

## ERIC MARGOLIS



# Brave Pakistan

Pakistanis living in Canada are all too frequently the targets of abuse and discrimination. The beer-sodden louts who so often assault these smaller reserved men would be surprised to learn that Pakistan's Punjabis are among the world's finest martial races.

In fact, while outwardly macho Canadians do no more than whimper about Soviet aggression, Pakistan is almost singlehandedly blocking the expansion of Russian power into southwest Asia.

For the past 400 years, Russia has been expanding southward; first to the Black Sea, then into Central Asia, and now in Afghanistan. Czars and commissars alike have shared the ambition of reaching the open waters of the Arabian Sea. Sir Harold Mackinder, the great geopolitician, predicted in 1900 that when Russia reached the Arabian Sea it would become the world's dominant power.

Today, all that blocks this historical Russian goal is Pakistan. Russia is slowly but surely absorbing Afghanistan; the next Soviet target will be Pakistan's rebellious province of Baluchistan and its Arabian Sea port of Gwadar.

Russian KGB and East German agents are already hard at work in Baluchistan, stirring up its local tribes against the central government of Pakistan's tough military ruler, Gen. Zia ul-Haq. The Soviets are also helping aggravate Pakistan's increasing regional and tribal problems with the aim of shattering apart this strategic nation.

Pakistan serves as an arms conduit and base for the anti-Russian Afghan resistance movements; without this vital support, it would soon collapse. This war has also saddled Pakistan with three million Afghan refugees, an intolerable burden to such a poor country.

To the east, Pakistan faces a hostile India; many Pakistanis believe that New Delhi may aspire to the recreation of pre-1948 Greater India — including Pakistan, Bangladesh and perhaps even Sri Lanka. India's recent military occupation of the Minamayan kingdom of Bhutan and the simmering dispute over Kashmir have done nothing to ease Pakistan's apprehensions.

### India's ties to Russia

Under the rule of Indira Gandhi, India has become a close ally of Russia. There appears to be active strategic and political co-ordination between these two major powers, both of whom are inimical to Pakistan. India has never openly condemned the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan though it hardly misses an opportunity to denounce the U.S.

Indian-Russian pressure on Pakistan is mounting. In addition to Russia's efforts to destabilize Pakistan, India is rapidly increasing its already huge military forces that have a superiority of at least two to one over Pakistan. India is now reported to be planning to add the latest Russian arms, such as the T-80 tank and the MiG-31 fighter, to its impressive arsenal of Soviet and Western equipment.

In addition to thwarting Russia's southward drive, Pakistan also performs another little known but vital security function. Pakistani troops and military advisers are playing an increasingly important role in the defence of the West's oil interests in the Arabian Peninsula.

According to Israeli intelligence sources, at least two and perhaps three Pakistani Army brigades are now based in Saudi Arabia: one or more near the oilfields around Daharan and the second in the north at Tabuk. Additional Pakistani military and security advisers are aiding the Gulf Emirates and Jordan.

The underpopulated, backward oil kingdoms of Arabia lack the capability of defending themselves from either outside attack or against internal subversion. Pakistan's superb soldiers could become Arabia's — and the West's — first line of defence in the crucial oil-producing region. In return, Pakistan receives much-needed economic aid from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Emirates.

If Pakistan should collapse and splinter under the combined pressures of Soviet subversion, possible Indian invasion or its own regional squabbles, the West would suffer a major strategic defeat. The Middle East would lie exposed to the Russians.

Canadians should be aware of these facts. Pakistan is straining every resource to defend itself and the West's interests from the growing Soviet threat, something that cannot be said about Canada. Our political leaders enjoy the luxury of bleating about peace precisely because of brave nations like Pakistan.  
(Eric Margolis is a member of the Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies)