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Special Analysis

INDIA:

Civil Unrest in an Election Year

Prime Minister Gandhi is having to commit Army units in Punjab State to contain the growing threat of civil war between the local Sikh majority and the Hindus. Her action comes just two weeks after she dispatched troops in Bombay to quell rioting between Muslims and Hindus. Sending troops into Punjab is an admission that her political strategy and paramilitary troops have failed to solve the crisis. The Army may have trouble ending the violence quickly, because many formerly moderate Sikhs now support the extremists in their "holy war" against the mostly Hindu state government. [REDACTED]

Gandhi hopes by cracking down in Punjab to undo damage to her political standing that has resulted from the mounting religious violence throughout the country. She has long relied on votes from India's Muslim minority, but many Muslims now blame the Congress Party for failing to protect them or improve their status. She recently has tried to offset the loss of support from her traditional Muslim and southern constituencies by appealing to Hindus, but many Hindus believe she has been too generous toward religious minorities and too tolerant of their activism. [REDACTED]

Opposition parties are blaming Gandhi's reliance on delaying tactics for allowing Sikh extremists to turn demands for more state autonomy into a Sikh-Hindu conflict in a strategic border state. [REDACTED]

Relying on the Army

The military is always reluctant to be assigned domestic peacekeeping duties, especially in a potential staging area on the border with Pakistan. Gandhi sent in the Army only in response to renewed terrorism and a scheduled Sikh blockade of vital grain shipments from the state. [REDACTED]

Because of the large number of Sikhs in the Army, its deployment in Sikh-dominated Punjab is a measure of last resort. The crackdown by the Army risks provoking Sikh retaliation against Hindus in the countryside. [REDACTED]

Gandhi has placed Punjab on a war footing to ensure that the crackdown will work. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]
6 June 1984

The Army is in charge of all other forces in the state and will use whatever force is necessary to restore order. Press reports indicate that troops and tanks launched an attack this morning on the sacred Sikh Golden Temple in Amritsar, where extremists have been blockaded. [REDACTED]

Prospects

If the Army restores order in Punjab quickly, Gandhi probably will win the national elections, possibly with extra votes from Hindus who approve her decisive action. She presumably has already written off the votes of the Sikhs. If the conflict drags on, however, the crisis could cause the opposition to unite and threaten Gandhi's electoral prospects. [REDACTED]

In the meantime, the Prime Minister will blame much of the strike on foreign powers. This is bound to complicate India's relations with the US, Pakistan, and the Arab states. Rioting last week by pro-Pakistani Muslims in Indian Kashmir in sympathy with Indians in Bombay will increase Gandhi's fear that foreign powers are stirring up unrest in India. [REDACTED]