



POLITICO-MILITARY STRATEGY OF THE BANGLADESH LIBERATION WAR, 1971

Guru Saday Batabyal



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This book critically examines the politico-military strategy of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh during the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. What began as a power struggle and cultural conflict between West and East Pakistan, later compelled India to intervene—an intervention that decisively shaped and influenced the geo-politics of the region and the global order.

This volume is a systematic study of the situation of events, operational art and tactics, cold war politics, international reactions, and their impact on the formulation of the national grand strategy of all three nations. The book discusses various key themes such as the creation of Pakistan and events leading to its secession, the military geography of East Pakistan, state of armed forces of India and Pakistan and India's humanitarian intervention, the role of Mukti Bahini, and the ambiguous stance of the United Nations in the war. The book offers an appraisal of the performances of the opposing forces and reflects on the inevitability of war and its outcome. It also gives an overview of the state formation of the three nations, encompassing the defining moments of the modern history of these South Asian countries and highlighting the socio-economic progress they have made half a century after the liberation war.

A compelling treatise in the history of politico-military strategy, this book will be of interest to scholars and researchers of politics and international relations, partition studies, modern history, military history, South Asian studies, international security, defence and strategic studies, language politics, Islamic history, and refugee and diaspora studies. It will also appeal to general readers interested in the histories of Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India.

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To those who made the supreme sacrifice during the Bangladesh
Liberation War, 1971



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CONTENTS

<i>List of illustrations</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	<i>xxv</i>
<i>Glossary of military terms</i>	<i>xxix</i>

1 The idea of Pakistan and the road to Bangladesh	1
2 Art of war: nuances of strategy, operational art, and tactics	24
3 Military geography of East Pakistan: its implications on formulation of war strategy and conduct of battles	35
4 Strategic imperatives of cold war geopolitics in South Asia and the role of external powers during 1971 Indo-Pakistan War	49
5 Politico-military strategy of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh government in exile	76
6 Planning and conduct of operation	101
7 Mukti Bahini: strategy modus operandi and contribution	140
8 Air and naval operations: strategy and execution	161
9 Role of the United Nations during the Bangladesh Liberation War and its effect on war strategy	183

viii Contents

10 Appraisal of the war strategy, and its execution through the prisms of operational art and the principles of war	198
11 Reflection and war highlights	216
12 Years beyond the liberation war	254
<i>Appendices</i>	275
<i>Bibliography</i>	303
<i>Index</i>	311

ILLUSTRATIONS

Maps

3.1	Map of East Pakistan-1971	36
6.1	Bangladesh Liberation War-1971: operational plan of the opposing forces	111
6.2	Planning and conduct of 33 Corps Operation	112
6.3	Planning and conduct of 2 Corps operation	117
6.4	Planning and conduct of 4 Corps operation	121
6.5	Planning and conduct of 101 Communication Zone Operation	126
6.6	Advance to Dacca	129
6.7	Comparative Force Level in the Western Theatre	133
7.1	Sector-wise area of operation of the Mukti Bahini	147
8.1	Overview of Air and Naval Operations	163

Figures

1.1	Distribution of various language groups in Pakistan	9
1.2	Government spending 1947-55	14
1.3	Trade between East and West Pakistan: 1948-70	15
2.1	Comprehensiveness of strategy	26
2.2	The Lykke model	28
6.1	Signing of instrument of surrender	131
7.1	Mukti Bahini organisational structure	142
8.1	Comparative Strength of the Opposing Naval Forces	165
8.2	Comparative Force Level in the Western Theatre	169
9.1	The Influx of Refugees	185

Tables

1.1	Representation of two wings in civil and military services	15
3.1	Month-wise Temperature Conditions	39
8.1	Overall Losses of the Opposing Naval Forces	174
8.2	IAF Inventory at the Time of 1971 Indo-Pak War	175
8.3	PAF Inventory in 1971	175

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Dated: 7th March 2020

Guru Saday Batabyal

PREFACE

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.

—Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities¹

For the first time, 23 years after its creation, a free and fair general election was held in Pakistan in December 1970—not by any democratically elected head of the state but by the military dictator, General Agha Muhammad Yahya Khan, Chief Martial Law Administrator and President of Pakistan. The Bengali nationalist party, Awami League led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, notched a landslide victory in the eastern wing of Pakistan, securing majority in the Pakistan National Assembly. It is debatable whether the election was held with good intent or was just a pretence, but it is undeniable that the result was a real shock to the establishment in Pakistan. After many rounds of discussions, Yahaya promised to convene the newly elected national assembly on 3 March 1971. And when Mujibur Rahman was all set to form the government and become Prime Minister of Pakistan, his plan was usurped by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, a leader from West Pakistan whose party PPP had secured fewer seats. After all, it was too much for Bhutto and his fellow supporters, including many generals and bureaucrats from West Pakistan, to accept Bengali leaders from East Pakistan as their rulers. The trouble started when Bhutto aired his views that “winning the election is not enough” and came out with a bizarre compromise of two Prime Ministers for the two wings of Pakistan: Mujibur Rahman in the East and he in the West. Bhutto’s formula did not appease Mujib, and in a mammoth protest rally in Dacca on 7 March, shifting from his previous stance on autonomy for East Pakistan, he announced, “This time it is [a] struggle for independence.” Further negotiations

for a constitutionally acceptable solution spearheaded by Yahaya Khan reached a deadlock because both Mujib and Bhutto stood their ground so resolutely that neither was ready to concede an inch to the other. Yahaya ran out of patience, as did thousands of Bengalis, who thronged the streets of Dacca in protest and brought the administration to a standstill. Bhutto was unrelenting. President Yahya and his generals fell into his trap and chose a harsh military solution, aiming to terrify the restive Bengali population into quietude.²

The egregiousness of ‘Operation Searchlight,’ launched by the Pakistani Army from 25 March 1971 in order to suppress the Bengali nationalist movement, resulted in civil war in East Pakistan. Hundreds of thousands of people got killed and numerous hapless women of all ages were raped. These mass rapes and killings created such terror that almost ten million people, majority of them Hindus, fled to the neighbouring India, leaving their home and hearth. The magnitude of refugee problem, President Yahya Khan’s government’s disallowance of any political space to Mujib’s Awami League, and the cold response of international bodies pushed India to become a partner in the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh. Indira Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India, became deeply anguished with the flow of the events and its likely fallouts. But she responded in a calibrated manner and did not take any hasty action to recognise Bangladesh as an independent nation; nor did she, under pressure, opt for an immediate military option without exhausting all other avenues. India’s foreign affairs minister, Swaran Singh, was averse to war at such an early stage as he felt the diplomacy route had not been exhausted yet. And the Chiefs of the Services, particularly the army chief, Sam Manekshaw, wanted adequate time and resources to prepare the war machine for a successful campaign: a grim reminder to Indira Gandhi of what happened to the unprepared Indian army in 1962 during the war with China. India’s Ambassador to Soviet Russia, D.P. Dhar, whose views Indira Gandhi respected, opined that “an all-out war at this juncture is not the only alternative. India’s strategy should be to use the Bengali human material and the Bengali terrain to launch a comprehensive war of liberation.”³

No sooner had the Pakistan army launched Operation Searchlight on the fateful night of 25 March 1971, that Bengali soldiers of the East Bengal Rifles revolted and created the nucleus of *Mukti Joddhas* (liberation warriors). Their nationalistic spirit and courageous act spontaneously motivated thousands of men and women from all walks of life to join the liberation army. India condemned the brutal military suppression in East Pakistan and appealed to Yahaya Khan to adhere to the election verdict. Burdened with gargantuan refugee crisis and pained by the blatant violation of human rights, as part of the strategy, instead of a full-scale interstate war, ab initio India intervened by covertly sponsoring a Bengali guerrilla insurgency within East Pakistan. India secretly supported *Mukti Bahini* in training, equipping, and organising—a colossal project managed by the Indian army and Border Security Force through training camps along the border, initiated by India’s external intelligence service, Research and Analysis Wing under R.N. Kao, who worked closely with the liberation warriors engaged in guerrilla warfare.⁴

India, Pakistan, and the government of Bangladesh in exile, all three stakeholders in the Bangladesh cauldron of 1971, launched diplomatic offensives to convince the world of their viewpoints. India, through her emissaries, briefed world leaders about the gross human rights violations by the Pakistani army in East Pakistan, which forced ten million Bengali refugees to take shelter in India, causing unprecedented socioeconomic problems for the latter. India also urged international communities to intervene and convince Pakistan to follow the election verdict and arrange the safe return of the refugees to their homes, along with the release of the imprisoned leader Mujibur Rahman. The Provisional Government of Bangladesh in exile made efforts within their humble means to sensitise the international community about the misery, mass rape, genocide, and subjugation they were facing, as well as demand the right to self-determination and the release of their popular leader Rahman, who was lodged in solitary confinement in an undisclosed location in West Pakistan. Pakistan's main line of diplomatic offensives was on the issue of the threat to its territorial integrity; they also tried to convince the world that the demands for autonomy in East Pakistan by the Awami League, which later changed to demands for independence, was the game plan of India to break Pakistan. The USA, the UK, China, and Muslim nations were sympathetic to Pakistan's cries on the issue of Indian interference in their internal matters and no solution was forthcoming.

The Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty, signed in August 1971, was the path-breaking masterstroke of Indira Gandhi, where diplomacy as part of grand strategy had been best used. She made a whirling trip around the world to convince leaders to pressurise Pakistan into respecting the election verdict. Her aggressive and firm stand irritated the Kissinger and Nixon duo who were already inclined towards Pakistan and Indira returned empty handed from her trip to the United States. Her final attempt to find a resolution to the crisis did not succeed and at last, after exhausting all other options, she opted for a military solution, with a plan to attack Pakistan on 4 December 1971. Meanwhile the crisis deepened—Yahya further lost grip over the situation and his nerve too. Taking a cue from the Israeli 1967 war with the Arabs, the Pakistani air force launched pre-emptive air assaults on multiple Indian air bases on 3 December 1971. Instead of India attacking, Pakistan attacked first, which gave legitimacy to India declaring war against Pakistan. The Bangladesh crisis triggered a regional war between India and Pakistan, which added a global dimension when the United States, the Soviet Union, and China joined the brinkmanship that could have ignited a military clash among superpowers—possibly even a nuclear confrontation.⁵

The Bangladesh campaign, a “two-week swift war,” culminated with the unconditional surrender of the Pakistani armed forces and the capture of 93,000 prisoners of war (POW). Post-World War II, it was a resounding military victory and evidently, the strategy, planning, and conduct of this campaign have been a matter of great professional inquiry. The lightning campaign that ended with the liberation of Bangladesh has been studied from different angles, yet the war still has areas that are less explored. One such less explored thought-provoking

area is “the evolution and sequential formulation of the politico-military strategy of Bangladesh Liberation War,” which I chose for my doctoral thesis. This book draws heavily on the research and reading I did for my PhD thesis. A topic of such enormity, encompassing diverse disciplines, will have parameters with an interplay of heterogeneous beliefs. The fundamental problem that confronts the authors of military history, geopolitics, and international relations is the conceptual problem of analysis. The existing historiography on the creation of Bangladesh had to be carefully treaded as it is almost impossible to find history in its purest form. The literature and scholarly works on the 1971 Liberation War could be classified in the following categories:

Official Records or Government Documents

Books/articles written by the various categories of participants of the war

Non-participant accounts.

It is difficult to piece together facts from the primary sources when its distortion blurs the facts chronicled in different forms such as notes, army situation reports, inter-ministerial letters, embassy reports that could be at times based on unconfirmed reports, imagination, and hearsay. which are basic source of information. Mostly, secondary sources are beset with the nationality biases of the writers; the views expressed or facts mentioned in their work do not necessarily carry an objective neutral view. Besides, as generally happens, the victors and the vanquished tell the same tales differently, and the former is more believed. But thankfully, a handful of participants from all sides have given truthful accounts of the events of the war, highlighting the shortcomings in planning and execution while recognising the good soldierly qualities of their enemy and appreciating their plans. No official war reports giving the full details of the Indo-Pak War of 1971 have been published by the governments of India and Pakistan, and although the Bangladeshi government has come out with official records that cover some aspects of their part of the story, it is not all encompassing.

Military historian of repute Major General D.K. Palit wrote, “War can be studied from various perspectives. From the functional point of view, it can be classified into three main aspects, planning, execution, and logistics broadly... [the] purpose of war planning is to place the armed forces of the nation at maximum possible advantage over those of the enemy before the commencement of operations and at each subsequent step thereafter.”⁶ War planning at higher military levels mainly deals with strategy, whereas the lower levels deal with tactics. The translation of strategy is done through conducting a series of operations at the tactical level. Politico-military strategy is part and parcel of grand strategy, which is the central theme of this book. The book, while explaining the theoretical construct of grand strategy, crisply examines how leaders who were the main actors during this historical process perceived and steered the great art of grand strategy.

During my service in the Indian Army, I was fortunate to hear Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw, a man larger than life, speaking on the 1971 Bangladesh

Liberation War a couple of times. As the Army Chief of India during the 1971 War, he was the main architect of the military victory. For writing this book, I endeavoured to make use of maximum possible primary and secondary sources available in various countries and spoke to many prominent participants whose names figure in the acknowledgement. This book attempts to present a factual history of the Bangladesh Liberation War, after scanning the historical panorama with academic rigor and joining the dots, while also taking into consideration realism and the compulsions of all stakeholders. The book comprises twelve chapters, which begin with a trace of the history of the partition of India and thereafter identifies the fault lines that alienated Bengalis, triggering the Liberation War. The book also covers Cold War rivalry in South Asia and role of the United Nations and tracks the evolution of grand strategy, military plan, and its execution; and ends with a stocktaking of the present state of affairs of the states in the Indian subcontinent that fifty years ago fought the liberation war. Place names like Calcutta, Dacca etc. have been spelled as was in vogue at the time. An overview of the book and the key issues covered are:

Chapter 1, titled “Idea of Pakistan and Road to Bangladesh,” traces the defining moments of history that led to the construction of Pakistan, the reasons for Bengali Muslims joining the fray, and—in less than a quarter century—its dismemberment. I have tried to get answers to the moot question of why Pakistan, constructed on the foundation of religion, succumbed at a very nascent stage.

Chapter 2 deals with the “Art of War” and explains nuances of strategy, operational art, and tactics, with a view to facilitating readers with better clarity on their definitions, attributes, and correlation with other components of state machinery in the conduct of war. Strategic planning is an evolving process that needs to take note of various internal and external parameters. These parameters have been discussed along with a risk calculus model to check the viability of the evolved strategy. The theoretical concept and application of operational art in a multi-theatre war have been postulated and the concept of military tactics is explained here.

Chapter 3 highlights the military geography of East Pakistan, its implications on the formulation of war strategy, and the conduct of operations. To make a campaign plan successful, a military commander must have an eye for the ground and detailed knowledge of the topography of the area of operation. Here I have discussed major aspects of the geography of East Pakistan, including the topography, terrain, habitation, communication system, weather, lay of the ground, etc., which have a direct impact on the formulation of war strategy, military planning, the conduct of operation, and, most importantly, the timing of the campaign. The chapter ends with deductions of all the essential parameters that emerge from the study of military geography, which are essentially factored into formulating campaign strategy.

Chapter 4 deals with “Geopolitics in South Asia covering the period from 1947 to 1971, and the Role of External Powers during 1971 Indo-Pakistan War: its Effect on Formulation of Strategy.” South Asia is important because of its connection with vital sea-lines of communication in the Indian Ocean. Routes

connecting Europe, Africa, and Asia pass through this region, which makes it strategically the most significant geographical location in the world. Historically South Asia has witnessed many invaders for thousands of years, ending with the British suzerainty. British India was the base from which England projected its power towards China and Russia, as part of the infamous “Great Game” in the nineteenth century. But with the decolonisation of South Asia, the situation changed and Cold War rival powers the U.S.A. and U.S.S.R developed greater interest in the area. India and Pakistan, the two major countries in this region were divided between the United States, the Soviet Union, and China. Although India followed the principle of non-alignment as part of its foreign policy, during the Bangladesh crisis it became an important ally of the Soviet Union. Its regional rival Pakistan, already a member of NATO and SEATO, functioned as a broker for the West in relation to China and the countries in the Middle East and Gulf areas.⁷

This chapter unfolds the strategic imperatives of the Cold War imbroglio and the interest of these superpowers in South Asia, their power equations in the region, and their influence that shaped the politico-military strategy of the Bangladesh Liberation War. The chapter ends with the story of superpowers joining the brinkmanship with gun-boat diplomacy, which added a global dimension to the Bangladesh Liberation War.

Chapter 5 is devoted to covering the main theme of the book. It describes the sequential evolution of national strategy of all the stakeholders, i.e., India, Pakistan and the Provisional Government of Bangladesh, as well as the finalisation of the politico-military strategy. India’s Prime Minister Indira Gandhi went about step by step, informing the Indian parliament what was happening in East Pakistan and how brutal military operation and terror forced people in the millions to leave their homes and become refugees. India, as part of the strategy, allowed the Bangladesh government to function from Calcutta and secretly supported Mukti Bahini (the armed liberation warriors of Bangladesh). Indira, through her outreach initiatives, won the confidence of the opposition parties and simultaneously appealed to Yahya to arrange the return of the refugees by installing Mujibur Rahaman’s Awami League government and respecting the election verdict. India, Pakistan, as well as the Provisional Government of Bangladesh intensified diplomatic offensives to garner support of friendly countries. The USA tilted towards Pakistan after the latter secretly brokered America’s rapprochement with China. In their strategic calculation, Pakistan factored help of all forms from America and China in the eventuality of war with India. Through a friendship treaty with the Soviet Union, India ensured counterbalance. But diplomacy could not resolve the dispute because many nations gave more importance to the sanctity of the geography of Pakistan over the aspirations of its citizens. During the war, Pakistan followed the strategic dictum “defence of the east lies in the west,” signifying a major offensive operation in the India’s western sector and a defensive war in its eastern wing so that the bulk of the Indian forces would be tied up in the west, thereby sparing the eastern wing from any major

decisive war. India's strategy was the exact opposite: a quick multiprong offensive operations in the east and an offensive defence in the west. Mukti Bahini changed their strategy thrice as the Liberation War progressed. Initially they undertook a couple of conventional military operations rather unsuccessfully, followed by the adoption of guerrilla warfare, creating an impact, and in the final stage joined the Indian army to form an allied force. The Indian army, supported by the Mukti Bahini, was tasked with racing to the river line in East Pakistan and, as they progressed swiftly through series of blitzkrieg operations, the finish line shifted to Dacca. Pakistan tarried too long in the western theatre where decisive battles were to be fought and made a blunder in their political strategy by trying to resolve a political issue with force, without realising that the human spirit is more powerful than any amount of force.

Chapter 6 looks at the planning and conduct of the military operations of the opposing forces. The tactical positioning of troops is done according to the strategy evolved during the planning stage. The quantum of force available in each sector and their objectives are discussed, in order to have a glimpse of "troops to tasks." In East Pakistan, Niazi with about five divisions at his disposal had adopted a forward-defence posture and prepared a series of defence lines based on the fortress concept of defence. The war strategies of both India and Pakistan had a symbiotic relationship with the two fronts. Operational maps are used in the chapter and the timeline is mentioned, to facilitate understanding the progress of military operations. Some heroic actions have been highlighted to reiterate the importance of leadership during battles.

