

What next for Pakistan?

As the Afghan crisis becomes critical, the unsolved murder of a President and fragmented political parties cast uncertain shadows. By Susan Maitra and Ramtanu Maitra.

According to first-hand reports from Pakistan, a kind of anxious calm prevails in the aftermath of the Aug. 17 airplane explosion in Bahawalpur, Punjab, that took the life of President Zia ul-Haq as well as a number of his top army officers and the American ambassador. Whether this eerie calm is the prelude to a renewed national resolve, or the eye of new and terrible storms, will become clearer in the weeks and months ahead.

Senate chairman Ghulam Ishaq Khan, a respected senior bureaucrat, former minister and long-time political associate of General Zia, assumed the presidency as per the 1973 Constitution, and a meeting of the federal cabinet declared a National Emergency following the disaster. An "Emergency Council" was established under the new Chief of Army Staff Aslam Baig, and included the three service chiefs and the acting chief ministers of Baluchistan, the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and Punjab, two former generals and a businessman who were among General Zia's closest collaborators, to advise the government.

Although several top generals were also killed on Aug. 17, from all indications, the informal "military council" with which Zia ul-Haq took the decisions that guided Pakistan over the last 11 years—including such figures as Inter-Services Intelligence Chief Gen. Gul Hamid, Sind Governor Gen. Rahimuddin Khan (ret.), Gen. K. M. Arif (ret.), and Gen. Faiz Ali Chisti (ret.)—continues to oversee developments from behind the scenes.

Overshadowing everything, however, is the enormous vacuum left by Gen. Zia ul-Haq, the man who personally controlled the power combinations of the past decade and made them work to govern the country and steer it through a series of severe foreign policy challenges that are only now reaching a critical point.

At the moment, two issues are clanging about in that vacuum. First, who was responsible for the Aug. 17 disaster? Second, what will be the outcome of the Nov. 16 elections President Ishaq Khan has indicated will be held on a party

basis? Rattling around in the background, not as yet widely addressed, is the crucial issue of Afghanistan, the issue at the heart of the Aug. 17 tragedy. Soviet determination to hold onto Kabul, as an essential staging ground for future operations against Pakistan, the subcontinent and the Gulf—was directly challenged by Zia's commitment to create the conditions for a return of the 3 million refugees now in Pakistan.

A sensitive investigation

According to some reports, the investigation into the Aug. 17 explosion has narrowed down to the Afghan secret service organization, Khad, and its mentor, the Soviet KGB. Whether even conclusive proof of the KGB-Khad authorship of the crime will ever be made public is anyone's guess. The U.S. government's "new détente" euphoria may well rule out any such unpleasant intrusions. The fact that a key, embattled ally was assassinated under the nose of his solicitous friends in Washington already bespeaks the current government's ability to protect its allies.

Earlier, Pakistan government sources had leaked a "short list" of suspects that also included Shia fundamentalists and Al Zulfikar, the terrorist outfit founded by Murtaza Ali Bhutto, the brother of Pakistani People's Party founder Benazir Bhutto. An internal military conspiracy was notably absent from the official list, but it is evident that General Zia was compromised from within—the enemy penetrated Pakistan's innermost defenses, as President Ishaq Khan put it, underscoring the gravity for the nation.

In reality, any of several combinations of the various suspects is likely, and in almost every case the trail still leads back to Khad-KGB. Al Zulfikar, for instance, is nothing but the name of a KGB-Khad capability. Set up by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's son in 1979 to avenge the death that year of his father at the hands of General Zia's martial law regime, Al Zulfikar was for several years following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan safehoused in Kabul, with shuttles back and forth to Libya. Manipulating the rage of a young man whose

politician father was executed is “duck soup” for an intelligence agency. But in case Murtaza ever entertained any doubts about his place, his younger brother was “suicided” in 1986. Murtaza issued a disclaimer to the charge of involvement in the Zia murder from his present “base” in Syria last week, after one of his cronies had claimed credit by phone.

