

~~SECRET~~

DECLASSIFIED  
PA/HO, Department of State  
E.O. 12958, as amended  
June 9, 2005

# CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

12 April 1971

**SUBJECT: SNIE 32-71: PROSPECTS FOR PAKISTAN**

## NOTE

This Estimate assesses the present and prospective state of the Pakistani civil war, the role of India and other powers, and the outlook for Pakistan's two components -- if the Bengali uprising should be put down, and if it should succeed.

## THE ESTIMATE

### I. THE CONFLICT IN BENGAL

1. When they launched their campaign on 25 March, the West Pakistani military leaders probably expected -- or at least hoped -- to destroy the Awami League (AL) and regain effective control of East Bengal in a matter of days, if not hours. They clearly miscalculated; most of the top AL leaders have been arrested, but lower

GROUP 1  
Excluded from automatic  
downgrading and  
declassification

~~SECRET~~

Level party leaders continue to be active throughout much of the countryside. While no precise figures are available, substantial elements of the 13,000-man East Pakistani Rifles (the provincial paramilitary force) remain in being, as do a few of the Bengali units of the Pakistani Army. Although beset by serious logistic and leadership problems, these armed cadres continue to resist the West Pakistani units in East Bengal; they are able to move fairly easily through most of the countryside.

2. Islamabad's forces are in command of the two principal cities, Dacca and Chittagong, and a few of the lesser ones. Even there, the army's hold is maintained by severely repressive measures and rigid curfews. Most economic activity has halted; the ports are virtually closed and most transport is disrupted. A number of bridges have been destroyed, ferry boats sunk, and rail lines (including that between Dacca and Chittagong) cut. Nonetheless, regular army forces can move through the region at will, except where inhibited by transport difficulties.

3. The prospects are poor that the 30,000-odd West Pakistani troops can substantially improve their position, much less reassert control over 75 million rebellious Bengalis. This is likely to be the case even if the expeditionary force is augmented. For most of

~~SECRET~~

DECLASSIFIED  
PA/HO, Department of State  
E.O. 12958, as amended  
June 9, 2005

East Pakistan's residents, the time has come for a separate Bengali nation. Many years of economic discrimination and political repression by the west wing had made an autonomous Bangla Desh the choice of over 75 percent of Bengali voters in the December 1970 elections. The refusal of Pakistan's military leaders to honor that choice and their attempt to terrorize the Bengalis into submission have almost certainly ended any general desire in East Bengal to see the Pakistani union continue.

4. Whether the army is to face widespread non-cooperation or continued active resistance will depend in part on how much help India gives the Bengalis. All but a few miles of East Bengal's land frontiers are with India, and the movement of arms and guerrillas across these very extensive borders cannot be prevented. There is considerable evidence that some arms shipments have already taken place.\* The Indian Government's support for the Bengalis will be determined by a mix of response to domestic popular pressures -- which are quite strong -- and of an assessment of India's own national interests. Statements of support in parliament and the press have

---

\* *The evidence for this includes observation of weapons being trucked into East Bengal from the Indian border*



~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

DECLASSIFIED  
PA/HO, Department of State  
E.O. 12958, as amended  
June 9, 2005

been very strong. West Pakistan, with its military forces, has long been a principal enemy of India. A successful Bengali insurgency would serve to weaken and discredit West Pakistan. The east wing, basically uninterested in the Kashmir dispute and never the scene of major Indo-Pakistani fighting, poses no military threat to New Delhi. To the contrary, its leaders -- particularly Mujibur Rahman of the AL -- have advocated cordial relations with India. Hence, we estimate that India will continue and increase its arms aid to the Bengalis and this will enable them to develop at a minimum the kind of insurgency capability which the army cannot entirely suppress. In so doing, India is accepting the risk that some of the arms it provides may fall into extremist hands. In time the Bengalis may prove more than a match for the army except where the latter is concentrated in a few strong points.

5. New Delhi has an additional incentive to aid the Bengalis -- and sooner rather than later. It is probably concerned that a rebellion lasting for a considerable period could throw up a new, extremist leadership (as opposed to the relatively moderate AL one) which would eventually take over the new country. The advent of a radical regime in East Bengal would create very severe problems for India, especially in the neighboring Indian state of West Bengal.

