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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

1 March 1971

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Indo-Pakistani Tensions, Present and Future*

NOTE

Varying degrees of fear and distrust have usually characterized relations between the governments of India and Pakistan. Religious rivalries and unresolved territorial disputes, notably over Kashmir, militate against any lasting reconciliation. Islamabad fears that its larger neighbor will some day seek to destroy it. New Delhi has become increasingly concerned with Pakistani intentions, particularly since the latter now receives support from India's much feared enemy, Communist China. Internal political developments in both India and Pakistan are likely in the immediate future to add to the tensions between them. Neither country desires or intends to start a war, but each exaggerates the other's hostile intentions. The odds are still against hostilities, but the two could stumble inadvertently into a serious conflict, as they have in the past. This Memorandum examines relations between India and Pakistan, considers the contingency of new hostilities in both the short and longer term, assesses the general military capabilities of each, and discusses the likely outcome and some implications for the US.

PFIAB review completed

* This Memorandum was prepared by the Office of National Estimates and coordinated within CIA.

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1. As a result of several unforeseen and unconnected developments relations between India and Pakistan are now more strained than at any time since the 1965 Indo-Pakistani war. India will go to the polls during the first 10 days of March. The electoral campaign has brought forth much anti-Pakistani oratory. Pakistan for its part is in the midst of serious domestic crisis. Its martial law regime has relaxed its former strict controls over the people. It permitted a free election in December 1970. After a campaign which featured vociferous expressions of anti-India sentiment in West Pakistan, the voters chose an assembly charged with writing a new constitution. The assembly was scheduled to begin its work in early March, but its opening has been indefinitely postponed by President Yahya because of the intense disagreement between the East and West Pakistani factions.

2. Pakistan's domestic political situation has implications for the Indo-Pakistani dispute. The country has, since Ayub's takeover in 1958, been dominated by West Pakistan; its army has been overwhelmingly from the west wing; the national government's policies have reflected anti-Indian biases which are much stronger in West Pakistan than in the east. Even so, since 1958, Pakistan's governments have been autocratic in nature, not responsive to popular pressures and able (though not always inclined) to play down or ignore anti-Indian sentiments.

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3. The December elections have changed this. The West Pakistanis* overwhelmingly voted for the Pakistan Peoples Party of Z.A. Bhutto, a virulent anti-Indian xenophobe. The East Pakistanis, on the other hand, chose almost the full slate of candidates of the Awami League (AL) led by Mujibur Rahman (usually referred to as Mujib). The East Pakistanis have far less fear and hatred of India than do those in the west wing, are little concerned about India's occupation of Kashmir, and in fact want a rapprochement with their large Hindu neighbor. The AL would have an absolute majority in the constituent assembly -- if that body is allowed to convene -- and Mujib is determined to assure well-nigh complete autonomy for East Pakistan, including freedom to determine its own international relationships. But he has run into opposition, both from Bhutto and at least some elements of the ruling martial law regime.

4. The denouement of the present situation is anything but clear. Negotiations between Mujib and Bhutto have broken down. The attitudes of President Yahya and his government

* West Pakistan has recently been broken into four separate provinces. These nonetheless have much in common and will probably continue to work closely together; for the purposes of this paper West Pakistan will be considered as a single unit.

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continue to be uncertain. Yahya, when he ordered the elections held, stated that he would veto any constitution which destroyed the "integrity" of Pakistan. Privately, he has disapproved of Mujib's demands for autonomy, and as a West Pakistani military leader he almost certainly dislikes the AL's softness towards India. It is too early to say whether Yahya's postponement of the constituent assembly will bring on a showdown or temporarily postpone it. The former appears more likely at the moment.

5. East Pakistan's 75 million people resent -- with considerable justification -- what they consider discriminatory and repressive rule by the westerners. A growing number now demand full independence. Whether the 20,000 or so predominantly West Pakistani troops there could suppress a Bengali uprising, much less retain control over any extended period, is open to serious question. But this judgment may not be shared by hard line military leaders; at least some are probably disposed to hold the Bengalis down by force, and confident they can do so.*

6. As the Indian election campaign has drawn to a close, domestic tensions have risen there as well. Among those contesting for office is at least one fairly large political

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party, Jan Sangh, which is bitterly anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistani. Its candidates' oratory has inevitably roused emotions in those areas of India where anti-Muslim prejudices are strong. This in turn has put pressure on those relatively moderate leaders, including Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, to prove their patriotism and display their anti-Pakistani credentials. Initially this was achieved by jailing prominent Kashmiris who urged separation from India and by banning their political movement from participation in the election -- acts in themselves provocative to the Pakistanis. All this has tended to reinforce a climate in which the government would have difficulty in not reacting strongly to Pakistani moves considered hostile.

