

THE ROLE AND INFLUENCE OF MUHAMMAD ZAFARULLAH KHAN IN PAKISTAN'S FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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Abstract

This paper explores how Pakistan's first foreign minister, Muhammad Zafarullah Khan, shaped the nation's early foreign policy and diplomatic identity. Zafarullah Khan, a renowned lawyer, diplomat, and international statesman, was instrumental in defining Pakistan's position on important regional and international problems in the early years after independence (1947–1954). Drawing on archival records, United Nations proceedings, and contemporary analyses, the study explores his contributions to Pakistan's policy on Kashmir, its relations with the Muslim world, and its participation in the Non-Aligned and Commonwealth movements. The paper also evaluates his advocacy for decolonization and self-determination at the United Nations and the International Court of Justice, which elevated Pakistan's moral standing in global forums. Despite facing domestic political and religious controversies, Zafarullah Khan's vision established the foundations of Pakistan's international diplomacy and positioned the state as an active voice for Muslim and Third World solidarity. His legacy, though contested, remains central to understanding the evolution of Pakistan's foreign policy orientation and its engagement with the global community.

INTRODUCTION

The formative years of Pakistan's history were marked by the daunting challenge of establishing a coherent and independent foreign policy amidst the complexities of post-colonial statehood, regional insecurity, and global ideological divisions. Among the early architects of this diplomatic framework, Muhammad Zafarullah Khan (1893–1985) stands out as a figure of exceptional vision and influence. As Pakistan's first Foreign Minister (1947–1954), a prominent jurist, and later President of the United Nations General Assembly and the International Court of Justice, Zafarullah Khan played a defining role in positioning the newly created state within the international community.

Zafarullah Khan's diplomatic career extended far beyond national borders. His earlier experience representing India at the League of Nations and his legal expertise at the International Court of Justice endowed him with the intellectual and professional tools to navigate the global stage. In the years immediately following independence, he laid the groundwork for Pakistan's foreign relations by articulating clear policies on key issues such as the Kashmir dispute, relations with the Muslim world, and alignment within the Cold War context. His advocacy for self-determination and decolonization resonated strongly within the United Nations,

earning Pakistan recognition as a principled and moral actor in international affairs.

However, Zafarullah Khan's influence was not without controversy. His affiliation with the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community subjected him to domestic criticism and political marginalization, overshadowing his diplomatic achievements in later years. Yet, his contributions remain foundational to understanding the early trajectory of Pakistan's external relations and its pursuit of an identity as both a Muslim and modern nation-state.

This paper seeks to analyze the role and influence of Muhammad Zafarullah Khan in shaping Pakistan's foreign affairs, examining the ideological, political, and institutional dimensions of his diplomacy. By assessing his policies, speeches, and international engagements, the study aims to highlight how his vision and leadership helped define Pakistan's early foreign policy orientation and its place in the global order.

EARLY LIFE AND DIPLOMATIC BACKGROUND

Muhammad Zafarullah Khan, one of South Asia's most distinguished jurists and diplomats, was born on 6 February 1893 in Sialkot, Punjab, then part of British India. He belonged to a respected family known for its commitment to education and public service. His father, Chaudhry Nasrullah Khan, was a prominent lawyer who ensured his son received a modern education. Zafarullah Khan received his early schooling in Sialkot and later attended Government College, Lahore, where he demonstrated outstanding academic ability and an early interest in law and politics. In 1911, he traveled to England to study law at King's College London, and was called to the Bar at Lincoln's Inn in 1914. Upon returning to India, he began practicing law in Sialkot and Lahore, quickly gaining recognition for his eloquence, intellect, and integrity in legal and public affairs (Khan, 1994, P.23). Zafarullah Khan's entry into politics was driven by both his legal expertise and his belief in the political empowerment of Indian Muslims. In 1926, he was elected to the Punjab Legislative Council, where he became known for his reformist outlook and defense of minority rights. His growing reputation led to his appointment as President of the All-India Muslim League in 1931, a position that brought him into close contact with key leaders such as Muhammad Ali

Jinnah. During the Round Table Conferences (1930–1932) in London, Zafarullah Khan represented Muslim interests, articulating the political aspirations of the Muslim community in India before British authorities. His performance at these conferences marked him as one of the most capable Muslim negotiators of the time.