- 4 -

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

DECLASSIFIED  
PA/HO, Department of State  
E.O. 12958, as amended  
June 9, 2005

The latter, a very important industrial center, is badly troubled in its own right. Several extremist Communist groups are major political parties there. Social and economic conditions in its capital of Calcutta are exceptionally grim, and its residents would be quite susceptible to disruptive or even secessionist appeals from a radical East Bengal regime. Accordingly, the Indians are likely not merely to work for the liberation of Bengla Desh from West Pakistan, but also to seek to assure the advent there of a new government satisfactory to them.

6. India would prefer to aid the Bengalis by more or less clandestine means -- e.g., non-official "advisors", covert arms support, and sanctuaries. It could also undertake various forms of pressure, including troop movements towards either of its frontiers with Pakistan. If rebellion dragged on or if India saw significant chance of a radical leadership emerging, it would probably give more direct support. These actions could lead to deeper and deeper Indian involvement and to armed clashes with Pakistani forces; even open military intervention by India could not be ruled out. India has sufficient forces to defeat Pakistani forces in East Bengal without drawing down heavily on its troops on its other frontiers.

- 5 -

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

DECLASSIFIED  
PA/HO, Department of State  
E.O. 12958, as amended  
June 9, 2005

7. India of course runs risks in supporting or intervening in a Bengali rebellion. To do so could provoke Islamabad into launching an attack on western India. However, in the 1965 war the Indian military showed itself more than a match for the Pakistanis. The Indians are now much better equipped than in 1965, and face forces weakened by transfer of Pakistani units to East Bengal.

8. In addition to clandestine support, India has been applying diplomatic pressure in aid of Bengla Desh. It has urged the UN and major powers to express humanitarian concern and has pressured Ceylon -- with only limited success -- to withdraw landing rights for Pakistani military flights to East Pakistan. In addition, India would probably extend diplomatic recognition to a government of Bengla Desh if and when one satisfactory to India could demonstrate effective control of even a moderate portion of East Bengal.

9. Whatever the extent of Indian support to the Bengalis, the West Pakistanis will face increasingly serious difficulties in East Bengal. The area is principally riverine. With the advent of the monsoon in late May or early June, there will be extensive flooding which will further isolate the Pakistani Army in a few urban strong-points. Given the army's lack of complete control of water

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

DECLASSIFIED  
PA/HO, Department of State  
E.O. 12958, as amended  
June 9, 2005

transport, it will probably be forced to abandon a number of bases in the region, and limit its presence to those half dozen or so places which can be reached by air (helicopters are scarce) and those which can be reached by sea -- principally Chittagong. Even supplying these will not be easy. Transport of troops and supplies would be made more difficult if Ceylon terminated the landing rights it is now extending to Pakistani aircraft. The bulk of the arms and ammunition must be transported by sea from the west wing at a pace likely to strain Pakistani shipping capacities, and may result in the shortage of such items in the expeditionary force. Nonetheless, West Pakistani forces could probably, if they so chose, hang on to these selected bases for some time and conduct occasional forays into nearby areas. But if the Bengalis acquire greater military capabilities and develop something approaching a new national political leadership, the West Pakistanis' days in Bengal would be numbered, though the date and manner of their departure cannot now be forecast.

10. A good deal would probably depend on outside pressures, particularly by the great powers, and on developments in the west wing itself. In West Pakistan, the army's move against the Bengalis appears to have been generally popular at first. Support is likely to dwindle, however, if the cause appears to be a losing one and as

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

DECLASSIFIED  
PA/HO, Department of State  
E.O. 12958, as amended  
June 9, 2005

adverse economic consequences become apparent. Further, however much they wish to keep the east wing, the westerners know they would pay a very high price if they alienated the US, the USSR, and the West European countries. All these powers figure importantly, one way or another, in assuring a continued flow of trade and foreign aid necessary to the west wing's economy, in getting acceptance in the international community, and -- ultimately -- in helping provide protection against the threat believed to be posed by its large and hostile Indian neighbor.

