



Director of
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National Intelligence Estimate

**India-Pakistan: Prospects
for War in the 1990s**

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*This National Intelligence Estimate represents
the views of the Director of Central Intelligence
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October 1993

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NIE 93-37

India-Pakistan: Prospects for War in the 1990s

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*Prepared under the auspices of Bruce O. Riedel, National
Intelligence Officer for Near East and South Asia,
National Intelligence Council,*

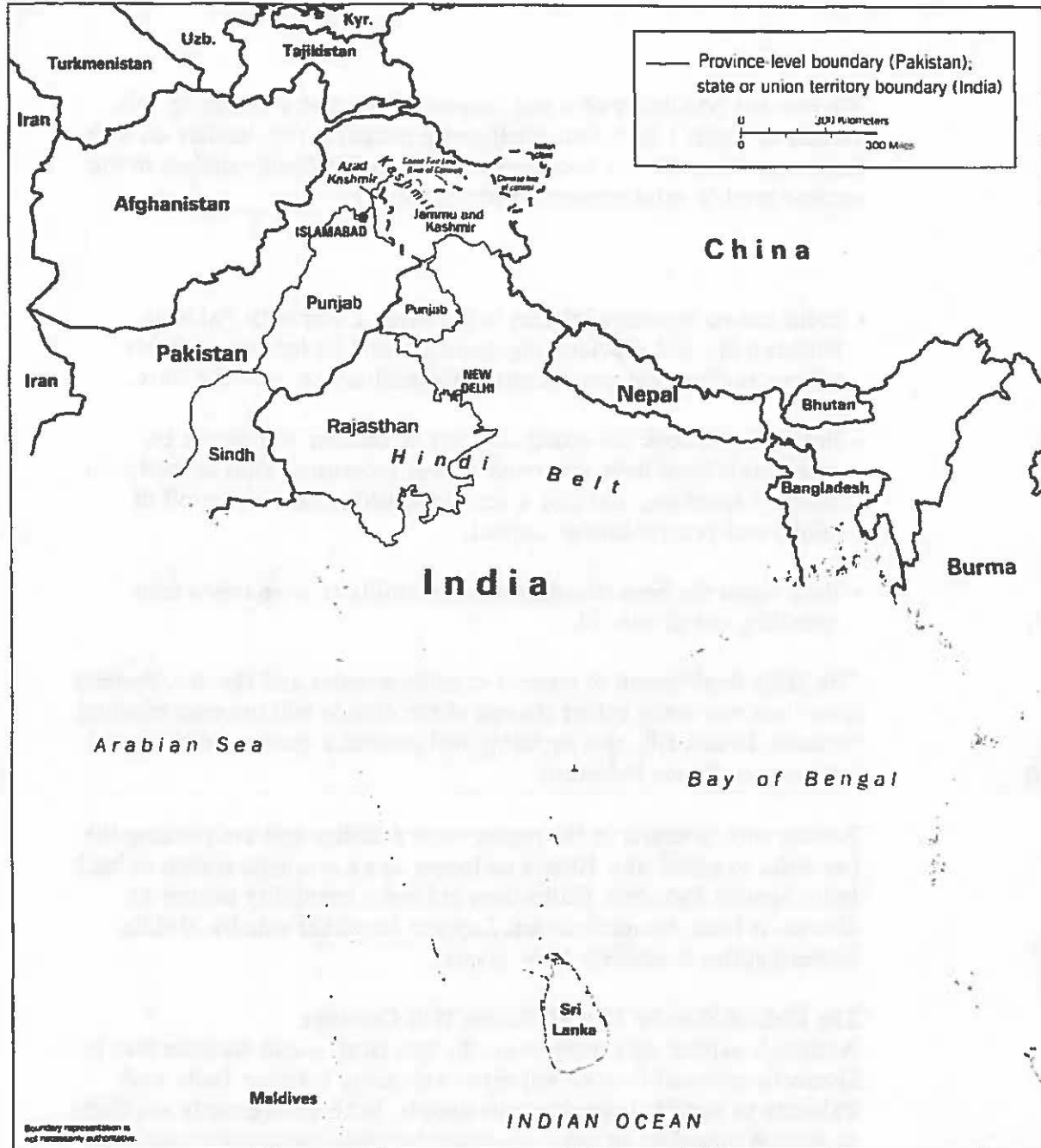
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Figure 1
India-Pakistan



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Key Judgments

We rate the possibility of a war between India and Pakistan in this decade as about 1 in 5. Our intelligence indicates that leaders on both sides want to avoid war because they fear that it could escalate to the nuclear level, a valid concern in our judgment.

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- India has no strategic interest in initiating a war with Pakistan. Pakistan has lost previous engagements, and its leaders probably believe another war could destroy the military or even the state.
- Both sides believe the economic costs of another war would be exorbitant. Both have economic reform programs, want to constrain military spending, and fear a conflict would result in a cutoff of public and private foreign capital.
- Both countries have demonstrated an ability to keep crises from spiralling out of control.