7. With such edgy situations in both countries, a specific event has triggered off what could be the beginnings of a new Indo-Pakistani crisis. On 30 January 1971, an Indian airliner flying between Jammu and Srinagar was hijacked and forced to land at Lahore in West Pakistan. The hijackers were Kashmiris out to publicize the plight of that predominantly Muslim area occupied by India since 1948. They initially demanded the release of those Kashmiri leaders recently jailed by the Indians, but they eventually let the passengers and crew go and then

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blew up the plane. The Pakistanis, ignoring official Indian demands for compensation, apologies, and extradition, granted asylum to the hijackers. India has since responded to the hijacking by banning overflights over India between East and West Pakistan -- posing a financial burden on that country.

8. Both governments have permitted if not encouraged large and sometimes violent demonstrations outside each other's diplomatic installations. Bhutto, attempting to consolidate his position in the west wing and to cast doubts on Mujib's patriotism (the latter had been critical of the whole hijacking affair), has lavished praise on the hijackers and made a point of going to the airport to congratulate them. Mrs. Gandhi too has gotten into the act and has revived a long standing demand of Hindu extremists that Pakistan be forced to give up that part of the old princely state of Kashmir which it occupies -- something which India could try to accomplish only by major armed action.

9. Reports of movements of armored units, of troops put on ready alert, and the like have been circulated. There apparently have been some troop movements, the extent of which we do not know, but they appear defensive. Completion

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of the Indian elections and forward movement on Pakistan's constitutional problems could in themselves lead to a quieting of the situation. There are already signs that governmental leaders on both sides are making a more sober assessment of the current problems between them, and are working towards a lesser level of tension.

10. But this is not to say that the basic hostilities and underlying strains between the two countries are likely to be overcome. They have already led to three wars, one of major dimensions, and the potential for strife will still be there. The specific political conditions in both nations offer ample opportunity for extremists and demagogues to heat up the atmosphere. It does not seem likely that either government will deliberately plan to initiate hostilities against the other. The real danger, as before, is that inflammatory events now unforeseeable will put further strains on their relations, produce exaggerated reactions, and escalate to military conflict.

Military Capabilities

11. The Indian armed forces have something over a million men; the Pakistani roughly a third that number. Both have been greatly expanded in size in the past decade

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and have received very substantial amounts of new and sophisticated equipment. Military budgets are now, in real terms, up to double what they were in 1960. Both countries must still rely on major arms producing countries for such complex weapons as jet aircraft, helicopters, most of their tanks, electronic equipment, naval craft, etc. They have so far been relatively successful in acquiring them, and the armed forces of the two countries are well equipped. Until 1965, Pakistan's armed forces were supplied almost completely by the US, which had provided nearly \$700 million in military aid since the mid-1950s. Since the cut-off of US arms supplies at the time of the 1965 war, Islamabad has greatly diversified its sources. Its principal new arms provider has been China which has sent over a hundred jet fighters, several hundred tanks, and enough materiel to equip at least two new infantry divisions. The Pakistanis have also purchased substantial amounts of arms in Western Europe and have gotten some modest numbers of tanks and other ground equipment from the USSR.

12. Unlike Pakistan, India has a substantial defense industry of its own, and now manufactures enough ammunition, small arms, machine guns, mortars, light artillery pieces and the like to equip its ground forces. While India still

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gets some sophisticated items from the UK and France (US military aid has been terminated), the USSR is its principal source of such equipment. Since 1962, the Soviets have delivered over \$700 million worth of jet fighters and fighter bombers, surface-to-air missiles, tanks, frigates, submarines and other materiel.

13. The splitting of Pakistan into two separate nations -- if such does indeed occur -- would have little impact on the balance of conventional military forces in the subcontinent. Those comparatively few West Pakistani troops in the east wing are essentially an occupation force, with obsolescent equipment and little military capability with respect to the Indians. In any Indo-Pakistani war, India could of course move forces into East Pakistan with little or no resistance, but this would not affect the main theater of fighting. It would take an independent Bengali regime many years to develop a military arm of any consequence, even if it decided to do so.