11. So far, with the qualified exception of China, none of the major powers have shown any support for the central government's efforts in Bengal. Moscow has put itself firmly on record in opposition to the West Pakistani military suppression of East Pakistan; its choice was no doubt heavily influenced by the Indian attitude. It has called for a political settlement, and probably does not believe Soviet interests would be served by prolongation of the conflict. The Soviets have probably concluded that the odds favor a separatist solution or at least that Islamabad has little chance of imposing its will on East Bengal in any lasting and effective way.

12. Communist China, circumspect at first in its reactions to Pakistani developments, has recently sent a note to the Indian Government accusing it of interfering in Pakistani affairs. Peking,

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

DECLASSIFIED  
PA/HO, Department of State  
E.O. 12958, as amended  
June 9, 2005

particularly if strongly urged to do so by the Islamabad government, will probably undertake other measures to assist. These may include an increase in deliveries of military equipment to West Pakistan, sharper threatening words to the Indians, and even a maneuvering of Chinese troops near the Indian border. Chinese military intervention in support of the West Pakistanis does not now seem likely. Further, the Indians, pleased with Soviet condemnations of Islamabad's repression of the Bengalis, probably see Moscow serving as a strong inhibition on Chinese moves in the subcontinent. Such an assessment is probably correct; the Chinese leadership is not likely to risk a major conflagration in an effort to bail out beleaguered West Pakistanis trying to repress a popular uprising. The Chinese may in time face a dilemma should an extremist group come to the fore in East Bengal and seek Peking's support.

13. Stories of atrocities in Dacca and elsewhere have been widely circulated in the Western world, and West Pakistani actions have been condemned by a number of private citizens and groups. No single Western country has much influence on the situation, but general Western disapproval may make the government in Islamabad less certain of the wisdom of present policies and more amenable to pressures for change.

- 9 -

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

DECLASSIFIED  
PA/HO, Department of State  
E.O. 12958, as amended  
June 9, 2005

## II. PROSPECTS FOR EAST BENGAL

### A. As a Part of a United Pakistan

14. In the unlikely event that the West Pakistanis did succeed in reasserting military control over the Bengalis, they would almost certainly find it impossible to develop a new political system based on anything approaching a consensus of opinion in the two wings. In the December 1970 elections, the Bengalis gave an overwhelming mandate for political and economic autonomy; opinions have since hardened. The best the West Pakistanis could hope to achieve would be something like a restoration of conditions which existed under Ayub (and which were ended by mass public uprisings in 1968-1969). Routine and low-level administrative duties would be in the hands of Bengalis loyal to Islamabad (and such individuals do remain, though they are in a minority); ultimate authority would continue to be in the hands of West Pakistani authorities, and the army would remain the final arbiter of power. The two areas would remain one economic unit, and the central government would make some effort to cope with the formidable economic problems of East Bengal. But a substantial majority of the population would continue to be strongly disaffected, probably to the point of launching sporadic uprisings. The Pakistani Government's

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

DECLASSIFIED  
PA/HO, Department of State  
E.O. 12958, as amended  
June 9, 2005

talk about enlisting loyalist Bengalis in any significant numbers is wishful thinking.

B. As an Independent Nation

15. The political complexion and outlook of an independent Bangla Desh are extremely difficult to forecast. If it came into being rather soon, and if Mujib and the principal AL leaders were still alive and permitted to return, they would quickly take over. Mujib's political and economic philosophies are essentially moderate ones; he wishes to develop good relations with India and adopt a generally balanced and neutralist international posture. In domestic affairs he advocates a mild type of socialism, emphasizing an improvement in the living standards of the Bengali people and a concerted attack on the many economic problems of the area. On the other hand, the longer the fighting goes on, the more the prospects for a take-over by an extremist and radical leadership would be enhanced. We know almost nothing about such radicals; in recent years the politics of East Bengali protest have focused almost exclusively on the issue of autonomy. Nonetheless, given the large number of Bangali extremists in India and the ease of interchange of ideas and people between the two regions, radical movements could develop extremely rapidly.

- 11 -

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

DECLASSIFIED  
PA/HO, Department of State  
E.O. 12958, as amended  
June 9, 2005

16. Whatever its government, an independent Bangla Desh would, in the short term, have some things going for it. Relatively speaking for an underdeveloped country, its balance of payments problems would not be bad, thanks to its large current exports of jute. It would almost certainly repudiate the large debts to West Pakistan and the outside world incurred in its name. Able to trade freely with India, as it has not been in the past, it could buy many goods more cheaply.

