CHAPTER 7
THE SOVIET UNION AND THE BANGLADESH WAR 1971

The Background

The Awami League led by Mujibur Rahman swept the polls in the eastern wing in the December 1970 Pakistan elections. The victory put it in the top spot, followed by Z. A. Bhutto’s Pakistan People’s Party (PPP), in the second position. President Yahya Khan’s military administration did not like the Awami League’s victory. It would have preferred the PPP or the fundamentalist Muslim parties. Yahya Khan rather hoped that no party would get a majority in the National Assembly, a number of parties would come to the fore and the military regime would be in a position to act as a ‘mediator’ among the coalescing parties and the coalition would be favourable to the continuance of the military regime. But the election results falsified these expectations.¹

The military government refused to accept the people’s verdict. The crisis was deepened with the Awami League’s demand for autonomy for East Pakistan, based upon

¹ Mohammad Ayub and K. Subrahmanyam (eds.), The Liberation War (Delhi, 1972), pp. 99 & 102.
a six-point charter. Bhutto and like-minded West Pakistan military and political leaders saw this as a demand for "separation" and stoutly opposed it. Bhutto declared that "majority alone does not count in national politics". He also pointed out that his Pakistan People's Party had won thumping majorities in the provinces of Punjab and Sind, which he termed the "bastions of power" in Pakistan.²

Soon it was clear that the democratic process would be sabotaged and Yahya Khan's democratic pretensions were an eyewash.³ He gave the impression that he was anxious to transfer power to a democratic government and expressed himself in favour of some sort of settlement between the two main contenders. At the same time, he deliberately postponed summoning of the National Assembly and ensured that the democratic process was scuttled. He talked of the regrettable confrontation between the leaders of East and West Pakistan to justify his decision in March 1971 "to postpone the summoning of the National Assembly to a later date".⁴

---


Postponement of transfer of power apparently at the behest of the minority party of Z. A. Bhutto, created a sharp reaction in East Pakistan. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman called for a "non-violent non-co-operation movement", still resisting pressures from his own party and other groups, for declaration of independence. He hoped that better senses would prevail in the military and West Pakistan political circles. The purpose of launching the movement was to build up such unprecedented pressure as to deter military action and to force the regime to negotiate with him. Sheikh Mujib uttered a stern note of warning. "You will see history made if the conspirators fail to come to their senses". The movement was an instant success and the whole country was aflame. All eyes were now turned towards Dacca where on March 7 Sheikh Mujib was to make his public declaration of what was widely expected to be "independence".

The military regime put on a facade of reconciliation and initiated talks with the Awami League leader, with a view to put an end to the impasse. The talks inevitably failed mainly on account of lack of sincerity on the part of the Generals and Bhutto's one-up-manship and obstinate

5. The People (Dacca), 2 March 1971.
refusal to share power with Sheikh Mujib. The failure of protracted negotiations and the realization that the military regime had no intention to give up power, prompted Mujib to declare on 24 March that "he would not allow 75 million Bengalees to be slaves".8

The military government which was only bidding time to make preparations and ensure support of friends like China and the US, unleashed a reign of terror following a broadcast of President Yahya Khan on 25 March. The military came down heavily on the Awami League supporters. A genocide, unprecedented in history, began. "The mass terror let loose by the Islamabad military dictatorship resulted in the exodus of millions of refugees to the neighbouring territory of India leading to new tensions in the Indo-Pak relations".9

India found it extremely difficult to tackle the not only political, but also sociological and economic problems created by this great human influx.

7. Mujib's suggestion for a separate wing-wise transfer of power to the two parties was unacceptable to Bhutto who considered this arrangement a "massive betrayal of West Pakistan". See Bangladesh Documents, Vol. 1, p. 195; Ibid., Vol. 11, pp. 216-218.

8. Ibid., Vol. 1, pp. 253, 258 & 266.

India appealed to the world community to bring about a political settlement in Bangladesh so that the refugees might go back to their homes. The Government of India did all that it could do, to invite world-attention to the plight of refugees. Though there was widespread sympathy for the Bangladesh people in the West, there was no concrete response from the political leaderships. Indira Gandhi herself visited Washington and tried her best to impress upon the US hosts, the humanitarian aspects of the problem. She also used the opportunity to remove US misunderstandings about the Indo-Soviet Treaty. She said in Washington that ". . . while under the treaty we shall consult with the Soviet Union should any dangerous situation arise, what decision we take, what steps we take, well, that is entirely a matter for India to decide by herself.10 However, the US was deaf to Indira Gandhi's entreaties. The US policy of acquiescence of the repression in East Pakistan was most disappointing for New Delhi. Instead of trying to restrain the hands of Yahyakhan and using its influence to bring about a political settlement, the Nixon Administration asked India to bear with the crisis and exercise restraint.11

10. Indira Gandhi, India and Bangladesh: Selected Speeches and Statements March to December 1971 (New Delhi, 1972), p. 72.

