proponent of socialism, viewed Pakistan's prior alignment with these Western-led military alliances as a constraint on the country's political and economic independence. He perceived SEATO and CENTO as instruments of the capitalist bloc that prioritized U.S. interests over the sovereignty and developmental needs of member states (Kux, 2001). Furthermore, the 1971 war and U.S. support to India further disillusioned Bhutto with the alliances, reinforcing his conviction that Pakistan needed an independent foreign policy free from superpower domination. By withdrawing, Bhutto aimed to assert Pakistan's autonomy, expand relations with non-aligned nations, and pursue economic and strategic

policies aligned with his socialist vision (Burki, 1980). This move marked a clear ideological shift away from Western dependency.

Findings

- Z.A Bhutto administration sought to pursue national interests in a manner consistent with his socialist ideology, which prioritised domestic development, equitable resource distribution, and reduced reliance on Western capitalist powers.
- American assistance, including infrastructure, agricultural, and industrial support, played a crucial role in stabilizing Pakistan's post-1971 economy.
- Legislative instruments like the Symington Amendment tied the continuation of U.S. economic and military aid to Islamabad's willingness to limit nuclear development, creating tensions in bilateral relations.
- Pakistan's exports, notably textiles, cotton products, and agricultural commodities, gained access to U.S. markets under preferential arrangements, yet tariff and quota restrictions constrained growth opportunities.
- Bhutto's decision to withdraw from SEATO and CENTO in 1972, which marked a clear ideological and strategic shift.
- Motivating Bhutto to pursue a foreign policy aligned with non-alignment and independent diplomacy, including stronger ties with China, the Arab world, and other developing nations.

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