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

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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July 12, 1971

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: Jagjivan Ram, Defense Minister of India
K. B. Lall, Defense Secretary
Mrs. Rukmini Menon, Chief of Americas Division,
Ministry of External Affairs

Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President
Kenneth Keating, U.S. Ambassador to India
Harold H. Saunders, NSC Staff

DATE AND PLACE: July 7, 1971, in the Defense Minister's Office
in New Delhi

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Dr. Kissinger opened the conversation by saying he appreciated the opportunity to talk with the Minister. Attempting to divert conversation from the arms shipments to Pakistan, he said that he had talked about immediate problems with the Foreign Minister and would like to ask the Defense Minister a more general question. He then asked how the Minister assessed the Chinese Communist military threat to India.

The Minister said that he saw no change in the military balance between India and China. The Chinese have their concentrations of troops at some points and their military exercises. Indian preparedness continues the same as it has been.

The Minister said that the Chinese Communists had been training Mizos in East Bengal for commando work on the Northeast Frontier, perhaps 1,000 - 1,200. Generally, however, the Chinese threat continued the same. They have not increased their forces during the present conflict in East Pakistan.

Mr. Lall said that the Chinese had gradually improved their communications, their bunkers and their airports. There are about 100,000 Chinese troops on India's northern border.

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Dr. Kissinger asked whether the Chinese could fight without reinforcing their troops there, or would the requirement for reinforcement give India advanced warning that the Chinese were preparing some sort of an attack?

Mr. Lall felt that India would know because the Chinese would have to build up their supplies there. Dr. Kissinger asked what had happened in 1962. Mr. Lall replied that India was not prepared and that its information was bad.

Dr. Kissinger asked how many months it would take the Chinese to build up their supplies to the necessary level. Mr. Lall said 2-3 months. Dr. Kissinger said that the US had made studies in Europe to try to determine what sort of buildup the Communist forces would need before an attack. The Defense Minister said that India had made similar studies.

Dr. Kissinger asked whether it was the Indian conclusion that a surprise attack would be difficult. The Minister said that this is true, even from Tibet. Mr. Lall said that, nevertheless, there is a great deal of talk and natural apprehension about what the Chinese might do. He asked Dr. Kissinger whether he thought the Chinese would do anything without some provocation.

Dr. Kissinger responded that this seemed unlikely. It was possible, however, that the Chinese would intervene if there were a war with Pakistan.

Mr. Lall asked what would be the justification for such an attack. India is not going to go to war with Pakistan. Ambassador Keating said that the Chinese had said they would support Pakistan in a war. Dr. Kissinger said that the US would take a grave view of any Chinese move against India.

Dr. Kissinger said that the Chinese have been cautious in their military moves although they have been tough in their talk. The US effort is to promote tranquility and peace.

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The discussion then turned to the current misunderstanding between the US and India. Mr. Lall said that "our quarrels are like lovers quarrels." The Defense Minister said that the problems sometimes transcended present disagreements. Dr. Kissinger said that he had been scolded by everyone.

Mr. Lall said that the US has persistently said its interest is in a strong and stable India. Now India is under great strain.

Dr. Kissinger asked what the Indian problem is on the West. He said he knew what it is on the East.

The Minister said there is constant tension on the Western border. Any accretion of military hardware creates difficulties for India. Bangla Desh should be seen in the wider perspective of peace and stability. The US has to judge whether Pakistan can retain Bangla Desh. Will it be in the US interest for Pakistan to stay together?

Dr. Kissinger replied that the US is considering that question. "What can the US do?" he asked.

The Minister said that the US could do a lot. All of Pakistan has been sustained by the US. He asked whether Dr. Kissinger agreed. Dr. Kissinger replied, "Partially." The Minister said, "Look at your support for building the army of Pakistan." The refugee problem is bad enough as an immediate problem. If the people think they are going to stay here in India, then it becomes a problem of great social concern. But even ignoring that, a solution of the Bangla Desh problem has to be found.

The Minister said that Pakistan ought to have another election. "I would not mind that." He said he knew the Bangla Desh leaders from partition days. He said he felt he knew what was going on in Bangla Desh. If Pakistan does not get massive outside aid, he did not feel they could survive.

Dr. Kissinger said Pakistan is not now getting "massive aid." The Minister replied that Pakistan is counting on receiving such aid.

Dr. Kissinger said that US policy is to try to avoid a confrontation with Pakistan and to have some influence on developments.

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Mr. Lall said that what is not clear to the Pakistanis is that US policy is directed at encouraging a change in the situation. The Pakistanis do not seem to understand that they cannot go on maintaining a country with an army drawn from six or eight different districts.

Dr. Kissinger said that the US is not in favor of secession. We are in favor of a political solution. We don't want to mislead India. What we want is a situation that will permit the refugees to return. The US has no fixed view on what a solution should be.

The Defense Minister said that he understands the situation in East Bengal. The Punjabis do not regard the Bengalis as of the same stock. The Punjabi rulers have not put faith in the Bengalis. Now, there is not even a constabulary in East Pakistan.

The Minister continued that Mujibur Rahman never wanted secession. He was a moderating influence.

The Indian problem, the Minister continued, is that there are now nearly 7 million refugees in India. All India has stood for is at stake. He said that, without a solution, he feared that the basic principle on which India is based would be in jeopardy.

Dr. Kissinger asked how the Minister felt a solution could come about. He said that the Minister seemed to think that the US should produce one, as if the US did not have enough problems of its own!

The Minister said that the US could tell President Yahya that he will have to find a solution that responds to the will of the people in East Pakistan.

Dr. Kissinger said that he has now seen the intensity of Indian feeling. The actions of the US are not directed toward the balance between India and Pakistan. A strong and stable India is a basic US national interest. The desire of the US is to preserve influence in Pakistan. Our hope is to use that influence to encourage a settlement that will permit the refugees to return. If this policy is not successful, then we shall reexamine it.

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The Defense Minister described the great pressures on the Government of India. There is a question of national pride and there are political parties and the press pushing the Government to take some kind of action. Pakistan is complaining about Indian intrusions into East Pakistan. There are none. As a matter of fact, at Argatala, there is shelling from Pakistani territory.

Dr. Kissinger asked how many Pakistani forces there are in East Pakistan, and the Minister replied that there are about 70,000. Mr. Lall said that there are 4 plus divisions. They are supplied by sea.

Dr. Kissinger asked how long they could fight in a major military confrontation. Mr. Lall said, "Not very long." The Minister said that the logistics problem for the Pakistani military forces is a real one. It would be difficult for them to continue fighting over a prolonged period.

The Defense Minister said that India would like the US to retain its influence in Pakistan. Dr. Kissinger said that the desire to do so explains most of the US actions in recent days. The Minister said that he hoped that the US would use its influence more aggressively than it had in the past.

Mr. Lall said that he felt that the US had been using its influence in questionable ways. Mr. Kissinger replied that the amounts of military equipment that Pakistan had received of late were relatively insignificant, though we recognize that the Indian reaction resulted as much from strong emotion as from actual assessment of the impact on the military balance. He again explained the fact that there had been a loophole in US administrative procedures which the top echelons of the government had not been aware of.

Mr. Lall said he recognized that nothing capable of offensive use was going to Pakistan, but it must not be ignored that the "bits and pieces" that were being shipped were sufficient to restore weapons to their full use. The Minister said the strong Indian feeling is not about the quantity and the type of equipment but about the intention of the US.

Dr. Kissinger replied that we could not expect to quiet a whole nation. However, he felt that it was possible to make clear to the Minister that we did not believe there was any sense in trying to trick the Indian government. The US interest is to help bring about a solution that will permit the refugees to go back. There is no intention of creating a balance of power situation between India and Pakistan.

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The Defense Minister said he was glad that this is the understanding. If India is weakened, it would affect the stability of the entire world. Dr. Kissinger replied, "That is our profound conviction."

Dr. Kissinger continued that the only balance of power the US is concerned with is the global balance--and the problem of preventing an outside power from dominating South Asia. The local balance within South Asia is not an American concern. The difficult problem we now have between us as nations is to maintain that long-term perspective.

Americans and Indians tend to talk with each other in this vein only when things get critical. Dr. Kissinger said that if the Minister came to the US he would certainly wish to see him.

The Minister replied that he would reiterate the common objective which the US and India have in peace and stability and in a solution to the **present problem that would contribute** to those objectives. Dr. Kissinger replied that he would leave India with a new awareness of its problems. His visit had been a very meaningful experience for him.

Harold H. Saunders

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