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14. India, with 10 times the population of West Pakistan and three times the number of troops, is not threatened by that country alone. But this is not India's real fear; India must take Communist China into account. The two countries have serious territorial disputes; their relations, initially cordial, began deteriorating in the late 1950s. In a border war in the autumn of 1962, China inflicted a humiliating defeat on India. It has developed close ties with the government of Pakistan; since 1965 it has been the chief source of arms supplies for the Pakistani military. During the 1965 Indo-Pakistani war the Chinese made a number of threatening noises, but did not actually intervene.

15. How far India's fear of China is justified is debatable. Certainly in any Indo-Pakistani conflict China's sympathy and interests would lie on Pakistan's side; at a minimum, it would make some gestures of support. But China's future policies are no more a known quantity to India than to us, and India feels it must be prepared for the contingency of another round of fighting with the Chinese.

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16. In any event, India military planners have prepared for a two-front war against West Pakistani and Chinese conventional military forces.* About 200,000 of its million-man army are positioned against West Pakistan, which has a force of roughly equal size, equipment, and leadership on its side of the frontier. Most of these units are deployed in the flat, open Punjabi plain. Another 200,000 Indian soldiers are posted in the high Himalayan areas and passes of Ladakh, eastern India, and Sikkim. These are specially trained and equipped mountain troops. Behind these two concentrations of forces are strategic reserve units of up to 200,000 men in north and central India, ready to come to the assistance of either force were the Chinese or the Pakistanis to break through on their respective fronts.

17. The Indians, since their military humiliation in 1962, have persistently exaggerated the strength of the conventional military forces that China could bring to bear against them. Because of long distances from supply centers

* The Indians are deeply concerned about China's nuclear arsenal, but have as yet not sought to develop a nuclear deterrent of their own. They could explode a low yield nuclear device within a year of a decision to do so, and could then manufacture several more. They will be unable to produce thermonuclear weapons in at least this decade, however. Pakistan's nuclear capabilities will remain virtually nil in this period.

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and severely inhospitable terrain, no more than 150,000 Chinese could be used in an attack on India from bases in Tibet and Sinkiang. Formidable Himalayan winters would permit major military operations in this region only between August and December. Such factors as very high altitudes and distance from available air bases would greatly reduce the amount of air support the Chinese could give their ground forces. Indian defenses in these areas have been very greatly improved since 1962.

18. On the other hand, there are some factors which could benefit the Chinese in an attack on India. They would start from a relatively favorable strategic position. Based on the high points of the large Himalayan plateau, the Chinese, if initially successful, would quickly come down through mountain valleys to the large Gangetic plain in the subcontinent. Their principal area of attack would probably be through the North East Frontier Agency and particularly through Sikkim which is only some 60 miles from the East Pakistani border. Were Chinese forces to reach the latter point, they would isolate eastern India -- including Assam and the North East Frontier Agency -- from the rest of the country. Further, the Chinese could attack eastern India with another 150,000 troops if they chose to move their forces through Burma.

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Military Prospects

19. In a war which saw no outside intervention in the subcontinent, India would almost certainly defeat Pakistan. Its forces are so much larger, its inventory of armaments and sources of supplies so much greater than the Pakistanis' that the latter would eventually be overwhelmed by sheer weight of numbers. This estimate is probably shared by the top authorities of both India and Pakistan. (In 1965, the Pakistanis overestimated their strength against India and now know that they did.) Accordingly we believe the Pakistanis would, in the present situation at least, go to considerable lengths to avoid provoking open combat unless they can get major outside, i.e. Chinese, support.

20. A number of factors bear on the possibility of Chinese involvement in an Indo-Pakistani war. Some, noted above, are physical and even seasonably predictable. For example, weather conditions in the Himalayas would severely limit Chinese military moves against India from January through July of each year. Other current impediments to Chinese intervention are political or more subject to change. These include the situation along the Sino-Soviet border, circumstances in Indochina and the state of internal politics

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in China. The outcome of a two-front conventional war fought by India against Pakistan and China is much less predictable than an Indo-Pakistani conflict. The Indians are far better prepared -- in strategic planning, training, equipment, and number of forces -- to meet the Chinese than they were in 1962. On paper they have the strength, without any outside aid, to wage a successful defense against a Pakistani-Chinese assault. But such intangible and unpredictable factors as morale, ability to handle sophisticated equipment -- and luck -- could possibly change this picture.

