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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

5 October 1983

Pakistan: Implications of the Disturbances in Sind

Summary

President Zia is facing the most significant challenge to his rule since he took over in 1977. We believe Zia will be able to retain power unless widespread protests break out in the key province of Punjab and the Army loses confidence in him. Despite some grumbling, we judge that the Army's backing for Zia remains firm. Zia will have to reassure the Army that he can return the country to civilian rule without widespread violence. He probably will have to modify his plan to hold elections by March 1985 to quiet opposition demands.

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The disturbances in Sind Province, which arise from deep-seated anger among ethnic Sindhis that their interests have been neglected, have not spread to other parts of Pakistan. Recent charges by Islamabad of foreign instigation probably have increased Punjabi reluctance to challenge the regime.

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Zia still has to move carefully to avoid a major incident in Sind. He will also have to be cautious not to allow the opposition a national issue. He has

This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] South Asia Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. It was prepared partially in response to questions from the Department of State and DoD/ISA. Information as of 4 October 1983 was used in preparing this paper. Comments and queries are welcome and should be addressed to Chief, South Asia Division,

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demonstrated considerable courage and acumen and probably can successfully manage the present crisis. [REDACTED]

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Pressure on Zia from within the Army to find a solution to the Sind problem will grow if the agitation continues unabated. In our view, the situation there has gone beyond the point where purely administrative measures such as removing corrupt bureaucrats will suffice. We believe that Zia will eventually have to compromise with moderate opposition leaders and let some of them participate in elections. Failure to negotiate now, while he retains a position of strength, probably would require greater concessions should the civil disturbances spread. [REDACTED]

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Prolonged disturbances in Sind would encourage other ethnic and opposition groups to join in the agitation and might eventually force the hand of the senior generals. Should Zia himself become the main issue, the Army might remove him to make way for negotiations. Widespread violence in Punjab Province almost certainly would be sufficient to quickly bring about the replacement of Zia by another general. [REDACTED]

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Alienation in Sind

We believe the current agitation is largely an expression of local Sindhi resentment. Only a few incidents have occurred in Pakistan's three other provinces. In contrast to Sind, attempts to disrupt local elections elsewhere received virtually no support. According to reports from the US Consulate, even in the Sind provincial capital of Karachi, most protesters have been Sindhi and Baluch. Other groups that form the majority of the city's population have indicated some support for President Zia. Karachi's sizeable leftist trade unions so far have not joined the protests. [REDACTED]

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Ethnic Sindhis have long been alienated from Zia's martial law government [REDACTED] A traveler in Sind recently found deep anger at the Army's overthrow of Prime Minister Bhutto, a native of the province, in 1977 and his execution two years later. Sindhis resent the domination of the largely Punjabi Army and bureaucracy and the economic inroads being made in their province by outsiders. Press and Embassy reports show the worst violence has occurred around strongholds of the Pakistan People's Party in central Sind and farther north where newly irrigated land is being given to Punjabi settlers, many of them former Army officers. [REDACTED]

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Sindhis are no longer a majority in their own province, and Karachi, their capital and the largest city in Pakistan, has only a small minority of Sindhis, most of them unskilled laborers, experts note. Most Sindhis remain bound to the land in a feudal

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system renowned for its violence and repression. For Sindhis, the Bhutto period opened new opportunities and raised expectations, but Zia has reduced resources for Sind and depended on non-Sindhis for support there. Punjabis and Pathans largely control firms supplying labor to the Gulf, effectively keeping Sindhis from an opportunity that has enriched perhaps a million Pakistani households. 


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Various Embassy and press reports suggest the groups in the forefront of the protests are the most influential in Sindhi society:

- Rural religious leaders: heads of heterodox Sufi sects who feel threatened by the Islamization drive pushed by the orthodox urban clergy. Enormously influential among the peasantry and poor, these leaders often communicate local needs to the bureaucracy and have often represented their localities in national and provincial assemblies.
- Landlords: the traditional ruling elite, many of whom are connected to the People's Party. They feel threatened by social change. Barred by the Sind Government on 12 August from contesting future elections, they are resisting the loss of local influence and patronage. As the key political class in the countryside, their support has always been essential to a smooth-running bureaucracy.
- Local elected officials: many also landlords, originally allied with Zia and opposed to the PPP due to old rivalries, protesting reduced resources earmarked for Sind since 1979 that are funneled through local councils. Extreme antiregime local opinion is forcing many of them to resign or refuse to run in the upcoming local elections.
- Sindhi middle class: emergent group of students and intellectuals who resent the domination of the professions, private business, and the government services by Punjabis, Urdu and Gujerati-speaking immigrants, and Pathans. The most committed separatists are drawn from this element. 

