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India and the Sikh Challenge

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A Research Paper

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*NESA 87-10015
March 1987*

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A Research Paper

This paper was prepared by [redacted]
Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis,
with a contribution by [redacted] Office of
Leadership Analysis. It was coordinated with the
Directorate of Operations. [redacted]

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India and the Sikh Challenge

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Summary

*Information available
as of 20 February 1987
was used in this report.*

India is slowing the growth of an incipient Sikh insurgency in Punjab. Indian Government officials estimate that security forces have captured or killed one-third of the extremist leadership. Border security forces have slowed Sikh infiltration from Pakistan. Despite several successful Sikh attacks against Hindus, New Delhi has succeeded in preventing widespread communal violence between Hindus and Sikhs.

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Nonetheless, the extremists pose a long-term terrorist threat that will prove impossible for New Delhi to stamp out. Indian security officials believe at least 200 Sikh extremists are active in Punjab. These extremists refuse to compromise on their demand for an independent Sikh state. Despite their limited numbers, the extremists enjoy widespread support and political influence throughout Punjab. Contributions from Sikh temples, profits from narcotics trafficking, and remittances from proextremist overseas Sikhs will probably ensure enough financial support to enable the extremists to continue terrorist activity.

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Sikh extremism threatens US interests in India, in part because the extremists' primary target is Prime Minister Gandhi. Even if Sikh extremist activity in Punjab should slow dramatically, the likelihood of Gandhi's eventually falling victim to a Sikh assassin is about even. Delhi's favorable response to US policy initiatives during the last two years has depended heavily on Gandhi's remaining in power. No successor is likely to be as motivated or have sufficient political standing to continue improving ties to the United States.

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Pakistan's limited support to Sikh extremists could also hurt prospects for improved US-Indian relations. Prime Minister Gandhi's public accusations of Pakistani training, support, and sanctuary to Sikh extremists have left the United States vulnerable to Indian domestic suspicions of US aid to Sikh extremists. Pakistan is most likely training small numbers of Sikh extremists but is unlikely to increase its support unless hostilities were to break out with India over other issues, such as Kashmir. Gandhi most likely discounts allegations of US support to Sikh extremists, but pressure from his Hindu constituency in the face of increased extremist activity would probably force him to slow improvement in US-Indian relations.

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Sikh extremists will continue to rely on violence—in particular, assassination—as their principal tactic for gaining an independent Sikh state. By fostering a climate of violence, the extremists seek to provoke Hindu migration from Punjab and reprisals against Sikhs elsewhere in India. They also want to topple the moderate Sikh state government and provoke New Delhi's direct intervention. The extremists may turn to increasingly spectacular terrorist acts such as mass killings of Hindus, assassinations of senior Indian officials, and the bombing of Indian civilian airliners. Unless the extremists can establish a unified command structure and maintain long-term, continuous operations, however, their tactics will not force a collapse of the state government and New Delhi's military intervention.

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New Delhi will continue to pursue a twofold strategy of exerting pressure on Sikh extremists and strengthening Sikh moderates. Cooperation with the moderate Sikh political party—the Akali Dal—is vital to Indian efforts to contain the spread of Sikh extremism in Punjab. The Akali Dal has enjoyed strong support among Sikhs in Punjab, including the politically powerful Sikh Temple Management Committee, which oversees collection and disbursement of Sikh religious donations made throughout the state. Gandhi will probably continue to provide support for the Akali Dal state government via votes from Congress Party members of the Punjab legislature and provision of paramilitary forces to counter Sikh extremists. At the same time, Gandhi is likely to rely on increased police penetration of extremist groups and capture of Sikh extremists entering Punjab from Pakistan to weaken extremist capabilities.

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Gandhi will be reluctant to deploy Army troops to Punjab and dismiss the moderate Sikh state government unless violence escalates dramatically. Until the 1987 elections in states across northern India are complete and the danger of a backlash by Hindu voters lessened, Gandhi will most likely rely on Punjab state security forces to maintain order and will not make further concessions to Sikhs.

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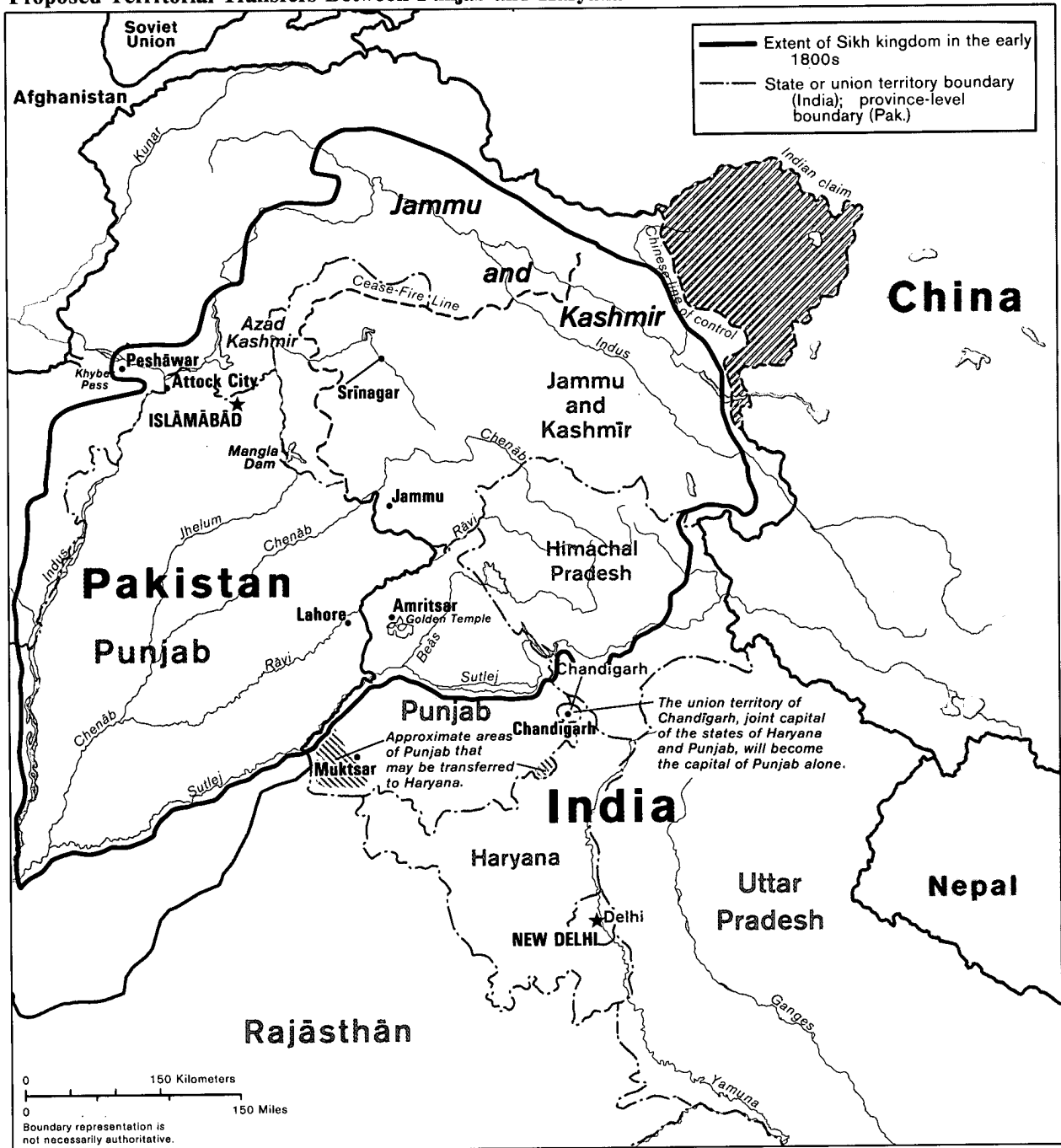
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Figure 1
Proposed Territorial Transfers Between Punjab and Haryana in Northern India