11. President Nixon impressed upon Indira Gandhi the utmost necessity of not initiating hostilities and listed what the US had accomplished through
As for the Chinese attitude, it tried to exploit Pakistan's discomfiture to its advantage by unleashing a virulent campaign against India, accusing that India was responsible for Pakistan's problems. The New China News Agency reported that Pakistan had lodged a strong protest against the alleged Indian interference in Pakistan's domestic affairs.\(^\text{12}\) This charge was also made in the Chinese protest note of 6 April 1971, addressed to New Delhi on 29 March 1971.\(^\text{13}\)

**The Soviet Attitude**

The Soviet Union was the first big power to realise the gravity of the situation and to see in it a major threat to peace and security in South Asia.\(^\text{14}\) At a time when both Peking and Washington were trying to condone the blood bath in East Bengal as an "internal affair" of Pakistan, Soviet President Nikolai Podgorny, in his letter persuasion. Indira Gandhi, however, returned to New Delhi unconvinced that there was any prospect of a viable political settlement. The Nixon-Gandhi conversation turned out to be, what Kissinger described as, "a classic dialogue of the deaf". Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (New Delhi, 1979), p. 880.


13. Ibid.

of 2 April to the Pakistani President Yahya Khan appealed to "stop the bloodshed and repressions against the population in East Pakistan" and resort to "methods of peaceful political settlement". Podgorny also expressed Soviet people's concern over the "arrests and persecution of Mujibur Rahman and other political leaders who had received such convincing support by the overwhelming majority of the population of East Pakistan at the recent general elections". The Soviet leader, however, made it explicit in his letter that his country had no desire to interfere in the domestic affairs of Pakistan and that in appealing to the President of Pakistan he was guided "by the generally recognized humanitarian principles recorded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and by concern for the welfare of the friendly people of Pakistan".

It was clear from the wordings of Podgorny's letter that the Soviet Union did not want to create the impression that it was interfering in Pakistan's internal affairs. Pakistan was still being described as a friendly country. The Soviet concern was only about the repression and the refugee problem. It only advised a political

15. Pravda, 4 April 1971, quoted by Devendra Kaushik, n. 9, p. 125.
17. Ibid., p. 126.
solution. What the Soviet Union wanted to avoid was political instability and the disturbance of peace in South Asia. Turbulence in South Asia, the Soviet Union apprehended, would work to the advantages of the United States and China.

The joint Indo-Soviet statement on A. Gromyko's visit to New Delhi to sign the Indo-Soviet Treaty also called "that urgent steps be taken in East Pakistan for the achievement of a political solution and for the creation of conditions of safety for the return of the refugees to their homes". Again the Soviet advice was to initiate political dialogues and a call to the West Pakistani regime to refrain from seeking a military solution of the problem. It is worthwhile to note that the eastern wing was still referred to as East Pakistan and not as East Bengal by the Soviet Union. It adequately brought home the point that the Soviet Union still considered it as an internal Pakistani crisis which the Pakistani authorities had to solve without outside interference. The Soviet Union never desired the disintegration of Pakistan, nor supported any move for the so-called restructuring of the Indian sub-continent.

Reports of the events of the sub-continent in the Soviet press reflected this Soviet desire to preserve the territorial integrity of Pakistan and a deep concern for peace in the region. Writing in the *New Times* (No. 25, June 1971), A. Ulansky expressed his "deepest concern and anxiety" at the tension in the Indian sub-continent and the plight of the refugees. However, he stressed only the humanitarian aspects of the problem and demanded, in the name of peace and humanity that "conditions be created in East Pakistan for the return of the refugees and that they be assured safety and the possibility to live and work in peace". He carefully avoided words and comments that could be objectionable to Pakistan.

In the July issue of the *New Times* (No. 30), L. Kirichenko referred to the "chauvinist great power policy" of China as fraught with dangers to the people of both India and Pakistan and to the cause of peace. He warned against Peking "exploiting the difficulties in Pakistan and the complications between that country and India" in an attempt to catch the Pakistani leaders in its net.

