

# Who gained most from Zia's death?

The plane crash that killed the late president Zia ul-Haq and some of Pakistan's top military men in August was definitely caused by sabotage. That was the finding this week of a joint Pakistani-U.S. investigation team. Who mounted the assassination will be the subject of yet another investigation.

But already State Department officials in Washington are putting out a steady stream of leaks designed to cast doubt on the report and spread the idea that the crash was merely an accident.

What we are seeing here may be a replay of events surrounding the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II. Though there was strong suspicion of Bulgarian and Soviet involvement in that plot, Washington went to great lengths to downplay or even pooh-pooh the evidence. Why? Because accusing the Soviet Union of such a heinous act would have undermined budding detente between the superpowers.

Even if proof was positive, what would Washington have done then? Bomb Moscow?

Easter, obviously, to shrug off the whole incident. And to ignore the intriguing possibility that the attack had been orchestrated not by the KGB, as most people thought, but by its rival, Soviet military intelligence — the GRU. This highly secret organization reports directly to the Soviet general staff, not to the party. It's just possible that the Soviet marshals decided to liquidate the Polish Pope because they feared he was sparking a Polish uprising against the Soviets. A few bullets could accomplish more than five armored divisions.

The same reasoning applies to Pakistan. I still find it hard to accept that the proud marshals of the Red Army would meekly pull out of Afghanistan, as provided by the Geneva Accords. Particularly to the sound of loud



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crowning by the U.S. and the mujahedin that they had beaten the Russians. The Russians have not been beaten. They are pulling out their troops to improve their worldwide image.

So it's just possible that the GRU may have been sent to kill Zia and his close ally, Gen. Akhbar, who were spearheading the war in Afghanistan against Soviet occupation. After all, didn't Moscow threaten Zia with "grave consequences," and warn that he would be held "personally responsible" for sustaining the war effort against the Red Army?

According to the investigators, Zia's well-guarded aircraft crashed after the crew was most likely "incapacitated" by some narcotic or toxic substance that had been secreted in the aircraft. Only the GRU, KGB or CIA would have the expertise to mount such a sophisticated method of murder, or possess the advanced biological warfare labs capable of producing whatever mysterious substance brought the plane down.

But accusing the Soviets of such a crime, just when Washington and Moscow seem to be falling rapturously into each other's embrace — and just before a U.S. election in which George Bush is gloating over chummy U.S.-Soviet relations — is simply too awkward and

unpleasant. That's why the State Department is loudly whispering "accident."

Anyway, who cares about Afghanistan or Zia's death? All that's history. We're moving forward into an era of goodwill!

Maybe in Washington. But in Pakistan, and among the Afghan resistance fighters, there is no goodwill to be seen. True, the Soviets have pulled half their occupation army out of Afghanistan and, in spite of recent threats by Moscow to halt the pullout, the rest may leave by March, 1989.

At the same time, however, the Soviets have just signed a major, long-term aid deal with the communist regime in Kabul. Even more important, they have also just named as new ambassador to Kabul a member of the ruling Politburo and one of the USSR's highest-ranking and most skilled diplomats.

This means there will be no humiliating Soviet flight from a besieged Kabul, no Soviet ambassador fleeing on the struts of a Russian helicopter. In short, no chance that Moscow will allow anything like the shameful route of the U.S. from Vietnam.

On the contrary, the Soviets are now engaged in a new diplomatic offensive to negotiate directly with the shaky mujahedin coalition and then split it apart. Zia's death and growing terrorist attacks against Pakistan by KGB and Afghan communist agents are aimed at getting Pakistan to cut off its vital aid to the resistance.

The likely victory of Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan's Nov. 16 national elections may hasten this process. What's more, U.S. military and diplomatic aid for the mujahedin is wiling in the powerful rays of sunshine emanating from Moscow. The Great Game for Afghanistan is far — very far — from being over, as the patient Russians quite well understand.