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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

23 March 1951

Memorandum for the Director of Central Intelligence

Subject: Plot to Overthrow the Pakistani Government

On 9 March, Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan of Pakistan publicly announced that a plot to overthrow the government by violence and subvert the nation's military forces had been foiled by the arrest of the Chief of the General Staff and his wife, a Brigadier, and the editor of the Pakistan Times, the country's leading Communist newspaper. Subsequently, the senior Air Force officer was placed under house arrest for connection with the plot. In a statement to US and other diplomats on 20 March, the Pakistani Government asserted that the conspirators, numbering half a dozen military men and a few civilians, planned the sudden seizure of the principal Pakistani officials and the establishment of a military dictatorship which would immediately invite the USSR to provide a trade mission and an advisory group to help draft a Soviet-style constitution. (Liaquat made a more general statement along the same lines to Parliament on 21 March.) The conspirators were described as planning to gain public support for their actions by charging the present government with failure to solve the Kashmir problem and with a close association with the Anglo-American bloc that had not brought Pakistan any benefits.

Little is known about the origins of the plot. The idea may well have been suggested by the Pakistan Times editor, an ex-Indian Army officer and erstwhile telegraph workers' union

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president who is considered Pakistan's leading Communist. The details, however, were probably worked out by the three military men, all of whom, for personal reasons, were susceptible to Communist blandishments. The conspirators probably were counting mainly on the widespread discontent in the army over the government's failure to press the Kashmir issue more vigorously; the Communist aspect of the conspiracy appears to have been carefully concealed.

It is difficult to understand how the conspirators hoped to succeed. Although many army officers were disgruntled over the government's handling of the Kashmir issue, it is unlikely that more than a handful of military men were involved in the plot. The three military men arrested had no large personal following and almost certainly would have failed to obtain solid support from the armed forces for an attempt to overthrow Liaquat's government. The Communist editor reportedly planned a simultaneous uprising of Pakistani Communists, but there is no evidence that it was imminent or that it could have been successful.

Although there is still little reason to believe that the Pakistani Government was or is in serious danger from Communist subversion, the plot is of considerable significance because of the high position of its military members. Moreover, the existence of a Communist-aligned conspiracy in an army which US observers have consistently described as 100 percent loyal suggests that future reports regarding the army's reliability must be treated with some caution.

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