Chapter 7 is dedicated to explaining composition of the Mukti Bahini, its strategy, modus operandi, and their contribution in the Liberation War. It comprised different categories of freedom fighters and men and women from all walks of life. The formation of Mukti Bahini went through various stages following the brutal attack of the Pakistani Army on 25 March 1971 and grew into a large and complex organisation with different kinds of capability. The Teliapara document prepared under the supervision of Col. M.A.G. Osmani, Commander-in-Chief of Mukti Bahini, and ratified by the Bangladesh government in exile outlined the strategy of the Liberation War. India's involvement in training, arming, organising, and guiding operations is covered. In the end, an appraisal is carried out to evaluate contribution of Mukti Bahini towards birth of Bangladesh. In nutshell, it can be said that Mukti Bahini, through its guerrilla warfare, became a "threat in being," which confused and demoralised Pakistan army. They made up for their deficiency in arms, ammunition, and at times tactical shortcomings through their spirit and blood and contributed hugely towards the overall success in the Liberation War. Their heroic actions are folklore in Bangladesh and they are remembered with great reverence.

Chapter 8 presents the air and naval operations of the opposing forces, including their organisations, state of inventory, strategy, tasks, and executions. Statistical data have been used to compare the combat potential of the opposing forces. On 3 December 3 1971, Pakistan carried out massive pre-emptive air bombings,

code-named *Operation Chengiz Khan*, targeting 11 airbases and air defence radars along the northern and western parts of India but failed to inflict major damage on the Indian air force. As a sequel, India formally announced the commencement of war along with heavy retaliation by the Indian Air Force (IAF) in both the theatres. Within the next two days, the IAF damaged runways and crippled the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) radars and aircrafts located in East Pakistan, making them fully non-operational. This facilitated achieving air supremacy in the east, which sped up army operations. The Indian navy ably assisted by the IAF carried out a devastating raid, code-named Operation Trident in the port of Karachi damaging much of the oil reservoirs and ammunition depots. The navy also secured sea lines of communication, ensuring the safety of commercial ships. For the first time since independence, the Indian navy played a major role during war. What surprises the military historians is defensive use of PAF as the war progressed, possibly fearing damage to these costly aircrafts as the result of the war was written on the wall. The Pakistani navy was much smaller comparing to the Indian one, but within its means carried out a commendable job. Here I also examine how the navy and air force played important strategic roles that influenced the tactical situation on several occasions. The naval war took on a global dimension when America dispatched Task Force-74 in the Bay of Bengal towards end of the war, with Soviet and UK warships also joining the brinkmanship, which could have erupted into a nuclear conflict. The scene changed after it was clear that the fall of Dacca was imminent and there was no way it could be saved.

Chapter 9 unfolds the role of United Nations during 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. On 9 December 1948, the UN unanimously adopted a convention on genocide, identifying it as a crime “committed with the intention to destroy in whole or part a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.” Its sole purpose was prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide. Despite international attention, the UN did not condemn or interdict the mass killing in Bangladesh. Even the Hamdoor Rahman Commission has, in its findings, brought out the fact that the Pakistani army specially targeted the Hindu community there (not that others were spared). Peggy Durdin, in a piece in *The New York Times* in early May, called the killing “one of the bloodiest slaughters of modern times.”⁸ But the genocide went unrecognised. Drama and climaxes at the UN during the Bangladesh campaign are highlighted in this chapter, along with its actions and inactions. The UN Security Council (UNSC) is the principle organ responsible for ensuring peace and it is the only body whose decisions are binding on all member states. Throughout the liberation struggle, the Pakistani army committed all manner of human rights violations, yet the UN remained a mute spectator because the UNSC never was unanimous, as its response was aligned with Cold War politics. The voting pattern in the UN General Assembly was an unambiguous statement: members acted only from the point of view of their national interest, a cruel realism, and hid behind the curtain of the territorial integrity of Pakistan, closing their eyes to all other ethical, moral, and humane issues. Salient UN deliberations from 3 to 23 December and its strategic imperatives are examined here.

Chapter 10 looks at the war strategy and its execution through the prisms of the Principles of War. The Principles of War provide an appropriate foundation for all military activities and guide commanders and their staffs in the planning and conduct of warfare. The Principles of War are a set of guidelines evolved from the Napoleonic era and in simplistic terms they are “dos and don’ts.” From the point of view of the established norms of military history, a campaign study is not complete without putting it through the prism of the Principles of War, through which reasons for success or failure are found. The application of operational art is examined here to ascertain how efficiently resources were used to achieve strategic objectives.

Chapter 11 encompasses reflections and highlights of the war. From the theoretical perspective, this war can be defined as an armed conflict within, between, and among states, which can be traced according to an ascending dimension of participation—students’ rebellion, mass insurrection, armed insurgency, guerrilla war, civil war, and regional war—culminating in a systemic war with a global dimension.⁹ War is a serious business where synergy between the political and military leadership is of utmost importance. Each must understand the point of view of the other and the long-term implications of their acts and decisions. No country should go to war unless there is a clear-cut, well-postulated aim and the means to achieve that aim. In war, unlike a game, there are no runners up and therefore victory must be assured or else a country ought to invest in options other than war. Wartime leaders must have firm resolve, a cool head to ensure that decisions are always calculated and that the war aim is carefully selected and efforts and resources are harnessed adequately to ensure a logical conclusion. True leaders in war must be both thinkers and men of action; usually they are a rare commodity. Some important politico-military leaders of 1971 Liberation War are discussed here to emphasise how leadership matters to a country in crisis and how that charts the destiny of a nation. The Bangladesh Liberation War has given a new dimension to international law. It stands out as a unique case of humanitarian intervention where India used the military to protect human rights without any sanction from the UN. The war is also a classic instance of forgotten and unrecognised genocide. This tragic and ghastly period remains excluded from the list of genocides of the modern world. Both these aspects are covered, albeit briefly, in this section.

Chapter 12 concludes the book with a brief glance at the state formation and nation building in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India—three important South Asian countries—half a century after the Liberation War. Not too long ago these warring states under the British Raj made one vast nation—India. The emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 altered the geography of Pakistan, negating Jin-nah’s two-nation theory, based on which Pakistan was born. It was a triumph of culture over religion. When the fall of Dacca was imminent, Bhutto was in New York to plead Pakistan’s case at the UN. He knew that a military government in Pakistan was untenable and, on return home, replaced Yahya, fulfilling his much-cherished dream. Mujibur Rahman, on release from the prison in

Pakistan, returned to Bangladesh to a tumultuous welcome and became the head of government. Though Jinnah and Mujib, founding fathers of their countries, pursued the idea of secular democratic government, soon their countries drifted from the envisioned paths of their founding fathers. Both Pakistan and Bangladesh changed their constitutions to make Islam their official religion. And both witnessed rapid growth of religious fundamentalists and the sporadic persecution of religious minorities. Both countries in next few decades oscillated between military rule and rule by the elected. In India, the military has remained apolitical but the same is not true in Pakistan, where the army chief remains the most powerful man. The military in Bangladesh of late has been distancing itself from politics. While India's state-building process has been more successful, Pakistan is still a fragile and crisis-ridden state, with some viewing it as a failed state, and Bangladesh can be considered a quasi-democracy, though in the socioeconomic sector the country is progressing well and is far ahead of Pakistan. India is the third largest Muslim country in the world and has maintained its secular credentials, which are enshrined in its constitution, though occasional violence due to conflicts between inter-religious groups do occur. Fortunately for India, no major riot has happened post those in 2002 in Godhra (Gujrat). All three of them have certain disturbing aspects in common to varying degrees; these are corruption, illiteracy, disease, malnutrition, unemployment, religious intolerance, and terrorism to name a few.

Kashmir is an enduring hotspot to which the two nuclear nations India and Pakistan have found no amicable resolution. After the abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, withdrawing special status of Kashmir and bifurcating the state of Jammu and Kashmir, the imbroglio was given further impetus by Pakistan raking up this issue in the international fora. Pakistan supports Kashmiri separatists and dreams that one day the Indian part of Kashmir will join them. Pakistan also alleges that India is engaging in *quid pro quo* in Baluchistan. Efforts to normalise relations between India and Pakistan have stalled a couple of times because of Pakistan's attack on Kargil (1999) and an attack on the Indian Parliament (2001), the citadel of democracy, by the Pakistan-supported and sponsored terrorists, which brought the two nuclear nations to the brink of war and would have escalated further but for US intervention. Political relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh are not too great either. Almost half a century has passed but Pakistan has not apologised to Bangladesh and the wound inflicted through their atrocities has not yet healed. *Inter se* relations between Bangladesh and India has seen its ups and down, depending on which party was in power in Dacca. Ethnically, culturally, and geographically Bangladesh is close to India. Both countries have the propensity to maintain cordial relations. Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan's repeated overtures on getting a third party, either the USA or China, to mediate and resolve the Kashmir dispute have been totally opposed by India. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has consistently taken a firm stance of "terror and talk cannot go together, and Kashmir is an internal matter of India." Thucydides teaches us that neither naïve dreaming nor unrestrained cynicism

work in international politics.¹⁰ However, it is utopian to ignore that in the near future, conflict resolution and a full normalisation of relations between India and Pakistan seems rather unlikely. But they should hope against all hopes for a better future. It is high time that India and Pakistan learn to live together, as the stakes are too high if they choose to clash.

Notes

- 1 Charles Dickens (1812–70), *A Tale of Two Cities*, Book the First, Chapter I, p.1.
- 2 Gary J. Bass, The Indian Way of Humanitarian Intervention, *The Yale Journal of International Law*, Vol. 40, 227, https://www.princeton.edu/system/files/research/documents/Bass_YJIL.pdf.
- 3 Letter from D.P. Dhar, Ambassador to the Soviet Union, India, to P.N. Haksar, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, India (1971) (on file with Nehru Memorial Museum and Library), Teen Murti Bhavan, Delhi, India, P.N. Haksar Papers, III Installment [hereinafter NMML, Haksar Papers], Subject File 89, cited in Bas, The Indian Way of Humanitarian Intervention, 227.
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ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Anti-Aircraft
AAR	After Action Report
ACM	Air Chief Marshal
AD	Air Defence
AF	Air Force
AHQ	Army Headquarters
AIR	All India Radio
Air OP	Air Observation Post
ALG	Advance Landing Ground
AOC	Air Officer Commanding
AOC in C	Air Officer Commanding in Chief
AOP	Air Observation Post
Armd	Armoured
BD	Bangladesh Document
Bde.	Brigade
Bn	Battalion
BOP	Border Out Post
Brig.	Brigadier
BSF	Border Security Force (India only)
Capt.	Captain
Cav	Cavalry
CENTO	Central Treaty Organization
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
COS	Chief of Staff
Coy	Company
Div.	Division

xxvi Abbreviations

EBR.	East Bengal Regiment (Army mostly comprised of Bengalis and stationed in East Pakistan)
EPR	East Pakistan Rifles
FF	Frontier Force
FOC	Flag Officer Commanding
FOC-in C	Flag Officer Commanding in Chief
GOC	General Officer Commanding
GOC-in	C General Officer Commanding in Chief
Gen.	General
GHQ	General Headquarters
Gp.	Group
Gp. Capt.	Group Captain
GR	Gorkha Rifles
HQ	Headquarters
IAF	Indian Air Force
IN	Indian Navy
Ind.	Independent
Indo	India
Inf	Infantry
INS	Indian Naval Ship
IWT	Inland Water Transport
JCO	Junior Commissioned Officer
LFO	Legal Frame work
Lt. Cdr.	Lieutenant Commander
Lt. Col.	Lieutenant Colonel
Lt. Gen.	Lieutenant General
LST	Landing Ship
Maj.	Major
Maj. Gen.	Major General
MEA	Ministry of External Affairs
MF	Mukti Fauj
MR	Maritime Reconnaissance
Mtn.	Mountain
NEFA	North East Frontier Agency
OC	Officer Commanding
OR	Other Rank
Para	Parachute
PAF	Pakistan Air Force
Pak	Pakistan
PIA	Pakistan International Airlines
PN	Pakistan Navy
PNS	Pakistan Naval Ship
POK	Pakistan Occupied Kashmir
POL	Petrol Oil and Lubricants

POW	Prisoners of War
PPP	Pakistan People's Party
Recce	Reconnaissance
Regt	Regiment
R&S	Reconnaissance and Surveillance (Pakistan only)
SEATO	South East Asia Treaty Organization
Sqn	Squadron
Sqn.	Ldr. Squadron Leader
TA	Territorial Army (India only)
Tac	Tactical
TAC	Tactical Air Centre.
TCV	Troop Carrying Vehicle
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
USS	United States Ships
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republic
VA	Vulnerable Area
VP	Vulnerable Point
Vol.	Volume
Wing	A paramilitary battalion (Pakistan) and in the Air Force it is a unit with a few sqns.
Wg. Cdr,	Wing Commander
WSAG	Washington Special Action Group



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GLOSSARY OF MILITARY TERMS

Administrative Area: An area, in which administrative units and administrative echelons are located, and from where, they carry out their functions. This may involve the offloading of transport in the area. An administrative area differs from a maintenance area, in that it does not hold dumped stocks in excess of the formation's second line holdings.

Air Supremacy: The degree of air superiority wherein the opposing Air force is incapable of effective interference.

Axis of Advance: The line giving the general direction, astride which a formation or unit is to move. A line of advance assigned for purposes of control: often a road or a group of roads or a designated series of locations, extending in the direction of the enemy.

Axis of Maintenance: This is a track required to logically sustain and maintain field forces carrying out advance/offensive ops. It needs to be linked to a black top road at the earliest. This axis is usually developed by laying track material to make on 4x2 and 4x4 vehicle traffic. Depending on the formation operating, two commonly used terms are Division Operational Track (DOT) and Corps Axis of Maintenance (CAM). In DOT, track material is laid selectively to take on 4x4 traffic, whereas in CAM 100% track material is laid to take on 4x2 and Civil Hired Transport (CHT) traffic.

Bridgehead: An area of ground held or to be gained by own troops on the enemy's side of an obstacle, so as to develop operations into enemy territory and to prevent enemy action from interfering with passage of troops/material, or establishing crossings over the obstacle.

Bypassing: To deliberately avoid offensive combat with an *en force* or position. This action is designed to avoid dissipation of comb power. Bypass operations are generally undertaken during exploitation, pursuit, or any other offensive action wherein the *en force* is of insufficient strength to jeopardise accomplishment of own mission.

Centre of Gravity: The centre of gravity is that aspect of the enemy's total capability that, if attacked and eliminated or neutralised, will lead either to his inevitable defeat or his wish to sue for peace through negotiations. The identification of the enemy's centre of gravity, and the single minded focus on the sequence of actions necessary to expose and neutralise it are the essence of operational art. At the strategic level the centre of gravity may often be abstract, such as the enemy's public opinion or perhaps his strength of national purpose, whereas at the operation level it would be derived from the desire operational end state and may be either moral or physical. The key to success in battle is the correct identification of the centres of gravity of both own and enemy forces.

Containment: To stop, hold, and surround the forces of the enemy, or to cause the enemy to centre his activity on a given front and to prevent his withdrawing any part of his forces for use elsewhere.

Coup de Main: A sudden surprise attack that relies on swiftness to accomplish its mission in one effort. It capitalises on speed and simultaneity of executing operations in one stroke.

Degradation: These are operations undertaken and executed by combat forces to cripple the enemy's war-waging machinery to the desired level and ensuring his field forces lose capability to respond in a planned or cohesive manner. This would include degrading his combat forces, reserves, reinforcements, firepower, logistics backup, communication systems, and any other war-waging potential. To be effective, degradation operations would include integration and coordination between the Army, Navy, and Air Force weapon delivery systems.

Encounter Crossing: A crossing over an obstacle, usually a water obstacle which is lightly held by the enemy. The momentum of the advance is maintained by forcing a passage across the obstacle by every available means, normally undertaken by mechanised formations/units utilising their own resources. Mechanised formations tasked for encounter crossing are group with adequate bridging and breaching resources. Encounter crossings exploit gaps in enemy defences and are attempted where *en reaction* is minimum.

Favourable Air Situation: This is an air situation in which own air forces have an upper hand over the enemy air force to an extent that the enemy air is not in a position to interrupt the ground or air operations in any significant manner for a given period of time. Sporadic air raids by the enemy air force cannot be ruled out in this situation.

Forward Line of Own Troops (FLOT): An imaginary line along well-defined geographical features, the enemy side of which own combat aircraft are free to engage without danger to own ground forces.

Gun Boat Diplomacy: A foreign policy tool that is supported by the use of or threat of military force. It implies a direct threat of warfare should terms not be agreeable to a superior force.

Impromptu Target: A target which appears during combat and which can be reached by ground fire, naval fire, or aircraft fire and against which fire has not been scheduled or pre-planned.

Interdiction: Interdiction means to intercept. Such operations are designed to destroy, neutralise, or delay the enemy's military potential before it can be applied in tactical battle or brought to bear against friendly forces and thus shape the battlefield to one's advantage.

Maintenance Area: An area where administrative reserves, deposits/installations are held/located on a temporary basis and hold stocks in excess of second line holdings. Maintenance areas will be called by the name of the formation controlling them such as divisional maintenance area, corps maintenance area and so on.

Nodal Point: A nodal point is an important ground, having tactical significance, such as a communication centre, water source in the desert or an important township which a unit or a formation occupies as self-contained independent defensive position. A nodal point may be occupied by a force varying from a Battalion to a brigade. As far as possible defences on a nodal point should be compact and sited for all round defence. Elements of supporting arms, like artillery, logistic and administrative units, may be sited inside a nodal point.

Opportunity Crossing: A crossing, unopposed or lightly held, affected across any linear obstacle. Normally accomplished by advancing with unexpected speed or from an unexpected direction or by the use of 'coup de main' forces introduced by parachute drop or helicopter landing.

Order of Battle: The identification, strength, command structure, and disposition of the personnel, units, and equipment of any military force.

Overall Force Commander: Joint ops are executed under the overall command of a designated theatre commander who is responsible for overall campaign within that theatre. He is called OFC and will function with an integrated staff deputed from corresponding commands of all services.

Sea Lines of Communications: The primary maritime routes between ports used for trade, logistics, and naval forces. It is generally used in reference to naval operations in times of war.

Strategic Surveillances: The continuous all weather (day and night) systematic watch over the battlefield to provide timely combat information.

Strong Point: A Key point in a defensive position usually strongly fortified and heavily armed with automatic weapons, around which other positions are grouped for its protection. This is similar to a nodal point except that the size and importance of the place/area defended is lesser than a nodal point. In all other respects the principles of nodal point defence are equally applicable to strong point defences. A strong point is usually held by a battalion minus depending upon its tactical significance.

Tactical Depth: In offensive operations the term signifies the extent of depth up to which a tactical formations in the combat zone can influence the battle

w/o unbalancing itself. It denotes the tactical reach of the formation and would vary in different terrain configurations. For a defender, tactical depth roughly coincides with the second tier of defences or the rear boundary of the defensive formation, where he orchestrates the battle by employing his reserve.

Vertical Envelopment: A form of manoeuvre conducted by heliborne/airborne forces with the aim of seizing enemy objectives in depth with a view to cut off his escape routes, disrupt communications, and ultimately destroy him by developing operations in conjunction with a ground thrust.

1

THE IDEA OF PAKISTAN AND THE ROAD TO BANGLADESH

No force on earth can stop an idea whose time has come.

—Victor Hugo¹

It would be worth recalling the defining moments of history that led to the construction of Pakistan and, in less than a quarter of a century, its dismemberment, proving right the prophetic statement of Admiral Lord Louis Francis Albert Victor Nicholas Mountbatten who, in a conversation with Mr. Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, conveyed his apprehension that “Pakistan is unlikely to survive more than 25 years in its present form.”² The moot question that needs to be answered is why a nation state named Pakistan, constructed on the foundation of religion, succumbed in a very nascent stage. One must also know the reasons for Bengali Muslims supporting the idea of Pakistan despite the fact that, except for religion, there was nothing in common between the two wings; even geographically, they were not conjoined.