Soviet Union apparently took the position that China was responsible for the escalation of the crisis and China stood in the way of a political solution. It tried its best to impress upon the world of China’s incendiary role in the East Pakistan crisis, which made a South Asian war more likely. Even after the signing of the Indo-Soviet
Treaty in August 1971 the Soviet Union took care not to offend Pakistan and continued to take the position that the crisis was Pakistan's internal affair, but one which needed a political solution. The Joint Indo-Soviet statement of 11 August 1971 reiterated the "firm conviction" of both sides that there could be "no military solution" and considered it necessary that "urgent steps" be taken in "East Pakistan" for the achievement of a "political solution". It did not, however, specify that the solution had to be acceptable to the elected representatives of Bangladesh. It called for the creation of conditions ensuring the safe return of the refugees to their homes because that alone would answer "the interests of the entire people of Pakistan and the cause of the preservation of peace in the area". 20

Indira Gandhi paid a visit to the Soviet Union in September and the joint statement issued on 29 September 1971 noted:

The Soviet side took into account the statement by the Prime Minister that the Government of India is fully determined to take all necessary measures to stop the influx of refugees from East Pakistan into India and to ensure that those refugees who are already in India return to their homeland without delay.[21]


Premier Kosygin told newsmen at the Indian Prime Minister's farewell function on September 29, "No country which committed atrocities can ever enjoy our support. Our sympathies are with the democratic forces in Pakistan". 22

It can be seen that there was a visible change in Soviet attitude by the time of Indira Gandhi's visit. The Soviet leaders showed a greater appreciation of India's difficulties on account of the refugee problem and in their statements demanded positive action by the Pakistan Government. They also clearly spelt out where their sympathies lay. Indira Gandhi seemed to have achieved considerable success in convincing the Soviet leaders of the need for political and military support in the event of war. The fact that she was met by an official delegation that included Soviet Defence Minister Grechko, underlined the military aspects of the Indo-Soviet relationship since the treaty. 23

However, the Soviet Union still preferred a peaceful political solution and persuaded India to exercise patience. Kosygin for example, at a luncheon in honour of

the Indian Prime Minister, condemned the repression in East Pakistan but then reiterated that the "Soviet Union is doing and will continue to do everything possible on its part to maintain peace in this region and to prevent the outbreak of an armed conflict". According to a distinguished Indian scholar, "The Russians were tireless in trying to persuade Indira Gandhi out of any intention to intervene militarily".²⁴ They legitimately feared that the outbreak of war would provide an excuse for the United States and China to take a more active role and the Soviet Union would be called upon to confront them. This was not an enviable task. Soviet Union's steadfast position was that the disturbance of peace in the region was not in its interest and it would also ultimately work in detriment to the national interests of India and Pakistan. So the Soviet Union continued to call for peace. However, for the first time, the Soviets stated that they "highly appreciated" India's policy and "understood" the "difficulties confronting friendly India in connection with the mass inflow of refugees".²⁵

This greater Soviet appreciation notwithstanding, President Nixon's National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger was mistaken and probably biased in his


²⁵ Robert C. Horn, n. 23, p. 68.
impression that the Soviet Union played a highly inflammatory role', and that Moscow desired the defeat of Pakistan, since it would be a blow to the American network of alliances and would "demonstrate Chinese impotence".\textsuperscript{26} Of course, a US loss of face and Chinese humiliation, Moscow would have loved to see, but there is little truth in the allegation that it encouraged war. A well-informed analyst recalled that Brezhnev, Kosygin and President Nikolai Podgorny all met Indira Gandhi in Moscow on 28 September and seem to have tried to use the treaty as a brake on India's tilt towards war.\textsuperscript{27}

In spite of all the Soviet reservations about war, there was no doubt that the Soviet perception of the crisis in Pakistan's eastern wing had grown closer to India.\textsuperscript{28} The difference was only that the Soviet Union wanted India to bear with the problem for some more time and exercise restraint. The Soviet leaders hoped that the West Pakistani military government would come to their senses and they could be persuaded to find a political solution.

During this period some high level Soviet official delegations visited India and held important discussions.

\textsuperscript{26} See Henry A. Kissinger, n. 11, pp. 874, 886.

\textsuperscript{27} Peter J. S. Duncan, \textit{The Soviet Union and India} (London and New York, 1989), p. 21.

\textsuperscript{28} See Robert C. Horn, n. 23, p. 68.
with their Indian counterparts. President Podgorny, on way to Vietnam, had a stop-over in Delhi on 1 October. He held meaningful discussions with the President and the Prime Minister. The Soviet leader referred to the "legitimate rights and interests of the people in that region" and offered "full Soviet co-operation to any such solution within the existing Indo-Soviet relations. He also administered a warning to Pakistan: ". . . the Soviet people are closely watching the difficult and dangerous situation in the Hindustan sub-continent". The Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Nikolai Firyubin visited New Delhi at the end of October where he expressed his full agreement with India's assessment of a threat of attack from the side of Pakistan. The Soviet Government gradually came round to the Indian view that a war could not be averted. There was apparent agreement in Moscow, of the Indian view that a military threat did exist which imperilled the security of India. Consultations that took place on the Soviet Foreign Minister's visit on 26 October 1971 were said to be not only in conformity with the existing procedure of annual bilateral consultations but also "under the provisions of Article IX of the Soviet-Indian Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Co-operation".

