

RECORD OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT OF PAKISTAN, GENERAL ZIA UL HAQ,
AND THE PRIME MINISTER, THURSDAY, 8 OCTOBER, 1981 AT 0915 HOURS

Present:-

The Prime Minister

Mr O G Forster

Mr J T Masefield

Mr C.A. Whitmore

The President, General Zia ul Haq
Lt General K M Arif, Chief of Staff
to the President

Dr Attiya Inayatullah, Minister in
Waiting

Mr Riaz Piracha, Foreign Secretary

Mr Ali Arshad, Pakistan Ambassador in
London

Mr Asif Ezdi, Director (W. Europe)
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The President, after welcoming the Prime Minister, introduced Brigadier Niazi who gave a briefing on the military security of Pakistan.

Brigadier Niazi said that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had brought the Russian threat directly to Pakistan's borders and had created a situation in which pressure could easily be brought to bear on Pakistan. It enabled the Soviet Union to outflank both Iran and China and could give the Russians a stranglehold on the Gulf. However, Soviet difficulties were compounded by the disintegration and ineffectiveness of the Afghan army. With only 9 Soviet divisions (80-90,000 men) the Russians had no option but to increase the size of their forces. Pakistan, which was weak in military terms, had led the world reaction to the invasion and was regarded by the Soviet Union as the only obstacle in its move towards the Gulf. Pakistan therefore had to face the full blast of Soviet anger.

In this situation India saw western assistance for Pakistan as the only obstacle to the primacy it had enjoyed in the region since dismembering Pakistan in 1971. India was therefore a willing partner to the Russians and had launched a diplomatic offensive before Pakistan was able to absorb Western military help. India took an ambivalent position, offering good relations but keeping the military options open. There was growing evidence that the Indians were mounting diplomatic pressures and a subversive threat to Pakistan.

/The Russians

The Russians in Afghanistan were unlikely to be a threat to Pakistan unless they could consolidate their hold and reorganise the Afghan army on the Soviet model. Then there was a risk that Pakistan would be threatened with confrontation from both sides.

The Russians had few troops on the border between Afghanistan and Iran. In Afghanistan as a whole, in addition to the Russian troops, there were 500 Cuban troops engaged in special operations, 2 Bulgarian construction units and some East Germans and Czech personnel including doctors. (President Zia later described these numbers, which he said were confirmed by American intelligence, as a token contribution, possibly with a training element). In 1980 the Russians had occupied the Wakhan Salient, which had strategic implications for both Pakistan and China.

Pakistan's military infrastructure on its western border was seriously underdeveloped. For the first time in the country's history they had had to shift troops from the eastern frontier and deploy them permanently on the western border.

Since the Soviet invasion Afghan army casualties included more than 1,000 officers killed and over 10,000 other ranks killed. Soviet casualties included 132 officers killed and 695 other ranks killed. 24 officers had been captured. Equipment losses were also on a large scale. After 21 months the Russians had failed to achieve their objectives. On the other hand, the Freedom Fighters also had problems arising from lack of leadership, difficulty of communications between groups, and the lack of weapons for use against M124 helicopters. There were 2.4 million refugees, more than one-seventh of the Afghan population. The Russians saw these refugees as the principal source of Freedom Fighters and the main threat to their plans to dominate Afghanistan.

The Indian arms deal with the Russians in 1980 was a significant landmark. It had increased the quantum and quality of Indian force beyond its legitimate needs. It was now the fourth ranking military machine in the world. New bases, new road and rail links and new formations were "earmarked for Pakistan". Nearly 25 standard infantry divisions faced Pakistan. The bulk of the Navy was to

/ the west

the west of India. Twenty-three out of 35 fighter squadrons were in the west and these included India's high-performance aircraft such as MIG 21s and 27s and Jaguars. Low performance aircraft were being shifted to India's eastern borders.

Soviet designs fitted well into India's territorial ambitions. The Russians had now inherited Afghanistan's border claims. Pakistan could not rule out the possibility of co-ordinated action against her, and had never faced so great a defence problem.

