CHAPTER-IV
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The spirit of Tashkent proved short-lived, as Indo-Pakistani relations soon reverted to their usual state of mutual hostility and suspicion. In fact, the promise contained in the Tashkent Declaration that India and Pakistan ‘would continue meetings’ at the highest level was redeemed by the two countries only once: an Indo-Pakistani conference at Foreign Ministers’ level was held at Rawalpindi on 1 and 2 March, 1966.\(^1\) The unending rivalry and distrust ultimately culminated on 3 December 1971, when India and Pakistan fought their third war. The 1971 Indo-Pakistan war is regarded as a watershed in the history of Indo-Pak relations. Though it was the shortest war in the subcontinent,\(^2\) its outcome was most devastating for Pakistan. It led to the dismemberment of Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh in place of East Pakistan. Moreover, it almost witnessed the first ever direct military intervention by a superpower in the region.

**Background**

The Indo-Pakistani war of 1971 did not arise directly from any contention between these estranged neighbours in the subcontinent. Its genesis could be traced back to the internal developments and crises within Pakistan. The external factors played only a secondary role. The 1971 war and the critical events immediately preceding them must be analyzed and understood in the context of the country’s disjunctive political development, and also the socio-economic, cultural and geographic incongruities between West Pakistan and

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2 This war continued for fourteen days only.
East Pakistan. Little besides allegiance to Islam and hostility to India had held the two wings of Pakistan together.3 Despite the putative bond of Islam, significant differences existed between East and West Pakistan. Apart from other incongruities, the relationship between the two wings of the country was one of fundamental social, economic and political inequity. As G. W. Choudhury writes, the immediate causes of the disintegration of Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh on 16 December 1971, were the military atrocities committed by the Pakistan Army against unarmed Bengalis; rapid growth of Bengali nationalism; the influx of millions of refugees from East Bengal into India since March 1971; and subsequent Indian military intervention in East Bengal, backed by the diplomatic support of the Soviet Union. The rise and growth of Bengali sub-nationalism within Pakistan, had its origin in a number of factors — political, economic, cultural, ethnic, sociological etc., operating since Pakistan’s creation in 1947.4 The internal contradictions of the Pakistani State were destined to culminate in East Pakistan’s struggle for separation.

After partition, Pakistan became a country comprising two landmasses with India in-between. Its unique geographical features posed considerable political and security problems. With East Pakistan nearly 1300 miles away from West Pakistan, Pakistan’s political geography was an absurdity. Indo-Pakistani hostilities made it virtually impossible for Pakistan to maintain land connection between its two wings. East and West Pakistan maintained communication by air and sea. The two wings, moreover, differed greatly in

size and density of population. The West wing was six times larger than the East, while the population of East Pakistan was 50.8 million (1961 census) as against 42.9 million of the West.\(^5\)

The people of both wings were different from each other by language and culture. The West Pakistanis predominantly spoke Urdu, whereas, Bengali was the language of communication in East Pakistan. The West Pakistani Muslims considered the East Bengali Muslims to be of an inferior stock and their sense of cultural-cum-religious superiority almost touched the boundaries of racialism.\(^6\) Such feeling was reflected in the writing of former Pakistani President Ayub Khan. To him the East Bengalis, "who constitute the bulk of the population, probably belong to the very original Indian races...they have been and still are under considerable Hindu culture and linguistic influence. As such they have all the inhibitions of down-trodden races and have not yet found it possible to adjust psychologically to the requirements of the new born freedom."\(^7\) The languages, thinking, dress, diet, sports, and above all the way of life of the inhabitants of both wings of Pakistan were thus drastically different from each other. Indeed, a Bengali Muslim was considered to be more akin and nearer to a Bengali Hindu than to a West Pakistani Muslim. These culture-bound attitudes and images on both sides created a gulf between the two wings, which became less and less bridgeable as time passed.

The cultural domination of West Pakistan was reinforced by the economic domination. There was lop-sided economic growth and industrial

development in two wings of Pakistan. The bulk of Pakistan's foreign exchange was earned by the jute industry of East Pakistan, but most of the money so earned (about 60 per cent) was utilized for the industrial development of West Pakistan. Moreover, most of the migrating Muslim capitalists and industrialists from India chose Karachi in West Pakistan as their new home, and put their money and skills to work there. According to a large-scale sample survey of industry, the location of capital for all Pakistani industries in 1958 was largely concentrated in West Pakistan, and particularly in Karachi. That year, while the total volume of industrial capital in East Pakistan amounted to 148-crore rupees, Karachi alone had 114.6-crore rupees of it. Moreover, the total amount of industrial capital in West Pakistan was more than double than that of East Pakistan. With every passing year, the West wing became more industrialized and prosperous, while conditions in East Pakistan deteriorated. Whether it was revenue or development expenditure, foreign assistance and loans or foreign exchange, East Pakistan did not get its fair share, though majority of country's population lived there. East Pakistan's economic plight was compounded by a shortage of raw materials, industry and markets, along with a rising population density. Combined with inflation and the lack of industrial development, these factors led to a sharp decline in the living standards of the people. Just after partition in 1947, the per capita income of West Pakistan was 10 per cent higher than that of East Pakistan. In 1960, this difference was 32 per cent. It increased to 61 per cent by 1969. This increasing economic disparity exacerbated the

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9 ibid.
discontent and the sense of injustice among the East Pakistanis leading to an overall alienation among them.

In the political sphere, West Pakistanis clearly dominated over the East Pakistanis leading to a constant friction between them. Even though the East Pakistan population far outnumbered the population of West Pakistan, its representation in the Central Government was disproportionately low. Given the army's frequent interference in national politics and its historic role as power broker, parliamentary democracy failed to thrive in Pakistan. It led to the development of an all-powerful and irresponsible executive, aided and abetted by a powerful bureaucracy. The emergence of this all-powerful ruling elite had a great impact on the separatist movement in East Pakistan.\textsuperscript{11} The ruling elite was composed of senior bureaucrats almost all of whom where from West Pakistan. Except during the short interval of thirteen months, when Husein Shaheed Suhrawardy became the Prime Minister of Pakistan in 1956-57, the Bengalis had hardly any role in national affairs. Every vital decision, whether it related to political or defence or economic or diplomatic matters, was in the final analysis made by the ruling elite, composed of West Pakistani civil and military officers. In provincial matters also, the situation was no better for the Bengalis. Even in their own province, the West Pakistanis who had direct access to the central ruling clique held all the key posts in the administration. The civil and military officials from West Pakistan stationed in East Pakistan never bothered to develop any real bonds with the local population who looked upon them as aliens. There were few social contacts and interactions among them. The result was bitterness and a widening gap.

\textsuperscript{11} Choudhury, n.4, p. 243.
Summing up the situation a study stated: “East Pakistanis were never allowed to occupy the real corridors of power. Although in a majority, they never had representation in the country on the basis of population. On the contrary, for many years Bengalis were virtually reduced to the status of a minority in the first two Constituent Assemblies.”

The already worsening political situation aggravated further when the Army rule under General Ayub Khan came to be established in Pakistan since 1958. Henceforth, East Pakistan became a hotbed for political agitation and unrest. Hardly a year passed without Bengalis revolting against alleged maltreatment by the central government. The result was the repressive measures by the military regime, which gave further impetus to the growth of Bengali nationalism. By the 1960s most of the urban professional Bengali groups were beginning to consider seriously whether they could or would live together with the Western part of the country.

Finally, the Indo-Pak war of 1965 disastrously weakened the national bond between East and West Pakistan. The war demonstrated the vulnerability of East Pakistan to Indian attack and also the inability of Pakistan to protect its Eastern wing from external aggression. Although India had refrained from carrying the war to the eastern front, Pakistani Foreign Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto attributed the defence of East Pakistan during the war to the Chinese threat of retaliation. Consequently, the old argument that the defence of East Pakistan lay in West Pakistan no longer held water. The Bengali Muslims

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13 Choudhury, n.4, p. 244.
14 As cited in Burke, n.1, p.338.
started thinking why depend on West Pakistan, which could give no protection to East Pakistan. It brought home to Bengalis, East Pakistan's vulnerability and the impossibility of defending it by military efforts based in the West. There was increasing realization that the cause of war – the Kashmir question – was essentially a West Pakistani concern, for which East Pakistan was being made needlessly vulnerable.  

All these divergences reinforced an asymmetrical relationship between the two wings of Pakistan to such an extent that the East Pakistanis increasingly experienced a sense of 'internal colonialism' in their relationship with Pakistan. The war thus gave a fillip to the forces working towards the estrangement of the two wings of Pakistan and intensified East Pakistan's alienation from Pakistan. It was during this period that the long-standing East Pakistani demands for greater autonomy, and more specifically, the demand for self-sufficiency in defence gathered new strength. In 1966, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the leader of Awami League formally crystallized the Bengalis’ demands into ‘Six Points’, which were to become the central issue in Pakistan’s politics for next five years. Mujib’s ‘Six Points’ were: (i) Pakistan should be a Federation on the basis of the Lahore Resolution; (ii) the Federal Government should deal only with Defence and Foreign Affairs; (iii) there should either be two separate but freely convertible currencies or one currency with constitutional provisions to prevent the flight of capital from East Pakistan; (iv) Fiscal policy should be the responsibility of the federating

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16 Emphasis added, Jackson, n. 5, p. 15.
17 These points were elaborated by Mujibur Rahman in a pamphlet, 6-point Formula: Our Right to Live, published on 23 March 1966. The six-point manifesto was designed to be a charter for the economic and political autonomy of East Pakistan. In subsequent years, there were revised versions of the Six Points but the essential demands always remained the same.
units; (v) each wing should control its own foreign exchange earnings and both should contribute towards the foreign exchange requirements of the Federal Government; (vi) a militia or paramilitary force should be set up for East Pakistan.\(^{18}\)

With the declaration of the ‘Six Point’, the autonomy movement in East Pakistan got into full swing. During the succeeding months and years, Mujib and the Awami League intensified their agitation, which soon reached unprecedented heights. Around the same time, a mass movement had already risen in the West Pakistan, where people were fed up with the Ayub’s military regime and demanded for political freedom. In both wings the movement was spearheaded by students and by a young, aspiring, urban middle class.