29. The Times of India, 2 October 1971.
30. The Patriot (New Delhi), 26 October 1971.
The change in Soviet perception was eloquently expressed by V. Kudryavtsev, of the Izvestia, who after meeting the representatives of the Indian Press, described the struggle in Bangladesh as "a national liberation movement with elements of a civil war".32

Firyubin's visit was followed by the deputation to India of a high-powered Soviet military delegation to study India's defence requirements. This was an indication of the seriousness with which the Soviet Union viewed the situation and that the friendship treaty had a military punch. It was reported that between August and the end of November 1971 eight shiploads of Soviet arms had arrived in India.33

By November, Soviet commentators were echoing the Indian line that the refugee problem was no longer an internal affair of Pakistan. Leading Soviet journals also came out in support of the demands of the Awami League and stressed the immediate need of a peaceful political solution of the problems in the sub-continent. Pravda expressed deep concern over the massacre in East Pakistan and observed that it was difficult to remain indifferent to the genocide in East Pakistan. P. Mezentsev's

32. Ibid., 10 November 1971.
commentary on 23 November 1971 admitted that the repression by military authorities was the source of tension in the entire sub-continent. Influx of refugees had put "a very heavy economic burden on India". Still the refugee problem and "serious difficulties" it created in the relations between India and Pakistan should not become "the cause of military conflict between them" and moderation was counselled.

The refugee problem has created serious difficulties in the relations between India and Pakistan. However, it should not become the cause of military conflict between them. The military administration should stop the reprisals against the East Pakistani population and take measures for millions of refugees to return home. Such a solution would, above all, be in accord with the interests of Pakistan itself and the cause of preserving peace on the sub-continent.[34]

Red Star, the Soviet Army Paper, blamed Pakistan for resorting to a military solution.35

United States Policy

White House reactions to events in South Asia were considered primarily in the light of their effect on the global strategic competition between the US and the Soviet


Union. For the Nixon Administration there was a great concern of demonstrating to the Chinese—in the first test of new relationship—that the United States was dependable and it would endorse the Chinese policy of checking the Soviet Union in South Asia. It was mainly to appease China that the United States went out of its way in extending all-out support to Pakistan. It was also a US expression of gratitude to Pakistan for its services in opening a channel to China. Pakistan was favoured as an earnest of goodwill to China which had befriended Pakistan against India and as a demonstration of US 'reliability' as an ally or partner.37

However, there was mounting public and congressional criticism of the repression in East Pakistan by the military regime and Nixon's policies came under fire. In August 1971 the House of Representatives passed a resolution calling for the suspension of military and economic assistance to Islamabad. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee followed suit. Senator Edward Kennedy did a splendid work, as Chairman of the subcommittee on


Refugees of the Senate Judiciary Committee, in arousing American public opinion against the repression in East Pakistan. He and Senator Charles Percy also led a fact-finding mission to India. Their report threw light on the sad plight of refugees and secured liberal US financial assistance for relief. The Nixon Administration's decision to spend large sums of money on humanitarian assistance was primarily motivated by a desire to reduce the barrage of criticism it was receiving from the media and the Congress, and to defuse pressures upon the White House to exert influence on Yahya Khan to make meaningful political concessions. The United States took the view that what was going on in Pakistan was "an internal matter" of that country and that Washington should move Islamabad towards political accommodation through understanding rather than pressure. In adopting this approach, Washington was also guided by the consideration of not jeopardising its opening towards China.

The Indo-Soviet Treaty came as a further irritant in US attitude towards the sub-continent. The US suspected India of helping in realizing the Soviet Union's

38. See Surjit Mansingh, n. 36, p. 87.
40. Kissinger, n. 11, p. 862.
'hegemonistic' ambitions in South Asia. The treaty was considered by the United States as an unfriendly measure. The normally pro-Pakistan US news weekly *Times* in its issue of August 23, 1971 commented: "The Soviet-Indian friendship treaty caught the Nixon Administration flat footed. Indian officials in New Delhi and Washington hastened to assure American policy-makers that the document was in no way directed against the United States and Pakistan as well. India pointed out that friendship with the Soviet Union or any other country does not prevent India from maintaining friendly relations with any third country". The weekly also pointed that "Washington was wounded and that wound was largely self-inflicted. In its overriding pre-occupation with India's two greatest enemies, Pakistan and China, the US simply left New Delhi nowhere to go but Moscow". Kissinger subsequently described the treaty as a "bomb shell" charging that "Moscow threw a lighted match into the powder keg".\(^41\) He thus gave vent to the US view that the Soviet Union was bent on dismembering Pakistan, and with India on its side, establishing its hegemony in South Asia.

