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## Behind the Pakistani Hijacking

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# Bhutto family targeted by Britain's Libyan-KGB agents

by Daniel Snieder

MAY 1980—Somewhere in Western Europe I am sitting talking to a Pakistani friend, an exile and activist in the circles of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), the party founded by the executed Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. We are discussing a recent newspaper report, alleging that Murtaza Bhutto, the exiled son of the late leader, is in Kabul, Afghanistan. The source of the report, he tells me, is an exiled Pakistani army officer active in anti-regime politics.

"I am worried" he says to me as we talk quietly in the corner of a restaurant. "Zia [referring to the military dictator, General Zia Ul-Haq, who overthrew the Bhutto government in 1977] is planning something. This report was planted by Pakistani intelligence to provide an excuse to eliminate Begum Nusrat Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto." He is referring to the wife and daughter of the late prime minister who now leads the PPP.

OCTOBER 1980—General Zia announces the indefinite cancellation of national elections that were promised (for the third time since the coup) for November; cancelled when it was obvious that the PPP would win an overwhelming victory, a tribute to the memory of the martyred leader and the vast unpopularity of the fundamentalist Islamic military regime.

FEBRUARY 1981—Despite a ban on political parties and their activity, nine opposition parties—almost all those in the country—led by the PPP form the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy. Shortly after, waves of student protests calling for an end to the martial law regime and restoration of democracy swept the country, forcing the regime to close colleges and universities. The protests spread to strikes of doctors and lawyers and the Movement planned an escalating series of actions, aimed at culminating in a nationwide demonstration/strike on March 23.

MARCH 2, 1981—A Pakistani Airlines Boeing jet is hijacked on a domestic flight from Karachi to Peshawar in the northwest. The hijackers, three of them, claim to represent a previously unheard of organization called Al-Zulfikar, presumably named after the late premier. The plane is taken to Kabul where for almost a week negoti-

ations go on, then flies on to Syria where finally after tense moments the Pakistani regime yields to demands for the release of political prisoners who are flown out of the country.

In the midst of the hijacking and after comes a wave of propaganda from the Zia regime, echoed in the Western press, claiming that the terrorists are part of a "foreign" conspiracy involving the Afghan government (and by implication the Soviets) and that the hijackers are led by Murtaza Bhutto. Young Bhutto is accused of plotting with the infamous international terrorist Carlos "the Jackal."

Amidst this propaganda a massive wave of arrests and political repression is launched in Pakistan. The target is the Bhutto family and the PPP, who are linked by the regime to the incident. Mrs. Bhutto and Benazir are thrown in jail along with hundreds of others.

### The nature of the plot

The Pakistani hijacking is part of a plot, but it is not the one described by the regime and its supporters around the world. It is part of a carefully knit conspiracy, one which my Pakistani friend smelled in the making almost a year ago.

It is a plot against first of all the Bhutto family, a terrible conspiracy to finish the job the junta began when it overthrew the Bhutto government, the only democratically elected government in the history of the country, hauled Bhutto before a military controlled kangaroo court on phony "murder conspiracy" charges, and subsequently executed him in the dead of night April 4, 1979 despite worldwide protests.

Bhutto had become the target of Henry Kissinger after the Pakistani leader went ahead with the purchase of a nuclear reprocessing plant from France, despite Kissinger's protests. In 1976, then Secretary of State Kissinger warned Bhutto that he "would make a horrible example of Pakistan," if he did not give up the reprocessing plant deal. Kissinger remained active in the persecution of Bhutto even after he left his state department post, and is seen by many leading Pakistanis

as the man responsible for Bhutto's execution.

As to General Zia's motives, the military junta was desperate to extinguish the one leader they knew could challenge their rule if he was alive anywhere. When the job was done they felt safe to pursue their policies of "Islamization," the policies of the Muslim Brotherhood which runs General Zia. But they were wrong, for Bhutto became perhaps even more a martyr than he was alive—the popularity of the regime is non-existent.

The regime meanwhile was facing doubts as to its viability even from its backers in London and Washington. Pakistan is seen by the geopoliticians as occupying a key strategic position as the eastern anchor of the Persian Gulf and the "front-line" against "Soviet aggression" in Afghanistan. Rumors abounded in Western capitals that "Zia must go" or perhaps the entire game would be lost. But, it was argued, if we remove Zia, we may lose control entirely.

