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March 29, 1972

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION FOR THE PRESIDENT'S FILE

PARTICIPANTS: The President joined the group for about 15 minutes in the middle of the conversation. Aziz Ahmed, Secretary General of the Pakistani Foreign Ministry
Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President
Nawabzada Raza, Ambassador of Pakistan
Harold H. Saunders, NSC Staff

DATE AND PLACE: 12:15 p.m. Wednesday, March 29, 1972, in Dr. Kissinger's office

Dr. Kissinger opened the conversation by saying that we in this building feel very close to Pakistan. We "went through tragic days together in December." Pakistan has our goodwill.

Mr. Ahmed said that Pakistan was grateful for the assistance it had received and for the present support of the US. Pakistan is conscious of having a good friend in the United States. The leadership of Pakistan is now trying to put together the pieces left from the tragic crisis of last year.

Dr. Kissinger said that we admired the way President Bhutto has conducted himself.

Mr. Ahmed noted that the Assembly would be meeting in April and that martial law would be lifted on August 15. President Bhutto is deeply conscious of the need for internallunity, and he has made some progress. Pakistan's main problems now are external, particularly the relationship with India and the need for the return of the prisoners of war whom India holds.

Mr. Ahmed said that Pakistan is militarily very weak. It was weak in December and is weaker now. India knows that. India knows she has 90,000 men that Pakistan needs for maintaining internal security and order. He expected the negotiations to be tough. The Indians are talking about finding a settlement to the Kashmir problem which had eluded settlement for two decades.

~~SECRET/NODIS~~

- 2 -

Mr. Ahmed said that India had started out by demanding recognition of Bangladesh as a precondition for talks. India has now withdrawn that precondition but has put Mujib up to making it a precondition of his. Bhutto's strategy is to see Mujib first to try to gain his agreement to the return of the prisoners before he sees Mrs. Gandhi. Otherwise, Bhutto feels that Mrs. Gandhi would say that she could not do anything about the prisoners because she would have to check with Mujib first.

Mr. Ahmed noted that Bhutto intends to recognize Bangladesh. It is just a matter of time. President Bhutto had come to power with three cards to play. First was the release of Mujib, which he had now given away.

Dr. Kissinger said that was a good move.

Mr. Ahmed agreed that it was a sensible move, but it was a major card to play and Pakistan has now played it. The second card Pakistan has to play is recognition of Bangladesh. Bhutto hopes to play this in connection with the return of the prisoners of war. The third card he has to play is the 28,000 Bengali soldiers in West Pakistan whom Mujib wants and the 20,000 civil servants whom he also wants. Mr. Ahmed said that President Bhutto is ready to record his intent to recognize if the prisoner issue can be settled. He told this to the Russians in Moscow but had received no response yet.

Mr. Ahmed continued that India has moved three divisions to the West Pakistani border. General Manekshaw has gone to Moscow, presumably to seek equipment to replace India's war losses. India is going ahead with whatever plans it has--either exerting pressure on Pakistan for the negotiations or for a more serious attack. There has been some thought that the Indians would seize Azad Kashmir. The Chinese, however, felt that an attack on Azad Kashmir would be unlikely until after President Nixon's visit to Moscow.

Dr. Kissinger said that he was inclined to agree with that assessment.

Mr. Ahmed said that the Chinese capacity to give sophisticated weapons to Pakistan is very limited.

Dr. Kissinger asked whether France could supply them.

~~SECRET/NODIS~~

~~SECRET/NOBIS~~

- 3 -

Mr. Ahmed replied that France could provide some for cash but that Pakistan has no means to pay. He said he had talked with a number of Congressmen while here. Senator Kennedy was sympathetic on general issues, although Ahmed had not specifically broached the question of military assistance to Pakistan. The Senator said that he wanted to have a dialogue with the government of Pakistan.

Mr. Ahmed said that his conversation with Senator Kennedy had gotten off to a good start because the Senator had vividly recalled an incident in which the Senator and his father and the Ambassador were involved during the Ambassador's tour here in Washington. He continued describing his general conversations with Congressmen on the military aid question. He acknowledged that the issue was "tricky," but he felt that most of those he talked to were not "violently opposed." On the whole he found sympathy and understanding.