Indira Gandhi visited Washington in November 1971. Nixon showed an appreciation of India's difficulties on

\(^{41}\) Van Hollen, n. 39, p. 347.
account of the refugee problem. But he could not see it as sufficient excuse for war. He tried to impress upon Indira Gandhi the need for exercising restraint. However, the Indian Prime Minister remained unconvinced. She found the prospects of the military government of Pakistan seeing reason very bleak. If at all that was to happen, everybody knew that only the United States could influence the West Pakistani leadership for a policy-change. Nixon seemed to be not inclined to do so. And, after the outbreak of hostilities on 3 December 1971, the United States swiftly moved to salvage Pakistan. It strongly pleaded the Pakistani case in the UN Security Council and made a valiant effort to absolve the West Pakistan military regime from its responsibility for the escalation of the crisis.\textsuperscript{42}

As a matter of fact, the crisis in Pakistan counted little in US policy calculations. The Administration was not inclined to go into the merits of the respective cases of India and Pakistan. Nixon and Kissinger made decisions on the basis of calculations about a global triangle between the US-China and the Soviet Union. They justified their tilt towards Pakistan as a reaction to Soviet

expansionism. They classed India as a Soviet client state intent on dismembering Pakistan. Kissinger himself explained US decisions during the war as a counter to the Soviet Union's 'highly inflammatory role'.

The Chinese Attitude

The Chinese took much the same position as the United States, but in a more outspoken and forthright fashion. Following a diplomatic note to New Delhi and a People's Daily editorial charging India with interference in the internal affairs of Pakistan, Premier Chou En-lai himself addressed a letter to President Yahya Khan on 12 April. The assurance was offered that "should the Indian expansionists dare to launch aggression" Peking would "firmly support the Pakistan Government and people in their just struggle to safeguard state sovereignty and national independence".

Within three months of the signing of the Indo-Soviet Treaty Bhutto led a politico-military delegation to China to appraise the Chinese leadership of the implications of the treaty and the security-threat to Pakistan. Bhutto sought specific guarantees from China in the event of

43. Surjit Mansingh, n. 36, p. 88.
44. Kissinger, n. 11, p. 874.
45. Quoted by Dilip Mukerjee, n. 4, p. 150.
joint Indo-Soviet moves. However, China made no commitment on military support. Only political support was assured. At a Pakistan Embassy reception, acting Foreign Minister Chi Peng-fei defined this support:

Our Pakistan friends may rest assured that should Pakistan be subjected to foreign aggression, the Chinese Government and people will, as always, resolutely support the Pakistan Government in their just struggle to defend their state sovereignty and national independence.[46]

Pakistan was a little disappointed over the absence of words "territorial integrity" and "national unity" in the afore-said statement. Obviously China did not want to make a public commitment on these matters. China was also unsure of its ability to act effectively against any Indo-Soviet move in East Pakistan. As regards Chinese help and co-operation in the case of a war between India and Pakistan, the Chinese left Bhutto with no doubt that Pakistan had better not expect any such help or intervention as China promised, and was serious in implementing during the war of 1965. Bhutto, however, presented a bold and confident front and declared at a news conference on 7 November that the results of the two-day discussions in Peking should be a deterrent to aggression in Asia.[47]

46. Times, 8 November 1971.

Yet, an outcome of Bhutto's visit was that China began to use international forums of discussions, such as the United Nations, for putting international pressure on India. In the UN Third Committee Chinese delegate Fu Hao on 19 November 1971 alleged, without naming, that India was interfering in Pakistan's internal affairs. He said:

The so-called question of refugees from East Pakistan came into being and developed into its present state due to a certain country's intervention in Pakistan's internal affairs, which has resulted in the present tension on the sub-continent.[48]

On 26 November 1971, Chiao Kuan-hua declared in the United Nations that Peking would support Pakistani people in their "just struggle against foreign aggression". He denounced the Indo-Soviet Treaty and criticised the Soviet Union for encouraging India to launch "bare faced armed aggression against Pakistan".[49]

China also considered Pakistan's military requirements favourably and the visit of a Chinese delegation including military officers in November 1971, was very significant. The delegation led by Vice Minister Li Shui-Ching discussed the military situation in East Pakistan with those concerned. Li Shui-Ching reassured Pakistan on Chinese support.[50] All the loud

49. Ibid., 3 December 1971, p. 18.
pronouncements and denunciations of Soviet and Indian policies notwithstanding, Chinese policy in South Asia had limitations and in the final analysis it can be seen that it was marked by great caution.