While these games went on, the plot unfolded, heading toward a "final solution" to Zia's problem—the elimination of the entire Bhutto family, the wiping out of the memory of a national leader, and the guaranteed destruction of any hope to unify the opposition to the regime.

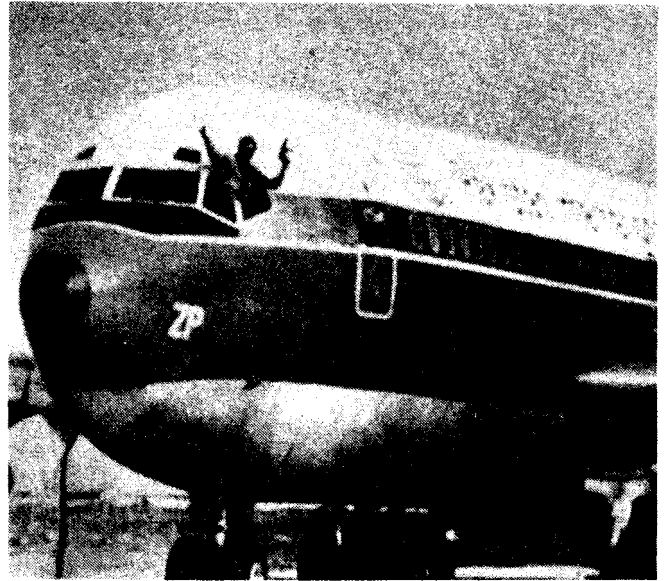
The unfolding of this plot takes place as the Thatcher regime mounted a heavy-handed effort to drag the Reagan administration into backing for the Pakistani regime, part of a general buildup of the military deployment into the Persian Gulf region, and piggy-backed as a policy of support for the "valiant Afghan freedom fighters" against "Soviet invaders." The Zia regime will not allow an escalation of the arms supply to the rebels unless Pakistan is protected by both security guarantees and by large-scale arms supplies. The Reagan administration is actively contemplating these moves now.

The hijacking has all too conveniently helped set the stage for these moves.

Now let us examine who is really involved and the details of their actions. But before we start I should add that I have decided to reveal information which I have gained through privileged access to the movement against the Zia regime, a movement I have been a friend of for many years and whose cause, in the dear memory of Z. A. Bhutto, I have often supported. Not all of what is reported here may be complimentary to my friends, but it is part of the truth that will be told here.

### **The plotters**

The principal elements of the hijacking plot, and what led up to it, were constructed by the intelligence services of Pakistan (particularly military intelligence) and Britain, the latter being the colonial trainers of the former. But the plot could not have gone as far as it did



if it were not laundered through two countries where it gained credibility in the eyes of those who needed to be duped—Libya and Afghanistan. In the case of both of these countries the role played by the Soviet intelligence service, the KGB, is such that their involvement is also evident. But the evidence suggests that these were not acts of Soviet state policy but rather of elements linked to British intelligence "triple agent" KGB General H. "Kim" Philby, whose specialty is particularly in this part of the world.

As I have watched detailed accounts of the alleged conspiracy behind the hijacking appear, mostly in the British press, accounts which usually trace the role of Murtaza Bhutto, a curious feeling has come to me. The trail of evidence is presented, sometimes with a degree of truth, but when that trail is examined closely it becomes clear that the footprint must have been planted in advance with the aim of leading to the door of Murtaza Bhutto and by implication from him to his family inside the country.

### **The planting of the clues**

Murtaza Bhutto, the eldest son of the Pakistani leader, was studying in England at the time of the 1977 coup and subsequent arrest of his father. Until April of 1979, when his father was murdered, Murtaza campaigned unceasingly to try to save his life and his country. He traveled all over the world, including to the United States and to the Middle East, where Bhutto had many friends, to seek support for this cause. Despite letters and telegrams from heads of state from Moscow to Washington, Bhutto was killed on April 4, 1979.

Murtaza was determined to avenge this deed and to serve the cause to which his father had dedicated his

life, the development of his nation. He left London on April 18, 1979 returning after that date for only a few short visits. He first went to the Middle East with the aim of trying to build a political organization of exiles against the Zia regime. Searching for support he arrived in May in Kabul, capital of neighboring Afghanistan, which had the virtue of providing access for propaganda and organizers into Pakistan and a haven for those fleeing Pakistan. It was Murtaza's presence in Kabul that provided the circumstances for the trap to be laid.