President Ayub Khan decided to respond in a ruthless manner. At a meeting in Dacca, he threatened that he would accept the challenge of civil disorder and chaos and use the ‘language of weapons’ if the nation faced ‘disruption’.\(^{19}\) Despite Ayub’s threatening words, the movement continued to gather momentum. Consequently, in desperation, the Ayub regime resorted to repressive measures to bring the fast deteriorating situation under control. From April 1966 onwards, Mujib, who was the leader of the East Pakistani movement, was arrested several times, and finally, in January 1968, he was implicated in a highly controversial conspiracy case known as the ‘Agartala Conspiracy Case’\(^{20}\), when he was already under arrest. It was a last-ditch effort on the part of the military regime to discredit Mujibur Rahman and the

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\(^{18}\) As cited in Richard Sisson and Leo E. Rose, *War and Secession: Pakistan, India, and the Creation of Bangladesh* (New Delhi, 1990), p.20.

\(^{19}\) *Dawn* (Karachi), 21 March 1966.

\(^{20}\) Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was charged along with three Bengali members of the civil service and twenty four Bengali junior officers in the armed forces, for collaborating with India through meetings in the town of Agartala to bring about the secession of East Pakistan.
Awami League in the eyes of the East Bengali people. But as it turned out, the
effort proved counter-productive. It further inflamed passions in East
Pakistan. Mujib came to be looked upon as the principal spokesman of
Bengali aspirations and the unchallenged leader of East Bengal’s national
movement. The Awami League launched a mass campaign for the withdrawal
of charges against Mujib. By this time the struggle in East Bengal was
unmistakably taking on more and more the colour of a national movement. It
no longer remained a struggle for autonomy alone; it had become a struggle
for the assertion of a nation’s right to honourable existence.21 In an effort to
pacify the Bengali Muslims and contain the revolt, Ayub subsequently
released Mujib and invited him for an “All-Parties Round Table Conference”
in February 1969. But the Conference ended without agreement among
political parties on guidelines for Pakistan’s constitutional future.22 With the
passage of time, the public unrest and the movement for greater autonomy and
political freedom became more intense. Clashes between dissidents and police
resulted in death of several people and paralysed Dhaka. Gradually, the
political climate in the whole of Pakistan deteriorated sharply. Under pressure,
Ayub agreed to hold general election in 1970 and declared that he would not
contest the election, and to change the system of government from the
presidential to a parliamentary one. But it failed to break the deadlock and
restore normalcy in the country. Finally, with the situation completely out of
control and no solution in sight, a dejected Ayub resigned on 25 March 1969,
handing power to Army Chief, General Mohammed Yahya Khan.

21 Ayoob and Subramanyam, n. 6, p.71.
22 Sisson and Rose, n. 18, pp 22-23.
Immediately after assuming power on 25 March, Yahya Khan declared martial law in Pakistan. Thus he became the Chief Martial Law Administrator and later, the President as well. However, Yahya realized that to preserve the territorial integrity of the country, and to achieve a lasting constitutional settlement, he would have to address the relationship between East and West Pakistan, and also to undertake necessary constitutional reforms. Thus he decided to pick up the threads dropped in 1958, when martial law had first been proclaimed, and to return more or less to the position which had obtained in 1947: the election of a new Constituent Assembly, the adoption of a new constitution by the elected representatives of the people, and the transfer of power into their hands.\(^\text{23}\) In this context, Yahya announced a Legal Framework Order (LFO) on 28 March 1970. The LFO stated that there would be elections to a unicameral National Assembly that would reflect East Pakistan's numerical superiority. The Assembly would have 300 seats out of which, East Pakistan and West Pakistan would have 162 and 138 seats respectively. The elected Assembly would draft a new constitution for Pakistan within 120 days. Though the LFO made no stipulation about the size of the majority needed to pass the new constitution, it was understood that a simple majority could pass the constitution. The new constitution would set out the degree of regional autonomy for the two wings. Even if these arrangements left many fundamental questions unanswered, the LFO amounted to a major concession by West Pakistan.\(^\text{24}\)

\(^{23}\) Jackson, n. 5, p.22.

The December Election

Finally, the first ever general elections took place in Pakistan on 7 December 1970. Twenty-five different parties participated in the elections for three hundred seats in the National Assembly. The elections in essence involved two separate campaigns — one in the east, one in the west. The leaders of the two parties most successful in the elections — the Awami League and the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) — had devoted their energies only to one wing of the country. In East Pakistan the statements of different party leaders and the manifestos of parties strongly expressed Bengali sentiments. Party leaders substantially agreed on the principles behind the six-point programme of the Awami League. As the election campaign progressed, the decentralizationist demands of East Pakistani parties became increasingly intense.\(^{25}\) The Awami League headed by Mujibur Rahman contested the election on the basis of its Six-Point Formula. When the electoral result was declared, Mujib’s Awami League won a nearly total sweep in East Pakistan. It won 160 of the 162 seats contested, to obtain an absolute majority in the 300-seat National Assembly, but none in West Pakistan. In West Pakistan, former Foreign Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto’s Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) emerged as the single largest party by winning 81 seats out of 138 seats.\(^{26}\) However, it did not win a single seat in East Pakistan.

While the first ever general elections in Pakistan did produce an absolute majority for one particular party, it also brought to the fore the seemingly unbridgeable differences between the two halves of the country. Although Awami League won the election with absolute majority, the Punjabi elite of

\(^{25}\) Sisson and Rose, n. 18, pp. 28-31.
\(^{26}\) Jones, n. 24, p. 161.
West Pakistan could not reconcile to the fact that the East Pakistanis would be occupying the treasury benches in the National Assembly. Soon a political impasse developed as the three key leaders – Yahya Khan, Mujibur Rahman, and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto – failed to agree on a constitutional arrangement. The heart of the problem remained how to reconcile Bengali demands for autonomy with the survival of a united Pakistan. Before elections, Mujib showed flexibility regarding his demands for provincial autonomy. But the massive mandate that the Awami League received and the pressure from Bengali hard-liners converted his six-point programme into the minimum, non-negotiable demands of East Pakistan. Mujibur found that there was very little area of manoeuvre and he did not have the option to swim against the tide of popular opinion.  

Thus following the announcements of electoral results, in his post-election speech on 19 December 1970, Mujib set the tone for the Awami League by declaring categorically, “I warmly thank the people for having given a historic verdict in favour of our six-point programme. We pledge to implement this verdict. There can be no Constitution except one which is based on the six-point programme.”

In response to Mujib’s statement, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Chairman of PPP declared the very next day: “No constitution could be framed nor could any government at the centre be run without the cooperation of the People’s Party. The PPP was not prepared to occupy the Opposition Benches in the National Assembly…majority alone does not count in national politics.” Bhutto also-

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27 Ayoob and Subramanyam, n.6, pp. 96-97.
declared that PPP had won thumping majorities in the provinces of Punjab and Sind, which he termed the “bastions of power” in Pakistan.29

This Polarisation of political attitudes between the two wings of Pakistan threatened the country’s fragile fabric of unity and led to a deadlock in the political situation. While Yahya on his visit to Dhaka in mid-January 1971, had called Mujibur as “the future Prime Minister of the country”, three days later he explicitly accepted the “two majority parties”, theory – the Awami League in East Bengal and the PPP in West Pakistan – propounded by Bhutto. Talking to newsmen at Bhutto’s hometown of Larkana in Sind, Yahya went on record to state that “the people have given their decision in favour of the majority parties.”30

Finally, after much delay, on 13 February 1971, Yahya announced his decision to call the National Assembly into session in Dhaka on 3 March 1971. But Bhutto immediately announced that his party would not attend the opening session unless Mujib agreed to take part in discussions beforehand to secure a consensus on the nature of the new constitution.31 He further declared that no other party form West Pakistan would attend the session either. Later, on 28 February, Bhutto demanded the postponement of the proposed National Assembly session and threatened to call a general strike in West Pakistan. He also called upon his supporters to prevent West Pakistani members of the National Assembly from taking part in its deliberations in Dhaka.32 Several rounds of negotiations ultimately failed to break the deadlock and to find a solution. By taking a stubborn stand on the issue, Bhutto had ended any

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29 *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 21 December 1970.
30 Emphasis added, as cited in Ayoob and Subramanyam, n. 6, p. 100.
31 *Dawn*, 16 February 1971.
32 Bhutto’s statement in *Pakistan Times*, 1 March 1971.
possibility of resolving his differences with Mujib through constitutional means.