On Aug. 27, the London *Sunday Times* reported from Karachi that the Pakistan government was seeking extradition of five Pakistanis living in England, several of whom have been associated with Al Zulfiqar. One, a Maj. Mohamed Afzaal, was involved in a coup attempt against the Zia regime in 1984 and subsequently fled to the United Kingdom.

Further, on Aug. 18, the day after the plane explosion, coordinated rocket attacks were launched on three petroleum refineries in the port city of Karachi. Pakistani intelligence officials pointed to the hand of Al Zulfiqar, and a Crime Investigation Agency official disclosed that the prime suspect was one Mohammad Rafiq Memon, who had earlier been tried and convicted of terrorist activity. Memon, who is still at large, was said to have organized the attack with the help of certain local members of the PPP and its student wing, the Pakistan Student Federation (PSF).

Al Zulfiqar figures in several other attempts on General Zia’s life, apart from the spectacular 1981 airline hijacking to force the release of a group of PPP members from jail. In 1982, according to Pakistani officials, a missile was fired at General Zia’s plane over Rawalpindi, adjacent to the capital of Islamabad. The missile missed its target, but Al Zulfiqar was blamed and two men jailed for 25 years by a military court in 1985. In 1983, two rockets were found at the home of a popular sportsman in Lahore whom authorities linked to Al Zulfiqar.

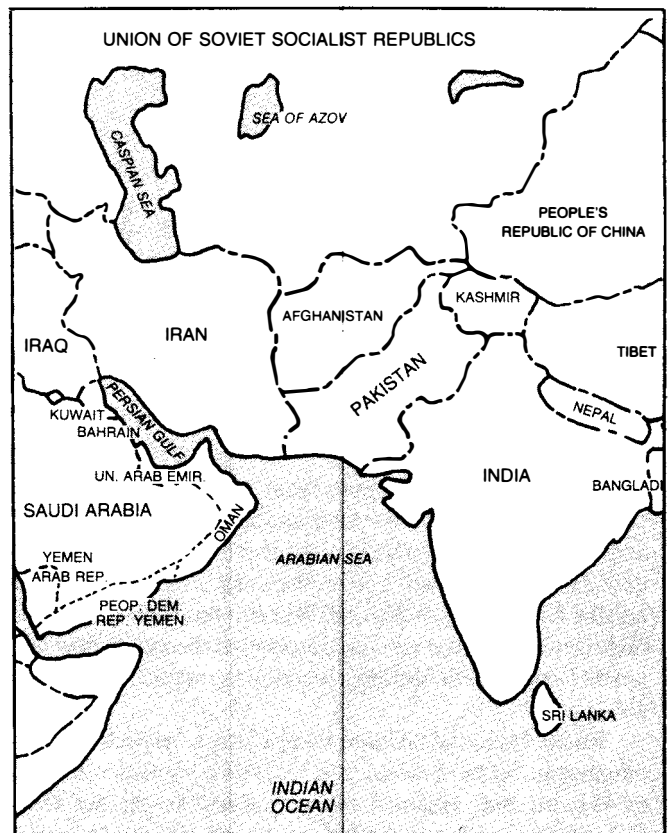
The Shia factor

Revenge is the motive of another group whose authors could certainly have been willing vehicles for the assassination plot against Zia—the Shias of Pakistan. The Aug. 5 assassination of the young Shia leader Allama Syed Arif Hussain al-Hussaini in Peshawar, a stronghold of, among other things, the Khad, gave a powerful boost to Shia passions, and to hostilities between the majority Sunnis and increasingly vocal minority of Shias in Pakistan. Just three months earlier, in May, several hundred Shias were killed in an organized attack by Sunnis in Gilgit, in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. This incident, according to some, figured significantly in President Zia’s May 29 decision to sack then-Premier Mohammad Khan Junejo and his cabinet.

