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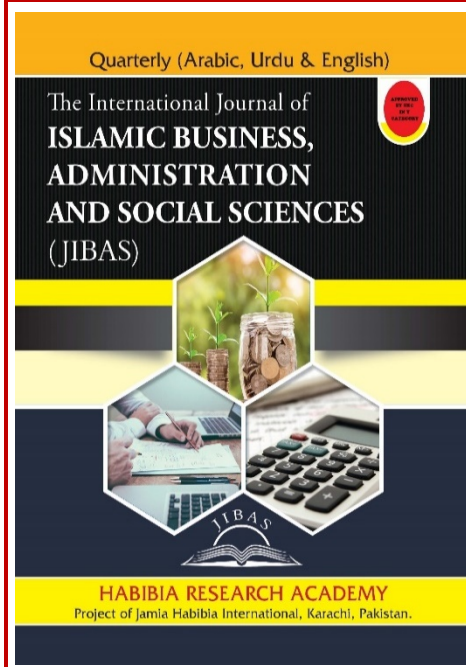
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TOPIC:

FROM ANTAGONISM TO DÉTENTE: ASSESSING THE GEOPOLITICAL AND GEOSTRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS OF PAK-RUSSIA TIES (1970-1977)

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FROM ANTAGONISM TO DÉTENTE: ASSESSING THE GEOPOLITICAL AND GEOSTRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS OF PAK-RUSSIA TIES (1970-1977)

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ABSTRACT:

This research study seeks to address the pivotal period of the relationship between Pakistan and the former Soviet Union (present-day Russia) during the reign of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto from 1970 to 1977 which resulted in a geopolitical shift. The study is purely based on the qualitative analysis of secondary sources. The paper reviewed and analyzed academic literature under the domain of thematic analysis. The core emphasis of the study is to investigate the bilateral political, military, socioeconomic, and cultural ties between Russia and Pakistan during the phase of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The findings of the study suggest that for the first time in the political and diplomatic history of Pakistan and Russia, the tenure of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto maintained ties with Russia which lasted only for a few years. However, the ties helped Pakistan militarily, economically, socially, and politically to expand its presence in regional politics. Therefore, the core emphasis of this study is to examine Pakistan's Cold War political shift and the impact of regional dynamics which culminated in the formation of Pak-Russia ties during the 1970s phase.

KEYWORDS: *Pak-Russia; Geopolitical; Geostrategic; Cold War*

INTRODUCTION: This research investigates the geopolitical paradigm shifts in Pakistan's foreign policy during the Bhutto government (1970-1977) with particular emphasis on the Russia-Pakistan rapprochement and its repercussions on the political dynamics of the region. The turbulent years between 1970 and 1977 provide ample evidence of a geopolitical shift in Pakistan's foreign policy with Russia from antagonism to rapprochement. The regional powers struggle for power and the dynamics of the Cold War proved the era as an important political and diplomatic juncture between Pakistan and former Soviet Union (present-day Russia). According to Noorani (1979), the Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty (1971) had grave implications for the South Asian region – particularly Pakistan. The Treaty marked a significant shift in the South Asian political and diplomatic environment. Since the epoch of the Cold War was marked by the alignment of nations with the communist or capitalist bloc, Pakistan initially parted with the Soviet Union.¹ Moreover, during Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's tenure, the foreign policy shifted towards the communist regime and thereby introduced socialism as an economic and political ideology in the country.² The visit of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to Moscow was a turning point in the political and diplomatic history of both nations.³ The visit benefited the country with the advancement of infrastructure and economic projects such as the establishment of the Guddu Thermal Power Station and Steel Mills in Karachi resulting in economic growth in the country.⁴ The analysis of Chia and Haiqi on Bhutto's visit to Moscow suggests that various agreements on trade, military, and cultural exchange programs were signed marking a new phase of Pakistan's Cold War alignment with the communist regime.⁵

Therefore, Pakistan's foreign policy shift from the Western bloc to the communist bloc marked by the formation of regional geostrategic and geopolitical collaboration was an important phase of its foreign policy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Context:

The era between 1945 to 1990 was marked by an intense geopolitical a global political shift from a multipolar to a bipolar world as the rivalry between two powers – the United States and the former Soviet Union – shaped the global alignment and alliances.⁶ At this juncture, Pakistan's foreign policy endured a considerable shift – particularly in the after-effects of the Indo-Pak war of 1971 succeeding in the formation of Bangladesh.⁷ This quarrel profoundly wrenched Pakistan's ties with the United States compelling Islamabad to seek alternate avenues for strategic and diplomatic cooperation. The Bhutto's coming into power and the geopolitical and geostrategic tussle between the Soviet Union and the United States significantly brought changes in Pakistan's foreign policy from 1970 to 1977.⁸ Therefore, the geopolitical and geostrategic paradigm shift in Pakistan's foreign policy from pro-western to pro-communist left a significant impact on the regional political arena.