Confronted with mounting pressure and opposition from the PPP leadership, President Yahya, on 1 March, announced the postponement of the National Assembly session to a later date. Yahya’s decision proved catastrophic and acted as a proverbial last straw, which broke the East Pakistani camel’s back. The postponement decision caused widespread resentment and anger in East Pakistan. Mujib called it a ‘conspiracy’ and a device to keep East Bengal as the colonial market of West Pakistan. On 4 March, Mujib called for a strike across East Pakistan. The response to Mujib’s call was instantaneous. Life in Dhaka came to a standstill with large number of masses came to the streets to demonstrate against the postponement decision. The Awami League launched non-cooperation and civil disobedience movement, which picked up momentum immediately and spread like wild fire. The Pakistani military responded to the agitation with characteristic harshness. There were widespread clashes between the security forces and protestors leading to firings in which several people lost their lives. Denied their democratic rights inside Pakistan, the Bengali demands for full-blown independence gradually became ever stronger. The course of events increasingly paved the way for a full-scale confrontation between the Awami League supporters and the Pakistani military junta. It set the entire State on the path of civil war.

In the face of mounting crisis and to bring the situation under control, on 6 March, Yahya announced the decision to call the National Assembly into

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Mujib responded to Yahya’s announcement by laying down four pre-conditions for Awami League’s participation in the National Assembly: (i) immediate termination of martial law; (ii) immediate withdrawal of all military personnel to the barracks; (iii) inquiry into the recent killings; and (iv) immediate transfer of power to the elected representatives of the people, even before the National Assembly met on 25 March 1971. Soon he added one more significant demand to his four pre-conditions, which was related to the “immediate cessation of military build-up and the heavy inflow of military personnel from the western wing.”

Reacting to Mujib’s demands, Bhutto declared that if power was to be transferred to the elected representatives as demanded by Mujib, it should be transferred to the majority party in East Pakistan and to the “majority party in West Pakistan.” He argued that because of the peculiar geographical situation in the country, the “rule of majority” would not apply to Pakistan. He suggested that the power at the centre should be transferred to the majority parties of both the wings and in the provinces, to the majority parties in the provinces.

Meanwhile, troop reinforcements continued to arrive in East Pakistan, and so were arms supplies. Riots and communal violence along with the non-cooperation movement continued, as did the clashes between the army and people, resulting in considerable loss of life and property. As the situation in East Pakistan worsened alarmingly, President Yahya flew to Dhaka on 15 March in a final attempt to find a political settlement of the crisis. Bhutto and

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34 *Dawn*, 7 March 1971.
35 ibid., 8 March 1971.
36 ibid.
37 ibid., 16 March 1971.
several other West Pakistani leaders subsequently joined in the negotiations. As the negotiations seemed to be making progress, rumours spread that it was Yahya’s charade to complete the military build-up before cracking down in East Bengal.\textsuperscript{38} The turning point in the negotiations came on 23 March, which had been celebrated as ‘Pakistan Day’ since 1947. That morning, in what turned out to be the final negotiating session, the Awami League formally rejected the government’s proposal and presented its own draft constitution. It called for a “Confederation of Pakistan” that left the central government with very limited powers. The day was filled with demonstrations, parades and call for independence, even through armed resistance. Bangladeshi flags were hoisted on buildings everywhere and ‘Independence Day’ was proclaimed.\textsuperscript{39} As the crisis atmosphere mounted rapidly, the military regime decided to resort to use of force.

**Operation Blitz: The Military Crackdown**

On the late afternoon of 25 March 1971, President Yahya ended the negotiations abruptly and flew back to Islamabad. To end the simmering East Bengal crisis, he ordered a military crackdown in East Pakistan. He gave orders to General Tikka Khan and General Rao Farman Ali to undertake rapid military action to restore order and central authority in East Pakistan.\textsuperscript{40} Accordingly, from the mid-night of 25 March, the Pakistani Army launched *Operation Blitz* – later re-named *Operation Searchlight* – to quell the “rebellion” and to reinstate public order and central authority in East Pakistan. Its important objectives were: (i) to arrest the top leaders of the Awami

\textsuperscript{38} Dennis Kux, *The United States and Pakistan, 1947-2000: Disenchanted Allies* (New York, 2001), pp. 185-86; Ayoob and Subramanyam, n. 6, p. 126.

\textsuperscript{39} ibid. p. 186; Ayoob and Subramanyam, n.6, pp. 122-23; Jackson, n. 5, p. 32.

\textsuperscript{40} Sumit Ganguly, *Conflict Unending: India-Pakistan Tensions Since 1947* (New Delhi, 2002), p. 60
League and anti-government student leaders; (ii) to take over and protect vulnerable points; and (iii) to disarm the East Pakistani units of the military forces and police. Soon Awami League was outlawed and its leader Mujib arrested on the charge of treason. The Pakistani Army resorted to excessive use of force and indulged in unprecedented brutality to quell the “rebellion” ruthlessly. The brutality and scale of this military operation against a civilian population was *unparallel in the history of South Asia*. The Army ruthlessly killed a large number of defenceless students inside the campus of Dhaka University, which was perceived to be a hotbed of resistance to the military regime. As the military crackdown went on, the Awami League announced the formation of Provisional Government of Bangladesh and urged the people to launch a liberation movement against the Pakistani occupation forces. As a result, a civil war soon erupted in East Pakistan with heavy fighting taking place between the Pakistani Army and *Mukti Bahini* — the “liberation forces”. *Mukti Bahini* was a guerrilla force led by the Bengali resistance leaders and took up arms against Pakistani forces. Due to the heavy fighting, a massive exodus of refugees numbering in millions crossed into India from mid-April on, creating serious socio-economic and political problems for New Delhi. By May 1971, some 3.5 million refugees entered into India and by the end the summer, the number had nearly tripled.

Meanwhile, relations between India and Pakistan deteriorated rapidly. New Delhi’s policy towards the East Pakistani crisis took a novel form in early April, when the Indian Government permitted the establishment of an Awami League...
League headquarters at Mujibnagar in Calcutta and formation of a Bangladesh government-in-exile, even though India did not formally recognize it. New Delhi ultimately decided to actively support the resistance movement in the East Pakistan by training and arming the Mukti Bahini, to mount an insurgency.\textsuperscript{44} Though initially India refrained from any direct intervention in East Pakistan crisis, the massive inflow of refugees in an alarming rate put severe political, economic and security strains on India and eventually induced Indian intervention. Indian government officials considered the refugee situation as a form of “indirect aggression” against India. Pakistan’s civil conflict thus eventually turned into a dispute between Pakistan and India.\textsuperscript{45} Prime Minister Indira Gandhi took a key decision not to allow the refugees to stay permanently in India and insisted that they should eventually return home. She reasoned that, Pakistan could not “be allowed to seek a solution of its political or other problems at the expense of India and on Indian soil” and stated:

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Conditions must be created to stop any further influx of refugees to ensure their early return under credible guarantees for their safety and well being. I say with all sense of responsibility that unless this happens, there can be no lasting stability or peace on this subcontinent. We have pleaded with other powers to recognize this. If the world does not take heed, we shall be constrained to take all measures as may be necessary to ensure our own security and the preservation and development of the structure of our social and economic life.\textsuperscript{46}
\end{quote}

India put its weight in favour of a political, rather than military solution to East Pakistan’s problem and felt that the great powers had a special responsibility to help see such a solution through. However, by the end of

\textsuperscript{44} Sisson and Rose, n. 18, p. 182.
\textsuperscript{45} ibid., n. 23, p. 148.
May 1971, any hope that East Pakistan civil war might be resolved politically and peacefully was fast disappearing. By late spring, there was a broad political consensus in India, regarding the future course of action that India needed to pursue to deal with the East Pakistan crisis. The Indian government preferred the return of all refugees, including the Bengali Hindus, since any “peaceful solution” that did not provide for this would be short lived. India also wanted the transfer of power to the moderate Awami League leadership in East Pakistan, either within the nominal confines of a Pakistani federation or in a newly independent state. Either was acceptable to India as long as conditions were established for the return of the refugees. India did not rule out a military course of action either indirectly through increased support to the Mukti Bahini, or direct Indian military intervention, if necessary. In the backdrop of worsening situation, India began to make efforts to mobilize the international community and organizations in support of Indian objectives in the Pakistan civil war. New Delhi initiated a campaign directed at persuading major powers to pressure Pakistan to revise its policy and stop military atrocities in East Pakistan by suspending their economic and military aid to Pakistan.

