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## Aid to Pakistan should be Conditional

By: Benazir Bhutto

After the tit-for-tat nuclear tests by India and Pakistan in May, one of Washington's principal concerns has been nuclear weapons making their way into the hands of unstable, fundamentalist regimes. Ironically, President Clinton's meeting last week with Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif may have made that a reality.



The White House summit ostensibly was to help Pakistan pull back from the brink of economic and political collapse in exchange for further nuclear restraints.

Mr. Clinton temporarily prevented Pakistan's economic collapse when he gave Mr. Sharif billions of dollars in emergency bail-outs. But by doing so without conditions, Mr. Clinton is completing the consolidation of the very same unstable, fundamentalist regime the United States fears.

Mr. Sharif is seeking to undermine Pakistan's liberal constitution through the forced passage of a bill that -- in a dangerous exploitation of the sacred name of Islam -- would concentrate all powers in the hands of the prime minister, degrade women, and remove all protections for ethnic and religious minorities.

It would give Mr. Sharif sweeping powers, including the power to supersede the constitution at any time, oblige people to pray five times a day and, purely through edicts, "prescribe what is right and ... forbid what is wrong."

Mr. Sharif recently announced his intention to emulate the system of 'justice' carried out by the fanatic Taliban Islamic militia of Afghanistan, arguably the most cruel and inhumane system in the world. Under Taliban rules, women may not study or work outside their houses, men must grow beards of a prescribed length, and alleged criminals are subjected to summary amputations and public executions.

Since Mr. Sharif came to power in February 1997, Pakistan's democratic institutions have been under continual assault, leading to the dismantling of the nation's fledgling democratic institutions and its system of checks and balances.

Pakistan's once independent and fair judicial branch has come under increasing pressure to conform to the dictates of the prime minister and his regime. Last December, Mr. Sharif's supporters physically attacked the nation's Supreme

Court, forcing judges to flee out the back door.

Pakistan's once free press is under assault, too. Publishers willing to criticize the Sharif regime find themselves being harassed or under investigation for trumped-up charges of tax or financial impropriety.

On the issue of personal character, investigative journalists from leading British papers have uncovered substantial evidence linking the prime minister to systematically laundering more than \$40 million in illegal funds, evading payment of more than \$60 million in taxes and misusing government funds to improve his personal residence.

Taken together, those actions add up to a regime rapidly heading towards a dangerous, unstable and fundamentalist Islamic dictatorship, not the creation of a pluralistic and democratic society that those now in opposition -- and, we would hope, the American people -- feel is required for the world's newest nuclear power.

In this light, Mr. Clinton can continue to hand Mr. Sharif a windfall of economic rewards. Or he can use American generosity to

ensure that the institutions of democracy in Pakistan are viable and strong.

He can do the latter by:

- Sending a strong signal that the United States won't give economic rewards to a regime that dismantles democracy, oppresses women, and emulates the Afghan Taliban;
- Directly linking any new U.S. assistance to demonstrable steps that protect an independent judiciary and a free press;
- Conditioning U.S. approval of new International Monetary Fund bailout packages for Pakistan on a resumption of the rule of law and adherence to the secular constitution.

As Washington has learned from its assisting the Eastern European nations' move from authoritarianism to free-market democracies, stability and democracy flourish where institutions with checks and balances are strong.

If Mr. Clinton continues to provide rewards to Mr. Sharif without pro-democracy conditions, American generosity will further embolden a budding fundamentalist dictator.

In the new age of a nuclear South Asia, such a development would be dire indeed.

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