Pakistan's Strategic Priorities:

With the tragedy of the fall of East Pakistan, distrust of the United States, and the growing threats from India, Pakistan was left with no other strategic option other than approaching the former Soviet Union. Abbasi and Raza have explored Pakistan's pursuit of strategic independence and expansion of partnership as a key drive behind its ties with the former Soviet Union during the epoch of the 1970s. Abbasi argues that Pakistan's security calculations – particularly its conflict with India – induced it to obtain a balance of power through developing relations with its non-traditional allies including the Soviet Union.⁹ Raza's analysis highlights its rational attitude to leveraging its geopolitical weight to plot between superpower opponents.¹⁰

Economic and Military Cooperation:

The period of détente between Pakistan and Russia observed a substantial trend in military and economic collaboration. Studies by William and Constance highlight the contracting of distinct accords on trade, security, and machinery transference.¹¹ William underlines the importance of economic inducements in promoting diplomatic reconciliation while Constance's evaluation accentuates the common strategic values that arose from military assistance including arms trades and shared military exercises.¹² Therefore, the analysis suggests that the era of the 1970s was a turning point for Pakistan and Russia to compromise on the military and economic rapprochement.

Regional Dynamics and Geopolitical Shifts:

The geopolitical relevance of the Soviet Union in South Asia and its pronounced approach to swell its hold in the region played a decisive part in advancing détente with Pakistan. Hilali and Hussain have best explored the Soviet Union's strategic calculations in the South Asian region during the détente period with Pakistan. He argues that the core motivation behind the Soviet Union's détente with Pakistan was to counter the American influence from the South Asian region.¹³ However, Hussain elucidates that the Soviets considered Pakistan as a likely partner to counterweight India's hegemony – thereby increasing its strategic depth in the South Asian region.¹⁴ Moreover, Ahsen's analysis suggests that the changing geopolitical landscape of the South Asian region – particularly after the 1971 Friendship Treaty between India and the Soviet Union – had grave implications for Pakistan.¹⁵ Mazumdar's view elucidates the regional consequences of this development. Mazumdar argues that Pakistan's alignment with the Soviet Union served as the counterbalance to India's mounting closeness to the Soviets adding to the development network of regional power dynamics.¹⁶ Therefore, there are lasting repercussions of the Cold War legacies on current relations between Pakistan and Russia concerning regional security and Afghanistan.

To sum up, the reviewing of existing literature expounded different aspects of regional cooperation that underpinned the transformation of Pakistan-Russia ties from antagonism to détente during Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's government. The geostrategic and geopolitical considerations derived from Pakistan's pursuit of strategic independence and the Soviet's regional interests played a significant role in fostering their progressing ties. Moreover, military, and economic cooperation along with changing regional dynamics defined the Pakistan-Soviet Union's Cold War engagement.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**Qualitative Approach:**

Since the nature of this study is descriptive, the secondary data is analyzed and interpreted using the qualitative research approach. The qualitative research approach offers a systematic mechanism to analyze the data. Therefore, the secondary data is analyzed through the qualitative research method.

Secondary Sources:

This research venture is purely based on the analysis, investigation, and interpretation of secondary sources of data. The data is collected from various sources such as books, published research journals and articles, published surveys, and interviews.

Thematic Analysis:

The data collected from the secondary sources are reviewed, interpreted, and analyzed using the thematic analysis approach. A set of themes and coding schemes from secondary sources are employed to extract the specific data on the study.

DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS

The historical relationship between Pakistan and the former Soviet Union characterized as suspicious and antagonist saw a significant shift during the Bhutto administration from 1970-1977.¹⁷ The period marked by the Nixon Doctrine and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan offers an important case study for contemporary geostrategic and geopolitical dynamics.¹⁸ This research venture seeks to address contributing factors that resulted in the transformation of domestic, regional, and international geopolitical and geostrategic choices allowing Pakistan and the Soviet Union to embrace the policy of cooperation over antagonism.

The Legacy of Distrust and Hostility:

The historical relationships between Pakistan and Russia remained frosty – particularly before 1970. According to Zaman, the alignment of Pakistan with the West – especially with the United States – throughout the Cold War era positioned it resolutely anti-Soviet.¹⁹ Moreover, Adnan’s investigation provides another dynamic factor that kept both nations limited in their diplomatic exchange. For Adnan, Pakistan’s anti-communist behavior in Afghanistan also placed Pakistan’s position as anti-Russian resulting in the distrust between the two nations for decades.²⁰ Therefore, owing to decades-long distrust and the conflict in Afghanistan, they kept their diplomatic exchange limited.