As the response of the international community was poor and tension was mounting along the Indo-Pak border, Prime Minister Gandhi embarked on a final effort to apprise the international community of the prevailing crisis and to persuade them to get round Yahya Khan to make him agree to a peaceful settlement of the East Pakistan problem. On 23 October, she went on a three-week whirlwind tour of seven Western capitals. However, her diplomatic venture did not attain any significant breakthrough to diffuse the simmering
crisis. On the diplomatic front, Pakistan attempted to counter India at two levels. Ostensibly to avoid the war and end the hostilities peacefully, Yahya Khan on 12 October suggested that the crisis might be resolved by mutual troop withdrawals from the borders. In this connection he went on to revive the proposal, which had first been made in July for the posting of UN observers to facilitate the return of displaced persons and diffuse the explosive situation on the borders. The UN Secretary-General U Thant endorsed these proposals on 20 October. He appealed to both the parties to withdraw their troops from the borders. In identical memoranda addressed to Yahya Khan and Indira Gandhi and to the Indian and Pakistani Ambassadors at the UN, U Thant placed the United Nations and its facilities at their disposal in view of the threat of war in the sub-continent'. He was of the view that along the international frontiers in East and West Pakistan there was no equivalent to the safeguard mechanism provided by the UN military observers in Kashmir. Pakistan immediately welcomed this initiative and Yahya Khan again repeated his 12 October proposal of mutual troop withdrawals and posting of UN observers on both sides of the borders to ‘oversee the withdrawals and supervise the maintenance of peace’. India, on the other hand, rejected the proposals. Prime Minister Gandhi indicated that India would not agree to the stationing of UN observers on Indian soil to supervise the withdrawal of troops from the borders. Thant clarified that he was offering 'good offices' and not mediation — which would require the consent of the Security Council. However, Indira Gandhi argued that the effect of the Secretary-
General’s proposals was once again ‘to equate Indian with Pakistan, although Pakistan’s actions had threatened our security.’

On the diplomatic level, Pakistan now turned towards its ally, China, to deter any Indian aggression in its Eastern Wing. While Indira was visiting the Western capital, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto led a high-level military delegation to China on 5 November. The visit was designed to elicit Chinese support as the crisis had significantly worsened. To reinforce Bhutto’s efforts, five days before his dispatch, President Yahya told Newsweek that war between India and Pakistan was imminent, and that China would supply Pakistan ‘with all the weapons and ammunition we need.’ He also told an American television interviewer that China would help Pakistan in any way she could in the event of an Indian attack on Pakistan. The Pakistani delegation led by Bhutto was warmly welcomed in China. But Beijing did not make any specific commitment to the ‘unity’ or ‘integrity’ of Pakistan. During the visit, the Chinese Foreign Minister, Chi P’eng-fei stated that:

Should Pakistan be subjected to foreign aggression, the Chinese Government and people will always resolutely support the Pakistan Government and people in their just struggle to defend their state sovereignty and national independence.

He did not elaborate on the nature of support China would give to Pakistan. Moreover, no joint statement was issued at the conclusion of the talks by the visiting delegation from Pakistan. It was believed that privately Chi told the Pakistani delegation that they should find a ‘national’ solution to the crisis in

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47 Jackson, n. 5, pp. 91-92.
48 ibid., p. 95.
49 ibid.
50 As quoted in Ayoob and Subramanyam, n. 6, p. 205.
the subcontinent. The Chinese perhaps decided that it was not in their interest to become embroiled in the vexing sub-continental crisis, especially after improving Indo-Soviet strategic ties. The fear of antagonizing the Soviet Union most likely led China to limit its support for Pakistan’s position to “verbal exhortations and little else.”

Pakistani officials, especially President Yahya Khan, however, continued to hope that in case of Indo-Pak war, China would come to Pakistan’s assistance. After all, he played a ‘grand role’ in acting as an interlocutor between the US and China only in the recent past.

On the other hand, New Delhi quietly assessed that the Chinese support for Pakistan was mostly verbal and symbolic, and that there was little likelihood of Chinese military intervention in the crisis in favour of Pakistan.

Throughout 1971, the Government of India considered any political settlement that did not specifically include provisions for the return of all refugees to East Pakistan, to be unacceptable. Pakistan on the other hand, appeared disinterested in any settlement under which the “traitorous” Hindu Bengali refugees would be allowed to return. The thorny refugee issue thus became a major barrier even to the initiation of serious negotiations for a political settlement between the two countries, ultimately culminating in a military solution.

Outbreak of Indo-Pak War

After the 25 March military crackdown, India had begun a gradual, but substantial build-up of its military in West Bengal, Assam and Tripura.

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51 Choudhury, n. 10, p. 219.
52 S. M. Burke and Lawrence Ziring, Pakistan’s Foreign Policy: An Historical Analysis (Karachi, 1990), p. 404.
53 At that time, the Pakistani President was playing the crucial role of a facilitator in the emerging Sino-US detente.
Pakistani forces also substantially expanded in East Pakistan, particularly in areas bordering on India that had been controlled by the Awami League. That constituted a novel security problem for India, which had never before had to contend with large Pakistani military concentrations in the East. During this time the Pakistani Army appeared to have been prepared for launching military action on both the eastern and western frontiers with India. It required a major change in Indian security planning, including the stationing of a larger military force on the East Pakistani border.

The heavy flow of refugees to India and the stepped up activities of *Mukti Bahini* in East Pakistan, escalated the Indo-Pakistani hostilities, giving way to direct military confrontation. Both the Indian and Pakistani Armies started moving up to forward positions along the borders in both eastern and western fronts. In East Pakistan the situation was indeed becoming increasingly tense, as after the monsoons, the Pakistani forces moved up to the border areas, where the *Mukti Bahini* was making efforts to operate in larger and better-equipped groups. These developments were accompanied in late September and October by the larger concentration of Indian regular forces in the frontier zones. It was at this stage in early October that the exchanges of fire across the borders between the two Armies began, first with small guns and mortars, then with larger guns. Shellings and other border incidents intensified as the Indians sought to give covering fire to *Mukti Bahini*'s incursions and retirements across the border and the Pakistanis sought to prevent them from
doing so. Locked in this situation, both sides moved with increasing speed towards full-scale hostilities.\footnote{Jackson, n. 5, p.100.}

By late October, India started to exert steady military pressure on Pakistan. In November, the tempo of military action further increased. India increased its direct involvement in \textit{Mukti Bahini} operations by Indian military personnel. The Pakistani military regime considered this intolerable and began to react more forcefully. The Pakistani shelling across the border ostensibly to punish the \textit{Mukti Bahini} guerillas intensified and in return provoked retaliatory action from the Indian Army. Late in the month, Indira Gandhi authorized Indian forces to enter East Pakistan to “pursue” the Pakistani forces.\footnote{Dennis Kux, \textit{Estranged Democracies :India and the United States, 1941-1991} (New Delhi, 1993), p. 302.} A direct Indian military campaign against the East Pakistan seemed imminent. India was expected to begin its military offensive on 6 December 1971, to extend its control upto Dhaka.\footnote{Sisson and Rose, n. 18, pp. 213-14.} However, before India could act, in a pre-emptive strike, Pakistan attacked the Indian airbases in the western sector on 3 December 1971, and the very next day declared war against India. Thus commenced the third Indo-Pak armed conflict.

The Pakistani offensive in the western sector began abruptly at 5.30 p.m. on the afternoon of 3 December 1971, when the Pakistan Air Force struck simultaneously at the Indian airfields at Amritsar, Srinagar, Avantipur and Pathankot, and at the landing ground at Faridkot and the radar station at Amritsar. The air strikes were apparently designed to damage runways and impede the Indian response to Pakistan’s subsequent ground attack. But although the Pakistanis succeeded in evading Indian early-warning system by
flying low over Rajasthan, the forces employed were not sufficient to do much damage. The attack failed on several counts. The Indian Air Force (IAF), which had anticipated such an attack, had removed its aircrafts from open locations and had placed them in specially reinforced concrete bunkers. Only at Agra – which was bombed by three Pakistani B-57s later in the evening – was much damage done to the runways. Eight hours after the Pakistani attack, the IAF launched counter-attacks by targeting the Pakistani airfields at Murid, Mianwali, Sargodha, Chander, Risalwala, Shorkot and Masrur. On the next day, Indian Air Force launched a series of raids especially on Peshawar – the Pakistani Air Force headquarters – and, in cooperation with the Indian Navy, on the oil-storage depots at Karachi. Thereafter, the Pakistanis never recovered the initiative in the air war, which was dominated by the Indian offensive.^[57]

In the Eastern sector, the IAF’s operations were even more successful. Close to half of the Pakistani Air Force’s aircrafts were destroyed on the ground or in air combat. The Indian Navy also played a substantial role in the war. It launched major attacks on Karachi, which had two goals: to destroy initial oil installations at the port and to blockade the harbour for the entire course of war. Both objectives were fully achieved in this coordinated land-air action. In addition to attacking Karachi with Soviet-built Osa-class missile boats in early December, the Navy attacked oil storage facilities at Jewani and Gawadar on the Makran coast near the Iranian border. By mid-December, the Navy had succeeded in establishing a virtual naval blockade of the two wings of

[^57]: Jackson, n. 5, p. 116.
Pakistan.\textsuperscript{58} When Pakistan launched attacks on the ground in Poonch and Chhamb sectors in the Western front and set on foot a long-range armoured operation in Rajasthan, India massively retaliated leading to an all-out Indo-Pak war in Eastern and Western front. Indira Gandhi immediately gave the green light for the planned attack against East Pakistan. Indian forces entered East Pakistan and New Delhi declared that the \textit{liberation of Bangladesh was India’s objective}.\textsuperscript{59} On 6 December, after Indian forces penetrated far into East Pakistan, New Delhi recognized the independent country of Bangladesh and the Awami League government-in-exile as the Government of Bangladesh. Pakistan reacted violently and immediately broke off diplomatic ties with India, which had otherwise remained intact since independence, even during the previous two wars between the two countries. Indian military forces very soon gained the upper hand in the Eastern wing of Pakistan, although in the Western sector, in the absence of a clear objective, its strategic posture was one of deterrence only.

