



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

18 September 1981

Prime Minister

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Dear Michael,

I enclose copies of two despatches from HM Ambassador in Islamabad which the Prime Minister may wish to see before she arrives in Pakistan on 8 October. They deal respectively with the viability of Pakistan as a state and the stability of the Zia regime.

We suggest that the despatches be regarded as background reading at this stage. We propose to use them as the basis for a careful study of the prospects of the current regime in Pakistan and of the implications for British policy. This will take a little time but the despatches are clearly of considerable topical interest in the context of the Prime Minister's visit and we thought you would wish to have them without waiting for the conclusions of our study.

A brief has of course already been prepared for the Prime Minister's use on the internal situation in Pakistan. We see no need to change it.

I am copying this letter and its enclosures to David Wright in the Cabinet Office.

Yours ever,

(F N Richardson)
Private Secretary

Francis Richardson

M O'D B Alexander Esq
10 Downing St



014/2

SUMMARY

HOW VIABLE IS PAKISTAN?

1. Pakistan's importance to Britain and the West arises from its position next door to Afghanistan and the consequences of the Russian invasion of that country (paras 1 and 2). What are Pakistan's chances of survival?
2. Pakistan began life as a geographical anomaly. The separation of Bangladesh may have been no bad thing. Pakistan has defensible borders, and its ethnic and regional differences, though deep, do not seem stronger than the sense of nationhood, incomplete though it may be (paras 3 to 6). The Baluchistan problem is manageable (para 7). Even the influx of Afghan refugees has a local rather than national impact (para 8).
3. External threats to Pakistan have played a major role in the unifying process (para 9). Islam was its raison d'être and remains the most powerful single internal force for stability. But Islam in Pakistan is moderated by various historical and cultural factors, and the mullahs are not the force they are, e.g. in Iran. The Shias occasionally display their differences, but neither they nor the far smaller other religious minorities constitute any real threat to national integrity (para 10).
4. The economy is basically agricultural. Pakistan can, short of major disaster, feed itself. Poverty of the Indian type is absent. Lack of minerals and oil mean much development aid and long-term indebtedness. Remittances continue for the time being from Pakistanis overseas, but inflation is rising, and there are the problems common to all Third World countries (paras 11 to 13).
5. On balance, Pakistan is here to stay (para 14).

CONFIDENTIAL



13 September 1981

014/2

The Rt Hon
The Lord Carrington KCMG MC

My Lord

HOW VIABLE IS PAKISTAN?

1. Until December 1979 Pakistan was probably not of major importance to British interests or to Western strategy. It occupied a strategic position near the entrance to the Persian Gulf and was part of the containing front against a southward spread of Russian and Communist power that the West sought to build up through CENTO and SEATO. But countries like Iran and Turkey were more important components of this front and were in more important strategic positions. It was an artificial creation, inherently unstable with its two widely separated wings, and subject to what looked like chronic internal unrest. Much of its energy and resources were consumed in implacable opposition to India which had resulted in three wars between the two countries.

2. The Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the near simultaneous collapse of Iran altered the picture considerably. The southern frontier of the free world against Russian expansion towards the Gulf began to look very vulnerable indeed and Pakistan was suddenly projected into the front line of the free world. The frontiers of the Russian empire had advanced from the Oxus to the Khyber, something which successive British Governments had worked hard to prevent throughout the second half of the 19th century. The immediate Western objective of securing a

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Russian withdrawal from Afghanistan became largely dependent on Pakistan cooperation and willingness to stand firm. If this objective was not achieved then Pakistan would have to take the place of Afghanistan as a buffer state against a further Russian expansion southeast-wards. Whether the Russians intended to expand further in that direction might be open to question, but on past form it would clearly become a Russian objective to convert Pakistan into an amenable ally if not a client state; at any rate, as in Afghanistan, the Russians could be relied upon not to miss any opportunity which a weakened Pakistan might present of furthering their aims. So to an extent, the global balance in this part of the world has come to depend on the future stability of Pakistan and, since it may take a long time to restore the status quo and to consolidate that balance, this stability may have to stand up to a prolonged period of pressure. This and the following despatch attempt to examine Pakistan's ability to face a long haul.

3. In this despatch I will consider the integrity of Pakistan - whether it is likely to survive as a nation. In the following despatch I will look at its internal political stability. In considering the stability of Pakistan, we need constantly to bear in mind the wise words of Sir Anthony Parsons on the debacle in Iran: "No third world regime is stable in our sense of the word. It only maintains a greater or lesser degree of tranquillity."

Almost all third world regimes rest on the loyalty of their Armed Forces, not on their popularity." Pakistan is a

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Third World country which has been in existence for 34 years only and, like most of the former British Empire, is to an extent an artificial creation. It is misleading to judge its stability against the standards of the older nation-states with their ethnic homogeneity, their historically developed political institutions and their secure frontiers built up over centuries. As with other Third World countries, it is impossible to say with any certainty that Pakistan will survive; one can only assess the chances of whether in 50 years time Pakistan will or will not still feature on the maps of the world.

