

APPROVED FOR RELEASE

DATE: 1/19/81
(b)(1) (b)(3)

~~Secret~~
NOFORN-NOCONTRACT-
ORCON

Articles

Pakistan: Political Soundings of a Traveler

President Zia appears to have a firm grip on the country and faces no evident or early threat to his rule.¹ Student politics continue to be confined to university issues, and sectarian tensions, despite efforts by dissidents to expand them to Punjab, remain isolated in Karachi. There is virtually no significant political tension in the bazaars and no sign of any coalescing of demands or groups against the regime. Although the national mood could change overnight should Zia blunder, the continuation of his regime has substantial, if grudging, support among a variety of key national and provincial interest groups.

Zia's Position

The President appears to have strengthened his position over the past year. The maintenance of economic stability, his ability to contain and co-opt powerful domestic interests, and foreign policy successes have bolstered his standing. Prolonged rule by Zia is a possibility accepted by a growing number of Pakistanis. The perception that Zia is in for "long innings" inevitably enhances his position as influential groups find ways of benefiting from the status quo.

Even Zia's strongest opponents do not predict an early opposition movement against the regime. They believe nothing will happen until political restrictions are lifted or there is a change at the top. According to several Lahore political families, Zia has decreed that

¹ This article is based on the observations of an analyst who spent the month of April traveling in parts of Pakistan's four provinces. The author's impressions were gained in talking to Pakistanis of all social levels, but principally those in the middle and lower social orders, and are not based on any scientific sampling of opinion. This article supplements and updates the author's judgments set forth in the DDI Intelligence Assessment NESA 83-10090 (Secret NF NC OC), May 1983, *Zia's Pakistan: The Politics of Survival*.

there will be no demonstrations—Ayub's mistake was to allow them to get started—and the regime's [redacted] upgraded police forces ensure that any that do start are quickly nipped in the bud. Leftist leaders are not looking to the "masses" but are putting their hopes in an old rumor that Army brigadiers and major generals are preparing to force a change at the top and arrange with moderate politicians for a return to civilian rule.

Zia himself shows signs of increasing political confidence. According to local observers in Sukkur and Quetta, his recent "nonpolitical" tours of Sind and Baluchistan attracted large and enthusiastic crowds. A tour of the Punjab is planned for midsummer, which, if a recent visit to Gujranwala was any indication, could indicate substantial popular support for Zia in this all-important province. Many believe the President is testing the waters before deciding how best to fulfill his commitment to announce a political framework for the country on 14 August—which undoubtedly will be a critical turning point in Zia's political fortunes.

The Army

According to several Punjab families with members in the Army, the arrival of the first installment of weapons from the United States has markedly improved morale in the Army officer corps and strengthened Zia's position. Officers who last year were admiring Khomeini and thinking about how to create a "People's Army" are this year studying how best to

~~Secret~~
NESA NESAR 83-011
13 May 1983

~~Secret~~

integrate their new weaponry. [REDACTED]

The dichotomy between senior officers (brigadier and above), who tend to support martial law, and junior officers, who want a return to the barracks, continues, although most junior officers agree that a practical alternative to martial law must be found before it is lifted. The slow attrition of officers resigning from the armed forces continues, though this reportedly is more for economic than political reasons. Nevertheless, officers that leave tend to be more critical of Zia after they have left the service.

Rumors of corruption in the Martial Law Administration (MLA) continue to abound, particularly around Islamabad and the provincial capitals. Lahoris point to a neighborhood of large new houses under construction in Lahore Cantonment by several generals, which they jokingly call "Generalabad." Most can cite one or more examples of alleged corruption in the MLA, although sober observers insist that it is not increasing. For bazaar merchants and middle class families, the petty corruption of Pakistan's endless bureaucracy is much more pervasive. The poor complain more about the police, and taxi and rickshaw drivers say that the police have over the past year returned to the old practice of taking a percentage of their proceeds.

Perceptions of the United States

There is widespread relief in Pakistan, particularly in the North-West Frontier Province and Punjab, that arms from the United States have begun to arrive. The F-16s are especially welcome and are a crucial symbol of the US commitment to Pakistan. There is a distinctly more positive attitude toward the United States in the bazaars this year, although old doubts about the durability of US commitments remain. Nevertheless, Pakistanis feel a little more confident and a little less isolated than they did last year.

* Zia's closer ties to the United States could prove double edged should American assistance be curtailed or not meet expectations.

[REDACTED] there is a body of officers who believe Zia has placed too much trust in Washington.

A surprising number of Pakistanis want a closer relationship with the United States, provided it is backed by a strong commitment from Washington. As things stand now, however, there is an almost universal desire to avoid becoming a US pawn on Afghanistan. As one religious notable in Chiniot (near Sargodha) put it, "we will support the Afghan Mujahideen as long as their struggle is genuine, but not if it simply results from US activities."

Strong criticism of US Middle East policy [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] consistently emerged in discussions on US-Pakistan relations at all levels of Pakistani society. There seems little question that events in Lebanon, particularly the killing of civilians, deeply upset Pakistanis. Among the bazaar merchants and lower middle class elements, US support for Israel—the dynamics of which are universally misunderstood in Pakistan—is the chief complaint against the United States and the source of considerable ambivalence about how far the US-Pakistan relationship should go. Among more educated folk and those with ties to the military and bureaucratic elites [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Lebanon is an important issue.

