



How long can Pakistan's Zia last?

by Daniel Sneider

"The Soviet Union is on our doorstep and the United States of America is 10,000 miles away. We ought to view the situation very pragmatically. You can't live in the sea and create enmity with the whales. You have to be friendly with them." These are the brave words of America's stalwart ally and front line against "Soviet expansion," Pakistan's military dictator General Ziaul Haq.

General Zia uttered this barely disguised blackmail threat only a day after he played host to Britain's Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington, on a tour of the Persian Gulf, Pakistan and India to bolster a new front against the Soviet Union. Zia perhaps was anticipating the visit two days later of Huang Hua, the Foreign Minister of China, a country Zia proclaims to be the only really trusted friend of Pakistan which shares Pakistan's doubts about the reliability of their "friends" in Washington.

In the view of General Zia, at least as can be figured out from his recent periodic statements, Pakistan is now in a position to play a neat game of extortion with the Carter administration. Having had its official economic aid suspended, due to the revelation of Pakistan's efforts to construct a nuclear device, and with military assistance reduced to cash-only sales, particularly during the period of Janata government rule in India, the Pakistani ruler now feels vindicated by the warm embrace given his regime since the events in Afghanistan. He is intent, however, in making sure that this time he gets what he wants, and in the amounts he wants before signing over Pakistan to the U.S.-British-Chinese axis in the region.

General Zia's game is not merely one of making the

best of a bad situation. There is a more profound need: to save the very political existence of the regime itself. Despite frequent pronouncements of the importance of Pakistan, those who have been watching this country carefully over the past two-and-a-half years since Zia and the army overthrew the popular government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and subsequently executed him know that the regime rests on the narrowest of bases. In a country which has experienced two previous military regimes, both overthrown by popular uprising, Zia's regime is the least stable in a long line.

The roots of Zia's demise

The roots of Zia's shakiness are both economic and political—and now strategic. The easiest to see is the economic factor. Zia has made the point several times over the past two weeks that he does not want simply military aid but even more economic aid, a point also made by Carrington and reflected in the \$400-million aid package proposed by the Carter administration, half of which is economic assistance. But \$200 million is a drop in Pakistan's empty bucket.

The fact is that Pakistan is broke—already in default on its debt obligations to its World Bank organized aid donors and politically unable to enforce internal austerity. Early last summer, Pakistan went to the annual meeting of the Aid Pakistan Consortium of the World Bank and presented a request for a rescheduling of approximately \$300 million of its debt repayments, par-

ticularly those which fall due beginning 1980. The U.S., the major donor, and others flatly said "no" and demanded instead that Pakistan institute the familiar package of austerity measures—currency devaluation, budget reductions (particularly in the area of food and basic staple price subsidies), and similar measures.

Pakistan was in a bind and faced with a singular lack of enthusiasm from traditional Arab donors. Many were openly antagonistic to the regime after it executed Bhutto in the spring despite appeals to save the life of a man held in high esteem in the Arab world. Later this past summer the government presented its budget, a budget so rife with disaster for the average Pakistani that even Zia's right-wing anti-Bhutto allies in the Pakistan National Alliance attacked it strongly. Even worse U.S. and World Bank officials alike made it clear that they did not view this budget as sufficient to meet their austerity demands.

During this period Zia had been forced to release from imprisonment the leaders of Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) including Bhutto's wife, Nusrat Bhutto, and fiery daughter, Benazir Bhutto. The PPP rapidly expanded its organizing, with Benazir and Nusrat greeted by massive crowds wherever they appeared. Zia had committed himself to holding national elections on Nov. 17, a commitment which followed similar ones earlier in his regime (one of which came in declaring that the regime would last 90 days) which were not filled.

A series of measures were attempted to rig the elections but failed to accomplish their goal of barring the PPP from participation. Zia faced the inevitable. He cancelled the elections indefinitely in a speech on Oct. 16, banned all political parties, arrested their leaders, particularly those of the PPP, imposed strict martial law and press censorship and made it clear that the rule of his military regime would not be ended at any ballot box. He then returned to his economic troubles.

In late November, an IMF team landed in Pakistan to make a preliminary assessment of the austerity measures that would be required for Pakistan to receive the aid it needed to get by its impending debt crisis. Already Zia had received promises of a \$100 million loan from the Bank of Commerce and Credit International (BCCI), a Dubai-financed London banking house run by renegade Pakistani banker Hasan Abedi. The loan was given with Pakistan's next rice crop as collateral. The IMF team's conclusions are not known, but judging from Pakistan's condition and the IMF track record, Zia was faced with carrying out measures that would not only shrink its barely existent economy to nothing, but risk political upheaval right then and there.

Under these conditions the Afghan crisis almost appears a blessing for Zia. One Pakistani official was quoted in the *Washington Post* Jan. 17 saying that the debt problem would not be solved by rescheduling.