It was during this time that two crucial actors in the plot entered the scene. They are Major Iftikhar Ahmed and Brigadier Usman Khalid, both officers in the Pakistan army who ostentatiously defected from the army and became political exiles in London, where they claimed to be supporters of the Bhutto cause. The major arrived in early January 1979 and the brigadier in September of that year. A third officer, a colonel, also defected with them.

All of these men were in fact agents of Pakistani military intelligence planted by the regime. All of them served in the military intelligence branch of the service and were working in London in close collaboration with the British Home Office and British intelligence. Major Iftikhar in fact received curiously good treatment from the Home Office. He was granted the status of political asylum and a U.N. passport for a stateless person—privileges denied far more prominent Pakistani political exiles.

Their job was to set up an operation inside the exile movement, get close in particular to Murtaza Bhutto, who led the exiles, and implicate him and his followers in "terrorism." With great publicity they held press conferences denouncing the regime, established their opposition "credentials," and moved themselves into place. Privately they claimed links to disaffected army officers inside Pakistan who would provide their services in case of an armed struggle.

### **The curious case of Flight 702**

In January of 1980 another actor entered the scene. He was Afzal Bangash, a Pakistani leftist lawyer from the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) bordering Afghanistan, where he had organized the Kisan Mazdoor party. Bangash had been a communist who broke from the party on his own and formed the Kisan Mazdoor in the 1960s, based among tenant farmers from the NWFP. He had been accused among the left of being a Maoist, but in recent years had presented himself as pro-Soviet and a sympathizer of the April 1978 Afghan revolution.

Bangash arrived in London after "fleeing" Pakistan through Afghanistan. In February Murtaza Bhutto visited London, seeking political support for the organ-

ization he was setting up, later to be called the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA). Major Iftikhar, by then having gained a relationship with Murtaza, introduced him to Bangash, whom he met in the major's house in London. After several meetings Murtaza was persuaded to form an alliance with Bangash and his party, and in early March the "Peoples Liberation Movement" was formed.

Bangash's offer was to provide the services of his organization in NWFP, said to be the best-organized leftist group in Pakistan, including the offer to carry out armed activities against the regime.

On March 2, 1980 Major Iftikhar boarded Ariana Afghan Flight 702 from London to Kabul, carrying with him a list of names of Bangash's people to be given to Murtaza's associates there. Curiously the flight detoured to Karachi, Pakistan due to bad weather and for two nights Major Iftikhar, a public defector from the army carrying a British Home Office-approved U.N. passport clearly identifying him, stayed in a Pakistani hotel.

How did the major explain this to his confederates? How did he escape the watchful eye of Pakistani authorities? Later he claimed that he had destroyed the documents with the names of Bangash's people while in Karachi and told authorities there that he "lost" his passport. He arrived in Kabul on March 6 and left on March 13, returning to London.

On April 13 Murtaza Bhutto traveled to Kabul in the company of Bangash. Bangash claimed that he could provide a link to Babrak Karmal, the Afghan president who had been installed by the Soviets when they intervened in December 1979. (Bhutto's patron had been Afghan leader Hafizollah Amin, deposed by Moscow and accused of being a CIA agent). On April 20, 1980 the major again came to Kabul, returning to London on May 18 and to our knowledge not returning since.

In April a series of bombings took place in the NWFP, apparently the work of Bangash's people, perhaps an effort to establish the "credibility" of his credentials. Curiously when the PLA tried to send a group of organizers secretly into Pakistan, where they were to make contact with Bangash's people, they found the Pakistani army waiting for them.

### **The Libyan connection**

Simultaneous with these developments, another part of the trail was being put into place—the Libyan connection. The key to this was the other Pakistani military intelligence officer, Brigadier Khalid. Khalid, working with the major, set up a newspaper based in London called *Inqilab* (Revolution), a paper with only a thousand or so circulation which was in fact a front and

a useful device in later implicating Murtaza Bhutto in alleged terrorist activities.

Khalid was a Khomeini type in his proclaimed ideology—opposed to the PPP and for a Qaddafi style “one-party state” to be formed in Pakistan. Clearly such were not the views of Murtaza Bhutto.

