

February 20, 1969

To : The Secretary
Through: S/S
From : INR - Thomas L. Hughes *TH*
Subject: Pakistan on the Brink

The situation in Pakistan is one of chaos, in many places approaching anarchy. The increasing vehemence of rioting, especially in East Pakistan, where mobs have engaged in arson and attacked government offices, plus the collapse of the round-table conference between Ayub and the opposition which had been scheduled for February 19, reflect a situation in which political demands are rapidly reaching a level which can no longer be contained within the political system.

Whatever grass-roots support Ayub may possess in West Pakistan--possibly in some rural areas--is inaudible and too remote to bear on the political struggle, which is being fought in the cities. In East Pakistan, opposition to Ayub has taken on strong overtones of anti-West Pakistani sentiment to the point that secession can no longer be ruled out as a possible consequence of the political convulsion.

The Deteriorating Situation. In retrospect, it is clear that Ayub incorrectly assumed that the real challenge to his regime would come from the traditional opposition politicians--whom he has regarded and treated with contempt. It is this conservative and moderate coalition, represented by the Democratic Action Committee (DAC), with which Ayub belatedly has sought to reach political compromise as a means to stem the political crisis. Ayub mistakenly discounted the ability of the new militant leaders to catalyze mass

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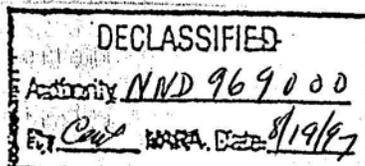
urban and East Pakistani hatred of his regime. Politically isolated over the years by Ayub and overtaken by extremists, the moderates have been at least temporarily neutralized.

Events in Pakistan are being forced by mobs in the streets -- comprised largely of students and the urban discontented. It is to the uncompromising leadership of Z.A. Bhutto of the Pakistan Peoples Party, Maulana Abdul Hamid Bhashani of the left wing of the National Awami Party, and Sheikh Mujibur Rehman of the Six-Point Awami League (who articulates East Pakistan's demand for autonomy) that the mobs respond. By word and action Bhutto, Bhashani, and Mujib have clearly indicated that the time for compromise with the regime is past -- Ayub must meet their demands in full. But these demands are escalating rapidly and may already imply strains which would break Pakistan's present political system. Among the most difficult is Mujib's categorical requirement that the government quash the Agartala conspiracy trial -- viewed by East Pakistanis as the symbol of West Pakistan's domination over them. Since many of the accused are military personnel, however, it is doubtful that the Army -- which is still a vital support to any political structure -- would permit the case to be dropped. Beyond this runs Bhutto's demand, now voiced loudly in the streets: that Ayub and his system must go.

The Outlook. Events have now reached the point that a change in government in Pakistan is likely in the near future. Two principal alternatives emerge: One, the declaration of martial law is a strong possibility, but even if Ayub declares it the dominant voice will no

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longer be his. At the level of present turmoil, it is also doubtful that the Army would have the stomach for the violence that would seem necessary to restore order. Two, also possible is the creation of a national-front caretaker cabinet. Ayub's role -- if any -- would probably be minor except insofar as he articulated the Army's requirements.

The underlying difficulty will be to accommodate the interests of the disparate elements of the opposition. At a minimum, East Pakistani sentiment must be mollified and an understanding reached with Sheikh Mujib.

Bhutto may present a special problem. Unacceptable to the rest of the opposition, and probably to the Army as well, it may be necessary to exclude Bhutto from the eventual political settlement. Bhutto's exclusion presumably would prolong civil disorder in West Pakistan and would require the full support of the Army. Bhashani may pose a similar problem in East Pakistan.

Whatever the outcome, Pakistan is confronted at best with a difficult and probably prolonged period of adjustment. Even should the militant leaders come to power, they may find it difficult to assert their authority. The failure of Ayub to build a solidly-based political system has come home to roost; the country will be fortunate if it emerges from this period of stress as a single entity, sufficiently unified to cope with the still pressing problems of economic development and the virtually untouched problem of creating a viable national political structure.

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