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Why Visit to Moscow not materialized: Myths and Realities

Abstract

Liaquat Ali Khan's visit to USSR was initiated, proposed, accepted but not honoured. Liaquat Ali Khan was invited by the ultimate approval of Joseph Stalin, brokered by Pakistan ambassador: Raja Ghazanfar Ali in Tehran through Soviet Embassy. Between June 1949 to October 1951 it did not take place. Liaquat Ali Khan visited USA in May 1950, a successful visit, but Moscow remained unvisited. It threw cold water on Pakistan-Soviet relationship by putting the former a dependent periphery ally on US military, economic and political support in the years to come. In wider analysis the visit to Moscow should have taken place for balanced and co-existent foreign policy of Pakistan with major and regional powers, but it unfortunately did not. It dimmed the prospects of good relationship with Moscow in years to come.

Keywords: *Liaquat Ali Khan, Stalin, Truman, invitation, Moscow, proposed, extracted, distracted*

Introduction

Foreign policy of a country is determined by a number of factors. They include geographical, historical, ideological, political, incidental like the 9/11 episode and personal ones. Similarly, in the process of the formulation of policies there are many myths and realities which are not easily understood and realized. A similar myth and reality lies about the proposed visit of Liaquat Ali Khan, the first Prime Minister of Pakistan to USSR in 1949. The visit being initiated, proposed, accepted but not materialized. The visit has been widely quoted and referred in more or less all the leading books and articles on Pakistan's foreign policy. There have been many "ifs" and "buts" about the visit. To many, had it taken place would have changed the course of Pakistan's relations with the outside world without putting Pakistan into a dependable periphery role on the United States of America in years to come. Many refer to it as the failure of the establishment of Pakistan's visionary approach towards a balanced relationship with the major and regional powers. Even it is claimed by analysts that the visit was a flirt with Moscow to attract Washington DC for an invitation. There are few career Pakistani diplomats who having written authentically on Pakistan's foreign policy in short reference to the visit refute that there was no written invitation from Soviet Union and all went verbally. Nonetheless, no non-

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Pakistani claims that invitation came only in verbal and not writing. No matter whatever said about the visit, the fact remains that the visit proposed could not take place. And hardly there is any written authentic work on the visit. All about the visit is that it is that it has slightly been mentioned in a paragraph or two by a number of scholars and diplomats. Abdul Sattar in his book refers to the visit as “an episode the around much attention at the time and later, involved the invitation to the Pakistan Prime Minister to visit the Soviet Union which was accepted but not honoured.”¹

The article is an attempt to answer the queries regarding the Liaquat Ali Khan’s proposed visit to the USSR which as mentioned was never materialized. The article will focus on the major factors and circumstances which possibly led to the making and unmaking of the Pakistan’s initiation for the visit with repercussions Pakistan faced in the years to come. It was an opportunity which Pakistan did not avail and let it go without any justification or circumstantial factor. Nehru was very keen on establishing relations with Moscow. Had Stalin invited Nehru, no matter how much attraction lied in invitation from White House, he would have availed his visit to Moscow without any time wasted. Nehru left no stone unturned to attract Stalin but the latter always took a dim view of him. He is on record for not having appreciated Nehru except in short message to him on 18th July 1950 for his stand on Korean Crisis. To be discussed next in detail, Nehru’s sister who celebrated the first independence day in Moscow on 15th August 1948 as emissary was never seen by Stalin during her more than two year stay.

Prelude to Invitation

Pakistan emerged on the world map as an independent nation-state in 1947 as surprise and nuisance to many world leaders. Being an important South Asian country, geographically and strategically, it was numerically the largest Muslim country in the world after Indonesia. Pakistan was unanimously recognized by the permanent and non-permanent members of UN in the inaugural session of UN on September 1947. India had inherited its original membership of UN in 1945. The only country to go against Pakistan for its membership was Afghanistan which veto was largely due to the grudges over the border division between King Abdur Rehman and British India in 1892 which the Afghan rulers believed as invalid after the British Raj in India came to an end.