By 10 December, the India forces in concert with the \textit{Mukti Bahini}, had succeeded in marching deep into East Pakistan and were ready for a final attack on Dhaka. The badly outnumbered Pakistani forces retreated from the borders towards Dhaka, and the war in the eastern front was for all intents over. It was only a question of how long the Pakistanis would hold out. President Yahya urged the troops to prolong the fight and hold on, hoping for intervention from the US and China.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{58} Ganguly, n. 40, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{60} Kux, n. 55, p. 303.
Pakistani hope of external intervention did not fructify. In the face of heavy reverses in battlefield and mounting pressure by the Indian forces, on 15 December, Gen. A.A.K. Niazi, the commander of the Pakistani forces in the Eastern sector, sought a conditional cease-fire. But his Indian counterpart, Lt. Gen. Jagjit Sing Aurora, the commanding officer for the Eastern Command, rebuffed that offer.\textsuperscript{61} By 16 December, the advancing Indian forces had reached the outskirts of Dhaka. On the same day, the Pakistani Army in the Eastern sector surrendered unconditionally and the fighting ended. The following day, India offered a unilateral cease-fire in the West, which was promptly accepted by Pakistan. Thus ended the short war, marking the bifurcation of Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh as a newly liberated sovereign state.

The US Policy

Since December 1970 general elections in Pakistan, the US was quietly but closely watching the developments there. When the military crackdown and the subsequent bloody repression of the Bengalis began in March 1971, the US Consul General in Dhaka, Archer Blood urged the US government to condemn the wide-scale human rights violations in East Pakistan. Although most nations immediately denounced the atrocities in East Pakistan, the US – at the specific direction of the White House – remained mute. On 6 April, twenty Americans assigned to the consulate in Dhaka filed a formal dissent from the official US policy towards East Pakistan. They urged the US government to denounce the suppression of democracy and commitment of atrocities. In similar vein, the US Ambassador to India, Kenneth Keating in a

\textsuperscript{61} Ganguly, n. 40, p. 69.
dramatic cable to Washington on 29 March urged the Nixon Administration to avoid “association with a reign of military terror.” He recommended that the Administration “promptly, publicly and prominently deplore this brutality” and immediately suspend all military deliveries to Pakistan. 62 Although not going as far as Blood, the American Embassy in Islamabad recommended that the US government voice its deep concern but try “not to make developments a contentious international political issue.” 63 The Nixon White House took no prompt position, saying that it wanted to await further developments. 64 As Henry A. Kissinger wrote, “There was no doubt about the strong-arm tactics of the Pakistani military.” 65 But most of the top officials in the Nixon Administration were oblivious of a top-secret plan, which was being undertaken by President Nixon around the same period. It was Nixon’s endeavour towards a Sino-American rapprochement where Pakistan played a crucial role, by providing a channel of communication with the Chinese leadership. It was not possible for the Nixon Administration to isolate Pakistan, despite the simmering crisis in the subcontinent. To quote Kissinger, “Pakistan was our sole channel to China: once it was closed off it would take months to make alternative arrangements.” 66 Obviously, Pakistan’s role in facilitating a Sino-American rapprochement impinged heavily on the Nixon Administration’s policy response to the crisis in East Pakistan. President Nixon ordered the transfer of Consul General Archer Blood out of East Pakistan and ridiculed Ambassador Keating for having been “taken over by

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63 Kux, n. 38, p. 187.
64 “US Policy in the India–Pakistani Crisis”, 11, NSC Files, as cited in Kux, n. 38, p. 187.
66 Emphasis added, ibid.
the Indians."\textsuperscript{67} However, the State Department could not ignore Blood's recommendation and evacuated about seven hundred American citizens from East Pakistan, leaving only twenty members of the consulate staff in Dhaka.

The political response of the US government to the crackdown in East Pakistan was a repeated the warning to President Yahya to refrain from a military solution to the crisis. The Nixon Administration ignored gross human rights violations by Pakistani Army and termed the fast unfolding events in the region as "\textit{internal matters}" of Pakistan, in which Washington should not interfere in a major way. Washington rather preferred to follow the policy of non-interference towards the issue. The US Secretary of State William Rogers deplored the suffering caused by the civil strife, but refused to get drawn into what he termed "an internal Pakistan matter."\textsuperscript{68} Echoing the same approach, the Assistant Secretary of State Joseph Sisco maintained that "no issue is regarded as more intimately internal than the kind which confronts the Pakistanis. It is the kind of issue which can be settled only the people of that country."\textsuperscript{69} Thus, the US government continued to advise Pakistan to seek a political, rather than a military solution in East Pakistan and did this quietly and informally, refraining from any direct intervention in the state of affairs there. Washington was undoubtedly concerned about the possibility of yet another round Indo-Pak war resulting from the huge refugee inflow to India and the arming and training of \textit{Mukti Bhalimi} by India. President Richard Nixon thus sent a message to both Indira Gandhi and Yahya Khan on 28 May 1971, urging them to take necessary steps for the peaceful solution of the

\textsuperscript{67} ibid.
\textsuperscript{68} As quoted in Kux, n. 38, p. 187.
\textsuperscript{69} \textit{Hindustan Times} (New Delhi), 21 May 1971.
problem. In his letter to Yahya, Nixon wrote:

I feel sure you will agree with me that the first essential step is to bring an end to the civil strife and restore peaceful conditions in East Pakistan... While this is being done, it will, of course, be essential to ensure that tensions in the region as a whole do not increase to the point of international conflict. I would be less than candid if I did not express my deep concern over the possibility that the situation there might escalate to that danger point... it is absolutely vital for the maintenance of peace in the Subcontinent to restore conditions in East Pakistan conducive to the return of refugees from Indian territory as quickly as possible. I urge you to continue to exercise restraint both along your borders with India and your general relations with that country. We are counseling the Government of India to do the same.\(^70\)

In his letter to Indira Gandhi, Nixon wrote:

The United States has not been passive observer of these events. We have had under active and continuous review two elements of the situation which we regard as particularly urgent: the human suffering and dislocation which has taken place and the basic political cause of this suffering and dislocation... In regard to the basic cause of this human suffering and dislocation, my government has also been active. We have chosen to work primarily through quiet diplomacy... we have been discussing with the Government of Pakistan the importance of achieving a peaceful political accommodation and of restoring conditions under which the refugee flow would stop and the refugees would be able to return to their homes... I am also deeply concerned that the present situation not develop into a more widespread conflict in South Asia, either as a result of the refugee flow or through actions which might escalate the insurgency which may be developing in East Pakistan. The problems involved in this situation can and should be solved peacefully.\(^71\)

However, it is to be noted that neither this manifested concern for the possibility of an Indo-Pak war, nor the public outcry and media criticism of the Pakistani Army's use of US-supplied arms in the suppression of Bengali resistance movement and human rights violations in East Pakistan, did hinder the US arms aid policy towards Pakistan. The military crackdown in East


Pakistan immediately raised doubts about the US-Pakistan agreement signed on 7 October 1970, under which Pakistan could purchase some lethal weapons and “essentially unsophisticated” military equipment under the “one-time” exception rule. None of the proposed equipment had been supplied by 25 March 1971, but licenses valued at about $35 million had been issued, and others were being negotiated. On 6 April 1971, the Nixon Administration took a decision under which the State Department ordered a total embargo on new licenses (retroactive to 25 March) but stipulated that, equipment under old licenses – valid for one year – that had already been “delivered” should not be stopped. A Department of Defense directive, issued on 23 April, added a stipulation that certain categories of shipments to Pakistan should be “held” until approved by the Deputy Secretary of Defense. Thus under this order only spares for nonlethal items and equipment already in the hands of the Pakistani government or its agents could be shipped.

In June 1971, the fact that some “military” equipment was still being shipped to Pakistan was made public. The New York Times on 22 June 1971, revealed that the arms embargo was not strictly enforced, and millions of dollars worth of arms and ammunition that had been authorized prior to the cutoff date were shipped in June. Pentagon officials also continued to meet with their Pakistani counterparts through the year to discuss the arms needs of Pakistan. The Administration’s explanation was that the items shipped in June were already “in the pipeline”, that is they had been purchased prior to 25 March, and legal

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72 *New York Times*, 8 and 11 October 1970. The agreement included 330 armoured personnel carriers, 7 “replacement” B-57s and 6 F-104s, 4 maritime reconnaissance aircrafts, and some “nonlethal” equipment, with a total estimated sales value of approximately $90 million.

73 As cited in Sisson and Rose, n. 18, pp. 256-57.

74 As cited in Hersh, n. 62, p. 449.
title to the equipment had been transferred to agents of the Government of Pakistan before that date. These shipments thus did not constitute a violation of the 6 April suspension of military aid to Pakistan.\textsuperscript{75} Although the explanation may be technically correct, it was against propriety. It amounted to indirect endorsement of the use of American weapons by the Pakistani forces to crush the popular uprising in East Pakistan. The revelations in June 1971 about the arms exports to Pakistan sparked stinging criticism from various sources within the US — media, public, Congress and even some officials in the Department of State. The news also caused uproar in India. Nevertheless, President Nixon, in a memorandum dated 25 June, decided to continue military supply policy towards Pakistan for the time being, although he placed it under review.\textsuperscript{76} Nixon’s overriding proviso, according to the National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger, was more accurately expressed in the following order: “To all hands. Don’t squeeze Yahya at this time.”\textsuperscript{77}

As has already been mentioned, at this juncture, Nixon’s soft policy towards Pakistan in general, and his sympathy for Yahya in particular, stemmed from the latter’s crucial role in the establishment of Washington’s China connection. On 28 June 1971, Kissinger left Washington on a supposedly routine trip to the Far East and South Asia. Apart from the Pakistani leadership, very few people, not even the Secretary of State Rogers, knew that Kissinger’s real mission was a planned clandestine visit to China during his stay in Pakistan. After stopping for talks in New Delhi, Kissinger flew to Islamabad, ostensibly for two days of discussions. He then secretly flew to


\textsuperscript{76} ibid; \textit{Foreign Relations of the United States}, 1969-1976, vol. 11, pp. 198-199.