There is an ongoing historical debate on when Muslims first set in their feet on the Indian subcontinent. Did the Arab traders first come as early as the seventh century AD to coastal Malabar and Konkan-Gujarat? Cheraman Juma Mosque in Methala, in the Thrissur District of the Indian state Kerala, is assumed to be the first mosque in India, built in 629 AD by Malik Deenar. While debate on the timeline of arrival of Muslims can go on, one cannot shy away from the fact that the political history of Muslims in India commenced from 712 AD with the invasion of Sind by Muhammad Bin Qasim. Thereafter, Muslims came to India in waves as conquerors. Therefore, Muslims and Hindus of Indian subcontinent have different historical experiences that have shaped their views and destiny too. For more than a thousand years, the Hindus and Muslims of India have mixed but never fused, as they have retained their distinctiveness. The British, after

2 Idea of Pakistan and road to Bangladesh

observing this contrast, heightened the differences further, to their advantage.³ Based on Macaulay's advice,⁴ English education was introduced in India. Historian R.C. Mazumdar observes that the foundation of the Hindu College in 1817 was a great impetus for English education among Hindus, but Muslims made very little progress with this aim over the next 50 years. In 1835, English became the official language for government business, replacing Persian. Hindus studied in English-medium schools whereas a majority of Muslims did not participate. A hostile attitude and aloofness from English education impacted heavily the Muslim community; they lost advantages both material and social that other sections of society enjoyed.

Bengali Muslims were so apathetic to modern education that Hooghly College, founded in 1836 by the Muslim philanthropist Haji Mohammad Mohsin, had only five Muslim students out of a total of 409 as late as 1850.⁵ The comparative position of Hindus and Muslims in English education are evident in the following figures: In 1865, nine Hindus and no Muhammadan passed the M.A. examination; 41 Hindus and 1 Muhammadan passed the B.A.; and 17 students, all Hindus, passed the law examination. All the medical graduates were also Hindus. In 1887, 88 Hindus and not a single Muhammadan passed the M.A. and B.A. examinations.⁶

Mr. R.M. Sayani, a liberal Muslim, while delivering the Presidential address at the twelfth India National Congress in Calcutta in 1896 said,

Before the advent of the British in India, the Musalmans were the rulers of the country... the court language was their own. Every place of trust and responsibility or carrying influence or high remunerations was by birth right theirs... the Hindus stood in awe of them. By a stroke of misfortune, the Musalmans had to abdicate their position and descend to the level of their Hindu countrymen... they were soon reduced to a state of utter poverty. Ignorance and apathy seized hold of them while the fall of their former greatness rankled in their hearts.⁷

Growth of Muslim separatism

After the defeat in the Battle of Plassey, and with the advent of British rule, Muslims lost their superior position in the Indian societal structure. Lord Cornwallis' administrative decision about land settlement and revenue collection in 1793–94, which spawned the *zamindari* system in Bengal, had economic and social ramifications with far reaching impact, ultimately manifesting itself in the emergence of Bangladesh.⁸ However, it would be incorrect to say that poor Muslim peasants were against Hindu *zamindars* only; in fact they were mostly against the *zamindari* system, irrespective of the religion of the *zamindar*. But it so happened that majority of *zamindars* were Hindus and most land labourers and peasants were Muslims. This manifested in a social divide between the two religious' communities. A great limitation of the nineteenth century renaissance

of Bengal—encompassing intellectual, economic, and political movements—was its inability to attract Muslims and lower-caste Hindus. Upper-crust Muslims became extinct and people belonging to the Muslim community could not act on the economic and political advantages that British rule offered, because of their averseness to English education. Educated Hindu Bengalis grabbed the majority of government jobs, as well as those in other professions like medicine, engineering, judicial, teaching, etc., as the Muslims denied themselves an English education. Slowly, they withdrew into a cocoon.⁹ And during that period, Bengali Hindus benefitted because of their monopoly in all these fields.

The general characteristics of civil society in Bengal during this period was of Hindus being dominant, acquisitive and exploitative and the Muslims being the deprived the exploited and devoid of any significant role in the power structure. ... The trauma of their changed position in the society from belonging to the ruling class of India to being collectively suspected and neglected made the Muslims of Bengal insecure and insular. Understanding this predicament of Muslims in Bengal is necessary to comprehend why a major portion of them became advocates of the two-nation theory and of the partition of India.¹⁰

Noticeably, such deplorable conditions as in Bengal were not faced by Muslims in other parts of the subcontinent. Sir William Hunter, an ICS officer, while describing condition prevailing in lower Bengal province said,

The Muhammadans have suffered most severely under British rule. ... A hundred and seventy years ago, it was almost impossible for a well born Muslim in Bengal to become poor. At present it is almost impossible for him to continue rich.¹¹

In 1867, when the Hindus of India started agitation for the replacement of the official language Urdu with Hindi written in the Devnagri script, Sir Syed Ahmed of Aligarh said, “I am convinced that the two communities will not sincerely cooperate in any work. Opposition and hatred between them, which is felt so little today, will in the future be seen to increase on account of so-called educated classes.”¹² His statement in context of partition is worth pondering. He established Aligarh College in 1874 and encouraged Muslims to opt for an English education, advising them to be loyal to the British for the benefit of Muslim community. Syed Ahmed could influence Muslims of North India but for Bengali Muslims, this awakening only commenced when Syed Amir Ali chaired the first session of All India Muslim Educational Conference (AIMEC) in Calcutta in 1899. In fact, credit for pioneering the modern education for Bengali Muslims is given to Nawab Abdul Latif of Faridpur, based in Calcutta, who founded the Muhammadan Literary Society in Calcutta in 1863. He believed that for upliftment of Muslim society, a western education was a must. But he himself was a

4 Idea of Pakistan and road to Bangladesh

product of the old *madrassa* system of education. Along with modern education, he upheld the *madrassa* system and opposed its replacement. Thus, two parallel systems of education were practiced in Bengal. The traditional *madrassa* system was fully based on a religious community. This exclusivity encouraged communal feelings amongst Muslims and was despised by Hindus, which further added to already existing social divisions.

Meanwhile, the British government, who thus far had favoured the Hindus, started distrusting them after the great revolt in 1857 and commenced leaning towards the Muslim community. A Government Resolution in 1871, during the administration of Governor General Lord Mayo, is proof of the change in the British attitude towards Muslims.

The political orientation for the Muslim community was pioneered by Syed Amir Ali through the "National Mohammadan Association," founded in 1878. It was impressed upon people that only the political empowerment of Muslims, with adequate safeguards for the community, would save them from subjugation by others. He received moral and financial support from lot of influential Hindus. This was one of the rare Muslim organisations where Hindus were co-opted—a great sign of Hindu-Muslim unity.¹³

The Indian National Congress (also known simply as the Congress), born in 1885, although secular in character had overtones of a Hindu majority community. Here began the political aspirations of upper- and middle-class Hindus. In the same year, Syed Ahmed formed the Patriotic Association to oppose the Congress. Bengali Muslims resorted to communal and religious identity-based politics in the dawn of the twentieth century, which resulted in the division of Bengal in 1905 by Lord Curzon. Census results of 1881 showed that in Bengal, Muslims were numerically superior. Lord Curzon insisted that the partition was meant to facilitate better administration, however, many viewed a sinister design behind it in line with the policy of "divide and rule," a balancing act between Hindus and Muslims that was rescinded in 1911 due to vehement opposition by both groups, but majorly by Hindus.¹⁴

Nawab Sir Salimullah, a Muslim of Kashmiri descent, convened a meeting of pan-India Muslim leaders on 30 December 1906 at Dacca. The meeting, attended by about 70 Muslim elites, formed the "Indian Muslim League," a political platform for the Muslim community. It had three main objectives: to promote among Muslims a feeling of loyalty to the British, to protect the political rights and interests of the Musalmans of India, and to prevent rise of hostile feelings against other communities.¹⁵ Unlike the Indian Congress party, which had members from all religious communities, membership of the Indian Muslim League was restricted to Muslims only.

While analysing the genesis of the formation of Pakistan, one finds that the idea of a separate homeland for Muslims matured through various stages. Sir Syed Ahmad Ali of Aligarh, who championed Muslim identity, during the latter half of nineteenth century felt that Hindus by sheer majority were likely to subjugate Muslims. He had great influence especially over North Indian Muslims. He, like

Syed Amir Ali of Calcutta, thought of empowering Muslims through modern education and the safeguarding of political spaces for the Muslim community by being loyal to the British to achieve the political goals of the Muslim community. He was the beacon of the Aligarh Movement, which opposed the All India Congress tooth and nail, giving impetus to ideas of Muslim separatism. Over the years since the inception of the Muslim League in 1906, the gulf between Hindus and Muslims widened.

Mr. Chitta Ranjan Das was possibly the only leader who commanded great respect from both Bengali Hindus and Muslims. To forge unity amongst the two communities, he drafted the historic Bengal Pact 1923. But he passed away on 16 June 1925 and with his untimely death, once again the Hindus and Muslims of Bengal drifted apart. In 1926, the Bengal Pact was rejected both by the Bengal Provincial Congress committee and by Kakinada session of the All India Congress. Mr. H.S. Suhrawardy and many other Muslim leaders who were lieutenants of Chittaranjan Das were estranged as they felt betrayed. This spurred communalism; the frequency as well as magnitude of communal violence increased. “The much talked of composite culture of Bengal gave way to the political stance of ‘Islam in danger’ accepted by large sections of Bengal Muslims.”¹⁶

In 1930, philosopher poet Mohammed Alama Iqbal, a follower of Sir Syed Ahamad Ali, while arguing for a separate Muslim state remarked in his presidential address at the Muslim League Annual Session at Allahabad that the “formation of a consolidated North-West Indian Muslims state appears to be the final destiny of the Muslims, at least of North-West India.”¹⁷

It is interesting to note that Iqbal in his scheme of a Muslim state did not talk of a separate nation and he did not mention Bengal (East Bengal); nor did Chaudhuri Rahamat Ali and his fellow students of Cambridge University who, inspired by Iqbal’s idea, coined the word “Pakistan”—an acronym to denote “P” for Punjab, “A” for Afghanistan, “K” for Kashmir, “S” for Sind, and “TAN” for the area of Baluchistan (the “I” was inserted to conjoin PAK-STAN). Even the 1940 Lahore Resolution (also known as the Pakistan Resolution) moved by Mr. A.K. Fazlul Haq was aimed at the formation of autonomous states for Muslim majority areas of India, but not an amalgamation of these areas to form a separate country (a copy of the Lahore Resolution can be found in Appendix 1). Muhammad Ali Jinnah, at this session mooted his “two nation” theory, by making an emphatic statement that Hindus and Muslims belong to two different civilisations that are based mainly on conflicting ideas and conceptions; peaceful coexistence was, therefore, impossible.

For the next six years, no one took the idea of Pakistan seriously, even after Jinnah eloquently put across his theory in Lahore. Jinnah was never a staunch practitioner of Islam—he was a shrewd politician and a pragmatic person. After the conclusion of the World War II, Churchill lost the election and Attlee succeeded him as the prime minister of Britain. Attlee was keen that British exit India for good by the middle of 1948, much against the wishes of Churchill, who wanted India to remain a dominion. Meanwhile, Jinnah had a secret tie-up with

6 Idea of Pakistan and road to Bangladesh

Churchill, now the Tory opposition leader in the British parliament, to whom the Muslim League's loyalty and support of dominion status after independence was assured. Jinnah wanted all the Muslim majority states to be grouped under the banner of "Pakistan," which did not find favour with Congress leaders. Admiral Mountbatten replaced Lord Wavel in April 1946 and put the issue of Indian independence into fast-track mode. The geographical area of the proposed new nation was much debated, with the viceroy acting like a referee. And to Jinnah's horror, he found that he was going to get a much truncated Pakistan with two wings separated by 1,000 miles, which he had not dreamt about. Jinnah was unsure of the viability of defending the proposed geographical area of Pakistan and requested Lt. Gen. Sir Arthur Smith, the Deputy Commander in Chief of the Indian Army to examine Pakistan's defence needs on becoming a separate state. In March 1946, in a confidential report to Jinnah; Smith wrote, "Unless Pakistan included all of the Punjab and Bengal—especially Calcutta, which accounted for 85 percent of India's engineering capability and half of its sea trade—Jinnah's state was unlikely to survive."¹⁸ And even with these areas, Smith did not believe that Pakistan could defend itself alone against a Soviet invasion. No wonder Jinnah almost gave up the idea of Pakistan. But, publicly, he hardened his stand and kept jockeying for a greater share of power. Moon Pendel, then a serving ICS officer, in his account of the partition of South Asia states,

Privately Jinnah reassured his sceptical colleagues that Partition was only a bargaining chip: the British could not hand over power to Nehru as long as Hindus and Muslims did not even agree on whether they were one nation or two.¹⁹

Jinnah called for "Direct Action" to reject the British compromise plan and to protest against the Congress and Jawaharlal Nehru's stand on the shape of governance. He was hellbent to either have "a divided India or a destroyed India". On 29 July 1946 in Bombay while briefing the press Jinnah said, "I am going to make trouble." And what trouble it was! On 16 August 1946, which was chosen as Direct Action Day, there was fury in Calcutta. The Great Calcutta Killings happened the Muslim League in the state of Bengal, under the premiership of Suhrawardy. It was a free-for-all mayhem. This was followed by the Noakhali and Tipperah riots. The Noakhali pogroms were led by Ghulam Sarwar, a Muslim League ringleader. J.B. Kripalani, the Congress president visited the area and highlighted the rape, forced conversion, and mass killing of Hindus. Figures quoted by him during his hyped speech was refuted by the government of the day and by the British Commander-in-Chief. The exact figure is anybody's guess. This madness spread across Bihar, the North-West Province, and many other parts of India all through the autumn of 1946. Both the high-pitch voice of Congress leaders and the silence of Jinnah after the Noakhali riot were deafening. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was pained. He wondered why his philosophy of non-violence had failed. But he did not want to give up his belief. So, to douse the fire of hatred, he directed Bengali Hindus not to fight back and urged Hindu women to commit suicide rather than

get violated by the frenzied, rioting Muslims. His appeal did not impress all sections of the Hindu society in Bengal. The *Hindu Mahasabha* organised themselves into a major force and asked Hindus to fight back. In Bengal, like many other parts of India, the gulf between the two major religious communities simply widened.

After the Lucknow Pact in 1916, Sarojini Naidu described Jinnah as the “Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity.” At the beginning of Khilafat Movement, Jinnah warned Gandhi not to endorse as that would bring religion into politics. It remained a puzzle whether the “two nation” theory was Jinnah’s core belief or whether it was his political manoeuvring to ensure his own edge in the power sharing game. But Jinnah changed. His reciprocal hatred for Nehru, dislike for Gandhi and Mountbatten, and, above all, his obsession with power made him a changed man as time went by. It was only in 1946, during the Muslim League Legislatures Convention held in Delhi, that there was an official endorsement of the concept of the single state of Pakistan. The idea of an undivided Bengal received a death knell when, on 20 June 1946, the Bengal Legislative Assembly voted for Pakistan. On 2 June 1947 in Delhi, Mountbatten and seven other leaders finalised the partition, which was publicly announced the next day.

Bengali Muslims supported the formation of Pakistan with the hope that their upper crust would enjoy the power and people from the lower strata would be free from the exploitation of *zamindars* and money lenders ,who were mostly Hindus. And paradoxically the Hindus, who fought tooth and nail against the 1905 division of Bengal, supported the idea of another division because of their bitter experience from 1940 onwards. Mr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee was one such leader who was pro-division of Bengal. The current of politics engulfed all.

The idea of Pakistan though did receive support of Bengali Muslims and their leaders, but a few were sceptical about the shape of things and what the new nation of Pakistan would become. One such prominent leader was Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy whose letter—dated 10 September 1946 and addressed to Khaliquzzaman, a well-known Muslim League leader from North India—was a statement seeking rationale for Pakistan from the Bengali Muslims’ point of view. Undercurrents of distances and differences between the leadership of East Pakistan and that of West Pakistan were visible in this letter. He criticised Md. Ali Jinnah and the leadership of the Muslim League from Sindh, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh for doing nothing to stabilise the polity of Pakistan on a rational basis.²⁰

Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the sole spokesperson for the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent, sold dreams about the country to be named “Pakistan,” to the brothers and sisters of the common faith of Islam. Historian Ayesha Jalal observed that “the term Pakistan was put forth as the panacea for all problems facing Muslims. Its meaning was kept deliberately vague so that it could mean all things to all people.”²¹ The upper crust of society thought that the new state would give them a great opportunity to occupy powerful positions, while the lower strata society thought that their miseries would be alleviated: Pakistan would be a land of honey and milk. The geographical separation of a thousand miles between East and West Pakistan and their diverse cultures were no barrier because “commonality of faith” was thought to be sufficient to hold the nation together.

8 Idea of Pakistan and road to Bangladesh

Though religion was considered the bedrock of the “two nations” theory, Mr. Jinnah was aware of the importance of language and culture. For this reason, while negotiating the territory of Pakistan, he claimed the whole of Bengal and Punjab and, when denied, argued with Mountbatten that Bengal and Punjab were indivisible and needed to be transferred whole, as the inhabitants saw them more as a linguistic and culturally homogeneous community rather than a religious group. “A man is a Punjabi or a Bengali first before he is a Hindu or Muslim... under no condition, partition them. ... You will destroy their viability and cause endless bloodshed and trouble.”²² Ultimately, Jinnah accepted the division of both these states, either out of assent or despair, though he termed the geography of this new country a “moth-eaten Pakistan.” Ironically during the finalisation of that division on 2 June 1947, among the seven leaders present, none was from Bengal. Possibly a few prominent leaders of Bengal were then toying with the idea of “Greater Bengal,” so they were best avoided by the central Muslim League as well as the Congress leadership; others might not have mattered. The formal decision on the partition of India was announced by Admiral Mountbatten on 3 June 1947 after getting the nod from Mahatma Gandhi. To many, this partition literally embodied Shakespeare’s quote, “This was the unkindest cut of all.”²³ The geography of India and Pakistan was hurriedly decided by Sir Radcliff.²⁴ Thus, on 15 August 1947 Pakistan was born, on the premise that the uniformity of religion would one day overcome the impediments created by the geographical separation and diversity of culture.

Road from East Pakistan to Bangladesh

Muhammad Ali Jinnah during his very first address to the constituent assembly on 11 August 1947 stated, “You may belong to any religion or caste or creed—that has nothing to do with the business of state. We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one state.”²⁵ Jinnah’s proclamation and grandstanding notwithstanding, in the same year, during the national education summit in Karachi it was proposed that Urdu be the sole state language and be used in the media and in schools. It was perceived that Urdu was the more Islamic language and would help integrate the newly born nation. The Pakistan Public Service Commission removed Bengali from the list of approved subjects. Bengali was also removed from currency notes, postal stamps, and government forms.

Pakistan became accident prone from its very birth. The leaders of Pakistan, who primarily belonged to West Pakistan, made every attempt to destroy it. And the first assault was on the Bengali language.