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India and the Sikh Challenge

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More than two years after Indian Army troops occupied the state of Punjab in a bid to contain Sikh extremist violence, Sikhs are still deeply suspicious of New Delhi and tensions between Hindus and Sikhs remain high throughout India. Negotiations between New Delhi and moderate Sikhs are stalled, but security forces have made gains against Sikh extremists and the extremist leadership remains deeply divided. The violence has resulted in more than 4,000—mostly Sikh—deaths and placed India's strategic frontier opposite Pakistan in constant turmoil.

Army, where they make up 25 percent of the officer corps and 11 percent of enlisted men.

Sikhs serve in 15 exclusively Sikh battalions and in several ethnically mixed units. The President of India is a Sikh, several Indian corporations are headed by Sikhs, and Sikhs are well represented in the Indian civil service.

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Sikhs in Indian Society

Faced with an overwhelming Hindu majority, India's Sikhs have long sought to assert their linguistic, religious, and political identity in India. After Indian independence from Great Britain in 1947, the Sikh movement, while remaining mostly nonviolent, won major concessions from New Delhi, including the establishment in 1966 of a Sikh majority state—Punjab. But, according to British and Indian scholars, the emergence of charismatic Sikh leaders and an increasingly youthful Sikh population, combined with frustrations with slow economic growth in Punjab, helped fuel the development of a radical Sikh movement in the late 1970s.

India's Sikhs are divided into four major castes. The Rajput caste is a relatively high caste and is well represented in India's military and business elites. The more lowly Jat caste of rural, landowning peasant farmers is politically most important and represents approximately one-third of all Sikhs in Punjab. The Baniya caste comprises merchants and is more urban and mobile than the Jats, who are tied to the land. Scheduled castes or "untouchables" represent the lowest caste of Sikhs. The bulk of Sikhs in Indian areas outside Punjab and overseas belong to non-Jat castes.

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Caste distinctions play an important role in Sikh politics. According to Indian press and scholarly sources, the Sikh political leadership is drawn almost exclusively from the Jat caste. As a result, Sikh political demands since the early 1970s have focused primarily on agricultural concerns—such as water and land rights and farm subsidies—reinforcing caste differences between urban and rural Sikhs.

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Sikhs are a small minority but hold prominent positions throughout Indian society. On the basis of 1981 census data, we estimate that Sikhs currently number about 14.5 million, approximately 2 percent of India's population. More than 60 percent of India's Sikhs live in Punjab, where they constitute a majority of about 60 percent. The rest are widely distributed, with large numbers in New Delhi and the states of Haryana and Jammu and Kashmir. Another 2 million Sikhs live in more than 20 other countries, with large communities in Great Britain, Canada, and the United States.

Sikh religious institutions are a major source of political power in Punjab. The Golden Temple at Amritsar is Sikhism's holiest place, enshrining the Sikh scriptures and the Akal Takht—a throne representing Sikh spiritual and temporal authority. Indian press reporting indicates control of the Akal Takht is considered by many Sikhs to be a prerequisite for political power in Punjab. The Golden Temple receives funds donated from a continuous flow of Sikh pilgrims and imposes taxes on other Sikh temples throughout Punjab. These funds are controlled by the

Sikhs have long been leaders in Indian military, commercial, and political life. Since the 19th century, Sikhs have enjoyed a privileged position in the Indian

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Sikh Religion and Culture

Sikhism is positioned geographically and doctrinally between Islam and Hinduism. The majority of India's Sikhs live in the fertile plains of Punjab, wedged between the Muslims of Pakistan and India's Hindus. The first Sikhs were followers of Guru Nanak (1469-1539), a mystic who rejected both the clerical dominance of Islam in the Mughal court and the caste system and elaborate rituals of Hinduism. Guru Nanak absorbed into his teachings basic doctrines of Hinduism including the transmigration of the soul and the role of karma. He also drew heavily from the radical monotheism of Islam to establish the basic tenet of Sikhism: God is eternal, one, and never incarnate like the gods of the Hindu pantheon.

"Sikh" is derived from the Sanskrit "shiksha," meaning disciple. Guru Nanak was the first of 10 Gurus to lead the new religion of the Sikhs. The fifth Guru, Arjan (1581-1606), compiled an authoritative version of the teachings of the Gurus and built the Golden Temple at Amritsar, where the Sikh scriptures are enshrined today. These efforts to give structure and permanence to the Sikh faith led to his death at the hands of the Mughals. His death established the Sikh tradition of reverence for martyrs and led to the militarization of the Sikh faith.

In 1699, the 10th Guru, Gobind Singh, turned Sikhism into an army of the faithful. Threatened by Muslim persecution and determined to avoid reabsorption by Hinduism, the 10th Guru commanded his followers to affirm a distinct identity and to arm themselves. He gave the name Khalsa—"pure ones"—to his new order and commanded all Sikh males to adopt the name Singh, meaning lion. To set his community further apart, he ordered his disciples not to cut their hair or shave their beards, to carry a comb, to wear a bracelet and breeches, and to carry a

dagger. Sikh extremists today have substituted a war against Hindus for their traditional conflict with Muslims.

The Sikhs succeeded briefly in establishing an independent state. A Sikh chieftain, Ranjit Singh, popularly known as the "Lion of Punjab," took advantage of inconclusive warring between Mughal and Afghan armies in the late 18th century to establish a Sikh kingdom in 1799 at Lahore. As Maharajah of Punjab until his death in 1839, Ranjit Singh ruled an area comprising much of present-day Pakistan and Jammu and Kashmir. His expansion to the east was halted at the Sutlej River by the British, who in 1849 reconquered Punjab. This golden age of Sikh rule serves as a model for present-day extremists, and one terrorist group has even appropriated the name of the 19th century Sikh army—the Dal Khalsa, meaning "army of the pure."

The most important leader of the Sikh extremist movement in the early 1980s was Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale (1947-84). Educated at the Damdami Taksal seminary, Bhindranwale traveled throughout Punjab, exhorting Sikhs to assert their rights and denouncing a rival Sikh sect. According to Indian scholars, his preaching had a strong impact among young Sikhs, especially those from poor farming families, and by 1981 Bhindranwale had developed a large following. With the support of the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF), Bhindranwale orchestrated a series of assassinations of moderate Sikhs and Hindus, seized control of the Golden Temple, and fortified it. His death during the Indian Army assault on the Golden Temple in June 1984 elevated him to the status of a Sikh martyr, revered by all Sikh extremists—especially the leaders of the AISSF.