His diplomatic career expanded significantly during the 1930s and 1940s. He served as a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council (1935–1941), where he was responsible for the portfolios of Railways and later Political Affairs. In this capacity, he represented India at the League of Nations in 1939, becoming one of the few Indians to participate in international diplomacy before independence. His work at the League displayed his ability to navigate complex international issues with clarity and principle, earning him respect among global diplomats (Khan, 1983, P.27).

In 1941, Zafarullah Khan was appointed as a judge of the Federal Court of India, the highest judicial body in British India. During the critical years leading up to partition, he provided valuable legal counsel to the All-India Muslim League, particularly in matters concerning the Punjab Boundary Commission and the Kashmir dispute. His advocacy helped articulate the Muslim League's position before British and international audiences, reinforcing his reputation as a persuasive legal mind and skilled diplomat.

By the time Pakistan emerged as an independent state in 1947, Muhammad Zafarullah Khan had already acquired vast experience in law, governance, and international diplomacy. This rich background made him the natural choice to serve as Pakistan's first Foreign Minister, where he would go on to play a defining role in establishing the young nation's foreign policy, representing its interests at the United Nations and on the global stage.

FORMULATION OF PAKISTAN'S FOREIGN POLICY (1947–1954)

The years 1947 to 1954 marked the formative phase of Pakistan's foreign policy, during which Muhammad Zafarullah Khan, the country's first Foreign Minister, played a defining role. Facing severe political and security challenges after independence, Pakistan sought to secure its sovereignty, stabilize relations with neighboring India, and gain

international recognition. Under Zafarullah Khan's guidance, Pakistan's foreign policy was shaped by three core principles:

1. Promotion of peace and cooperation in international affairs.
2. Support for self-determination and decolonization movements around the world.
3. Solidarity with Muslim countries and advocacy for their collective interests (Ahmed, 2013, P.75)

Zafarullah Khan emphasized strong ties with the Muslim world, advocating unity and cooperation among newly independent Islamic states. His defense of Palestine and opposition to the creation of Israel at the United Nations earned Pakistan wide respect in the Arab world. Equally significant was his handling of the Kashmir issue, where his legal and diplomatic efforts at the UN Security Council (1948) established Pakistan's case for self-determination through a plebiscite.

Though Pakistan maintained cordial relations with the Western bloc, Zafarullah Khan promoted an independent foreign policy, balancing relations with both East and West. His diplomatic skill and moral stance gave Pakistan an international identity as a principled and peace-seeking nation. By 1954, Zafarullah Khan had laid the foundation for Pakistan's external relations rooted in Islamic values, justice, and international cooperation which continued to influence its foreign policy for decades (Burki, 1986, P.115)

ADVOCACY AT THE UNITED NATIONS: THE KASHMIR ISSUE

One of Muhammad Zafarullah Khan's most defining contributions to Pakistan's early foreign policy was his strong advocacy of the Kashmir issue at the United Nations. Following the accession of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir to India under controversial circumstances in October 1947, Pakistan brought the matter before the UN Security Council in January 1948. As Pakistan's Foreign Minister and chief representative, Zafarullah Khan presented the country's case with exceptional legal skill, clarity, and moral force.

In his historic speeches before the Security Council, Zafarullah Khan argued that the future of Kashmir must be decided by its people through the principle of self-determination, a right recognized under

international law. He contended that India's military occupation of the territory violated both the will of the Kashmiri people and the terms of the standstill agreement between the two new dominions. His eloquent presentation not only exposed the complexities of the issue but also appealed to global conscience by framing it as a matter of justice, not mere territorial dispute.

