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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
14 April 1964

Cy Kowal
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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Kashmir and Sheikh Abdullah

1. During the course of the last year, Indian policy toward Kashmir has moved slowly toward bankruptcy. The release of former Kashmiri prime minister Sheikh Abdullah on 8 April, after nearly 11 years of imprisonment, is the most significant step New Delhi has taken to arrest this slide and improve its image at home and abroad. The release, however, is a gamble of major proportions in view of the popular Abdullah's known differences with the Indian Government on the extent to which Kashmiris may govern their own affairs.

2. For the ten years prior to last August, India's rule over the state depended on Bakshi Ghulam Muhammad, a corrupt and dictatorial prime minister backed ultimately by the strength of the Indian Army. Any fair election in the predominantly Muslim state in which the options were limited to a preference for Indian or Pakistani rule would have resulted in a choice of Pakistan.

3. However, because Kashmir is predominantly Muslim and because of the 15-year-old dispute with Pakistan for control of the state, it has assumed a status well beyond its immediate importance. It is a symbol of India's "secularity" to Indians with a secular bent and of vital Indian national interests to a variety of other political elements. It is the "sacred cow" of Indian politics; both the right and the left agree that Kashmir is Indian and must remain so.

4. New Delhi, however, had increasingly felt that Bakshi's value as the strong man capable of keeping the lid on the state had depreciated, and that because of his unsavory qualities he was a growing burden both at home and especially abroad,

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where Pakistan was mounting a concerted and largely successful policy of focusing attention on Kashmir and calling into question India's right to block self-determination for the Kashmiris. Included also have been a spate of new military incidents along the cease-fire line.

5. In what was probably a key miscalculation, New Delhi removed Bakshi last August as part of the wider Kamaraj plan for rejuvenating the Congress Party by bringing high-powered ministers into full-time party work. However, because of Bakshi's maneuvering, New Delhi failed to get its man in the job and wound up instead with a spineless Bakshi puppet.

6. When the state was thrown into turmoil last December by the theft of a much-revered Muslim relic --with implications that Bakshi was involved--anti-Bakshi, antigovernment, and, inferentially, anti-Indian disturbances resulted. Bakshi's puppet proved unequal to the task, and he and his mentor were thoroughly discredited. The attention focused on the communally-sensitive Kashmir question by the relic controversy and by steady Pakistani pressure sparked a chain reaction of Hindu-Muslim bloodshed in East Pakistan and northeastern India which is not yet fully spent.

7. At about the same time, Nehru suffered his stroke and Lal Bahadur Shastri, considerably more moderate and pragmatic than the declining Nehru, returned to the cabinet and began making his influence felt. He brought about a quick resolution of the relic controversy and, in a further step to improve India's image in and outside Kashmir, engineered the election to the prime ministry of G. M. Sadiq, an anti-Bakshi politician who had been Nehru's original choice to succeed Bakshi in August.

8. The new regime moved to liberalize the police state Bakshi had built up, in part to put a new face on Indian rule in Kashmir. It had little popular support, however, and Kashmiris, their appetite whetted by finally getting rid of the hated Bakshi, continued to press for even more change.

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9. The focus of their attention was the long-imprisoned and widely popular Sheikh Abdullah who, as the state's prime minister, had played a leading role in Kashmir's accession to India in 1948. An old independence struggle colleague of Nehru's, Abdullah had been deposed and jailed in 1953 when it became clear to New Delhi that Abdullah wanted more autonomy for Kashmir than India was willing to permit. In a short period of freedom in 1958, Abdullah reasserted these views, was again jailed, and was charged with conspiring to bring Kashmir into Pakistan.

10. With the state rudderless, with resentment continuing to mount, and with Pakistan continuing its relentless pressure at the UN and along the cease-fire line, something had to give if stability were to be restored. Laying his reputation on the line, Shastri moved in the only way he saw open. He persuaded Nehru that the situation in Kashmir was moving so swiftly toward crisis that unless New Delhi moved quickly, a resort to force would be necessary. He proposed the release of Abdullah, not because he felt the Sheikh had changed his views or because he agreed with them but because he felt that New Delhi had to gamble and that Abdullah might have mellowed enough to come to some mutually acceptable arrangement. He reasoned that the explosion which New Delhi sought to avoid could just as easily occur with the Sheikh in jail as out and that his release offered the only way out of the dilemma--albeit a highly risky one. If successful, the gamble could restore a stable and popular government to the state and might also result in some progress toward a settlement with Pakistan; if a failure, the situation would be no worse than it would have been had nothing been done. Abdullah was accordingly released on 8 April. Indian newspapers described the release as an act of hope--a hope that somehow it would be possible to work out a modus vivendi with the independent-minded Sheikh.

11. Abdullah's first press conference on 9 April threw some cold water on this hope. He left much unsaid, but he said enough to dispel any doubts among his followers that he had sold out to New Delhi to obtain his release. Moreover, he said enough to elicit "pain" and "amazement" from Shastri, a mild

"unfortunate" from Nehru, and a reminder of his just-vacated jail cell from another Indian minister. What he said actually was a relatively mild repetition of his long-held views. He does not regard the Kashmir dispute as settled by accession to India; he feels that it is still a problem to be worked out taking due account of both India and Pakistan; and he feels that Kashmiris should have a voice in this too. But he seemed also interested in maintaining some measure of flexibility, at least until he has had a chance later this month to meet with Nehru, Shastri, and company.

12. Editorial comment in India was almost uniformly bad, and the hard-liners on Kashmir--on both the Krishna Menon left and the traditional Hindu right--stepped up their pressure to resist any changes in India's long-standing policies toward the state.

13. Actually, India's objectives have not changed. India wants to retain control of the two thirds of the state that it now rules or claims to rule, and it wants to do so with minimum recourse to the discredited strong-arm measures of Bakshi's time. However, in the changing atmosphere in New Delhi, there does appear to be a greater willingness to go further down the road with Abdullah to salve Kashmiri discontent and to satisfy Kashmiri yearnings short of option for Pakistan or complete independence. New Delhi may be willing to arrest the state's integration with the rest of India and to countenance greater autonomy for an eventual government to be formed and led by Abdullah. But this will take time, and India hopes Abdullah will sense the changing of the guard in New Delhi and will act responsibly in the framework provided.

14. Abdullah has emerged from jail, however, with the strongest hand he has ever had in dealing with New Delhi. Everything depends on whether or not he will play the role the Indians have in mind, how much risk of reimprisonment he is willing to run, and on whether the newly emerging team in New Delhi has the courage to stay with the game they have started. Pakistan's actions, too, will be important; thus far, the Ayub government has welcomed his release and obviously sees in Abdullah an opportunity to exploit. It does not want to jump in too quickly, however, at least not before the Sheikh has sorted out his relationship with the Indian Government.

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15. We believe that the chances of his working out a modus vivendi with New Delhi are about even. But this is the first order of business; only after this has been accomplished can there be any movement forward in the basic Indo-Pakistani dispute over Kashmir.

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