Soviet Union and the War

All efforts for a peaceful settlement of the East Pakistan crisis failed and by the end of November the grim realization dawned on all concerned that a war could not be averted. On 3 December 1971 Pakistan launched a pre-emptive air strike on eight Indian air fields in the Western sector and followed up this with a declaration of war against India. The Government of India filed a formal complaint, about Pakistani aggression, with the Secretary General of the United Nations.51

Soviet Union realized the danger inherent in a possible Chinese involvement in the conflict. It, therefore, came out strongly in support of India both in and out of the United Nations. A TASS statement of 5 December 1971 blamed Pakistan for the escalation of the crisis into a military conflict with India. It noted that there was a "growing resistance by the East Pakistan population to the mass repressions and persecutions". 51

51. See report of the Secretary General, relating to the situation in East Pakistan, to the Security Council in UN Document, S/10410/3 December 1971. Also see S/10410/Add., 4 December 1971.
Pakistan was also accused of starting the war by bombing and straffing a number of towns in north-western India. It also warned the Governments of all countries of the world against "involvement in the conflict" lest it should lead to "a further aggravation of the situation in the Hindustan peninsula".52

Participating in the UN debate, Agha Shahi, the representative of Pakistan, sharply attacked the Indo-Soviet Treaty and criticized the Soviet Union for supplying military hardware to India. He held the Soviet Union responsible for India's "subversion and aggression" against Pakistan while outwardly seeking to invoke the Tashkent spirit. He took exception to the TASS statement of 5 December 1971, which "in effect says that Pakistan was following a dangerous course in defending itself and resisting a military occupation and implied that Pakistan’s action even posed a threat to the Soviet Union’s security interests". He also found fault with the Soviet Union for referring to the Pakistani attacks of 3 December and ignoring "the large scale attacks on East Pakistan from all sides, which commenced on 21 November".53

52. The Hindustan Times, 6 December 1971.
53. UN Document, S/PV 1607, 5 December 1971, pp. 82-85.
The United States, as expected, threw its weight behind Pakistan's military regime. On December 5, it introduced a resolution in the Security Council calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities and withdrawal of troops from the border of India and Pakistan. As the resolution was anti-Indian in tone and content, the Soviet Union vetoed it. The Soviet representative Jacob Malik refuted the charges levelled by China and Pakistan against the Indo-Soviet Treaty. Defending the treaty, he said:

We are proud to have friendship with India and we cherish it like the apple of our eyes. This is Lenin's dream that we have realized. The relation between India and the Soviet Union are genuinely fraternal. China says that India wants to attack it, but who will believe it. It is another fairy story for children.[54]

Expressing concern over the developments in the sub-continent, Malik quoted the following excerpts from the TASS statement.

Guided by concern for the maintenance of peace, the Soviet Government repeatedly expressed to President Yahya Khan of Pakistan and to the Government of Pakistan its concern over the situation that had developed in the Hindustan peninsula in connection with the events in East Pakistan . . . . In approaching the Government of Pakistan with these considerations the Soviet Government acted in accordance with the principles of humanitarianism, wishing the Pakistan people well in the solution, in a

---

democratic way, of the complex problems facing the country . . . . In the face of the military threat now hanging over Hindustan, to which not a single peace-loving country can remain indifferent, the Soviet Union calls for a speedy end to the bloodshed and for a political settlement in East Pakistan on the basis of respect for the lawful rights and interests of its people. [55]

After vetoing the Peking-backed US proposal for immediate ceasefire and troops withdrawal, the Soviet Union put forward its own draft resolution calling for a political settlement "in East Pakistan which would inevitably result in cessation of hostilities". [56]

The Soviet Union also vetoed the draft resolution submitted by Belgium, Italy and Japan which called upon the Governments of India and Pakistan "as a first step for an immediate ceasefire and for a cessation of all military activities". [57]

Spartak Baglov's commentary in the Soviet Press on 8 December 1971 described the influx of 10 million East Pakistanis into India as "not a mere flow of refugees" but an event which drastically upset the balance of the Indian economy "affecting its security in the widest sense of the

55. UN Document, n. 53.
57. Ibid.
word and the outcome of all its political campaigns at home". He deplored "the evermore threatening statements from the Pakistani capital" and the warlike passions roused against India. "Mutual troop withdrawals" and "ceasefire" were not enough. The hotbed of war, he said, could not be extinguished without a simultaneous settlement in East Pakistan with account taken of the will expressed by the people".58

Pravda on 9 December 1971 accused China of playing "an instigator's role in exacerbating the situation in the Hindustan peninsula" and of pursuing "a policy of setting Asians against Asians", a policy palpably similar to the Guam Doctrine of the United States.59

Izvestia on 12 December 1971 stated that by giving military assistance to Pakistan both China and the United States had not only encouraged Pakistan to attack India but also helped it in the cruel suppression of the Bengali people. In doing so, it added, China had proceeded solely from the selfish motive of establishing its hegemony in Asia".60


