

# After the raid

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Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi took a calculated risk in a bid to quell violence in the Punjab. The calculation was that an army blitz could crush Sikh terrorism at its source. The risk is that the frontal assault on the Golden Temple will have enabled the martyred extremist Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale to recruit more supporters in death than he was able to do in life.

Clearly, Mrs. Gandhi acted with reluctance — and only after months passed, the stalemate persisted and the death toll mounted. There could be no safety for either Hindus or moderate Sikhs in the Punjab so long as armed extremists continued to utilize the sacred temple as the command post for a campaign of terror.

Nor was the decision to intervene impulsive. The military offensive was carefully planned and, apparently, timed to coincide with a diplomatic offensive abroad to explain the Government's intentions. Still, questions remain.

Two months ago, Home Affairs Minister P. C. Sethi assured the Indian Parliament that no military raid would be launched under any circumstances. Was this a feint, or was New Delhi then too optimistic about a peaceful resolution of the crisis? Even when the army was deployed at the temple complex this week, Government spokesmen insisted that the plan was to flush out the terrorists by employing tear gas or other kinds of force short of a frontal assault. Yet the army quickly abandoned those tactics and stormed the temple. Would not a squeeze play have succeeded with patience, costing fewer lives and sparing the temple?

The death and destruction in Amritsar have touched off violent protests in New Delhi and Kashmir, which have sizeable Sikh communities. Some moderate Sikh members of Parlia-

ment have condemned the Government's action and warned that it will alienate many Sikhs who had not previously been sympathetic to Sant Bhindranwale. A spontaneous Sikh eruption, followed by a Hindu backlash, could produce much more violence than Sant Bhindranwale could mastermind.

The passions unleashed on the subcontinent have once again produced lawlessness in Canada. The Indian consulate in Vancouver was temporarily forced to shut down by Sikh protestors, while the consulate in Toronto was vandalized by a Sikh youth. Most Canadian Sikhs are law-abiding, but their community is ill-served by the conduct of a violent minority. It is particularly badly served when Gurdpe Singh Nagra, vice-president of the Federation of Sikh Societies of Canada, says, "I can't oppose what the man did at the Toronto consulate. To protest is natural." To protest violently in Canada is neither natural nor acceptable.

In India, unfortunately, violence is an increasingly common means of protest, albeit an unacceptable one for a democracy. Mrs. Gandhi's task is to demonstrate to the discontented in Punjab and elsewhere that negotiation rather than lawlessness is the best hope for reform. She says the solution for the Punjab's crisis must ultimately be political rather than military, but it is too soon to know whether her crackdown has facilitated or foreclosed a political dialogue.

The Akali Dal, the Sikh autonomy party, may eventually have more room to compromise, thanks to the army's decapitation of its extremist wing. But much will depend on the fate of its non-violent leader, Sant Harchand Singh Longowal, who was holed up in the temple but surrendered to the army. Will he have a role to play in reconciliation?