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Zia's Options

Despite six weeks of unrest, we believe Zia still hopes to ride out these disturbances as he has lesser disorders in the past. So far Zia has been careful to keep the Army as a tool of last resort in the unrest and has made several minor gestures to Sindhi opinion during his recent tour of the province. He has made no public effort to address key Sindhi concerns. 

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Zia appears determined to carry through with his basic plan to hold elections, amend the constitution to strengthen

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presidential powers, and lift martial law by March 1985. We believe he may be ready to modify some of its details to mollify moderate Sindhi leaders. Zia has left open the timing of national elections and has not finally barred all opposition parties from participating. He has said in public he is in touch with moderate opposition politicians.

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Zia's top staff officer met recently with Ghulam Mustapha Jatoi, a Sindhi and the most prominent PPP leader currently in the country. Jatoi refused Zia's offer to become Prime Minister under the current regime.

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We believe the feeler to Jatoi was an opening gambit to test opposition moderates. Jatoi has been offered the Prime Ministership by Zia before, only to have it withdrawn. Jatoi has in the past expressed suspicion about Zia's motives in making such offers and probably would require other concessions before he would agree to negotiate. In our view, it will be difficult for Jatoi or any other opposition leader to make a deal with Zia as long as the disturbances in Sind continue because they would fear losing their credibility.

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We believe Zia may adopt administrative measures to deal with the crisis, including the removal of bureaucrats, such as the Punjabi Chief Secretary of Sind, who are known to be corrupt. The government, in our view, also may look for ways to put pressure on traditional Sindhi leaders by charging them with avoiding court cases on land reform or bringing up old felony charges.

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Zia may also replace the Governor of Sind, Lieutenant General Abbasi, a member of the original senior Army group that helped Zia overthrow Bhutto. In our view, the removal of Abbasi now would not by itself be interpreted as a sign of weakness. Its impact would depend on whom Zia picks to replace him, and Zia would have difficulty finding a senior officer who is not a member of one of the communities disliked by ethnic Sindhis. The choice of a hardline Punjabi or Pathan general would, we believe, indicate a policy of repression that would only worsen the basic problem over the mid- to long-term.

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The Negotiations Gambit

In our view, the situation in Sind has gone beyond the point where purely administrative measures will suffice and will ultimately require negotiations between Zia and moderate opposition leaders. We believe failure to negotiate now, while Zia retains a position of strength, probably would mean greater concessions should the civil disturbances spread.

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The moderates in the People's Party, in our view, now that they have strengthened their support by leading protests and going to jail, may be prepared to negotiate if the unrest dies

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down. They have common interests with the regime in seeing that more extreme groups--like the land-reform minded Sind Hari Committee and the Sind Awami Tehrik--do not gain significant strength. [REDACTED]

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Although we believe opposition moderates will demand earlier elections and the restoration of parliamentary government, the key issue, in our view, will be their right to participate in elections. We believe Zia must find a way to reassure the moderates that Sindhi interests will be represented and their place in the regional political and social order will not be diminished. [REDACTED]

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In negotiating with the moderates, we believe Zia will have to watch his right flank carefully, particularly if it appeared that some People's Party elements might gain significant concessions. Zia might then face competing demands from conservative and Islamic groups that have supported him in the past and who distrust the PPP. [REDACTED]

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The leftists groups in the opposition movement, including the left wing of the PPP, oppose negotiations and want to force more radical change. So far, however, the mainline Karachi leftists have been unable to demonstrate strength by bringing labor into the movement. Consulate reports show that only the peasant radicals of interior Sind have shown some strength. [REDACTED]

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Quiet Elsewhere

Although Zia is not a popular leader and lacks a strong base outside the Army, there are no indications that the public outside the Sind has decided he must go. We believe that to be successful, an opposition movement would have to show significant support in Punjab. With 65 percent of the population and much of the country's wealth, Punjab is by far the dominant province in Pakistan. It is also the home of most of the Army and civil service. If the Army were called out to put down widespread violence by fellow Punjabis, Zia probably would soon be replaced by another general. [REDACTED]

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Zia apparently has some support in Punjab for his plan for a phased return to civilian rule. According to the press, bazaar merchants and the local clerics--important elements in any urban agitation--have so far refused to support opposition strikes and demonstrations. We believe labor leaders probably would only join a movement already well underway, and anti-Zia students have been unable to organize because schools are closed for vacation. Punjabis are the most concerned of Pakistan's ethnic groups that the Indians or Soviets will exploit unrest in the country [REDACTED]

