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# Who Killed Pakistan's Zia: The Fears and the Theories

By Lally Weymouth



ABOUT 10 DAYS before the death of Pakistan's Zia ul-Haq, Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Yuliy Vorontsov warned the U.S. ambassador in Moscow that the Soviets were going to teach Zia a lesson if the Pakistani president did not cease his support for the *mujaheddin* resistance.

"We thought they would do some bombing [of targets in Pakistan]," said one U.S. official, recalling the Soviet threat. "We went to the Soviets and warned them against bombing Pakistan because we were so concerned." According to this official, the Soviets replied, in effect: "We won't bomb, but we will teach him a lesson."

Moscow's threatening message to Zia came back to haunt U.S. officials a week and a half later when the Pakistani leader's C-130 exploded in the sky, with most of the Pakistani army high command on board as well as U.S. Ambassador Arnold Raphel.

What caused the C-130 crash remains unclear. Moscow has denied any involvement, and at this point there's no evidence to contradict the Soviet denial—nor is there even final evidence that the crash was the result of a deliberate attack, rather than mechanical failure. Real answers aren't likely to come until a joint U.S.-Pakistani team completes its investigation of the crash. While waiting for the results, the United States has sent a message to the Soviets warning that we will not accept any outside interference in Pakistan.

The Reagan administration, wary of the explosive implications of the case, last week instructed employees at the State Department and other agencies not to comment on the Zia crash. Most high-level officials refused to speculate. But behind the public silence, it's clear that officials in Washington and Pakistan are worried about several aspects of the case:

■ **Preliminary evidence.** The formal U.S.-Pakistani investigation of the crash won't be concluded until this week, at the earliest. But according to one U.S. source, the Pakistani air force made a preliminary finding last week that Zia's plane had been downed by a missile that struck one of its engines.

"They did a study of the crash and they concluded that it wasn't internal but was a missile striking one of the engines," said one U.S. official who was briefed on the Pakistani preliminary report. Because the crash site was small and the debris hadn't scattered, the Pakistani air force concluded that the plane hadn't been bombed, the U.S. official said. But this official cautioned that this initial Pakistani report could be self-serving, since it was the air force—which was responsible for security on the plane—that would be blamed if a bomb had been smuggled aboard.

Zia had a range of enemies, domestic and foreign, that might have had access to anti-aircraft missiles. One U.S. official hopes it was not an American-made "Stinger" missile that downed Zia's plane. The Stinger, he noted, was the symbol of the *mujaheddin*. "It would have been delicious for the Soviets to train a team and go in and use it," speculates this official.

■ **Soviet threats to Zia.** Many U.S. officials are troubled by the pattern of Soviet warnings to Zia before he died. In addition to the warning made to the U.S. ambassador to Moscow, Jack Matlock, a similar statement was delivered to Pakistani Foreign Minister Yaqub Khan during his recent visit to Moscow. And only the day before Zia died, Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman Gennadi Gerasimov attacked Zia. According to Tass, Gerasimov charged:

"Pakistan is continuing to supply arms and ammunition to the most intransigent part of the Afghan armed opposition . . . Islamabad is continuing its line of open support for the Afghan armed opposition, having as its aim the overthrow of the government with which Pakistan signed these agreements."

The diplomatic war of words worried U.S. officials. So did the clashes on the ground between Pakistan and Afghanistan that escalated in the month before Zia's death.

Several weeks ago, for example, two Soviet SU21 warplanes were shot down near the Pakistan-Afghan border by Pakistani F16s. According to a U.S. official, one of the two Soviet pilots was captured and confessed that he and his comrades were trying to lure the F16s close to the border so they could be shot down by Soviet MiGs.

Some U.S. officials doubt that the Soviets would have targeted Zia, no matter how angry they were with his Afghanistan policy. But others aren't so sure. One official summarizes his suspicions about the Soviets this way: "They warned in unambiguous terms that they would do something to Zia . . . It was naive to believe the Soviets would leave gracefully and just abandon Afghanistan."