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The likely deployment of nuclear-capable missiles and the development of nuclear warheads before the end of the decade will increase bilateral tensions. Eventually, this probably will provide a more credible deterrent, especially for Pakistan.

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Powers with interests in the region want stability and are pushing the two sides to avoid war. Russia no longer has a strategic reason to back India against Pakistan. China does not want instability nearby to distract it from domestic issues. Support for either side by Middle Eastern states is unlikely to be pivotal.

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The Risk of War by Miscalculation Will Continue

Although neither side wants war, the two rivals could stumble into it. Domestic political factors will cause animosity between India and Pakistan to persist throughout the decade. Both governments are likely to remain unwilling to risk a domestic backlash by compromising on

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Key Assumptions

- *Governments in New Delhi and Islamabad* [redacted] *They generally will remain centrist, democratic, and secular in orientation, but the Pakistani Army will continue to play a role beyond its constitutional mandate.*
- *India's military and economic advantages over Pakistan will increase over time.*
- *But India is not likely to acquire a decisive conventional or strategic military advantage.*

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such core issues as Kashmir or the possession of nuclear weapons. Opposition parties will try to gain electoral advantage by perpetuating the rivalry. Communal violence in India will grow, further poisoning relations with Pakistan. [redacted]

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Compounding matters, [redacted] each supports militants and secessionists in the other. The two sides have created confidence-building measures (CBMs), but these are weak and might become irrelevant in a crisis. [redacted]

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Possession of Muslim-majority Kashmir is fundamental to the self-image of each nation—it has been a battlefield in all previous conflicts. About 350,000 Indian troops are fighting an insurgency that appears to have no end. These forces can prevent Kashmir's succession or its acquisition by Pakistan but are unlikely to defeat the insurgents. [redacted]

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[redacted] we think nuclear deterrence could break down in a crisis. Either military could develop hair-trigger responses that would escalate quickly to the nuclear level, and the time available to national leaders and external powers to defuse tensions would rapidly compress. [redacted]

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Implications for the United States

India and Pakistan likely will seek US assistance in reducing the risk of inadvertent war. They are not impervious to US and Western pressure:

- [redacted]

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• [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Both sides will resist pressure that affects such core security issues as nuclear weapons:

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- Each views US relations with the other as a zero-sum game. Positive steps toward one side likely will be misinterpreted by the other as a "tilt."

• [REDACTED]

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Both sides probably would consider US assistance in CBM verification

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What Could Change Our Forecast?

Our estimate of the relatively low probability of war would change in the unlikely event that India achieved a dramatic military advantage or if either country underwent radical political change:

- If India's conventional military superiority grew rapidly, Pakistan probably would rely increasingly on its nuclear deterrent.

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• [REDACTED]

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Scope Note

This Estimate complements National Intelligence Estimate 92-31 (three volumes), *The Indo-Pakistani Military Rivalry*. In that Estimate we addressed trends in military power and capabilities, and posited potential conflict outcomes. This Estimate assesses the likelihood that the two sides would go to war and under what circumstances. It addresses these questions:

- What is the likelihood of another Indo-Pakistani conflict erupting by the year 2000?
 - Will nuclear deterrence be a stabilizing factor?
 - To what extent will external actors—particularly the United States—be able to prevent war and reduce the chances for miscalculation?
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Discussion

An Enduring Rivalry

India and Pakistan are locked in a visceral rivalry that is not likely to moderate appreciably through the end of the decade. After achieving independence in 1947, India and Pakistan fought three major wars—in 1947, 1965, and 1971; since then, two border crises—in 1987 and 1990—raised tensions to alarming levels. Each country regards the other as a military and subversive threat. Pakistan designs its defense and foreign policy strategies primarily to counter that threat, while India also takes China into consideration. []

Domestic political considerations will reinforce the rivalry:

- [] in both countries are not likely to risk domestic political backlash by offering accommodations on core issues such as Kashmir or nuclear weapons.
- Opposition parties in both countries will seek electoral advantage by perpetuating the rivalry and pressuring the government to act tough.
- Communal violence in India—which almost certainly will worsen—will continue to poison relations with Pakistan and promote the political fortunes of extremists in both countries. Resurgent Hindu nationalism, led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), will further strain New Delhi's ability to keep the communal peace and normalize relations with Pakistan. []

Potential Flashpoints

Kashmir. Kashmir—a battlefield in all previous conflicts—will remain a dangerous, unresolved issue. Possession of this Muslim-majority territory is fundamental to the self-image of each nation: Pakistan as a self-proclaimed homeland for South Asian Muslims and India as a united, secular democracy with a large Muslim minority. Neither government is likely to deviate from its well-established position that independence for Kashmir is out of the question:

- Pakistan sees Kashmir as an issue of self-determination and human rights. It backs 40-year-old UN resolutions calling for a plebiscite that allows Kashmiris to choose between India and Pakistan. Islamabad will seek every opportunity to internationalize the dispute, including pleas to Washington to convene a Camp David-like process.
- New Delhi counters that Kashmir is an integral part of the Indian Union and regards bilateral or international arbitration as unacceptable. India will vigorously oppose a US or UN role in settling the dispute. The crux of the problem, according to New Delhi, is Pakistan's political and military assistance to Kashmiri and other anti-Indian militants.
- The 1972 Simla Accord committed both sides to resolving disputes peacefully. Although the Accord is not likely to be shelved, each side accuses the other of violating key provisions. []

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3.3(b)(1) [] Indian security personnel are
6.2(d) fighting an insurgency that appears to have
no end. Firing incidents along the Line of
Control are common, particularly in the
spring when militants begin their seasonal
infiltrations across the Line of Control. []

In our judgment, Indian security forces can
prevent Kashmir's secession or its acquisition
by Pakistan, but these forces will not be able
to defeat the insurgency in this decade.
Kashmiri militants have the staying power to
tie down substantial numbers of Indian secu-
rity personnel. []

New Delhi will continue efforts begun last
spring to establish a dialogue with Kashmiris
with the goal of ultimately holding state
elections. New Delhi hopes that divisions
among the militants and war weariness
among Kashmiris will work in its favor.
These efforts to restart the political process
in the war-torn state probably will falter
because Kashmiri moderates have been
weakened by New Delhi's tough security
policies and because Kashmiri hardliners are
intransigent. The militants are divided over
whether Kashmir should become indepen-
dent or merge with Pakistan and appear
unwilling to settle for less. []

Pakistan uses the Kashmir issue as a foreign
policy bludgeon against India. Whenever dis-
content in Jammu and Kashmir erupts,
Islamabad highlights the problem and
demands international action favorable to
Pakistan's interests in the dispute. []

Internal Meddling. New Delhi and Islam-
abad are unlikely to stop supporting seces-
sionist and other militants in each other's
territory. Pakistan has had a more aggressive
campaign than has India. Pakistan wants the

secession of Kashmir and has a receptive
audience there. India has supported ethnic
separatists in Pakistan, but the effort has
been comparatively small. India has no
desire to annex Pakistani territory. Both
sides will be wary that extremist attacks
could invite military retaliation or US sanc-
tions. Consequently, the provision of arms
and training will be carefully circumscribed.
Because []
however, the clients could independently
conduct highly destabilizing terrorist opera-
tions. []

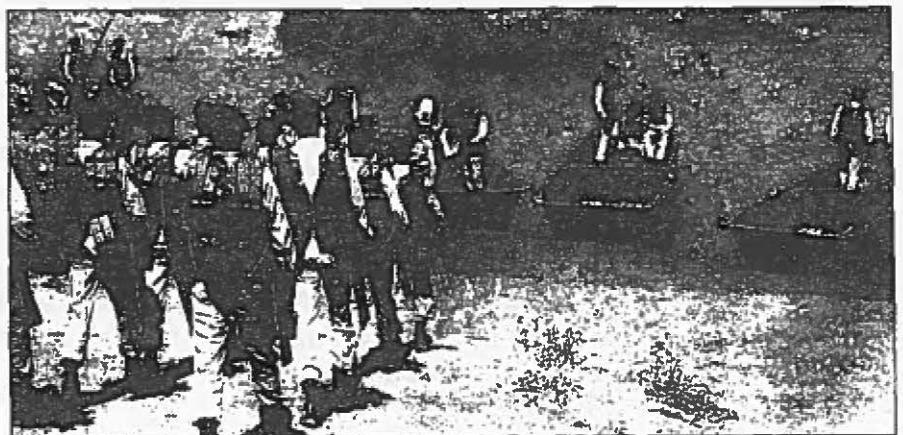
Communal Incidents. The 1947 partition of
the Subcontinent along Hindu-Muslim lines
did not resolve the communal question but
broadened it into a diplomatic and military
problem. Communal violence in India and its
repercussions in Pakistan will poison bilat-
eral relations and promote the political for-
tunes of extremists in both countries. Over
time, the cumulative impact of this violence
probably will increase levels of tension in the
Subcontinent. Examples of this trend include
destruction of a mosque/temple in Ayodhya
by Hindu radicals in 1992 and the standoff
between Indian security forces and Kashmiri
militants in the Hazratbal shrine in October
1993. []

[] believe Hindu nationalists led
by the BJP will not form a national govern-
ment this decade, largely because it lacks
appeal in many parts of the country. Never-
theless, the BJP's divisive campaign of
championing the rights of the Hindu major-
ity—over 80 percent of India's population—
will continue to inflame communal passions
and erode the secular ideal in India.
Although India's national survival likely will

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Figure 2. India and Pakistan have a long history of supporting opposition elements in each other's territory. Kashmiri militants who advocate merger with Pakistan stage an anti-Indian rally (top). Pakistan Army troops (bottom) conduct internal security operations in troubled Sindh Province.