4. Dealing first with the geographical integrity of Pakistan, she is now not too badly placed. The original creation in 1947 of a state divided into two halves 1,000 miles apart, and of roughly equal populations and economic potential, each half inhabited by people of totally different culture and race united only by the bond of religion, was an obvious nonsense and it took no great prescience in 1947 to see that it was unlikely still to be there in 50 years time. Most of Pakistan's early troubles stemmed from the difficulties of administering a country split into two halves and of harmonising the divergent interests of each half. I am myself sure, though most Pakistanis would not agree with me, that the best thing that happened to Pakistan was the 1971 war and that Pakistan is much better off as a result of the secession of Bangladesh. Certainly,

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geographically it has left Pakistan much stronger. Pakistan is now one geographical entity and for the most part its frontiers rest on defensible natural features. The Western frontier with Afghanistan runs roughly along the watershed of extremely rugged mountains, interspersed with deserts on the southern side of Afghanistan. The Pakistan/Iran border is an artificial line drawn up by the British in the last century but runs for the most part through similarly inhospitable territory. The eastern frontier with India up to the latitude of Delhi is covered by extensive deserts (an Indian force penetrated some distance in the 1971 war but a major invasion through the deserts would be very difficult to sustain). The northern frontier with India in Kashmir runs along the points to which Pakistan troops had penetrated when the cease-fire was agreed; it is artificial to that extent but again the country is extremely mountainous and is defensible from the Pakistan side. Only the Punjab frontier is a line drawn across the Punjab plain resting on no real geographical features except the river Sutlej for a part of its length. This is by no means an unfavourable geographical picture and many Third World countries would undoubtedly be glad to live within such secure frontiers. Of course, as with many other Third World countries, there are claims from Pakistan's neighbours to stretches of Pakistan territory - India to the rest of Kashmir and Afghanistan to the North West Frontier Province - but the

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point I am making is that Pakistan has a geographical unity with defensible frontiers resting for the most part on natural features.

5. Turning to the ethnic composition of the country, the picture is not so simple and must raise greater doubts about the future integrity of Pakistan. Of the four major races which inhabit Pakistan, the Punjabis constitute roughly 66 per cent of the total population, the Sindhis 13 per cent, the Pathans 8 per cent and the Baluch 3 per cent. Ethnic loyalties, or regional loyalties since the provincial boundaries conform more or less to the ethnic ones, are as deep-rooted in the Sub-continent as they are in the rest of the Third World. Each of the four races in Pakistan speak their own language, have distinctive cultures and spring from different historical backgrounds; their attitude to each other ranges from disinterest through dislike to active hostility. However, while it would be wrong to minimise these regional differences and loyalties, it is equally wrong in my view to make too much of them. India is a case in point. Many very knowledgeable people, including former Indian Civil Servants, forecast that when the British left, India would split up into its component parts. When that did not happen, it was argued that once Nehru died the powers of the Centre would decline and those of the States increase, leading eventually to fragmentation. This did not happen either - if anything the powers of the Centre over the States has steadily increased - and the reason seems to be that the 200 years of British rule had succeeded in imposing a

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CONFIDENTIAL



consciousness of being Indian and of being part of one nation which has transcended the ethnic loyalties. The question is whether the same thing has happened in Pakistan. This, I think, is more doubtful. Having served in both countries, I can say that one does not find in Pakistan quite the national self-confidence that one finds in India. They are still unsure of themselves. They are too anxious to prove that they are one nation, whether by emphasising their common religion or by repeating ad nauseam the words of the founding fathers. But at the same time I have a feeling that, after 34 years, the concept of nationhood is now there and that the average Pakistani does think of himself as a Pakistani as well as, e.g. a Pathan. It is a small thing, but the Pakistan Government's decision to make much of Independence Day this year (presumably because they share some of the doubts expressed above) aroused a quite unexpected and spontaneous outburst of popular feeling. There are of course other reasons for this, but I am now surer than I was some years ago that Pakistan has acquired a sense of nationhood.

6. Of course, looking at the four races in more detail, it is easy to get a picture of diversity and to see only the factors making for disunity, but there are many which make for unity as well. The Punjabis are not only numerically far larger than all the others put together but also they occupy the economic heart of the country and command the major resources. In India, the various regional groupings

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groupings tend to balance each other. In Pakistan there is an imbalance. Whether this makes for stability or instability is arguable. On the one hand it perpetuates the dislike of the Punjabis as the dominant race; on the other hand, in the last resort the Punjabis can impose their will on the rest of the country and hold the others in check. At the moment, the relative backwardness of at any rate the Pathans and the Baluch, means that this country is dominated and largely run by Punjabis. The Sindhis feel this most as the nearest neighbour, with their own distinctive and equally historic culture and background. They are a poorer province but they control Karachi, the main centre of population and of industrial growth in the country. There seems to me a provincial self-confidence about Sind which makes for unity since they feel themselves an equally important component of Pakistan as the Punjab. The Pathans are a quite different people, of Persian rather than Sub-Continental extraction, with strong tribal loyalties and a tribal system of government. The Pathans normally cause no trouble provided no attempt is made to interfere with their traditional self-government and way of life; the Central Government is sensible enough to realise this and to ride the Pathans on a loose rein. They are a surprisingly mobile people and because of the poverty of their resources at home, Pathans have always sought employment elsewhere in the Sub-Continent and now elsewhere in Pakistan; there are

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large colonies of Pathans in Sind and other provinces. There is a sense of Pathan nationality and hence a fellow-feeling with the Pathans of Afghanistan but generally tribal or clan loyalties transcend ethnic ones. (Pathan refugees from Afghanistan who do not belong to any of the Pakistan tribes are pushed on down into the plain for the Central Government to look after). Pakhtunistan, a union with the Pathans of Afghanistan, would only I think become an attractive proposition if Pakistan were to break up.