India and the Soviets

Many—possibly most—Pakistanis now perceive the Soviet Union as the chief threat to Pakistan. India is the traditional enemy, but India, by itself, is a known quantity. Most Pakistanis are confident they can defend themselves against a unilateral Indian attack and worry about India mostly in the context of a joint Soviet-Indian move against Pakistan. Although there are pockets of diehard anti-Indian sentiment in Punjab, there is a recognition—even among Kashmiri merchant families in Gujranwala and Sialkot—that India is now too strong to attack. They believe the Kashmir issue should be put aside and support Zia's efforts to reduce tensions with India.

There is widespread fear in Pakistan about Soviet long-term objectives in South Asia and the consequences of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Some merchants in Peshawar openly expressed the belief that a Soviet attack on Pakistan was as inevitable as the Israeli invasion of Lebanon—and for much

~~Secret~~

~~Secret~~

the same reason: to deny the insurgents their sanctuaries and punish the host government. Bazaar merchants and the lower middle class see the Soviets as a threat to their religion and way of life, while the more educated fear the Soviet ability to exploit regional tensions and the economic frustrations of the poor.

The Pakistan People's Party

Most observers concede that the Pakistan People's Party would still win a majority in any free national election that it was allowed to contest. The Bhutto family, particularly Benazir, retains the loyalty of party workers and the party faithful, but the party organization continues to deteriorate, and few Pakistanis believe the PPP will be back in power soon, if ever.

The most active elements in the PPP are students and the immediate poststudent generation, some of whom have ties to Al-Zulfikar. The Bhutto generation, who are now in their thirties and forties, are more quiescent, still inclined to vote for the PPP, but with growing family and work commitments are unwilling to actively oppose the regime.

According to PPP workers in the old city of Lahore, Al-Zulfikar activists continue to filter in from Afghanistan and India, as does a trickle of arms. The infiltrators are supposed to recruit from 10 to 100 supporters and concentrate on the younger generation (16 to 24). The group reportedly is concentrating for the present on organization and has put out the word that the time is not ripe for a move against the regime.

The Refugees

Public support and sympathy for the Afghan refugees has declined somewhat over the past year, but the situation does not appear to be of crisis proportions, except possibly in the Hazara district of the North-West Frontier Province. More contempt is expressed for the untrustworthiness and greed of Afghans and with aspects of their culture, such as marriage conventions, that are at odds with Pakistani customs. Most complaints, however, focus on security and economic issues. There is concern, particularly around Peshawar and Quetta, about Soviet and Afghan

agents and provocateurs among the refugees and about Soviet retaliation against Pakistan for aiding the resistance. Locals also attribute the decline of public order in the refugee-affected areas to the Afghans.

Competition for scarce resources and the continuing penetration of the refugees into the local economy as day laborers, roadside hawkers, and transporters fuel local resentment. There is serious worry around Kalabagh and Mianwali in the Punjab about the settlement of refugees in that province, and Islamabad will have to tread warily if it wants to avoid serious political problems on this issue in Punjab. In Quetta, the Baluch fear that the Pushtuns, both refugee and local, will join against them. Some of them say that then the Baluch would, however reluctantly, be forced to seek Soviet protection.

In the main, however, there seems to be a tendency to avoid confrontation on the part of both locals and refugees. Both groups know that fighting between them would only benefit their common enemy, and neither side can be confident about where such a confrontation might lead. Most observers believe there will be increasing incidents but do not foresee generalized major clashes. Nonetheless, prevailing opinion around both Quetta and Peshawar urges that a way must be found to return the refugees to their homeland.

Outlook

At present, President Zia appears to be as secure in power as any leader can be in a country like Pakistan. Key constituencies—the Army, bureaucracy, clergy, bazaar merchants, industrialists, and landed classes—support his rule. His opposition is fragmented and dispirited. Only the student opposition—linked to the PPP and to regional parties—has the energy and verve to challenge Zia. Having recently won student elections all over Pakistan, defeating the Islamic fundamentalists who supported Zia, they could be

~~Secret~~

~~Secret~~

emboldened to challenge Zia in the streets.' To succeed, however, they would need the support of other key groups, such as the inner city clerics and the bazaar merchants. Unless the economy declines, or Zia somehow blunders, it is doubtful that these groups would be prepared to join the students against the regime.

[REDACTED]

In Sind one student [REDACTED] attributed the upsurge in the strength of the National Students Federation (NSF) to the belief that a vote against the fundamentalist student group was a vote against the Zia regime. He also noted that many students believed the fundamentalists had gone too far in imposing their religious tenets and morals on campus. At least in Karachi, however, the NSF revival may not be an entirely adverse development for Zia. Students are also reported to have rejected the fundamentalists because they had overly politicized the campuses and caused the quality of education to decline through frequent political agitation, class disruptions, and protests.

~~Secret~~

4

0 9 1 4