17. But Bangla Desh would face serious problems both in the short and long term. The floods and cyclone of 1970 raised import requirements to about 3 million tons of food grains for the period until June 1971. Some, though almost certainly not all, of this has already been met by shipments of PL 480 and West Pakistani food grains. But Bengali ports have been closed since 25 March, and ships carrying food have been diverted. The internal transportation network has been disrupted. We have no information about food conditions throughout East Bengal now, but severe food shortages are almost certain and famines in certain areas not out of the question. Beyond this, the basic economic problems in that region are as severe as those faced by any country in the world, and they appear unlikely to improve much in the next several years.

- 12 -

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

DECLASSIFIED  
PA/HO, Department of State  
E.O. 12958, as amended  
June 9, 2005

18. Indeed the formidable and probably insoluble nature of these problems will make East Bengal -- be it East Pakistan or Bangla Desh -- an object of concern to its people, its neighbors, and the world in general for the foreseeable future. With 70 to 80 million people packed into an area the size of Florida, unable to grow enough food to feed itself, almost devoid of natural resources, facing a decline in the sale of jute (its principal export), periodically subjected to floods and cyclones, East Bengal will be plagued by economic privation and political crisis. Were the moderate Mujib to come to power, it is questionable whether he could do much to improve the lot of his people. If he did not, the euphoria of independence would likely disappear within a comparatively short period of time, and there would be an increased interest in and susceptibility to the radical and extremist ideas and groups which now exist in West Bengal. Its government, lacking well-organized security services, might have difficulties coping with such challenges.

19. This would of course make Bangla Desh a continuing object of concern to the Indian Government. East Bengal -- weak but potentially dangerous -- is likely to be under constant Indian scrutiny. It will probably, in the name of national security, be an object of manipulation and even of open interference on New Delhi's part.

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

DECLASSIFIED  
PA/HO, Department of State  
E.O. 12958, as amended  
June 9, 2005

Indeed, an independent Bangla Desh is likely to remain very much in the Indian orbit so long as that country has a government strong and decisive enough to seek to exercise its influence.\*

### III. PROSPECTS FOR A SEPARATE WEST PAKISTAN

20. The successful secession of the east wing would produce a severe psychological shock in West Pakistan. Indeed, President Yahya may well either resign or be ousted before the issue is decided in the east. Separation would also bring on painful economic difficulties, e.g., lower foreign exchange earnings, the loss of a protected market for its industry, higher per capita expenses for its armed forces, among others. The region might experience so severe a crisis that West Pakistan could itself split into as many as four separate nations, though this contingency now appears unlikely. Its relatively large and indigenous army, embittered by the loss of the east wing, could probably stifle any secessionist or insurgent efforts in the west. Unlike East Bengal, West Pakistan's longer term economic prospects are fairly promising, though it remains a poor country. It is a net food exporter, has a modest but growing industrial base, and experiences no severe population pressures on the land.

---

\* *The Indians have the capability both in terms of contiguity of territory and numbers of troops to maintain control of both East and West Bengal, however difficult or unpleasant the task would be.*

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

DECLASSIFIED  
PA/HO, Department of State  
E.O. 12958, as amended  
June 9, 2005

21. The army is likely to remain a principal political factor in West Pakistan, though it might eventually turn over formal political power to some civilian groups whose views are compatible with those of the military establishment. Whoever takes charge is likely to suffer from the diminished prestige and stature that comes with being the spokesman of 55 million people as opposed to 130 million. But over time this is likely to appear less serious. The loss of East Pakistan, which would probably have become an increasing economic and political burden, could prove to be a blessing in the long run.

22. The West Pakistani military machine's capabilities would remain -- the army would see to that. West Pakistan would be likely to pursue the same foreign policies it now does: maintaining an antagonistic posture towards India; seeking close ties with China, particularly in the field of military supply; and at the same time trying to achieve the best possible relations with the US, West Europe, Japan, and the USSR with the object of aiding its economic development programs and enhancing its international stature.

~~SECRET~~