Conflict of culture

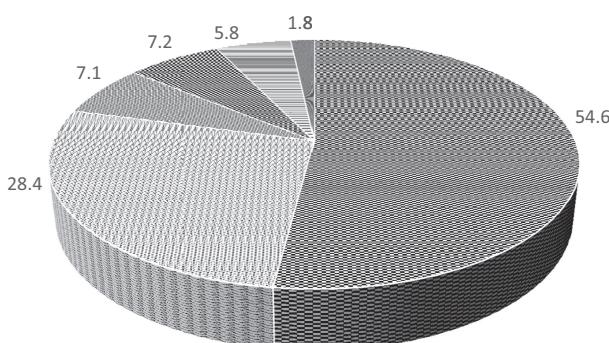
The cultural conflict between the West and East Pakistan began with the language issue. Culture has been defined as

the total of the inherited ideas, beliefs, values and knowledge, which constitute the shared basis of social action; the total range of activities and ideas of a group of people with shared traditions, which are transmitted and reinforced by members of group.²⁶

Culture entails various characteristics of a group that include language, arts, music, religion, cuisines, social habits, race, skin colour, dressing norms, ancestry, education, profession, skill, political attitudes, etc. Therefore, culture distinguishes the members of one category from those of another. Culture is an important factor in shaping identity. On the aspect of cultural relativism, it has been found that “different culture group[s] think, feel and act differently, but there is no scientific standard for considering one group is intrinsically culturally superior to another.”²⁷ In the case under study here, it was well known that Pakistan was constructed on the bedrock of multi-cultural societies. Despite that, many West Pakistani civil servants would routinely refer to the Bengalis as “Bingo bastards” or “black monkey.”²⁸ Such comments reflect a degree of cultural insensitivity. It therefore needs to be explained why despite Jinnah’s idea of equality for all, the tenets of pluralism were violated once Pakistan commenced its journey.

Language Movement (*Bhasa Andolon*)

Public outrage spread over the removal of the Bengali language from the list of approved subjects and from government-issued stationaries, including notes and coins. A large number of Bengali students met on the University of Dacca campus on 8 December 1947, demanding Bengali be made an official language. Abul Kasem, Secretary of Tamaddun Majlis, a Bengali Islamic Cultural Organization,



❖ Bengali (54.6%) ❖ Punjabi (28.4%) ❖ Pushto (7.1%) ❖ Urdu (7.2%) ❖ Sindhi (5.8%) ❖ English (1.8%)

FIGURE 1.1 Distribution of various language groups in Pakistan.³¹

10 Idea of Pakistan and road to Bangladesh

led the protest. Many prominent leaders voiced their concern over the language issue. Dr. M. Shahidullah may be credited as being one of those pioneer protesters against making Urdu the national language of Pakistan. In fact, the Language Movement started before partition when Dr. Shahidullah, on learning that Urdu was being proposed as the national language of Pakistan, protested by saying, “That would [be] tantamount to political slavery.”²⁹ The Pakistani government’s efforts to impose Urdu went unabated with the zeal and false hope that it would harmonise great Muslim values and unify the populace of the two wings. On the contrary, this codification of a uniform means of communication brought about disharmony among the Bengalis that comprised 55% of Pakistan’s population. Mr. Dharendra Nath Dutta moved a resolution in Pakistan’s National Assembly on 25 February 1948 to make Bengali a language of the constituent assembly along with Urdu and English. He said, “[The] state language should be the language used by the majority of the people of the state and for that I consider that Bengali language is the *lingua franca* of our state.”³⁰ Prime Minister Liaqat Ali, along with many prominent leaders from West Pakistan, vehemently objected to this proposal. Liaqat Ali Khan argued that

Pakistan has been created on the demand of hundred million Muslims in the sub-continent and the language of hundred million Muslims is Urdu. Pakistan is a Muslim state and it must have for its *lingua franca*, the language of the Muslim nation.³²

The Figure 1.1 above shows the distribution of various language groups in Pakistan as tabulated during the decennial census conducted in 1951.³³

The following two points challenge the opinion above. Firstly, 100 million Muslims of pre-partitioned India spoke many different languages and not Urdu. Secondly, only 2.5% of the population in East Pakistan and 7% in West Pakistan spoke Urdu. When the language agitation movement was gaining momentum, to make the matter worse, on 22 March 1948 Md. Ali Jinnah in his speech at Dacca declared that the state language of Pakistan was going to be “Urdu and no other language.”³⁴ Hearing it from the horse’s mouth was a big blow to Bengali Muslims. Agitation on the language issue continued in various forums. And a broad-based All-Party Committee was formed under the Chairmanship of Maulana Bhashani. Amongst Bengalis, the language impasse brought a sense of despair and betrayal. On 21 February 1952, five young men were gunned down in Dacca by the police for protesting the imposition of Urdu and demanding Bengali as one of the national languages. Abdul Gaffar Choudhury composed a soul stirring and much inspiring lyric, “*Amar bhaiyer rakte rangano ekushey February, Ami ki bhulite pari?*”³⁵ (Can I forget 21 February incarnadined by the blood of my brother?). It captured the hearts and minds of Bengalis and was the most celebrated song then. The Language Movement gave birth to regional nationalism. During this period more creative literature blossomed. which helped in spreading socio-cultural and political consciousness. The Language Movement also brought many political

parties and various groups under one platform with a common cause for protest. Agitation continued with indomitable spirit. But instead of handling it deftly, in 1955, the establishment—to add salt to the injury—renamed East Bengal “East Pakistan.” The land synonymous with their mother tongue lost its distinctive identity of nomenclature through cultural aggression. Abdul Mansur Ahmad, an East Pakistani who had participated in the 1956 constitutional debates in the Constituent Assembly, had made a strong statement on the distinctiveness of East Pakistan, and the differences between East and West Pakistan:

Pakistan is a unique country having two wings which are separated by more than a thousand miles... these two wings differ in all matters, except common religion... the language, the tradition, the culture, the costume, the custom, the dietary, the calendar, the standard time, practically everything is different. There is, in fact, nothing common in the two wings, particularly in respect to those [things] which are the *sine qua non* to form a nation.³⁶

The Language Movement came to an end in 1956, when a constitutional provision was made through Article 214(1) that recognised Bengali and Urdu as state languages.

One of the characteristics of cultural identity is race. West Pakistanis perceived themselves racially superior and looked down upon the Bengalis as a non-martial race. Bengalis were seen not only as socially inferior but also as lesser Muslims because they did not adhere to many of the cultural practices that North Indian Muslims considered properly Islamic. Ayub Khan felt that Bengalis had been and were still under considerable Hindu cultural and linguistic influence and once again in 1969 tried to push Urdu as the sole national language of Pakistan.³⁷ The Pakistani establishment failed to realise that to the Bengalis, a common religious identity that was shared with other Pakistanis had never meant that they would be denied their own cultural traditions. “Most Bengalis, initially, did not see any contradictions in being a Bengali, a Muslim and a Pakistani all at the same time. The contradiction was to be perceived with other Pakistanis.”³⁸

The Bengali script is derived from Sanskrit (Brahmi). The central government, in their attempt to “de-Sanskritise” the Bengali language, undertook a programme to teach Bengali through the Arabic script. Students of the University of Dacca protested vehemently. A programme was also undertaken to tamper with the existing works of poets and writers by substituting Bengali words with Arabic ones. The proposed centenary celebration of Rabindranath Tagore in 1961 was opposed by the Pakistani government through its mouth-piece newspaper *Azad*. A series of vilifying articles condemning Tagore’s ideals as anti-Pakistan appeared in the paper. In 1961 during the centenary celebration, a leading cultural organisation named “Chhayanat” was formed. It played a major role during the cultural movement of East Pakistan by fighting to keep Bengali culture alive through the preservation of music and dance. In 1963, Dacca University began an annual event called “Bengali Language and Cultural Week.”

12 Idea of Pakistan and road to Bangladesh

A grand celebration of Bengali New Year (*Poila Boisakh*) at Ramna Ground Dacca was started by Chhayanat in 1965, an expression of Bengali cultural identity. Celebrations like this contributed to reunifying the group and displaying their solidarity. Cultural events transformed into cultural movements, which metamorphosed into Bengali nationalist movements in due course. In 1965, during the Indo-Pak war, Radio Pakistan and Dacca Television stopped broadcasting all works of Tagore. Another onslaught on Bengali culture was the promulgation of East Pakistan Ordnance Number 5, dated 25 October 1965, by Governor Momen Khan, which essentially was an East Pakistan Press and Publication of Books (Regulation & Control) Ordnance. Through this ordinance restrictions were imposed on the distribution and publication of foreign books and journals presumably to restrict access to Indian propaganda.³⁹ Essentially it meant banning the import of Bengali books and journals from West Bengal or India. This drew much ire. After revoking the earlier order for some time, once again in 1967 Tagore's songs were taken off the air. There were protests against it initially by 19 intellectuals from different fields, which were subsequently joined by many. There was mass resentment as Tagore was a cultural icon in Bengal. This was the period when Mujib's six-point program on autonomy was gaining ground. Mujib revered Tagore and was inspired by his ideals. His *Amar Sonar Bangla* (My Golden Bengal) used to be sung in various meetings. This song was later made national song of Bangladesh. Other works of Tagore, Nazrul Islam, D.L. Roy, etc. were used during the freedom struggle by cultural activists. Prominent among them was the "Bangladesh Mukti Sangram Shilpi Sangstha" (BMSSS). From the very inception of Pakistan, the culture of 56% of its citizens was under attack. Culture had been the centre point of East Pakistan's political movement. Cultural activists continually protested the suppression of Bengali culture. West Pakistanis never understood that culture and language were very deep rooted among Bengalis and that their "Bengaliness" could not be uprooted by force or intimidation. An American assessment was that "the bureaucracy was uninterested and contemptuous of Bengali culture, language and literature, and it was this insensitivity and indifference which aggravated Bengali sentiment and pride."⁴⁰

The Pakistani establishment failed to appreciate that East and West Pakistan had two distinctly separate cultures. They should have realised that "nations are made up of human beings where deep feelings about such questions as their languages cannot be safely ignored. Pakistanis attempt to impose uniformity where diversity was desirable had unfortunate consequences."⁴¹

The dream of a democratically elected government with equal opportunity for all, as envisioned by Jinnah during the construction of Pakistan, never came true.

The East Bengal middle class soon realized that one could not live by religion alone. They faced both economic exploitation and lack of political voice within the new country. Pakistan's power structure was heavily biased in favour of West Pakistan, and particularly its Punjabi and Mohajirs elites, such that its politically conscious Bengali elites felt an acute degree of political exclusion. Combined with the geographical distance between

the two wings of Pakistan, and the linguistic differences, demand grew for a degree of autonomous existence for East Pakistan's people, demands that were not acceptable to the central government⁴²

The lack of democracy and development during the first two decades post-partition frustrated the East Bengalis. The rise and popularity of the Awami League and particularly the announcement of its "six-point formula"⁴³ captured the imagination of all and sundry. Essentially, the six-point programme was a demand for autonomy based on the Lahore Resolution; it was also an indication of the rise of regionalism. It can therefore be inferred that, the leadership of Sk. Mujibur Rahaman was perceived as a threat by Ayub Khan and his government.

Formation of the government from 1947 to 1971: political alienation

Jinnah's death created a void and there was leadership crisis that was further aggravated by the assassination of Jinnah's most trusted lieutenant, Liaquat Ali Khan on 16 Oct 1951. The undemocratic removal of Khwaja Nazimuddin, who was a Bengali, from the office of the prime minister by the Governor General Ghulam Muhammad, a West Pakistani, was protested strongly. And this brought many East Bengal parties together, which formed the United Front and their discontent was expressed through a "twenty-point agenda," which included autonomy of the province in line with the Lahore Resolution of 1940. In the following years, Bengali politicians were rarely given important portfolios. In fact, Pakistan failed to hold regular elections and, most importantly, it did not have a constitution from where it could derive legal and functional directions. Stephen Cohen commented,

Most of the key power players in Pakistan respected democracy and wished Pakistan to be a democratic but they were not willing to make it so. These included the army, which admired democracy in the abstract but found it troubling in practice, civilian bureaucrats, who tended to equate democracy with civilian governments in which they played a major role; and the left which advocated democracy in theory but also had authoritarian inclinations. In fact, many groups in Pakistan lacked a nominal commitment to democratic forms, let alone substance.⁴⁴

In its first 25 years after becoming an independent state, Pakistan made constitutions twice, once in 1956 and then again in 1962, but both were shelved. Pakistan had seen political instability and domestic disorder too frequently in the initial years, which culminated in military rule. On 7 October 1958, all political parties were abolished and provincial governments were dismissed by the President of Pakistan, Major General Iskander Mirza. He also promulgated martial law and installed Army Chief General Ayub Khan as Chief Martial Law Administrator. Three weeks later, Mirza was exiled to London and Ayub Khan became the sole supremo of Pakistan. Ayub tried to bring in a new vision for Pakistan. He ruled Pakistan through an

14 Idea of Pakistan and road to Bangladesh

established civil-military coalition where the military played the dominant role. The Punjabi-dominated army had always considered Bengalis an inferior community vis-à-vis the so-called martial race that they and the Pathans were. Stephen Cohen opines that in the dominant western wing, the idea of Pakistan pertained to a martial people defending its Punjabi stronghold. Bengal and Bengalis only figured in as an investment opportunity or source of foreign exchange.⁴⁵

Economic disparity

Studies carried out by a group of economists including Kabir Uddin and Rehman Shoban and another group of three Harvard economists uncovered facts regarding the glaring economic disparities between East and West Pakistan. Important findings included:⁴⁶

- In 1950–55 East Pakistan received only 20% of development expenditure vis-à-vis 80% for West Pakistan. In 1965–70, East Pakistan received 35% against 65% by West Pakistan.
- 40–50% of all West Pakistani exports were sold to East Pakistan, treating it like a captive market.
- East Pakistan's export surplus by trade with foreign countries was utilised by the central government to finance the deficit of West Pakistan. The total transfer of resources in this manner in the 20 years ending 1968–69 has been computed at \$21,000 million.
- In 1969–70, the per capita income in West Pakistan was 61% higher than East Pakistan and double what it was ten years earlier.⁴⁷

Certain statistics produced below reflect the severity of the economic disparity.⁴⁸

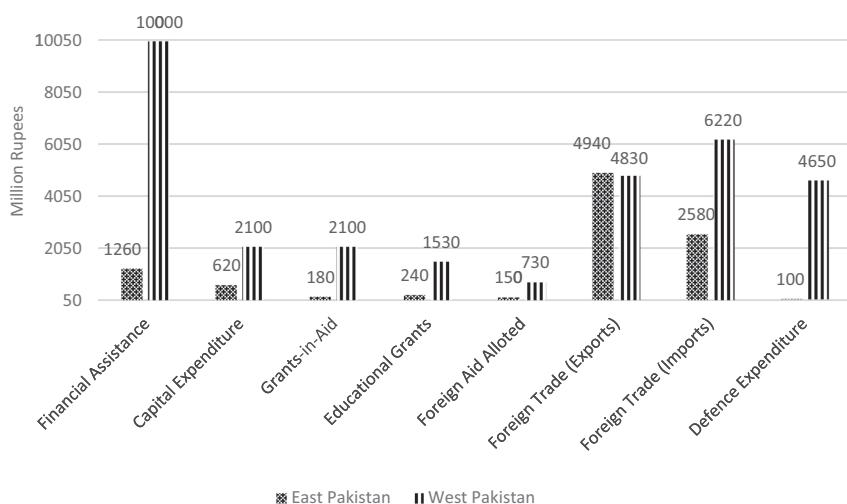


FIGURE 1.2 Government spending: 1947–55.

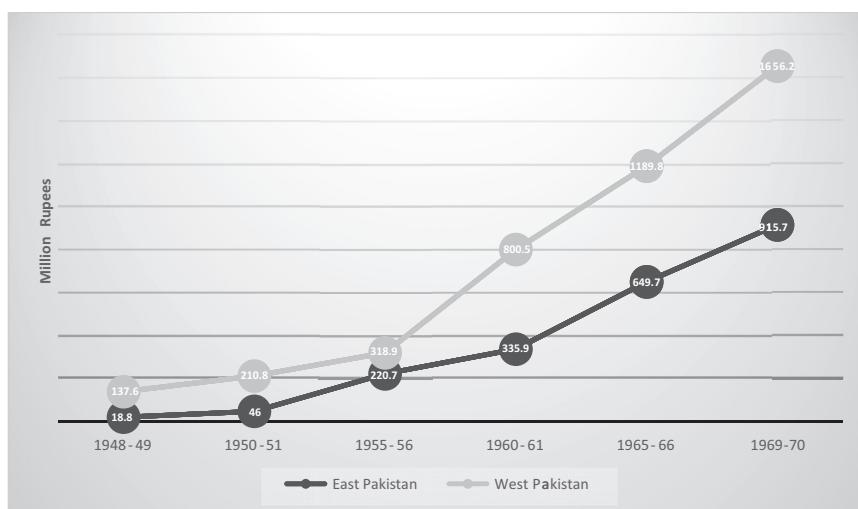


FIGURE 1.3 Trade between East and West Pakistan: 1948–70.

TABLE 1.1 Representation of two wings in civil and military services^a

Service	East Pakistan	West Pakistan
Central Civil Service	16%	84%
Foreign Service	15%	85%
Ambassadors/Heads of Mission (numbers)	9	60
Army	5%	95%
Army General Ranking Officer	1	16
Navy Technical	19%	81%
Navy Non-Technical	9%	91%
Air Force Pilots	11%	89%
Armed Forces	20,000	500,000
Pakistan Airlines	280	7,000
PIA Directors/Area Managers	1	14
Railway Board Directors	1	7

^aMascarenhas Antony, *The Rape of Bangladesh* (Delhi: Vikas Publication, 1971), pp. 6–20.

Business houses in East Pakistan belonged mostly to West Pakistanis. They controlled major industries, tea gardens, jute factories, banks, and insurance companies and siphoned money to West Pakistan. The economic

16 Idea of Pakistan and road to Bangladesh

strangulation of East Pakistan created frustration amongst the population. This was reflected through the voice of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in his speech in February 1966:

Does it not put you to shame that every bit of reasonable demand of East Pakistan has got to be secured from you at tremendous cost and after bitter struggle as if snatched from unwilling foreign rulers as reluctant concessions?⁴⁹

Table 1.1 presents comparative statistics of civil and military employment and clearly indicates that West Pakistanis had a hugely disproportionate presence in government services, particularly in senior appointments.

Antony Mascaren has observed, “The bonds between West Pakistan and the east as religion receded into the background in the face of painful economic disparities.”⁵⁰

Result of general election: 1970

A general election under martial law throughout Pakistan was held at the end of 1970, in which the Awami League led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman secured 167 seats out of 169 from East Pakistan. He had the absolute majority in the Pakistan National Assembly. The second largest party, the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP), entirely based in West Pakistan and led by Mr. Z.A. Bhutto, captured only 88 seats. All the other parties won 58 seats out of a total of 313. The Awami League had the mandate of its people through their election manifesto based on the “six-point formula”—demands ensuring total provincial autonomy. The text of the “Six-Point Formula” mooted by Mujibur Rahman can be found in Appendix 2.