In a short discussion after the briefing the President described the Indian briefing given to the US Representative at the UN, Mrs. Kirkpatrick, in which Pakistan's military forces had been played up and the situation in Afghanistan had been dismissed as no more than "a hue and cry raised by Pakistan". The President said he had gone out of his way to inform Mrs. Gandhi and to draw her out, but without success: the state of confrontation continued. The Prime Minister congratulated the President on the successful end to the hijacking of the Indian aircraft to Lahore. She had hoped that the successful action by the Pakistanis to end this hijack, which had worried Mrs. Gandhi at the start of the Commonwealth Meeting in Melbourne, would have helped Indo-Pakistan relations. But Mrs. Gandhi had not changed: she had an obsession that weapons supplied to Pakistan by the West would not be used against the Russians - they would in any case not be sufficient to stand up to the Russians - and would be used against India. This was a pity, as both India and Pakistan had pressing economic problems at home. The President said that Mrs. Gandhi had more problems than he did: he could only keep on trying. He had already promised to return the hijackers.

After adjourning to less formal surroundings, President Zia indicated some rays of hope in the Afghan situation. First of all, although the Russians had gone into Afghanistan for political reasons the military had not been able to carry out their objectives. Even if Soviet casualties were less than estimated, very many families, especially in the southern parts of the Soviet Union, were affected by the return of sick, wounded and dead soldiers. Already, according

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to reports, soldiers were asking whose war they were fighting. Finally, 15 million Afghans had not been subdued.

The Prime Minister commented that the British knew of the courage and determination of the Afghan people, but she had feared that the Soviet helicopter gunships might have given the Russians a qualitative advantage which the British had never had. However, the Freedom Fighters had even found ways of dealing with the helicopters.

The President said the situation in Afghanistan directly affected Pakistan, but since the 80,000 Soviet troops had not been able to subdue Afghanistan there was still no direct threat to Pakistan. If, however, the Russians pushed in the extra 10 divisions which were north of Afghanistan and the 10 divisions north of Iran the situation might be different. The present violations of Pakistan's border were sometimes deliberate and sometimes accidental. In answer to questions, the President thought that, although the Russians could increase their troop numbers, the lack of room for manoeuvre and the difficulty of communications would be a constraint. To some extent they were using Afghanistan as a testing ground for their latest weapons. However, Pakistan had no concrete evidence that gas was being used. General Zia had tried to get the six resistance groups to unite but they would not, and he had now given up. They were in any case doing the same job, even if some were more effective than others. The number of Freedom Fighters was increasing and was helped by the large numbers of defecting Afghan troops. The border post recently attacked in Pakistan was opposite an area where a whole battalion had defected across the border. The political situation in Afghanistan was that Babrak Karmal was a Soviet puppet who would be out 24 hours after the Russians had left. But the resistance leaders could not create a political leadership and would not allow others to do so while they were doing the fighting. However, leaders might emerge, as had happened with the Palestinians, but this would take time.

The President said that 80,000 refugees per month had crossed into Pakistan over the last 4 months. There would be fewer in the winter months, but the problem was enormous. Yet the response of the people of Pakistan had been splendid. Even the Baluch had been

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prepared to tolerate 600,000 more Pathan refugees from Afghanistan in Baluchistan. The effect on Pakistan's economy was considerable. They were bearing half the financial burden. They had spent the equivalent of 120 million dollars on food, clothing and shelter for the refugees. They were grateful for the help provided by Britain and other western countries but feared that the international community did not like long term problems, and this refugee problem would be long term.

Pakistan could not afford to absorb so many people. Some were engaged in work, but every Afghan was determined to go back even though their conditions were often better in Pakistan. UNHCR had rehabilitation plans to help them improve their agriculture and economy when they returned. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait had also provided useful assistance. But the Government of Pakistan were still giving a small sum equivalent to £2.50 per family per month, which added up to a lot. The supply of kerosene for cooking and heating was also expensive but essential as the refugees had burnt up everything that grew within 10 miles within months of their arrival. The Soviet Ambassador had complained in 1979 that Pakistan was making life too attractive for refugees here and should put its house in order, although in 1971 the Russians had complained of the opposite when refugees left Pakistan to go into India.

