

April 26, 1979

**J.C.W. Bushell (British Embassy, Islamabad),
'Pakistan - Valedictory Despatch'**

Citation:

"J.C.W. Bushell (British Embassy, Islamabad), 'Pakistan - Valedictory Despatch'", April 26, 1979, Wilson Center Digital Archive, The National Archive of the UK, FCO 96/955. Contributed by Malcolm Craig. <https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/280726>

Summary:

After a thirty-four-year career, John Bushell, the then British Ambassador to Pakistan, penned this dispatch as a "farewell" to the diplomatic service. The document touches on many subjects, such as the current political state of Pakistan, his predictions for its future, and the country's diplomatic status among its neighbors.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY)

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

MAN 156/307/1

CONFIDENTIAL REGISTRY No. 99

12

DESPATCH

Int. Secy

Action Taken

569

PAKISTAN - VALEDICTORY
SUMMARY

1. The Ambassador's final despatch on retirement from the Diplomatic Service reviews Pakistan in a broad historical sweep. He finds little cause for optimism about this country, which has failed so often in the past to achieve stability or democracy and which seems, with its old-fashioned structure and conservative outlook, perhaps dangerously exposed to pressures for change. To the internal disunity which has persisted throughout Pakistan's 30 years of independence must now be added the problems and influences of revolutions in Iran and Afghanistan (paras 1-7).
2. Two years of General Zia have underlined Pakistan's second-rateness and lack of friends in the world. Since the loss of Bangladesh it has become a Middle East-oriented country, but despite measures of Islamisation and much talk of Muslim brothers, it is no easy partner for the Arabs. It would like to be a special friend of the US, but at the same time, suggesting a direct collision course with the West, it seems determined to achieve nuclear parity with India. Overall the situation looks a nasty, potentially explosive, mixture. It is difficult to see how the UK can help, but the area is of importance to the West and needs to be denied to Soviet influence (paras 7-14).
3. The Ambassador ends with some more personal comments on his 34 years' service.

CONFIDENTIAL

BRITISH EMBASSY
ISLAMABAD

26 April 1979

014/1

The Right Honourable
Dr David Owen MP
etc etc etc

Sir

1. Next month I leave this post after something less than three years. It has proved to be a good deal more interesting period than one could have expected in 1976. In retrospect it may turn out to have been a watershed in Pakistan's history.

2. In perhaps more extreme fashion than most others in similar historical and economic circumstances, this country has been both beneficiary and victim of the winds of change that have blown so strongly since 1945. Its independence - in practice from India rather than from the UK - was a remarkable achievement, and in the end swiftly attained. How to meet the problems of independence, though, has never been resolved. Over 30 years these problems have been shown to be complex, deep-seated and persistent. They owe something to Pakistan's geo-political position, perhaps something more to the nature of Pakistanis, even if you believe that basically all people's behaviour is conditioned by their history. Externally, Pakistan has been involved in classic manifestations of the cold war, and is now caught up in perhaps more critical great power rivalries. Internally, its unity has been denied - and is still being threatened - dangerously so, by the forces of nationalist and regional sentiment. Attempts to make democratic government work

/have

CONFIDENTIAL

have failed again and again. And in the 1970s, for better or for worse, Pakistan acquired the extraordinary Mr Bhutto, first as President, and then as Prime Minister. He proved an alarming child of the times, a feudal ruler in the Mogul tradition, but as a secular prince, gifted with a high degree of intelligence, enormous energy and dangerous ambition. The most significant use of these qualities, I think, - significant for Pakistan, that is - was in his mobilisation of the hitherto dormant masses in the towns and countryside for his direct personal support.

3. Pakistan has many of the characteristics of mid-Victorian England - few, unfortunately, of the better ones. Power lies essentially in the hands of a small ruling elite. Ownership of land is the normal basis of power and respectability. As a general rule women are kept firmly in the home and the middle class, though it is coming up, is not yet of much significance. Education is making only a slight dent in illiteracy. Population is growing fast, while contraception is hardly a matter for public discussion. Religion maintains its strong and binding force; only a daring intellectual or eccentric would question it.