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Sikhs in the Indian Military

The Sikh community is well represented in the Indian military. Two hundred years of intermittent Mughal and Afghan persecution developed a strong warrior tradition among Sikhs. After proving their loyalty to Britain during the mutiny of 1857, Sikhs established a reputation for professionalism and discipline in the Indian military. Since independence in 1947, Indian leaders have relied heavily on Sikh battalions—especially during the 1965 Indo-Pakistani war—to buttress Indian military strength. [redacted]

The Indian Army assault on the Golden Temple in 1984 and rumors of Army atrocities against Sikhs in Punjab provoked widespread mutinies among Sikh regiments. Most of the 2,733 mutineers deserted their units and attempted to return to Punjab, [redacted]

Sixty-seven were killed, 30 are still missing, and the remainder were arrested. Most of those apprehended were charged, convicted, and either sentenced to imprisonment, discharged, or rehabilitated and transferred to paramilitary units. [redacted]

New Delhi has rejected appeals by the moderate Akali leadership to pardon the mutineers, claiming the mutiny is an exclusively military issue. Since the mutiny, the Army has reduced three Sikh battalions to cadre status, dispersed men to other units, and cased the colors of the 9th Sikh Battalion. [redacted]

Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), an elected Sikh body with close ties to the Akali Dal. The symbolism and wealth of the Golden Temple have made control of its numerous buildings and the SGPC a primary objective of both Sikh moderates and Sikh extremists. [redacted]

Fears and resentment of the Indian Government and its predominantly Hindu constituency have grown rapidly throughout the Sikh community since 1984. The military assault ordered by Indira Gandhi in June 1984 on the Golden Temple, then occupied by Sikh extremists, resulted in at least 1,000 Sikh deaths

and widespread destruction. The attack provoked deep resentment even among secular Sikhs overseas and elsewhere in India. Anti-Sikh riots in November 1984 following the assassination of Indira Gandhi by a Sikh led to an additional 2,000 deaths, mostly Sikh. The failure of Indian police and Army units to restore order and protect Sikhs in riot-torn areas in northern India left many Sikhs deeply suspicious of the government and fearful of additional Hindu reprisals. [redacted] 25X1

Most Sikhs view New Delhi and Hindu dominance as a threat to their religion and culture. According to Indian press and scholarly sources, Sikhs believe New Delhi acquiesces in Hindu violence against Sikhs, uses Indian security forces to execute innocent Sikhs, and practices political and economic discrimination against them. The US Embassy in New Delhi reports Sikhs in Punjab are unanimous in condemning random police executions of Sikh youth, and Indian press reports indicate Sikhs in northern India fear Hindu violence against Sikh homes and businesses. [redacted]

Sikh Goals

Sikh political organizations in Punjab break down roughly into three major groups, each with its own demands:

- Moderates in the Akali Dal who are primarily interested in economic reforms and are led by Punjab Chief Minister Barnala.
- Dissidents in the Akali Dal who are dissatisfied with Barnala's leadership, seek more stringent limits on New Delhi's control of agricultural policy in Punjab, and want greater political autonomy for Punjab.
- Extremists—mainly students—who want an independent Sikh state and support terrorism. [redacted]

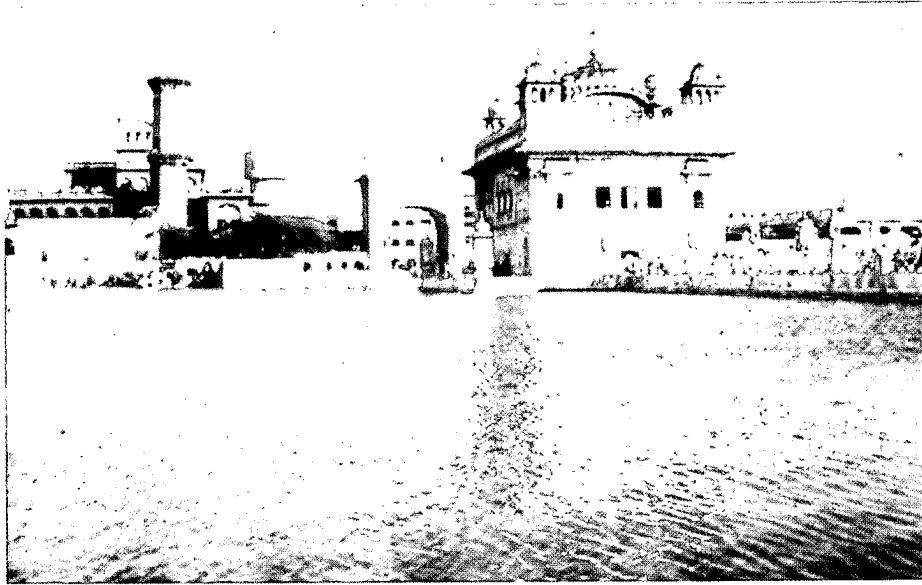
According to surveys by Indian scholars and journalists, most Sikhs do not support the demand for an independent state. Barnala's victory in the Punjab state election in September 1985 demonstrated broad Sikh support for negotiations with New Delhi on issues of concern to them. Despite this widespread

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The Golden Temple




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moderation, lingering fear and communal passion stirred by Sikh militants have made a majority of Sikhs determined to win at least some concessions from New Delhi. 

Moderates. The Shiromani Akali Dal is the main Sikh political party in India. Established in 1921 by members of the Jat caste to protect Sikh interests during the Indian independence movement, the Akali Dal now leads the Punjab state government and represents moderate Sikh demands. Indian press reports indicate New Delhi views the Akali Dal as the only legitimate Sikh political organization, and the government of Punjab Chief Minister Surjit Singh Barnala has become closely identified with New Delhi and its efforts to contain Sikh extremism. 

Sikh moderates—most of whom are farmers—are concerned about land and water issues. Barnala and his supporters demand implementation of the 1985 Punjab accord between the Akali Dal and Gandhi. The accord culminated six months of direct negotiations and was strongly supported by a majority of Sikhs in Punjab. The agreement grants Punjab's predominantly Sikh farmers a constant water supply from the Ravi-Beas river system. So far a tribunal has failed to determine the volume of additional water Punjab may divert at the expense of the neighboring

states of Haryana and Rajasthan. The agreement also establishes Chandigarh—now the capital for both Punjab and Haryana—as the capital of Punjab, but conflict with Haryana over compensation has delayed formal transfer of the capital. According to the US Embassy in New Delhi, Barnala also wants New Delhi to pardon and rehabilitate the small number of Sikh soldiers still in prison for deserting their units during the 1984 assault on the Golden Temple. 

