

Cato Institute: how to sell out Pakistan

by Jerry Berg

At midnight Oct. 1, U.S. aid to Pakistan was abruptly terminated with the expiration of a special six-year waiver of the Symington nuclear non-proliferation amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act. Authoritative sources on both sides of the Pakistan issue had insisted that the aid would never be cut off, just debated. That debate on harsh new conditions has, with the tacit approval of the "pro-Pakistan" Reagan administration, outlasted the aid, and opened new vistas for destabilization, all based on an overblown "Pakistani bomb" scare. This hypocritical approach deliberately feeds anti-American sentiment, hastens the collapse of U.S.-Pakistan relations, and guarantees a Pakistani bomb.

The U.S. government is showing this willingness to sacrifice our closest ally in South Asia to Russian imperial appetites, in the context of a new round of negotiations with the Kremlin on a "regional matters" package deal tied to the "arms control offensive." This begs the question, has the State Department joined the kooky arch-libertarian Cato Institute, in seeking Pakistan's destruction?

Cato's Ted Galen Carpenter, in a January 1987 report entitled, "U.S.-Pakistan Relations: A Fortress Built on Quicksand," makes a case for Pakistan becoming the next disintegrating Beirut. Cato's alternative is to turn Pakistan into a new Austria or Finland, at the mercy of Soviet expansionist whims. The State Department agrees.

The Cato Institute, a nominally conservative offspring of the Heritage Foundation, last year had Carpenter deeply involved in a campaign to rollback the war on drugs by propagandizing anew for legalization. The Cato drug stance goes beyond that of even quack economist Milton Friedman, a 1978 endorser of legalized heroin. The "right-wing" group has also allied with the left-terrorist Green Party of West Germany to demand withdrawal of U.S. troops from Europe and an end to the Strategic Defense Initiative. These Soviet objectives are urged on "cost-effective, free-market" grounds. Cato's prescription for Pakistan is disengagement and disintegration.

Carpenter says Pakistan "could crumble at any time causing the collapse of Washington's entire South Asian strategy. Disengagement would then be a forced process." In other words, if we do not abandon Pakistan now, "the chance of securing a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan will have been lost." Pakistan is thus treated not as a sovereign nation, but as a bargaining chip.

He adds, "Pakistan's political and social problems dwarf those of the Philippines."

Carpenter goes a step further. "The current situation in Pakistan bears an alarming resemblance to conditions in Lebanon during the early and mid-1970s." More recently, in a conversation, Carpenter declared that "political entities are fragile in Pakistan, with major separatist tendencies, particularly in border provinces. In Lebanon . . . you had the Palestinian refugees and the PLO. You have a similar problem in Pakistan . . . Afghan mujaheddin operating out of border sanctuaries and a very large Afghan refugee population—3 million or so—straining the social and economic structure of Pakistan."

The Cato report proposes to "offer the Soviet Union an extremely tempting package deal . . . an 'Austrian Solution' for both Afghanistan and Pakistan. . . . 1) a complete Soviet military withdrawal from Afghanistan and the formation of a new government in Kabul, including . . . the mujaheddin; 2) termination of the security agreement between the United States and Pakistan; 3) a commitment from both superpowers that they will provide no military assistance to any faction in Afghanistan or Pakistan. . . . This 'neutralization' option contains attractive features for all parties involved"—especially Moscow.

In a "worst case scenario," under his scheme, Carpenter acknowledges the truth: "Pakistan would be the first item on Moscow's territorial menu." This, he says, is because Pakistan's role as a U.S. ally "causes the Kremlin to pay an inordinate amount of attention" to Pakistan and heightens Pakistan's woes. Therefore, let's surrender now and get the best deal. After all, Carpenter writes, "there is nothing in South Asia—not even the much-touted Persian Gulf oil routes—worthy of incurring such a grave risk" as "nuclear conflagration," especially since we have such a "geographical disadvantage" anyhow. He insists that "a stable non-communist barrier to Soviet expansion in South Asia requires U.S. military disengagement from the region and an end to the Pakistani connection."

The State Department and Congress are doing their best to break that connection this autumn. The drumbeat for the current destabilization got under way last January—around the time Carpenter's report was issued by the Cato Institute—when several journals trumpeted an alleged interview with a top Pakistani nuclear researcher asserting that his nation already had the bomb. This was followed by a sudden spate of Pakistani nuclear smuggling indictments by the Justice Department.

Furthering the Cato/State Department scenario, the *Wall Street Journal* on Aug. 25 published a front-page item highlighting anti-Americanism and domestic turmoil in Pakistan, that included a purported quote from a Pakistani "man on the street" that may as well have been lifted from Carpenter's report. Things in the country were "just like Beirut," this convenient Pakistani declared.