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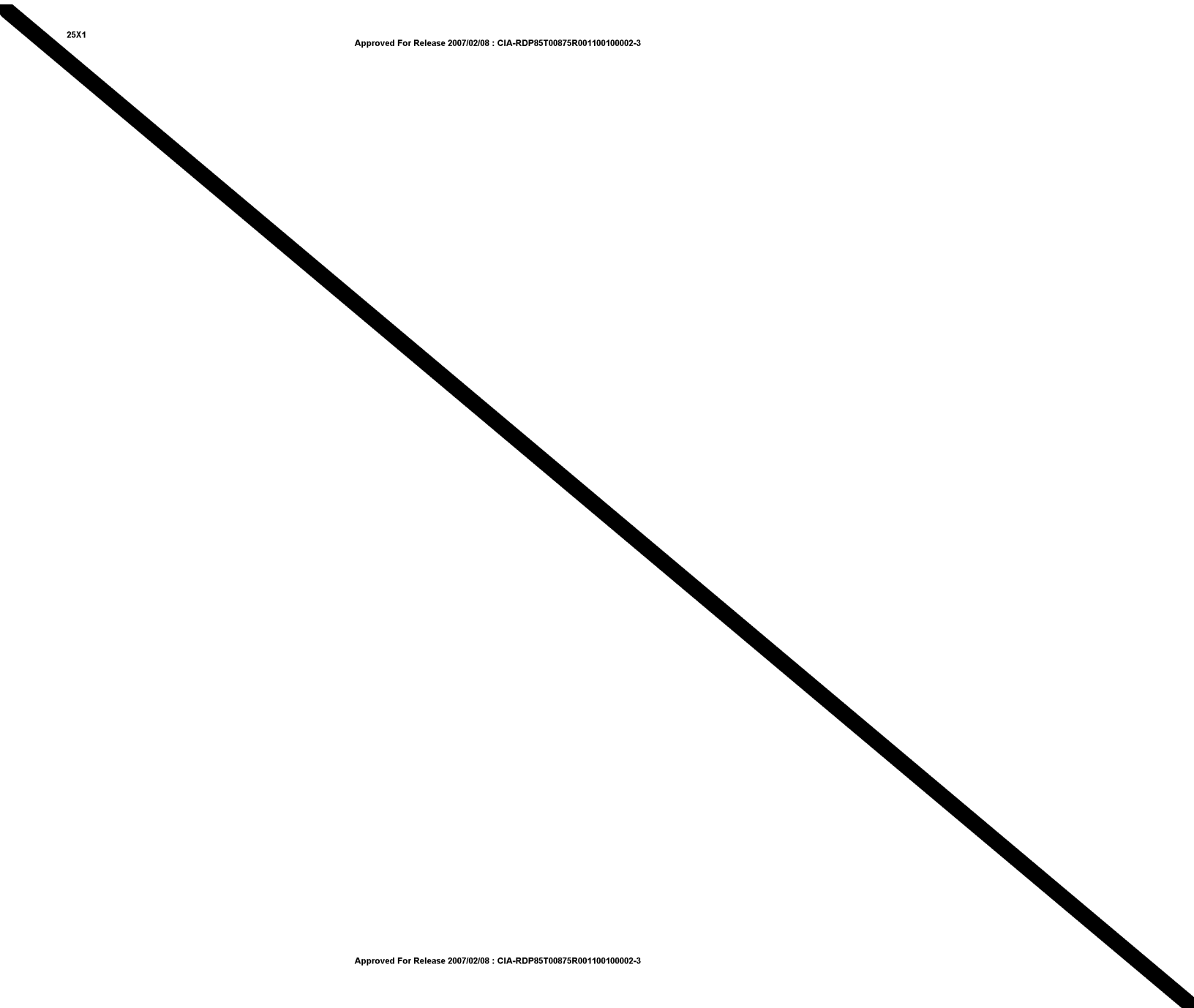

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OCI No. 0965/71

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
1 March 1971

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Pakistan

(Situation as of 1200 EST)

1. President Yahya Khan today postponed the meeting of the National Assembly until "a later date." The assembly was to convene on 3 March in Dacca, East Pakistan, to begin writing a constitution, which would come into force only if approved by Yahya.

2. In a message to the nation, Yahya said that because of the "confrontation" between East and West Pakistani leaders over constitutional provisions and the refusal of the major West Pakistani party to attend, "if we were to go ahead with the inaugural session, the assembly itself could have disintegrated." Yahya added that when the politicians work out their differences he will call the assembly into session immediately.

3. The US consul general in Dacca reports that the initial reaction there to the postponement has been several spontaneous processions calling for independence for East Pakistan. Although the general mood of the people was peaceful, an atmosphere of tension pervaded the city, and most businesses and shops had closed down. Top leaders of the Awami League (AL), including party leader Mujibur Rahman, were arriving for a previously scheduled meeting of the AL parliamentary board.

4. Mujibur Rahman, whose AL swept elections in East Pakistan for the national constituent assembly and possesses a numerical majority in the assembly, has long taken a hard-line approach in regard to his

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six-point plan to provide extensive provincial autonomy in the new constitution. He has stated repeatedly that he will not compromise on the substance of his program, and he has made only a few conciliatory gestures intended to mollify opposition on the part of West Pakistani leaders. He has stated publicly that if anyone attempted to thwart his program, there would be bloodshed and a mass movement that no one would be able to control.

5. Although Mujibur Rahman has claimed frequently that he does not seek the separation of the two wings of Pakistan, since early February he and other AL leaders have sounded out different foreign representatives concerning their attitudes towards an independent East Pakistan. One of his advisers said that the last recourse open to the AL in the face of efforts to block the six-point program would be a unilateral declaration of independence for East Pakistan.

6. On the morning of 28 February Mujib met with US Ambassador Farland in Dacca, prior to President Yahya Khan's postponement of the national assembly. Mujib said that if West Pakistani delegates disrupted the assembly by leaving it once it had begun, the life struggle for Bangla Desh (the term now used by Bengalis in referring to East Pakistan) would then begin. He addressed several questions to the ambassador about US aid for the rebuilding of Bangla Desh, claiming that East Pakistan could become a viable area. The question of US recognition of an independent East Pakistan was not raised at this meeting.

7. President Yahya is well aware that he risks a strong East Pakistani reaction, but presumably decided that the alternative to postponement would be even worse. In a major address on 28 February, Z. A. Bhutto, the leading West Pakistani politician, threatened a mass movement if Yahya went ahead with his plans for the National Assembly. [redacted] 25X1

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[redacted] Yahya may have believed that if the assembly did produce a constitution, it would incorporate East Pakistani demands to such an extent that he would be unable to accept it.

8. Thus, Yahya may have seen two principal alternatives: 1) postpone the session and--although he left some room for maneuver--risk an immediate confrontation with the East Pakistanis; or 2) hold the session, risk an immediate confrontation with the army, the West Pakistanis or both, and, because he would have to reject their constitution, a confrontation with the East Pakistanis in a few months.

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