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6.2(d) not be in jeopardy, resurgent Hindu nationalism will further strain New Delhi's ability to keep the communal peace and normalize relations with Pakistan. []

But War Is Probably Not on the Horizon

Despite these flashpoints, overall, we rate the possibility of war between India and Pakistan as about 1 in 5:

- 6.2(d) • Leaders on each side will fear the other's nuclear weapons potential and thus will be cautious about risking a conflict that could escalate to the nuclear level. []
[] key Indian and Pakistani leaders are deeply concerned that a fourth war cannot be kept limited.
- The likely deployment of nuclear-capable missiles and development of nuclear warheads before the end of the decade will increase bilateral tensions but should, in the long run, provide a more credible deterrent, particularly for Pakistan.
- Military leaders will exercise caution because they know they cannot achieve victory at an acceptable cost. Both militaries will remain ill-equipped for war. Budget constraints, supply disruptions, and the burden of internal security duties will continue to undermine readiness.
- India outnumbers Pakistan in almost every category of military capability—a disparity not likely to change in this decade. India, however, has no overriding strategic interest in initiating a war with Pakistan.

- [] Pakistani military leaders probably believe that another conflict with India could well destroy the Pakistan military, if not the state.

- Indian and Pakistani leaders perceive the economic costs and dislocations of another war—conventional or nuclear—as exorbitant. For example, [] during the 1990 Kashmir crisis indicates the potential economic costs of war weighed very heavily on the minds of Indian leaders.

- India and Pakistan have demonstrated in past crises an ability to pull back from the brink and to develop “red lines” they will not cross.

- The international community, worried about a nuclear conflict in the Subcontinent, will pressure both sides to step back from confrontation. []

Both countries have launched broad economic reform programs that are likely to continue to constrain military spending. Political leaders of both are sensitive to the concerns of international financial institutions about the size of their military budgets. Both believe a regional conflict would provoke a cutoff of public and private foreign capital. []

War Through Miscalculation

The lessons of previous Indo-Pakistani crises suggest several conditions that could contribute to a conflict (see annex B). []

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~~Secret~~***Divergent Negotiating Perceptions***

Since achieving independence in 1947, India and Pakistan have negotiated regularly to reduce tensions and resolve contentious issues. Noticeable successes include the 1962 Indus River Waters Treaty, the 1972 Simla Accord, and the 1990 agreement covering military exercises in border areas. These diplomatic

milestones notwithstanding, Indian and Pakistani diplomats bring to the negotiating table assumptions about their adversary that will hinder—if not doom—diplomatic progress. Overcoming these divergent perceptions will pose a serious challenge to the United States or other potential intermediaries:

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Intelligence failures could prove disastrous. Pakistani war plans call for preemptive strikes against Indian forces if Pakistani

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Indian and Pakistani Views on Nuclear Weapons

For both sides, nuclear weapons confer status in a world that otherwise is generally indifferent to the Subcontinent's intramural disputes. Both India and Pakistan maintain a public position of ambiguity concerning nuclear weapons, though neither doubts the other's nuclear capability (see annex A). Each shoulders significant diplomatic and economic costs by developing a nuclear capability, suggesting that both have calculated the political, and perhaps military, value of these weapons.

India views nuclear weapons primarily as the coin of international power and prestige, deterrence against Pakistan, retaliation against a Pakistani first strike should deterrence fail, and—once it has ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear payloads long distances—a strategic

equalizer with rival China. India, though mindful of the high costs of a nuclear exchange, probably believes it could absorb a limited nuclear strike from Pakistan and then could retaliate.

Pakistan sees nuclear weapons primarily as a deterrent and as insurance for its survival if a conflict developed with conventionally superior India.

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leaders are convinced an all-out attack is imminent because Pakistan lacks the strategic depth to absorb such an attack. If India's military leaders were convinced—rightly or wrongly—that Pakistani units were preparing another conventional assault on Kashmir, they probably would order armored strike units into wartime positions in Punjab and Rajasthan. That, in turn, would prompt Pakistani countermeasures.

Furthermore, existing crisis reduction mechanisms may not be enough. Confidence-building measures (CBMs)—such as the military communications “hotline” between

New Delhi and Islamabad—have contributed to the Indo-Pakistani dialogue but might prove irrelevant in a fast-moving crisis.

Several events could trigger an escalating confrontation, for example:

- A protracted surge of violence in Indian Kashmir that threatened New Delhi's grip on the state.
- Large-scale military exercises in border areas, especially if one or both sides deliberately evaded prior notification requirements.

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India than to Pakistan. But Moscow has no strategic reason to support New Delhi unless Pakistan cooperates closely with Islamic extremists in Central Asia.

- *Middle Eastern Islamic states* provided no significant support to Pakistan during previous wars with India and are unlikely to do so in the future. [redacted]

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[redacted] Most other Islamic states will give lipservice to Pakistan's position on Kashmir but will not risk mortgaging their relationship with India.