Pakistan had to begin everything from scratch. So was the case of Pakistan foreign policy. The founder of Pakistan: Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah being an old and sick man could not live longer to build its relationship with the outside world on solid grounds, but he however had a visionary approach. During his short tenure as the Governor General of the newly raised state he made only two statements in public being reflective of his vision. He believed in a balanced approach with the major powers of the time with friendly and goodwill relations with immediate neighbors. He believed in the comity of nations with brotherly relations with the Muslim world. He bestowed the responsibility of external affairs upon Sir Zafrullah Khan (Dec 1947- Oct 1954), the first foreign minister of Pakistan and a competent man about whom the famous American

Senator: Warren Austin, the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee had said, “as the most competent and brilliant foreign minister”.

Though the Soviet Union being one of the major powers and leader of the communist bloc was not much supporter of the reasons with the creation of Pakistan and viewed it as the “divide and rule” policy of the British imperialism, it nevertheless, supported Pakistan as newly independent state in UN and in its important forums. Though it was the period when Soviet Union used frequent vetoes to debar many countries from UN membership.

Unlike India which soon after independence showed urgency in exchange of diplomatic emissaries and opening of missions in 1947, Pakistan did not. In fact, the first Indian Ambassador to Moscow was Nehru’s younger sister, Vijay Lakshmi Pandit who later on served as Ambassador to US, UK and President of General Assembly. He presented her credentials to Soviet foreign ministry on 13 August 1947, few days prior to Indian independence. Stalin did not meet her. She did not want to leave India before August 15 but did under circumstances being forced by Nehru about whom she writes in her memoirs:

For some still unknown reason I was to leave for Moscow before the day on which the transfer of powers was to take place. I pleaded to be allowed to remain in India but was told that Moscow was important and that August 15 be celebrated there. If Bhai (Nehru) had realized how little importance Soviet Union attached to this day we might have been permitted to celebrate it at home as we had longed to do”²

She also expresses her concern in sadness that that Stalin did not receive or met her during her entire stay in Moscow. Mrs. Pandit was not “being able to meet Stalin was a disappointment and led to much criticism of me in Parliament”. She says in her autobiography that Stalin was sick and was not meeting anyone. However, she cites that during the period, an Indian couple who were known as comrade communists were invited by Stalin and decorated. She also write that on Berlin airlift Stalin met American ambassador for long, but for her there was no time.³ Stalin met, her successor ambassador, Radha Krishnan who few years later became the President of India. Stalin gave Radha Krishnan an interview in April 1952.⁴ Stalin received K. P. S Menon too and is on record to have interacted with him for quite some time. K. P. S. Menon was the first Ambassador to China whom Nehru assigned task in Moscow as Indian ambassador after Krishnan. He was very instrumental in bringing India closer to Soviet Union under Khrushchev.

The first Soviet ambassador to New Delhi was K. V. Novikov, a career diplomat. He reached a day before his presentation of credentials to Governor General on 23 January 1948. He presented credential to Governor General, but was received and interviewed by Nehru few days later in the Prime Minister House. Pakistan established diplomatic ties with Soviet Union in December 1949, two years and four months later than India did.

Joseph Stalin

Personal basis of support based on likes and dislikes of leaders compared to organizational or ideological ones may not be the stronger basis of support, however, their importance cannot be denied. They have played an important role in the relationship of nations throughout history. Joseph Stalin between 1945-53 was one of the “most powerful dictators of all time – the absolute ruler of the 1/6 of the world’s surface”.⁵ He also followed his own likes and dislikes in relationship with outside world. He was least considerate of Congress leadership, particularly Nehru, though the later after independence tried his best to have close relationship with Soviet, but Marshall Stalin showed reluctance. He never invited Nehru to Soviet Union though efforts were made by the Indian embassy in Moscow. As mentioned he declined meeting Vijay Pandit during her tenure as ambassador. As Adam Ulam writes in his biography of Stalin, Stalin was against Nehru and assumed that Indian independence movement was a “reactionary movement. More or less Gandhism was considered as an ideology directed against the revolution of the popular masses. To him, “communism must fight against it (Gandhism) relentlessly.”⁶ Gujral, the ex Prime Minister of India quotes in his book on foreign policy of India that Stalin was on record for publically defying Nehru. He once cited him as “running dog of imperialism”.⁷ Many Soviet leaders, particularly Stalin perceived Indian mass movement at the hands of Congress as anti-communist. Gandhism was taken as a reactionary movement and an ideology directed against the revolution of the popular masses. To him, communist forces must have fought against it recklessly.”⁸ Stalin never supported, as did his successor Khrushchev, on important Indian stand or issue such as on Kashmir or Gao. Whatever the relations developed between India and USSR were after Stalin under Khrushchev.