Zafarullah Khan's persuasive diplomacy contributed directly to the establishment of the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP), which called for a ceasefire and the holding of a plebiscite under UN supervision. Although the resolutions were never fully implemented, his efforts secured Pakistan's position as a committed supporter of peaceful conflict resolution and the rights of oppressed peoples. His performance at the UN earned international recognition for his intellect and oratory, enhancing Pakistan's diplomatic credibility at a time when it was still struggling for global visibility. Zafarullah Khan's advocacy thus became a cornerstone of Pakistan's foreign policy and continues to influence its stance on the Kashmir dispute to this day (UN Archives, 1948-1954, PP.1132-72).

STRENGTHENING TIES WITH THE MUSLIM WORLD

A key feature of Muhammad Zafarullah Khan's foreign policy vision was his unwavering commitment to building strong and cooperative relations between Pakistan and the Muslim world. As Pakistan's first Foreign Minister, he viewed the new state not only as a homeland for South Asian Muslims but also as a potential leader and unifying force within the broader Islamic world. Guided by ideals of Islamic solidarity, justice, and mutual support, Zafarullah Khan sought to position Pakistan at the heart of a revived international Muslim community.

He used every major international platform, especially the United Nations, to advocate for Muslim causes. His passionate defense of Palestine in 1947-48, where he condemned the partition plan and the displacement of Arab populations, earned Pakistan widespread admiration across the Arab world. Zafarullah Khan's moral and diplomatic leadership during these debates projected Pakistan as a

principled voice for the rights of Muslim nations and communities (Anjum, N.D, P. 474).

During his tenure, Pakistan established close diplomatic relations with Egypt, Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, emphasizing cooperation in political, economic, and cultural spheres. Zafarullah Khan believed that the unity of Muslim states was essential to resist neo-colonial domination and to secure collective progress. He also promoted the idea of a Pan-Islamic framework, which later influenced Pakistan's participation in regional and Islamic organizations such as the Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) (Qureshi, 1991, P.176).

Through his visionary diplomacy and moral authority, Muhammad Zafarullah Khan helped define Pakistan's identity as a spokesperson for Muslim causes and a bridge between the Middle East and South Asia. His efforts laid the intellectual and diplomatic foundations for Pakistan's enduring commitment to Islamic unity and cooperation in its foreign policy.

RELATIONS WITH WESTERN POWERS AND THE COMMONWEALTH

In the formative years of Pakistan's foreign policy, Muhammad Zafarullah Khan recognized the importance of maintaining balanced and constructive relations with Western powers while safeguarding Pakistan's sovereignty and independence. As the nation's first Foreign Minister, he navigated a complex post-World War II geopolitical landscape marked by the emerging Cold War, decolonization, and regional conflicts.

Zafarullah Khan sought to establish cordial ties with the United Kingdom, leveraging historical connections to secure technical assistance, military cooperation, and economic aid crucial for a fledgling state. Simultaneously, he engaged with the United States, emphasizing Pakistan's strategic significance and need for development support, but carefully avoided over-reliance on any single superpower. His diplomacy reflected a deliberate effort to maintain Pakistan's independence while benefiting from the expertise and resources of Western nations (Batalvi, 1991, P.57).

As a member of the British Commonwealth, Pakistan under Zafarullah Khan sought active participation in

multilateral forums that could promote development, peace, and international cooperation. He championed the idea that Commonwealth membership provided Pakistan with both a platform for dialogue and an opportunity to contribute to global stability. By engaging in Commonwealth initiatives, Pakistan projected itself as a responsible and credible member of the international community, committed to democratic values and peaceful diplomacy (Wilcon and Embree, 2004, PP. 98-9).

Zafarullah Khan's approach combined pragmatism and principle: he cultivated Western relationships without compromising Pakistan's national interests or Islamic identity. His efforts laid the foundation for Pakistan's long-term foreign relations with Western powers and the Commonwealth, ensuring that the young nation had access to international support while retaining flexibility in global affairs.