- Tehran probably has agreed to provide Islamabad with logistic support, such as ammunition and safehaven for aircraft and naval assets, in the event of an Indo-Pakistani war. *Iran*, however, is trying to improve ties to India and probably would demand a significant quid pro quo before extending further aid to a Pakistani war effort. [redacted]

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Nonetheless, extra-regional powers will retain a measure of military influence in the region by providing or denying military hardware, including spare parts. The two South Asian adversaries will continue to be viewed as potential arms purchasers, even though neither will have the financial resources to make large-scale military purchases as both did in the 1980s. Both will seek to strengthen existing military supply relationships and develop new sources of weaponry, overhaul, and upgrade services. Most hard currency arms producers will not give Islamabad or New Delhi concessionary prices or favorable payment terms. Some weaponry, however, may be obtained at

"bargain basement" prices from such traditional suppliers as Russia and China. Niche marketers—Israel, for example—will find increased demand for their more affordable upgrade services and are likely to provide them to India. [redacted]

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What Would Change Our Assessment?

Our estimate of the relatively low probability of war assumes that governments in New Delhi and Islamabad will remain centrist and generally democratic and secular in orientation for the remainder of the decade. A dramatic shift in the military balance or radical political change would increase the probability for military brinkmanship and war. Several scenarios could fundamentally alter our estimate for the prospects for war, and we assess their impact below. [redacted]

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A Dramatic Shift in the Indo-Pakistani Military Balance. The Indian and Pakistani economies probably will not expand sufficiently by the year 2000 to allow either side significantly to modernize its armed forces. Defense budgets will be hard pressed to keep up with inflation, and funds for procuring foreign weapons will be tight. Moreover, neither side will have the industrial capability to produce sophisticated weapons of sufficient quantity and quality to alter the military balance. [redacted]

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Nevertheless, if India's economy grew considerably faster than we anticipate, New Delhi could elect to acquire greater mobility for its infantry and artillery forces and a better logistic capability. These improvements would provide Indian military planners with a higher probability of success in a

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war with Pakistan and would increase the temptation to launch an attack during a crisis. []

emphasize defense preparedness, and staunchly preserve India's nuclear options. []

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Rapid Indian military improvements would strain Pakistan's ability to remain competitive. Islamabad would feel even more threatened by India's growing military edge and would rely more heavily on nuclear deterrence. As a last resort, a desperate government in Islamabad also might consider an extreme measure such as openly deploying nuclear weapons. []

The prospects for war would increase in the unlikely event a radical BJP government came to power. Such a government—perhaps swept to power on the heels of an Indian economic collapse—would be more likely than the secular Congress (I) to blunder into a conflict with Pakistan. Moreover, BJP radicals almost certainly would polarize Indian society and cause significantly more communal violence that would damage relations with Pakistan. Deep distrust would increase the potential for military reprisals by either side. []

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We do not foresee circumstances under which Pakistan could tip the conventional military balance in its favor. []

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We think the nuclear rivalry will be relatively stable. []

[] But if one side achieved the result would be destabilizing. []

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A Hindu Nationalist Government in New Delhi. The BJP, now India's largest opposition party, is unlikely to have sufficient support to win the next national election that must be held by 1996. Later in the decade, however, BJP fortunes may improve as the party expands its political base beyond the Hindu heartland. Although the moderate wing of the party probably would predominate as it did when BJP leaders held ministerial portfolios in a coalition government in the 1970s, a BJP government would blame Pakistan for India's domestic turmoil,

An Islamist Regime in Islamabad. A radical Islamic government in Pakistan also is highly unlikely this decade. Islamic parties, such as the Jamaat-i-Islami, received less than 5 percent of the vote in recent national elections, but these parties will continue to exert political influence out of proportion to their popular support. Under certain extreme conditions—for instance, economic collapse and/or a military dictator joining with militants—an Islamist government could be formed. []

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A radical government almost certainly would establish an Islamic system of government based on its interpretation of shariah law and Islamic values. Such a regime would champion the cause of India's Muslims—some 12 percent of the Indian population—particularly when communal riots erupt. It also would promote the liberation of Kashmir by openly arming and training anti-Indian militants. []

