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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

7 August 1987

PAKISTAN/USSR: The Soviet Campaign Against Pakistan's Nuclear Program

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Summary

For the past few years Moscow has campaigned actively against Pakistan's nuclear weapons program, attacking it in both the press and private demarches. Although Moscow's criticism is consistent with its longstanding desire to limit the spread of nuclear weapons, it also is exploiting the issue to its own advantage in South Asia. Soviet attacks on the Pakistani program escalate during periods of tension with Islamabad--usually over Afghanistan--and subside when Moscow is seeking improved bilateral ties.

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The Soviets have charged the United States with complicity in helping Pakistan develop nuclear weapons in return for Islamabad's cooperation in projecting military power into South Asia and serving as a supply base for the resistance forces in Afghanistan. Moscow hopes to pressure Pakistan into backing away from its nuclear weapons program and, perhaps more importantly, into modifying its policy toward Afghanistan. Moscow also is seeking to undermine US-Pakistani relations, strengthen relations with India, portray the United States as a threat to regional

This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] the Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis, with a contribution from [redacted] the Foreign Broadcast Information Service. Information as of 7 August 1987 was used in its preparation. Questions and comments should be addressed to Chief, Issues and Application Division [redacted]

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stability, and project an image of a respectable superpower seeking peaceful solutions to regional problems. The Soviets have demonstrated some caution in their exploitation of the issue, probably because they do not want Indo-Pakistani tensions to get out of control and because they do not want India to activate its own nuclear weapons program. [redacted]

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If the United States cuts aid to Pakistan as a result of Islamabad's nuclear procurement activities, Moscow probably will soften its criticism of Pakistan in an effort to exploit the strain in US-Pakistani relations. If Pakistan subsequently backs away from its support for the Afghan resistance, Moscow almost certainly will seek improved relations with Pakistan in order to further prospects for a favorable political settlement in Afghanistan. The Soviets might reduce their criticism of Pakistan's nuclear program, but would continue to counsel restraint in Islamabad in order to maintain credibility in India. Should Pakistan test a nuclear device, Moscow will protest strongly and launch a major propaganda campaign against Islamabad's action. [redacted]

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Soviet Comment on Pakistan's Nuclear Capabilities

Moscow's public campaign against Pakistan's nuclear weapons program has drawn heavily on Western and Indian press reporting. In October 1985, TASS cited a Western report that Pakistan had "already created the necessary components for a nuclear bomb" and had "even tested the explosive device" to trigger the nuclear reaction. Shortly thereafter, the Soviets cited Indian press reports that Pakistan had the necessary technology to produce two nuclear bombs annually. [redacted]

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--From May through July 1986, Soviet media criticism of Pakistan was particularly harsh. Pravda went beyond normal Soviet rhetoric to assail Pakistan for its

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"criminal involvement" in Afghanistan.

--Air and ground attacks into border areas of Pakistan from Afghanistan increased sharply in the first half of 1986.

From the summer of 1986 until the spring of 1987, Moscow's anti-Pakistan propaganda mill was muted

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This paralleled a generally softer line by Moscow toward Pakistan which may have reflected a perception by the Kremlin that its policy of pressure had been counterproductive.

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By late 1986, Moscow and Kabul had embarked on their "peace offensive" in Afghanistan and were trying to pull Islamabad into the campaign for "national reconciliation."

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By the spring of 1987, the Soviet attitude toward Pakistan and its nuclear program had again toughened, and pressure on the border with Afghanistan intensified. When a leading Pakistani nuclear scientist, A. Q. Khan, made a statement that a bomb had "already been tested on a simulator,"* the Soviets gave the statement extensive publicity. One Soviet press account cited US experts as having concluded that Pakistan was capable of producing "four or five Hiroshima-sized weapons annually."

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In the wake of this episode, the Soviets intensified their propaganda campaign against Pakistan and made a series of demarches on the nuclear issue. They approached the United States, charging that Pakistan's nuclear program was accelerating and calling on Washington to prevent Pakistan from exploding a nuclear device. Moscow stressed that such an explosion would damage international non-proliferation efforts and fundamentally change the strategic situation on the sub-continent.

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*In reporting Khan's statement, TASS acknowledged that the scientist subsequently had repudiated his statement about Pakistan's nuclear potential, but recalled that in 1984 Khan had blurted out comments about Pakistan's capacity for developing an atomic bomb.