"Why don't they just write it off," he declared. Such elation may go unrewarded, but its roots are clear enough.

The economic side however is the least of it. Politically, Zia is a total liability. When Zia cancelled the elections, he had the support of a handful of Pakistan's recognized political leaders, including the State Department's favorite, former Air Marshall Asghar Khan and the Muslim Brotherhood's arm in Pakistan the Jamaate Islami. The latter, a secretive neo-facist Islamic fundamentalist organization, is understood to be the controller of Zia, who is the nephew of the head of the Jamaate, Mian Tufail Mohammed. Every other political leader of note, including many who had supported the coup, opposed Zia and are now under arrest. The Jamaate alone has been allowed to maintain its organization, despite the ban on all parties, merely changing the signboards on its offices to say a "cultural organization."

Standing against Zia and commanding the vast majority of the population's support are the PPP, some of the rightist opposition parties, and the Pakistan National Party (PNP) which also has the support of smaller leftist groups. The PNP is crucial for one fact alone—it is mostly composed of Baluchis, including the left wing of the former National Awami Party (NAP), the only other popularly based party to come close to the PPP. The NAP had been banned under Bhutto and was based in Baluchistan and the Northwest Frontier Province. When its leadership came out behind Zia out of hatred for Bhutto, the left wing and the majority of the party finally broke to form the PNP. The rump, led by Pathan politician Khan Wali Khan, is said to command very little support even among the tribesmen of the northwest.

The Baluchistan scenario

The bandying about these days of the name "Baluchistan" in the Anglo-American press, the area described as the next state to fall in the Soviet drive to the Persian Gulf and warm water, is usually accompanied by little in the way of hard facts. The crucial factor there is not tribal secessionism among the mountainous and rough territory of 2.5 million Pakistani Baluch, a tribalism that the Soviets supposedly can whip up anytime they want.

The fact is that the Pakistani Baluch, distinct from their brothers in Iran and Afghanistan, have had a well-developed political leadership, including student intelligentsia based in Quetta University. The Baluch Student Organization, for example, is an open left-wing led grouping.

This leadership made up the core of the PNP, including the former Governor-General of the province, Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo, and his close ally Astaullah Khan Mengal. They had the support of the key tribe, the Marris,

whose tribal elder, Khair Bakhsh Marri, a former NAP president, commands great loyalty and whose nephew, Sher Mohammed Marri, is the leader of the left-wing Baluchistan Peoples Liberation Front. All of these men, particularly the Marris, were involved in a four-year insurgency against the Pakistan central government from 1973 to 1977, ultimately involving more than 70,000 Pakistan army forces in the province and ended only by a truce with Zia. There is little question that this leadership has the network and the loyalty of the populace to repeat this, only this time with a friendly Afghan regime across the border behind them.

The more interesting aspect of this situation is the links between the PPP and the PNP, most of which must now be semi-underground. Before the ban, the two parties had been moving toward a united front out of common opposition to the Zia regime and some shared vague leftist views. Both parties had supported the Afghan revolution of April 1978 and had attacked the Zia regime's barely disguised support for the "Islamic" tribal rebellion against the Kabul regime.

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The PNP commands support in the southern province of the Sind, Bhutto's home province, and the Punjab. The Punjabi characteristic of the Zia military regime is thus a factor in alienating the country's three national-ethnic minorities, the Sindhis, Baluchis, and Pathans, but it is not clear that Zia can even count on support among his fellow Punjabis, including in the military.

The Zia regime's sensitivity to the Baluch situation was visibly displayed last month in the arrest of the correspondent of the Hong Kong-based weekly *Far East Economic Review* and his subsequent sentencing to prison. It was revealed that the cause of the arrest was an article written by the reporter, Salamat Ali, in the Oct. 19 issue of the *Review*, entitled "Baluchistan: An upheaval is forecast." The article gave an account of the simmering unrest in the province among the Baluch leaders, many unnamed. Perhaps the most telling quote from one such

leader was this response to a question on the immediate future for Baluchistan:

We have discussed our options for a long time. One is a greater Baluchistan. Another it to take the province of Sind with us, and that has obvious advantages. The third is to go with Iran, but that right now seems ruled out. The fourth is a loose confederation of Baluchistan, Pakhtoonistan (the Pathan areas of Pakistan), and Afghanistan. The fifth is a Soviet socialist republic in which Baluchistan should be a partner. The last-named option has always appealed to our youth, but the problem was that neither Iran nor Afghanistan next door were socialists. Now that hurdle has been removed.