4. The political consequences of Mr Bhutto are incalculable but they mean at least, I think, that in political terms Pakistan can never be the same again. His critical contribution has been to end the old traditions of power, essentially the readiness of the peasant to accept that his superiors know best. Bhutto is dead, but history, it seems

/to

CONFIDENTIAL

to me, must be on Bhutto's side. Awakening the masses means bringing particularly to their attention the greed and corruption of their rulers, be they politicians, businessmen or even generals: and inviting them to draw their conclusions.

5. One must avoid exaggeration. I know personally a couple of highly literate and charming Pakistani Communists, in certain circumstances perhaps dangerous men. But there are not many such. Socialism is still rather an ugly word, incompatible with Islam, many Pakistanis say, though I tend to doubt it. Corruption is not the way of life here that I encountered in South Vietnam. Extremes of poverty and wealth are less glaring than in many third world countries, and perhaps can be kept reasonably out of sight, particularly now under the stricter rules of Islamic society. But Pakistan at the end of the '70s is in a dangerously exposed position both geographically and ideologically, open to new ideas, ready to be influenced by outside pressures. Change must surely come faster. To continue to live with Victorianism is itself difficult, yet evolution must bring its own, probably more difficult, problems. After Afghanistan and Iran, even if nothing like the Shah and Savak exist here, the scent of revolution must be that bit stronger.

6. Pakistanis are often, and rightly, described as volatile. Urban rioting here has a long history. But ironically enough, it was the struggle to overthrow the "Islamic Socialist" Bhutto after the 1977 elections that gave the politicised mob its first real taste of success. Of course,

/Bhutto's

CONFIDENTIAL

Bhutto's apparent championing of the left at the end of the '60s had by 1977 become little more than a facade. Even so, this was hardly a revolutionary movement. While the opposition certainly expressed protests by the individual at the dictatorship and corruption of society under the Bhutto regime, they were also inspired by the belief that a return to Islamic purity would ipso facto restore democracy in Pakistan. The movement has parallels in the revolts against both Mrs Gandhi and the Shah. The latter is more important and interesting. How Khomeini Iran develops may offer significant pointers for the future of Pakistan. And, to some extent, vice versa.

7. For Pakistan, internal fragility is aggravated by alarming external changes, for the most part still in course of evolution. Neighbours look dangerous or liable to be dangerous. The giant India seems to have moved into a different world class, emphasising Pakistan's second-rateness and lack of success. Afghanistan threatens subversion or something worse. Iran may attain stability as a sister Islamic Republic: but then again, it may not. And if it does not, any real benefit to Pakistan from a strengthened RCD (in which any Pakistan Government must be interested) can probably be written off. China is admittedly a friendly neighbour but no guarantee of safety for Pakistan in a real emergency: nor a great provider of aid, either.

8. In the last two years Pakistan has displayed symptoms

CONFIDENTIAL

of what is often described as an Islamic revival. Immediate Western attention has tended to focus on the news-worthy aspects of prohibition of drinking, Islamic punishments of hand-cutting, flogging, etc. The more important aspect is whether the new Islamisation in Pakistan reflects a wider movement of unity among Islamic states and if so, whether this might develop to UK and Western disadvantage. One significant element in the revolution in Iran has surely been the Muslim protest against things foreign, notably the "conspicuous consumption" and laxity of the Western way of life. Dismay at the morals of Western society is also clearly noticeable in Pakistan. Hence in part at least the frequent and public reassertion of the fundamental values of Islam. Similar sentiments are also, I suppose, capable of making themselves felt in the Arabian and Gulf States. In theory, a powerful (oil-rich) and perhaps fundamentalist Islamic bloc might seem on the cards, which would be non-aligned and probably less friendly to the West. This is something which quite a lot of Pakistanis could find attractive in Islamic terms and in which General Zia may see considerable practical advantage for Pakistan's national interests. Certainly, now that Pakistan has left CENTO, the way is open to explore some alternative grouping.

