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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE
13 OCTOBER 1954

TO: Deputy Director (Intelligence)

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SUBJECT: The Current Political Situation in Pakistan

CONCLUSIONS:

1. The dissident group of Moslem League members who engineered the so-called "constitutional coup" in the Pakistani Constituent Assembly on 21 September is probably merely a temporary threat to Governor General Ghulam Mohammad and the small clique which now rules Pakistan.

2. There is doubt that the dissidents actually control a majority of the assembly as reported. In addition, the group is likely to disintegrate before it can form an effective government, partly because of its own lack of unity, partly as a result of countermeasures adopted by the ruling clique, and possibly because of the threat of military intervention. The ruling clique, therefore, will probably retain its power, though it may lose some of its democratic trappings in the process.

3. Such developments would afford a striking parallel on a national scale with the situation created in East Bengal early in 1954, when the ruling Moslem League party was overwhelmingly defeated in provincial elections by a United Front of diverse elements. This Front collapsed completely within a month, permitting the national government to step in and establish a dictatorial rule through a newly appointed governor of the province.

4. The stability achieved through such action without the support of the populace is unlikely to result in a satisfactory solution of Pakistan's political and economic problems.

DISCUSSION:

5. The 21 September "coup" itself consisted of the legal passage by less than 42 of the 72 active Constituent Assembly deputies of an amendment to the Government of India Act, 1935, under which charter the Pakistani government has operated pending the drafting of a constitution. The amendment stripped the governor general of his essentially viceregal powers, enhanced

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the position of the prime minister, and made the prime minister and his cabinet responsible to the national assembly rather than to the governor general.

6. At present, the body of men constituting the assembly perform two functions, constituent and legislative. Under the law, the governor general no longer has any power over the assembly when it meets as a constitution-making body. He seems, however, to retain the power to prorogue the assembly in its guise as a legislative body.

7. Simultaneously, the perpetrators of the "coup" repealed the Public Representative Officers Disqualification Act (PRODA), thus freeing from fear of government action a number of highly placed dissidents, whose positions were in imminent jeopardy.

8. The "coup" was executed early in the morning of the last day of the Constituent Assembly's session, two hours before the regularly scheduled time for convening. Several procedural rules were waived in bringing the amendment to a vote, and the bill was passed 10 minutes after presentation.

9. The governor general was in northern Pakistan at the time. Foreign Minister Zafrullah Khan and Finance Minister Choudhuri Mohammad Ali were in the United States. Iskander Mirza, governor of East Bengal and a key member of the ruling clique, was on his way to London. General Ayub Khan, commander in chief of the Pakistani army and another key man in the governing clique, was not in Karachi. Interior Minister Gurmani and Law Minister Brohi, both loyal to the governor general, received no word of the early meeting and were not on the floor of the assembly. Prime Minister Mohammad Ali, who concurred with the action taken by the dissidents, was the only member of the clique informed in advance of the intended maneuver.

10. The real leader or leaders of the "coup" have not yet been identified. M. H. Gazdar, Sindhi deputy president of the Constituent Assembly who moved the amendment, and Fazlur Rahman, an East Bengali who was ousted from the commerce minister-ship when the present clique seized power in April 1953, acted as front men for the group. Prominent among other East Bengalis, Sindhis, and Northwest Frontiersmen closely associated with the "coup" were former prime minister Nazimuddin, former chief minister of East Bengal Nurul Amin, former industries minister Abdur Rab Nishtar, Chief Minister of Sind Pirzada, the Food and Industries Minister Abdul Qayum Khan, and business magnate Yusuf Haroon. Most of these men are discredited

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politicians, either repudiated by their constituents or under threat of disqualification on grounds of corruption. Prime Minister Mohammad Ali seems to have been a tool rather than a leader of the group.

11. The actual strength of the dissident group has not yet been established. Reports that it includes a majority of the 72 active members of the 79-man assembly may not be true. Twenty assemblymen failed to attend any session on 21 September. Of the 52 who signed in as present at some time during the day, only 42 are known to have been on the floor when the vote was taken. Twelve Moslem Leaguers from the Punjab were absent, and none of the four present is known to have been party to the "coup." Only 10 of 17 non-Moslem League deputies--all members of the opposition--were present, and there is no record either of their vote or of their subsequent activities.

12. The vote was by voice. No "nay" was recorded but there were probably some government deputies or others who abstained. For instance, Punjab chief minister Feroz Khan Noon, who was present, is loyal to Governor General Ghulam Mohammad and almost certainly abstained.

13. Considering the possibility that some deputies loyal to the government voted for the amendment in ignorance of its significance and that others might be coerced into changing their stand, it is too early to state that the governor general has permanently lost control of the assembly. In fact, it is quite possible that the dissidents could not repeat their success except under highly artificial conditions such as existed on 21 September.