7. Baluchistan is a separate case. The Baluch are also organised on a tribal basis, but in much smaller units than the Pathans inhabiting the odd fertile valley in the surrounding desert and mountain wastes. The British left them, like the Pathans, to govern themselves and it was the attempt of the Pakistan Government after partition to integrate them that led to increasing disaffection and open hostilities in the Bhutto era. The disaffection of the Baluch is often made much of by visiting journalists and others, but it is basically a small and manageable problem. The number of true Baluch (half their province is inhabited by Pathans) is only about 2 million out of a total Pakistan population of some 84 million. The problem is largely a psychological one. The Baluch feel they are economically and politically neglected and always have been and that their province is run by Punjabis and Pathans. This is true, but the fact is that there are still too few educated Baluch to take on the administration. It will take a long period of education, economic development and sensitive /government



government before the Baluch can stand on their own feet and rid themselves of their feelings of inferiority. Of course Baluchistan is a worry because it borders on Afghanistan and contains useful material for subversion but in the last analysis it is unlikely that anything which happens in Baluchistan can seriously shake the fabric of Pakistan.

8. There is one other group which needs to be touched on - the Afghan refugees. The refugee problem could be a factor for local unrest in both Baluchistan and the North West Frontier Province though more seriously in the latter. So far relations between the local population and their usually ethnically related kin from Afghanistan have been remarkably good. But there are now over 2 million Afghan refugees and the number is still rising. The impact on the land, the already sparse grazing (many of the refugees have brought their cattle with them), and none too plentiful tree and bush cover will inevitably become more severe. The Afghans may in many cases be said to have a better standard of living in terms of food provision, health care and the subsidy each family receives from the Pakistan Government, than the local population. Trouble between the refugees and the indigenous population seems inevitable sooner or later, but it is a local problem and not I think a large enough one to affect the stability of the country.

9. So my conclusion is that although the ethnic stability of Pakistan is open to some question, the question marks are no larger than those which apply to many other Third

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World countries. My guess is that the overall concept of Pakistan is now firm enough to hold the four races together and, of course, in theory, the longer Pakistan lasts, the stronger the national bonds and the weaker the regional ones should become. There is a further factor. The external threat to Pakistan throughout its short history both from India and Afghanistan has undoubtedly been largely responsible for imposing a unity on Pakistan; the fissiparous tendencies might have been more in evidence had it not been for this threat. The fact is that Pakistan has been throughout its existence a beleaguered country and its inhabitants of whatever race have been kept constantly aware of that. If the country were to split up there is nowhere else for them to go except to India, Afghanistan in the case of the Pathans and Iran in the case of the Baluch. They either hang together or hang separately and this continues to be perhaps the most potent factor in ensuring the unity and integrity of the country.

10. When we turn to religion, the cause of so much instability and disunity in the Sub-Continent, the picture is clearer. Pakistan was formed because a large section of the Muslims of the Sub-Continent did not wish to live under Hindu rule; the religious motivation and the killings which it gave rise to was strong enough to cause millions of people to give up everything and flee either to India or Pakistan. In the Sub-Continent, it has been said that there are only two basic issues which will get a man out

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on to the streets, his religion and his pocket. Certainly the hold of religion over the peasantry is often not fully understood in the Western world. Islam was the raison d'être for Pakistan and it remains the most powerful internal force for unity and stability. There is a consciousness also of being part of a worldwide faith and way of life often under threat from other religions. The educated Pakistani may lapse from the true faith, but the peasant and the uneducated man is as bound to his religion as he always was and prepared, if sufficiently roused, to do battle for it. The founder of Pakistan, Jinnah, was in no way a devout Muslim (this fact is now well-concealed), but he saw very quickly that Islam had to be placed in the forefront in order to keep the country he had founded together. Zia is similarly on the right lines in stressing Islam, but I think he neglects one factor. The Muslims of Pakistan are probably 80 per cent Sunni. Most of them have lived for generations surrounded by Hindus and people of other religions. They have incorporated much Hindu culture into their way of life and some Hindu practices into their practice of Islam (to an extent this accounts for the strong strain of Sufism, Islamic mysticism, in Pakistan). They have never been fanatical except when driven to extremes by other religions. The Mullahs are not the force in the land that they appear to be in Iran or perhaps in Shia countries generally. The average Pakistani talks about the Mullah in somewhat similar terms that we might use for the