Diplomatic Philosophy and Leadership Style

Muhammad Zafarullah Khan's diplomatic philosophy was rooted in moral conviction, intellectual rigor, and an unshakeable belief in the principles of justice and equality among nations. As one of Pakistan's foremost statesmen and diplomats, his approach to foreign affairs reflected both his deep Islamic values and his commitment to international cooperation. He viewed diplomacy not merely as a tool of statecraft but as a means of promoting peace, understanding, and the moral responsibility of nations toward one another. His philosophy was guided by the idea that Pakistan, though a new and developing state, could command respect through principled stances and adherence to international law rather than through power politics.

Zafarullah Khan's leadership style was characterized by integrity, humility, and a disciplined professionalism that set a high standard for Pakistan's early diplomatic corps. As Pakistan's first Foreign Minister, he combined eloquence with a strategic vision, articulating the country's foreign policy in a manner that earned global recognition. His advocacy for Muslim causes especially in Palestine, North Africa, and Kashmir was grounded in a sense of justice rather than mere political alignment, reinforcing Pakistan's image as a voice for the oppressed. He maintained that foreign policy must be guided by ethical principles rather than expedient

alliances, a philosophy that distinguished his tenure in an era of intense global polarization (Abid, 1992, P.179).

In multilateral diplomacy, particularly at the United Nations and the International Court of Justice, Zafarullah Khan's leadership reflected his mastery of international law and his persuasive moral reasoning. He combined legal precision with empathetic diplomacy, ensuring that Pakistan's positions were communicated with both logic and compassion. His calm demeanor, patience in negotiation, and respect for differing viewpoints made him an effective mediator and a respected figure even among ideological opponents.

Ultimately, Zafarullah Khan's diplomatic philosophy and leadership style left a lasting imprint on Pakistan's foreign policy traditions. His vision of principled diplomacy anchored in faith, fairness, and foresight continues to serve as a model for statesmen navigating the complex moral and political challenges of international relations.

CHALLENGES, CRITICISMS, AND RESIGNATION

Despite his remarkable contributions to Pakistan's foreign policy, Muhammad Zafarullah Khan's diplomatic career was not without formidable challenges and criticism. As Pakistan's first Foreign Minister, he faced the daunting task of representing a newly created state struggling for international recognition and economic stability. Pakistan's foreign policy had to be crafted amid regional hostilities, particularly with India over Kashmir, and global pressures from emerging Cold War blocs. Balancing ideological commitments with pragmatic state interests required delicate judgment, and Zafarullah Khan often found himself navigating conflicting domestic and international expectations.

One of his major challenges stemmed from internal political divisions and ideological tensions within Pakistan. As an Ahmadi Muslim, Zafarullah Khan's religious identity became a source of controversy, particularly as sectarian sentiments gained strength in the early 1950s (Qasmi, 2014, P.114). Despite his exceptional service to the country, certain political and religious groups began questioning his loyalty to the Islamic character of Pakistan, using his faith to undermine his legitimacy as Foreign Minister. These

attacks were less about his diplomatic competence and more about the growing politicization of religion in national discourse.

Criticism also arose regarding some of his foreign policy positions, which were occasionally perceived as overly idealistic or misaligned with realpolitik. His principled stand on issues such as Palestine and decolonization earned him international admiration but, at times, limited Pakistan's flexibility in pursuing bilateral advantages. Moreover, domestic critics accused him of focusing excessively on Muslim world causes at the expense of strengthening relations with powerful Western states a charge that overlooked the constraints and aspirations of a fledgling nation seeking its identity on the world stage.

Under mounting religious and political pressure, Zafarullah Khan tendered his resignation as Foreign Minister in 1954 (*Report of the Court of Inquiry Constituted Under Punjab Act II of 1954 to Enquire into the Punjab Disturbances of 1953*, Lahore: Government of Punjab, 1954). His departure marked the end of an era of moral-driven diplomacy in Pakistan's foreign affairs. While his resignation was a personal and national loss, it underscored the tension between principle and politics in Pakistan's early years. In retrospect, his challenges and critics only highlight his resilience and the integrity with which he served, standing firm on conviction even in the face of prejudice and political expediency.