Bhutto’s stance at this juncture suggests his line of undemocratic thinking, where his sole concern was power at any cost. “On 20 December, Z.A. Bhutto, referring to Mujibur Rahman’s majority in the National Assembly, made an uncharitable remark that ‘majority alone did not count in national politics.’ He had fired the first shot in his Machiavellian battle. In yet another affront to Bengali sentiments, he added that the PPP had won a majority in Punjab and Sind where “lay the real centre of power.”⁵¹ However, on 5 January 1971, Bhutto announced his readiness to form a coalition government at the centre with the Awami League. At the same time, he was opposed to the autonomy issue raised by Mujib. His talks with Mujib failed and he refused to attend the meet of National Assembly at Dacca on 3 March, announced by Yahya Khan. Bhutto demanded that power be handed over to the majority parties in East Pakistan and West Pakistan. This was rejected by Mujib, who stated, “Power is to be handed over to the majority party, the Awami League. The power now lies with the people of East Bengal.”⁵²

On 16 February Mujibur Rahman was elected the leader of the Awami League Legislative Party and on 18 February he declared that “Islam will not be used to liquidate Bengali culture.”⁵³

On 28 February, Bhutto sought the postponement of the National Assembly’s inaugural session and Yahya on the next day (1 March) postponed it. As a consequence there were protests all over East Pakistan and a country-wide general strike was called on 3 March. On 7 March at a mammoth public rally at the Dacca racecourse, Mujib declared:

The struggle this time is the struggle for independence. ... Since we have given blood, we will give more blood. By the will of the Almighty God, the people of this land will be liberated... turn every house in to a fortress. Face [the enemy] with whatever you have.⁵⁴

The resistance movement called by Mujib was responded to by people across all segments of society. Everything came to a standstill. Financial institutions, academic institutions, factories—all stopped functioning. The central government failed and Mujib became the *de facto* ruler from 7 to 25 March.

A Mujib-Bhutto-Yahya talk held at Dacca until 24 March failed. And on the evening of 25 March Yahya left Dacca secretly, with instructions to Lt. Gen. Tikka Khan to “sort them out.” Tikka Khan’s order to his troops were, “I want the land and not the people.” Maj. Gen. Farman, who was carrying out this order, wrote in his diary, “Green land of East Pakistan will be painted Red.” It was painted red with Bengali blood.⁵⁵

And on the night of 25 March, the Pakistani Army cracked down (through Operation Searchlight)⁵⁶ on unarmed people with all their might. They attacked the Pilkhana headquarters of the East Pakistan Rifles, the police headquarters at Rajabagh, and Dacca University. Lt. Gen. Niazi described the ferocity of the army action by saying, “The military action was a display of stark cruelty, more merciless than the massacres at Bukhara and Baghdad by Changez Khan and Halaku Khan or at Jallianwala Bagh by the British General Dyer.”⁵⁷

Commencement of the Liberation War

Mujibur Rahman, at 12:30 am on 26 March, declared independence. He said,

This may be my last message; from this day onward Bangladesh is independent. I call upon the people of Bangladesh wherever you might be and with whatever you have to resist the army of occupation to the last. Your struggle must go on until the last soldier of Pakistan Army is expelled from the soil of Bangladesh. Final victory is ours.⁵⁸

At 1:30 am, the Pakistani army arrested Mujib from his residence and three days later he was transported to West Pakistan. On 26 March, General Yahya Khan

18 Idea of Pakistan and road to Bangladesh

banned the Awami League and declared Mujib a traitor. The text of Yahya's address to the nation explaining the grim situation in East Pakistan and justifying his actions can be found in Appendix 3.

On 10 April, the Provisional Revolutionary Government of Bangladesh, headed by Mujib (in absentia), was formed and they took the oath of office on 17 April at the Amrakanan of Baidyanathatala in Meherpur (now called Mujib Nagar). The position holders of the government of Bangladesh are as below:

- 1 President: Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (in absentia).
- 2 Acting President: Syed Nazrul Islam.
- 3 Prime Minister: Tajuddin Ahmed.
- 4 Col. M.A.G. Osmani: Commander-in-Chief, Bangladesh Liberation Force.

Officers and men of the East Bengal Rifles (EBR) and the police deserted *en masse* and formed the nucleus of the Mukti Fauz (later renamed "Mukti Bahini"). Lakhs of volunteers from all sections of society went through a preliminary selection process and swelled the ranks.

Millions of refugees move to India

Operation Searchlight created such terror and genocide-like situations that huge number of people fled to India. In a couple of months, their number swelled to almost 10 million.

Allen Ginsberg,⁵⁹ an American poet, wrote an immortal poem called *September On Jessore Road* depicting the conditions of the refugees. A few stanzas are reproduced below:

Millions of babies watching the skies
Bellies swollen, with big round eyes
On Jessore Road-long bamboo huts
No place to s— but sand channel ruts
Millions of fathers in rain
Millions of mothers in pain
Millions of brothers in woe
Millions of sisters nowhere to go
Millions of Souls nineteen seventy-one
Homeless on Jessore under grey sun
A million are dead, the millions who can
Walk toward Calcutta from East Pakistan⁶⁰

Such a precarious socioeconomic problem was beyond India's capability to cope with. Indian Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi, deeply concerned over the situation, mooted a resolution in parliament and announced that India expressed solidarity with the people of East Pakistan. The text of the resolution is in

Appendix 4. She requested Pakistan and the world to ensure the speedy political resolution and the return of refugees to their homes. But there was inaction by the United Nations and most of the countries gave more importance to the unity of Pakistan than addressing the predicament of 55% of its citizens. India armed and trained the Mukti Bahini, who were fighting a civil war.

Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra (Radio Station of Independent Bangladesh) played a key role in igniting passion and motivating people by airing programs like *Chorompotro* (Letter ultimate) hosted by M.R. Akhtar, “*Jallader Darbar*” (Court of a Butcher) by Kalyan Mitra, and “*Bojro Kontha*” (Thunderous Voice), which presented speeches of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Many poems and songs were written for broadcasting. One of those songs, *Joy Bangla Banglar Joy* (Victory of Bengal), was the signature tune of the radio station. Songs like *Purbo Digante Surjo Uthechhe*, *Ekti Phoolke Bachabo Bole*, and *Salam Hajar Salam* became immensely popular.⁶¹ The radio station through its programming launched psychological warfare to boost morale and motivate people and the *mukti joddhas* to face the Pakistanis and keep fighting. The radio station was no less strong than the men fighting with guns.

At last, India officially joined the war after the Pakistan Air Force struck Indian assets on 3 December 1971. The civil war had been going on for nine months culminated on 16 December 1971 after two weeks of intense and swift all-out military operations. jointly conducted by the Indian military and the indigenous Mukti Bahini. Thus, Pakistan was dismembered with the emergence of the nation of Bangladesh.

The dismemberment of Pakistan happened less than 25 years after its inception. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad in his memoir, *India Wins Freedom*, wrote,

It was one of the greatest frauds on the people to suggest that religion can unite areas that are geographically, economically, linguistically and culturally different. ... No one can hope that East and West Pakistan will compose all their differences and form one nation.⁶²

It is worth quoting the admission of Benazir Bhutto, as expressed in her biography *Daughter of the East*. She said,

The democratic mandate of East Pakistan was grossly violated. The majority province of East Pakistan was basically treated as a colony by the minority west. From revenue of more than thirty-one billion rupees of East Pakistan's export, the minority in West Pakistan had built roads, schools, universities and hospitals for themselves, but developed little in the East. The army, the largest employer in our very poor country, drew 90 percent forces from the West Pakistan.80 percent government jobs were filled by people from the West. The central government even declared Urdu our national language, a language few in East Pakistan understood thus further handicapping the Bengalis in competing for jobs in government or education. No wonder they felt excluded and exploited.⁶³

20 Idea of Pakistan and road to Bangladesh

However, her observations omit mention of her father Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's undemocratic demand of sharing power even though the PPP fell behind the Awami League in the election mandate.

It is often the case that wars are the result of multiple causes—political, economic, geographical, religion based, etc. But the birth of Bangladesh proved that culture is one such cause, which, although less recognised, manifested itself in organised warfare, further signifying Clausewitz's philosophy that “war is not an act performed by military men alone but is an expression of the conflict of ideas, objects and the way of life of an entire society with those of another society.”⁶⁴ In 1993, Huntington famously wrote in his seminal essay *Clash of Civilization*, the “fault line of civilizations will be the battle lines of future.” Possibly in hindsight, similar conclusions can be drawn on the causes of Bangladesh War of Liberation in 1971.

Ayesha Jalal mentioned,

Pakistan's central leaders had expected to hasten process of assimilation and secure allegiance to a monolithic notion of state sovereignty, instead they created an arena of fierce contestation where Urdu, Mughal power and Islam wore doctrinal than syncretic in complexion, gave a powerful stimulus to the articulation of regional dissent in the linguistic idioms.⁶⁵

In the aftermath of the split of Pakistan, General Niazi acknowledged that “the culture of East Pakistan clashed with the culture of West Pakistan.”⁶⁶ Fault lines of culture became the battle lines of East and West Pakistan. Rafiuddin Ahmed's observation that “a religious community, without socio-territorial base, is not real”⁶⁷ seems true. East Pakistan, unlike West Pakistan, had a long history of syncretistic culture symbolised and exemplified through their folk songs, art, literature, music, and festivals. The sum of this mosaic culture is its very “Bengaliness.” Jinnah ideated Pakistan on the “two nation” theory but he never explained in clear terms, in writing or verbally, his idea of Pakistan. In 1947, it was the wave of religion that created Pakistan; in 1971, it was the cultural movement that started with the Language Movement in East Pakistan that triggered a nationalist movement that ultimately transformed into an armed struggle, resulting in secession of Pakistan. In the final analysis, the emergence of Bangladesh signifies the triumph of culture over religion. With the birth of Bangladesh, Jinnah's two-nation theory was forever sunk in the Bay of Bengal!

Notes

1 Victor Hugo (1802–85), French poet, novelist and dramatist. Victor Hugo, *History of a Crime*, trans. T.H. Joyce and Arthur Locker (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1879).

2 Muhammad Ali Chaudhuri, *The Emergence of Pakistan* (Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, University of Lahore, 1973), pp. 1–7.

3 Macaulay wrote his famous “Minute on Education,” which aimed at producing “a class of per morals and intellect,” In pursuance of this policy, English was brought in

- as language for higher education and replaced Persian in official, business, and court of law transactions. Also read Chaudhuri, *The Emergence of Pakistan*, p. 7.
- 4 Sengupta Nitish, *Land of Two Rivers* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2011), p. 281.
 - 5 R.C. Majumdar, *History of Freedom Movement in India* (Calcutta: Firma KLM Private Limited, 1962), pp. 414–415.
 - 6 Ibid., pp. 414–415.
 - 7 J.N. Dixit, *Liberation of Bangladesh* (New Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1999), p. 1.
 - 8 Nitish, *Land of Two Rivers*, p. 278.
 - 9 Quoted in Nitish, p. 278; W.W. Hunter, *Indian Musalmans* (London: Trubner & Company, 1876), p. 158.
 - 10 Dixit, *Liberation of Bangladesh*, pp. 2–5.
 - 11 Quoted in Chaudhuri, 1973, reprint of 2nd ed. of 1967, p. 9.
 - 12 Nitish, pp. 286–287. Raja Indra Chandra Singh of Paikpara was one of its vice presidents. Amongst other prominent Hindu members were Maharaja Jatindra Mohan Tagore, Surendra Nath Banerjee, etc.
 - 13 Rabindranath Tagore too opposed this partition. He organised Rakhi Utsav to symbolise unity amongst Bengalis and composed his famous poem Banglar mati Banglar jal, *Banglar bayu Banglar fal punya houk punya houk*. The swadeshi movement, boycotting foreign goods, etc. happened in protest. Also read Craig Baxter, *Bangladesh: From a Nation to a State* (Nashville, TN: Westview Publishing, 1998). Only a handful of Muslim leaders like Liaqat Ali Khan and Barrister Abdullah Rasul joined the protest against partition; otherwise, a majority of the Muslims in East Bengal supported it. Nawab Salimullah of Dhaka and Nawab Ali Choudhury of Dhanbari (Tangail) supported the partition. They were the followers of the Aligarh school of politics.
 - 14 Nawab Salimullah on the conclusion of AIMEC meeting held at Dhaka, convened another meeting where All India Muslim League was formed on 31 December 1906. Later its headquarters was shifted to Lucknow in 1910 when Urdu speaking Musalmans of North India controlled the organisation. Also read B.D. Banerjee, *East Pakistan: A Case Study in Muslim Politics* (Delhi: Vikas, 1969).
 - 15 Nitish, p. 347.
 - 16 Allahabad Resolution – 1930.
 - 17 Hajari Nisid, *Midnight's Furies: The Deadly Legacy of India's Partition* (Harcourt: Houghton Mifflin, 2015).
 - 18 Moon Pendel, *Divide and Quit* (Oxford, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 21.
 - 19 Nitish, p. 486.
 - 20 Dixit, p. 6.
 - 21 Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman Jinnah, The Muslim League and the Demand For Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
 - 22 Mountbatten and Jinnah negotiations on Pakistan April–July 1947 – Cabinet Mission Plan (2019). Available at: <https://sites.google.com/site/cabinetmissionplan/mountbatten-and-jinnah-negotiations-on-pakistan-april-> (viewed on 25 December 2018).
 - 23 Seven leaders present on 2 June 1947, when Mountbatten announced his proposal of partition were, from the Congress party, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, and J.B. Kripalani; M.A. Jinnah, Liaquat Ali Khan, and Abdur Rab Nishtar from the Muslim League; and Baldev Singh representing the Sikhs. When on 3 June 1947, after seeking the approval of Gandhi, Mountbatten announced it in All India Radio, Nehru, Jinnah, and Baldev Singh announced their acceptance. Not a single leader from Bengal was present member 201.
 - 24 William Shakespeare, Julius Ceaser, Act-3, Scene-2, p. 8.
 - 25 The Radcliff Boundary Commission was appointed both for Bengal and Punjab, presided over by Sir Cyril Radcliff, a British jurist. For the division of Bengal, four members were part of this commission, two Hindus and two Muslims. They were Justice Bijan Mukherjee and Justice G.C. Biswas and Justice S.A. Rahaman and Justice A.M.

22 Idea of Pakistan and road to Bangladesh

- Akram, respeciately. Because of their differences in opinion, the final award was an arbitrary award by Radcliff, which defied logic. The award, which was kept secret, was revealed on 17 August, two days after independence, to make it *fait accompli*. In less than six weeks, the task of such complexity that decided fate of millions was finalised.
- 26 Muhammad Ali Jinnah's presidential address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan on 11th August 1947. Available at www.pakistani.org/pakistan/legislation/constituent_add_11th_August1947.html, viewed on 8th August 2014.
- 27 www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/culture, viewed on 10th August 2014.
- 28 www.tamu.edu/faculty/choudhury/culture.html, viewed on 12th August 2014.
- 29 Akbar S. Ahmed, *Jinnah, Pakistan and Islamic Identity* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 240 quoted in Iain Cochrane, p. 30.
- 30 Rehman Shoban, *The Crisis of the Bourgeois State: Selected Papers on the Bangladesh Economy* (in Bangla) (Dhaka: Jatiya Shahitya Prakashani, 1982), p. 204. Also read Tariq Rahman, *Language and Ethnicity in Pakistan, Text in Education and Society*, ed. Desmond Allison (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1998), p. 240.
- 31 Nitish, p. 505.
- 32 *Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Smarakgrantha*, ed. Anisuzzaman (Dhaka: Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Smritiraksha Parishad, 1994), pp. 391–404: Cited by Dr. M. Waheeduzzaman Manik in Dhirendra Nath Datta and the Making of the Bengali Language Movement. Also read, Philip Stephen Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (Washington, DC: Brookings Publications, 1992), pp. 34–54.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Oldenburg, "A Place Insufficiently Imagined." Language Belief and the Pakistan Crisis of 1971, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 04, August 1985, pp. 711–733.
- 35 This song was written by Abdul Gaffar Choudhury and the tune was composed by Abdul Latif. Later it was translated to English by Kabir Chowdhury. The song is recognised as the most influential song of the Language Movement. (Also see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amar_Bhaier_Rokte_Rangano).
- 36 Richard Sisson and Leo E. Rose, *War and Secession: Pakistan, India and the Creation of Bangladesh* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), p. 15.
- 37 Philip Oldenburg, "A Place Insufficiently Imagined: Language, Belief, and the Pakistan Crisis of 1971." *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 4, August 1985, pp. 711–733. (1990), p. 15.
- 38 Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850* (Oxford: Routledge, 2005), p. 570.
- 39 British High Commission, Calcutta, DO 196/319, 3 August 1966, National Archive, Kew, quoted in Ian Cochrane, in *The Birth of Bangladesh*, Amazon.co.uk, Great Britain, 2009, p. 65.
- 40 British High Commission, Rawalpindi, DO 134/33, 20 March 1967, National Archives, Kew, cited in Ian Chociane, p. 68.
- 41 G.W. Choudhury, *The Last Days of United Pakistan* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1993), quoted in Nii Kathy in "Songs of Freedom".
- 42 Sanjay K. Bhadwaj, Contesting Identities in Bangladesh: A Study of Secular and Religious Frontiers, *Asia Research Centre Working Paper 36*, London School of Economics.
- 43 Sheikh Mujibur Raman, *Bangladesh, My Bangladesh* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1972), pp. 130–149. Also see, Dixit, pp. 17–20. Here full text of six points program with Mujib's explanatory note has been included.
- 44 Cohen Philip Stephen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2004), pp. 15–34, http://www.academia.edu/18691313/Stephen_Philip_Cohen_The_Idea_of_Pakistan_2004_ch_1_15_34, viewed on 10 December 2014.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Rehman Sobhan, *Bangladesh: The Problem of Governance* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1993), pp. 82–108.

- 47 Feroze Ahmed, *Ethnicity and Politics in Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 20. quoted in Ian Cochrane, *The Causes of Bangladesh War* (2009), p. 45.
- 48 Ahmed, *Ethnicity and Politics in Pakistan*, p. 20. quoted in Ian Cochrane, *The Causes of Bangladesh War*, p. 45.
- 49 Dixit, pp. 15–16.
- 50 Nitish, p. 544.
- 51 Mujib's speech quoted in Mascarenhas Antony, *The Rape of Bangladesh* (Delhi: Vikas Publication, 1971), p. 17. Also see "Speeches of Sheik Mujib," 1972. Translation in English. External Publicity Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of Bangladesh.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Speeches of Mujibur Rahman.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Lt. General A.A.K. Niazi, *The Betrayal of East Pakistan* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1998), p. 46.
- 56 Operation Searchlight was Pakistan's military action against the Bengali nationalists, launched by Lt. Gen. Tikka Khan on the night of 25/26 March 1971. Operation Blitz was launched in November 1970, Operation Searchlight followed it. Also see Ganguly Sumit, *Conflict Unending: India-Pakistan Tensions Since 1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 60. Also read, Niazi, *The Betrayal of East Pakistan*, pp. 45–46.
- 57 Niazi, p. 46.
- 58 Mujib's last message. see "Speeches of Sheik Mujib". 1972. Translation in English. External Publicity Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of Bangladesh.
- 59 Allen Ginsberg will be remembered by Bengalis for calling the world's attention to the suffering of victims during the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971. He wrote his legendary 152-line poem, *September on Jessore Road*, after visiting refugee camps and witnessing the plight of millions fleeing the violence. Also, See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allen_Ginsberg.
- 60 'September on Jessore Road' by Allen Ginsberg. Copyright © 1971, Allen Ginsberg, used by permission of The Wylie Agency (UK) Limited.
- 61 Desh Premik and Swadhinatar Gaan, *Patriots and Songs of Freedom*. Available at www.londoni.co/index.php/history-of-bangladesh?id=160, viewed on 8th July 2014. Also see Yusuf Banna, "A Tribute to Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra."
- 62 Maulana Abul Kalam, Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (Calcutta: Orient Longmann, 1959), p. 227.
- 63 Benazir Bhutto, *Daughter of the East* (Great Britain: Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 2008), p. 53.
- 64 Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976, rev. 1984), ISBN 0-691-056-57-9.
- 65 Jalal Ayesha, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 225.
- 66 Niazi, p. 33.
- 67 Raifuddin Ahmed, *Understanding the Bengal Muslims* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 2.