60. Quoted by Raghunath Ram, Soviet Policy Towards Pakistan (New Delhi, 1983) p. 220.
In the Security Council the Soviet Union supported the Indian position that a representative of Bangladesh should be allowed to address it. This was in a way a Soviet recognition of the Bangladesh government and was in sharp contrast to the Chinese position that the "so-called government was another Manchukuo". The far-fetched comparison with Manchukuo brought an angry retort from the Soviet delegate who charged China of "kissing the iron boots of militarists who trampled upon the rights of the people". Malik asked some pointed questions to the Chinese delegate, "What has Manchukuo to do with East Pakistan? Are you aware that in East Pakistan there was an expression of the will of the people and that 167 seats out of 313 in the National Assembly were obtained by the elected representatives of East Pakistan? Are you aware what happened there, are you aware that their rights were downtrodden by the iron boots of militarists?"\(^{61}\)

When the question was transferred to the UN General Assembly with the Sino-US support, the Soviet delegate exposed the Washington-Peking conspiracy in South Asia and their 'hypocritical' concern for peace.\(^{62}\) Soviet Union took the stand that the Chinese policies would please only

---


the imperialists. Referring to the Chinese accusation that India was interfering in the internal affairs of Pakistan, the Soviet delegate said in the General Assembly: "It was very much to the liking of Portuguese colonialists, butchers and stiflers of some African states like Mozambique and Guinea . . . ".63

The UN General Assembly on 8 December passed a resolution sponsored by Argentina calling upon India and Pakistan "to take forthwith all measures for an immediate ceasefire and for the withdrawal of their armed forces" from each other's territory, resumption of negotiations and voluntary return of the refugees to East Pakistan.64 This US-backed resolution was opposed by the Soviet Union on the ground that it would "serve only to confuse the UN and complicate the situation". "Without the decisive rapid and effective elimination of the main causes of the conflict and the decision of the destiny of the majority of Pakistani population, any one-sided push would lead to nothing"--the Soviet delegate observed.65

63. The Times of India, 9 December 1971.

64. See Department of State Bulletin, 27 December 1971, pp. 727-728.

On December 5, 6, and 13, the Soviet Union cast vetoes on US-backed resolutions that supported Pakistan by calling for a ceasefire and the withdrawal of troops.66 The Soviet Union's firm stand in support of India thwarted all US initiatives to involve the world body acting to India's disadvantage in the war. India got plenty of time, before the inevitable ceasefire to conjure up a victory and consolidate the gains.

Had the United States and China, intended military intervention on Pakistan's behalf—they were deterred from doing so by reports that the Soviet Union would invoke the security provisions of the Indo-Soviet Treaty. Following the announcement of the movement of an American naval Task Force (led by Carrier Enterprise) to the Bay of Bengal on 13 December, Soviet Union informed India that the Soviet naval units were being ordered into the same area as a countermeasure.67 China was deterred by reports that the Soviet Union would take diversionary action in Xinjiang.68 China knew very well that a large number of Soviet forces,


68. Surjit Mansingh, n. 36, p. 147.
including forces equipped with nuclear weapons, were poised along the Sino-Soviet frontier.69

The war went India's way, proving India superior in Air, on Land and at Sea.70 Upon actual surrender by the Pakistani Commander, India declared a unilateral ceasefire on the Western Front effective from 17 December. President Yahya Khan conveyed his acceptance of the ceasefire through US and Swiss diplomatic channels in New Delhi.

The decisive end to the war facilitated recognition of Bangladesh. The first big power to announce its recognition of the new state was the Soviet Union on 25 January 1972.

It was also widely recognized that the liberation of Bangladesh was made possible because of the moral and political support extended by the Soviet Union.71

The Hindustan Times of 18 December 1971 said:

The Soviet Union had stood by this country and has shown genuine understanding of the underlying forces at work in South Asia. The Indo-Soviet friendship endangers none and is not a threat that has to be countered.


70. Dilip Mukerjee, "First Round to India", The Times of India, 12 December 1971.

71. The Times of India, 17 December 1971.
Swaran Singh, the External Affairs Minister, said in an interview with the Soviet news agency TASS on 17 February 1972, that the Indo-Soviet Treaty had shown that it is an effective instrument for the maintenance of universal peace and international security and development not only of our two countries but the region as a whole. The treaty is in a true sense, a treaty of peace.

The Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty, as an article in Pravda put it, acted as a "shield which protected South Asia from the interference of outside forces during the Indo-Pakistan conflict".72

The Bangladesh war resulted in an enhancement of Soviet Union’s international image, especially its position in Asia.73 China’s sharpest attacks in the UN debates were directed against the Soviet Union labelling India as a "pawn" of Soviet expansionism. However, barring lip service, China could do nothing to prevent the disintegration of Pakistan in 1971. China might have had aggressive designs. But those were effectively countered by the Soviet warning that diversionary action would be taken should India be attacked.74

