

WORLDLY JEREMIADS

Ideology and Aid

For a regime that rode to power on the distinction between totalitarianism and authoritarianism, the Reagan administration has shown an almost blind ignorance of democracy. Nowhere is this more clear than in the Indian Ocean area, where the U.S. is preparing to aid Pakistan over India's objections.

During the Carter presidency the Indian Ocean began to loom large as the result of Communist takeovers in Ethiopia and South Yemen and the crises in Iran and Afghanistan. These events, in countries so near the Persian Gulf, focused attention on a part of the world that had never been major to our geopolitical outlook. Indeed, throughout most of our history India, Persia, Afghanistan, and East Africa were parts of the British Empire, off limits to U.S. trade, missionary endeavors, and military activity. Even after World War II, British arms provided the muscle for Western interests beyond Suez. Only since 1970, when the British began their final withdrawal, has the U.S. faced up to its new geopolitical responsibility.

Remarkably, the U.S. strategy does not focus on the largest economic, political, and military factor in the region—India. Little is written about India (compared to China, for example), less is shown on TV, and—incidentally—little thought is given to it by the State Department. Despite India's strategic position dominating the Indian Ocean's entire eastern littoral, it is at the periphery of U.S. interests. Pakistan, on the northeast of the Ocean, is the center of our attention.

More is involved than strategy, for in choosing Pakistan over India, we indicate how little value we place on democracy.

U.S. blindness toward India is based on two historical errors. The first, perpetuated by American neo-Malthusians (e.g., Paul Ehrlich, Robert Heilbroner, the Rockefeller Foundation), presents India as an economic "basket case," in the Kissingerian phrase. The second is our tendency to view India as a Soviet clone—a "proxy force," as a RAND Report by Francis Fukuyama puts it. Seldom do we see reference to India as a capitalist, democratic, pluralistic, and growing industrial state. Indeed, in the U.S. media China is almost never portrayed as "Communist," while references to India's government and economy rarely fail to mention India's military aid from the USSR.

That India's democracy has persisted for three decades, that India is self-sufficient in grain, that it is the world's tenth largest industrial power, that its self-generating nuclear program is tied to a growing missile capability, that it is the most intensely capitalist country on earth with more private landholders and businesses than Europe, that its engineers, financial experts, and doctors are the chief source of expertise in the Persian Gulf, that it has the largest navy in the area, and that its press is the freest and its educational system the most open in Asia (not excepting Japan)—all this is

ignored. It is as if India's size, diversity, and heroic struggle for development are too large for U.S. observers to grasp.

Part of the problem is that India is too democratic, too Western, too difficult for Americans to deal with. The poverty of India—and poverty is certainly still visible—coupled with the Indians' refusal to accept an American worldview produce a sense of outrage. After all, how dare poor people question our superiority!

That India's cantankerousness, nationalism, and vision of a Gandhian-socialist path of development originate in Western ideas of democracy seems to be beyond the ken of most Americans. Nor do we understand that India will not be lectured to like a naughty child, as will Pakistan. No self-respecting Indian elected official could accept the lecture and survive politically.

As a consequence, Americans gravitate to Pakistani generals. Under Ayub Khan, YaYa Khan, and Zia al Haq, Americans have hastened to Islamabad, where pro-Western sentiments abound, and, flattered, have offered aid. This preference for generals over elected officials is not lost on the rest of the world and makes a joke of our distinction between "authoritarian" and "totalitarian," a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy.

Pakistan receives \$3 billion in aid, mostly military, though it refuses to call a halt to its nuclear program. China, India's other main enemy, has never signed a nonproliferation treaty, yet we supply computers to help its nuclear program. Democratic India is refused help not only with this program but with its program of peaceful nuclear energy as well. This is why U.S. foreign policy is so often labeled hypocritical. Democratic and multiracial Zimbabwe is ignored in favor of apartheid-ridden South Africa. Democratic Greece and Israel are slighted in favor of monarchical Saudi Arabia and military Turkey. Can we blame the people of the world for doubting our sincerity?

A few years back Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan issued a call for U.S. support of the world's democracies, "the party of liberty." By this he meant not only the wealthy democracies, but those of the Third World as well: Sri Lanka, Costa Rica, Zimbabwe, Malaysia, Kenya, Peru, Venezuela, Jamaica, Nigeria....

There is a party of liberty to defend. Yet India, the largest democracy, is still ignored. Now, when the U.S. is stationing a fleet in the Indian Ocean and building a string of bases in East Africa, it is time to realize that more than anti-Soviet strategy must be taken into account. It is time we made up our minds about the principles we hold sacred. Do we base our policy on Pakistan's generals or on India's democracy? It is a test of what we mean by freedom.

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