

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



~~TOP SECRET~~

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AUSTRALIA
WASHINGTON, D. C.

13th January, 1972.

Dear Dr Kissinger,

....

I attach a message to the President which I have received from the Prime Minister of Australia, about the situation on the Indian subcontinent, and I would be grateful if you would pass it to the President.

I am also passing a copy to the Secretary of State.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'J. Plimsoll'.

(J. Plimsoll)
Ambassador

Dr Henry A. Kissinger,
Special Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs,
Executive Office of the President,
WASHINGTON, D.C.



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For some time now I have been deeply concerned with the problem of Pakistan and the strategic importance of recent events to the balance of power and influence in the Pacific and Asian theatres. This applies particularly to the sub-continent and the Russian potential, naval and political, in the Indian Ocean.

Whatever past doubts there may have been, our assessment now is that Bangladesh, painfully and haltingly, will come into being as an independent republic. The task of reconstruction after natural disasters, the brutal repression of the Pakistani martial law administration and then the devastation of war will be a tremendous one.

Money and skills will be needed to rebuild the shattered economy and replace the skilled technicians who have been killed. Food and medical supplies are also lacking.

The provision of these needs is far beyond the resources of India and Bangladesh. It is beyond the resources which the Soviet Union is likely to be willing to provide. In any case I believe it would be a great tragedy if we were to give India and the world the impression that we were content to leave to the Soviet Union the task of solving the problems of India and Bangladesh. It has never been the case, is not now, and will not be in the future, that the provision of aid to a country desperately in need of it, like India, ensures compliance with any particular line of policy. Natural disappointment when things go awry should not obscure fundamental longterm objectives.

I also see grave dangers in giving the People's Republic of China the impression that we are not concerned about Russian expansion into the subcontinent. They are highly sensitive to Russian moves in Asia and may well see in the appearances of some American coolness towards India an attempt to set the Soviet Union against China, however unjustified this obviously is.

Our own view, as I know it also to be the view of your Administration, is that playing off China against Russia will be productive of dangerous domestic instability in South and South East Asian countries.

Assuming as I do that the separation of the East and West wings is now inevitable, I still believe that both states can be economically viable. Indeed Bangladesh, with access to the markets and the raw materials of West Bengal, may prove more prosperous than she has been in the recent past.



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West Pakistan will no doubt look to a closer association with the states of the Middle East where its role might be a more helpful one than it has been when in association with the nations of South East Asia.

My particular concern is with Bangladesh. As a country of more than 70,000,000 people, on the edge of the South East Asian region, it is an important neighbour for Australia.

At present, the Government is not in effective internal control. However, we have made it clear to India that we are not against recognising Bangladesh once the government is clearly established, functioning and in control, and when President Bhutto's attempts to reach some composition with East Bengal have been given a little more time to work themselves out.

You will know, Mr President, that I hold the view that Australian and American interests run substantially parallel in most areas of the world and that I am acutely aware of the immense contribution which your country has made to the security and prosperity of the whole world.

You will know too of my admiration for the leadership you and your Administration have taken in reducing world tensions and the contribution you personally are making in the cause of detente and world peace. Such actions can never be forgotten by us.

For these reasons I am encouraged to write to you in this vein. I perceive the possibility that by withholding support and encouragement from India and the new country of Bangladesh at this time the United States runs the risk of facilitating a massive expansion of Russian activity in the Asian and Indian Ocean area, an expansion which we assess here as inevitably hostile in intent.

Furthermore, there is a chance that India will become politically and economically tied to the Soviet Bloc. Whatever may be one's view of Mrs Gandhi's hard-headedness, India, without Western and mainly United States support, is just not strong enough to resist at least partial absorption into the Russian sphere of influence.

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May I urge you to consider these views at a critical time in the development of the balance of power and influence in a very important area of the world.

One idea which presents itself to me and which I would like to submit to you is that because of our common interests we might have a joint study made at official level about these problems or perhaps we could prepare a basic paper and send it to you for your comments.

I would deeply appreciate the benefit of your personal views on this and related matters.

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