The Prime Minister saw no hope in the talks between Mr. Gromyko and Mr. Haig. The Russians seemed to be in Afghanistan without knowing what to do. It was important to keep the problem before the world and not allow it to be institutionalised. The President agreed that the question of Afghanistan must not die. He agreed with the Prime Minister that the film "Afghanistan 1980" had been most effective.

Asked about Iran, the President said that Pakistan kept in touch but the country was in a confused state. There was no contact at the top. Something, however, should be done now. When President Carter had told him about plans for the Rapid Deployment Force he had said that it would be no use to prevent a take-over by the Left in Iran. The Prime Minister asked what could be done. So many people equated the two super powers. Even in Melbourne many of the

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Non-Aligned wanted to refer in equal terms to the activities of the two super powers in the Indian Ocean and she had had great difficulty in getting reference to them omitted from the communique.

President Zia said that Pakistan had spent much time and effort trying to get the Iranians to agree to a ceasefire in the war with Iraq but without success. As a former Ambassador in Tehran, Mr. Ali Arshad commented that the new Prime Minister Khomeini had been behind the students when the American Embassy was occupied. He was not necessarily a leftist although under their influence.

Bilateral

The President raised a number of bilateral points.

(a) He told the Prime Minister that Pakistan had a candidate for the International Court of Justice competing against the present Indian incumbent and 3 other Asian candidates.

(b) The Pakistanis were grateful for the help given to establish an Institute for Handicapped Children. They would like more - in particular, help with speech therapy, some equipment and teachers, and diagnostic specialists. The idea was for British experts to come to Pakistan for 6 months or so at Pakistan's expense to provide technical help to set up an Institute. X

(c) Oil Exploration. Pakistan had recently found some oil and BP were involved in a joint venture in the southern part of the country. Pakistan would like similar joint ventures offshore, where they knew there was oil.

(d) Defence Collaboration. Pakistan appreciated the British military training assistance programme, but would like even more, primarily for the Navy, although the Army needed some training against chemical and biological warfare. The Prime Minister commented that military training assistance was something we could do and did well.

/(e) If Pakistan

(e) If Pakistan had the money they would approach HMG for some decommissioned ships for the Navy and some artillery guns. The Prime Minister said that in principle the Government would view such a request favourably.

(f) The President touched on the Pakistan community in the UK and agreed with the Prime Minister that they made good citizens.

(g) The President hoped that with the political situation stabilising in Pakistan there would be more inward capital flows from Britain.

(h) The President regretted the increased fees for overseas students in Britain. There were currently 700-800 Pakistanis in the UK and the number was declining, while those going to the USA were increasing (now 10,000).

(i) Pakistan had an adverse trade balance with the UK, which did not matter, but this year Pakistan would have some good quality rice to export, textiles and light engineering products. He would be grateful if these could be viewed favourably.

The Prime Minister said that she would be telling the refugees that the British Government would be contributing an extra £2 million. She was sorry it was not more, The President said that its effect would be equal to £20 million.

Finally, there was a brief discussion on the Commonwealth, on which the Prime Minister undertook to brief the President separately. In sum, there was considerable support for Pakistan's return but the discussions continued.

The meeting ended at 10.40 am.

8 October 1981

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

8 October 1981

Meeting with President Zia
of Pakistan

I attach a copy of the record of the meeting between the Prime Minister and President Zia of Pakistan which was held in Rawalpindi this morning.

I am sending a copy of this letter and of the record to David Omand (Ministry of Defence) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

C. A. WHITMORE

Brian Fall, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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TO IMMEDIATE FCO

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PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO PAKISTAN

1. AFTER A FULL CEREMONIAL WELCOME AT THE AIRPORT MRS THATCHER BEGAN HER ONE-DAY VISIT TO PAKISTAN WITH ONE AND A HALF HOURS DISCUSSION WITH PRESIDENT ZIA. THIS OPENED WITH A MILITARY BRIEFING ON THE THREAT TO PAKISTAN'S SECURITY.