\textsuperscript{77} Emphasis added, Kissinger, n. 65, p. 856.
Beijing to strike a political deal with Mao. Later on 15 July, President Nixon revealed Kissinger's secret trip to China and announced his own upcoming visit to Beijing.\(^78\) The news was a political bombshell that caught the world totally by surprise. Although India expected little help from the US in resolving the East Pakistan crisis, closer Sino-American relations was regarded by the India leadership as a disturbing development. On 17 July the Nixon Administration gave New Delhi a direct warning. On that day, Kissinger summoned the Indian Ambassador to the US, L.K.Jha, and told him that if a war broke out between India and Pakistan, and China became involved on Pakistan's side, "We would be unable to help you against China."\(^79\) Kissinger's blunt message to Jha, came when Indian strategists were already apprehensive about the gradual emergence of a US-China-Pakistan axis. This perception coupled with the worsening situation in East Pakistan led India to forge closer security relationship with the former Soviet Union. India was in search of deterrence against the possible Chinese intervention. On 9 August 1971, New Delhi and Moscow signed a twenty-year Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation.\(^80\) The treaty constituted an insurance against possible Chinese military support for Pakistan in the wake of an Indo-Pak war. In fact, after signing of the treaty, Nixon came to regard India as a Soviet client for the rest of the crisis.\(^81\) Nixon and Kissinger saw the Friendship Treaty as a confirmation of their concerns about India's alignment

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\(^78\) Kux, n. 55, pp. 294-95.
\(^79\) Hersh, n. 62, p.452.
\(^80\) Article 9 of the treaty, which India admittedly invoked on the eve of her military offensive in East Pakistan stipulated that "Each High Contracting Party undertakes to refrain from any assistance to any third Party that engages in armed conflict with the other Party. In the event of either Party being subjected to an attack or threatened thereof, the High Contracting Parties shall immediately enter into mutual consultations in order to remove such threat and to take appropriate affective measures to ensure peace and the security for their countries."
with the Soviet Union. Kissinger described the agreement as "...the bombshell...The Soviet Union had seized a strategic opportunity. To demonstrate Chinese impotence and to humiliate a friend of both China and the United States proved too tempting. If China did nothing, it stood revealed as impotent; if China raised the ante, it risked Soviet reprisal. With the treaty, Moscow threw a lighted match into a powder keg."82 India’s tougher line, despite Kissinger’s warning was subsequently used by the White House in an attempt to counter opposition from the US bureaucracy and Congress to its sympathetic tilt towards Pakistan.

After his return from South Asia and China trip, when Kissinger briefed the National Security Council, his assessment was that India seemed “bent on war” and Yahya lacked “the imagination to solve the political problems in time to prevent an Indian assault.” He recommended that the US should aim for an “evolution that would lead to eventual independence for East Pakistan”, even though he doubted this was likely “to happen in time to head off an Indian attack.”83 Nixon agreed that Pakistan should be pressed to do the maximum to encourage the return of the refugees in the hope of lessening the chances of war.84 In the meantime, Washington urged for an expanded UN relief effort to help the refugees in India and improve economic conditions in East Pakistan. It was hoped that, coupled with gradual political accommodation in the East, this approach would eventually ease the crisis. Under US pressure, Yahya finally agreed to permit UN supervision of relief and resettlement efforts, reversing his previous position. However, New Delhi

82 Kissinger, n. 65, pp. 866-67.
83 ibid., p. 863.
84 ibid.
refused to accept any UN operations on its side of the border, arguing that UN relief programmes might encourage the refugees to remain in India.\textsuperscript{85}

As the monsoon ended and the flooded rivers began to subside, the terrain became more suitable for a military solution. At this point, the overriding concern of the Nixon Administration was to do anything to prevent the outbreak of an Indo-Pak armed conflict, which was becoming more likely than ever before. In a meeting of the Senior Review Group (SRG) on Pakistan, Nixon spoke the following lines:

\textit{First, we must look at this situation above all in terms of US interests. The interests of the US would be very much jeopardized by any development that could break into open conflict. We will have to do anything – anything – to avoid war. We will do “anything – all we can – to restrain” those who want to be involved in war.}\textsuperscript{86}

However, by September, most Indians concluded that military solution would be the likely outcome. To muster international support for the possible Indian military intervention in the East Pakistani crisis, Indira Gandhi set off on a three-week tour of Western capitals on 22 October 1971. As part of her tour, Indira visited Washington on 4-5 November. Her message was clear: India hoped for a political solution, but this required negotiations between Yahya and Mujibur. India was patient but would not bear the refugee burden indefinitely. It was an implicit threat of military action. During their meeting, Nixon tried hard to convince the Indian Prime Minister to refrain from initiating any military action. Nixon expressed confidence that a satisfactory political settlement could be worked out if India gave the US enough time. He told Indira Gandhi that the US government had thus far placed great pressure

\textsuperscript{85} Sisson and Rose, n. 18, pp. 146-48.
on Pakistan and had convinced Yahya Khan to unilaterally pull back the Pakistani forces from border, as a de-escalatory step. Then he urged her to consider similar reciprocal gesture of troop withdrawals, which would help in lessening the tensions. By observing that nothing could be served by the disintegration of Pakistan, Nixon warned that:

...the consequences of military action were incalculably dangerous...Should the situation deteriorate to armed conflict, there is doubt that the conflict could be limited to just India and Pakistan. It would have implications and possibly great dangers for the whole framework of world peace...The initiation of hostilities by India would be almost impossible to understand...It would be impossible to calculate with precision the steps which other great powers might take if India were to initiate hostilities.87

Nixon and Kissinger claimed Washington could get Yahya to concede self-determination for the East Pakistanis, either provincial autonomy or full independence. However, skeptical about the prospects, and not trusting Nixon’s bona fides, Indira Gandhi could not accept Nixon’s proposals. She responded that India was neither driven by anti-Pakistan motives, nor wished the destruction of Pakistan or its permanent crippling. Rather India sought the restoration of stability in the area and wanted to eliminate chaos at all costs. The mass exodus of refugees to India had created novel security problems for her government. She stated that it was wrong to accuse India squarely for the guerilla movement. She noted that despite oppressive measures, the Pakistani military had been unable to establish control in the area. In reality, the pressures for autonomy among the East Bengalis were so overwhelming that, it was no longer realistic to expect East and West Pakistan to remain

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together. Thus, substantively, there was complete disagreement about the prospects for a political settlement. The talks ended in failure. In fact, in the words of Kissinger, the Nixon-Gandhi conversation “turned into a classic dialogue of the deaf.” Thus Indira Gandhi’s US visit ended without progress on any outstanding issue or even on a procedure by which progress could be sought.

After the return of Indira Gandhi from Washington, any peaceful political solution to the India-Pakistan deadlock over East Pakistan crisis was almost ruled out. Ample signs indicated that a military showdown was inevitable. Both India and Pakistan were amassing troops along their borders, and guerrilla attacks against the Pakistani military in the east were increasing. As the situation worsened, the criticism against the Nixon Administration’s handling of the crisis intensified, even within the US. Finally succumbing to the strong domestic public opinion, the Nixon Administration on 8 November announced the termination of all US military sales to Pakistan and the cancellation of all unused valid export licenses issued before 25 March 1971. Meanwhile, the Indo-Pak hostilities escalated alarmingly, as Indian troops supporting the Bengali insurgents, went on the offensive. Yahya sent a letter to Nixon, detailing the “unprovoked and large scale attacks by Indian Armed Forces into various parts of Pakistan.” He also expressed the hope that some initiatives by the White House at this crucial juncture “could still prove decisive in averting a catastrophe.” The White House saw this development, in effect, as the start of war by India and redoubled its diplomatic efforts to

88 ibid.; Aijazuddin, n. 86, pp. 334-40.
89 Kux, n. 55, pp. 297-99; Sisson and Rose n. 18, pp. 195-96; Kissinger, n. 65, pp. 878-82.
90 Sisson and Rose, n. 18, p. 261.
avert an all-out Indo-Pak war. On 23 November, Kissinger accompanied by the US representative to the UN, George Bush, met secretly in New York with Huang Hua, China's UN representative, to review how the US and China could deal with the East Pakistan issue in the UN. On 26 November, the US Ambassador to Pakistan, Joseph S. Farland, suggested to Yahya that a meeting be arranged between one of the “cleared” Awami Leaguers and Mujib as a first step towards a political settlement that might be acceptable to India. But it was already much too late for such “first steps” to have any effect on the inevitable.