The question of the army

The prospect of a revolution in Baluchistan and beyond must be on the minds of the only other institution that counts in Pakistan—the army. There are signs that within the army there is talk of removing Zia. Pakistani sources in London report that British circles in fact are considering such an option—a "preemptive coup" against Zia which would remove the unpopular leader in a controlled manner before it happens in an uncontrolled manner. Several middle-level officers have left the country and are working with pro-Bhutto exiles in Europe. Bhutto's former military secretary Major General Imtiaz Ali, is reported actively organizing pro-Bhutto army officers from exile abroad in the Gulf shiekhdom of Abu Dhabi. There General Ali is acting as a "military adviser" to Sheik Zayeed, a man who was very close to Bhutto personally.

Zia has responded, our sources report, by constant reshuffling of military personnel in order to prevent a regroupment of these circles. However, a key point is coming up in early February when Zia's retirement from the army is due. It had come up last year and was extended. Also due to retire are three of his close Army supporters: Lt. General Sawar Khan, Governor of the Punjab, Lt. General Faiz Ali Chisti, Governor of Pakistani Kashmir, and Lt. General Iqbal. If Zia does not retire, which he certainly prefers, then it will be difficult for him to go ahead with the retirement of these officers also. Such a move is sure to cause discontent among the ranks of the younger officers who are due to move up in the ranks as a result. That may well be the catalyst for a coup.

Zia will certainly try to buy loyalty in the army with new arms from the U.S. and China to replace the outmoded equipment of the armed force. This has been an issue for some time, also affecting the army's loyalty to

Bhutto. If Zia does not deliver and the army faces the Red Army across the border—and, in their minds, India—then it will be difficult to predict how long Zia can last.

The strategic dimension

It is in this context that we must finally return to the strategic dimension of Zia and Pakistan. The reluctance of Zia to rush into a new axis with the U.S. must stem from this consideration. Militarily, there is little in the way of a Soviet thrust into Pakistan, either in the form of punitive raids on Pakistan-based camps of the Afghan Islamic rebels or a massive drive with full Soviet forces. The terrain bordering Baluchistan is best suited for that, being relatively flat and suited to heavy armored equipment. However, the political realities of Pakistan do not even require that.

Ultimately, Soviet actions will depend on Zia and what he does. It is no secret that the regime has encouraged, armed, trained, and politically backed the various Afghan insurgents, with the aid of China, which has kept up a steady flow of arms and advisers. In fact the main tribal forces are not those in Afghanistan but the Pathan tribes based mainly in Pakistan, who spread across the border. A continuation of this policy, particularly as the snows start melting in the spring, bears heavy risks for Pakistan, as the Soviets have already made perfectly clear.

Zia dispatched his Foreign Secretary Aga Shahi to the U.S. more than a week ago for a first round of talks on what the U.S. would deliver. Shahi was accompanied by two military men—Lt. General Gullam Jilani Khan, the secretary general of the Defense Ministry and Major General K.M. Arif, his chief of staff—presumably carrying a long shopping list. In recent press statements following the visit, Zia indicated displeasure with what had been offered so far by calling the talks “preliminary.” To unnamed Pakistani officials he made it clear that the \$400 million figure was way too low.

What the Chinese have to give is none to clear. They have been major arms suppliers to Pakistan for almost 15 years, including light arms and jet aircraft, but Chinese arms are of a quality not much better than some of the Korean War era equipment found in the Pakistan army now. The *New York Times* reports that U.S. Defense Secretary Harold Brown asked the Chinese to help smooth out U.S.-Pakistan relations but what that means is also not certain.

Gandhi arrives on the scene

The advent to power of Mrs. Gandhi in India must be equally unsettling to General Zia. Mrs. Gandhi, at the

bottom line, will respond toughly to any move to recreate the U.S.-Pakistan-China alliance that functioned during the 1971 war between India and Pakistan. More to the point, she was a vigorous defender of Bhutto during the period when the Zia regime had sentenced him to death. Bhutto supporters will look to her for support in their own cause. While India will not rush into war with Pakistan, hopes circulating in Washington that somehow India and Pakistan can be joined in an anti-Soviet front are totally futile.

Adding it up, the only conclusion that can be reached is that Zia's Pakistan is a card only jokers would depend on playing, a country led by a kook, in the Khomeini sense of the word. He has based his regime entirely on the Jamaate Islami's Islamic ideology, proclaimed friendship for Iran, and overseen such incidents as the burning of the U.S. Embassy and the resulting death of two Americans—an incident organized and carried out by the Jamaate. At every point, Zia has not only refused to relinquish power, but has plunged ahead into disaster, hanging Bhutto, despite the pleas of almost every head of state in the world, and trying to impose a military version of Khomeini's Islamic state which includes public flogging and similar barbarities.

General Zia is unlikely to hear the voice of reason including his “allies” who may urge internal cosmetic reforms to regain some public support. As a military man, he may be impressed by the hard steel of the Soviet tanks on his borders, but as a kook he will likely take Pakistan into a confrontation that the populace will not support. The only question to really ask is whether General Zia can last long enough to try it.