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Parish Priest in England - a well-meaning chap, who knows all about religion, but is a bit unworldly and is certainly not to be trusted with practical secular problems (this is not entirely a true analogy, since there is very often an additional element of distrust of the Mullah - he is potentially a dangerous figure who needs to be watched in case he tries to step outside his religious role). It is difficult to see Islamic fundamentalism taking root in Pakistan or a repetition of events in Iran. I would judge that the religious backgrounds of the two countries are very different. But it is self-evident that having a common religion is one of the major factors making for the integrity and unity of Pakistan. If religion were to decline in importance, then the ethnic diversity might become more significant. Of course, there is a Shia population, believed to number about 20 per cent of the total population, which has caused difficulties in the past. But these difficulties have never presented anything like a national threat. They manifest themselves sometimes in riots generally at times like Muharram when Shia practices differ from those of Sunnis and are ostentatiously displayed. Normally the two branches of Islam co-exist in Pakistan without too much difficulty, going to their own mosques and not interfering with each other; Shias are spread throughout all branches of the administration and there is no discrimination on grounds of sect. The other religious minorities in Pakistan are so small (about 3 per cent of the population) as to constitute no threat to

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national integrity.

11. Finally, in this survey of the factors affecting the integrity of Pakistan, I need to look at the economic scene and to consider briefly how economically viable Pakistan is. The picture here is a mixed one but again it is probably no worse than most Third World countries present. Basically, Pakistan is still an agricultural country with a mixture of blessings and misfortunes. Compared to India, Pakistan has the advantage of a much smaller (though still too rapidly growing) population and much less pressure on land, though much of the land is barren. A higher proportion of agriculture than in India rests on irrigated rather than on rain-fed lands and hence Pakistan is not so susceptible to the vagaries of the weather as India. Rice for the Pakistani is a secondary item in his diet, so the bulk of the rice crop can be exported. Wheat is the staple item and Pakistan has just achieved self-sufficiency. She ought to have done so a long time ago and there is no reason at all why she should not remain self-sufficient and become a considerable exporter; the yields in Pakistan Punjab are still well below those achieved on the other side of the border. So because of her agricultural blessings the Pakistan economy does have one major and significant advantage at least in that in the last resort, and short of a serious disaster with the weather, the country should be able to feed itself. This, and the relative lack of population pressure, can readily be seen throughout

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Pakistan. Nowhere in Pakistan is there anything approaching either the urban or the rural poverty of parts of India; there is an air of prosperity which is to an extent spurious but strikes visiting Indians quite forcibly.

12. The gloomy part of the picture is Pakistan's lack, up to now, of mineral and other resources. Locally produced oil at the moment only meets 10 to 12 per cent of Pakistan's requirements and further exploration, stepped up considerably over the last few years, has so far proved disappointing. It is true that Pakistan has large fields of natural gas and that these are already meeting some 40 per cent of the country's energy requirements, but the fields are finite and probably have a shorter life than was at first expected; nothing else is emerging at the moment to take their place. Pakistan also seems to lack other mineral resources, though there is some poor quality coal in Baluchistan and copper has also been discovered there. There may well be much concealed in the mountains of Baluchistan but they have not yet been fully explored. So the external account presents a dismal picture as it does in most other parts of the Third World, with Pakistan heavily dependent on overseas aid for its development and with a correspondingly large amount of long term indebtedness. Pakistan exports mainly textiles and the industrial base is still too narrow to sustain much diversification into non-traditional exports, though a considerable amount of import substitution is being achieved. At the moment she is exporting population and the remittances

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from the Pakistan Workers Overseas are helping in large measure to meet the rising cost of imported oil. But this flow is also not likely to last for ever.

13. So, while there is a certain inherent strength in the agricultural basis of the economy, there are major economic weaknesses and of course a collapse in the economy could quickly lead to widespread unrest in which the other factors making for disunity could come to the fore, thus imperilling the integrity of Pakistan. And of course there are other factors, more sociological than economic, which are bound to exert increasing pressures as time goes on. The high population growth-rate, which the Government is doing little to check; the exodus from the countryside to the towns, particularly in Sind to Karachi which the Government has controlled with a fair measure of success; the increase in consumer goods and the rising expectations in the villages as a result of the remittances from Pakistanis overseas; rising inflation, due to deficit financing as a result of the heavy burden of defence and other subsidies; the general wind of change affecting traditional and conservative societies everywhere. There are no easy answers to these economic and sociological problems and it is not much consolation to know that the same problems undoubtedly face most Third World countries.

14. To sum up this diverse picture, in which I have tried to bring out the various factors making for disunity and for unity, my answer to the question whether Pakistan will

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still feature on the map in 50 years time is that I think that there is a good chance that it will. I think that, after 34 years and the removal of the millstone of Bangladesh, the country rests on reasonably sure geographical, religious and psychological foundations. I would expect this fragile unity to persist long enough to erode some of the existing ethnic differences, particularly if the external threat persists. The major doubt is over the long-term economic viability of the country, which could have serious consequences for its integrity, but it is a doubt which hangs over the whole non-oil-producing Third World. Of course, I have excluded throughout the possibility of major external aggression from India or from Afghanistan which would no doubt very quickly bring Pakistan's independent existence to an end. Short of that and of an economic collapse, I think that this country is here to stay, whatever its system of government which I will examine in my following despatch.