2

ART OF WAR

Nuances of strategy, operational art, and tactics

All men can see these tactics whereby I conquer, but what none can see is the strategy out of which victory is evolved.

—Sun Tzu, Art of War¹

The central theme of this book being the politico-military strategy of the Bangladesh Liberation War, an explanation on the historical transformation and changed perception of strategy as applicable in modern warfare will facilitate better clarity for the reader on its definition, attributes, and correlation with other components of state machinery in the conduct of war. Since time immemorial, there have been great many works on warfare and strategy, like *Peloponnesian War* of Thucydides; Chanakya's *Arthashastra* and Sun Tzu's *Art of War*—both written almost twenty-five centuries ago—Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Art of War*, *The Discourses*, and *The Prince*, written in the sixteenth century; Frederick the Great's *Instructions for His Generals*; *The Military Maxims* of Napoleon; *The Art of War* by Jomini; *Art of War* by Clausewitz; *Strategy of Indirect Approach* by Liddle Hart; and, last but not least, contemporary American strategist Colin S. Gray's *Modern Strategy*.

The art of warfare is practiced on three levels: strategic, operational, and tactical. The English word “strategy” originates from the Greek word *strategia*, meaning “the generalship” and ,therefore, the art of planning and directing overall military operations and movements in a war or battle.² For most of history, two conceptual levels of warfare and command have sufficed: strategy (how to win war) and tactics (how to win battles). It seems that Admiral Marlborough was able to distinguish between the two when he famously said: “My strategy is one against ten, my tactics ten against one.”³

Over time, the scope of strategy, once considered a pure military concept related to warfare, has been enhanced. Clausewitz defines military strategy as “the

art of employment of battles as a means to gain the object of war.⁴ Liddle Hart modifies this definition to term it “the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfil the ends of policy.”⁵ As society and warfare have steadily grown more complex, military and political factors have become more and more inseparable in the conduct of war. Georges Benjamin Clemenceau, Prime Minister of France during World War I, famously said, “War is too serious a business to be left to the generals.”⁶ General Charles de Gaulle, a well-known WWI and WWII veteran who later rose to become president of France, said, “War is too serious a business to be left to politicians,”⁷ a kind of rebuttal to Clemenceau. In the context of modern warfare, both are partially right in their respective standpoints. The essence of both the statements taken together makes better sense because of the kind of ramifications war has on a modern nation state. Strategy is no more confined to the generals, which many centuries ago might have been the truth. Hence, the importance of political strategy or policy guidelines on the aim of war, which military (army/navy/air force) commanders need to translate in terms of military strategy with a view to achieving the national aim. Political considerations have always conditioned military operations. Clausewitz makes this a central theme of his theory of war, repeatedly stressing the subordination of war to politics, asserting that “war should never be thought of as something autonomous, but always as an instrument of policy.”⁸

When military and political strategy merge to achieve the national aim after factoring in aspects such as the economy and the available power of information, then the combined strategy takes the shape of the “grand strategy.” The role of grand strategy is to coordinate and direct all the resources of a nation, or band of nations, towards the attainment of the political objective of the war. Most importantly, grand strategy looks beyond war to the subsequent peace.⁹

Col. Ravi Nanda in his book *National Strategy of India* states:

In today’s environment, national strategy concerns whole gamut of national wellbeing and existence. National interest in purely political-military terminology should be one for which a nation should be ready to go to war. This definition would emphasize the seriousness with which national interest of a country need to be identified and analysed so that they do not commit their country to war by an error of judgment... national interest will also include the elimination of hostile neighbours or their neutralization by diplomatic, political or military means so that they cease to interfere with its national security. Diplomacy and foreign policy are two means for effective neutralization or elimination of the hostility of superpowers.¹⁰

Definition of strategy

War strategy is aimed at achieving the policy objective. Webster’s dictionary defines strategy as “the science and art of employing the political, economic, psychological, and military forces of a nation or group of nations to afford the

maximum support to adopted policies in peace or war.”¹¹ Strategy flows from national policy. From the military point of view, contemporary strategist Colin Gray’s definition is also worth mentioning. He says:

By strategy I mean the use that is made of force and the threat of force for the ends of policy.¹²

The US Department of Defense gives a comprehensive modern definition of strategy by stating, “It is the art and science of developing and employing instruments of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theatre, national, and/or multinational objectives.”¹³ This definition encompasses aspects related to war strategy aiming at victory, which is the very purpose of strategy.

Leadership and the strategy formulation process

The high-level conduct of war needs leadership vision and constant focus on the strategic objective. Leaders at the strategic level should be flexible, to change and adapt with the shift in situations, “but above all (there should be) unity of purpose and effort based on a firm grip of reality. To that end, strategic leadership in war demands consistent coherence between political objectives and the politico-military organization.”¹⁴ Strategic planning is an evolving process that needs to take note of various internal and external parameters, which will be discussed along with a risk calculus model to check the risk factor on the evolved strategy.

Comprehensiveness of strategy

During the formulation of strategy, aspects that need to be considered are



FIGURE 2.1 Comprehensiveness of strategy.¹⁵

- National Interests, to include national policies based on national value and the end state desired;
- External Environment, to include domestic and internal conditions affecting the state;
- National Security Strategy, to include the combined political, economic, military, and information elements of power (intelligence); and
- the National Military Strategy, which signifies the military state of power aimed at achieving the policy objective during the war.

The theatre level strategy is executed through Operational Art and Tactics, fulfilling the military aim of the war. It therefore must be understood that strategy is comprehensive and cannot be formulated on a “stand-alone mode.” The above diagram in this context is self-explanatory. Richard Yadger, in his seminal essay, “Towards a Theory of Strategy,” makes similar suggestions, insisting on the totality aspect of strategy formulation. He says:

While the strategist may be devising a strategy from a particular perspective, he must consider the whole of the strategic environment in his analysis to arrive at a proper strategy to serve his purpose at his level. ... In formulating a strategy, the strategist must also be cognizant that each aspect—objectives, concepts, and resources—has effects on the environment around him. ... Strategists must think holistically ... must be cognizant of both the “big picture,” their own institution’s capabilities and resources, and the impact of their actions on the whole of the environment. Good strategy is never developed in isolation.¹⁶

Risk calculus: strategy

“The Art Lykke Strategy Model” is worth considering in understanding the risk factor of an evolved strategy. Col. Lykke, a renowned professor of strategy who taught at the US War College, devised a simple but effective model known as “The Lykke Model,” shown below. The model depicts the risk factor to check the viability of the evolved strategy. Risk factor widens (becomes more) with the corresponding mismatch of “ends and the means.”

In the Lykke proposition (model) the ends are “objectives,” the ways are the “concepts” for accomplishing the objectives, and the means are the “resources” for supporting the concepts. The stool tilts if the three legs are not kept in balance. If one leg is too short, the risk is too great and the strategy falls over.¹⁷

Richard Yadger explains that it should be evident that the model poses three key questions for strategists: What is to be done? How is it to be done? What resources are required to do it in this manner? Lykke argues that if any leg of the stool is out of balance then one accepts a corresponding risk unless one adjusts the legs. One might add resources, use a different concept, or change the objective. Or, one might decide to accept the risk. The theory is

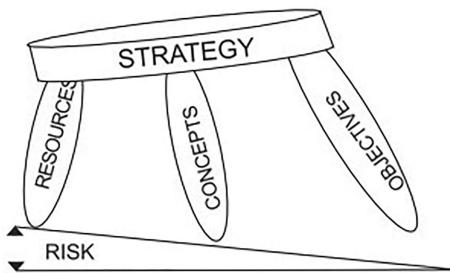


FIGURE 2.2 The Lykke model.¹⁸

quite clear—a valid strategy must have an appropriate balance of objectives, concepts, and resources or its success is at greater risk. The strategist seeks to minimize this risk through his development of the strategy—the balance of ends, ways, and means.¹⁹

To sum it up it, I would like to quote Henry Eccles, who describes strategy as “the comprehensive direction of power to control situations and areas in order to attain objectives.” His definition captures much of the essence of strategy. It is comprehensive, it provides direction, its purpose is control, and it is fundamentally concerned with application of power.”²⁰

Operational art

Operational art refers to the military commander’s employment of force in a theatre of operations in order to achieve strategic objectives. Operational art is inextricably linked to the planning and conduct of military campaigns in specific theatres of war, which distinguishes it from tactics and strategy.²¹ Operational art has been defined as “the pursuit of strategic objectives in whole or part, through the arrangement of tactical actions in time, space, and purpose.”²²

At the operational level, battles are fought to achieve or deny freedom of action, rather than to achieve the destruction of the enemy. Operational art is, therefore, oriented towards geography and terrain, instead of the classical strategy of focusing on the enemy. The retention and seizure of key terrain features with a view to retain freedom of action while denying the same to the enemy thus becomes central to the practice of operational art.

According to US historian Michael D. Krause, the Germans are traditionally credited with delineating the three levels of warfare. The operational level of war situated conceptually between war (the strategic level) and battle (the tactical level) was, according to Krause, first conceptualised by Von Moltke, although it was not given this name by the German general. Instead, it was the Soviets who gave the Western world the term “operational art.” Between the wars, a group of outstanding Soviet military theorists—including M.N. Tukhachevsky, Aleksandr

Svechin, N.E. Varfolomeev, G.S. Isserson, and V.K. Triandaffilov—codified the theoretical basis for the development of the operational level of war and the concept of the operational art, both of which sought to redefine the purpose of battle in the post-First World War environment.²³ Operational art, as a distinct field of study, emerged in the 1920s and evolved over the next two decades as Soviet military theorists pondered the nature of modern war and solutions to the dilemmas of the First World War. The most important questions of the day were how to restore mobility and manoeuvring to a stagnant battlefield and how to harness those means to achieve strategic aims. According to Shimon Naveh, the development of the post-1917 Soviet school of operational warfare is “the most creative theoretical adventure in the military history of the twentieth century.”²⁴ The Soviets, like the Germans before them, recognised that the conditions of warfare were changing.

Soviet strategists such as Tchaikovsky and Svechin had postulated in the early 1920s that military art is divided into strategy, operational art, and tactics. Over the years, the military world has realised that, indeed, strategy and tactics are interconnected. There is a creative art called operational art that needs to be explained to ensure that the tactical results are made to serve the strategic purpose of operations.²⁵ The military campaign through which operational art is conducted comprises a series of major operations (land/air/sea) sequenced and synchronised in time and space to accomplish a strategic objective in a given theatre of operations. A major operation is described as a series of tactical actions like battles, engagements, strikes, raids, etc., sequenced in time and space to achieve an operational goal. A logical sequence of handling operational art would be by finding answers to the questions as under:

How does operational art fit into the strategy-operation-tactical levels of war? How do these interact? How does the military campaign become the vehicle of the operational art? How is the campaign designed? What are the strategic aims? What are the end state and operational objectives to be achieved? What are the critical enemy factors that need to be considered to ensure defeat? How are the operations sequenced and harmonised? How operation art is executed? What is the end distillate—the campaign plan? How are the building blocks of operational art like manoeuvring, mobility, surprise, operational logistics, and, above all, leadership appropriately employed to achieve success?

In essence, the operational level of war is the discipline of conceiving, focusing, and exploiting tactical actions, including their sequencing, to realise strategic aims. The operational level thus involves the decision of when, where, for what purpose, and under what conditions to engage in or refuse a battle, with reference to the strategic vision. As Manstein, the great World War II German strategist said, “The basic concept of a campaign plan with which it is intended to execute operations should be born in the mind of the man who has to direct the campaign.”²⁶ This brings the element of creativity into operational art, even in those cases when the strategic vision is provided to the operational commander by an apex authority. The basic tool by which the operational commander translates tactical actions into strategic results is the campaign. Thus, just as strategy

is the discipline of making war and tactics the discipline of fighting and winning in combat, the operational level of war can be described as the discipline of campaigning. Its “means” are tactical results. Its “ends” are the accomplishment of the established strategic aim. Its “ways” are the schemes by which the senior commanders combine and sequence tactical means to reach the strategic end-state. From the point of view of distributed operations, operational art is best expressed in the use of multiple axes of advance, directed against the enemy’s capacity to wage war—his centre of gravity.

Tactics

The word “tactics” comes from the modern Latin *tactica* (17c)—which finds its origin in the ancient Greek word *taktike* meaning “art of arrangement”—is a conceptual action implemented as one or more specific tasks.²⁷ Webster’s dictionary defines “tactics” as “the activity or skill of organizing and moving soldiers and equipment in a military battle”.²⁸ These days the word tactics is used in many fields like politics, sports, business, etc.

Clausewitz said that military tactics are the science and art of organising a military force, and the techniques for combining and using weapons and military units to engage and defeat an enemy in a battle.²⁹ Tactics are operation and terrain specific. For example, tactics for offensive battles in each type of terrain like mountains, deserts, jungles, plains, riverine, etc. will be different. Similarly, different types of operations like advance to contact, defence, attack, ambush, raid, patrolling, counter insurgency, etc. have different tactics that are taught in military schools and practiced as part of the military’s operational role. Military technology is also factored into the tactical concept of battle. The whole aim is to defeat the enemy at the earliest with the least possible damage to one’s own forces.

The four recognised operations of war are advance, attack, defence, and withdrawal. Advance and attack are offensive operations while defence and withdrawal (retrograde) come under defensive operations. However, though the offensive element is predominant in offensive operations, a certain amount of defensive aspects are inherent in them. For instance, an attack is launched from a firm base and terminates in the reorganisation of the objective—both have all the ingredients of a defensive operation. Similarly, there is an inherent element of offensive aspects in a defensive operation. It can be said that from the point of view of tactical concepts, there is no operation of war that is purely defensive or offensive in nature. The dividing line between the two operations of war, advance and attack, is difficult to determine. This will be obvious from the fact that a force undertaking an advance operation of war will invariably be required to launch several attacks during advance.

In the case of the Bangladesh campaign, being a riverine terrain, two aspects of tactical warfare in addition to advancing to contact require mentioning. Here, the attacking force must invariably undertake crossing the river, whether it is held or not by the opposing force. In military tactical terminology, “opposed

river crossing operation is to be launched if held by the enemy or opportunity crossing operation to be undertaken if un-held or very thinly held by the enemy.” To gain tactically, the defending force needs to utilise these river obstacles to their advantage. In this type of situation, both the defenders as well as the attackers have unique problems that need to be planned and addressed. For example, a defender will always be short of troops. A river being a natural obstacle, there is a need to keep the ground ahead under surveillance, hold the likely crossing places strongly, and have sizable reserves to react.

An attacker in this type of situation should ensure that the advance to the river line dovetails into the proposed plan of crossing. The advance should be made rapidly on a wide front. Mechanised forces (armour and mechanised infantry), artillery, and bridging equipment with adequate engineering resources must be grouped with the infantry. It would be better to organise into a composite task force concept to attempt encounter crossings. The employment of parachute units/ helicopter-borne units in conjunction with task forces can be considered to ensure speed and momentum. As far as possible, the selection of the crossing place (in tactical terms, “the bridgehead”) should be chosen after considering tactical as well as technical aspects like which place would offer the maximum tactical advantage for progressing the operation in depth and which requires affordable engineering efforts to cross. All efforts must be made to capture an existing bridge intact. From a tactical point of view, rivers are crossed by the assaulting troops in the dark so that there are fewer casualties. After establishing a bridgehead, it should be ensured that the area is covered by artillery and air force through their firepower. In a major river crossing operation, a reserve of engineer manpower and equipment must be maintained to cater to any unforeseen eventualities of bridges/rafts being damaged or destroyed.³⁰

It is a matter of debate until what level formations could be said to fight tactical battles. In the Indian context, it is perceived that battles up to the level of division can be categorised under this head. At the corps level, depending on the situation and the composition of the force, military operations could either turn into the strategic or tactical level. However, many feel that only the theatre commander has the capability to undertake strategic level operations, not a corps. In fact, there cannot be a sacrosanct dividing line. The United States Department of Defense Dictionary of Military Terms defines the tactical level as

the level of war at which battles, and engagements are planned and executed to accomplish military objectives assigned to tactical units or task forces. Activities at this level focus on the ordered arrangement and manoeuvre of combat elements in relation to each other and to the enemy to achieve combat objectives.³¹

Historians have largely overlooked the operational level of 1971 Indo-Pakistan War. I intend to debate the successful or otherwise practice of operational art during the Bangladesh Liberation War.

Ruthless honesty is critical to the high-level conduct of war (strategic leadership), requiring an unremitting focus on the strategic objective, openness to change and adaptation, but above all unity of purpose and effort based on a firm grip of reality. To that end, strategic leadership in war demands consistent coherence between political objectives the political strategy and the politico-military and military organization.

Actually, leadership is the most important factor in formulating strategy. Clarity of thought, vision, and adaptability exemplify the strategic leader as much as resolution and determination. An ability to live with ambiguity and uncertainty, and, not least, a pragmatic capacity to take a calculated risk for the longer-term and greater benefit distinguishes the successful strategic leader from the tactical thinker.³²

As tactics are an application of strategy on a lower plane, so too is strategy is an application on a lower plane of “grand strategy.” While practically synonymous with the policy that guides the conduct of war, as distinct from the more fundamental policy that should govern its objective, the term “grand strategy” serves to bring out the sense of “policy in execution,” for the role of grand strategy—higher strategy—is to coordinate all the resources of a nation, or a band of nations, towards the attainment of the political object of the war—the goal defined by fundamental policy.³³

Today wars are thus fought to fashion stability for which intense civil, military, and bureaucratic cooperation is a prerequisite. How does one judge whether the strategy formulated by leaders are right or wrong? The rightness or wrongness of a strategy depends on the situation. Because of this situational dependency, strategic planning is an evolving process. If you don’t like your current situation you have the power to change it. By changing, in a strategic situation you change others. There is a strategic umbilical cord connecting you to others. As they move, you move, and vice-versa.³⁴

For a military campaign to be successful, political objectives and military strategy must be in total sync. It is imperative that between the political and military leaders responsible for the higher direction of the war there is adequate harmony. “Strategy guides operations in three basic ways: it establishes aims, allocates resources, and imposes conditions on military action. Together with the enemy and the geography of the theatre or area, strategy guidance defines the parameters of operations.”³⁵

Strategy is all about how (way or concept) leadership will use the power (means or resources) available to the state to exercise control over sets of circumstances and geographic locations to achieve objectives (ends) that support state interests.³⁶ The word strategy has found usage in many fields other than the military, such as politics, economics, business, sports, etc. The word “tactics” too has similar usage in these fields. Strategy is in the higher plane and tactics are in the lower plane. So, the basic concept everywhere is the optimal economic usage of resources for the maximum gain on a planned path to reach a desired goal. A strategist or a tactician has to be ever proactive and keep themselves abreast with the latest happenings. Strategists in particular must be visionary people, who

can chart a new course of action that results in long-term benefits to the nation/organisation they are leading. A strategist as well as a tactician should have “out of box” thinking abilities.

From World War I onwards, the process of evolving national strategy as well as war strategy has become more comprehensive. Improvements in automobiles, weapons, ammunition, and surveillance technology have added new dimensions to operational art and the tactical level of war. International relations, strategic alliances with other friendly nations, the justification of resorting to military action, and, last but not the least, the legality aspect of the conduct of war, adhering to international norms and conventions have to be factored in when resorting to a nation’s last option: the military. In essence, war strategy is a nation’s policy in motion.

