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## **The West Chose the Wrong Ally in South Asia**

**May 26, 1998**

India's belligerent nuclear tests last week should once and for all show that the long-standing American mistrust towards Pakistan was unfounded and misguided. It is time for Washington to adjust its strategic partnerships in South Asia, and recognize that it has been Pakistan, not India, which for decades has acted responsibly, with restraint and in cooperation with the international community.

Pakistan has long borne the burden of American wrath regarding our nuclear policies. It was not Pakistan, rather India, which first opted for the nuclear option. It was not Pakistan, rather India, which refused to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Pakistan has on numerous occasions stated publicly and privately that we would sign the NPT along with India.

Now the international community led by Washington is using a very heavy hand to pressure Pakistan not to test a nuclear device, in spite of very real and pressing security threats from a demonstrably hostile and belligerent India.

As Prime Minister of Pakistan, I tried to convince Western leaders for over a decade that, in the absence of active and high-level Western mediation, South Asia was plunging headlong into an arms proliferation race that Pakistan did not want and sought to prevent.

I stressed that the fifty-year-old Indo-Pak dispute over Kashmir, where an uprising had tied down 600,000 Indian troops, was leading to a dangerous flashpoint in the South Asian region. In this dispute, it has been India, not Pakistan, which has refused to consider compromise.

Washington is now considering how to clean up a nuclear mess exacerbated by decades of American pressure on the wrong party, Pakistan, and decades of compliance towards India, the hostile aggressor in the region.

Pakistan, meanwhile is considering its option to match eye for eye Indian resolve. In order for the Pakistani people to feel secure in the face of unprovoked Indian aggression, the West should consider offering:

1. Ironclad treaty guarantees from the US and China protecting Pakistan's territorial integrity.
2. A UN Security Council commitment to resolve the Kashmir dispute within a time certain. India has been holding Kashmir hostage for over fifty years. This dispute lies at the heart of all security concerns in the region. Now is the time to allow the Kashmiri's freedom.
3. An immediate effort to strengthen Pakistan's economic security by writing off its debt. This is a bill that Washington can afford with its coming budget surplus. And, it is leverage that Washington has twice used this decade to pursue strategic goals, once with Egypt and once with Jordan.

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4. Agreement from the international community that sanctions against India will be in place until such time as they open all nuclear facilities to international inspection. At that time, Pakistan can consider doing the same.
5. Lastly and perhaps most importantly for long-term stability, the West ought to help Pakistan rebuild its shattered democracy, now under serious strain. Our judicial branch is in tatters, our electoral system is anything but free and fair, our society under increasing ethnic, religious and economic stresses. The West can help by urging Pakistani institutions and parties to create a more civil atmosphere, respect for an independent judiciary, and protection for minority political opinions in a multi-party system.

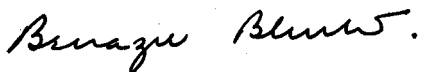
Washington must remember that the Pakistani people admire American freedoms and entrepreneurial spirit, but they do not trust Washington. We bore the burden of your Afghan struggle with Moscow, paying a heavy social and financial cost. We paid over \$650 million for new F-16 fighter jets needed to protect us from a growing Indian threat in Kashmir, and some ten years later, Pakistan still has not received either the jets or a refund of our urgently needed hard currency.

Under the Pressler Amendment and other congressional sanctions demanded by America's Indian lobby, we have already experienced first-hand the pain of over eight years of lost economic, military and technological assistance from Washington as punishment for pursuing our legitimate defensive security needs. This has cost our people billions in critical funds during a time when our fragile democracy needed help from the West.

The Indian tests call for a demonstration of international leadership and resolve in the post Cold War period. But sanctions are simply not enough. We know that sanctions will be lifted with time, as India is too large a market for the West to ignore. We fear that in a decade, India, now a member of the nuclear club, will be admitted as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

Washington must act now to meet these genuine concerns and to show that the world is not prepared to accept a fait accompli that undermines the global regime for arms control and security.

But if the West again chastises Pakistan and continues to see us as a nation and people to be mistrusted, rather than viewing Pakistan as a moderate, restrained and cooperative partner, we will have no choice but to again fulfill our own defensive security needs, alone. Even if that means again bearing an unfair burden. For, it is a burden we have lived with before.



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