15. I am copying this despatch to Her Majesty's Representatives in New Delhi, Washington, Kabul, Dacca and Karachi.

I am, Sir,
Yours faithfully

O G' Forster

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SUMMARY

THE INTERNAL STABILITY OF PAKISTAN

1. The preceding despatch looks at the general problem of Pakistan's viability; the present despatch looks at the current regime which, as for half Pakistan's history, is a military government. Democracy of the Western variety has never flourished in what is now Pakistan, perhaps because of Islam, and because for historical and social reasons experiments in democratic practice in the 1930's degenerated into feudal habits. Traditional tribal democracy on the frontier was an isolated phenomenon (paras 1 to 3).
2. The Muslim League never achieved the same grass-roots appeal as that of the Congress Party, nor did it represent a political ideology. The factions of the League and the behaviour of individual leaders debased the popular image of politicians. Nor was the Pakistan Civil Service left sufficiently strong at 1947 to govern the country regardless of the politicians. The Army, by contrast, formed itself into the only solid and stable force (paras 4 and 5).
3. The Bengal factor bedevilled Pakistan's political development, and eventually was only resolved by the breakaway of Bangladesh. Bhutto's success of combining Bengal political thinking with the feudal element enabled him to become the first leader of Pakistan's Muslims to obtain real grass-roots support, but his achievement was flawed, and instead of imposing a proper form of democracy, Bhutto may have wrecked its chances here for good (paras 6 and 7).
4. The breakdown of Bhutto's government led to General Zia's takeover, first to avoid further bloodshed, and then as a caretaker. Four years later, Zia's tenure, still nominally that of a caretaker, continues. He is no stereotype military dictator. Although no intellectual, he possesses a certain shrewdness and tactical skill. His simple religious faith is not fanatical but can result in flesh-creeping statements, and he has an old-fashioned view of discipline. He seems determined to keep control of the situation. His intention is to rebuild democracy in an Islamic framework, but his pronouncements are often contradictory. He certainly does not intend a return to PPP rule, nor to the former style of political manoeuvrings (paras 8 and 9).

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5. What are Zia's chances? So far he has given Pakistan four years of peace and stability, helped internally by the lack of obvious alternatives and externally by the Afghan crisis and threats from India. His regime is marked by apathy among the public rather than hatred, and is reasonably efficient and not overly onerous. He has never looked stronger (para 10). But Zia's is a balancing act, preserving the status quo and the goodwill of important blocks of opinion, the Army itself, the Muslim right-wing, business people and the ordinary man. Politicians and students who cannot be placated are kept quiet by a mixture of force and favour (para 11). But Zia is making no real progress towards his declared aim of evolving a new political system. Sooner or later the pressures will increase, and it is doubtful whether Zia, who lacks popular support, will contain them. His regime is likely therefore to collapse at some stage, but from what precise cause or combination of forces cannot be foreseen. The likely outcome in any case would be another general taking over (paras 12 and 13).

6. For Britain and the West, there nevertheless seems no alternative but to give Pakistan as much support as is consistent with our interests elsewhere: she must solve her internal problems in her own way.



BRITISH EMBASSY
ISLAMABAD

13 September 1981

014/2

The Rt Hon
The Lord Carrington KCMG MC

My Lord

THE INTERNAL STABILITY OF PAKISTAN

1. In my preceding despatch, I discussed the chances of Pakistan surviving in its present form. In this despatch I will examine the internal political stability of Pakistan and the chances of the present regime surviving. It is an historical fact that in the 34 years of Pakistan's existence exactly half - 17 years to date - has been spent under military rule. In considering the internal stability of Pakistan and what type of government is likely to emerge it is first necessary to discuss why this has happened and why democracy has proved so fragile a plant in Pakistan soil while taking root and flourishing, after a fashion, in Indian soil.

2. I am not sure that I really know the answers to this question. To start with I suspect that there is something in Islam which is basically inimical to Western democracy. Certainly a creed which claims to embrace all aspects of life and which, at least in its more fundamentalist doctrines, denies the Western distinction between Church and State, seems to point towards theocracy rather than democracy. President Zia has expounded to me what Islamic
✓democracy



democracy means to him and its sounds perilously close to what is happening in Iran. According to him, by popular consent, certain men of proven religious knowledge, zeal and integrity are somehow chosen to rule the country and, by implication, they can only be removed when they begin to depart from the true faith. Anyhow, whether or not Islam is basically in conflict with the concept of Western democracy, it remains a fact that there are very few Muslim Western-type democracies in the world. (Of course this may be a Third World and not simply a Muslim phenomenon, though that does not account for cases like India).

3. Beyond this, there are particular factors which apply in the case of Pakistan. Before 1947, democracy and the political process never really flourished in this part of the British Raj. Apart from the fundamentally autocratic tradition of Moghul rule which Muslims in the Sub-Continent looked back to as a golden age, the social structure in what is now Pakistan did not lend itself to democracy. The West Punjab (unlike the East Punjab where there were more small land-owners) and Sind had always been dominated by princely rulers and big land-owners; when democracy was tried in these parts in the 1930s it simply led to the creation of a string of pocket boroughs. The tribal areas in the North West Frontier and Baluchistan had their own traditional system of democracy - the tribal Jirga sitting under the chairmanship of the hereditary village or tribal

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chief, the Sardar. Such political agitation against the British as there was in this area before 1947 was largely stimulated by Hindus.