Dissidents. The dissidents within Barnala's Akali Dal want significantly greater concessions from New Delhi. According to Indian press reports, the dissidents—led by former Punjab Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal and SGPC head Gurcharan Singh Tohra—want to restrict New Delhi's powers in Punjab to defense, foreign relations, currency, and communications. Under these conditions, New Delhi would have to surrender its right to impose direct rule in Punjab and dismiss the Punjab state assembly. This would give Punjab exclusive jurisdiction over key economic issues including water rights to rivers flowing through Punjab and neighboring states. The dissidents agree with Barnala on the need to pardon Army deserters and have used the issue to fuel Sikh hostility toward

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Communal rioting [redacted]

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New Delhi. The dissidents probably hope their hard-line demands will discredit Barnala and expand their own support among Sikhs in Punjab so they can eventually take control of the state government. [redacted]

Sikh Extremists

Several Sikh organizations in Punjab want an independent Sikh state, which they call Khalistan (land of the pure). They campaign against both New Delhi and Barnala's government. According to [redacted] press reports, the most important extremist group—the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF), representing at least 2,000 Sikh students in Punjab—demands the release of Sikhs held in jail without trial, an end to “random” police shootings of Sikh youth, and an end to discrimination against

Sikhs in university admissions. The group has publicly threatened to assassinate moderate Sikh and Hindu leaders. Other groups such as the United Akali Dal—now allied with some dissidents—and the Damdami Taksal—Punjab's preeminent Sikh seminary—organize rallies throughout Punjab calling for Sikhs to protect themselves from New Delhi's “oppression.” [redacted]

The most hardline Sikh separatists operate as an underground terrorist network in Punjab. According to press reports, the Khalistan Commando Force, the Dashmesh Regiment, and the Dal Khalsa are three of the most active radical groups. [redacted]

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The 1985 Punjab Accord

On 24 July 1985, Prime Minister Gandhi and Harchand Singh Longowal, president of the Akali Dal, signed a memorandum of settlement addressing a broad range of Sikh demands. The main features of the agreement are:

- *Compensation to innocent persons killed in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots.*
- *Army recruitment on the basis of merit.*
- *An extension of the investigation of the November riots to include affected areas outside Delhi.*
- *A pledge by the government to rehabilitate and provide gainful employment to Sikhs discharged from the Army after their desertion in June 1984.*
- *Chandigarh, the capital city for the neighboring states of Punjab and Haryana, will become the exclusive capital of Punjab. A commission will be constituted to determine the specific Hindi-speaking areas of Punjab to be transferred to Haryana in lieu of Chandigarh.*
- *A separate commission will consider claims and counterclaims for readjustment of the existing Punjab-Haryana boundaries.*
- *Farmers of Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan will continue to receive water from the Ravi-Beas river system according to levels of consumption in July 1985. A tribunal headed by a Supreme Court judge will adjudicate claims by Punjab and Haryana to additional waters.*
- *The central government will take steps to promote the Punjabi language.*

in 1985. [] some of these gangs operate under the guise of Sikh extremism but are committed only to criminal activity. The US Embassy in New Delhi reports that the ranks of Sikh extremists grow quickly after police shootings of Sikh youth. We believe the number of Sikh extremists operating in Punjab also varies according to the rate of cross-border infiltration of Sikhs using Pakistan for sanctuary. []

Despite their limited numbers and the opposition of most Sikhs to an independent state, the extremists have expanded their influence in Punjab by threatening Sikh and Hindu politicians. According to press reports, even some members of Barnala's Cabinet support Sikh extremism. Embassy reports indicate that dissident members of the Akali Dal frequently attend public memorial services for Sikh youth killed in confrontations with the police and use extremist rhetoric in denouncing both New Delhi and the moderate state government. The dissidents praised the extremists for the assassination last August of the retired Indian Army Chief of Staff who led the assault on the Golden Temple. []

Sikh extremists draw their strongest support from the AISSF and Damdami Taksal. [] most of the hardcore extremists in Punjab are students, suggesting the AISSF may provide them sanctuary in homes and in AISSF offices and may supply funds for terrorist operations. We believe some AISSF members also belong to underground terrorist groups. According to the US Embassy in New Delhi, the Damdami Taksal claims to have assisted Sikh extremists by sending them to Pakistan for training. []

Funding. We believe that Sikh extremists are well funded and well armed. []

[] extremist groups in Punjab receive funding and material support from Sikh *gurudwaras*—temples serving as the center of Sikh religious and political life. We believe the *gurudwaras* are the primary source of funding for the extremists. Press and Embassy reports indicate the extremists also rob

Size, Organization, and Support. Hardcore Sikh extremists are relatively few in number. Indian security officials estimate about 200 are active in Punjab.

[] approximately 12 gangs of Sikh youth, each with 10 to 50 members, instigated the majority of violent incidents in Punjab

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The Sikh International Network

25X1 The presence abroad of more than 2 million Sikhs has given Sikh extremism an international dimension. Nearly one-third of these expatriate Sikhs are in the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States. According to [redacted] Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) reporting, Sikh extremists frequently travel between these three countries and probably maintain contact with extremists in India. Some Sikhs apprehended in the United States on immigration charges have admitted plans to recruit Khalistan sympathizers and to set up safehouses for Sikh militants wanted for crimes committed in India. According to the INS, The Bahamas, Mexico, Thailand, and West Germany serve as way stations for illegal Sikh immigration to the United States. The explosion that downed an Air India 747 flying from Canada to India was probably executed with the help of Canada-based Sikh extremists. [redacted]

25X1 Sikh extremists have developed an extensive overseas network. The Khalistan National Organization based in London is one of the most politically active overseas Sikh extremist organizations. The group's leader, Dr. Jagjit Singh Chauhan—a former Punjab

finance minister who emigrated to the United Kingdom in 1971, has declared himself the leader of the "Republic of Khalistan." The International Sikh Youth Federation, the international wing of the All India Sikh Students Federation, is especially active in Canada and the United Kingdom. Press reports indicate other Sikh groups, such as the World Sikh Organization based in Washington, lobby democratic countries for support for an independent Sikh state.

25X1 banks and steal government weapons and ordnance stocks. A police raid last summer of a Khalistan Commando Force hideout uncovered revolvers, light machineguns, rifles, and ammunition stolen from Indian Army stocks. Press reports indicate extremists stole \$100,000 in a single bank robbery last November. Police have also discovered at least one arms factory operated by extremists in Punjab. [redacted]

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We believe narcotics trafficking provides only a small fraction of funding for the extremists. [redacted]

25X1 [redacted] Diplomatic reporting indicates Sikh extremists abroad have used heroin as payment for terrorist attacks, and members of Sikh extremist organizations have been arrested in possession of heroin. Sikh extremists have probably used traditional smuggling channels across the Indo-Pakistani border to facilitate narcotics and arms smuggling. [redacted]

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Objectives and Strategy. Sikh extremists are religious fundamentalists. They are trying to reverse decades of secularization among Sikhs and to halt the assimilation of Sikhs into modern, Hindu-dominated India, which they maintain is hostile to Sikh religion and culture. The extremists' campaign of violence is designed to force India to release Punjab from the

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Indian federal system. They are also trying to force secular, moderate Sikhs to adopt a Sikh communal identity and practice Sikh communal politics. [redacted]

A key element of the extremist strategy is to force Hindus to leave Punjab. The extremists also want Sikhs to return to Punjab from elsewhere in India and appear to welcome Hindu reprisals against Sikhs as evidence of Hindu enmity and as an inducement to Sikhs to flee to Punjab. Reporting from press and Embassy sources suggests the extremists seek to destabilize the moderate Sikh-run state government and assert their leadership over the Sikh community through assassinations of moderate Sikh and Hindu politicians. [redacted]

