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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

15 February 1985

Pakistan: Implications of Elections

Summary

We believe President Zia will score a political victory in the non-party national and provincial elections scheduled for late February. A respectable voter turnout should occur and opposition efforts to use the campaign to ignite anti-Zia violence seem unlikely to bear fruit. [Redacted]

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The political coloration of the new assemblies on national issues will be hard to determine because most candidates are running for the first time, campaigning on local issues and drawing upon local ties. On balance, however, we expect politicians from the two major parties that have accepted Zia's election formula to restrain the assemblies from pursuing confrontation, at least initially. [Redacted]

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Efforts by the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy to disrupt the elections by boycott and intimidation have foundered. We believe the opposition is likely to revive over time, however, particularly if Zia tries to force through major constitutional changes. Ultimately, the new assemblies are almost certain to be more independent than Zia would like. [Redacted]

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This memorandum was prepared by [Redacted] the Pakistan/Afghanistan/Bangladesh Branch, South Asia Division, Officer of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. Information as of 14 February 1985 was used in its preparation. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to Chief, South Asia Division [Redacted]

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Bouyed by the 19 December referendum confirming him in office through 1990, President Zia has called for elections on 25 February to select the first national assembly since he seized power in July 1977. Provincial assemblies will be elected three days later. They will in turn select delegates to the Federal Senate in March. Zia has not outlined the authority of the assemblies nor the relationship between the President and the Prime Minister. In our view, these questions will dominate Pakistani politics during 1985. [Redacted]

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The government is tightly controlling the election campaign. Although most restrictions on candidacy have been lifted, party affiliation is still prohibited and candidates convicted of election fraud in 1977, most of them members of the late Prime Minister Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP)--the leading opposition party--are barred. Rallies and processions are also prohibited and the press is forbidden to publish statements by "individuals not participating" in the election. The latter measure is aimed at the leaders of the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy, a center left coalition dominated by the PPP. [Redacted]

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On 19 January the MRD called upon the public to boycott the elections. MRD leaders cited these restrictions and declared that elections held under them would violate Pakistan's constitution, suspended by Zia in 1977. [Redacted]

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Zia's Goals

In our judgment, Zia particularly wants to use the elections to destroy the existing party structure which he believes is the strongest threat to his continuation in power. At a minimum, we believe Zia wants to end the influence of the PPP whose leaders, particularly Bhutto's exiled daughter Benazir, might avenge Bhutto if returned to power. [Redacted]

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We believe Zia's criticism of the opposition has been effective. He has declared that political parties are a legacy of colonial rule, contrary to the spirit of Islam and detrimental to national unity and security. The poor record of Pakistan's civilian governments during the 1950s and 1970s as well as ongoing indecision and divisions within the opposition have helped him make his case. [Redacted]

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By holding elections, Zia is also responding to concerns of the Army, the core of his strength. [Redacted]

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[redacted] US Embassy reporting indicates the generals long have worried that direct military rule has harmed the Army by diverting manpower and resources. They also fear damage to the Army's public image from corruption charges and identification with unpopular police measures taken during the martial law administration.

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[redacted]

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The generals have insisted that the transition to civilian rule lead to a stable political structure that will protect military interests. They have a shared interest with Zia in not risking the return to power of a potentially vindictive government.

[redacted]

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Zia has sought to satisfy the military's concerns by retaining the presidency, thus preserving a direct military link to the government. He has also declared that before he turns power over to a civilian government, he will amend the constitution to reduce the power of the Prime Minister and the National Assembly and to create a National Security Council. US diplomats speculate that the NSC will give the Army a constitutional right to monitor the actions of the assembly and would have sole power to declare martial law.

[redacted]

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We believe the military's concerns about the dangers represented by the election of some former politicians are overstated. Few of the more worrisome opposition leaders who could have benefited from the relaxed guidelines filed for candidacy.

[redacted]

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Zia seeks also to legitimize his rule--putting to rest opposition charges that his control rests solely on the bayonet--and to improve his international image. The recent presidential referendum began the legitimization process but was marred by charges, credible in our judgment, that Zia had heavily inflated the turnout to dispel MRD charges that its boycott succeeded. Electing and installing national and provincial assemblies would permit Zia to claim with some plausibility that he has restored democratic institutions and give the people a real role in governing.

[redacted]

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Breaking the Boycott

Diplomatic reporting suggests that the election boycott called for by the MRD is failing nationally. Even in Sind Province, a stronghold of anti-Zia sentiment, enough candidates are running to allow the government to claim that the elections are credible. An average of five candidates is running for each national assembly seat and seven for each provincial seat.