*Inqlab* was financed out of the Libyan embassy in London—hardly a concealed fact as the paper was full of pro-Qaddafi propaganda including advertisements to purchase Qaddafi’s “Green Book” from the Libyan embassy. Khalid set up a Peoples Liberation Movement (PLM) as a political front and with lots of money at his disposal became very visible and active among the large Pakistani community in Britain, and elsewhere in Europe. He claimed also to be a defense adviser to Qaddafi.

Khalid in collaboration with the Libyans—whose links to British intelligence and British-KGB networks are known—set up a training camp in Libya supposedly to train young Pakistanis for guerrilla warfare. The camp was run by his sister, Samina, and his brother-in-law, Col. Usnan, also a Pakistani military officer.

Through a connection inside Pakistan, also run by Pakistani military intelligence, leftist and pro-PPP students were recruited and provided visas and tickets to Libya. According to an eyewitness account the students were told that this was an operation of the PPP and that everything was being done “on the orders of Begum Bhutto.” They were told “you will be met in Tripoli.” In Tripoli, they were met by Khalid, the sister, and Col. Usnan and taken to the camp where they were trained to blow up bridges, hijack planes, etc. Some 30 students were brought in on this basis.

In the meantime the *Inqlab* operation was being run to drive a wedge between Murtaza Bhutto and regular circles of the overseas PPP as well as to move to set up the “incriminating evidence.” The crucial piece of “evidence” was placed in the Sept. 27, 1980 issue of *Inqlab*. Under the headline “Bhutto’s Son Forms a Guerrilla Army,” the paper claimed that Murtaza Bhutto was the head of the PLA which was carrying out armed activities against the army. Also in that issue of *Inqlab* was a purported interview with Murtaza claiming credit for alleged guerrilla actions carried out in Pakistan.

The importance of the *Inqlab* operation has only recently become apparent. In January of this year it was announced that a closed military tribunal was being formed in Peshawar to try 24 people including Murtaza Bhutto (12 of them were not in the country) for “waging war against the country” and committing acts of “sabotage” and “subversion.” The penalty is death and could also mean the confiscation of all the Bhutto property in the country.

The key to the evidence being presented in the tribunal and now being reproduced throughout the

Pakistani government controlled media is none other than that Sept. 27 issue of *Inqlab*. The evidence thus was manufactured by the same people who now are using it to the hilt—the Pakistani military junta.

### **The final acts**

The convening of the tribunal, whose decisions could be announced any day, helped set the stage for the final acts.

We must first pick up the trail of Afzal Bangash, the Northwest Frontier Province leftist. According to informed sources Bangash left Kabul in the late fall, sometime around October-November of 1980 and by December was in London again where he has since stayed. According to our source Bangash had been publishing a paper which was being smuggled into the NWFP which took a left, militant and anti-PPP line. This activity at some point crossed the boundary of Soviet toleration (assuming there was some Philby-KGB control previous to this, which is likely), and the Soviet and Afghan authorities moved in and closed down his operation. This may reflect moves by the Brezhnev elements who would not favor the destabilizing politics Bangash was pushing.

The beginning of this year found Bangash, Brigadier Khalid and Major Ahmed all in London, and, our sources report, all working together in something called the Organization of Overseas Exiles.

The hijacking itself is almost an anticlimax. Its major purpose has been to surface all the parts of this trail of footprints at the door of Murtaza Bhutto and provide the pretext for the massive political crackdown in Pakistan. One major source for much of the stories in the British press is none other than Maj. Iftikhar Ahmed, who was identified in the March 19 *Guardian* as the London end of the PLA. Major Iftikhar is also employed by Credit Commercial Insurance Company in London, a subsidiary of the Bank Commercial and Credit International (BCCI).

This bank is owned by a Agha Hasan Abidi, the key financier of the destabilization operation against Bhutto. A strange employer indeed for the intrepid major!

### **The hijackers**

The case of the hijackers themselves is less conclusive but fits the pattern. The leader of the hijackers is Salamullah Tippu Khan, described as a student at Karachi University wanted for the bombing murder of a Muslim Brotherhood youth leader during the campus disturbances in February. Tippu is a member of the Pathan ethnic group from the NWFP, as is one of the other hijackers, suggesting in fact that they may have come out of Bangash’s network.