Mr. Ahmed said he had explained to the Congressmen that the end of the war with India and the breakup of Pakistan formed the beginning of a new chapter in South Asia in which the Soviets are moving strongly into the subcontinent. He stated as his own opinion that the Soviets would offer a friendship treaty to Pakistan within a year.

Dr. Kissinger indicated some surprise and asked whether he did not feel that would hurt the Soviets in India. He wondered what the Indians would get out of it.

Mr. Ahmed replied that he felt that the Soviet position would be sufficiently strong there that this would be possible by that time. The Soviets want to demonstrate to all that they--not the US or China--are the providers of security in South Asia. He noted also that the Indians had offered treaties of friendship with India to Ceylon, Nepal and Burma.

At this point the President came into Dr. Kissinger's office and was introduced to the Secretary General. After an exchange of pleasantries, Mr. Ahmed picked up the conversation.

Mr. Ahmed stated that US and Pakistani interests are "intertwined" in South Asia. Pakistan hoped that the US would maintain a strong presence in the area. The Soviet Union is making a major effort to consolidate its position there. Pakistan was weak militarily before the war and is "very much weaker" since the war. He said he would not be surprised if the

~~SECRET/NOBIS~~

~~SECRET/NODIS~~

- 4 -

Soviet Union offered Pakistan a friendship treaty within a year. The Soviet interest seems to be in showing that it is the USSR and not the US or China who will provide security in the subcontinent.

As an example of the role the Soviets are playing, he noted that the Pakistanis had sent messages to Mrs. Gandhi through Ceylon, and the answers had come back through Moscow. It seemed clear that the Soviets intended to keep the peacemaking process very much within their grasp.

He noted that the Indians also were making their own effort toward greater control in South Asia. They had offered treaties of their own--similar to the one signed with Bangladesh--to Burma, Ceylon and Nepal. So far these offers have been turned aside.

The President asked how Secretary General Ahmed felt that the US should deal with Bangladesh.

Mr. Ahmed said that he felt that the US should definitely recognize Bangladesh soon.

The President indicated that we would be doing something along those lines next week. Our recognition had been delayed out of deference to President Bhutto. He asked how the Secretary General felt that the US should handle aid to Bangladesh.

Mr. Ahmed replied that the US should provide all the aid it could so that Bangladesh would feel that it had an alternative to dependence on the USSR. He noted that the Soviet Union is building "a large mission" in Bangladesh.

The President noted that we would be providing our proportionate share of humanitarian assistance through the United Nations. We had begun doing so through the United Nations because we had not recognized.

Mr. Ahmed asked whether he might make a comment on the President's remark. He said he would suggest that the US provide its aid to Bangladesh bilaterally.

~~SECRET/NODIS~~

~~SECRET/NODIS~~

- 5 -

The President indicated interest in this idea and said he assumed that the Secretary General's recommendation was based on the assumption that this would give the US "more stroke."

Mr. Ahmed said that was his point.

The President asked Dr. Kissinger to consider whether this would be possible. He felt that the UN operation was not an exceptionally good one. The President showed definite interest in the idea of shifting aid to a bilateral basis. He went on to say that if he were in Dacca he would be very much concerned about being "swallowed up" by India and assumed that the Bangladesh leadership would eventually welcome a good relationship with Pakistan. He said he did not know this to be a fact but felt that this would be his position if he were there. He asked the Secretary General what kind of relationship with Bangladesh Pakistan had in mind.

The President asked what Pakistan's intentions to recognize Bangladesh are.

Mr. Ahmed responded that Pakistan would recognize Bangladesh but that timing was the only problem. Bhutto wished to use the card of recognition to get back his 90,000 prisoners of war. He said that Pakistan wanted to develop a good relationship with Bangladesh. He did not feel that this was precluded by the Bengali leadership. He agreed with the President that Bangladesh would be concerned by the possibility of Indian domination.

The President then turned to the question of our overall posture toward South Asia and how he felt Pakistan might play the situation in the coming months. He repeated that the US would move ahead into a relationship with Bangladesh.