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Extremist attacks are unlikely to provoke widespread Hindu migration from Punjab. [redacted]

[redacted] only about 7,000 Hindus—approximately 1,500 families—have left Punjab since last spring. Some 7 million Hindus remain. [redacted] some Hindu businessmen are withdrawing investments and closing factories in Punjab, but the US Embassy in New Delhi reports industrial production in Punjab is rising. [redacted]

Extremist attacks have also failed to provoke widespread Hindu reprisals against Sikhs elsewhere in India. We believe that the threat of widespread Hindu reprisals against Sikhs remains high but that many Sikhs are prepared to fight instead of fleeing to Punjab. According to the US Embassy in New Delhi, most Sikhs outside Punjab are of the Baniya merchant caste and do not want to accept Jat dominance by taking refuge in Punjab. [redacted]

The extremists are able to strike at will. In 1986 they assassinated eight moderate Sikh and Hindu politicians, six members of the Congress Party, a member of the Communist Party of India, and at least one member of the Akali Dal. They also threatened to kill Punjab Chief Minister Barnala. The extremists fired on the Punjab head of state security forces and killed 61 policemen. Press reports indicate Sikh extremists killed several prosecutors, judges, and witnesses participating in trials of extremists, contributing to a

Sikh Terrorist Capability: An Example

Sikh terrorists in Punjab are capable of elaborate and sophisticated attacks. The attempted assassination of Punjab's Director General of Police, Julio Ribeiro, demonstrates Sikh terrorist ability to penetrate state security forces and recruit policemen for terrorist operations. According to the Indian press, confessions of a policeman involved in the conspiracy against Ribeiro indicate Sikh terrorists spent three months preparing for the attack and gained full knowledge of the fortified police compound where Ribeiro lives and coordinates security operations. The terrorists recruited and placed a four-member cell of Punjab policemen within the compound, preying upon dissatisfaction among overworked Sikh policemen to recruit their cell. [redacted]

The attack against Ribeiro took place on 3 October 1986 within the police compound and resulted in injury to Ribeiro's wife, the death of a loyal policeman, injury to several other policemen, but no injury to Ribeiro. The assassins, dressed as policemen, entered the compound unchallenged and confronted Ribeiro during his early morning walk. Despite the failure of the assassination plan, the terrorists appeared to make the most of their effort by sending letters of resignation signed by the four police conspirators to two Indian journalists. In the letters, the policemen accused Ribeiro of wanting "to finish the sons of Guru Gobind Singh," a reference to the militant 10th Sikh Guru, and declared their intention to join the Khalistan Commando Force. [redacted]

total of 520 killings by extremists in 1986. [redacted] the Indian Army is missing sophisticated weaponry from its stocks. Press reports indicate these weapons include surface-to-air missiles. If the Sikhs have such weapons, they might target civilian airliners. [redacted]

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New Delhi's Strategy

Indian Stakes in Punjab. We believe New Delhi's main equities in Punjab are securing its strategic frontier with Pakistan, maintaining access to Jammu and Kashmir, and preventing an eruption of communal violence. Since independence, Indian governments have given high priority to maintaining control of strategic border states and territories such as Jammu and Kashmir, Sikkim, and now Punjab. [REDACTED]

of all foodgrains supplied to the nation's public food stocks controlled by New Delhi. Although the state does not possess any heavy industry, agroprocessing and textile industries in Punjab account for 13 percent of India's jute, cotton, and textile production. [REDACTED]

We believe Gandhi is vulnerable to charges of appeasing Sikh moderates at the expense of farmers—especially Hindus. [REDACTED]

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India's defense strategy against Pakistan and China is heavily dependent on full military access to Punjab. We estimate India deploys four infantry divisions, one mountain infantry division, one armored division, and two independent armored brigades in Punjab comprising approximately 100,000 men and 675 tanks. The loss of Punjab to Sikh separatists would push India's forward defense line to within 125 kilometers of New Delhi, greatly diminish the ability of the Indian Air Force to operate over northern Pakistan, and cut Jammu and Kashmir's ground supply route, making Indian-held territory there virtually indefensible against Pakistani or Chinese attack. [REDACTED]

The US Embassy in New Delhi reports Gandhi and his party need to win state elections in the spring of 1987 in the predominantly Hindu state of Haryana, which borders Punjab, and other states in northern India to maintain traditional Congress Party strength throughout the region. [REDACTED]

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New Delhi will probably use all means—including full deployment of the Indian armed forces if necessary—to prevent the establishment of an independent Sikh state and to ensure that a negotiated settlement on Sikh autonomy will remain strictly within the limits of Indian federalism. India's political cohesion has been strained frequently since independence by a variety of separatist movements. An extremist victory in Punjab, in our view, would put New Delhi on the defensive against separatists throughout India, possibly provoking a rash of attempted secessions in other Indian states—especially in predominantly Muslim Jammu and Kashmir. [REDACTED]

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Sikh extremist violence poses a serious internal security problem for Prime Minister Gandhi personally and for New Delhi in general. Since his election in December 1984, Gandhi has been under constant threat of assassination by Sikh extremists. A Sikh gunman fired several shots at the Prime Minister last October. Despite quick and widespread deployment of Army troops to maintain order, communal violence in New Delhi and elsewhere in northern India has flared since July 1986 after two large-scale Sikh attacks against Hindus. A sustained Sikh offensive that resulted in large numbers of Hindu deaths would probably force New Delhi to deploy troops to Punjab to restore order. [REDACTED]

Since March 1985, Gandhi has pursued a combined political and military strategy designed to prevent growth of extremist capabilities and popular support. He has made significant political concessions to Sikhs, strengthened Sikh moderates, and appointed commissions to address moderate Sikh demands. At the same time, he has sought to improve security in Punjab and keep the militants off balance by buttressing local police with paramilitary troops, slowing infiltration of Sikh extremists from Pakistan, and preventing the establishment of a unified Sikh extremist leadership. [REDACTED]

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India also has important economic stakes in Punjab. The agricultural growth spurred by the Green Revolution—the introduction of high-yield grains—has made Punjab India's richest state with a per capita income nearly twice the national average and an important contributor to the country's agricultural sector. According to Indian agricultural statistics, Punjab supplies 22 percent of India's wheat crop and 8 percent of its rice. Punjab's farmers raise about half

Political Tactics: Strengthening the Moderates.