A large nation like India, surrounded by many neighbouring countries, some of whom are not too friendly, makes it a compulsion to continuously review the international situation as well as internal economic and military capabilities so that the country can remain prepared for any eventuality. Therefore, it is a strategic imperative for India to prepare or perish.

By World War I, it was clear that single battles could not yield strategic results. The armies were simply too large for single decisive battles to provide political results, and so campaigns designed to arrange a series of battles became necessary. Strategy and tactics have long been studied and described, but the third level of war—the operational level (operational art)—in the context of the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War has been hardly studied, which has been covered in this book, albeit briefly. Understanding warfare is a science, but the conduct of war itself is largely an art. This will not change in the future, regardless of scientific and technological advances. As in the past, the character of war will change, even dramatically, but the nature of war as explained by Clausewitz will not.³⁷

Notes

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5 B.H. Liddle Hart, *Strategy*, Second Reviewed Edition (New York: Meriden, 1967), p. 321.

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34 Art of war

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3

MILITARY GEOGRAPHY OF EAST PAKISTAN

Its implications on formulation of war strategy and conduct of battles

If a general desired to be a successful actor in the great drama of war, his first duty is to study carefully the theater of operations so that he may see clearly the relative advantages and disadvantages it presents for himself and his enemies.

—Baron de Jomini¹

The French term *coup d'oeil* (an eye for the ground), coined by Fredrick the Great, appears to symbolise the intellectual capacity of military commanders to evaluate geography and apply that evaluation to the successful prosecution of war. “*Coup d'Oeil* views geography as the relationship among what a commander can do with the ground, what his opponent can do with the ground, and how they will interact on the ground.”² The military geography of a country has a great influence on the formulation of war strategy and execution of military operational plans.

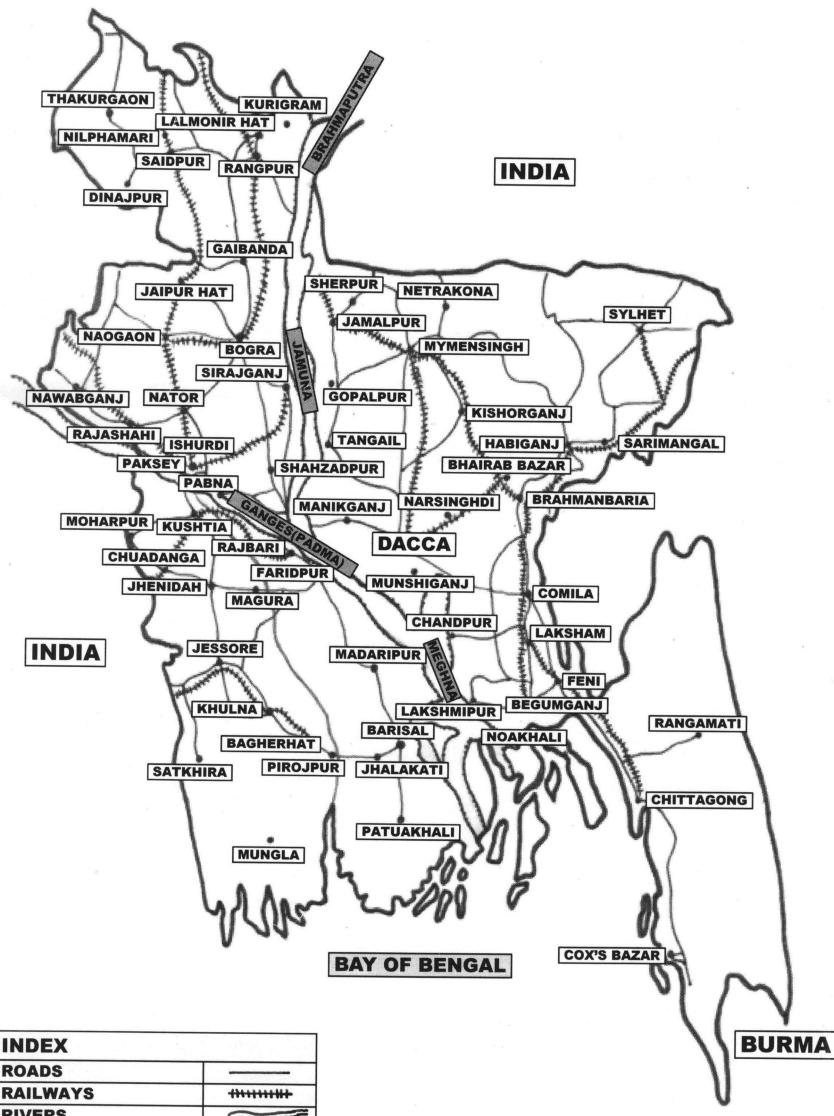
This aspect of geography is the relationship of some, or the total of all the environmental factors such as relief, climate and weather, vegetation, soils, lithology, drainage characteristics, and cultural features—to the solution of military tactical and strategic problems.³

It is therefore imperative that a detailed study of the military geography of East Pakistan as in 1971 be a prerequisite in assessing the effects of terrain and topography on the war strategy adopted by opposing forces related to the deployment of force, timing of the campaign, and tactical conduct of operations.

36 Military geography of East Pakistan

Military geography must be able to assist the commander:⁴

- 1 To envision the military end-state, where his forces must be at the desired end-state.
- 2 To envision a sequence of events in the medium of time, space, and mass, which gets his forces to the desired end-state.
- 3 Envision how to apply resources operational and logistical, which will carry the force through the sequence of events with sufficient strength to achieve the desired end-state.



MAP 3.1 Map of East Pakistan-1971.

The land

Pakistan was constructed as a geographical rarity with two wings, east and west, separated by 1,000 miles with India sandwiched between them and no land route connecting them. East Pakistan was carved out of the provinces of Bengal and Assam of British India. It was bounded on three sides by India's five north-eastern states—West Bengal to the west, Meghalaya to the north, and the Cachar District of Assam and Tripura to the east—and by the Bay of Bengal on the fourth side. A small portion in the south-east near Chittagong and Cox's Bazar bordered Burma (Myanmar). East Pakistan had typical riverine terrain, except for the hilly areas in the Sylhet and Chittagong; the remaining part of the terrain of this country was plain. Important geographical statistics are as stated below:⁵

- a Total Area –144,000 sq.km
- b Land – 133,910 sq. km
- c Water – 10,039 km
- d Land Boundaries – 4,246 km
 - i With India – 4,053 km
 - ii With Burma –193 km
 - iii Coastline – 580 km

Population

East Pakistan had a population of 75 million as of 1971. The average population density was 922 persons per square mile; in some parts it rose to 1,500 people per sq. mile. Among the population, almost 98% were Bengalis, and the balance were Urdu-speaking Bihari Muslims and members of various tribal groups mainly living in the Chittagong Hill Tract. From the religious group point of view, about 82% were Muslims, 17% Hindus, and the remaining were Buddhists, Christians, and practitioners of tribal religions.⁶

River system

East Pakistan had approximately 700 rivers including tributaries, which flow through the waterway of a total length of around 24,140 km. The rivers of East Pakistan stood out as a special mark in its physiography and had great influence on its population in terms of irrigation, water transportation, fishing, etc. During monsoon, the rivers were flooded and caused hardship for the people and many times it became devastating, causing enormous damage. There were three major rivers in East Pakistan, namely Padma (known as Ganga in India), Jamuna (known as Brahmaputra in India), and Meghna. These major rivers naturally divided the country into four sectors. They are:

- South-western sector (area south of Padma).
- North-western sector (lying between Padma and Jamuna).

38 Military geography of East Pakistan

- Central sector (lying between Jamuna and Meghna).
- Eastern sector (lying to the east of Meghna).

The river system of East Pakistan can be divided into five major networks as stated below:⁷

The Jamuna-Brahmaputra network

This was 292 km long and extended from northern East Pakistan to its confluence with the Padma, originating from Tibet and flowing through India's Arunachal Pradesh and Assam and then into East Pakistan. At the point where Brahmaputra meets the Tista River in East Pakistan, it becomes known as Jamuna. The sub-channels of Jamuna had been continuously shifting, as a sequel formation of "chars" (silt islands) occurred. Because of the continuous shifts, its banks are devoid of human habitation.

Padma-Ganges network

It was divided into two sections: a 258 km segment, the Ganges, which extends from the western border with India to its confluence with the Jamuna some 72km west of Dacca, and a 126 km segment, the Padma, which runs from the Ganges-Jamuna confluence to where it joins the Meghna at Chandpur.

Surma-Meghna

This was the third river network system, which ran from the north-eastern borders of India to Chandpur, where it joined Padma. It was the longest river network of East Pakistan, having a length of 669 km.

Padma-Meghna network

Below Kalipur, this river (Padma) got the name Meghna. It was 145 km long and flowed to the Bay of Bengal.

Karnaphuli

It was the fifth river system, which flowed through the region of Chittagong and Chittagong Hills and ran to the west and south-west and to the sea. The port of Chittagong was situated on the banks of Karnaphuli.

The climate

The climate of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) is characterised by high temperatures, heavy rainfall, and often excessive humidity and fairly marked seasonal

TABLE 3.1 Month-wise Temperature Conditions⁸

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Maximum temperature (°c)	25.4	28.1	32.3	34.2	33.4	31.7	31.1	31.3	31.6	31.0	28.9	26.1
Minimum temperature (°c)	12.3	14.0	19.0	23.1	24.5	25.5	25.7	25.8	25.5	23.5	18.5	13.5
Rain fall (in mm)	07.9	19.8	40.7	110.7	257.5	460.9	517.6	431.9	289.9	184.2	35.0	09.4

variations. It has a tropical monsoon-type climate and six seasons. The summer is hot and humid with a prolonged rainy season from June to September, at times spilling over into October, and a dry season in the cooler months from October to March. January is the coolest month while April is the warmest. The average annual rainfall is 200 cm.

In the early summer (April–May) and late in the monsoon season (September–November) storms of very high intensity with wind speeds of 100–150 miles/hour occur in the coastal districts, particularly those flanking the Meghna estuary, causing great losses of life and property. The Bhola Cyclone of November 1970 can be cited as an example of the worst kind of devastating cyclone that East Pakistan suffered.

Sector-wise terrain analysis

North-western sector

This sector is bounded by the Indian border (mainly West Bengal) to its north and western sides, on the east by the Jamuna River, and on the south by the Ganga River. From the Indian point of view, this sector assumed great strategic importance as it was adjacent to the Siliguri corridor, which is a gateway to the north-eastern states of India, Sikkim and Chumbi Valley. China, an ally of Pakistan, can threaten India in this sector if it decides to join war with Pakistan. The Siliguri corridor is a vulnerable area for India, which the war planners had to keep in mind.

Bogra and Rangpur were important communication centres. Rangpur was also an important cantonment. Other key places were Dinajpur, Pirganj, Gaibanda, Nator, and Bera. The road Tituliya to Bogra and Bera was an all-weather one in this sector, which connected Kushtia and Jessore by a ferry near Hardinge Bridge.

In addition, an offensive operation in the narrow waistline in between Hilli and Gaibanda would pose a great problem to the Pakistani defenders as it had strategic consequences. When considering Dacca the final objective, this sector provided the longest approach. There were no bridges on the Jamuna River to connect with the Dacca sector. Thakurgaon had a small airfield for light aircraft.

South-western sector

The river Ganga flowed to the north and east of this sector, on the south lay the Bay of Bengal, and in its west was the Indian border. From a communications point of view, this was an important sector as key towns such as Jessore, Jhenida, and Magura were located here; other important communication centres in this sector were Faridpur, Kustia, Khulna, and Chalna. Amongst these, Jessore was well known for its cantonment. It also could be considered a strategically important town that controlled communications to the Chalna port and the capital city, Dacca. Magura was another important communication centre, to the east of which the river Madhumati flowed. Magura controlled the ferries across Madhumati—Faridpur and Goalando Ghat. Chalna was developed as the second biggest port in East Pakistan, which allowed access to the open sea and, thus, to West Pakistan and the rest of the world. From there existed a strategically and commercially important communication road between Hardinge Bridge to Chalna, connecting Jhenida, Jessore, and Khulna.

This sector was the closest to Calcutta from the point of view of an invasion of Dacca. Distance-wise it was the second nearest approach from the Indian border. However, it must be noted that Dacca could not be reached with single mode of communication in this sector.

Eastern sector

This sector had a common boundary with the north-eastern states of India, Meghalaya on the north and Tripura, Mizoram, and some parts of Burma on the east. The Bay of Bengal was on its south and Meghna to the west. This area had mixed type terrain, unlike the other sectors. The area around the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Lalmai Hills (Comilla), and Sylhet had hilly terrain. Sylhet, Comilla, and Chittagong were the important towns in this sector. Chittagong and Cox's Bazar were two important seaports. Ashuganj, Chandpur, and Daudkandi were important ferries. Comilla had an all-weather airport and this important town was connected with Chittagong, Chandpur, Sylhet, and Dacca by rail and also had a road connection with Chittagong, Chandpur, Sylhet, and Daudkandi. Strategically, Comilla therefore assumed significance; its capture would deal a great blow to the defender. Chandpur was an important link between Chittagong and Dacca. It was also a road and rail terminus connecting Comilla and Akhaura.

It is important to mention that the bridge over Meghna at Ashuganj was not meant for road traffic. It had a meter gauge railway connecting Akhaura, Mymensingh, and Dacca. Communication with Silchar of India existed before partition and could be fixed with some effort, if needed. An approach to Dacca through this sector was the shortest from India.

Central sector

This sector was the gravitas centre because of the location of East Pakistan's capital, Dacca. The shape of this sector resembles an inverted triangle, with the

international border as its northern base and Dacca at its southern apex. The Meghna on the east and Jamuna on the west form the other two sides of the triangle.⁹ To reach Dacca one needed to clear Tangail, it being an important communication centre on the approach road. To reach this sector, particularly Dacca, from north-western or south-western sectors, ferries had to be used as there was no road link. Only from the eastern sector Chandpur, Daudkandi, and Bhairab Bazaar had road links to Dacca.

When moving from Meghalaya towards Dacca, Brahmaputra, a local tributary of Jamuna, could be crossed at the ferries of Jamalpur and Mymensingh vis-à-vis other approaches, which were more interspersed with rivers. Brahmaputra, which was about 100 feet wide, was the only water obstacle to be crossed by ferry. However, this approach from India is the second longest approach.

Communication systems

Roads and rail communications for undivided Bengal as well as Assam were developed with focal points in Calcutta and Chittagong. Most important roads and rail routes ran from the south to north. Roads and railways running east to west had to cross many rivers and streams, which were not always bridged. Dacca, being district town during the British Indian era, was not part of the main communication network. Only after the birth of Pakistan and after it became the capital of East Pakistan did Dacca gain prominence. Because of the step-motherly treatment it received from the colonial-minded Pakistan government, there was bare minimum development of the communication system.¹⁰

Dacca was surrounded by the Brahmaputra, Jamuna, and Meghna rivers in the east and west and delta areas to the south. Thus, Dacca enjoys natural protection from three sides, which an invader had to factor into his attack plan. It is also worth mentioning that since the pre-partition era, Dacca had been linked with other prominent towns in East Pakistan, but there was no direct road linkage from India. Dacca could not be reached without crossing at least one major river.

The north-western and south-western sectors were linked by the Hardinge Bridge over the Ganga, but this bridge was not meant for vehicular traffic. The Meghna river divided the eastern part into two, i.e., the eastern and central sectors. The Rail Bridge at Ashugang over Meghna linked the two and connected Chittagong with Dacca, Mymensingh, and Jamalpur, etc. From the strategic as well as tactical point of view both bridges were of great significance.

In addition to the big rivers discussed above, there were numerous other rivers such as the Madhumati, Karatoya, Surmam and their tributaries, whose size during monsoon season became exceptionally large when they were in spate. The state-operated water transportation system was an integral part of the popular communication system. There were various types of rivercrafts and boats were extensively used by the locals, which were their lifeline. About the communication system in East Pakistan, Lt. Gen. A.A.K. Niazi, Commander of the East Pakistan Forces, succinctly said,

42 Military geography of East Pakistan

Here the communication system is unique in the world; it is waterway-railway-roads, in that order, while in the rest of the world it is the other way round. To get from Dacca to Jessore: up to Narayanganj the journey would be by train or road, from Narayanganj to Khulna or Goalando Ghat by steamer, and from there to Jessore by broad gauge railway. A crow's flight distance of 75 miles from Dacca to Jessore would take two days and involve three trans-shipments.¹¹

Railways

East Pakistan had approximately 1,700 miles of railways, of which two-thirds were metric gauge and one-third was broad gauge. The latter covered Khulna, Chilhati, Benapol, Faridpur, Bhatiapara, the Kumarkhali ghats, and Sirajganj. Ishurdi used to be the focus of most of the traffic. Paksay was the headquarters for the railways commercial and transportation district, which covered the whole broad-gauge system.

The main meter gauge system was in the eastern and central regions, with controlling HQs at Dacca and Pahartali (Chittagong). The Bhairab Bazar (Dacca) sector included Narayanganj, Jagannathganj Ghat, Jamalpur-Bahadurbud Ghat, and Tongiti Chhatak via Akhaura. Chittagong (Pahartali) controlled rail/communication from south of Akhaura in Chittagong-Akhaura, Lakshan, Chandpur, Lakshan-Noakhali, Feni-Belonia, and Chittagong-Doa. The river ferries at Jagannathganj-Sirajganj and Bahadurabad-Fulchari were maintained by the railways in addition to the large bridges at Paksey, Bhairale, and Mymensingh.

The railway system had linked at nine places with the Indian railway at the time of the division of British India; but during 1971 they were not operational.

Inland water transport

Being a riverine country and also with innumerable khals, bils, etc., communication by waterways assumed great importance in East Pakistan. The Inland Water Transport Authority (IWTA) estimated that there were approximately 5,000 miles of waterways during the rainy season, which would shrink to 2,500 miles during the summer. From May to November the waterways were busier than all the other forms of communications put together. As per the IWTA, there were 203,072 passenger-carrying boats (Dingi, Pansni, Goyna, Sampan, etc.) The core of the water transport system was made up of 172 steamers, 887 motor vehicles, 6 oil tankers, and 713 dumb crafts (mostly jute barges).¹²

Important ports

Chittagong and Chalna were the two major ports of Bay of Bengal. Other important ports were Cox's Bazar, Chandpur, and Khulna.

Airfields

Airfields were located at Dacca, Jessore, Ishurdi, Sylhet, Shamsher Nagar, Comilla, and Chittagong. These airfields had different capabilities in terms of type of aircrafts that could be operated. Some needed repair and upgradation for sustained operation.

Roads

By 1970, East Pakistan had approximately 2,397 miles of metaled roads. These were connected by un-metaled feeder roads linking remote interior villages with urban townships. The metaled roads were raised some 15 feet or so above the surrounding countryside. Nearly all the un-metaled roads were dusty during the dry season and muddy in the rainy season. From Indian side, roads leading to the various sectors of East Pakistan were:¹³

- a South-western sector:
 - i Calcutta-Bangaon-Jessore-Jhenida Magura-Faridpur.
 - ii Krishnanagar-Jibannagar-Kotchandpur-Kaliganj-Jhenida-Magura.
- b North-western sector: -
 - i Balurghat Gobindganj-Bogra-Bera. From Bogra, a road connected with Nator-Hardinge Bridge-Jhenida.
 - ii Siliguri-Dinajpur-Rangpur-Bogra.
 - iii Jalpaiguri-Domar-Rangpur-Bogra.
- c Central sector:
 - i Tura-Jamalpur-Tangail-Dacca.
 - ii Tura-Mymensingh/Jamalpur-Madhupur-Tangail-Kalaikar-Tungi-Dacca.
- d Eastern sector:
 - i Shillong-Jaintiapur to Sylhet
 - ii Kailashahar-Maulavi Bazar-Sylhet
 - iii Agartala-Akhaura-Ashuganj
 - iv Sonamura-Comilla-Daudkandi.
 - v Comilla-Lalmari-Chandpur
 - vi Chuaddagram-Laksham-Chandpur

Within East Pakistan, it could thus be seen that the road system had been linked up within the frame of five major routes.¹⁴ They were:

Route 1. Teknaf-Cox's Bazar-Chittagong-Comilla-Daudkandi-Dacca-Aricha (360 miles).