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The People's Party retains the loyalty of much of the rural and urban poor in Punjab, [REDACTED] but we believe only Bhutto's wife and daughter could quickly

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galvanize these groups. Bhutto's widow is undergoing treatment for a serious illness in Europe, and his daughter has been under house arrest since 1981. Other PPP groups among lawyers, professionals, and landlords have attempted to arouse opposition in the province's cities but so far have failed. [REDACTED]

In an apparent effort to keep the unrest from spreading to Punjab, Zia has been emphasizing his commitment to Islamization to keep conservative Islamic parties that have influence in Karachi and Punjab from joining the protests. In Punjab the government informally permitted opposition figures to run in local elections on a case-by-case basis. We believe this maneuver helped undercut the MRD's efforts to organize an election boycott and may enable the regime to buy off moderate PPP landlords in central and western Punjab. [REDACTED]

The Religious Groups and pro-Zia Opposition

Zia's position has been strengthened over the years by the tacit support of several parties, including most of the religious groups, and he would face serious trouble if they decided to oppose him. So far only one of these parties--the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Islam (JUI)--has decided to join the civil disobedience movement. The JUI is a left of center Islamic party that has significant support among the Pushtun tribes of Baluchistan and southern North-West Frontier Province. Part of the alliance that served under Zia in a previous cabinet, the party split over leadership issues and the question of joining the opposition Movement for the Restoration of Democracy. The JUI has now decided to back the MRD campaign, but we believe the party's Punjab faction will continue to show little enthusiasm for the MRD. [REDACTED]

A second party--the Muslim League--has not yet decided to support the agitation, but wants to emphasize its independence and to maneuver itself into negotiations with the government. The League, a remnant of the party that founded Pakistan, has little popular support, but its membership includes some influential landlords in Sind, Punjab and the NWFP. The Pir of Pagaro--the most prominent of Sind's traditional divines and currently head of the League--in the past has offered his party to Zia if he decides to become a civilian leader. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Pakistani security officials want to use the Pir's militant followers--called Hurs--to protect government installations in Sind. At the same time, however, Pagaro's shrine town was the scene of anti-Zia demonstrations in mid-September and he likely is under strong pressure from his Sindhi adherents to support the agitation. [REDACTED]

A third party, the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Pakistan (JUP), is leaning towards active opposition, according to the press. The JUP--the mainline Sunni party--is not well organized but does claim the support of thousands of local clerics in Karachi and

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urban Punjab. According to the press, the JUP head initially said he would keep his party out of the campaign for a month to give Zia a chance to negotiate. According to the press, he declared his party would join the agitation on 1 October if Zia did not meet with the opposition and agree to early elections. However, as October 1 approached, the JUP leader again delayed, asserting he had received an offer from Zia to hold talks. According to the US Consulate in Karachi, however, the party's Punjab wing is pressing the party's leader to hold off on direct elections. A decision by local clerics--who have benefited from Zia's Islamization policies--to heed the leader's call of open opposition would spread protests to Punjabi cities.



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The Jama'at-i-Islami (JI), the smallest but best organized and most fundamentalist party, so far continues its tacit support for Zia. The JI has strong support among students, professionals, and business groups in Karachi and Punjab, [redacted] Its strong organization and dedicated followers made it the core of the movement that toppled Bhutto, and it would be a formidable opponent if it decided to challenge Zia in the streets. We believe a decision to do so would indicate that opinion in key Punjab cities like Lahore had begun to shift decisively against Zia. The senior generals would probably view Zia's position as significantly eroded if he lost the Jama'at's support.



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Outlook

We do not believe that either the MRD's "fill the jails" movement or the disturbances in Sind now threatens to topple President Zia. Public opinion in no other province has risen to support the Sindhis. Indeed, too many concessions to ethnic Sindhis could alienate "new Sindhis"--Punjabi and Pathan settlers in Sind--who have influence in their home provinces.

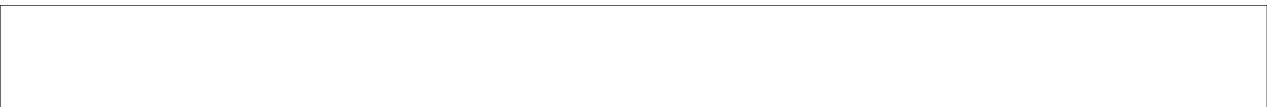


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Most Punjabis presumably have concluded that their country's interests would be better served by permitting President Zia to implement his program than by engaging in the kind of disturbances that would benefit the Indians and Soviets. Although some urban groups in Punjab--lawyers, professionals and some students--want a return to the 1973 parliamentary system and national elections, Zia can claim that his plan offers an alternative to continued martial law or the chaotic parliamentary politics of the Bhutto era. Nonetheless, if important interest groups in Punjab conclude the opposition is gaining momentum against Zia, they would quickly join against him.