14. An additional sign of the dissidents' weakness is the fact that the assembly adjourned shortly after passing the amendment, to reconvene on 27 or 28 October after the prime minister's return from the United States. This gives the governor general over five uninterrupted weeks in which to recover lost ground without interference from the assembly.

15. Furthermore, it is uncertain that the dissident group, regardless of whether it held a majority on 21 September, is sufficiently cohesive to remain a real threat to the government. Former prime minister Nazimuddin is a long-standing opponent of the present prime minister, whose position has been temporarily enhanced by the new amendment. The prime minister, despite his initial co-operation with the dissident group, publicly criticized Fazlur Rahman, one of the dissident leaders, in a speech broadcast to the nation on 1

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October. Abdur Rab Nishtar is at odds with Qayum Khan, who forced him out of Northwest Frontier politics. There is no indication that members of this group will continue to cooperate any longer than did the leaders of the United Front in East Bengal. Efforts on the part of the dissidents to enlist the support of other prominent politicians, such as the Punjabi Mian Mumtaz Daultana, are unlikely to be successful because of the price such men would probably put on their services.

16. Meanwhile, the governor general and his lieutenants are gathering their forces for a counterattack which may well return the dissidents to relative obscurity. Ghulam Mohammad, Gurmani, and General Ayub Khan are not men to shirk a fight and they will not surrender passively to the dissident group. Their initial shock and dejection was probably occasioned more by their surprise at the disloyalty of Prime Minister Mohammad Ali, whose tenure in office will probably be short, than by any defeatist attitude.

17. The Pakistani army under General Ayub is solidly behind the present government and prepared to take action at any moment if necessary. Composed mainly of West Pakistanis, the army generally looks with disdain on East Bengalis, who comprise the bulk of the dissident group. In addition to the army, the governing clique can probably count on the loyalty of even some opposition deputies from West Pakistan if the issue of rule by East Bengalis comes to a showdown.

18. Other weapons in the ruling clique's armory include the direct control still wielded by Brohi, minister of information and broadcasting as well as of law, over the Pakistani press and radio. The fact that little or no discussion of a "coup" seems to have leaked out through news media is evidence that this control is still effective.

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[REDACTED] Iskander Mirza, governor of East Bengal, retains civil jurisdiction in that state and can still bring court action against dissidents who have escaped the clutches of the Disqualification Act.

19. The fact that active countermeasures by the governor general's clique have been slow in developing is not necessarily a sign of weakness. The basic confidence of the clique is reflected by the fact it has made no strenuous effort to date to recall members now abroad to help defend its position.

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20. Ghulam Mohammad and Brohi have presumably explored all possible legal loopholes in the new amendment and apparently feel that the governor general still has the power to dissolve the legislative assembly. Possibly as a result of this decision, Ghulam Mohammad has sought the support of H. S. Suhrawardy, an astute politician and the strongest leader of the now defunct United Front of East Bengal. On 9 October the Pakistani press printed a demand from Suhrawardy, who apparently has responded to the governor general's appeal, demanding the dissolution of the present assembly as unrepresentative.

21. It seems clear that the government leaders are attempting to set up Suhrawardy as a rallying point around whom East Bengali deputies dissatisfied with the action of the dissidents can gather. Suhrawardy's attraction is that he represents the party winning 70 percent of the votes in the East Bengal elections of March 1954 and the party holding over 90 percent of the Moslem seats in the provincial legislature. Nazimuddin, Nurul Amin, and the other dissidents who were repudiated by a landslide vote cannot similarly claim to reflect public opinion.

22. This maneuver by the government may succeed in winning away from the dissident side enough East Bengali deputies to destroy any majority it may have had on 21 September. A press report of 12 October stating that the Chief Minister of the Punjab, Malik Feroz Khan Noon, had returned to Karachi after cutting short a visit to England indicates that the governor general is also counting on this loyal deputy to prevent Daultana from cracking the solidarity of the Punjabi deputies who were not involved in the "coup."

23. The odds appear to favor the capability of the ruling clique to remain in power and to restore to Pakistan a degree of political stability equal to that enjoyed in recent months. This does not mean that real stability will be achieved, however. Dissension within the Moslem League will almost certainly continue. So will the rivalries of provincial politicians. Pakistan's critical economic situation will still plague the government unless additional foreign aid enables it to overcome popular criticism by producing tangible evidence of progress.

24. Most important of all, the probable failure of the Moslem League to reconcile its internal differences before 31 October, the date set for an already once-postponed convention, will result either in another disastrous postponement or an equally disastrous public airing of the League's dirty linen. In either event, the political bankruptcy of the

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organization on a national scale will become as obvious as that of the provincial League in East Bengal. Under these conditions, the governor general's clique would almost certainly consider it necessary to remain in office, ruling by more or less dictatorial means with the backing of the armed forces.

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