Implications for the USSR and the US

21. The past five or six years have seen an increasing political interest and involvement by the USSR in the affairs of South Asia. The Soviets have expanded their already substantial military aid program to India and have begun a much more modest -- and perhaps temporary -- one to Pakistan. Soviet economic assistance programs have shown no significant increase, but neither have they precipitately declined. [redacted]

[redacted]
[redacted] US associations with Pakistan in CENTO and SEATO have been, in effect, terminated; US military supply programs to India and Pakistan have all but ended; US

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economic assistance programs for both countries -- though still larger than those of the USSR in absolute terms -- have been cut considerably.

22. While active in promoting closer bilateral political ties with both India and Pakistan, Moscow has also gone to some lengths to bring about an improved climate of relations between the two antagonists themselves. This was conspicuously the case in the Tashkent Conference of January 1966, wherein Kosygin persuaded the then leaders of India and Pakistan to pull their troops back from areas occupied during the 1965 war, to restore diplomatic relations, and to begin dialogues leading to resolution of outstanding disputes. Such dialogues have, of course, failed, but the Soviets still seek to enhance their leverage and to promote stability in the area.

23. To a very considerable extent their policies have been the outgrowth of a rising concern with Communist China. Moscow has sought to increase its leverage in Pakistan in order to reduce Chinese influence there. It has given considerable backing and support to India as the latter has sought to strengthen itself militarily with respect to the Chinese. And Russian efforts to reduce Indo-Pakistani tensions

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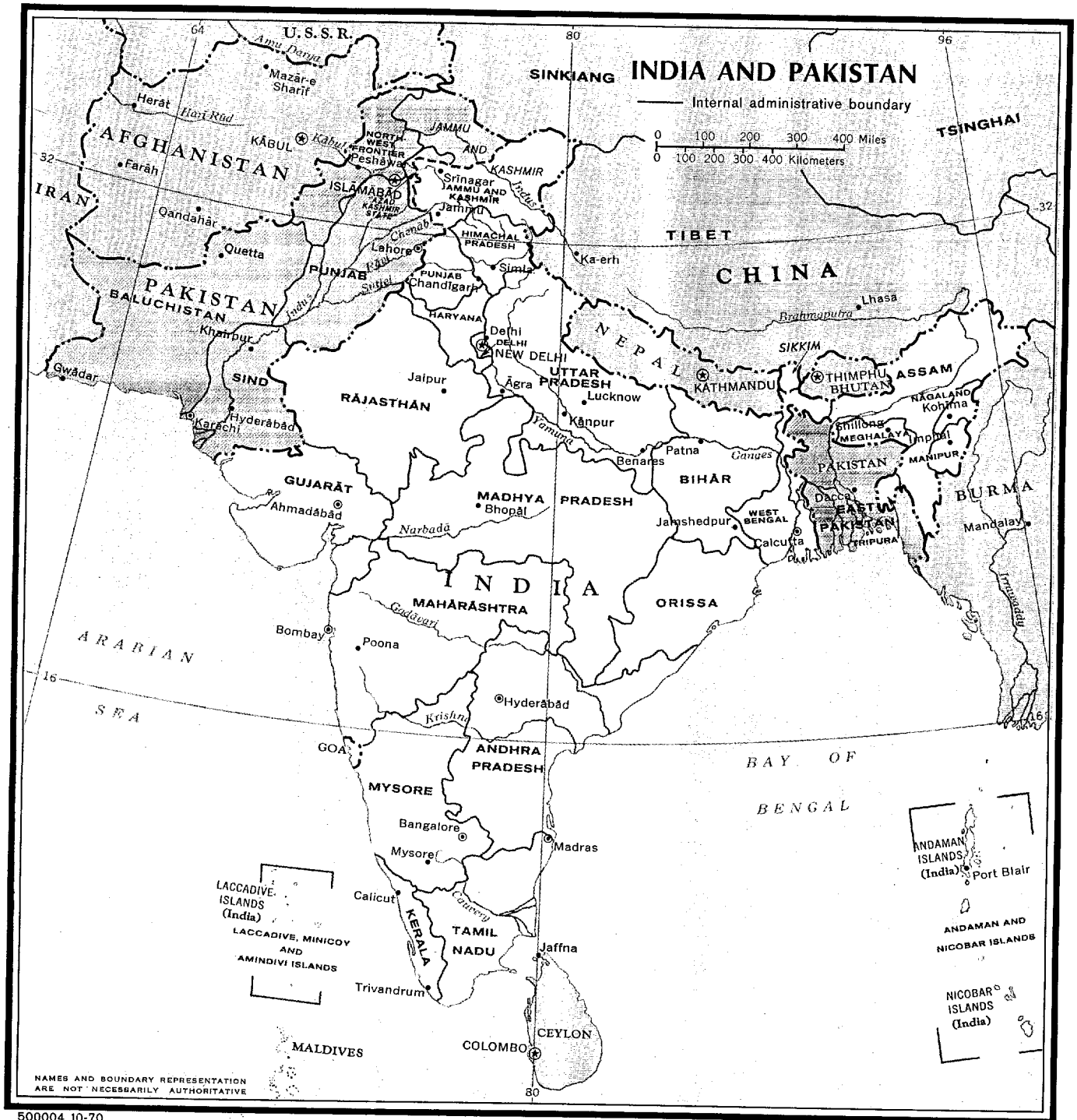
appear motivated chiefly to prevent crises which Peking could exploit. Accordingly, the outbreak of a war even between India and Pakistan alone would be a matter of major concern to the USSR; the possibility of an entry of Communist China into the fighting would pose a most serious challenge.