LEGACY AND LONG-TERM INFLUENCE

Sir Muhammad Zafarullah Khan's legacy in Pakistan's foreign affairs is both profound and enduring. As the architect of the country's early diplomatic vision, he laid the foundational principles that shaped Pakistan's engagement with the international community. His belief in moral diplomacy, commitment to justice, and advocacy for the rights of oppressed nations established Pakistan's reputation as a principled voice in global politics. His speeches at the United Nations, particularly on Palestine, Kashmir, and decolonization, not only elevated Pakistan's international standing but also aligned the country's foreign policy with broader humanitarian and Islamic causes (Munir, 1981, P.230).

Zafarullah Khan's long-term influence is evident in the consistency of Pakistan's positions on major international issues. His emphasis on international

law, multilateral diplomacy, and support for self-determination became hallmarks of Pakistan's foreign policy for decades. The diplomatic infrastructure he helped build grounded in professionalism, discipline, and ethical conduct served as a model for successive generations of diplomats. His insistence that Pakistan could command respect through principled stances rather than power politics inspired the country's continued engagement with global organizations such as the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) (Wali, 1984, P.168).

Beyond his official contributions, Zafarullah Khan's intellectual and moral legacy endures in the realm of international jurisprudence. His later service as President of both the International Court of Justice and the UN General Assembly reflected not only personal distinction but also brought prestige to Pakistan on the world stage. He demonstrated that individuals from a newly independent state could lead in shaping international norms, reinforcing the idea that diplomacy grounded in ethics could transcend geopolitical limitations.

Even decades after his resignation, Zafarullah Khan's influence continues to resonate. His vision of a foreign policy driven by justice, mutual respect, and faith-based ethics remains relevant amid contemporary global challenges. Though he faced political and sectarian opposition in his lifetime, history remembers him as a statesman of exceptional integrity and intellect one whose moral courage and diplomatic foresight helped define Pakistan's identity in the community of nations.

CONCLUSION

The role and influence of Muhammad Zafarullah Khan in shaping Pakistan's foreign affairs remain among the most significant chapters in the country's diplomatic history. As Pakistan's first Foreign Minister, he not only represented the aspirations of a newly independent nation but also articulated a vision for its place in the world grounded in justice, moral integrity, and faith-based ethics. His early efforts defined Pakistan's external posture, securing its membership in key international organizations and advocating for the rights of Muslims and colonized peoples across the globe. Through his eloquence, intellect, and deep understanding of international law, Zafarullah Khan transformed Pakistan's foreign

policy from a position of vulnerability to one of principled strength.

Zafarullah Khan's diplomatic philosophy emphasized that Pakistan's foreign relations should not be dictated by power politics or expedient alliances but by adherence to moral principles and respect for international law. His leadership during the formative years of Pakistan's statehood set a precedent for professionalism and ethical conduct in diplomacy, values that continued to shape the Foreign Office long after his tenure. While he faced considerable challenges, including sectarian opposition and political pressures, his unwavering commitment to justice and fairness distinguished him as a statesman of global repute. His resignation in 1954 marked the end of a formative era, yet his influence persisted through the values and institutional frameworks he established.

In retrospect, Zafarullah Khan's enduring legacy lies in his vision of Pakistan as a moral voice in world affairs a country that could wield influence through integrity rather than might. His contributions extended beyond Pakistan's borders, as seen in his leadership roles at the United Nations and the International Court of Justice, where he embodied the principles he had championed at home. Today, his example serves as a reminder of how diplomacy, when rooted in ethical conviction and intellectual clarity, can elevate a nation's stature. Muhammad Zafarullah Khan's life and work remain a testament to the power of principled leadership in navigating the complex realities of international relations.

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