

Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

31 August 1984

Pakistan's Defenses Opposite Afghanistan



Summary

Islamabad's concern about the Soviet military threat from Afghanistan has increased, but because the Pakistanis remain most concerned about India, they have maintained only relatively modest defenses opposite Afghanistan. The Pakistanis would have difficulty reacting quickly to Soviet or Afghan airstrikes or heliborne assault raids in the frontier region and could not resist large-scale Soviet or Afghan operations in their territory without significant US support. They could, however, inflict high casualties on Soviet or Afghan forces in ambushes or chance encounters--particularly if enemy forces operated for long periods in Pakistani territory. Pakistan has asked the United States for radar surveillance aircraft and early delivery of advanced air-to-air missiles.



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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] the Pakistan/Afghanistan/Banladesh Branch, South Asia Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. It was coordinated with the Office of Soviet Analysis. Information as of 31 August 1984 was used in its preparation. Questions and comments should be directed to Chief, South Asia Division, at [redacted]

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Senior Pakistani officials have told US officials they believe the Soviets intend to increase military pressure on Pakistan because of their growing frustration and higher combat losses in Afghanistan. The Pakistanis view the 13, 14, and 23 August bombing attacks in the Parachinar area and the cross-border artillery fire of 18, 19, and 21 August as deliberate attempts by the Soviets to press Islamabad before the UN-sponsored indirect talks on Afghanistan resumed in Geneva on 24 August. The Pakistanis assured US officials that Pakistan was determined to defend its territory against Soviet attacks and would stand firm on its principles at the Geneva talks despite the increased military pressure. They asked for increased US support--including radar surveillance aircraft and early delivery of advanced air-to-air missiles--military equipment to strengthen Pakistan's defenses opposite Afghanistan. [REDACTED]

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The Air Threat

Airstrikes against suspected insurgent camps and supply lines in Pakistani territory would be the most likely Soviet military actions to threaten Islamabad in the next year. As in the past, most of the air attacks probably would occur in the Parachinar area--an important area for insurgent infiltration into Afghanistan--or in remote regions of the Pakistan Tribal Areas along the border. If the Soviets were to mount frequent airstrikes into Pakistani territory, they probably would fly MIG-23 fighter patrols on the Afghan side of the border during the attacks to deter or respond to Pakistani aircraft. In the event of a major airstrike, Soviet MIG-23s probably would try to prevent a Pakistani response by flying patrols near Peshawar and Quetta airbases in Pakistan. [REDACTED]

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Pakistan's Air Defenses

Pakistan would be unable to conduct an effective defense against Soviet or Afghan air incursions in the border region. The Soviets have some 12 SU-25 attack planes, 30 modern MIG-23 fighters and 30 SU-17 fighter-bombers at Bagram, Kabul, and Qandahar airbases in Afghanistan that could be used in cross-border air attacks; the Afghan Air Force has some 30 SU-17/22 fighter-bombers and 40 MIG-21 fighters at these airbases. The Pakistan Air Force has only some 40 F-6 fighters and 15 A-5 attack planes opposite Afghanistan even after being strengthened in the last year by the deployment of a second F-6 squadron to Quetta and the formation of a new A-5 squadron at Peshawar to supplement the F-6 squadron already there. The F-6 squadron at Mianwali in central Pakistan also could respond to air incursions from Afghanistan. Pakistan's F-16s are based at Sargodha, closer to the border with India, but could be moved quickly to Quetta or Peshawar in a crisis. [REDACTED]

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Pakistan's F-6s and A-5s both are Chinese models of the obsolescent Soviet MIG-19 and would be greatly outmatched in aerial combat by the more advanced Soviet fighters in Afghanistan. Moreover, most of the Pakistani F-6s are in poor repair and, [redacted] will need to be replaced in the next three to five years. Soviet MIG-23s armed with medium-range radar-guided air-to-air missiles would have an advantage over Pakistan's F-16 fighters. [redacted]

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The Pakistanis have limited capability to detect airspace violations along the border with Afghanistan. [redacted] Pakistan has only five air surveillance radars deployed along the Afghan border and that their capability to provide early warning of air incursions is seriously degraded by the mountainous terrain along much of the frontier. Even without the terrain problems, Pakistan's air defense system would have little capability to detect and track aircraft at low altitudes. [redacted] most airspace violations are undetected because of Pakistan's poor radar coverage; visual observers at remote outposts provide only marginal improvement. [redacted]

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[redacted] Pakistan's air defense system is still poorly integrated and slow in processing and transmitting targeting information to fighter units. Pakistani air controllers have difficulty directing aircraft to aerial intercepts. In addition, the Pakistani airbases at Peshawar and Quetta are not close enough to the most likely areas of Soviet or Afghan air incursions for fighters to arrive in time to engage intruding aircraft even though F-6s at both bases are kept on a six- or eight-minute alert status. [redacted]

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[redacted] the 13 August bombing attack near Parachinar had already ended by the time Pakistan Air Force F-6s were scrambled and airborne. [redacted]

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The Ground Threat

Soviet or Afghan ground incursions are likely to be small in size and short in duration, and the Soviets almost certainly would try to avoid a military confrontation with the Pakistan Army. The Soviets could mount quick heliborne raids into Pakistani territory adjacent to Afghanistan's border regions where resistance pressure on Afghan Army garrisons is greatest. Large-scale military operations in Pakistan's border regions in the next year would require the Soviets to significantly increase their forces and logistics in Afghanistan. Soviet and Afghan cross-border artillery fire aimed against Afghan insurgents using Pakistan as a sanctuary and staging area, however, probably will become more frequent in the next year. [redacted]