9. Personally, however, I doubt whether Pakistan will follow where Zia and the religiously minded parties seem to be pointing. The so-called Islamic revival looks to me at present superficial in Pakistan. I detect no real

/revolutionary

CONFIDENTIAL

revolutionary favour, as in Iran. Indeed, pressure for Islamisation may well produce a back-lash. Pakistan's elite give no impression of welcoming the practical implementation of Koranic rules. There is perhaps in any case an essential difference between Pakistan on the one hand and the Arabian States and Iran (possibly Afghanistan) on the other. The former still enjoys its long-established British connections and Westernised infrastructure inherited from British India, including sophisticated methods of business and a comfortably non-doctrinaire way of life. Nor is the ordinary mullah in Pakistan highly rated. My guess of the people as a whole is that if offered a choice, they would say cooperation with Muslim brothers, yes, alliance on the basis of fundamentalist Islam, no thank-you.

10. There is another aspect to this. Pakistanis are not only short of real friends in the world, as I have often commented, but also proud and touchy - a pretty awful combination. Since the loss of Bangladesh, they have paid little attention to countries east of India. Membership of the Commonwealth was ended by Bhutto in 1972 and although Zia would like to re-join, pride forbids Pakistan to ask - by invitation, apparently is re-entry considered possible. Pride also plays a part in Pakistan's relations with the Arab states. At the end of the '40s and into the '50s, enthusiastic Pakistani spokesmen frequently lectured other Muslim states on Pakistan's pre-eminent role in the Islamic world. Not surprisingly reaction was widely /unfavourable.

CONFIDENTIAL

unfavourable. Pakistani attitudes are less brash nowadays and the concept of Pakistan as the "arsenal of Islam" may ring friendly bells in some capitals; but in most cases friendly noises appear to be muffled with caution. If Pakistan is large in Islamic terms (pop. c 130 m. by the end of the century), so also is its need for aid. In the past Saudi Arabia and the UAE (and perhaps Libya - but it is difficult to know) have been generous with help, but from other countries in the Arab world Pakistan attracts a rather more critical look. In Islamic terms an "arsenal" Pakistan may be: but now an arsenal in nuclear terms also? With the problems of its politics and policies post-Bhutto, which Arabs can really want to become seriously engaged with Pakistan?

11. In their heart of hearts most Pakistanis would like to be a favoured child of the US. All their problems would be solved, they think, by massive US aid plus a treaty of friendship guaranteeing their frontiers. They also believe that they deserve no less - being more serious and stable than Iran, more loyal to the West than India. Once again their pride is touched (as well, of course, as their policies) when the Americans seem to assess it quite otherwise - and indeed suggest that Pakistan is secretly working towards a nuclear weapons programme. In return the Americans are found guilty of bias against Pakistan and lack of leadership in the region. So far, fortunately, this condemnation of US policies has not yet led to any serious

/measures

CONFIDENTIAL

measures of "appeasement" vis-a-vis the Soviet Union. Pakistan's friendship with China and the Soviet need to be seen supporting Afghanistan are useful counter-balancing factors.

12. So what is Pakistan's future? General Zia believes it is safe in the hands of Allah, though, being a practical man, he would prefer this safety buttressed by US power. Unfortunately he also believes that Pakistan's security requires at least parity with India in the nuclear field, perhaps something more. He is thus on a direct collision course with President Carter and all who take seriously the cause of non-proliferation. As this situation evolves one can only guess at the consequences for Pakistan. At the least, unless Zia retreats from his nuclear ambitions - which looks unlikely -, anti-US forces in the country will be encouraged and anti-Western sentiment stimulated. More alarming, without leadership of a higher quality - and I see no evidence of such emerging, with or without Zia, - the risk must be of a sharp deterioration in relations with India. The winners may be the purists of Islam supported by anti-Westerners and those (perhaps not so few) who believe that the time has come for a "Muslim bomb". Equally, they could be the few operators on the left. As usual in modern politics, these latter should be able to recruit strength from the semi-educated (plenty in Pakistan) and from the illiterate and under-privileged industrial worker. The growth of professional trade union /organisers,

CONFIDENTIAL

organisers, notably in Karachi, and normally left-wing, might be a significant development in this respect. Either way, the West - and democracy - look likely to be the losers.