4. A further factor militating against the emergence of a viable democracy in Pakistan lay in the nature of the Muslim struggle for independence. For a long time the Muslims of the Sub-Continent believed that their future lay in backing the British Raj against rising Hindu nationalism; they hoped to regain some of their former power by becoming loyal satraps of the British. Politically and nationalistically-minded Muslims like Mr Jinnah who wanted to get rid of British rule joined the basically Hindu Congress Party. It was only when, in the 1920s and 1930s, it became evident that independence for India was likely to be achieved and that the Congress Party might emerge as the new rulers that fears of Hindu domination grew among the Muslims and the Muslim League, founded primarily to protect Muslim religion and culture, took on a political form. The manifestly Hindu slant of the Congress Party, despite Gandhi's efforts, and the experience of Muslim minorities under the Congress provincial governments formed after the 1935 Government of India Act led to the demand for Pakistan. But it was never a unanimous demand among Muslims. Many Muslims remained in the Congress Party and many preferred to continue living in India and disagreed with the whole concept of a Muslim State.



5. A more significant development, however, was that whereas Gandhi's great achievement was to give the Congress Party a mass and grass-roots appeal, the Muslim League was never more than a coalition of wealthy, educated Muslims aiming basically to protect their own economic interests. It had no political ideology beyond the creation of a separate Muslim State. So at Partition, Pakistan was left with the rump of a Constituent Assembly, and Provincial Assemblies elected under the 1935 Act, dominated by a group of corrupt and self-seeking land-owners and politicians with no political programme and quickly dividing into factions based on personalities and wheeling and dealing. This unsavoury image of the average politician remains very strong in the minds of ordinary Pakistanis today and the behaviour of such of the old politicians as remain still tends to conform to these earlier patterns. Behind this basic political weakness was a Civil Service framework considerably weaker than that which steered India through the formative years. The Muslims of the Sub-Continent had always been educationally backward compared to the Hindus and anyhow by temperament preferred the Army to the Civil Service (administration was for Hindu babus; real men went into the Army). As a result, Pakistan was left in 1947 with very few good administrators and when I first came here, seven years after independence, Englishmen were still occupying key positions in the central and provincial administrations. The Civil Service machine was not strong /enough



enough to govern the country regardless of the politicians. By contrast, the Army, drawn from the large Muslim section of the old Indian Army, contained a large section of the educated elite and quickly formed itself into an efficient machine and the only solid and stable force in the country.

6. As well as these basic weaknesses, a further factor which bedevilled the first 25 years of Pakistan's existence was East Bengal. The pace of Bengal's political development had been entirely different. The Bengalis were highly educated and politically articulate, had led, both in thought and practice, the struggle against the British and had a well-developed party political system. From the very start, the East Bengal politicians and their left-wing doctrines exercised a baleful influence on the politically-naive and conservative West Pakistanis; and of course added to the differences in political background was the major problem of administering and balancing the two wings. Most of the political manoeuvrings and constitutional experiments of the first 25 years of Pakistan were designed to reconcile the divergent interests and backgrounds of the two wings and, from the point of view of West Pakistan, were designed basically to perpetuate Punjabi domination of East Bengal and of Pakistan as a whole.

7. For the purpose of this despatch, I do not need to go into the details of what happened between 1958 and 1971. It is sufficient to say that the Army stepped in to resolve the political deadlock, tried under Ayub to produce a

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solution, which in turn failed and led eventually to the secession of East Pakistan and a democratic system of a sort under Bhutto. Bhutto was a curious phenomenon who has been much analysed. He combined in himself the political thinking of Bengal with a background of Sindhi landlordism. The former enabled him to become the first leader in the history of the Muslims of this part of the Sub-Continent to achieve real grass-roots support. His political programmes and his demagoguery appealed to the ordinary man and he constructed a party machine much on the lines of the old Congress machine in India which reached down to the grass-roots. But the other side of his make-up - that of the Sindhi feudal landlord - began to emerge increasingly as his power grew. He became increasingly authoritarian, contemptuous of democratic forms, ruthless and flamboyant; the stories of his vindictiveness and of the evils perpetrated, often with his knowledge, can be heard all over Pakistan and not only from supporters of General Zia (these stories are never told in the liberal Western Press since they do not fit the image of the martyred hero). He was a flawed genius and the great tragedy for Pakistan is that he had the mass support and the ability to impose a proper democratic system on Pakistan and to ensure that it took root; instead he destroyed democracy in Pakistan for what may be a very long time.

