

Central Intelligence Agency



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## DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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## PAKISTAN: US OFFICIALS VIEW THE FUTURE: A TRIP REPORT

## Summary

*Discussions in late October and early November between NESAs analysts and US diplomats [redacted] in Pakistan revealed that all expect martial law to end--probably before Zia's deadline. Views differed as to whether Zia can establish the kind of civilian government he wants, and whether the transition to an elected government will be peaceful.*

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Zia's Goals

Zia would like a government elected on a nonparty basis, with little or no role for former Prime Minister Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party, and with some constitutional means for the military to retain ultimate control. A few US officials argued that Zia will recognize that his goals are unacceptable to most Pakistanis, and, rather than risk a popular uprising, he will make major political concessions. He would much rather be remembered as a leader who restored democratic rule [redacted]

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Most US officials believe that Zia will not make substantial concessions. He believes his program is necessary for a stable,

*This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] South Asia Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. Information as of 10 November 1983 was used in preparation of this paper. Comments and queries are welcome and should be addressed to Chief, South Asia Division*

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effective civilian government, and he would risk serious opposition in the Pakistani military were he to give in to the politicians.

#### Differing Views on the Opposition

Many politicians--especially those in the People's Party--are as inflexible as Zia, in the view of most US officials. The politicians will insist on free elections with political party participation and no constitutional role for the military.

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The key question is whether these politicians have enough popular support to cause civil disorders that would either force Zia to abandon his goals or cause the Army to remove Zia. Some argued that the politicians can mobilize the people. Zia has little popularity anywhere in Pakistan. The Sind disturbances showed the opposition's ability to foment unrest, and the province will erupt again because basic complaints remain unsatisfied. These officials believe that trouble might begin in Punjab after an announcement of procedures that exclude most of the PPP from the next government, any effort to give the military a constitutional veto over the government, or a constitutional amendment that would prevent the punishment of the military for its actions--including overthrowing an elected government in 1977.

Other US diplomats doubt that a strong anti-Zia movement will develop. In the North-West Frontier Province, military rule has not been harsh and economic conditions are good. Zia is not popular there, but there is little inclination on the Frontier to take the lead in any movement against him. Sparsely populated Baluchistan cannot pose a threat to Zia by itself, and some US officials believe that the absence so far of any serious anti-Zia movement in the province indicates none is likely to develop.

In the view of these officials, Sind, despite the serious disorders that began in August, is manageable in the short run. Only ethnic Sindhis have been involved in the disturbances, and rival ethnic groups, which dominate the main cities, are unlikely to follow their lead. Zia can still buy off some Sindhi politicians--including several of the most prominent--and can use the Army to prevent serious civil disorder. Zia may exacerbate Sindhi resentments, making Sind an even more dangerous problem for Pakistan in the long run, but he will be able to hold an election there on his own terms in 1984 or 1985.

Most Punjabis want a government elected on a party basis, and the People's Party would probably carry Punjab in a free election. Nevertheless, according to several US officials, a popular anti-Zia movement is unlikely to develop in the province.

- Religious leaders believe Zia has moved too slowly to implement Islamic practices but prefer Zia to the secular politicians likely to rule Pakistan if Zia falls.
- Landowners complain that they suffer from Zia's policies, but they are still doing well enough so that they may be unwilling to risk the economic uncertainties of political instability.
- Small businessmen have benefited from Pakistan's continuing prosperity and may opt for stability rather than agitation.
- Peasants were the main support of the People's Party in the past, but they too are living better than before, and, in any case, rural opposition will have much less impact than the situation in the cities.
- Lawyers have already demonstrated against Zia and are almost certain to do so again but have received little support from a population that tends to distrust the bar.

US officials agreed that Zia can control the pace of the transition. He can move cautiously, testing the popular reaction to each step in the process before moving to the next. He, nevertheless, will have moved ahead fast enough to avoid any impression that he is abandoning plans to end martial law. All agreed that were Zia to cancel elections, the popular reaction would be so severe that Zia would fall. He may not face a serious confrontation in the next few months, but by late 1984 it will probably be clear whether Zia or the politicians have won. Zia will either be well on his way to becoming the elected civilian president of Pakistan or to being overthrown. The most optimistic gave Zia only a 70 percent chance of carrying out his plans; the most pessimistic believed Zia's chances were a little below 50 percent.

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Source Discussions with US Officials in Pakistan

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