Gandhi's political strategy hinges on the moderate Akali Dal. In our judgment, New Delhi would like to ensure that moderate Sikhs remain a viable force in Punjab so that it can avoid having to choose between accommodation with Sikh extremists or imposing direct rule. [redacted]

Barnala's government in Punjab has not only survived extremist pressures but has also mounted a counteroffensive and won strong public backing from Gandhi as recently as February 1987. Barnala has used antiterrorism laws to jail political foes such as Prakash Singh Badal and Gurcharan Singh Tohra and has refused to allow Sikh extremists to reestablish a foothold in the Golden Temple. Despite defections to Badal's camp in May 1986, Barnala has not hesitated to dismiss members of his Cabinet expressing sympathy for the extremists or providing aid to Badal or Tohra. [redacted]

Lacking an alternative, New Delhi has a high stake in keeping the moderate Barnala in power. We believe his status as a Jat Sikh and his strong electoral mandate in the 1985 Punjab state election have made him a critical bridge between New Delhi and the Sikh community in Punjab. [redacted]

Gandhi probably calculates he must fight Sikh extremists using Barnala as a proxy rather than risk further Sikh alienation by intervening directly in Punjab. Press reports indicate that Gandhi is careful in public to dissociate New Delhi from police operations in Punjab and that he will not speculate on possible deployment of regular Army troops. [redacted]

Barnala's commitment to improve security in Punjab helps New Delhi define the unrest as a problem of law and order for Punjab and not as widespread Sikh nationalism. Barnala has imposed curfews, closed schools, and given police chief Ribeiro broad latitude in the use of Punjab police and paramilitary forces. According to the US Embassy, 70 Sikh youths have accepted Barnala's offer of amnesty to those involved in extremist activities. [redacted]

We believe that factionalism within the Akali Dal poses a serious threat to New Delhi's strategy of putting all of its eggs in the Akali Dal basket.



Julio Ribeiro [redacted]

According to Embassy sources, Akali Dal leaders routinely place personal ambition ahead of cooperation. The defections of former Punjab Chief Minister Badal and SGPC head Tohra in the spring of 1986 were followed by the establishment of a dissident Akali Dal party, which reduced Barnala's control of the 117-member state assembly from 77 to 46 and made him dependent on the support of 31 Congress Party legislators to govern. [redacted]

We believe that further defections from Barnala's camp to the dissidents could make Barnala unable to govern. Under these circumstances New Delhi would probably appoint a new chief minister from the dissidents' camp, but any new chief minister, in our view, would still face difficulties in bringing unity to the Akali Dal. [redacted]

Security Tactics: Using a Heavy Hand Against the Extremists. A unified command and increased deployment of paramilitary forces are the core of the government's military campaign against the extremists. New Delhi decided in June 1986 to place units of the Border Security Force and Central Reserve Police Force—the central government's paramilitary forces—under the direct command of Punjab's Director General for Police, J. F. Ribeiro. [redacted] Ribeiro, popularly known as India's "supercop," has made Punjab's state police force more cohesive and has purged incompetent officers.¹

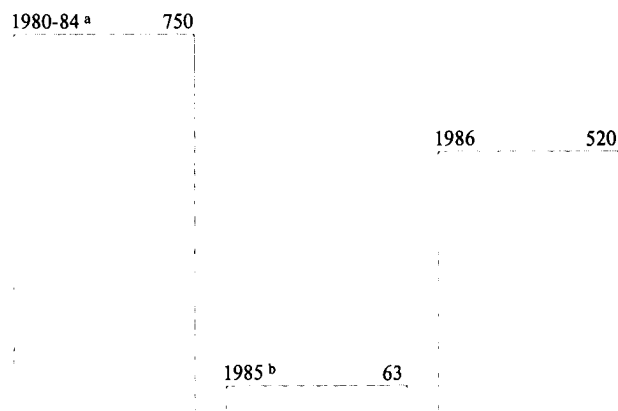
¹ Ribeiro earned his reputation as a "supercop" by successfully combating organized crime in Bombay before his assignment to Punjab in March 1986. [redacted]

Press reports also indicate New Delhi has moved quickly to meet Punjab state government requests for additional troops, deploying as many as 19,000 paramilitary forces for joint operations with police forces against the extremists. Killings by Sikh extremists in 1986 dropped from a high of 105 in March to 16 in September but rose to 70 in November. [REDACTED]

India has tightened security along the Pakistani border to block the infiltration of Sikh extremists into Punjab. [REDACTED] Ribeiro has significantly reduced such infiltration as well as the movement of arms and funds into Punjab from Pakistan. Between April and September 1986, Border Security Forces killed 198 infiltrators—including some Pakistani nationals and smugglers. We have no reliable information on the number of Sikh extremists using Pakistan as a sanctuary, but New Delhi's conviction that Islamabad is actively aiding Sikh extremists suggests border security will remain a key element in New Delhi's strategy. [REDACTED]

Ribeiro has prevented the establishment of a unified Sikh extremist leadership by applying heavy pressure inside Punjab against extremist organizations. According to Indian press reports, state security forces have captured approximately one-third of the Sikh extremist leadership. Expanded police powers under existing antiterrorism legislation have led to more frequent arrests and detentions of suspected extremists. Rivalries among the extremists have made them vulnerable to penetration and capture by security forces. Police penetration of extremist groups, confessions from captured extremists, and protection of Sikh temples—especially the Golden Temple—against Sikh extremist control have forced key extremist leaders to remain in hiding. Indian press reports

Figure 2
India: Sikh Extremist Killings
of Hindus and Sikh Moderates, 1980-86



^a Does not include 3,000 Sikh deaths due to Hindu rioting and Indian Army assault on Golden Temple in 1984.

^b Does not include the 86 killed in Sikh extremist bombing campaign in New Delhi or the 329 people killed in Air India bombing.

indicate the security forces have successfully exploited personal rivalries among the extremists to obtain intelligence information. [REDACTED]

Despite these accomplishments, the security crackdown is creating new problems for New Delhi and the state government. According to the US Embassy, Sikhs and some Hindus believe that the Punjab police arrest and execute Sikh youth on the basis of unconfirmed suspicions of terrorist activity. Embassy sources claim these killings have a profoundly negative impact on the Sikh population, creating many new Sikh extremists for every Sikh youth believed to be falsely charged or randomly executed [REDACTED]

The heavy pressure from the security forces, in our view, is forcing the extremists to resort to more spectacular acts of terrorism to demonstrate their viability. Press reports indicate that since last summer the extremists have executed their most deadly attacks in Punjab, killing 14 and 22 Hindu bus passengers in separate bus attacks, assassinating a retired Indian Army general, and firing on Ribeiro. [redacted]

Outlook

We believe that India faces a long-term terrorist threat from Sikh extremists that the government probably cannot eradicate. We expect resentment of New Delhi and fears of Hindu domination to linger among a majority of Sikhs, allowing the extremists to retain at least some popular support. The enduring differences between India and Pakistan suggest Islamabad will continue to provide sanctuary and limited aid to Sikh extremists. [redacted]

We believe Pakistan would significantly increase its support to Sikh extremists only if hostilities were breaking out with India over other issues, such as Kashmir. In this case, Pakistan would see Sikhs as a potential fifth column that would carry out terrorist activities in India and interfere with Indian military efforts. [redacted]

Sikh extremists will remain capable—without outside support—of significantly increasing terrorist operations in Punjab, elsewhere in India, and overseas. We believe contributions from Sikh temples, profits from narcotics trafficking, and remittances from proextremist Sikhs overseas will ensure enough financial support to enable the extremists to continue terrorist activity. Mass slayings, such as those in last summer's bus attacks, are likely to recur as extremists try to provoke Hindu flight from Punjab. Indian officials overseas will remain a prime target of Sikhs, especially in Great Britain, the United States, and Canada. Prime Minister Gandhi and his family will also remain primary and vulnerable targets. [redacted]