72. Quoted by Raghunath Ram, n. 60, p. 222.
74. See the speeches of the Chinese representatives in the UN Security Council on 5 December 1971 and the General Assembly on 7 December 1971. See GAOR, n. 65.
In an interview with an eminent Indian journalist, Bhutto refused to admit that Pakistan had been defeated by India. He pointed out that Pakistan had plenty of fighting left in the western front. According to him the limited Indian success was made possible by the Soviet Union. He remarked: "We have not militarily been defeated by India, we have been defeated by Russia".75

A distinguished Indian analyst reported that, after the war, the Soviet Union was "generally perceived as the dominant external power in South Asia" among the Asian countries which he visited.76 There was no doubt that the US and Chinese policies in South Asia received a drubbing. Obviously, the events of 1971, at both the global and the regional level, clinched the issue for India and the Soviet Union.77 The Indo-Soviet Treaty had stood the test of the crisis of 1971 and proved to be the best bet for India's security in South Asia. It was also very effective as a guarantor of South Asian peace and stability in general. Had it not been for the treaty the


United States and China would have militarily intervened in the conflict and the India-Pakistan war would have been prolonged. Even if we accept Henry Kissinger’s claim\textsuperscript{78} that Indira Gandhi’s unconditional ceasefire in the West on 16 December 1971 was a "reluctant decision" resulting from Soviet pressure, that shows that the Soviet Union worked for peace and stability in South Asia. The fact remains that even if there had been any pressure on India to agree to a ceasefire, that came only after India had achieved its military and political goals. Soviet blocking of possible US-instigated UN actions enabled India sufficient time to launch a successful operation. The Indian victory had enhanced Soviet image. At the same time this victory exposed China to Asian eyes as a virtual paper tiger.\textsuperscript{79} It lent legitimacy and credibility to the Soviet Union’s quest, under the Brezhnev leadership, for a larger role in Asia. South Asia was the first testing ground of the new forward policy and here it was remarkably successful.

A careful analysis of the Soviet Union’s policy in 1971 will reveal that it was not drastically different from its attitude towards the South Asian security

\textsuperscript{78} See Henry A. Kissinger, n. 11, p. 905.

\textsuperscript{79} The Hindu, 14 December 1971.
problems in 1965. It was obviously neutral in 1965. And it successfully played the role of the peace maker. In 1971, in a logical continuation of policy, the Soviet Union tried its best to avert a war. It never sought the dismemberment of Pakistan. Pakistan was repeatedly exhorted to find a political solution for the crisis which the Soviet Union viewed as an internal matter of that country. Soviet Union's main concern was the prevention of outside interference to exploit the situation. Pakistan was asked not to play China's game in South Asia. But the West Pakistan military leadership refused to budge as it vainly hoped that the United States and China would win the war for it. Disappointment was in store for them and the Soviet Union with India's co-operation successfully contained the United States and China in the region. The victory of India, a close ally and a treaty-partner was widely regarded as a political and moral victory for the Soviet Union.

Even in victory, the Soviet Union did not want to humiliate Pakistan. There were reports that the Soviet Union used its influence on India to exercise restraint in the western sector. This was actually done in Soviet Union's national interest and in consonance with its policy in South Asia, formulated in the mid 1960s.
Kissinger was mistaken in his claim that the Soviet Union restrained India because of the fear of US intervention and a US threat to cancel detente and the Moscow summit for relaxing the cold war. Pakistan’s disintegration was not a Soviet objective. Soviet Union knew that Pakistan was China’s client state and a pawn in China’s game plan for South Asia. China was checked and exposed. Even with US support, China could not act in favour of Pakistan. Here the Soviet Union had achieved its policy target.

Support was extended to India for the liberation of Bangladesh. This was also achieved. Soviet Union did not want to go beyond that. It appeared that just like the United States, the Soviet Union also wanted West Pakistan to remain in tact. A distinguished Indian scholar saw a duality in Soviet attitudes at the time. As a matter of fact, this was not a question of duality of objectives. From a regional point of view, the objectives of the Soviet Union were limited. For it, the containment of China was a priority. It was partially accomplished with the victory of India, China’s adversary. But efforts had to be continued to wean away Pakistan from Chinese influence. Hence the Soviet Union’s reported anxiety to bring about a ceasefire at that time and prevent further damage to Pakistan’s state structure. As a regional

80. See Surjit Mansingh, n. 36, p. 148.
power, India was bound to have had divergences in outlook from the perceptions and policies of a Great Power. But in this case there is no material to prove that Indira Gandhi wanted Pakistan's dismemberment. She had one main objective. That was achieved, by the victory which formalised India's long-standing claim to regional pre-eminence in the region. It may be noted that South Asia came to be talked of as a regional entity, for the first time, in the early 1970s. Naturally, the Soviet Union had reasons to be satisfied with its standing in the power equations of this region. Its position, as the dominant external power in South Asia, seemed to be unassailable at the end of the India-Pakistan war of December 1971.