He said that we would move ahead correctly with India. We wanted to maintain a relationship there, although we would move slowly. In Pakistan we would provide all the help we could. Most of our help would be in the economic field. Until after the US election in November, it would be very difficult to move ahead with any military assistance. The Congress would make too much of an issue of it. However, on the economic side there would be little opposition; the Administration would do all it could so that Pakistan's own resources could be free

~~SECRET/NODIS~~

~~SECRET/NODIS~~

- 6 -

to work out its military arrangements with "other friends." The US would also take a very hard line in Moscow. He agreed with the Chinese assessment--which the Secretary General had alluded to--that India would not attack Pakistan before the Moscow summit in May.

Dr. Kissinger said he also felt that the Soviets would exercise restraint on the Indians in the aftermath of the summit as well. If things went at the summit as we hoped they would, the Soviets would have no interest in creating a confrontation with the US soon.

The President said that the Soviets were quite aware of our strong feelings expressed during the crisis in December. They know very well that if they permitted the Indians to attack Pakistan now, this would have a very high cost in Soviet relations with the US. He felt that the US diplomatic approach to the Soviet Union would be of very great value in reducing the military threat to Pakistan in the coming months.

Mr. Ahmed quietly indicated his understanding of the President's comments. He then described the conversations he had had with members of the Congress during his stay in Washington. He felt that they had been sympathetic, and although he had heard reservations about resuming military assistance to Pakistan, he did not feel that there was sharp opposition among those to whom he had talked. He had even had a conversation with Senator Fulbright in which the Senator had indicated that while there was sharp opposition last year because of the special circumstances, that might not be true now.

The President by his facial expressions seemed to indicate a mixture of interest and some skepticism. He said that the Secretary General's comments were interesting and that it was possible that he "had made a sale where we could not." He asked Dr. Kissinger to explore this with Senator Fulbright. But he repeated his feeling that probably the US would not be able to do much before the election. We would then examine the issue after the election. The President then asked the Secretary General about Pakistan's other sources of arms, particularly the French.

Mr. Ahmed said that the Chinese were very limited in their capacity to provide what Pakistan needed and the French would sell but would require cash. He noted that Pakistan's ability to pay for weapons was very limited.

~~SECRET/NODIS~~

~~SECRET/NODIS~~

- 7 -

The President returning to the more general question of Pakistan's position in South Asia said that he felt that the Pakistanis should play for a reasonable relationship with Bangladesh and should do what they could to try to make peace with India. The President noted that US and Chinese policy toward South Asia was parallel. The Secretary General could give his warmest regards to President Bhutto and indicate our desire to be helpful as we have tried to be in the past. The President then expressed pleasure at meeting the Secretary General and left.

The President before he left asked that the Secretary General keep this conversation entirely confidential. He noted stories in the morning New York Times about Jordanian military assistance to Pakistan during the December crisis. He figured this was just a story to embarrass the King of Jordan who is in town, but in any case it was difficult to keep things out of the newspapers so he would appreciate Pakistani confidence.

After the President had left, Dr. Kissinger continued the conversation. He said it was important for Pakistan to get through the next six months. He felt that it was inconceivable that there would be an Indian attack before the summit meeting in Moscow, or even for some time after.

Dr. Kissinger continued that the President makes the policy and "we won't let Pakistan down. If there is another attack, we will react violently." He noted that we have told the Indian Ambassador that we cannot cut off military aid to Pakistan unless India is prepared to forego Soviet military aid. We have said that we will not restore the \$87 million of aid that had been suspended.

The US does not believe one country should have the right to impose its will on its neighbors. The President has very warm feelings for Pakistan. He noted that the President does not normally see foreign visitors except for heads of state and that the President's gesture in meeting with the Secretary General had been an unusual one. He hoped that the Secretary General would convey our "warmest regards" to President Bhutto and that he would not go back upset by what he had been told by other officials of the government, especially at middle levels.

~~SECRET/NODIS~~

~~SECRET/NO~~
- 8 -

Mr. Ahmed noted that in the State Department they had been sympathetic, had explained the problems with military assistance but they had emphasized that no final decision had been made.

Dr. Kissinger then spent about three minutes alone with the Secretary General before he left.

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Harold H. Saunders