It is the Shias who have organized the largest and most menacing demonstrations ever held against the Zia regime. In 1980, they marched 1 million strong on Islamabad to protest Zia’s imposition of *zakat* (religious tax) and his interpretation of the Shariat, early steps in the Islamicization campaign from which Zia promptly backed away at the time.

Al-Hussaini was a well-known scholar who had studied in Qom, the center of Iran’s theocratic power, under Ayatol-

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lah Khomeini. He had recently upgraded the Shia religious-social organization in Pakistan into a full-fledged party, the Tehrik-i-Nifaz-e-Fiqah Jafriya (TNFJ). His murder touched off large demonstrations marked by tirades against Zia and the United States. Although at the funeral—to which the Ayatollah himself sent a personal delegation—banners accusing Zia, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. of the murder were unfurled, Iranian Majlis speaker Rafsanjani’s terse message on the occasion expressed “complete faith” that President Zia would bring the assassin to justice.

There is also a Shia factor within the Pakistani military that is significant enough to have caused problems with Saudi Arabia. When Iranian pilgrims went on a rampage during last year’s Hajj in Mecca, Pakistani soldiers stationed there refused to confront them, either because they were Shias or because as Pakistanis, the soldiers did not want to offend their neighbor Iran. The incident prompted the Saudis to re-evaluate their employment of Pakistani guards.

Other vulnerabilities

Within the armed forces, the Shia factor is not the only point of vulnerability, as a string of plots against Zia’s life

since 1980 indicates. In 1980, a military court convicted Army Maj. Gen. Tajammul Hussain and his son of plotting to overthrow General Zia, and in 1985, a military court sentenced seven officers for conspiring to kidnap him and seize power. An attempt on General Zia, in which an aide died, was also recorded in 1980 in Baluchistan. According to the Pakistani daily *Nawa-e-Waqt*, two other attempts on Zia's life were not reported at the time because of martial law restrictions on the media.

Zia was promoted to the position of Chief of Army Staff by then-Premier Z.A. Bhutto, superseding 10 generals of higher rank. Zia continued the tradition of handpicking and promoting favorites in defiance of seniority.

The corrosive effects of this practice have been compounded under the circumstances by the fact that military support for the Mujahideen has meant "big business" for many officers whom the flow of arms has brought into contact with the international arms and drug-smuggling mafias. It would not be difficult for the KGB to find one or two high-level generals to bribe or blackmail.

When Zia took power in the early morning of July 5, 1977, deposing Z.A. Bhutto and imposing an eight-year long martial law, he did so in the midst of escalating political and social chaos, the direct result of Bhutto's attempt to impose the outcome of what was widely seen to have been a thoroughly rigged national election. When the great populist, Bhutto, asked for military assistance against his opponents some brigadiers applied for leave. This is a political problem, he was told, and must be resolved politically. Bhutto had run out of tricks.

The present predicament

In 1977, Zia took charge of a nation which was in complete chaos. Within two short years, Pakistan was confronted with the menacing specter of violent upheavals in two of its neighbors. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan not only brought the Red Army to Pakistan's doorstep, it also pushed 3 million Afghan refugees into the poverty-ridden country. The overthrow of the Shah and the rise of the messianic Shia theocracy in Iran posed an immediate danger to the Sunni-majority Pakistan.

It is a tribute to Zia that Pakistan neither submitted to external pressures, nor got involved in a war with any nation, nor crumbled under the strain. On the contrary, Pakistan has been the key to pushing the Red Army back, and has also succeeded in developing friendly relations with Iran without causing any problem with either the United States or Saudi Arabia. Pakistan's independent and substantial relationship with China is also to Zia's credit.

Zia's internal policies met with less success. The Pakistan Zia has left behind is almost as divided as when he took over. The failure to begin a viable political process in the country, has accentuated ethnic, religious, and tribal forces with demonstrated explosive potential. Zia's vision of using his own brand of Islam as the glue that would hold the warring fac-

tions together has proved illusory.

