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May 10, 1971

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: M. M. Ahmad, Economic Adviser to President
 Yahya Khan of Pakistan
 Agha Hilaly, Ambassador of Pakistan
 Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President
 Harold H. Saunders, NSC Staff

DATE AND PLACE: 3:05 p.m. to 3:30 p.m., Monday, May 10, 1971

Mr. Ahmad opened the conversation with a long explanation of the political developments over the last couple of years in Pakistan and then turned, at Dr. Kissinger's request, in the last few minutes to the prospects for the future.

Mr. Ahmad described President Yahya's wish that he come to Washington and acquaint Dr. Kissinger and others with what has happened, why it happened, the present situation and the future program. President Yahya had been anxious that the army should hand over civil power as soon as possible and he had worked hard in that direction. He has been deeply disappointed at the way events have turned out. He believed that the solution to the situation in Pakistan was political--not military. Events prove this. A military solution could have been enforced easily back in 1969, and he did not choose to do so. He broke up the one unit in the West Wing, dividing authority in line with the several provinces. This tilted the balance in favor of East Pakistan. He held fair and open elections. Mr. Ahmad cited this background to show that President Yahya's main desire had been to find a political solution.

Mr. Ahmad continued, saying that President Yahya had placed no limits on the making of a constitution except that it be in the framework of one single country. The President felt disappointment that Mujibur Rahman had begun shifting his ground after the election. Mujib was to have come to Islamabad for meetings early in the constitutional process, but Yahya went to Dacca. Arrangements were made for a second round of talks but Mujib found an excuse not to come. The President felt that there had to be some understanding among the politicians before the constituent assembly actually met.

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The problem was that the main political parties were regional in character. When the President was unable to arrange a round of discussions, he found it necessary to postpone the constituent assembly. Postponement had provoked a sharp reaction in East Pakistan, even though the President announced a fresh date within six days.

President Yahya had gone to Dacca on April 15. The Awami League put forward its six demands plus four more. The additional demands amounted to lifting martial law before the constituent assembly and transferring power to civil government beforehand. Then Mujib began shifting ground again. Some progress had been made in the talks, and President Yahya asked other political leaders to come over from West Pakistan. Ahmad joined them for talks on the economic side of the problem. There were some differences on this subject, but general agreement that the economic problems could be worked out.

President Yahya offered the possibility of a solution along any of the three following lines:

-- There could be a proclamation embodying an interim constitution including most of the six points. President Yahya wanted the constituent assembly to meet first, letting them provide the authorization for the constitution. But the Awami League wanted martial law to be lifted first.

-- If the constituent assembly could not meet first, there could be a proclamation putting forward the interim constitution but not lifting martial law, although that would be pushed into the background.

-- A third possibility would have been to make an announcement that such an interim constitution would date from the date that the constituent assembly adopted it.

The West Pakistani leaders wanted the constituent assembly to meet and then break into two houses. The Awami League wanted the assembly to meet as two houses right from the start.

At this point Dr. Kissinger interjected that he would have to be leaving soon for a meeting with the President and the Secretary of State to hear the Secretary's report on his trip to the Middle East. He said he wanted to hear whatever Mr. Ahmad had to say but simply wanted to point out that he would only have another ten minutes if Mr. Ahmad wanted to use the remaining time to look to the future.

Mr. Ahmad continued saying that President Yahya's policy is still for the transfer of political power. He does not intend fresh elections. Apart from those people against whom there is some unfavorable evidence, those elected last December will still be able to form the nucleus of a government.

Dr. Kissinger asked whether this would include Mujibur Rahman. Mr. Ahmad replied that he ranked within the first eight or so of those political leaders against whom there is evidence of conspiring to secession. However, the rest of the Awami League can drop its title and form a government. They will be able to operate on the basis of an agreement as close to the six points as possible, meeting the legitimate needs of East Pakistan.

Dr. Kissinger asked when this might take place. Mr. Ahmad replied that this would be possible as soon as normal conditions are restored in East Pakistan-- "shortly." The law and order phase is, by and large, completed. Civil administration needs to be restored. Indian activity on the border will have to be ended, and Pakistan will appreciate whatever US assistance there can be on this score.

When Dr. Kissinger asked how this might be done and noted that we have not had much success in having New Delhi heed our advice. Mr. Ahmad simply said he hoped we would try. President Yahya said he hoped that it would be possible to produce a political package that would permit the Awami League to come forward. He continued saying that he hoped that Pakistan could remain an element of stability in South Asia and he sought US help.

Dr. Kissinger said that he has explained to Ambassador Hilaly that the President has high regard for President Yahya and a feeling of personal affection. The last thing one does in this situation is to take advantage of a friend in need. He said that "we in this building" have resisted efforts to do just that. The development of Pakistan remains in the US interest. Mr. Ahmad is familiar with the political and bureaucratic pressures that operate in Washington. Anything the government of Pakistan can do to take account of our public opinion and help us with it would be most helpful, although Dr. Kissinger said quickly that he had no prescriptions to offer. We would do our best to be helpful and not to compound the anguish "your country is already suffering." Ambassador Hilaly, Dr. Kissinger concluded,

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could keep him informed on a discreet basis on how the talks were going and perhaps the two would meet before M. M. Ahmad left.

Mr. Ahmad concluded that President Yahya was very appreciative of the stand that the US had taken in a hostile atmosphere. The political initiatives now planned are intended to help improve this atmosphere. Any ideas the US might offer, "on a friendly basis", would be most acceptable.

Harold H. Saunders

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