Although we expect the extremists to continue terrorist operations, they are unlikely to be able to wage an organized, long-term insurgency. The preponderance of Jat Sikhs among the extremists will prevent the

development of broad Sikh support for an extremist-led independent Sikh state. Despite lobbying by an articulate and wealthy overseas community, the extremists have failed to win significant international backing for an independent Sikh state. [redacted]

Alternative Scenarios. In the unlikely event of a sharp and sustained escalation in the Sikh terrorist campaign in Punjab, we believe Gandhi would choose military intervention to secure India's strategic frontier with Pakistan, to maintain access to Jammu and Kashmir, and to prevent an eruption of communal violence. Military intervention—most likely following a collapse of the Barnala government and the reimposition of New Delhi's direct rule in Punjab—would severely set back Gandhi's attempts to restore Hindu-Sikh relations and Sikh confidence in the central government. We believe further concessions—such as granting additional water rights to Punjab—would fuel the ire of Hindu voters in state elections this spring, costing Gandhi and his Congress Party vital support. [redacted]

In a more likely scenario, extremist activity would continue at its current level or even decline gradually, allowing New Delhi to minimize its involvement in Punjab. Sustained security measures against the extremists, the lack of a charismatic extremist leader, and continued interdiction of Sikh infiltrators from Pakistan would give security forces an edge. As a result, Barnala could solidify his position in the Akali Dal and resume negotiations with Gandhi on moderate Sikh demands. [redacted]

We believe that during the next year New Delhi will adhere to its two-track policy of reconciliation with Sikh moderates and cracking down on the extremists. New Delhi's main political challenge will be ensuring the viability of a moderate Akali Dal in the face of a large dissident Akali faction and Sikh extremist assassination threats against Barnala and other moderate Sikh leaders. Stringent security measures by Barnala—including protection of Sikh temples from extremist control—are likely to win New Delhi's support but will do little to ease divisions within Barnala's own party. As a result, New Delhi will have

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to either gamble on Barnala's political skills to maintain his position as chief minister or prepare an alternative candidate for the role. [REDACTED]

US involvement, pressure from his Hindu constituency, in the face of increased extremist activity, would probably force him to slow improvement in Indo-US relations. Unless Pakistani aid to Sikh extremists increases significantly, New Delhi is unlikely to seek Washington's aid in pressing Islamabad. [REDACTED]

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In the absence of stepped-up extremist activity in Punjab, Gandhi would probably renew efforts to address moderate Sikh demands after the 1987 elections. In our view, Gandhi would try to fulfill—at least partly—the terms of his agreement with the Akali Dal to bolster New Delhi's limited credibility with moderate Sikhs. Gandhi might also choose to release Sikh detainees and offer agricultural subsidies to supplement the accord's provisions. Concessions on autonomy would be unlikely. Even under the best scenario, the likelihood of Gandhi eventually falling victim to a Sikh assassin would be about even. [REDACTED]

The continued high risk of a Sikh assassination of Gandhi also poses a threat to US interests in India. Gandhi's survival is key to continuing improvement in US-Indian relations, and we doubt any successor would be as committed to improving ties to Washington. [REDACTED]

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Implications for the United States

India views US policy toward Sikh extremists in the United States as a major element in bilateral relations. The presence in the United States of 150,000 Sikhs—some who send funds to extremist organizations in India—has made New Delhi eager to see the United States act against Sikh extremist activity within its borders. Senior Indian officials—including Prime Minister Gandhi—credit Washington for the arrest of several Sikhs in the United States on conspiracy charges and welcome repeated US statements supporting Indian unity, according to the US Embassy. [REDACTED]

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On the negative side, the government's accusations of Pakistani support for Sikh extremists have fueled Indian press and parliamentary speculation of US complicity. We believe Soviet disinformation has reinforced such suspicions. A significant increase in extremist activity would prompt fresh accusations of foreign intervention in Punjab to deflect domestic criticism. Even if Gandhi discounted allegations of

Appendix A

Sikh Chronology

1708	Guru Gobind Singh, 10th and last Guru dies. Sikh scriptures serve as religious authority.
1799-1839	Ranjit Singh establishes Sikh kingdom in Lahore including territory in present-day Pakistan and Jammu and Kashmir.
1849	British reconquer Punjab.
1902	First Sikh political organization, "Chief Khalsa Diwan," founded.
1921	Shiromani Akali Dal founded.
1953	States Reorganization Commission established. Rejects Akali Dal demand for Punjabi-speaking state.
1966	Indira Gandhi establishes Punjabi-speaking state in response to Akali agitation.
1973	Akali Dal lists demands for increased Sikh autonomy.
1981	Sant Bhindranwale attracts radical Sikh following in Punjab.
June 1984	Operation Blue Star: Army takes over Golden Temple. Sant Bhindranwale killed along with an estimated 1,000 Sikhs.
6 July, 24 August 1984	Sikh extremists hijack Indian airliners to Pakistan. Pakistani authorities arrest hijackers.
31 October 1984	Indian Prime Minister Gandhi assassinated by her Sikh bodyguard.

November 1984 Hindus riot against Sikhs. Approximately 2,000 dead in New Delhi.

23 June 1985 Air India 747 explodes west of Ireland, killing 329 passengers and crew. Khalistan Commando Force, All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF), and Dashmesh Regiment claim responsibility.

 Sikh extremists claim responsibility for bomb explosion at Narita Airport, Japan killing two.

June 1985 Arrest of US Sikhs for conspiring to kill Rajiv Gandhi.

24 July 1985 Prime Minister Gandhi and Akali Dal head Harchand Singh Longowal sign accord addressing Sikh demands.

20 August 1985 Sikh extremists assassinate Longowal.

January 1986 Damdami Taksal and AISSF activists reoccupy Golden Temple.

March 1986 Punjab state security forces recapture Golden Temple with little resistance.

25 July 1986 Fourteen bus passengers killed by four Sikh extremists in Muktsar, Punjab.

10 August 1986 Sikh extremists assassinate General A. S. Vaidya, Chief of Indian Army Staff during the 1984 Army assault on the Golden Temple.

2 October 1986 Sikh gunman fires several shots at Prime Minister Gandhi.



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Appendix B

India's Most Important Sikhs

Gurdial Singh Dhillon Minister of Agriculture

Although Dhillon, 71, has some experience in agriculture, he probably received his post for other reasons:

- His appointment added another Sikh to the Union Cabinet.
- His home state, Punjab, is India's largest grain producer.
- His long tenure as a Congress Party elder statesman. [REDACTED]

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Dhillon was speaker of Parliament during 1969-75 and Minister of Shipping and Transport (1975-77) under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. He served as High Commissioner to Canada during 1980-82. Dhillon was appointed to his current post in June 1986. [REDACTED]

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Buta Singh Minister of Home Affairs

Buta Singh, 52, [REDACTED] He has [REDACTED] taken an increasingly active role in overseeing the Home Ministry and internal security matters. During his six months in office, he has visited both Punjab and Madras (the home of most Tamil insurgent leaders) and dealt with contentious ethnic groups in West Bengal and Mizoram states. Buta Singh has also taken a hard line against Sikh extremists, delivering anti-Khalistan speeches in Parliament and strongly supporting the Punjab accord. He was excommunicated by Sikh high priests for his role in helping the Indian Government rebuild Sikhism's holiest shrine, the Golden Temple, after Army troops stormed the temple in June 1984. Buta Singh has been a Congress Party member for two decades and has held ministerial posts under both Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. [REDACTED]