Changing Sands: Afghan Puzzle and Nixon Doctrine:

The Nixon Doctrine was the initiation of the United States' aloofness from geopolitical and geostrategic involvement in the Asian region. The announcement of President Nixon’s doctrine in 1969 marked a turning point in the foreign policy of the United States as it refrained the direct military intervention in Asia and allowed great powers to assume the responsibilities of security in the region.²¹ However, this policy had long-term economic, political, and security implications for Pakistan as the country felt isolated – particularly during the Indo-Pak war in 1971 and the subsequent dismemberment of the country from the Western military alliance under the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).²² An academician like Christopher examined the changing sands of Pak-Russia ties after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. He is of the view that the conflict brought opportunities as well as challenges for Pakistan. Instead of continuing ties with Russia, Pakistan, under the government of President Zia ul Haq, chose to participate with the United States to counter communist Russia in Afghanistan.²³ The hostile India and domestic instability were the main factors resulting in Pakistan’s realignment with the United States. Therefore, Pakistan’s diplomatic and military collaboration with the West derailed the country’s short-term ties with the former Soviet Union.

The Era of Détente: A Geopolitical and Geostrategic Shifts:

The period of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto is considered a turbulent era in Pakistan’s foreign policy choices based on geopolitical and geostrategic choices. The country’s

internal issues coupled with the regional tensions with India marked a paradigm shift in its foreign policy. According to Adil Zaman, Pakistan's defense, and political shift from Western to Communist Soviet sparked a sense of betrayal in its interplay of diplomatic exchange with the West.²⁴ At the same time, he is of the view that Bhutto's alignment with the Soviets was marked by internal, regional, and international necessities.²⁵ The reconciliation with the Soviet Union was followed by economic assistance, defense aid, and strengthening diplomacy over the issue of Kashmir. However, Safdar examined the shift while discussing the fruits of the new alignment of Pakistan in the realm of the Post-War epoch. Safdar believes that Bhutto's choice of alignment was followed by a pragmatism approach leading to the progress and development of the country's economy.²⁶ The visit of Bhutto to Moscow marked a new era in Pakistan when different economic, technological, development, and defense-related agreements were signed empowering Pakistan's military, economic, and political position in the region.²⁷

Limitations in the Alignment:

Though the alignment brought significant changes and development in Pakistan, however, the cooperation was also brought by numerous challenges resulting in the end of Bhutto's government. For instance, Tahir argues that the agreements signed between Pakistan and the Soviet Union established a dynamic infrastructure in the country.²⁸ The infrastructure projects include the establishment of the Guddu Thermal Power Station and Steel Mills in Karachi demonstrating an energetic commitment to economic development.²⁹ The economic cooperation was also shadowed by the projects and agreements on cultural exchange and openness to educational contacts indicating a promising alignment.³⁰ Additionally, with such a wide range of cooperation, the alignment had limitations. According to Sten, internal battles such as the pressure of leftist political groups, national parties, and rightist political parties coupled with the Soviet's intrusion in Afghanistan were challenges to that alignment putting limitations to the cooperation.³¹ The results of these challenges fostered anti-communist narratives in the country resulting in the end of Bhutto's regime and collaboration with the Soviet Union.³²

The Culmination of Détente and Its Lasting Legacy:

The year of 1979 was a tragic moment in the history of Pakistan-Russia partnership. The end of the détente era was followed by the death of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and the intrusion of the Soviets in Afghanistan. In the words of Malik, Bhutto's rapprochement with the Soviets and the separation of East Pakistan coupled with the war with neighboring India brought a paradigm shift in Pakistan's Cold War interplay.³³ The country's powerful position in siding with the United States and fighting against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan had far-reaching impacts on the country's partnership with the communist regime.³⁴ The event reshaped the old partnership after the end of a short-term distrust associated with the 1971 war.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the era between 1970 to 1977 and the short-term partnership between Pakistan and the former Soviet Union had brought lasting impacts on Pakistan's geostrategic and geopolitical choices of its foreign policy. The pragmatic approach of Bhutto to end the dependency on the West has been lauded by various think tanks, analysts, academicians, and political scientists. The cooperation brought significant development in infrastructure leading to the improvement in economic activities. However, internal pressure, military influence on foreign policy, and the Soviet's interest in Afghanistan made this partnership limited and temporary. Additionally, the changing geopolitical and geostrategic demands shifted Pakistan's re-alignment with the West under the military regime. To sum up, the lasting impacts of the short-term cooperation with the former Soviet Union still cast a shadow on Pakistan's contemporary foreign policy decision-making and strategic options in the reign of expanding rule of India in the South Asian region.

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