Nixon-Kissinger Tilt

From the beginning to the end, strong pro-Pakistan tilt could be clearly discerned from the Nixon Administration’s policy response towards the entire crisis. The Administration officially maintained that America was following a policy of strict neutrality towards the crisis. "In secret, however, both Nixon and Kissinger were issuing instructions that could hardly be called neutral." Even before the hostilities started between India and Pakistan, Nixon summoned representatives of the high-powered Washington Special Action Group (WSAG) into his office and directed them to seek ways to aid Pakistan. WSAG met frequently on the India-Pakistan crisis, and Kissinger,

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92 Kux, n. 38, p. 199.
93 Sisson and Rose, n. 18, p. 261.
94 ibid.
96 The WSAG was the National Security Council subcommittee established in 1969 by the Nixon Administration to deal with crises. Chaired by Kissinger, the WSAG, during the 1971 South Asian crisis, included participants from the State Department, Defense Department, Central Intelligence Agency, Agency for International Development, the Joint Chief’s of Staff and National Security Council staff. During war, WSAG made frequently on the India-Pakistan crisis, and Kissinger, its chairman, constantly reminded the group of Nixon’s determination to “tilt” in Pakistan’s favour. He castigated diplomats who hesitated to violated the neutrality the US had proclaimed and admonished WSAG’s members to follow the President’s wishes. It held four meetings on 3, 4, 6, and 8 December 1971, in the Committee Room of White House. See Jack Anderson and George Clifford, The Anderson Papers (London: Millington, 1973).
its chairman, constantly reminded the group of Nixon’s determination to ‘tilt’ in Pakistan’s favour. Similarly, on 24 November, while discussing the developments in South Asia in light of the worsening conflict in East Pakistan, Nixon told his foreign policy planners “...I think that our policy wherever we can should definitely be tilted toward Pakistan, and not toward India. I think India is more at fault....”

Even as tensions mounted and an Indo-Pak armed conflict became almost inevitable, the Nixon Administration perceptively hardened its stance towards India and accused it of inciting the conflict. In the words of Seymour M. Hersh, “What had begun as a ‘tilt’ to protect the China opening had become national policy, and what had been Nixon’s visceral dislike of ascetic Indians had been elevated to a personal vendetta against Indira Gandhi.” On 1 December 1971, the Nixon Administration announced its decision to suspend issuance of new Munitions List export licenses and renewal of existing Munitions List licenses for military sales to India. Existing licenses covering the export of about $2 million worth of components and machinery for the manufacture of ammunition were also cancelled. Then on 6 December, the US announced, “general economic assistance in the pipeline for India has been suspended to the extent it is not firmly committed to suppliers and banks.” The amount of economic aid affected by this suspension was $ 87.6 million.

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98 Emphasis added, Hersh, n. 62, p. 456.
When the Indo-Pak war began on 3 December, Nixon Administration held India responsible for the conflict and branded it as “aggressor”. In Washington on 4 December, Assistant Secretary of State Joseph Sisco set the pro-Pakistan tone of the US reaction by stating that, although “the crisis in its initial stage was not really of Indian making...India bears the major responsibility for the broader hostilities which have ensued.” This accusation was echoed at the UN by the US representative George Bush, who fingered India as “the major aggressor.”

Immediately after the Pakistani air strikes on the Indian air fields on 3 December, the Nixon Administration convened the National Security Council’s Washington Special Action Group (WSAG) to discuss the Indo-Pakistan conflict situation and to explore the policy options to deal with it. In this meeting Kissinger said:

I am getting hell every half-hour from the President that we are not being tough on India. He has just called me again. He does not believe we are carrying out his wishes. He wants to tilt in favor of Pakistan. He feels everything we do comes out otherwise...It’s hard to tilt toward Pakistan if we have to match every Indian step with a Pakistan step...We need to think about our treaty obligations. I remember a letter or memo interpreting our existing treaty with a special India tilt. When I visited Pakistan in January 1962, I was briefed on a secret document or oral understanding about contingencies arising in other than the SEATO context. Perhaps it was a Presidential letter. This was a special interpretation of the March 1959 bilateral agreement.

Thus it is obvious that President Nixon had already decided to tilt in favour of Pakistan without even verifying facts. And the National Security Adviser, within few hours of Pakistani air strike on the Indian targets, on his own

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103 Minutes of WSAG, 3 December 1971, (extracts); Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, vol. 11, p. 597; Aijazuddin, n. 92, pp. 399-401; Jain, n. 70, pp. 25-26; Anderson and Clifford, n. 95, p. 227.
volition brought up the issue of any secret document or defence commitment (outside the context of SEATO or 1959 bilateral defense cooperation agreement, both of which are public) which the US might have made in the past to assist Pakistan in the event of hostilities. However, after reviewing all the relevant records, the US official found no such secret document or agreement existing.

The open tilt by the Nixon Administration in favour of Pakistan gradually intensified in the subsequent WSAG meetings and the consequent follow-up actions. The Nixon Administration declared that the Indo-Pak conflict posed a threat to international peace and security and urged for an immediate cease-fire, but of no avail. In the WSAG meeting held on 4 December, it was decided that the US would request an immediate meeting of the UN Security Council, where Washington would introduce a resolution. The US-UN approach would be tilted towards Pakistan. It was also decided that the current economic aid for Pakistan would not be terminated. Acting upon the recommendation of WSAG, Washington convened an emergency meeting of the UNSC on 4 December, to discuss the issue, and obtain a cease-fire. The US representative to the UN, George Bush, accused India of repeated incursions across the border of East Pakistan and unwillingness to withdraw troops. He introduced a draft resolution that called for an immediate cease-fire and withdrawal of all armed personnel to their own side of the border. It also attempted to revive again the long-standing project of deployment of UN observers along the India-Pakistan borders to report on the implementation of

the cease-fire and troop withdrawals. However, this resolution was vetoed by the Soviet Union.

As deadlock continued in the UNSC, the US supported the Somalian move to refer the issue to the UN General Assembly under the ‘uniting for peace’ procedure. The UN General Assembly met in New York on 7 December. A draft resolution was put before it by Argentina co-sponsored by several other nations, calling for an immediate cease-fire by India and Pakistan and the withdrawal of their armed forces to their respective sides of the border. It insisted that “efforts be intensified in order to bring about speedily and in accordance with the purpose and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, conditions necessary for the voluntary return of the East Pakistan refugees to their homes.” On 8 December, the resolution was adopted by the General Assembly by an overwhelming vote of 104 to 11, with 10 abstentions. The next day Pakistan informed the UN Secretary General, her readiness to abide by the terms of the resolution. But it was already clear that India would not accept it, and some days later, on 12 December, Indira Gandhi affirmed that Indian troops would not be withdrawn from Bangladesh until a Pakistani military withdrawal had been accomplished.

With the failure of the UN efforts to enforce a cease-fire, there seemed to be little prospects for the US to end the fighting at the diplomatic level. By this time the White House had accepted that the situation in East Pakistan was beyond its control and reconciled itself to the inevitable — creation of Bangladesh. But expressed grave concern about the possible motives of India

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105 Draft resolution submitted by the US in the UNSC, 4 December 1971, Jain, n. 70, pp. 32-33.
106 Jackson, n. 5, p. 127.
107 ibid., p. 128.
towards West Pakistan. This concern was aggravated after a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) source quoted Indira Gandhi as telling her cabinet on 6 December, that India would launch a major offensive into West Pakistan in order to destroy “Pakistani armored an air force strength” and to seize some areas of Pakistan occupied Kashmir. The CIA report, obtained from a source close to Indira Gandhi, was not considered very important and it was made the fifth item in a situation report of the Agency. Although some CIA and State Department officials played down the intelligence report’s significance and expressed doubts about the reported war objectives of India, President Nixon and Kissinger exaggerated the report, accepting it as hard evidence that India was going to crush West Pakistan. Kissinger called in Indian Ambassador L.K. Jha to warn against such a course. Government of India’s denial of any such Indian designs failed to convince Nixon and Kissinger. At this critical juncture, when Pakistani forces were suffering heavy reverses and the war had entered into a critical phase, the Nixon Administration wanted to do everything it could do to help Pakistan, even if it meant violating the decree of US Congress. To bail out Pakistan, the White House was seriously contemplating the delivery of military equipment to Pakistan from friendly third countries, thus bypassing the embargo on arms supply to Pakistan. Accordingly, the US Embassies in Saudi Arabia,

109 Anderson and Clifford, n. 95, p. 232.
110 Such request was made by Yahya Khan to the US Ambassador to Pakistan Farland on 3 December. When Kissinger reported this request to Nixon saying that it could be done through Iran, the latter concurred. Nixon added, “If it is leaking we can have it denied. Have it done one step away.” Nixon confirmed this decision in a conversation with Kissinger on 6 December. He authorized Kissinger to proceed on the understanding that any “back channel” military assistance provided to Pakistan by Iran would be offset by comparable assistance provided to Iran by the US. As cited in Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, vol. 11, p. 610.
Jordan, Iran and Pakistan were instructed, “to report to the [State] Department any indications [of] third country transfers being contemplated by host government.” Kissinger was vocal on this point at the 6 December WSAG meeting. He asked about the legalities of allowing Jordan or Saudi Arabia to transfer military equipment, provided by the US, to Pakistan. When other members discouraged such option, Kissinger said that President Nixon may want to honour Pakistani requests in this regard. He added, “The matter has not been brought to Presidential attention, but it is quite obvious that the President is not inclined to let the Paks be defeated.” Kissinger again raised the issue of arms transfer to Pakistan – F-104 fighter planes – from Jordan in the December 8 session of WSAG. Ultimately, acting on Kissinger’s recommendation, Nixon authorized Jordan to send 10 F-104s to Pakistan. The transfer was accomplished “very quietly”, even though it violated the US Foreign Assistance Act.