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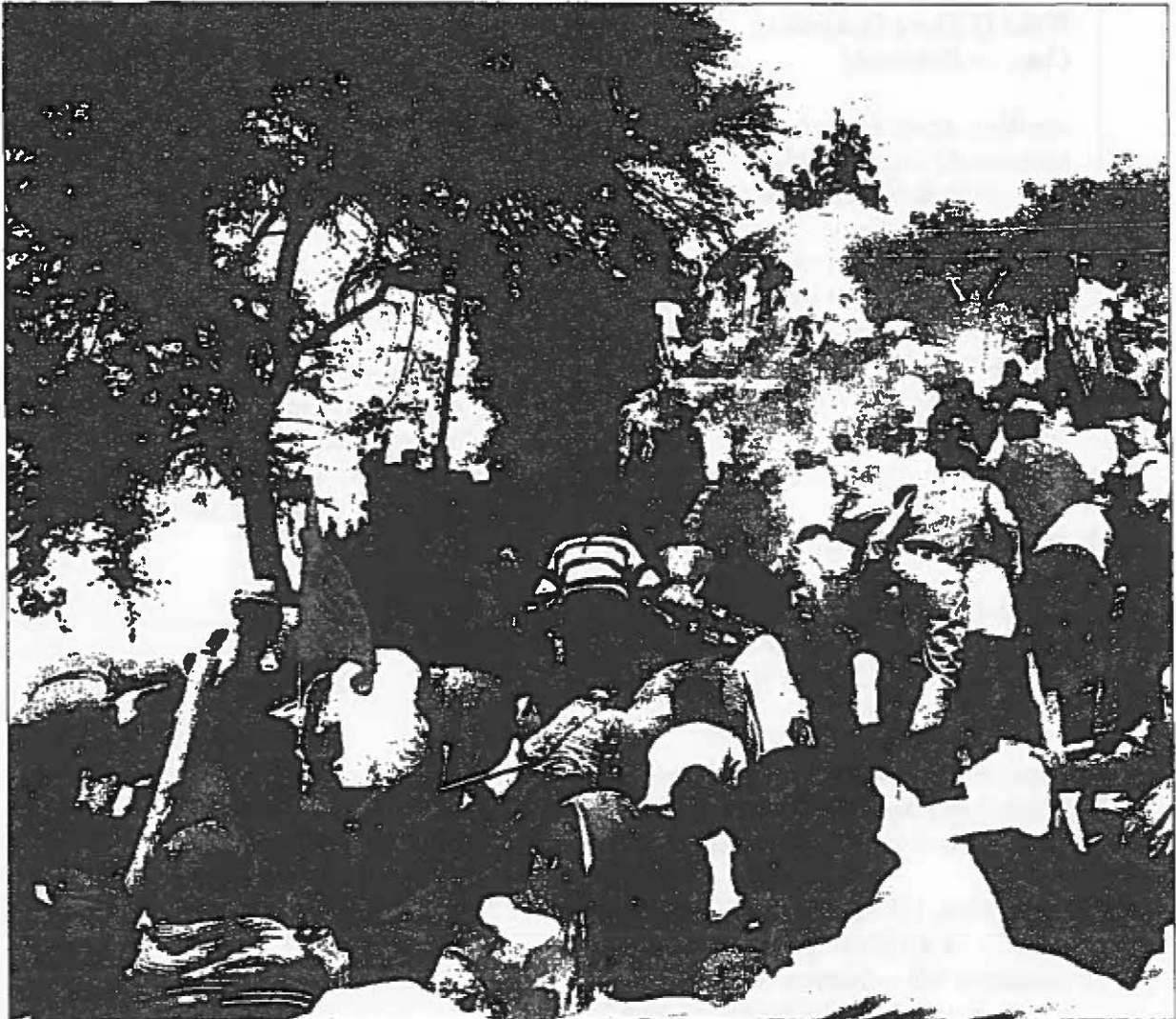


Figure 3. [redacted] The action at Ayodhya sparked widespread communal riots in India and drew sharp protests from Pakistan. [redacted]

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If such a regime came to power, [redacted]
[redacted] At a minimum, New Delhi would step up military preparedness along the western border. The political appeal of the BJP would grow in India as BJP leaders capitalized on heightened anti-Muslim sentiments. [redacted] 6.2(d)

A combination of change in the military balance and an extremist government in either capital would significantly increase the prospects for war, in our judgment. [redacted]

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Coup in Pakistan?***

Another Army seizure of power in Pakistan would immediately set back relations with India. After an initial period of mistrust, however, New Delhi would accustom itself to dealing with a military regime that, in our estimation, would want to avoid war. As in the past, a military government probably would be cautious but willing to negotiate with India.

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Implications for the United States

India and Pakistan are likely to seek US assistance in advancing their competing agendas and reducing the risk of inadvertent war.

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- Both countries will resist pressure that affects such core security issues as Kashmir and nuclear weapons.
- Each views US relations with the other country as a zero-sum game and overestimates US influence. Measures applied to one country will be perceived as a "tilt" toward the other.

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Yet, the two countries are not impervious to US pressure:

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[Redacted]

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Both parties will continue to discuss nonproliferation policies with the United States. However, their objective will be to avoid US sanctions while cultivating Washington's support for their own positions.