Today, three provinces—Sind, Baluchistan, and the Northwest Frontier Province—remain fundamentally unstable. Secessionist movements in each of these provinces are alive and well. Fanned for years by discrimination and worse at the hands of the Punjabi-dominated central government, they are now fueled by the presence of large contingents of Afghan refugees.

Unlike Iran, which strictly confined the refugees and sent them to fight the Jihad against Iraq, Zia permitted the Afghans free movement around the country and allowed them to acquire land and other properties by legal as well as illegal means. Those who have not become rich compete with other poor Pakistanis for scarce unemployment opportunities. The Afghans have also created a hospitable environment for Khad agents.

The election prospect

In his address to the nation Aug. 17, President Ishaq Khan vowed that free and fair elections for the national assembly and state legislatures would be held as scheduled on Nov. 16. Zia's plan to conduct the poll on a non-party basis, which would have required a special presidential order countermanding certain provisions of the constitution, has apparently been abandoned.

In any event, the parties and politicians are already maneuvering for position, and the demand to replace the interim cabinet, which was handpicked by Zia and consists mostly of Pakistan Muslim League (PML) members, with a strictly nonpartisan caretaker group, will soon test the resilience of the present leadership.

The international press is projecting Mrs. Benazir Bhutto Zardari as the next prime minister of a "truly democratic" Pakistan. The PPP is the largest party in Pakistan. In Bhutto's days, hooligans, leftists, and even secessionist elements found their home in the PPP, and it's no surprise that the terrorist Al Zulfikar continues to draw its support from the PPP base.

Since the mid-1970s, a number of PPP leaders have left the party, including Mumtaz Bhutto, Ghulam Mustafa Khar, Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi, and Abdul Hafez Pirzada. The last, a leading light in Bhutto's inner circle, went on to form the secessionist-leaning Sind-Baluch-Pakhtoon Front! The influx of \$80 billion in black and white revenue from the Gulf countries over the past decade has considerably transformed the party's traditional "Roti, Kapra aur Makan" ("Bread, Clothing, and a Home") base.

Moreover, Benazir Bhutto's nearly decade-long one-point program—Down with Zia—has suddenly become meaningless. This was underscored in a recent incident in Lahore, when PPP activists who rose to protest that "Zia was a tyrant" at a memorial meeting were physically slapped down. No longer the avenging angel, Benazir is now one among equals in an electoral fight.

Though in an interview Benazir insisted the party could make it alone in the election, she has told interviewers that

in the interest of unity and reconciliation in the country, the PPP will fight the elections as part of the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD), and will seek allies beyond the front. The MRD, for its part, is a grab-bag of clan leaders, sects, and sectlets of all shades and stripes.

One of the most significant of the MRD parties is Wali Khan's tribal-based Awami National Party. Wali Khan personally led the charge that brought down Bhutto in 1977, and ultimately led to Bhutto's death. His second (or perhaps first) home is in Kabul, where he hobnobs with PDPA officials, including PKPA chief Najibullah himself, who during a sojourn in Peshawar some years ago was an active member of Wali Khan's party.

Then there is the grandly named Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) of Baluch tribal chieftain Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo, who, as also cited by foreign media, cannot claim a political base beyond his own family clan.

Also in the MRD is the Pakistan Democratic Party, a centrist grouping led by Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan, another veteran of the get-Bhutto 1977 drive.

Then there is the Jamiat ul Ulama-e-Islami (JUI), an Islamic party led by Maulana Fazlur Rehman; the Pakistan Muslim League (Malik Qasim faction); the Quami Mahaz Azadi, a centrist grouping led by a former PPP leader Mairaj Mohammad Khan; the Mazdoor Kisan Party, a leftist peasant grouping led by Fatehyab Ali Khan; and the Pakistan Khaksar Tehrik, another leftist party led by Mulavi Ashraf Khan.