However, the Nixon-Kissinger tilt in favour of Pakistan appeared complete on 10 December, when the US dispatched a strong naval task force – Task Force 74 – to the Bay of Bengal, from the Seventh Feet off South Vietnam. The Task Force 74 was spearheaded by the world’s most powerful ship, the USS Enterprise, a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier with a crew of more than five thousand, plus seventy-five planes and five helicopters. Officially it was declared that the task force’s main mission was to evacuate American citizens from embattled Dhaka. However, in the words of Anderson, its real objective was to draw the Indian Air Force away from Pakistani targets; to divert the

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111 Anderson and Clifford, n. 95, p. 228.
112 Emphasis added, ibid., p. 250; Memorandum on WSAG meeting on 6 December 1971, Aijazuddin, n. 86, pp. 406-12.
113 Anderson and Clifford, n. 95, pp. 250-52.
Indian aircraft carrier *Vikrant* from its position off the East Pakistan coast, and, possibly, to break the Indian blockade of East Pakistan ports. The top-secret message stated the mission of task force: "To form a contingency evacuation force capable of helicopter evacuation of civilians, of self protection, and of conducting naval air and surface operations as directed by higher authority in order to support U.S. interests in the Indian Ocean area."\(^{114}\)

In the words of Kissinger, its purpose was to send a signal to the India and the Soviet Union "to give emphasis to our warnings against an attack on West Pakistan."\(^{115}\) Moreover, the Nixon Administration wanted to show the Chinese that, if they entered into a relationship with the US, they could count on American steadfastness in times of trouble.

Despite its high strategic significance, the *Enterprise* did not play any direct role in ending the conflict and even could not prevent the dismemberment of Pakistan. By the time the *Enterprise* entered the Bay of Bengal on 15 December, the Indo-Pak war was almost over. On 16 December, the Pakistani forces in East Pakistan surrendered unconditionally to India ending the fighting there. The next day Indira Gandhi declared a unilateral cease-fire on the Western front, as the Indian objective was accomplished and Bangladesh was liberated. Yahya reciprocated by accepting the cease-fire the same day. Thus the fourteen-day old third Indo-Pakistani armed conflict came to an end.

**Conclusion**

The US policy response to the Indo-Pak war of 1971 could be summed up in one sentence: during this period the US played a role somewhat similar to that

\(^{114}\) ibid., pp. 263-66.
\(^{115}\) Kissinger, n. 65, p. 905.
of the Chinese during the 1965 Indo-Pak war. To quote H.W. Brands, "Of all
the Nixon administration’s major foreign policy decisions, only those
involving Vietnam brought upon it such violent criticism as its handling of the
Bangladesh crisis. Even to that diminishing of the American opinion making
elite not yet predisposed to think the worst of the Republican president, the
administration’s refusal to speak out against Pakistan’s undeniable atrocities
in East Pakistan, and its condemnation of India for acting to end the
bloodshed and the misery of the millions of refugees, seemed a clear case of
power politics taking precedence over the most basic humanitarian
considerations."

In the words of Hersh:

What had begun as a “tilt” to protect China opening had become
national policy, and what had been Nixon’s visceral dislike of ascetic
Indians had been elevated to a personal vendetta against Indira
Gandhi. With her quick tongue and uncompromising manner, she was
perceived not only as a symbol of America’s previous misguided
policy in South Asia but also as a threat to the Chinese summit
scheduled to be held in early 1972.

Few outsiders could realize how much the event of China opening was
shaping the White House’s policy in South Asia. It was for the first time in the
long history of Indo-Pak conflicts that Washington so openly showed its
distinct tilt in favour of one of the two South Asian rivals and almost came to
the verge of direct military intervention. The action brought America to the
edge of a war that could also have involved Russia and China. Criticizing the
Nixon approach, Jack Anderson held that the US “might have used its
enormous influence with the Pakistanis at any time during the nine months of
the horror to protect the Bengalis and their leaders. That was never done…”

116 Brands, n. 3, pp.135-36.
117 Hersh, n. 62, pp. 456-57.
118 Anderson and Clifford, n. 95, p. 223.
Instead, both Nixon and Kissinger “used the India-Pakistan war for cynical ends. While pretending to strive for peace, they actually extended the fighting and increased the risk of a wider war.” Anderson further noted that there were “lies at almost every turn in the convoluted U.S. policy on the India-Pakistan war. Some of the most apparent involved White House efforts to convince the world that India was wrong and the United States was neutral in the conflict.”

What were the underlying factors that explained Nixon’s Pakistan obsession? The policies pursued by the Nixon Administration during the 1971 crisis in South Asia were influenced by a combination of many considerations — global, strategic, political and even personal. Both Nixon and Kissinger believed that a policy of limited support for Pakistan was essential at that critical juncture in US-China relations to convince Beijing that Washington was a worthwhile ally and, in the complicated process of developing a new relationship with the USSR, to convince Moscow that Washington would stand firm against the Soviets and their perceived allies, should they resort to aggression. For Kissinger, it was a question of preserving credibility and honour. To him, introducing the US military power into the equation, in the form of naval task force, the US was seeking to prevent a Soviet, ally supported by Soviet arms, from overrunning an American ally. In their memoirs, both Nixon and Kissinger saw their support for Pakistan during the crisis, as being global in nature. Seymour Hersh noted that such analysis was

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119 ibid., p. 224.
120 Ibid., p. 236.
more than merely wrong: “It was phantasmagorical. To protect his [Nixon] link to China and, later, the summit meeting in Peking, no price was too great, not even the butchery of hundreds of thousands of civilians in East Pakistan. Kissinger’s function was to rationalize White House support for West Pakistan....”

The dispatch of *USS Enterprise* – the most powerful ship of that time – may also be seen as part of a greater strategy. Presumably, the task of the *Enterprise* mission in this context was “to infuse visible power into the region, provide a point of stability around which concerned littorals could rally, mobilize the world community through the contagion of Washington’s example and thereby limit and partially compensate for the adverse consequences of the war, both on the regional and – because of linkages – the international balance of power.”

Moreover, the distrust of the Indian war motives, coupled with the misplaced apprehension of the Nixon Administration about the likely disintegration of West Pakistan by the Indian military attack also played a crucial role in Washington’s distinct tilt in favour of Pakistan. Within a week of the beginning of Indo-Pak war, East Pakistan was presumed to be lost, and there was not much sympathy for Pakistan or concern over US interests there. But given Pakistan’s membership in the CENTO alliance system in the Middle East and the very difficult position of the US in that region, the preservation of West Pakistan’s national integrity and political viability was considered

122 Hersh, n. 62, p. 447.
important to the US.\footnote{Sisson and Rose, n. 18, pp. 261-62.} A dialogue on the suitable American course of action in this context became particularly vigorous after a CIA source report reinforced such fear. Thus Nixon ordered the dispatch of Task Force 74 to the Bay of Bengal, which represented a continuation of the ‘tilt’ but with military means. The Nixon Administration viewed the break-up of Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh as an unfortunate development in the subcontinent, but not as a disaster. In contrast, Nixon and Kissinger would have considered the disintegration of West Pakistan, a catastrophe.

Last but not the least, Nixon shared a very warm personal relationship with Yahya Khan, which was conspicuously absent in his relationship with Indira Gandhi. In the words of Kissinger, Nixon and Indira Gandhi were not intended by fate to be personally congenial. “He considered her, indeed, a cold-blooded practitioner of power politics.”\footnote{Kissinger, n. 65, p. 879.} Due to their divergent perception of the events, things failed to improve in the meetings and discussions between the two in early November. Kissinger called those talks the “worst and most painful” in which he participated. Kissinger also added that Nixon’s comments after meetings with her were not always printable. In fact, with Indira Gandhi, Nixon’s tone bordered on the abusive. To some extent, this factor also impinged on the US policy towards the East Pakistan crisis and subsequent Indo-Pak conflict.

However, in concrete terms, the dispatch of the Task Force 74 into the Bay of Bengal did not prove decisive in determining the outcome of the war. Similarly, the distinct tilt of the Nixon Administration in favour of Pakistan throughout the crisis, hardly played any substantial role either in changing the
course of war or in ending it. It also failed to safeguard the territorial integrity of Pakistan, which led to the birth of Bangladesh as an sovereign nation. Far from a diplomatic victory, the whole affair proved an unnecessary and embarrassing diplomatic setback for the US. Through their misreading of the crisis, and their pro-Pakistan tilt, Nixon and Kissinger succeeded in needlessly transforming a regional dispute into one, which threatened to become a great power showdown. Moreover, the Nixon-Kissinger tilt ultimately led to severe and long lasting damage to the Indo-US relations, while enhancing Soviet influence with New Delhi.

Though the outcome of the war was not to the liking of the US, there was a definite change in the US policy towards South Asia in general and the Kashmir issue in particular in the aftermath of the 1971 conflict. The Simla Agreement signed by India and Pakistan on 3 July 1972 became a political mantra for the US. Since then, Washington kept harping on resolution of Indo-Pakistani disputes on the basis of Simla Agreement and in the spirit of healthy bilateralism.

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