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Pakistan: Implications of Military Commitments to Arab States

Pakistan's approximately 18,000 military personnel stationed in the Middle East and North Africa are becoming an important vehicle for achievement of Islamabad's foreign policy goals. Pakistan has reaped significant benefits from the program, according to our analysis:

- Salary remittances have provided an economic boost.
- Islamabad has acquired new sources of arms procurement.
- Pakistan has become one of the largest non-Arab recipients of financial support from the oil-rich Arab states.
- Pakistan's military personnel have gained valuable training on advanced Western and Soviet military equipment--including Soviet aircraft--which has given them a better understanding of the capabilities of the Indian Air Force. [redacted]

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We believe the military assistance, however, also carries risks:

- The longer the Pakistani troops stay abroad, the greater the risk that Pakistan will become embroiled in local or regional conflicts to which it is not a party.
- Pakistan's international image is tarnished by charges that it provides "soldiers for hire" to radical regimes such as Libya.

- [redacted] morale within the armed forces could be damaged by the disparity between overseas and domestic salaries and by discrimination against Pakistani Shia personnel by the recipient countries. [redacted]

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This memorandum was prepared by the South Asia Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis, [redacted]

[redacted] Information as of September 12, 1983 was used in preparation of this paper. Comments and queries are welcome and should be addressed to Chief, South Asia Division, [redacted]

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We judge Pakistan will continue and may even expand its military ties with the Middle East in order to ensure Arab political support and economic assistance. In our view, as long as Pakistani personnel demonstrate competence and Pakistan maintains a stable and moderate government with Islamic credentials, there will be a market for its military personnel in the Middle East and North Africa. We believe that concern over external and internal threats to stability brought on by the strife in Lebanon, the continuing Iran/Iraq conflict, and Iran's Shia religious fanaticism might well prompt the Gulf states to request even larger foreign military contingents. [redacted]

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Our analysis suggests, however, that several factors could slow an expansion of military ties or lead to a reduction in requests for military assistance:

- The limited capacity of the recipient countries to absorb more military personnel.
- Competition from other states to supply military advisers.
- The risk that Pakistan could be drawn into regional conflicts.
- The limited number of skilled technical personnel in Pakistan. [redacted]

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The United States generally benefits from Pakistan's military assistance program. Cooperation between Islamabad and the Arab States strengthens the military establishments of moderate governments while dampening Pakistan's financial demands on the United States and minimizing the US visibility in this sensitive region. Only in the training of Libyan pilots and small numbers of Palestinian guerrillas do Pakistan's military ties run counter to US interests. We assess that a setback to the military assistance program, accompanied by a reduction in Arab economic assistance to Pakistan, would increase political and economic strains in Pakistan and increase Islamabad's requests for US economic and military aid. [redacted]

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