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Pakistan: Military Seizes Government

The Pakistani military seized power last night, after apparently concluding that there was no hope of a negotiated settlement to the four-month-old political crisis. Prime Minister Bhutto and the most important opposition leaders have been placed in "temporary protective custody," and army commander Zia-ul-Haq reportedly is

heading the military government. [redacted]

The military had been extremely reluctant to intervene despite civil disorders worse than those that brought on military takeovers in 1958 and 1969. Among the most reluctant was Zia, who owed his position to Bhutto. He may well have agreed to act because of pressure from his

subordinates, and decisions are likely to be made by a group of senior officers rather than by Zia alone.

Zia, 52, has been in the army since 1944. He is a strong nationalist but is believed friendly to the US, where he attended two army staff schools when he was a major.

Although the generals could change

their minds later, they probably do not now want an extended period of military rule. The last military government ended in disaster with the loss of East Pakistan—now Bangladesh. The generals are still unsure of their popular support, and some have misgivings about the military's ability to govern.

Yesterday, the leaders of the opposition parties rejected a compromise formula for ending the crisis to which Bhutto and opposition representatives had agreed on Saturday. Although negotiations might still have continued, the military may have felt that widespread violence was likely to erupt. Clashes between the opposition and Bhutto's followers had been increasing, and [redacted]

[redacted] at least in Karachi, violence could surpass that of March and April if talks broke down.

A military government is unlikely to continue Bhutto's charges that the US is interfering in Pakistani politics, but otherwise it will probably pursue much the same foreign policy. The generals—as do most Pakistanis—see India as the major threat and will seek to maintain good relations with possible sources of military and economic aid including the US, China, and some of the Muslim nations. [redacted]

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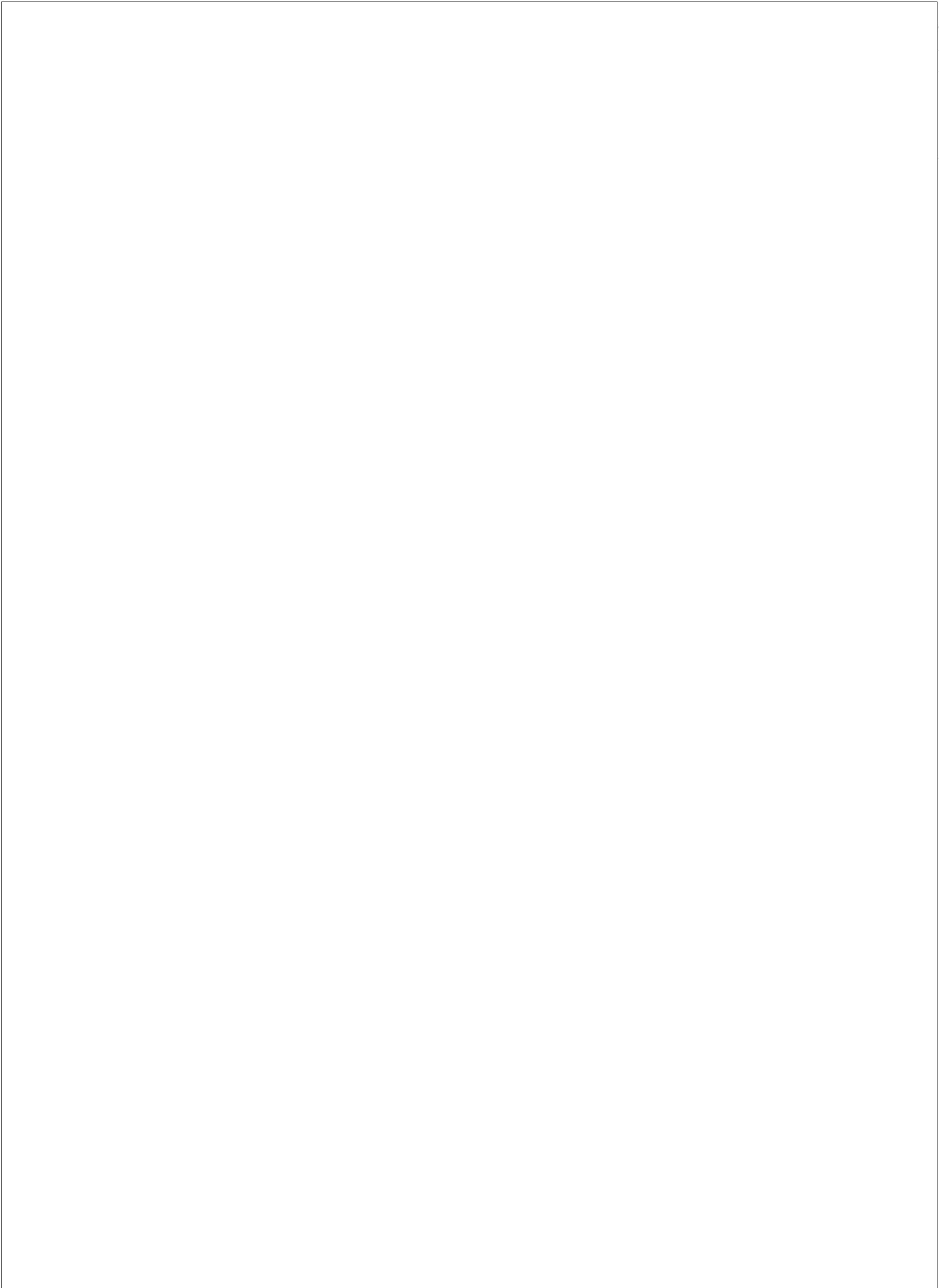
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