[redacted]

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One former cabinet minister who is following the elections closely recently told US diplomats that in his view, the people of Pakistan are

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"indifferent to the elections, indifferent to the regime, indifferent to the MRD." We believe this is an accurate assessment. Public acceptance of previous non-party local elections and the referendum plus the absence of reported incidents suggests few Pakistanis are willing to resort to violence to unseat Zia. [redacted]

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Few prominent opposition politicians are participating. US diplomatic estimates are that at least 75 per cent of the candidates have never run for public office. Some opposition politicians tell US diplomats that, since Zia will permit the new legislatures no real authority, they do not want to participate in a venture they claim will be discredited. The US Embassy has speculated, however, that many lack the strength to win office without party backing and do not want to risk the humiliation of defeat. [redacted]

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Despite their political inexperience, many candidates are related to or retainers of old line politicians. US diplomats note that the large landholders who dominate traditional caste and family groups are well represented in the national and provincial races as are members of Zia's appointed Federal Advisory Council and the municipal councils. [redacted]

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Zia's support comes primarily, in our assessment, from conservatives, small merchants and businessmen, who mostly gravitate to the religious parties and the various factions of the old Pakistan Muslim League that governed Pakistan during its first decade of independence. All have benefitted from increased stability and a healthy economy under Zia. [redacted]

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Zia's success in splitting the the opposition, in our view, ended the only realistic prospect for thwarting the elections. The Jama'at-i-Islami, Pakistan's strongest religious party and a major political force in the cities, and the largest faction of the Pakistan Muslim League agreed to play by Zia's rules. Both are gambling that Zia will give their delegates enough power to justify joining their fortunes to his. Pakistan's two other major religious parties rejected the non-party format but are not making a serious effort to dissuade their members from participating, US Embassy reporting suggests. [redacted]

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In the absence of strong party lines, the legislative races have stressed personalities over issues, according to US diplomatic reporting. Candidates are drawing upon family, caste, and party ties (even if left unstated), for support. They have avoided such controversial issues as Afghanistan, the refugee problem and provincial-federal relations and are concentrating on local issues like sanitation, education and property rights. [redacted]

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MRD Woes

Zia [redacted]

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[redacted] turned the full weight of the government against them after the Movement rejected his format. Almost all national and provincial leaders of the MRD have been arrested. [redacted]

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The few MRD leaders not detained tell US diplomats that the arrests and government press restrictions have severely curtailed their efforts to publicize the boycott, forcing them to rely largely on hand bills and word of mouth. [REDACTED]

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The MRD strategy has worked best in Sind Province where the PPP remains the dominant political force and anti-Punjabi sentiment adds an extra dimension to opposition against Zia, and in Baluchistan. The Consulate General in Karachi reports that 70 percent of the delegates from previously elected assemblies in Sind—most PPP members—are boycotting. Very few PPP figures of note are participating directly or indirectly. In Baluchistan, the MRD boycott has meant that almost all of the delegates to the 1970 and 1977 National Assemblies have stayed out, benefitting local tribal leaders. [REDACTED]

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Outlook--Zia in Control

We expect Zia to have little trouble maintaining political control in the near term. Opposition disarray is likely to continue. Some opposition leaders have admitted to US diplomats that Zia, by demonstrating his ability to conduct local, provincial, and national elections may have created a new political framework that could ultimately render them irrelevant. [REDACTED]

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On balance, we expect politicians from the two major parties that have accepted Zia's election formula to restrain the National Assembly from pursuing confrontation, at least initially, but we are less confident that the elections will give Zia the key to a stable governing consensus over time. Old political alliances under new names are likely to be reborn in the the new assembly and new alliances may evolve. At the national and provincial level, the assemblies are especially likely to strongly resist any serious effort by Zia to drastically amend the constitution to limit their powers. [REDACTED]

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Pakistan's chronic regional, ethnic and religious divisions plus the allocation of federal development funds will provide many opportunities for rancour in the new assemblies. Already strained relations between ethnic Sindhis and Islamabad are likely to be exacerbated if the delegates elected in the province prove as unrepresentative of local interests as preliminary reports indicate. In the absence of parties cutting across tribal lines and

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attempting to attract a national following, provincial assemblies in Baluchistan and the North West Frontier will be heavily influenced by tribal leaders that have a history of being independent minded and could demand more provincial autonomy. Moreover, tensions would be increased if the economy deteriorates as the worker remittance boom fades. [REDACTED]

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A truculent national assembly would give the generals pause, but we do not believe they would act against Zia unless they determined that he had lost control of the National Assembly. They would be most concerned if Assembly members attacked fundamental army interests such as the National Security Council or sought to investigate military activities during the martial law period. [REDACTED]

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Implications for the United States

The elections should have little immediate impact on the US-Pakistani relationship. We would anticipate a fundamental foreign policy shift only in the unlikely event Zia is forced from office and a Pakistan People's Party or PPP-dominated MRD government emerges in control. Most MRD/PPP leaders want direct talks with the Kabul regime and repatriation of the Afghan refugees. We think there is at least an even probability that they might quickly try to implement such a policy if they gained power. [REDACTED]

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