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Pakistan's Ground Defenses

Pakistan's transportation system could not support a major redeployment of forces from the Indian border, where most Pakistani units are located. Moreover, most of the Pakistan Army's ground combat units opposite Afghanistan--only four of Pakistan's 19 divisions and an infantry brigade--are deployed more than 20 kilometers behind the border to protect the major supply lines. The paramilitary Frontier Corps, which lacks heavy weapons and has only limited mobility, has primary responsibility for defending the border with Afghanistan, but [redacted]

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[redacted] have been augmented by a few Pakistan Army battalions in defensive positions--including bunkers and artillery emplacements--at strategic border crossings. [redacted] sources [redacted] indicate that additional forward defensive positions have been prepared near major border crossings that could be manned in case of intensified Soviet or Afghan military pressure on Pakistan. [redacted]

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[redacted] Pakistani forces opposite Afghanistan are weak in mobility and firepower. The four infantry divisions are not equipped with armored personnel carriers, are under strength in vehicles, and have fewer than 120 tanks and 80 pieces of towed artillery. [redacted] tactical mobility along most of the border with Afghanistan is also extremely limited because of rugged terrain and poor roads. Little has been done since the invasion to improve the logistics infrastructure in the west. [redacted]

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Islamabad regards the Parachinar salient in the Kurram Agency and the Tribal Areas between Miram Shah and Wana as the most vulnerable area to Soviet attack [redacted]

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[redacted] The Pakistanis believe this area is more suitable for maneuvering forces than elsewhere along the border, and that the Pakistan Army could not rapidly reinforce there because the road network is particularly bad. Most of the other major attack routes--including the Arandu, Khyber, and Khojak Passes--could be more easily defended because the attacking forces would be channelled through narrow passes and vulnerable to Pakistani counterattacks. [redacted]

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Outlook

The Pakistanis, who have acted with restraint toward past border incidents, are reluctant to risk a major military confrontation with the Soviets--especially when tensions with India are high. Despite increased Soviet military pressure, Islamabad continues to regard India as its most serious threat and does not plan to strengthen its defenses opposite Afghanistan at the expense of Pakistani defenses along the Indian border. [redacted]

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[REDACTED]

The Pakistanis probably will continue to act with restraint to air and ground incursions from Afghanistan. Pakistani Frontier Corps and Army units would fire on Soviet or Afghan aircraft or ground forces attacking near their positions in the frontier region, but we judge that Islamabad would keep Army units deployed principally in defensive positions away from the border both to avoid a major battle and to guard against deep incursions. The Pakistan Air Force continues to adhere to rules of engagement that prohibit firing on intruding aircraft less than 10 kilometers inside the border. President Zia would come under greater pressure to defend against Soviet or Afghan incursions if they became more frequent and systematic or to make the political concessions necessary to reduce the Soviet threat in the border region. [REDACTED]

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Pakistan would have difficulty combating Soviet or Afghan hot pursuit or quick heliborne assault raids against targets within 10 to 20 kilometers of the border--particularly in remote areas. The Pakistanis, however, could inflict serious losses on small Soviet or Afghan forces in chance encounters and deliberate ambushes. Islamabad does not expect that the Army could resist large-scale Soviet operations across the border, and senior Pakistani officials have said they would require significant US support but that US combat troops would not be needed unless there was a major invasion. [REDACTED]

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Implications for the US

The Pakistanis are using the latest cross-border incidents to press the United States for new arms deals and accelerated delivery of advanced weapons. Senior Pakistani officials have told senior US officials that Pakistan could not challenge Soviet military incursions unless it had modern weapons comparable to those of the Soviets. They warn that combat losses would undermine Pakistan's military credibility opposite Afghanistan and could encourage the Soviets to escalate cross-border operations. [REDACTED]

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Pakistan has pressed the United States for accelerated delivery of the advanced AIM-9L Sidewinder air-to-air missile and for an early decision on the E-2C Hawkeye radar surveillance aircraft. The Pakistanis say that their modern F-16 fighters would be at a disadvantage against modern Soviet MIG-23s without the AIM-9L and that the Hawkeye is essential for airborne radar coverage of the rugged Afghanistan border, where terrain limits the effectiveness of ground-based radar. While the AIM-9L would improve Pakistan's capability to counter Soviet air incursions, the Pakistanis would require considerable time to train with the E-2C, which might not in any case be available for many years unless manned by US crews. Islamabad probably will also ask for advanced Stinger Post tactical surface-to-air missiles for Pakistani ground forces. All of these systems would also enhance

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Pakistani capabilities against India--an important consideration for Islamabad. [REDACTED]

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The Pakistanis will continue to judge the reliability of the US commitment to Pakistan's security by the US response to their arms requests. US unwillingness to provide some of the military equipment requested, however, probably would not cause Islamabad to reach an accommodation with Moscow and Kabul so long as the Pakistanis believed the United States would back them in a confrontation with the Soviets. [REDACTED]

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SUBJECT: Pakistan's Defenses Opposite Afghanistan [Redacted]

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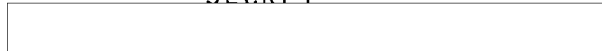
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