In authoritarian system or regime as the Soviet Union was in 1940s can well be explained under the idiosyncratic approach of foreign policy behavior. The Idiosyncratic Approach largely focuses on the perception, images, cautiousness, pragmatism, superiority, creativeness, confidence and other personal characteristics of decision-makers. The greater are the qualities of a leader the more effective foreign policy has the country. It simultaneously puts his personality as the major source of support for foreign policy which is large not the strongest source of support.

Stalin in 1949 had a leeway in his ability to go for major decisions and enjoyed big discretion. He was a greater agent to seek the influence of Soviet foreign policy. He claimed proudly in 1945 that Soviet Union under him defeated Hitler forces and by “defeating the Hitlerite coalition, the USSR helped to liberate central and southeast Europe from fascist slavery”.⁹ It might not have been the whole truth but partially it was true. Soviet forces and Russian cold weather inflicted a considerable damage on Nazis ---- geographical factor ignored by Hitler. On 28th June 1949 in a meeting regarding the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) he said, “I will shake little figure and there will be no Tito”. Stalin no doubt was a realist and was known for shrewd diplomacy and negotiation.

Mushtaq Ahmad writes in his book on foreign policy of Pakistan that the Soviets were however conscious and supporter of Pakistan. As, "*The emergence of Pakistan was a significant development from the Soviet point of view. Much as it may have lacked conformity to communist ideology, it very much conformed to the national interests of Russia which, ultimately must have preferences over all other considerations.*"¹⁰

Raja Ghazanfar brokers for Offer

It was largely due to Stalin being at helm of affairs that invitation was finally approved. It may be possible that Nehru or Indian factor was considered as *An enemy of my enemy is my friend* which plays a core role in formulation of countries' relationship with one another could be ruled out. At the slight initiation the desire of Liaquat Ali for visiting Moscow was turned into a reality. Liaquat Khan during international visits reached Tehran from Egypt on 16 May 1949 from Egypt. Few days earlier, President Truman had invited Prime Minister Nehru to visit US about which Nehru announced in publica in Bombay on 7 May. He told the press and audience to have accepted the invitation of President Truman to visit US with pleasure. It is believed that Liaquat Ali Khan was offended by offer as it was tantamount of him being ignored by Truman. As Burke and Ziring in their well read book on Pakistan's foreign policy write, "the news caused a flutter in Karachi, because Liaquat Ali Khan had received no such invitation, and in Moscow, where it was read as further proof of India's proclivity towards the West."¹¹ Liaquat Ali Khan is said to have remarked on the occasion that "Pakistan cannot afford to wait. She must take her friends where she finds them."¹² He expressed his desire of visiting USSR to Raja Ghazanfar Ali, the first Ambassador to Iran and his old trusted friend.

Raja Ghazanfar Ali who served the office from 1948-1952 is said to have established a close liaison with Soviet charge d affairs. Though Raja Ghazanfar was not a professional diplomat, he however, did his job well. Diplomacy is an art and is well defined by Nicholson as "the management of international relations by means of negotiation; the method by which these relations are adjusted and managed by ambassadors and envoys"¹³ He and the four persons from the Pakistan Embassy in Tehran: Syed Irtiza Hussain, Syed Hasan Zaheer, Shahid Amin and Syed Asfhaq Hussain Rizvi played an important role in engineering and implementing the initiation. It was Raja Ghazanfar Ali who initiated in 1955 the Cricket Diplomacy between India and Pakistan by allowing Indians to visit Lahore for the test match between India and Pakistan without formal visa. Unfortunately, Raja Ghazanfar Ali like the Quaid-e-Azam did not write memoirs or autobiography otherwise many things would have been extracted and clarified regarding the invitation.

