

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Role in Nuclear Programme of Pakistan (1971-1977)

Farah Gul Baqai*

Abstract

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto is considered as an architect of Pakistan's nuclear programme. Pakistan came into being with an innate hostility with India which kept us to respond India's most of the national, defense and foreign policies. After the debacle of East Pakistan the hostility aggravated due to nuclear explosion by India in 1974. Pakistan perceived it as a threat to its existence. Therefore, Pakistan embarked upon an ambitious journey of developing its own nuclear weapons to counter Indian threat. The present study is an attempt to explore the reasons that compelled Bhutto to initiate nuclear programme of a state that needed more focus on economic growth instead of spending huge amounts on an expensive programme like developing the nuclear bomb.

Introduction

The end of Second World War gave birth to many new nation states. Newly born states were fragile and weak and were dependent on developed countries. These states faced harsh attitude from international community. Bhutto felt the pain for Asians, Africans, and for Latin Americans, for that matter all marginalized communities of the world he put forward his thesis: the concept of Third World; he wanted the

* Senior Research Fellow, National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, Centre of Excellence, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.

weak forces to unite so they might be able to stop exploitation of rich and strong powers in the world.¹ The procurement of nuclear-tech venture was a step to break that hegemony of developed states that harass the third world due to their superiority in nuclear field.

In Pakistan, there were some people who were against the procurement of nuclear plants. They argued that processing plant was expensive and useless. They were not aware of technicalities of nuclear processing plant. Pakistan avoided to be exposed to this nuclear technology development, as it was likely to raise a hue and cry that this project might have died in its infancy. There were international forces which desired that the nuclear technology² should remain in their possession only. This technology was destructive and all annihilating and possessed an aura of awe, so the weak nations threatened by it and gave it up without a fight. Its devastation at Nagasaki and Hiroshima made all shiver. The Second World War gave a message to the world, that you may be brave and courageous i.e. Japanese; however in front of this nuclear device you are no better than mice. The newly emerged states realized that the new world order is based on a lopsided logic. The emerging states opened their eyes in fear that leads to servitude or rebellion. In this scenario, Bhutto chose to be a rebel. He felt deeply the pain of being bullied by stronger nations. After the Indian nuclear test in May 1974, he remarked that Pakistan will develop an atomic bomb even if its people will have to eat grass.³

For the development of the country, Bhutto was well informed about the progress taking place in the neighbouring countries. He was aware that how nations gain self-respect

1 Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, *The Third World: New Directions* (London: Quartet Books, 1977).

2 Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1982), 999.

3 Salman Taseer, *Bhutto: A Political Biography* (London: Ithaca Press, 1979), 154. Also see Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A New History* (London: Amarillis, 2012), 111.

and what were the compulsions of a nation to secure respect, dignity and honour. The world may dole out charity to poor countries and make them puppets with the strings in their hands. Bhutto passionately desired that Pakistan should be free from the dominance of others. Nations always have to struggle to maintain their dignity and self-respect.

Bhutto very aptly put his thoughts in these words:

In scenario of changing circumstances, the Second World War a new political situation has emerged in the world which, perhaps because it is so obvious, is sometime not seen in its correct perspective and its implications on the conduct of human affairs are not sufficiently understood.... The traditional method of conducting foreign affairs of a country in the Nineteenth Century and the first half of the Twentieth Century were to have regional alliance between smaller countries.... It was by maintaining a balance of power that peace was maintained; in fact, peace was disturbed only when the balance of power at any given time tilted in favour of one or the other group. In those days, smaller nations could influence the policy and the alignment of the Great Powers by indulging in various political permutations and combinations.⁴

Due to changing trends, with the emergence of global powers in addition to having all the attributes of great powers in the classical sense, are at the same time much more powerful and play a larger role in determining the destinies of the people all over the world. The emergence of these powers has radically changed the whole concept of conducting affairs of state. The task of the smaller nations, in determining their relationship with the great powers and in the furtherance of their national interests has been more complex and difficult. These small nations do not understand the new rules that were doomed to frustration, a sense of helplessness, isolation and perhaps, eventual extinction. Henry Kissinger, the fifty sixth Secretary of State of America, expressed his opinion in similar context:

The paradox of contemporary military strength is that a momentous increase in the element of power has eroded the traditional relationship of power to policy. Until the end of World War II, it would have never occurred to a leader that there might

4 Bhutto, *The Third World*, 127.

be an upper limit to useful military power. Since the technological choices were limited, strength was largely defined in quantitative terms. Today, the problem is to ensure that our strength is relevant to our foreign policy objectives. Under current conditions, no matter how our adversaries or we improve the size or quality of our strategic arsenals, one overriding fact remains. An all-right strategic nuclear exchange would risk civilized life as we know it.⁵

Stanley Wolpert mentions that Bhutto flew to Canada on February 24, 1976 announced in Ottawa that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) had approved the agreement signed by Pakistan and France for the purchase of a nuclear reprocessing plant. Prime Minister Bhutto and Trudeau met to discuss the possible sale of heavy water to Pakistan. The next day in New York, Bhutto was forced by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to abandon his top-priority scheme to acquire atomic weapons. He refused to dissuade, which seemed only to stiffen his resolve to build the bomb.⁶ Although Henry Kissinger had very lofty views about Bhutto, he considered him brilliant, charming, global stature in his perception⁷ yet Bhutto's dreams were a threat to the larger interests of America.⁸ Similarly India never accepted Pakistan as an independent state. India attained the status of nuclear state with the help of England and USA in 1970's.

Pakistan strongly believes in the fighting ability of its soldiers to protect its frontiers. Conventionally, it was true, but when one speaks in the present day world scenario it turns out to be very vague and inadequate. Contemporary pressures and requirements are not only to counter onslaught of armies on one soil, the state also has to rebuff onslaught of ideological concepts and to have a balancing

5 Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 999.

6 Stanley Wolpert, *Zulfi Bhutto of Pakistan: His Life and Times* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 262.

7 Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (London: Weindel and Nicolson and Michael Joseph, 1979), 907.

8 To know about Bhutto's dreams read Pilloo Mody, *Zulfi my Friend* and books written by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, especially *The Third World*.

nuclear technology. Nuclear technology outclassed humans beyond imagination. Its arsenal is deadly, destructive and a threat that leads to annihilation of the adversary.

India's Nuclear Tests

On May 18, 1974 India answered Islamabad and Beijing's reaffirmation of Kashmir's right to a plebiscite by exploding a plutonium device in a deep, salt cave at Pokhran in Rajasthan, close enough to Sindh seismically to jolt that province. Bhutto made it clear that "we are determined not to be intimidated by this threat. We will never let Pakistan be a victim of nuclear blackmail... In concrete terms, we will not compromise the right of self-determination of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Nor we will accept Indian hegemony..."⁹

American pressure on Pakistan to refrain from buying nuclear reactors from France was part of their desire to try to contain Bhutto's over-ambitious plans. With a nuclear bomb and the ability to share it with Arab states, Bhutto saw himself catapulted into an international role far greater than his poor country permitted him. Persistent American pressure to stop Pakistan's plan culminated in the cutting off aid on April 6, 1979.¹⁰

Pakistan has been facing a lot of pressure and problems from international forums to give-up its programme of acquiring nuclear technology. Now and then, they come up with novel ideas, pressures and threats that Pakistan give up its right to have this technology.

In his speech in the National Assembly on July 24, 1963 he said:

I submit that people of Pakistan are deeply concerned about military assistance which is being given to India. This concern is based on fact that India has committed aggression no less than five occasions during the last fifteen years, principally against Pakistan. We have therefore every cause to feel concerned. Really and fundamentally, it is not because of their global

9 Wolpert, *Zulfi Bhutto of Pakistan*, 237.

10 Taseer, *Bhutto: A Political Biography*, 154.

interest and the great powers are giving this massive assistance to India. They are giving it in order to make another Chung King (Chinese city) out of New Delhi to make another Kuomintang out of the present India regime. We know the fate of the assistance given to Chiang kai-Shek (Chinese military leader served from 1928-1975). Bhutto was well-read, well-informed, he used to move among the circle, which mattered in world politics.¹¹