Aside from the disparateness of the grouping, here is what it could deliver: The PPP has virtually nothing in Baluchistan and the NWFP, though there have been recent reports that it is gaining ground there. (In 1971, the PPP won 0 out of 7 and 1 out of 25 in the two provinces respectively; and in the 1977 poll, heavily rigged by Bhutto, the party got all 7 and 8 of 26). The ANP and PNA can aid in these areas, although at the price of heavy concessions to tribal autonomy. The burden for delivering votes in Punjab and Sind will fall on the PPP alone.

The stakes are high

The MRD will be challenged by the establishment party, the Pakistan Muslim League, which bears the mantle of the independence fight, its leader Mohammad Ali Jinnah and his first Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan. The PML is now deeply divided.

Following the sacking of Mohammad Khan Junejo, Zia had entrusted his three most trusted colleagues—Mian Nawaz Sharif, Gen. Fazle Haq (ret.) and Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali—into political service as acting chief ministers of Punjab, NWFP, and Baluchistan. The plan was to appoint one of the three as Junejo's replacement—although none of the three has a political base.

In the ensuing crisis, Pir Pagaro, the Sufi mystic with reputed army connections who is the real leader of the PML, intervened with Zia to negotiate a compromise candidate for

the party—former NWFP governor Fida Mohammad Khan. But the convention held in early August ended in stalemate.

After Aug. 17, Junejo attempted to steal the thunder with a "unity bid," but this ploy was rejected. Now both Junejo and the three chief ministers have held their own PML conventions and elected their own leaders.

Should Junejo decide to irrevocably split the PML, he could do serious damage. As a grass roots political leader, he commands a much larger following than the three chief ministers. Hamid Nasir Chattha, speaker of the dissolved national assembly who has pledged support to Junejo, reported that only 50 of the 170 PML assembly members had attended the chief ministers' convention.

Outside of the two major party groupings, there are several other parties that can command a few seats, and whose leaders cut a high profile on the national scene. Both the Tehrik-i-Istaqlal, led by retired Air Marshal Ashgar Khan, and the National Peoples Party, led by former PPP leader Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi, are expected to win a few seats in Punjab and Sind. Ashgar Khan and Jatoi have met with both the three chief ministers and some of the MRD parties, but it remains to be seen what sort of electoral arrangements might emerge. Two other Islamic parties—the Jamaat-e-Islam and the Jamiat ul Ulema-e-Pakistan—are expected to secure some seats in the two majority provinces.

The stakes in these elections are very high. The Afghanistan situation has entered a critical stage, and it is imperative for Pakistan's survival that it reassert a firm policy that ensures the conditions for a safe return of the refugees. So far, Benazir Bhutto has refused to say anything substantive on the matter. Beyond the promise to honor the Geneva accords, she sought refuge in a lack of knowledge of secret clauses, in a recent interview. Other members of her MRD coalition are outspoken advocates of recognizing the Kabul regime—a move which would not only prevent the refugees absolutely from returning but would most likely trigger a revolt among the Pakistan-based Mujahideen.

Mr. Junejo, who appears intent on staking his own claim to power, also advertises his wish to "honor the Geneva accords." Only the small but vocal Jamaat-e-Islami has stated unequivocally that Pakistan's support for the Mujahideen must remain unwavering. Jamaat head Qazi Hussain Ahmed announced that his party will not accept any attempt to change Zia's Afghan policy.

Besides a concretized Afghan policy, the politicians will have to address what measures can be taken to stop the growing ethnic division and separatist demands raised in Sind and Baluchistan, areas where the Soviets have known separatist assets. There are also pressing economic issues such as land reform, growing foreign debt, and investment mobilization for the Seventh Five Year Plan. In the absence of a responsible political leadership emerging to address these issues positively, the military will have no choice but to intervene once again.