



A motor car burnt down during hartal in Dhaka on March 4, 1971.

PHOTO: JALALUDDIN HAIDER

U.S. SECRET CABLE

How the US saw March 7 speech

This memorandum analysing the situation of Pakistan following Bangabandhu's March 7 speech was sent by Henry Kissinger, the US President's Assistant for National Security Affairs, to President Nixon

Washington, March 13, 1971.

Subject: Situation in Pakistan

An immediate showdown between East and West Pakistan has been averted for the time being. The prospects for a reconciliation and settlement remain poor, however, and the basic elements of the situation remain essentially unchanged.

Situation in Perspective

President Yahya and the West Pakistani military appear determined to maintain a unified Pakistan by force if necessary. The replacement of the Military Governor in East Pakistan with a tougher man, the generally harsh tone of Yahya's March 6 speech and the explicit warning that force would be used against any move for separation are all indications in this direction. There is also evidence that the military forces in the East Wing are being gradually strengthened by troops being airlifted through Ceylon. Yahya may personally lean toward conciliation, but he must answer to the dominant hardliners in his army.

While East Pakistani leader Mujibur Rahman has stepped back a bit from a declaration of independence, the full text of his March 7 speech conveys a harsher tone than the initial summary reports, and it seems apparent that his

retreat was tactical. He made clear that something very close to independence, i.e., “emancipation,” is his goal and that his movement will not be deflected until that is achieved. Noteworthy also is the fact that Rahman quite openly took issue with Yahya, accusing him of “submitting to the declaration of a minority” [West Pakistan] and asserting that his own Awami League is the only legitimate source of authority in the country.

Our embassy in Islamabad believes that Rahman's goal remains unchanged—"emancipation" of East Pakistan from West Pakistani domination. This could still conceivably mean "full provincial autonomy" within a united Pakistan. But it is just as likely, if not more so, that Rahman has come to believe firmly that the freedom he seeks is only attainable by outright independence. His speech last Sunday would suggest an effort to achieve his goal by gradual assertion of power without risking a direct confrontation with the army that might follow a unilateral declaration of independence.

The other element in this delicate political equation—West Pakistani political leader Z.A. Bhutto—is for the moment remaining relatively quiet. Since triggering the current crisis in mid-February with his

refusal to attend the constituent assembly, Bhutto has worked to consolidate further his support in the West Wing and at least to appear more conciliatory. Substantively, the differences between Bhutto and Rahman on the division of powers between the center and the provinces might be reconciled, or at least papered over, if a constituent assembly could be held. The bigger question, at this point, is whether either Bhutto or Rahman retain any genuine interest in cooperating toward settlement.

Conclusions

The coming days should tell whether Yahya and the West Pakistani military decide there are still grounds for trying to work out a political solution that would insure the continued unity of Pakistan. Yahya reportedly is going to Dacca to meet with Rahman shortly.

The following would seem to be the most likely situations that could now develop:

1. Yahya could decide not to take Rahman's challenge lying down and to retaliate, perhaps to the extent of arresting Rahman and the other leaders, and attempting to clamp a military lid on East Pakistan. There are two basic

problems here: (1) Rahman has embarked on a Gandhian-type non-violent non-cooperation campaign which makes it harder to justify repression; and (2) the West Pakistanis lack the military capacity to put down a full-scale revolt over a long period.

2. A static waiting game could develop with neither the army nor the civilians prepared to take a bold initiative to break the deadlock and each hoping the other will break first. This is where we are now and Rahman would probably prefer to continue like this for a while longer so that he can gradually take de facto control of East Pakistan without forcing a showdown.

There might be more tactical political moves by Yahya, Rahman or Bhutto designed to probe for areas of accommodation and buy more time without giving up anything. This has been the mode of operation so far but it may be that just about all of the possibilities in this sphere have been played out. In short, the Pakistan crisis is far from over and could suddenly flare up again. As you know, the Senior Review Group met last Saturday to consider the U.S. posture at this juncture. It was generally agreed that

very little, if anything, could be gained by U.S. diplomatic intervention at this point and that the best posture was to remain inactive and do nothing that Yahya might find objectionable. The choice was basically between continuing on this course, at least until the situation jelled, and weighing in now with Yahya in an effort to prevent the possible outbreak of a bloody civil war. The case for inaction at this point is:

- It is not necessary for us to shift now to a more activist approach since Yahya knows we favor unity and is doing everything possible to achieve a political settlement.

● It is undesirable for us to intervene now since we could realistically have little influence on the situation and anything we might do could be resented by the West. Pakistanis as unwarranted interference and jeopardize our future relations.

It should be pointed out that the main cost of following this approach is that it may jeopardize our future relations with East Pakistan if it becomes independent. On balance, however, it is a more defensible position to operate as if the country remains united than to take any move that would appear to encourage separation. I know you share that view.