Pakistan could not afford to remain a spectator or indifferent to all these developments. India was equipping herself with all sorts of weapons and Nehru was touring Europe and America in search of nuclear power. Pakistan had a few small ordnance factories which could not cater to the needs of the country. The USA and the West were not prepared to provide even reasonable weaponry to Pakistan. The only country, which supplied arms, was China, but China had its own limitations. Technologically, it was still not so advanced and was not a super power at that time. The task of Bhutto was tremendous, stupendous and indeed bigger than Himalaya.¹²

In June 1977, Bhutto in a speech at the National Assembly said that "in Pakistan there will be acute horizontal and vertical polarization, if Pakistan were to be destabilized". By Horizontal polarization, Bhutto meant provincial polarization, and by vertical polarization, he meant class polarization. The same anti-people alignments are being made between obscurantists: the same old rag-tag bands, the same "think-tanks" to do "*siyasi jor-tor*" [political manoeuvrings].¹³ Bhutto considered it as his single most important achievement which he believed would dominate the portrait of his life. The agreement with France, in which it was agreed to supply fuel reprocessing plant of French design with French assistance.¹⁴ Bhutto's assiduous and

11 Wolpert, *Zulfi Bhutto of Pakistan*, 18.

12 Wolpert, *Zulfi Bhutto of Pakistan*, 64.

13 Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, *If I am Assassinated*, 222.

14 Shahid Javed Burki, *State and Society in Pakistan 1971-77* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1980), 150.

tenacious endeavour spanning over eleven years of negotiations enabled Pakistan to acquire nuclear assets.¹⁵

Global Nuclear Scenario

In 1960's Soviet Union had weapons of mass destruction such as the 70 megaton hydrogen bomb and a global rocket which, it was claimed, will render useless all anti-missile defences and prompt warning systems against surprise attack. The United States has not been idle either. Only recently it has tested a new inter-continental ballistic missile of virtually unlimited range which can deliver nuclear warheads to any point on the globe. The smaller states were also acquiring the technology to manufacture nuclear weapons. In early 1960's Bhutto believed that more new nuclear states would emerge on the world map. The question of disarmament and maintenance of world peace is becoming dangerous and intractable.¹⁶

Pakistan tried to counter the India's nuclear explosion.¹⁷ The effect of a nation's diplomatic activities is often related to the strength of its fighting capacity. Therefore, too much reliance on diplomatic support, without sufficient backing of national security measures, cannot be considered safe. Pakistan due to its economic and political factors staggers in aggressive diplomacy. It must be kept in mind that aggression against Pakistan is very dangerous and we have to find means to deter it.¹⁸

Bhutto's Nuclear Aspiration

Christian, Jewish and Hindu civilizations had capability to acquire the nuclear technology. The communist power also possessed it. Only the Muslim world was without it, but that position was about to change.¹⁹ Zulfikar Ali Bhutto said

15 Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, *If I am Assassinated*, 223.

16 Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, *Reshaping Foreign Policy* (Lahore: Classic, 1974), 162-63.

17 Rafi Raza, *Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 221.

18 Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, *The Myth of Independence*, 152-53.

19 Bhutto, *If I am Assassinated*, 138.

that Henry Kissinger, the Secretary of State of the United States, has a brilliant mind, he told him that he would not insult the intelligence of the United States by saying that Pakistan needed the reprocessing plant for her energy needs.²⁰ Bhutto had been associated with nuclear programme from October 1958 to July 1977, a span of nineteen years. He was concerned directly with the subject as a Foreign Minister; he remained minister for Fuel, Power and Natural Resources and as Minister in Charge of Atomic Energy. When he took the charge of Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission, it was merely a signboard on an office.²¹

It was in 1975 that Bhutto decided to install many nuclear power projects to overcome energy crisis. Power generated through nuclear technology was much more expensive than power obtained from hydro-power plants. The main reason for this option was India's entry into nuclear club. Bhutto before becoming Prime Minister, had refused to sign nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) arguing that the country's 'position is entirely different because, for us, the nuclear threat is real and immediate.'²²