8. It was in these circumstances that General Zia took over, as Field Marshal Ayub and General Yahya Khan had done before him. Law and order had broken down, the mobs

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were on the streets and the Army was having to open fire on them. He has given me a graphic description of the evening when Bhutto ordered him, as Chief of Army Staff, to shoot down 4,000 people if necessary to impose order and of his realisation as he left the room that he would have to intervene at once to stop Bhutto. He saw himself, like many dictators before him, purely as a caretaker whose task was to restore law and order and to hold the ring until fresh elections could be held and a stable government could be returned. He talked constantly of his caretaker role for the first two years of his rule. Since his efforts to hold fresh elections failed in October 1979, we have heard less of this, but he still preserves the forms of the office of caretaker refusing, for instance, to move to the new Presidential Palace and continuing to live in the Chief of Army Staff's house in Rawalpindi - a somewhat cramped old British bungalow, not at all appropriate for Head of State entertainments.

9. Four years later, Zia remains in power and, by a combination of luck and judgement, has emerged as the dominant figure on the Pakistan scene. At the moment, he is so much the dominant figure and so much the key to the internal stability of Pakistan over the next few years at any rate, that I must attempt an analysis of his character and his thinking. He is not by any means the stereotype
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military dictator, if there is such a thing, or the conventional Indian or Pakistan Sandhurst-charicature General. He comes from comparatively humble origins and a non-army background; he has not had the British connections and does not look back with nostalgia on the British connection like some other Pakistan officers of his generation. There is a total and unusual (for the Sub-Continent) lack of arrogance and pomposity about him. He is courteous, soft-spoken, ready to listen and almost embarrassingly frank and humble in his approach to problems. He gives a distinct impression of mediocrity and of a man promoted out of his depth, but this is not an entirely accurate picture; he is not quite the simple soldier he likes to make out and he has much shrewdness and tactical skill. Above all, he is deeply and genuinely religious and always has been. He is not an intellectual and has, I think, no real understanding of the political process or of constitutional forms. I doubt whether he is a real believer in democracy, certainly of the Western type. He has a simple philosophy that the politicians have made a total mess of Pakistan and that there was something inherently wrong with the political structure which caused this. He believes that the ordinary man, if not seduced by demagogic politicians, is inherently sound and sensible and that if only good honest yeomen can be elected they will somehow remain unsullied by the political process. In keeping with his strong religious beliefs, he also believes that Bhutto was fundamentally irreligious and that many of Pakistan's

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problems are the result of departing from the true faith; a return to the true faith will in some way solve these problems. He is not a religious fanatic (he believes that what is going on in Iran is wrong) but his direct and simple faith that God has ordained certain things which Man tampers with at his peril makes my flesh creep at times, as does his belief, stemming from his army training, that this part of the world needs the smack of firm government and that if doses of discipline are not administered at intervals, the country lapses into corruption and inefficiency. I suspect that his sense of mission is growing and that he is beginning to believe that only he can solve Pakistan's problems. He still talks occasionally of being a caretaker but he is obviously determined to retain control over the situation and to keep the Army in control until something better emerges. What that something is is not at all clear and I am not sure that he himself really knows; his pronouncements on the subject are often contradictory. It certainly does not involve a return to the rule of Bhutto's party and to the former political manoeuvrings, though he has made considerable efforts to win over the more sensible of the older politicians. I think that he hopes to build democracy from the grass-roots. He already has his elected local government bodies and on these he is trying to construct provincial assemblies and a national assembly with, to start with, only advisory powers. From this process, he

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hopes a new breed of honest politicians will emerge to whom he can hand over the country. Somewhere along the line he has to incorporate Islamic democracy, whatever that is, and to bring the country back more to what he believes to be a proper Islamic state.

10. How far is he likely to achieve these rather nebulous and idealistic objectives? The future internal stability of Pakistan turns on this question. We should not underestimate his achievements to date. After the turmoil of the end of Bhutto's rule, he has given the country four years of peace and stability, despite the external pressures of the last two years; years which were badly needed to cool the passions of the Bhutto era, to heal some of the divisions created by Bhutto and to restore the economy. He has been helped by the lack of any obvious alternative, by the Afghan crisis and the continued threats from India, by good harvests and the improvement in a generally well-managed economy, by apathy and by the lack of issues likely to excite public opinion. The regime is not an onerous one and it is by and large an efficient one with corruption kept within bounds. It is not a hated regime or he a hated figure, except among the dedicated Bhutto supporters; the jokes which circulate about Zia show him as a fool and simpleton rather than an ogre. At the moment, after four years of rule, he has never looked stronger or more unchallengeable.

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11. But up to now it has been a (not unskilful) balancing act. He has not touched the essentials or grasped the nettles which will have to be grasped if his objectives are to be achieved and new institutions and a reformed political system are to emerge. He has concentrated on preserving the status quo and not alienating important blocks of opinion. The Army is kept happy by clamping down on the old politicians, by restricting the independence of the judiciary and by firm and efficient government. Right-wing Muslim opinion is kept happy by the Islamisation policy and the greater influence of the religious parties, but the Islamic punishments are never carried out so moderate opinion is not upset. Businessmen are kept happy by reversing Bhutto's socialist policies and by favouring the private sector, but there has been no move yet to reverse Bhutto's labour policies which would upset organised labour. The ordinary man is kept happy by keeping prices under control and eliminating corruption and black-marketing; it is hoped that his desire for some sort of say in the government of his country will be met by the elected local government bodies. The old politicians and the students who cannot be placated are kept quiet by a mixture of force and favour. There are powerful forces in a country like this which wish to maintain the status quo and are not unhappy to see the present regime continue:- the landowners and businessmen; the small shopkeepers, now protected to an extent from the exactions of the police even if their profits are cut a bit; the new type
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of Army Officer, with no independent means or wealthy family behind him and looking only to the Army for his future.