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[Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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The Kashmir Conundrum

International diplomatic engagement in the Kashmir dispute could take two forms: a definitive resolution of the problem, or a more limited goal of reducing tensions. A solution is highly unlikely because neither India nor Pakistan is willing to give up its claims. []

threat from India. Islamabad also would request that the United States and the international community underwrite a Kashmir initiative with massive doses of economic aid. []

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India will resist proposals that are not skewed in its favor and will demand recognition of its sovereignty claims. New Delhi is likely to see expressions of concern over Kashmir as an endorsement of Pakistan's campaign to reopen the Kashmir question to international arbitration. India will oppose all such efforts. []

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Pakistan will try to involve the United States and the international community by highlighting Indian human rights violations and exaggerating the military

Confidence-Building Measures

Both sides probably will consider longstanding US offers to assist in CBM verification [] and will look to Washington to help defuse crises that threaten to overwhelm existing CBM arrangements. Modest CBM advances will be possible, but progress will be slow and fitful. CBMs that have discernible benefits—improved communications for use during crises, for example—will have the best chance of success. Efforts to improve verification and compliance with CBMs already in force—for instance, the 1991 agreement on preventing airspace violations—also may be productive. []

Nuclear Proliferation

[] For domestic political reasons, both sides will resist “caving in” to Western—particularly US—nonproliferation pressures. []

Barring radical shifts in strategic thinking or public opinion, neither side is likely to foreclose its nuclear options by signing the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty:

- Islamabad would demand ironclad security guarantees against a conventional Indian attack.

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- New Delhi would want China to participate in the arms control process and drastically to reduce, if not dismantle, its nuclear arsenal. Moreover, New Delhi probably would seek US assurances that Washington would not rearm Pakistan if Pressler sanctions were lifted. [redacted]

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International efforts to discourage both sides from deploying ballistic missiles that could carry nuclear payloads also will face strong resistance. [redacted]

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In times of regional crisis the United States can help the two rivals back away from conflict. [redacted]

[redacted] for example, could assist in defusing tensions. [redacted]

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Altering Levels of US Engagement in the Region

Concerted US engagement in Indo-Pakistani "peacebuilding" initiatives is not likely to resolve the core disputes that define the rivalry and threaten regional peace. Each side would suspect that Washington had tilted in favor of the other. [redacted]

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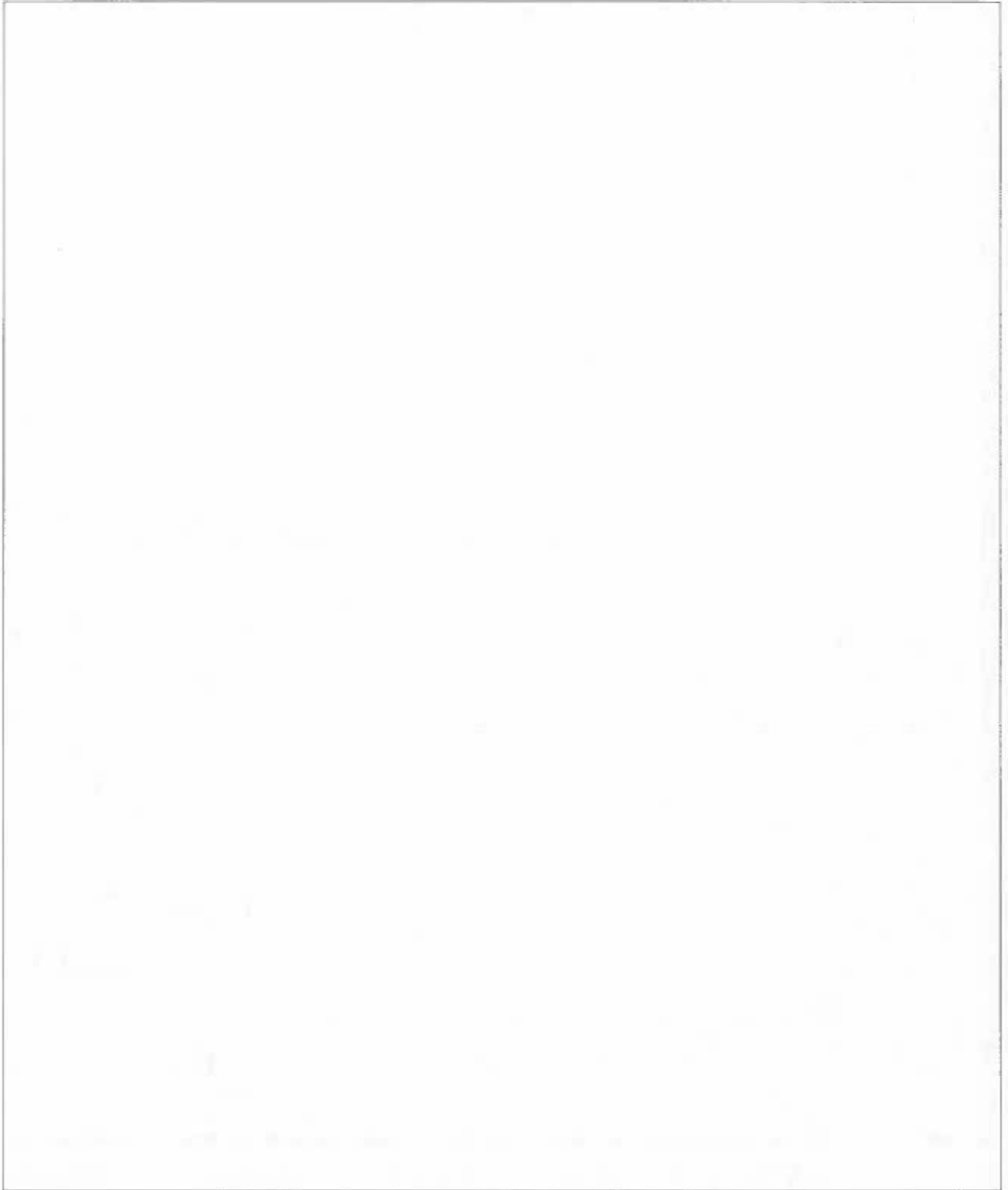
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Annex A