Bhutto geared all his efforts assiduously and with determination in acquiring nuclear capability for the country. He made arrangements for the youth to acquire education from foreign universities such as in Europe and North America to get training in nuclear technology.²³ Bhutto reaffirmed that Pakistan has the brain power, and also had a nuclear plant at Karachi, and it only required a nuclear reprocessing plant. Arrangements for the heavy water, the uranium and the fuel fabricating plant had been made. Pakistan was then at the threshold of nuclear capability when Bhutto left the government and was confined to the death cell.²⁴ He commissioned Edward Stone to build

20 Bhutto, *If I am Assassinated*, 138.

21 Bhutto, *If I am Assassinated*, 138.

22 Shahid Javed Burki, *Pakistan Under Bhutto 1971-77*, 2nd edition (London: The Macmillan Press, 1988), 150.

23 Bhutto, *If I am Assassinated*, 138.

24 Bhutto, *If I am Assassinated*, 138.

Pakistan Institute of Nuclear Sciences and Technology (PINSTECH) and laid its foundation stone in the wilderness of Islamabad. He negotiated for the 5-mw research reactor located in PINSTECH. Despite opposition from Finance Minister and Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission, Bhutto negotiated to obtain from Canada the 137 MW Karachi nuclear power plant and succeeded in inaugurating the plant. Towards the middle of 1976, he gave approval for the Chashma nuclear power plant. He negotiated and signed Nuclear Reprocessing Plant Agreement with France in 1976.

Due to his efforts, Pakistan acquired nuclear capability. It was not simple task for a country like Pakistan to aspire for lofty goals like nuclear technology. Bhutto was perturbed by the internal opposition to the nuclear programme that had come in his way from certain powerful ministers and bureaucrats.²⁵

China's Support for Pakistan's Nuclear Programme

Bhutto stressed that China is playing a great role in ensuring peace and stability in the region, the balance of power was tilted toward India, the world powers were helping out India in its nuclear programmes and similar opportunities that were offered to India were banned for Pakistan. On May 26, 1976 Bhutto was greeted in Beijing by Premier Hua-Kua-feng.²⁶

On April 20, Bhutto hosted a banquet for Vice-Premier Li Hsien-nien of China. Bhutto and Li exchanged promises of "steadfast support" for each other's country against "hegemony and expansion". They discussed in detail ways in which China could help Pakistan to develop its newly drafted program for building at least one dozen nuclear plants over the next quarter of century. At Chashma in Punjab, a large nuclear plant was in progress which Bhutto hoped to see operational by 1979. A small nuclear plant was also started at Karachi. "Pakistan's friends can rest assured that the people of China will always remain their trusted friends. Li

25 Bhutto, *If I am Assassinated*, 106-107.

26 Wolpert, *Zulfi Bhutto of Pakistan*, 266.

promised, "In near future joint struggle, we will always stand by Pakistan."²⁷

Pakistan has a comprehensive and vigorous nuclear programme, "Bhutto admitted to National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), it will be directed for peaceful uses and when I say peaceful uses I mean it."²⁸ Bhutto knew that nations need each other's help and the Regional Corporation for Development (RCD) was manifestation of that dependency of nations on each other. Bhutto had strong desire that Muslim countries should be close to each other in trade, education and defence, so they can merge at a common platform of mutual security.²⁹

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, Bhutto believed in a life of honour, dignity, equality, prosperity and power for Pakistan. He firmly believed in the renaissance of Islam. He was the architect of the country's nuclear programme and pursued it to the end, braving all risks and opposition from hostile quarters. Bhutto realized the grave threat, which India had posed with the help of her western friends. He was already apprehensive of the proliferation of atomic weapons, and had repeatedly warned the United Nations, but only empty resolutions were passed and no concrete steps were taken to prevent proliferation. He stood by his words and served the nation. Due to Bhutto's vision, farsightedness and efforts, Pakistan is strong enough to counter the threats from outside and within the country and Pakistanis as a nation is able to live in this world with dignity and pride.

27 Wolpert, *Zulfi Bhutto of Pakistan*, 253.

28 Wolpert, *Zulfi Bhutto of Pakistan*, 242.

29 Wolpert, *Zulfi Bhutto of Pakistan*, 266-67.