12. But life does not stand still and good government is rarely a satisfactory substitute for progress in a young country. Zia is producing no new policies, except Islami-sation and this shows no signs of attracting widespread support outside the right-wing religious parties. His progress towards evolving a new political system is snail-like. This is not entirely his fault; his difficulties are real ones and it is a nice matter of judgement to decide how fast political progress should proceed to keep ahead of popular demand without losing control. The snail-like progress has been sufficient up to now and may suffice for another year or two. But sooner or later the pressures will increase, whether from intellectuals for more of a say in government or, for example, from businessmen for tougher labour legislation. When that time comes, I very much doubt whether Zia, lacking popular support or full popular backing for his policies, will prove able or subtle enough to keep ahead of growing popular discontent without losing control of the situation.

13. Therefore, I expect Zia's regime to collapse at some stage, but when or in what way, whether a swift collapse or a slow decline, whether with bloodshed or with a smooth transition to a successor government, cannot yet be foreseen. Explosions happen quickly in the Sub-Continent, but

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the explosive material has to be around and there has to be a catalyst. There is plenty of explosive material to hand in Pakistan:- the students, always dissatisfied about something and traditionally in the forefront of any agitation, the growing industrial proletariat in Karachi, the regional dissidents, the increasing mobility of society and growing expectations (remittances from overseas Pakistanis in the Middle East are having dramatic effects in the villages); finally, the independence of mind and spirit which the ordinary Pakistani shares with his Indian counter-part. I also have a feeling that Bhutto has wrought some sort of sea-change in the Pakistan scene, with his appeal to the poor and down-trodden and his mass support, and that the seeds of a rejection of the hierarchical traditions of the East may have been planted. It is difficult to see what combination of these forces might bring Zia down. It was the students and industrial labour, touched off by trouble in Bengal, which brought down Ayub; it was the shopkeepers and religious right-wing elements which brought down Bhutto. Further, the catalyst is not yet apparent. It could be one particular issue - a defeat on the North West Frontier, a humiliation by India or particularly ham-handed behaviour by the Army. Or it could be a general decline in the economy, poor harvests, a growth in inflation and a steady rise in prices. Or some particular economic factor like the return of the overseas Pakistan workers with increased expectations and no jobs. At the moment, the most likely scenario would seem to be growing dissatisfaction with the

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performance of the regime for any of the above reasons and a growing demand for a return to some sort of democracy, with Zia not moving fast enough to meet the dissatisfaction and the demands. If he began to lose control of the situation he might then hand back power to the Army, represented by the senior Generals, the Corps Commanders and Provincial Governors, who would then no doubt appoint one of themselves to rule, possibly with a promise of elections and a return to democracy to follow. This, of course, is exactly what happened in the case of Ayub - leading to Yahya Khan and Bhutto. But history does not often repeat itself and there can be no certainty about any such forecasts. If I had to make a guess at the political future, I would say that the Westminster type of democracy will never take root in Pakistan, though we may yet have to go through some further alternations between it and military rule, and that Pakistan will eventually settle down under some sort of mildly authoritarian rule, susceptible in some degree to the popular will and with some mechanism for an orderly transition of power. This is probably the best we can hope for in any Third World country.

14. In these two despatches, I have argued that Pakistan is sufficiently soundly-based to survive and that it is unlikely to break up except under severe economic or external pressure, but that the internal political situation is unstable in the medium-term and is likely to remain unstable for some considerable time to come. In short,

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and not unfamiliar Third World picture. It remains to look at the implications of this reading, if it is a true one, for our and the West's policies towards Pakistan particularly in the context of the Afghanistan crisis. I can state my views quite shortly. If we want to call a halt to Russian expansion in this part of the World, I do not think that we have any alternative but to continue to back Pakistan and to give her as much support as is consistent with our important interests in India and elsewhere. Of course once again in the struggle against Communism we find ourselves backing an unpopular military regime which may not last long. But are we to tell Zia, as the Guardian would probably have us do, that we are not going to help him unless he holds elections? Obviously if Pakistan's internal policies became so oppressive as to be offensive to British public opinion, we should have to reconsider our policy. But we have not come to that yet and for the moment we should, in my view, continue to back Zia. At the same time, we should do what we can to improve the stability of Pakistan by encouraging Western economic aid, if we cannot provide it ourselves. We should also use the position of trust and confidence that our firm support for Pakistan has given us to offer discreet advice on how best to achieve greater internal stability, but without, to use your own word Sir, "nannying"; for in the last resort Pakistan must solve her own internal problems in her own way. Finally, we in this Embassy must continue to keep a close watch on

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the internal situation so that we are not taken by surprise by a change of regime and are in a position to change horses without falling off.

15. I am copying this despatch to H M Representatives in New Delhi, Washington, Kabul, Dacca and Karachi.

I am, Sir
Yours faithfully

O. G. Forster

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