One story which appeared in the Indian press originating from the United News of India press service,

claimed that he was a member of the Pakistani Secret Service Group who was trained at a special camp in Pakistani-occupied Kashmir by Chinese instructors. The third hijacker is from Azad, the Pakistani-held portion of Kashmir.

But it is other features of the job which give it away. According to even the Pakistani accounts, it is the hijackers who identified their "leader" as Murtaza Bhutto. Despite their claims that Murtaza Bhutto met them at the Kabul airport, Bhutto, in a message reported in the *Guardian*, explicitly denied any foreknowledge of the hijacking.

Indeed, aside from the footprints placed at Murtaza's door, there is no evidence at all, even of the kind the regime is manufacturing, to link Mrs. Bhutto and Benazir to these activities outside the country or to the hijacking.

This writer can reveal that well before these events, early in 1980, Benazir Bhutto sent a message to London in which she explicitly warned that the army "defectors" were "fifth-columnists" who were not to be trusted. She sent instructions to regard all army "defectors" as plants of the regime. Apparently these messages never reached Murtaza. Further, to our intimate knowledge, there was absolutely no contact for an extended period of time between Murtaza and members of the family inside the country. We also know that it was the wish of Mrs. Begum Bhutto that the use of Kabul as a base of operations cease precisely for fear that the regime would use that fact to its own ends.

### The plot against the Bhuttos

The plot against the Bhuttos is not over yet. Pakistani circles seriously fear that the regime is now set to eliminate the entire Bhutto family. On March 18 General Zia proclaimed that he would take "severe action" against the hijackers and those responsible. Asked how he would do that with the hijackers now in Syria, the general replied: "You just keep quiet and see the result. If they are not in the country, it doesn't mean that they will escape Allah Almighty."

Indeed, according to well-informed sources in London four teams of Pakistani hitmen, four men in each and trained as commandos, have now been dispatched. Their targets are the two sons of Bhutto, Murtaza and his younger brother Shahnawaz. Mrs. Bhutto and Benazir are under arrest in an increasingly repressive situation in which the regime is trying to isolate them from the rest of the political opposition.

Will General Zia and his backers in London and Washington succeed in this plot? That cannot be foretold. But, the Pakistan Peoples Party and the Bhutto tradition remain the best hope for stability and development in Pakistan and the region. Any attempt to remove that hope is a formula for disaster.

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## Israel

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# Shimon Peres makes overture to Arabs

by Mark Burdman

The intensifying political fight in Israel leading up to that country's June 30 national elections has taken an important turn with the March 25 unveiling by Labour Party prime minister candidate Shimon Peres of a major new initiative toward Israel's Arab neighbors and, indirectly, toward resolution of Israel's economic problems.

Although Peres's initiative, detailed in an interview with the Jerusalem Domestic Television Service, has gone almost completely unreported in the Western news media, it is potentially the most significant policy formulation made by an Israeli statesman since at least the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war.

In the March 25 interview, Peres offered to several of Israel's Arab neighbors an arrangement in which "promoting economic cooperation" would be linked to "joint action against terrorism and fanatic movements."

While not all the details of this conception were made public in the interview itself, Peres indicated that a key salient feature of his plan was Israeli cooperation with France and other European nations in opening up lines of communication with the Arab states—a departure from the wall-to-wall hostility toward France that has tended to operate in the Israeli political spectrum.

Peres also asserted that his plan signaled the opening of a "new chapter" in Israel's history, as Israel makes efforts to become a working partner in the development of the Middle East. This, again, is a new departure, this time away from the dominant geopolitical notion of Israel serving as a NATO-connected proxy power.

Finally, Peres insisted that Israel must "take the initiative" in launching a new political arrangement in the Middle East. This quality of voluntarism challenges the "victim mentality"-induced passivity that has characterized mainstream thinking in Israel for much of its history. In the past, Israeli leaders have characteristically used the excuse of Arab hostility to avoid extending economic cooperation-linked peace offers to its Arab neighbors.

According to an assessment presented to *EIR* by an associate of Peres, the March 25 offer is "not only meant for Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia [the countries named explicitly by Peres in the interview], but also to Iraq and other countries as well, as the circumstances become appropriate."