13. All this represents a fairly grisly scenario. After Iran it threatens yet another set-back in a hitherto friendly area, which is also rather too close for comfort to the West's oil supplies. I do not feel called upon to offer final words of wisdom about how to forestall it: and with luck, my analysis may prove much too pessimistic. Were I not leaving, it is not the moment I would have chosen for trying out the crystal ball. But it seems clear enough that only the US, or possibly the US plus the Nine, have the will and power to secure Western interests.

14. This is hardly, I am afraid, a new or creative thought, even with the reference to the potential of the European Community. It is the sort of remark that mutatis mutandis has come increasingly from our posts during my 30 years or so in the Diplomatic Service. There are many good reasons for this, and some bad ones. The worst is the failure of the UK to organise its economic potential. To Ernest Bevin is attributed the saying, in the hard times of 1946, (but he is almost as much a myth for us as Winston Churchill for the British people) "Give me 10 million tons of coal and I will give you a foreign policy". It is sad, in a country like Pakistan where so much goes for the British, that our ability to offer leadership should be ham-strung by our continuing economic weakness. It is this, more than any other factor,

/which

CONFIDENTIAL

which prevents an easy and natural relationship from developing into a really effective one.

15. I mention Ernest Bevin (when I was introduced to him as a new-type entry he remarked "I don't care 'ow 'e got in as long as 'e 'as what it takes". It is good to be able to add to the myth). But I am of the generation that entered Government service through the armed forces in 1939. Ignorant as most of us were at that time and age, there seemed to us no reason why the UK and France should not easily enough take on Germany and Italy without US help. When I went to Moscow in 1946, we were still allies of the Soviet Union and the great power of Europe, even if desperate for what emerged as Marshall Aid. We played a leading part in setting up NATO, but thereafter we seem to have rather squandered our unique advantages. It has been a frustrating period for the Diplomatic Service: and galling, at the end of one's career, to be told by the CPRS that we are too good, too "elite".

(The argument might as well apply to the competences of Harley Street or BP and I am glad that it received little attention).

I am personally of the view that the Service has adjusted itself pretty well to the changing scene and that HMG get good value for their money. Above all, in 30 years I have seen no falling-off of our sense of discipline and responsibility despite the increasing number of difficult posts and the always more complex stresses of social and family obligations. Having missed the traditional words when I left Saigon in a hurry in 1975, I take the opportunity now to say that, like, I believe, almost every Ambassador, the

/loyalty

CONFIDENTIAL

loyalty and reliability of staff has been for me a matter which I have been gratefully able to take for granted.

16. In a valedictory despatch personal idiosyncrasies may be excused. I have a comment on print, for example. Less despatches are written nowadays than 30 years ago - a happy reduction of our labours. Of traditional despatches still required, those entitled First Impressions could easily be dropped, in my view. Their utility, often their validity, seems questionable. On the other hand, if our Service contributes usefully through printed despatches to other Whitehall Departments, why is it that the latter do not make similar contributions? Policy discussions or assessments, sometimes negotiations, by other Ministries are surely of equal interest, both historical and, for posts abroad, educational.

17. Diplomatic Service wives also deserve a mention. Last year I pleaded with a (lady) member of the CPRS that the report should make recommendations to assist this hard-working, often over-worked, but always important element of British overseas representation. She was sympathetic, but the report offered little or nothing. At the least, for senior wives a wife's residence (at post) allowance, paid to the wife, seems due.

18. Finally, language ability. Our Service has practised economies over recent years to a degree which has left us too little time for training. In particular postings seem to occur at speeds which often preclude language training.

/No

CONFIDENTIAL

No member of my DS staff in Saigon spoke Vietnamese: none in Islamabad speaks Urdu. When I was Minister in Berlin, very few of us spoke fluent German. It is not very modern or efficient. It seems to me we cannot afford to be less than both.

19. I am sending copies of this despatch to Her Majesty's Representatives at New Delhi, Kabul, Tehran, Peking, Moscow, Washington and Karachi.

I am, Sir,
Yours faithfully

J C W Bushell

CONFIDENTIAL