Akhtar Baloch in his article published in Dawn elaborates the Raja Ghazanfar's role as thus:

Raja Ghazanfar was Pakistan's ambassador to Iran, and enjoyed a warm relationship with a Russian diplomat. He threw a dinner party, where the Russian diplomat Ali Alvi and Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan met.

The prime minister expressed his desire to visit Moscow. On 2nd June 1949, Liaquat Ali Khan received an invitation from the Soviet Union which he duly accepted after five days. Now, he was all set to visit Moscow.¹⁴

Invitation

On 4 June 1949, the formal letter of invitation signed by Joseph Stalin was handed over to Pakistan embassy in Tehran and foreign office. On 8 June, 1949 it was announced from Pakistan side that Liaquat Ali Khan and his wife would visit Moscow soon. It was largely assumed in couple of months. Many English dailies including Daily Telegraph highlighted that the said visit would be the “first commonwealth Head of Government to Soviet Union” and “coincide with the visit of Pandit Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, to the United States in October”.¹⁵

Stalin being in possession of absolute powers in fact officially enjoyed three two statuses in 1949. Simultaneously, he was the Secretary General of Communist Party as well as the Prime Minister. The late September or early October was scheduled as either month for Liaquat Ali Khan’s visit to Moscow. Moscow was flexible. They even gave inclination that if delayed to late December, Liaquat Ali Khan could attend the 70th birthday celebrations of Stalin. However, it could be feasible in late August in case Pakistan had expedited the preparations. It was though mutually agreed and international norms demanded that the two sides exchanged emissaries and establish missions prior to Premier, however, it assumed, was never the hurdle in the way of Liaquat Ali Khan’s visit. Pakistan’s first ambassador to Moscow was Shuaib B. Qureshi, a former foreign minister of Bhopal. He was nominated on 30 October 1949. He assumed office on 11 December 1949. The Soviet Ambassador to Pakistan assumed duties on March 15, 1950. His name was Alexender Georggrievich who prior to his appointment was Counselor in Soviet embassy in London. Earlier, Bakulin was nominated as the Soviet emissary to Pakistan but due to illness he could not come. He had served in Afghanistan as Soviet ambassador from 1943 to 1947 and could speak *Dari*, a version of Persian and *Pashto*.

Indian Reaction to Invitation

Indian government and bureaucracy was not comfortable with the Stalin’s invitation to Liaquat Ali Khan to visit Moscow. It was taken in zero-sum game strategy as a future loss for Indian national interests in the region. It was flashed as a setback to the country’s diplomacy versus a rival country. Girja Shankar Bajp, the first Secretary General or Federal Secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs wrote to the British High Commissioner in New Delhi on 15 June, 1949, a week after the invitation in the following words:

*Russia by treating Pakistan as the leading Muslim nation might strive for a new Soviet alignment of Muslims and Arabs throughout the Middle East. More specifically Bajpai was anxious that Liaquat would raise the Afghan question with Stalin and then threaten Afghanistan with a Soviet invasion of Northern Afghanistan.*¹⁶

In May 1950 Liaquat Ali Khan paid the official visit to US at personal request of President Truman. He sent his own plane to bring him from London. His visit spanned over weeks. The American administration and media acclaimed him as an “ambassador of goodwill from the world’s largest Muslim nation and as one of the outstanding statesmen”. It was successful and brought the two sides closer in the years to come as core and periphery. Jamshed Marker describes the visit as one of his major achievements: “Perhaps one of the Liaquat’s most significant decisions, and one that has been the subject of fierce debate over the year, was his acceptance of the Washington’s invitation for an official visit to the United States”.¹⁷ Jamshed Marker, a career diplomat who enjoyed his association with Liaquat Ali Khan as a junior foreign servant and later on served as a career diplomat to USSR slightly touches upon his proposed visit to Moscow. He categorically denies in his book that any written form of invitation ever existed. To him, it was all a myth. A verbatim claim is made by another career diplomat of Pakistan: Samiullah Koreshi who has written extensively on Pakistan diplomacy supports the fact that nothing existed like a written invitation: He writes that:

*Regarding the so called Soviet invitation to Liaquat, searching in the foreign office archives and files, no written invitation to Liaquat was found. It was all a verbal invitation of Soviet Charge’s Affairs at Tehran and when Liaquat accepted proposed different dates on which he was busy and finally on last date suggested by Liaquat they stopped replying.*¹⁸

Why Visit could not take Place?