■ **The record of Soviet-backed terrorism in Pakistan.** Since the early 1980s, Pakistani officials charge, the Soviets have conducted a campaign of terrorism to pressure Zia to stop supporting the *mujaheddin*. The bombing campaign has increased in ferocity during the last two years. Indeed, because of these attacks, Pakistan accounted for an amazing 45 percent of all those killed or wounded in international terrorist attacks last year, according to the State Department.

"The Russians considered Pakistan responsible for their present position in Afghanistan," a top Pakistani security official explained in an interview last January. "Therefore they tried to use all sorts of pressure to bring about a change in our attitude to the Afghan affair . . . [including] sabotage and terrorism. . . . There was a continuous wave, every other week on the average. When Gorbachev took over, it really became a killing operation." (Continued)

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**M**oscow's surrogate in this campaign of terror was the Afghan intelligence service, traditionally known as KHAD (recently renamed WAD). Trained and sponsored by the Soviet KGB, the Afghan intelligence service was a vital part of the war against the Afghan resistance. According to Pakistani officials, KHAD's strength today is approximately 27,000, and its budget has increased from \$7.4 million in 1982 to \$160 million in 1986. Afghanistan's leader, Najibullah, is a former chief of KHAD.

A Pakistani military officer who has studied KHAD closely estimated that there are more than 1,500 Soviet advisers attached to it. "Every KHAD section has a KGB adviser and every directorate has a team of advisers," he said in an interview last week. This official rejected the view held by some American analysts that the Soviets leave KHAD on a loose leash; he claimed that KHAD officers are given the blueprints for all operations by GRU or KGB advisers.

Zia himself was worried by the threat of Soviet-backed terrorism against his regime. He told me in an interview last January that the bombings in Pakistan were "the joint work of the Afghan KHAD and the KGB. We have very good evidence. Many agents have been arrested or captured by us, and through interrogation it has been found out who is their mentor. They are all Afghans or KGB-oriented KHAD agents."

Zia praised Pakistani civilians for holding out against a bombing campaign that was aimed at intimidating them. "A few knees were shaking and it has not stopped," Zia said. "This is how the Afghans destabilize Pakistan—through internal subversion and bomb blasts. What they have not won on the battlefield they want to win now through indirect means—sabotage, bomb blasts. They won't win, but they can make life difficult."

The Soviets had good reason to dislike Zia. The Pakistani president was the key to the covert war against Soviet forces in Afghanistan that was waged for eight years by the mujaheddin with the backing of the United States, China and Saudi Arabia. All supplies to the mujaheddin had to pass through Pakistan, and Zia not only kept the supply lines open and trained the guerrillas, he also gave shelter in Pakistan to 3½ million Afghan refugees.

Zia and the mujaheddin kept pushing, even after the Soviets agreed to withdraw their troops. As recently as Aug. 13, the Soviets suffered a big setback when a large ammunition dump located outside Kabul was destroyed by two rounds of mujaheddin rockets. According to a U.S. official, 500 Soviets were killed and over 1,000 were wounded, and as much as a year's worth of supplies for the Afghan government was destroyed. "It was a tremendous blow," says this official. "It looked like Carthage after the Punic War."

The Soviets now appear determined that their Afghan puppet, Najibullah, will not fall until after they withdraw their last troops next February. To ensure this, the Soviets reportedly have stopped withdrawing troops from Afghanistan and have recently been reintroducing combat troops as well as military advisers. According to one U.S. official, they have also launched some new offensive operations in Afghanistan—although the head of Soviet forces in Afghanistan has denied this. U.S. sources also say that in the recent battle for control of the city of Kunduz, the Soviets flew 30 high-level bombing sorties a day from the Soviet Union, devastating the local population. This high-level bombing has made it impossible for the mujaheddin to take and hold some urban centers.

**D**espite his brave stand against the Soviets in Afghanistan, Zia had been worried in recent months about the future of U.S.-Pakistani relations. He told me in January that he wanted a George Bush victory. "We hope it is Bush," he said. "I hope and pray he wins the elections." He feared that a Democratic victory might mean a decline in U.S. support for Pakistan.

Even with the friendly Reagan administration, the priority in Washington policy toward Pakistan was starting to shift to domestic political reform and the nuclear issue, instead of Afghanistan. The Pakistanis had asked the administration for AWACs radar-warning planes, for example, but the request had not been granted. The sale had been tied to Pakistan's success in holding elections in November.

"If he had stayed in power longer, we would have been destined for conflict with him on human rights, the nuclear issue and the kind of fundamentalist government he wanted to impose on Afghanistan," said Graham Fuller, an Afghan expert who is now at the Rand Corp.

Zia's death presents the Reagan administration with a dilemma. What if the evidence suggests that the Soviets or their surrogates had a role in the C130 crash? Many in the U.S. government may be reluctant to press the issue vigorously—for fear of interrupting the START talks, the talks on regional settlements in Angola and Kampuchea and the new era of good feeling between the two superpowers.

That's why the State Department—behind its self-imposed silence on the Zia affair—may be hoping that the investigation doesn't turn up any solid evidence of foul play. If such evidence were found, the awkward question would then be what to do about it. The United States, as some officials noted last week, actually has an incentive not to discover that the Soviets did it.

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# Missile killed Zia, Pakistan indicates

By Bill Gertz  
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A preliminary Pakistani Air Force investigation has concluded that a ground-launched missile shot down the aircraft that carried President Mohammad Zia ul-Haq, U.S. Ambassador Arnold Raphel and 27 others to their deaths, a senior Pentagon official said yesterday.

The Defense Department source also confirmed a report that less than two weeks before the plane crash, a high Soviet official warned the U.S. ambassador to Moscow, Jack Matlock, that Gen. Zia would be dealt with severely if he did not temper his support of rebel forces battling the Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan. The Soviet official was identified as Deputy Foreign Minister Yuly Vorontsov.

The disclosures, which could not be confirmed with other U.S. sources, seemed certain to intensify speculation about possible involvement in the crash by the Soviet and Afghan intelligence services. The Afghan secret service, known by the acronym WAD, has been implicated in a number of terrorist bombings inside Pakistan and was accused in a State Department report this month of being the world's top exporter of state-sponsored terrorism.

Moscow has strongly denied that it had any part in the downing of Gen. Zia's aircraft.

The Pentagon official, who declined to be identified by name, emphasized that the Pakistani Air Force report had not been confirmed independently by a U.S. team aiding in an investigation of the Aug. 17 crash. The disaster occurred as Gen. Zia was returning to the capital of Islamabad from a demonstration of U.S. military equipment. Among the other casualties of the crash was an American general, Herbert Wassom, and many of the top Pakistan military command.

The official also noted that the air force might have a self-interest in

proving the plane was shot down from the ground since the military was responsible both for security and maintenance of the aircraft.

The joint investigative team is expected to issue a formal report on the crash this week, he said.

The preliminary findings by the Pakistani Air Force, according to the Pentagon source, are based on two factors. One, he said, was the relatively "localized" crash sight. If an explosion had occurred aboard the plane, the Pakistani investigators have concluded, debris would have been scattered over a much wider area than was actually the case, the U.S. official said.

One theory of the crash has been that a bomb had been planted on the plane, possibly among a crate of mangos taken aboard at the final stop of the ill-fated flight.

The second factor in the preliminary Pakistani finding is the absence of any evidence of mechanical failure of the American-made, C-130 transport plane. Investigators have recovered and studied the recording of the plane's on-board flight recorders and have discovered no indication of mechanical malfunction before the crash.

The plane explosion followed several harsh warnings from the Soviet Union to Pakistan and the United States that continued Pakistan government support for rebels in Afghanistan would lead to retribution. The reported warning to Mr. Matlock in Moscow came just 10 days before the air crash, the Pentagon official said.

The State Department said last night it could not confirm the Matlock-Vorontsov meeting.

Earlier, Pakistan's foreign minister, Shahbazdha Yaqub Khan, was also warned by Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze not to continue backing the rebels, the official said, adding that the warning to Mr. Khan was not as harsh as the message delivered to Mr. Matlock.