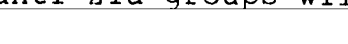


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[redacted] Punjabis usually regard the beginning of cooler weather (October-November) as the beginning of a new political season, and anti-Zia groups will increase their attempts to start trouble.



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Zia still depends on the Army to remain in power. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] some senior officers have doubts that Zia's program to restore civilian government by March 1985, can succeed, but there is no evidence they are plotting against him. In our view, the Army, which regards itself as the final arbiter of Pakistan's destiny, would be extremely reluctant to remove one of its own from power as a result of pressure from opposition politicians. However, it would replace Zia if it believed such a move was in the Army's and the country's broader interest. [REDACTED]

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We judge that Zia will attempt to ride out the current storm by dealing firmly with violent protests and putting out feelers to the moderates. Unrest probably would have to spread beyond Sind before Zia would consider major modifications in his program to restore an amended constitution, although he might make a show of negotiating to reassure the Army. Zia certainly will use both the Soviet threat from Afghanistan and the historic fear of India to remind Pakistanis that the country cannot afford domestic turmoil. [REDACTED]

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Prolonged disturbances in Sind, in our view, would persuade many that Zia was losing control, and protests by dissidents probably would gain momentum even in Punjab. We believe Zia's policies would then come under increasing criticism from within the Army. Junior and middle level officers, in our view, would renew their pressure to get the Army out of politics and back to the barracks. More senior officers would become critical of Zia's handling of the crisis and possibly begin maneuvering to succeed him. [REDACTED]

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The Army would act against Zia and his senior advisers if it believed the government had lost control of the situation. Evidence that public opinion had shifted against Zia or the spreading of the movement to Punjab would likely bring about the replacement of Zia by another general. We believe the Army would act as a unit and that the change would be peaceful. If faced with spreading disorders and growing doubts in the Army, Zia might eventually elect to leave voluntarily and turn over power to another general. [REDACTED]

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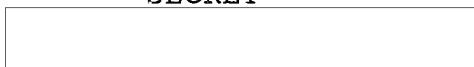
In our view, a successor to Zia would attempt to negotiate a return to civilian rule on terms the Army could accept. The Army would attempt to preserve the present US-Pakistan relationship, but, if the Pakistan People's Party took over, we believe Pakistan's ties with the United States and its position on Afghanistan would significantly weaken. [REDACTED]

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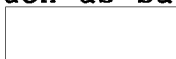
Indicators of Problems for Zia

Indications that Zia is not coping adequately with the disturbances and that momentum is shifting against him would be:

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- Continuing disturbances marked by growing violence and increased Army involvement in internal security duties.
- A major incidence of police or Army overreaction that causes general revulsion throughout the country.
- The disruption of transportation through Sind that results in shortages and higher prices of food and fuel in Karachi.
- Prolonged antigovernment demonstrations in Sind, including armed attacks on police and Army units, that require the redeployment of troops to Sind from opposite India.
- Widespread student demonstrations that turn from university to national political issues, move off campus, and begin to coalesce with opposition demonstrations.
- Involvement of non-Sindhi elements in Hyderabad and Karachi, such as bazaar merchants, clerics, and laborers. 

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Indications that Zia is in real trouble and could soon be removed would be:

- Signs that local clerics in Punjab cities are heeding calls to confront Zia.
- A decision by the Jama'at-i-Islami to confront Zia in the streets of Karachi and Lahore.
- The outbreak of widespread violent protests in Punjab, particularly in the cities of Lahore and Rawalpindi.
- Indications that bazaar merchants, clerics, and laborers are joining demonstrations by students, lawyers, and professional women.
- Signs the military--particularly the Army corps commanders--is becoming unwilling to suppress antigovernment demonstrations, particularly in Punjab.
- Indications that senior Army officers are becoming dissatisfied with Zia's conduct and are making contacts on their own with political leaders.
- Signs of an Indian troop buildup opposite Sind Province raising concern that India means to take advantage of Pakistan's troubles if the disturbances in Sind continue.
- Efforts by senior Pakistani security officers to seek advice from the United States about what should be done.



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