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Annex B

The Crises of 1987 and 1990

The Indo-Pakistani crises of 1987 and 1990 were symptomatic of the deep suspicions each side harbors about the other's intentions. In early 1987, India's BRASS TACKS military exercises precipitated a high-stakes game of military brinkmanship.

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Diplomatic intervention by Pakistan's martial law ruler defused tensions and allowed both sides to step back from the brink. Two years later Pakistan staged its own major exercise, "Strike of the Believers."

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The 1990 crisis stemmed from India's deployment of additional troops to Kashmir. The Pakistan Army's subsequent preparations for a major summer training exercise—probably intended to send a message to New Delhi—and Indian assessments of unusually large Pakistani force deployments in late April caused alarm in New Delhi. India then deployed armored, artillery, and infantry units closer to the border.

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An important lesson learned by both sides from the 1987 experience was the need for rapid communication between military commanders. By the time of the second crisis, a hotline had been installed and was used frequently.

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Several factors appeared to have played a role in defusing the 1990 crisis. Leaders in both countries wanted to avoid war and recognized that the cost of a conventional conflict would be unacceptably high. They made concerted efforts to get this message to third parties, especially Washington. Time US diplomatic intervention helped resolve the standoff.

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In our judgment, the threat of nuclear strikes also played an important role in preventing war.

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Aside from the low-level conflicts in the north stimulated by mutual subversion, the continent has long been in a guarded truce. This is the consequence of mutual nuclear deterrence and a conviction among more reasonable leaders on both sides that a conflict would probably not solve anything. There are no obvious indications that this situation will change in the short to medium term. But factors in the equation are changing:

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- Pakistan's economic woes make it questionable whether its military budget can be sustained at the level needed to keep it militarily competitive with India, which is much bigger and richer, and economically more robust.

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This paper will attempt to identify circumstances or developments that might destabilize this truce and greatly increase the chance of conflict. It will suggest triggers of such developments and indicators that they might be occurring.

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**National Security
Information**

**Unauthorized Disclosure
Subject to Criminal Sanctions**

**Information available as of 28 October 1993 was used
in the preparation of this National Intelligence Estimate.**

**The following intelligence organizations participated
in the preparation of this Estimate:**

**The Central Intelligence Agency
The Defense Intelligence Agency
The National Security Agency
The Bureau of Intelligence and Research,
Department of State
The Director of Intelligence,
Department of Energy**

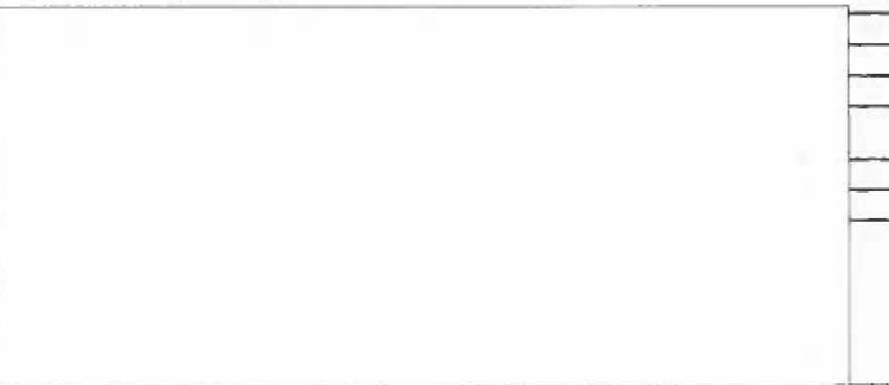
also participating:

**The Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence,
Department of the Army
The Director of Naval Intelligence,
Department of the Navy
The Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence,
Department of the Air Force
The Director of Intelligence,
Headquarters, Marine Corps
The Office of Intelligence Support,
Department of the Treasury**

6.2(d)

**This Estimate was approved for publication by the
National Foreign Intelligence Board.**

6.2(d)



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