The visit to Moscow went into cold storage. It never took place. There are many versions to the story of why the visit failed to take place. It is widely believed that Liaquat Ali Khan maneuvered the opportunity of being invited by Soviets to extract an invitation from Truman Administration of which he was successful. F. M. Innes in his detailed article published in 1953 supports the argument.¹⁹ It is widely said that Liaquat Ali Khan was neither in favour nor permitted by the bureaucratic politics to do so. As Burke and Ziring write in their book on Pakistan’s Foreign Policy, “Liaquat’s cold shouldering of the Soviet Union sorely wounded the pride of the Soviet leaders who are highly sensitive to political snubs of any sort. Moscow’s grievances on the subject was amply expressed to Pakistani diplomatists for years to come”.²⁰ Pakistan lost an opportunity to adopt a balanced foreign policy as well as qualified neutrality after it entered military alliances against communism.

Ghulam Mohammad, the Finance Minister and a strong lobbyist of Pakistan-US relationship opposed Liaquat Ali Khan’s visit to USSR. The famous historian Ayesha Jalal supports the fact in her book. She writes that Ghulam Mohammad supported by his lobby was in position to pressurize him and defied him on occasions. Ghulam Mohammad opposed his visit to Moscow and told him either to “Govern or get out”.²¹ Ghulam Mohammad from very beginning was in favour of only and only strong relations with America. He opposed communism as menace. He was vocal in his criticism of USSR even in capacity of Finance Minister. For example, three days after independence Liaquat Ali Khan in capacity of Prime Minister said in his interview that Pakistan would follow “a

policy of non-alignment”. Few weeks later Ghulam Mohammad told American Charge’d affairs that “Soviet Union watching India, Pakistan and Muslim World”. Pakistan has to be careful.²² On 25 May, 1950 in Boston Liaquat Ali in an address about the visit had said, “that he would be going to Russia, no has been fixed but the invitation is there, and I have accepted it”.²³ On 23 August, 1950 a month after his return from US in a press conference Liaquat Ali Khan was asked about the pending visit to Moscow. Khan replied that date has not been fixed from those inviting him. The correspondence raised the point that did Pakistan ever propose a date. USSR. The Prime Minister had no answer. It is also strongly believed

Mushtaq Ahmad, an eminent Pakistani writer writes in his book on foreign policy of Pakistan in such words:

*Stalin’s invitation to Liaquat had offered an opportunity to explore the possibilities of co-operate with Russia. Had, the visit to Moscow materialized, Pakistan’s position would have been better appreciated by America and the Russian attitude would have been conciliatory. We might have been the first country in Asia to gain recognition of our importance by the great powers. Non-acceptance of the Soviet invitation was a great diplomatic blunder and in a sense an admission of our sympathy with the west, particularly the US.*²⁴

Similarly, another version to his visit not taking place is that Liaquat Khan feared resistance from the Islamist and anti-India elements which were known as strong pressure groups inside and outside the Constituent Assembly. They were the one whose support Liaquat Ali Khan enjoyed after being the Prime Minister. In her precise but comprehensive article on the life and work of Liaquat Ali Khan In her article “Liaquat” published in the World Encyclopedia of World Biography, Ainslie T Embrace supports the facts and says his frequent interaction with Indian counterpart which eased the tension between the two sides was abhorred by the groups. “He was fiercely criticized by militant groups in Pakistan as concession.”²⁵ I agree with her. Liaquat Ali Khan was a liberal democrat with strong commitments to modernization but he depended on the religious factors for his support inside and outside the Constituent Assembly. He possibly perceived that his visit to Moscow would breed resistance from religious class and lest branded as proletarian. On light side, Quaid-e-Azam on December 26, 1943 in the session of All India Muslim League had once referred to Liaquat Khan as proletarian rather than Nawabzada (son of a Baron) due to his simple and modest habits. Liaquat Ali Khan was not a proletarian but he was a modest man and dedicated to his vocation of politics. His major problem was that he migrated from a place, Karnal left back in India. He unlike many Muslim League members of the Constituent Assembly did not have any of his own constituency. The Islamists in Pakistan enjoyed a pressure group status as well as reputation to which Liaquat Ali Khan could not turn back. Islamists were not easy about his visit to Moscow as the “Soviet state was essentially seen as expansionist, engineering a world revolution which, according to Marxist thesis was very much expected”²⁶. Thus the religious factions/groups were regarded a thwarting factor for his visit to Moscow.