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The recent arrest in Philadelphia of an individual of Pakistani extraction charged with trying to export from the United States material which could be used in the enrichment of uranium for nuclear arms triggered more critical Soviet commentary. TASS charged that Pakistani agents had tried to purchase such equipment and technology in the West for years. The article claimed that US intelligence had information that the Pakistani bomb would be analogous to those developed in the United States during World War II and would have a yield of 10-15 kilotons. [REDACTED]

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Soviet Charges About the US Role

The Soviets have coupled their attacks on the Pakistani program with allegations about US support for the program. They hope to undermine US-Pakistani relations, limit US-Pakistani military cooperation on Afghanistan, and weaken the prospects for better relations between the United States and India. They may even hope to help provoke US Congressional moves to cut aid to Pakistan. [REDACTED]

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Soviet charges of US complicity in Pakistan's nuclear weapons program have been directed primarily at Indian audiences and have emphasized the premise that Pakistan could not manufacture nuclear weapons without outside assistance. Moscow has charged that Washington has supplied Pakistan with the means to deliver nuclear weapons--even as it verbally "restrains" Pakistan from producing such weapons--and has accused the United States of violating the Symington Amendment, which provides for the cutoff of US assistance to any country importing technology for unsafeguarded nuclear facilities. [REDACTED]

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During its intense campaign against the Pakistani program in mid-1987, the Soviet press elaborated on these earlier themes. Pravda stated that the United States had trained Pakistani nuclear physicists, delivered a nuclear reactor to Pakistan, and "resorted to various ruses and illegal actions" in order to export nuclear technology to Pakistan. It explained that the United States was indulging Pakistan because the latter serves as a "bridgehead for the undeclared war against Afghanistan" and because having an "obedient ally, armed to the teeth, and, moreover, possessing nuclear weapons...fits well into US strategic plans in Asia." [REDACTED]

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Izvestiya charged Washington with having passed nuclear technology to Pakistan and accused the Reagan administration of having justified extending military aid to Pakistan by reassuring Congress that Pakistan does not intend to create nuclear weapons--even though Pakistan itself

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refuses to give such assurances. The article indicated that the administration has been reluctant to provide Congress with such assurances this year, because it would be "laughable" and was therefore asking Congress to make an exception to the law banning military sales to nations pursuing a nuclear weapons program. [redacted]

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The Indian Angle

Soviet propoganda [redacted] play to Indian fears of Pakistan's nuclear capability and complement domestic pressure in India to reassess its long-standing public policy of not developing nuclear weapons.

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[redacted] During the visit to India of the US Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs in August 1987, Soviet broadcasts to India were particularly harsh in their attacks on the United States for its failure to restrain Pakistan's nuclear ambitions. [redacted]

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While seeking to exploit the nuclear issue with India, the Soviets have shown occasional restraint--possibly because they do not want Indo-Pakistani friction to get out of control and do not want the Indians to activate their own nuclear weapons program. During a visit to India in the spring of 1987, when Indo-Pakistani tension was high, CPSU Party Secretary Anatoliy Dobrynin tried to calm Indian fears. According to press reports, he told a meeting of parliamentarians at an All-India Congress Committee reception that, although the Soviet Union shared India's general perceptions of threats in the subcontinent, it did not agree with the "paranoia" of the ruling Congress party. In response to questions, he specifically played down the threat from Pakistan, saying that the USSR was not aware of Pakistan's having a nuclear bomb. [redacted]

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Outlook

The Soviets will continue to work to prevent Pakistan from exploding a nuclear device and to focus attention on Washington's "complicity" in Pakistan's actions. They will emphasize Pakistan's success in importing nuclear technology and materials, attributing this to US collusion. They will ignore US efforts to cut off nuclear technology to Pakistan and US success in obstructing some nuclear transactions. [redacted]

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In exploiting the nuclear issue, the Soviets will continue to ignore Islamabad's rationale for its nuclear program--that it is needed as a deterrent against India--as well as President Zia's claims that Pakistan does not intend to take the final step of assembling a weapon. In order to avoid antagonizing India, Moscow will not endorse Pakistani proposals for

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New Delhi and Islamabad to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty and accept full scope safeguards, a nuclear free zone, or other verification measures, despite Soviet endorsement of nuclear free zones in other areas of the world. The Soviets presumably believe--as do we--that India is not likely to accept any nuclear arrangement in the region which limits its options, even if this position leads to a nuclear-armed Pakistan. Moscow's failure to put pressure on India with respect to these issues strongly supports our belief that the Soviets are less concerned with non-proliferation per se than with exploiting the issue to gain additional leverage in South Asia, particularly vis-a-vis the war in Afghanistan. [REDACTED]

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If the United States cuts aid to Pakistan as a result of Islamabad's nuclear procurement activities, the Soviets may soften their criticism of Pakistan, hoping to encourage the latter to alter its policy toward Afghanistan. If Pakistan should respond to these events by backing away from support for the Afghanistan resistance, Moscow will be even more likely to seek improved relations with Islamabad in order to achieve movement toward a favorable political settlement in Afghanistan. Under these circumstances, Moscow probably will be less critical, publicly and privately, of Pakistan's nuclear program. In order to maintain its credibility with India, however, the Soviets will have to continue to counsel restraint in Islamabad. And, should Pakistan test a nuclear device, the Soviets will feel compelled to protest strongly and to mount a propaganda campaign against Islamabad. [REDACTED]

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