Pakistan arms aid: 'For whose defense?'

Following are excerpts from an editorial on Afghanistan and U.S.-Pakistan relations that was published in the Jan. 1 edition Jang, the leading Urdu-language daily in Pakistan.

The willingness of Pakistan's former ally and super-power America, to extend military aid for Pakistan's security and defense is surprising, because Pakistan has long been a victim of American foreign policy and her fickle-mindedness. Pakistan has been trying, since even before the fall of East Pakistan, to secure arms from America and other friendly countries to meet its defense needs and strengthen its defense. And right at the mo-

ment when foreign troops were advancing in East and West Pakistan, Pakistan tried its best to secure military aid from America but Dacca fell and American aid did not reach Pakistan

... Then, even after such a great tragedy, Pakistan did not look away from America and kept seeking military aid from its friends for the security of the leftover Pakistan. But, making Pakistan's nuclear program a target of its criticism, America has since long stopped not only military but also economic aid

Now that Russian troops have entered Afghanistan in large numbers and American interests in this region are threatened by this action, not only have America and like-minded powers started shouting about the principle of nonintervention in foreign countries, America has, out of princely generosity, also announced military aid for Pakistan, and has immediately started taking stock of Pakistan's military requirements. America's mysterious silence, rather clandestine encouragement to India, at the critical juncture of East Pakistan's fall and then continuous discouragement of Pakistan, and American announcement of military aid for Pakistan now after Russian troops' entry into Afghanistan all show that the real objective (of these offers) can be anything except the defense of Pakistan's security. In this situation we will have to think whether acceptance of aid would be beneficial to us or harmful.

A second aspect of the matter is that the dispute between Iran and America has not yet been resolved. Iran is the closest Muslim neighbor of Pakistan and even in this period of Iran's trial relations between the two countries, have been close and most cordial, and Pakistan has openly declared that it will not tolerate the use of force against Iran. In a situation when the dispute between Iran and America has not been settled, how can Pakistan commit the mistake of irritating a close Muslim neighbor by accepting American aid?

The third aspect worth noting is against whom the American military aid offered to Pakistan is meant to be. Is it directed against Russia? Russia is a very big country; it is a super-power. Neither Russia will attack Pakistan nor can Pakistan fight Russia. As far as Afghanistan is concerned, Pakistan has no designs against Afghanistan also. Like Iran, Afghanistan is also a close neighbor. For thousands of years all pervasive and many-faceted relationships have subsisted between the two countries. Lakhs of Afghan nationals have taken refuge in Pakistan, and Pakistan's best hope in that Afghanistan should have such a stable and popular government as would stop the endless bloodshed in the country, restore law and order and win the confidence of the people so that the Afghan Government and people could together put their country on the path of progress.

'Pakistan has only three options...'

Following are excerpts from an editorial on the same subject in the Pakistan daily NAWA-I-Wagt, Jan. 2.

In connection with his warning (to the Soviet Union), Mr. Brzezinski has also said that this is an important commitment (to uphold the security of Pakistan) which it will honour. But because of the experience Pakistan has had of American attitudes in respect of defence agreements, people of Pakistan will be right in proceeding with care and hesitation in trusting this declaration and warning from America at this critical juncture. An immediate (and a very important) reason for this is that Russia's military occupation of Afghanistan has produced a most fundamental and far-reaching change. But even at this moment, instead of raising this issue at the United Nations, the resolution secured by America from the Security Council relates to American hostages in Teheran. America knows very well that Iran and Pakistan are brother Muslim countries and the people of Pakistan cannot fail to notice and highlight the contradiction between action against Iran and the offer of aid and support to Pakistan.

Regardless of the contradiction ... Pakistan has only three possible options:

1. The offer made by America may be accepted and (we) should be ready to pay the price, whatever it may be, of cooperation with and faith in it (America).

2. A wait-and-see policy may be adopted and an attempt made to adjust ourselves to the way the situation develops.

3. No attempt should be made to annoy Russia, that is, the path of staying non-aligned in the confrontation between the two superpowers should be adopted. And the fate that has befallen Afghanistan despite its reiteration of nonalignment and "friendship with Russia" should be dismissed as the destiny of Afghanistan alone.

All these three possible courses cannot guarantee Pakistan's freedom, sovereignty and security. The experience of relying and depending on America for our defence does not now encourage us to trust America. An attempt to escape Russia's annoyance is no easy matter either because it has an agreement with India similar to the so-called Treaty of Friendship it has invoked to despatch its troops to Afghanistan. In these circumstances the only proper and positive policy for us can be that first of all we should arrange for a national consensus to meet the situation facing us.