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Zail Singh President

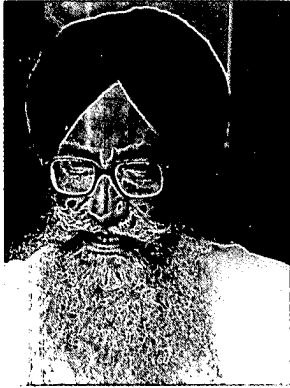
The 70-year-old Zail Singh, India's seventh president, assumed office in 1982 under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. He is a figurehead, performs mostly ceremonial functions, and, according to US Embassy officers, does not enjoy the confidence of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. The press has long reported a rift between the two. (Although the Constitution accords the president significant power, India has been governed by its prime ministers since independence in 1947.) [REDACTED]

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In 1984 he was excommunicated by Sikh priests for not condemning the Army's assault on the Golden Temple. [REDACTED]

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Punjab Political Figures

Surjit Singh Barnala
Leader, Akali Dal
Chief Minister, Punjab State

Barnala, 61, is the first Akali Dal party president to serve concurrently as chief minister of Punjab. A moderate, Barnala has tried to preserve his position in Punjab by balancing close ties to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi with his constituency's demands for an independent chief minister. His criticism of the central government is probably an effort to appease his critics in Punjab, where warm relations with New Delhi are anathema. In April 1986, Barnala provoked the wrath of Sikh militants and dissident members of his party for condoning an Army operation to clear out extremists using the Golden Temple as a haven. He later atoned for his role in that sweep by spending a well-publicized week cleaning shoes at Sikh temples. He nevertheless remains near the top of the extremists' hit list. Barnala started his career as a lawyer and in 1967 won election to the Punjab state assembly, where he served for the next 10 years. He held a seat in Parliament during 1977-79. [redacted]

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Gurcharan Singh Tohra
Sikh political leader

Tohra, 62, is a political opportunist who probably hopes to become Punjab chief minister. He was president of the Sikh Temple Management Committee for 13 years. He resigned his post in March 1986 to oppose the Akali Dal's support for the Indian Army's spring 1986 roundup of extremists from the Golden Temple. He was reelected in November 1986 to head the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) but was imprisoned immediately after his election on charges of supporting terrorism. Tohra, who has a strong following in the state legislature, was an opponent of former Punjab Chief Minister Badal but now works with Badal's dissident Akali Dal faction. [redacted]

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Prakash Singh Badal
Leader, Akali Dal (Badal)

Badal, 58, is working to advance his personal political fortunes by heading his own Akali Dal dissident party and siding with Sikh extremists against the state government. Twice chief minister of Punjab (1970-71 and 1977), Badal continues to try to position himself as a future candidate for that post. He has, however, lost some of his credibility with the central government after he split the Akali Dal in July 1986 and began paying lip service to some of the extremists' demands and tactics. His Akali Dal (Badal) faction controls about a quarter of the seats in the Punjab state assembly. After serving 19 months in prison when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi imposed a nationwide state of emergency during 1975-77, Badal was Minister of Agriculture in Prime Minister Morarji Desai's government. He returned to Punjab the same year (1977) to become chief minister and later led the Akalis in the Punjab assembly. Badal was arrested following the Army's assault on the Golden Temple and released in April 1985. [redacted]

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Sikh Extremist Leaders

Joginder Singh
Leader, United Akali Dal

In June 1985 octogenarian Joginder Singh established the United Akali Dal as a militant splinter group of the mainstream Sikh political party, the Akali Dal. Sikh extremists respect him because he is the father of Sikh martyr Bhindranwale. Since he founded the party in 1985, however, he has quickly earned a reputation as a front man for young extremists. Joginder Singh has argued for a "restoration of Sikh honor," the reinstatement of Sikh soldiers who deserted rather than participate in the Army's storming of the Golden Temple in 1984, and the release of Sikh prisoners taken during that operation. Singh is usually addressed with the honorific title "Baba." [redacted]

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Mohkam Singh
De facto leader, Damdami Taksal

Firebrand Mohkam Singh is the official spokesman of the Damdami Taksal, a Sikh religious seminary with ties to Sikh extremists. He was de facto leader of young Taksal militants before his arrest in the spring of 1986 on sedition charges. [redacted]

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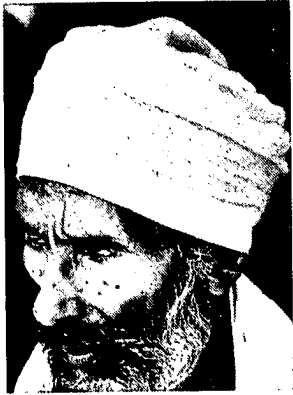
Harinder Singh Kahlon
Leader, All India Sikh Students Federation (Kahlon faction)

Kahlon leads a powerful faction of the militant All India Sikh Students Federation. He was jailed in July 1986 on sedition charges after publicly rejecting the Punjab accord and espousing violence as a means of attaining a separate Sikh state. Kahlon, a former schoolteacher, is the son of a farmer. He is about 32. [redacted]

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Thakur Singh
Leader, Damdami Taksal

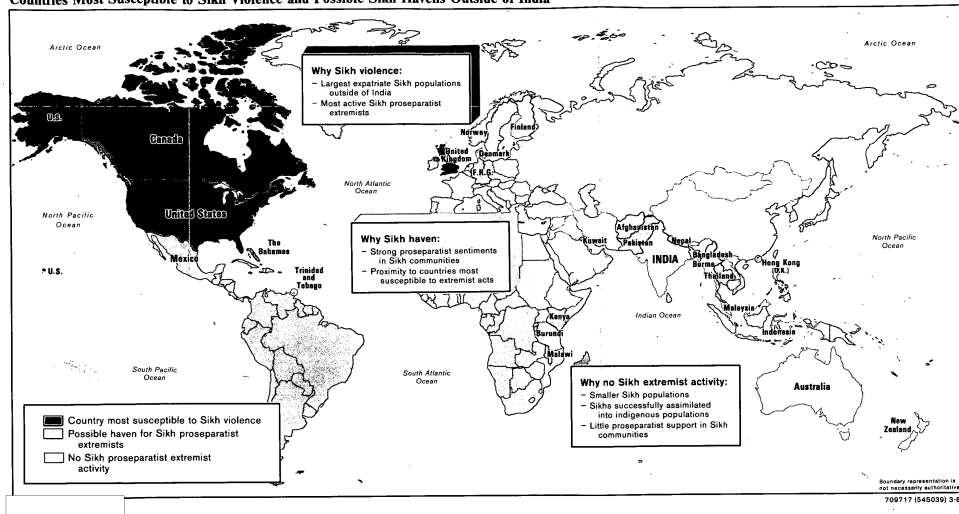
Thakur Singh is an elderly, traditional leader of the Damdami Taksal. He is usually addressed with the honorific title "Baba."

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Figure 3
Countries Most Susceptible to Sikh Violence and Possible Sikh Havens Outside of India



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