24. If fighting broke out between India and Pakistan, Moscow would probably seek, as it did in 1965, to get the fighting stopped as soon as possible. It would likely again cooperate with the US and other Western Powers in the UN to this end, and would also exercise strong bilateral pressures upon India and Pakistan themselves. Moscow would also probably try to deter the Chinese from any military intervention; to this end Soviet forces along the Soviet-Chinese frontier might undertake seemingly threatening moves. Whether or not Moscow would choose to go farther to keep the Chinese out, or what actions it would take if Peking did become militarily involved in South Asia would depend on factors and circumstances which cannot now be foreseen. The nature of Soviet-Chinese relations at the time; the apparent involvement or non-involvement of the US; and immediate military developments with respect to Pakistan, India, and China would probably all play important roles.

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25. In any event, Moscow will continue to play an important political role in the subcontinent. Its efforts to acquire more extensive political leverage seem likely to increase. The continued existence of tensions between India and Pakistan, and between India and China, will provide the USSR the opportunities, and at times the hazards, of increased involvement in South Asia -- probably to a greater extent than the US. At the same time, both India and Pakistan will probably continue to want to balance their ties by seeking reasonably good relations with Washington. In the event of rising Indo-Pakistan tensions, and particularly if fighting broke out, both would seek at least some form of diplomatic support from the US. India in particular would press the US for some kind of backing, support, or guarantees in the event of possible Chinese intervention.

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MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director

This is the memorandum I mentioned this morning which was sent to Admiral Anderson.

ABBOT SMITH
Director
National Estimates

Attachment:

Memorandum, dated 1 March 71
"Indo-Pakistani Tensions, Present
and Future"

1 March 71
(DATE)

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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

PRESIDENT'S FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE ADVISORY BOARD

17 February 1971

Dear Dick:

Many thanks for your letter of 23 January, and the attachments pertaining to the Sino-Soviet border situation. I found them extremely helpful.

I am looking forward to receiving the forthcoming NIE on Soviet Policy in Asia, which Abbot Smith informs me will deal with the specific question of the likelihood of a Sino-Soviet war, the forms it might take, and possible outcomes. I feel this type of intelligence forecasting (wargaming in military parlance) can be particularly helpful to our policy-makers. While I recognize that you are under severe constraints to avoid any incursions in the policy domain, I feel that an intelligence assessment of international disputes which may break out into hostilities, and an evaluation of possible implications for US policy should this occur, are within the bounds of your charter. If I interpreted correctly your remarks to the Board in connection with a study of the Caribbean recently forwarded to the White House, you share my view with respect to taking a look at potentially critical situations before they break out into open conflict. While I believe such assessments of a potential Arab-Israeli conflict are being continually updated, I have not seen them. I wonder, too, whether there has been an assessment of possible U.S. courses of action should the name-calling between the Indians and Pakistanis again break out into hostilities.

Let me take this opportunity to thank you again for the very useful contribution you made to the Board at its last meeting.

Sincerely,

George W. Anderson, Jr.
George W. Anderson, Jr.
Admiral, USN (Ret.)
Chairman

Mr. Richard Helms
Director
Central Intelligence Agency
Langley, Virginia

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