2. THE PAKISTANIS ESTIMATED THAT, IN ADDITION TO THE 80-90,000 SOVIET TROOPS, THERE WERE 500 CUBAN TROOPS, 2 BULGARIAN CONSTRUCTION UNITS AND SOME EAST GERMANS AND CZECHS IN AFGHANISTAN. THEY HAD NO EVIDENCE THAT THE RUSSIANS HAD USED CHEMICAL WEAPONS. PRESIDENT ZIA WAS AFRAID THAT WITH THE RUSSIANS BOGGED DOWN IN AFGHANISTAN THE MASSIVE REFUGEE PROBLEM IN PAKISTAN WOULD CONTINUE AND WESTERN ASSISTANCE, WHICH HAD BEEN PROMPT AND VALUED, WOULD TAIL OFF. HE AGREED WITH THE PRIME MINISTER THAT IT WAS VERY IMPORTANT TO KEEP AFGHANISTAN IN THE FOREFRONT OF THE INTERNATIONAL AGENDA.

3. THE POSSIBLE THREAT FROM INDIA WAS BRACKETED WITH SOVIET DESIGNS AND PAKISTAN'S FEAR OF CO-ORDINATED ACTION AGAINST HER. THE PRIME MINISTER SAID SHE HAD HOPED THAT THE PROMPT AND SUCCESSFUL PAKISTAN REACTION TO THE HIJACK OF AN INDIAN PLANE, WHICH HAD WORRIED MRS GANDHI AT THE START OF THE MELBOURNE CONFERENCE, WOULD HAVE HAD A GOOD EFFECT ON INDO-PAKISTAN RELATIONS. UNFORTUNATELY MRS GANDHI'S ATTITUDE HAD NOT CHANGED. THE PRESIDENT WAS ALSO GLOOMY, BUT SAID HE WOULD CONTINUE TO TRY. HE HAD MADE AN IMMEDIATE PROMISE TO RETURN THE HIJACKERS.

4. THE PRIME MINISTER TOLD THE PRESIDENT THAT BRITAIN WOULD BE CONTRIBUTING ANOTHER POUNDS 2 MILLION FOR REFUGEE RELIEF. GENERAL ZIA WELCOMED THIS, SAYING IT WOULD BE WORTH POUNDS TWENTY MILLION.

5. IN A BRIEF DISCUSSION ABOUT IRAN THE PAKISTANIS SAID THEY TRIED TO KEEP IN TOUCH WITH TEHRAN BUT THEY HAD NO CONTACT AT THE TOP. THEY THOUGHT PRIME MINISTER KHAMEINI, WHO HAD BEEN BEHIND THE STUDENTS WHEN THE AMERICAN EMBASSY WAS OCCUPIED, WAS NOT NECESSARILY A LEFTIST, ALTHOUGH UNDER THEIR INFLUENCE.

6. PRESIDENT ZIA ASKED ABOUT THE COMMONWEALTH. THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THERE WAS CONSIDERABLE SUPPORT FOR PAKISTAN'S RETURN BUT DISCUSSIONS CONTINUED.

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7. THE PRESIDENT DID NOT HAND OVER ANY LIST OF DEFENCE REQUIREMENTS, BUT SAID THAT IF PAKISTAN HAD THE MONEY THEY WOULD APPROACH HMG FOR SOME DECOMMISSIONED RN SHIPS AND SOME ARTILLERY GUNS. THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THAT IN PRINCIPLE THE GOVERNMENT WOULD VIEW SUCH A REQUEST FAVOURABLY.

8. AMONG OTHER BILATERAL POINTS RAISED AT THE END OF THE MEETING THE PRESIDENT ASKED FOR MORE MILITARY TRAINING ASSISTANCE, JOINT VENTURES TO SEARCH FOR OFFSHORE OIL, INCREASED CAPITAL INFLOWS FROM THE UK, AND TECHNICAL HELP TO SET UP AN INSTITUTE FOR HANDICAPPED CHILDREN. HE REGRETTED THE INCREASED FEES FOR OVERSEAS STUDENTS IN BRITAIN, AND HOPED THAT BRITAIN WOULD REACT FAVOURABLY TO PAKISTAN'S EFFORTS TO EXPORT MORE GOOD-QUALITY RICE, TEXTILES AND LIGHT ENGINEERING PRODUCTS.

FCO PSE PASS SAVING MOSCOW, KABUL, EC POSTS, CANBERRA, OTTAWA, AND PEKING.

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