Regarding Pakistan's options of visiting Moscow, I agree and quote John J Streamlau that "developing countries will continue to face domestic and external constraints that will severely restrict the range of options and the authority of their foreign policies".²⁷ In fact, Liaquat Ali Khan unlike his Indian counterpart Jawaharlal Nehru who started out with all advantages including stability at home and eminence abroad, he began with more disadvantages at home. Pakistan lacked expert diplomats, foreign service structure, organized emissary infrastructure and parliamentary debates in favor.

Besides America, the British government was not relaxed with the visit. As Akhtar Baloch writes "the British High Commissioner in Karachi, Sir Laurence Grafftey-Smith, warned Pakistani Foreign Minister Sir Zafarullah Khan that the upcoming visit to Moscow would be seen with mistrust by American and British populations".²⁸

Conclusion

The proposed visit of Liaquat Ali Khan to Moscow never took place thus leaving in history many myths and realities. As mentioned it was initiated at the behest of the Prime Minister which was skillfully and diplomatically brokered by then Pakistan Ambassador to Iran, Raja Ghazanfar Ali. Hardly few days had passed when an invitation for the Prime Minister to visit Soviet Union was extracted. It hardly took more than two weeks when the notification of invitation reached in the hands of Pakistani authorities. There is no record of the notification, either in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in shambles in June 1949 or Pakistan Embassy in Tehran. However, to many neutral and unbiased analyses to which I belong, there must have been something in writing. The invitation must have been finally approved by Joseph Stalin who during the period was an absolute and accomplished ruler of USSR. He really invited or accepted invitation to visit a country during the period. Had he invited Nehru to visit Soviet Union he would have left no time. How much Moscow meant for Indian foreign policy can easily be gauged by the appointment of Nehru's sister as the first Ambassador to USSR who reached Moscow a day earlier the independence day ceremonies at home. Pakistan embassy in Moscow became functional not before December 1949.

The invitation counterbalanced Truman's invitation to Nehru in favour of Liaquat Ali Khan who earlier was said to have been found deprived or ignored by Truman Administration. Had the visit taken place to Moscow, before or after, it would have counterbalanced Pakistan foreign policy in favor of the leading two blocs, but unfortunately it could not. The visit to Washington DC and the events in aftermath distracted Pakistan from Moscow. Pakistan became dependent on US for economic, political and security support in return for its sovereignty and qualified neutrality. America and its western allies became attraction and obsession for Pakistani ruling elite as well as for diplomats. I agree with Mushtaq Ahmad that due to heavily reliance on security pacts with America and its allies, Pakistan lost its neutral and balanced approach of foreign policy in world affairs. An invitation offered earlier should have been cashed as a prelude to another visit for a mutual and goodwill cooperation with both bloc powers on reciprocal basis by possibly serving the newly created state's national interests, but it

unfortunately went into different direction. The extracted visit to US distracted Pakistan from Moscow during the cold war period and in its aftermath.

Liaquat Ali Khan after the death of Quaid-e-Azam, emerged as the most powerful and popular ruler of Pakistan. Against all odds and resistance to his visit I believe he could easily and well manage his voyage to Moscow. The only matter to be decided between the sides was when to schedule. It was an unconditional and open invitation from Kremlin which was to be honored by Pakistani side. Liaquat Ali Khan was in a semi-authoritarian like system of government in Pakistan in 1949 where he could easily influence foreign relations. But he failed to do so in case of Soviet Union. It reflected negative on his foreign policy vision. To me, he was less successful of a “foreign policy maker (which) seeks to promote a country’s strategic interests by devising policies based on brutal realism, bereft of all kinds of illusions, romanticism, and emotions”.²⁹

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