Route 2. Comilla-Brahmabaria-Maulavi Bazar-Sylhet-Sunaumgang

44 Military geography of East Pakistan

Route 3. Nagarbari-Bogra-Rangpur-Dinajpur-Tetulia

Route 4. Khuulna-Jessore-Kushtia-Ishrudi-Natore-Rajshahi-Nawabganj

Route 5. Barisal-Faridpur-Goalundo-Jhenida-Chuadanga-Meherpur

Important towns and communication centres (nodal points/strong points)

- a North-west sector: Bogra, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Pirganj, Gaibanda, Nator, and Bera.
- b South-west Sector: Magura, Faridpur, Kushtia, Khulna and Chalna.
- c Eastern sector: Chandpur, Ashuganj, Sylhet, Maulvi Bazar, Bhairab Bazar, Comilla, Daudkhandi, and Chittagong.
- d Central sector: Dacca, Mymensingh, Tungi, and Tangail.

Topography-related problems for the defenders

The water table was about four to five feet, so unlike other places there, weapons pits had to be built up rather than dug down, making them conspicuous. Whichever way they were made, rainwater filled the trenches. The trans-sector movement of troops between Dacca and Rajsahai or Khulna had to be by river-crafts or by air. Niazi mentioned that the Dacca sector (central sector) had “good interior lines of communication, but [the] switching of forces from one sector to [an]other was not possible due to the huge river obstacles.”¹⁵

Topography on the Indian side of the border states

The topography, particularly the communication systems on the Indian side of the border, needs to be analysed in order to correlate axis of maintenance for the operational logistic support. It will also facilitate to reconnect the communication system between India and East Pakistan so that the invading force could carry out operations unhindered. Calcutta and Siliguri were the two big communication centres where there were existing pre-independence communication networks in East Pakistan, which—in the border areas and for some distance—were in disuse and were not operational. However, with some engineering effort, they could be linked when and where needed, based on the operational plan. The road and rail networks opposite the central and eastern sectors of East Pakistan were well developed. Guwahati was also a major communication centre that good road, rail, and air connectivity, but it was not in close proximity to the international border.

Another not-so-developed communication centre was Dharmanagar, which had a meter-gauge rail link with Lumding. Tripura was a remote sector that was least developed. Having examined the topography of the Indian side of the border states, one can conclude that the major portion of the military operation could be launched from West Bengal and Assam but not from Tripura. The

Indian side had three highly developed airfields at Calcutta, Siliguri, and Guwahati from where the Indian Air Force (IAF) could provide air support for the offensive operation.

Therefore, from the point of view of turnaround, the IAF could provide support to operations in the western and northern sectors of East Pakistan. The airfield at Silchar reduced the range of operation for the IAF because of the distance.¹⁶

Deductions from the analysis of the topography and terrain

- 1 **Important roads from India to East Pakistan during the Bangladesh campaign were as follows:**¹⁷
 - Calcutta-Bangaon-Jessore-Jhenida-Magura-Faridpur-across ferry to Dacca-across ferry to Daudkandi/Chandpur-Comilla.
 - Pachagarh-Thakurgaon-Rangpur-Bogra-Bera-across ferry to Sibalay-Dacca-Narayanganj. From Bogra-Nator-Hardinge Bridge-Jhenida.
 - Tura-Mymensingh/Jamalpur-Madhupur-Tangail-Kaliakar-Tungi-Dacca.
 - Shillong-Jayantipur-Sylhet-Maulvi Bazar-Comilla-Feni-Chittagong-Cox's Bazar.
- 2 **Timing of launching the military operation:** From the point of view of climate and weather, it is deduced that November to January was the appropriate campaigning season.
- 3 **Blockade/denial/destruction of sea/airports:** Seaports at Cox's Bazar and Chalna could be blocked to stop reinforcement of troops and military hardware, logistics supply, etc. Airports at Dacca, Chittagong, Comilla, Shamshernagar, Sylhet, Jessore, Ishurdi (Pabna), and Lalmanirhat could be made ineffective during the initial stage of the operation so that Pakistan Air Force (PAF) would be made defunct. However, a few airfields, if required, could be used for own build-up.
- 4 Major engineering efforts would have to be planned to reconnect some old rail/road links and adequate bridging equipment was needed to ensure the logistics supply, keeping pace with the advancing force.
- 5 Nodal points (fortresses): Pakistan's army would likely deploy troops in the following communication centres (nodal point/strong point/fortress concept of defence):
 - **North-west sector** – Bogra and Rangpur.
 - **South-west sector** – Magura, Jessore, Khulna, Chalna. Magura was vital, as it controlled road approaches to the Madhumati ferry site, Goalanda Ghat, and Faridpur.
 - **Eastern sector** – Chandpur and Ashuganj.
 - **Central sector** – Tangail.
- 6 The capture of Dacca by the invading force should be the ultimate objective to serve politico-military strategic purpose. The best geographical

46 Military geography of East Pakistan

- approach to Dacca from the Indian point of view was through the central sector, entering it from the northern direction; though, distance-wise, reaching Dacca via the eastern sector would have been shortest.
- 7 Being a riverine terrain, cross-country vehicular movement would be highly restricted as would be the employment of tanks. At the selected places, bridges would have to be laid. Various means of water transport available could be made use of, with the help of the Mukti Bahini, for ferrying troops and war-like materials.
 - 8 Defenders would base their defences on the communication networks and would make use of rivers and other water obstacles extensively.
 - 9 Poor roads near the international border and the limited number of metal roads and bridges on the rivers would slow down logistics support, which would require adequate planning and proper grouping of support services, in order to ensure matching support from operational logistics.
 - 10 Airfields at Kurmitoala, Tejgaon (Dacca), Jessore, Khulna, Thakurgaon, Rangpur, Sylhet, Feni, and Shamshernagar would have to be taken care of by the IAF. The PAF bases would need to be made non-operative. The use of airfields by the Indian Defence Forces, in subsequent stages of operation, would be part of the air force operational plan.
 - 11 Except for the hilly eastern sector, the ground configuration in the other three sectors were mostly the same.¹⁸ Tanks could be employed in the north-western sector and to some extent in the south-western sector.
 - 12 The following should be considered important strategic objectives, the capture of which would make the opponent's defence untenable, thus ensuring the speedy progress of the offensive operation by the invading force:¹⁹
 - North-western sector: Bogra was the most important communication centre in this sector. The domination of the area line joining Hilli-Gaibanda would split the defenders into two halves. Bogra controlled the ferry at the Bera gateway to Dacca and assumed an important military objective whose capture would enable an invading force to speed up the operation.
 - South-western sector: Khulna, Jessore, Jhenida, and Magura were important towns, which were likely to be defended strongly. Their capture could dis-organise Pakistani forces deployed in this sector.
 - Eastern sector: The capture of the Meghna Bridge would isolate Dacca from Chittagong, Comilla, Sylhet, Maulavi Bazar, Sylhet, and the airfield at Ahamsher Nagar. These places should be considered as likely objectives. A naval blockade of Chittagong is considered a must.
 - Central sector: Dacca, the ultimate objective located in this sector, the capture of which would ensure overall victory.

The military implications of a terrain are integral functions of effective military planning, both tactical and strategic²⁰ Geographic intelligence from the study of the military geography of the country where an invasion is planned is part of the overall intelligence spectrum. Aspects like accessibility, options of physical

entry into the campaigning area by getting information on all means of communication systems, are an important for war planning. The evaluation of accessibility continues until the operation ends. Operational logistics and maintenance including post-campaign support to the invaded country also fall within the ambit of an accessibility assessment. Mobility is another aspect that is assessed through the study of transportation networks and the existence of various obstacles. In case of East Pakistan, rivers, bridges, climatic factors like the rainy season, etc., all had to be considered both at a strategic as well as tactical level. Vulnerability in terms of “opponents’ capability to interdict” the axes of attack and maintenance. Another aspect that emerges out of the study of military geography and terrain analyses is “communicability,” i.e., the effect of terrain on the communication system, which, for command and control during war, is an inescapable requirement. Last but not the least is the assessment of the aspect of the “availability of local resources.”²¹ In the Bangladesh campaign, river crafts, local resources like civil hospital facilities, manpower, makeshift bridging materials, petrol dumps, etc. were used. Soldiers use geography unconsciously, so said Brinkerhoff.²² An eye for the ground and its proper use is a must even for the most basic tactics, “fire and move.”

Great military strategists like Sun Tzu, Napoleon, Jomini, Fredrick the Great, Clausewitz, Liddle, Hart, etc. have emphatically highlighted the importance of geographical elements in the conduct of military operations. In the campaign under study here, both the defending and the invading forces made good use of terrain. Mukti Bahini too, while operating following guerrilla tactics, made use of the terrain, in line with Sun Tzu’s suggestion that terrain can be used as a force multiplier by the smaller force and a force inhibitor against the larger force.²³

Notes

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48 Military geography of East Pakistan

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4

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES OF COLD WAR GEOPOLITICS IN SOUTH ASIA AND THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL POWERS DURING 1971 INDO-PAKISTAN WAR

The trouble with a cold war is that it doesn't take too long before it becomes heated.
—Anthony T. Hincks¹

The term “geopolitics” was ideated by the Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellén. He pointed at three geographical features of a state, namely, its location in relation to other states, the form of the territory of a state, and the surface and the physical characteristics of this territory. A historical retrieval and analysis of the global dimension of the 1971 South Asia crisis are considered necessary to understand its effect on the evolution of the politico-military strategy during the Bangladesh Liberation War. Until the end of British rule and for a few years thereafter, superpowers did not show much interest in the Indian subcontinent. Subsequently, the Cold War imbroglio and interest of superpowers in South Asia and their influence in the region made them party to the Bangladesh War of Liberation and Indo-Pakistan War of 1971. In addition, the actions and influence of China; the UK; other European, African, and Islamic countries; the neighbouring nations; etc. during the conflict and their involvement either directly or through their voice in the United Nations (UN) also had implications on the strategic decisions of the warring factions. Interestingly, the United States, China, and the Islamic countries were more supportive of Pakistan’s cry for stopping the disintegration of their nation than the cries of millions of terror-stricken East Pakistanis and closed their eyes to the gross violation of human rights by the Pakistani military and their supporters. The foreign policy of any country is driven by the principle of “the perceived interest of the country.” It is seen that with the change in leadership, many a times the perception on national interest also undergoes changes. Evidence suggests that to some extent, Brezhnev, Nixon, and Kissinger fit into this category of leaders. Whilst keeping interest of the nation a central theme, legal, ethical, and moral aspects are also factored at the time of formulating

a nation's foreign policy. After perusing historical records, one gets an impression that during 1971, on moral and ethical aspects, countries like the US and China in particular and some other countries did not come out clean. This chapter will briefly highlight the salient aspects of the foreign policies pursued by India and Pakistan after decolonisation and the role and influence of the US, Soviet Russia, China, and other countries leading up to the liberation of Bangladesh.

The Kashmir dispute and a sense of insecurity influenced foreign policy of Pakistan. Unlike India, Pakistan, from its inception to the emergence of Bangladesh, was mostly under military rule, the prime objective of which was to gain military parity with India. In pursuing this policy objective, Pakistan was in search of allies and embraced the US and, at a later stage, China. India kept safe distance from external powers and did not believe in military alliances, as it championed the "non-aligned movement." In recent years, the declassification of documents by the US, the UK, and memoirs written by quite a few policy makers have offered research inputs in addition to already available materials. These reservoir of information facilitated to discern realpolitik².

Role of the United States

During the first two decades after the partition of India, the US' policy was to sustain regional stability in South Asia by maintaining the balance of power between the two rival nations of India and Pakistan. The chief features of this policy were military and economic assistance to India and Pakistan and the use of that assistance to prevent war and encourage development and nation-building in the aftermath of colonisation. Since the partition, Pakistan suffered from a security crisis as it presumed that India would try its best to undo the partition.

The policy of the US also aimed to entice the two governments, i.e., India and Pakistan into the military alliance systems through which the US sought to contain communist superpowers. The US National Security Council prepared a major policy paper known as NSC 98 or "The Position of the United States with Respect to Asia." The paper stated:

The time has come to pursue our objectives in South Asia with more vigour. We are now in a position to assess the attitude and policies of area governments as well as the possibilities and limitations of our influence. ... The fall of China and the threat to Indo-China and the balance of Southeast Asia have added urgency to achievement of our objectives in this region. We must henceforth accept calculated risks in attacking the problems of South Asia. *Should India and Pakistan fall to communism; the United States and its friends might find themselves denied foothold on the Asian mainland [emphasis added].*³

Pakistan's search for security status and identity coincided with the US' search for an ally in South Asia to buttress its global strategic objectives. In 1954, Pakistan became a member of the military pacts CENTO and SEATO, sponsored by the

US. Pakistan offered the Peshawar air base, adjacent to Soviet Union territory, for the operation of US military spy planes. Though Pakistan joined military alliances with US, e.g., NATO and SEATO, to contain China and the USSR, Washington refused to act as Pakistan's guarantor against India's aggression.⁴

In his memoir, the President of Pakistan, Field Marshall Ayub Khan, wrote:

From the day of independence, Pakistan was involved in bitter and prolonged struggle for her very existence and survival. ... The cause of our major problem is India's inability to reconcile herself to our existence as a sovereign independent state. ... By 1954 Pakistan was compelled to align herself with the west in the interest of her security.⁵

Pakistan's preference for the US was explicitly spelt out in an article Ayub Khan wrote:

The US was much keen to have alliance with India to contain India's hostile neighbour; but India did not comply. India at this juncture was spearheading Non-Align[ed] Movement (NAM). That notwithstanding both President Kennedy and Johnson still maintained equitable relations with India and Pakistan. From the very beginning of its coming into being Pakistan thought of United States as its primary source of military and diplomatic supports against India.⁶

India's foreign policy was shaped by the vision of Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India. He structured the country's foreign policy based on non-aligned independence and non-attachment to any military block. He made an emphatic kind of foreign policy vision statement:

We propose as far as possible, to keep away from the power politics of group, aligned against one another, which have led in the past to World Wars and which may again lead to disaster on even vaster scale.⁷

India's foreign policy thus had a different perception. From the beginning, Pakistan enjoyed the US' support on the Kashmir issue. A US representative voiced this in a UN debate supporting a plebiscite.⁸ On this Nehru said, "The distinguished representative tells us what to do about Kashmir not realizing that Kashmir is a flesh of our flesh and bone of our bones."⁹

During the Cold War period, the US was bent on stopping the spread of communism. While commenting on the foreign policy of the US, Spanier John wrote:

In the international system, during the cold war phase, the main thrust of the foreign policy of the United States was containment of communism. In the era of close relationship between the Soviet Union and China, the policy of containment of communism in South East Asia occupied an important place in the foreign policy objectives of the U.S.A.¹⁰

52 Strategic imperatives of cold war geopolitics

The US, however, remained neutral during the 1965 Indo-Pak War. But Pakistan's membership in US-backed military alliances helped them receive military hardware from the US without many strings attached, unlike India. The Tashkent Treaty of 1966 between India and Pakistan, with the USSR as a facilitator, was a masterpiece diplomatic coup by Soviet Russia, which irked America. But John K. Galbraith, former ambassador of the US in India said to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1966, "If we had not supplied arm[s], Pakistan would not have sought a military solution."¹¹ It was indeed a forthright view. A couple of years later, on the supply of huge military aid, Mrs. Indira Gandhi stated in the Lok Sabha that it "had the effect of encouraging Pakistan in its intransigent and aggressive attitude towards India."¹²

Both Mrs. Gandhi, Prime Minister of India, and General Yahya Khan, President of Pakistan, participated in the silver jubilee celebrations of the UN in New York in October 1970. Yahya travelled to Washington to meet President Nixon, who was his good friend from his vice presidency days. President Nixon assured Yahya that "nobody has occupied the White House who is friendlier to Pakistan than me." Soon thereafter, in November 1970, Yahya visited Beijing, where he discussed with Mr. Zou En Lai ways of improving relations between Beijing and Washington.¹³

When on 25 March 1971, the Pakistani army commenced military operations against the unarmed civilians of East Pakistan, codenamed "Operation Searchlight," its brutality, horror, and the cold-blooded killing of thousands of Bengalis of East Pakistan shocked the world. The US, as well as international media, condemned the action, as did India, Soviet Russia, and many other countries. The next day, i.e., on 26 March, the Washington Special Action Group (WSAG), presided over by Kissinger, deliberated on the happenings in East Pakistan. Kissinger conveyed the group that President Nixon did not desire any active policy move as he didn't want the division of Pakistan. Accordingly, the group decided that the "United States should continue its policy of non-involvement."¹⁴ Hereafter the official response of the US was cautious and described the situation as an internal matter of Pakistan that should be settled by the Pakistanis themselves. This view of the crisis in East Pakistan as an exclusively internal matter of the government of Pakistan was maintained by Nixon and Kissinger all through the Liberation War. The American government never criticised Yahya or his government. The US government's official statements and actions hereafter, until the emergence of Bangladesh, was in consonance with the philosophy of "not to meddle[ing] with the internal affairs of a friendly ally." Interestingly, [The] White House and State Department had different perceptions. Many officials of the State Department were shocked by the ferocity of the army's action in East Pakistan. Public and media opinion, too, influenced them. An interdepartmental group recommended that India merited greater US attention in terms of the US' own interests. During the meeting of the Senior Review Group on 19 April, efforts were made by the members to convince Nixon and Kissinger to reshape policy accordingly. But the duo was emphatic about not forcing their views on

a friendly government in regards to the management of its internal affairs. And Nixon stated that he believed that external powers like India, Soviet Russia, China, the US, etc. had no role to play and the US' best strategy would be to maintain the balance of power in South Asia.¹⁵ Actually this concept of the “balance of power” was aimed at keeping Soviet Russia at bay. It was purely a global view of Cold War politics.

The US government's inaction embarrassed and enraged Archer Blood, US Consul General at Dacca, and his staff and they sent a five-page telegram, widely known as the Blood Telegram. Salient excerpts are given below:

With the conviction that U. S policy related to recent developments in East Pakistan serves neither our moral interests broadly defined, nor our national interests, narrowly defined... numerous officers consider it their duty to register strong dissent with fundamental aspects of this policy. Our government has failed to demonstrate the suppression of democracy. Our government has failed to denounce atrocities. ... Our government has evinced what many will consider the arrest of a leader of a democratically elected majority party, incidentally pro-west, and calling for an end to repressive measures and bloodshed.¹⁶

Archer Blood was recalled from East Pakistan. He was replaced by Mr. Spivack. In a memorandum dated 19 April, Henry Kissinger informed Nixon that the Pakistani government had conceded the need to provide greater autonomy to East Pakistan, but he feared that the way India was arming and training Bengali rebels would make it rather impossible for Pakistan to implement autonomy. He further stressed that India wanted to prolong this crisis at the expense of the US and Pakistan.¹⁷

By end of April, Kissinger sent a note to Nixon offering three policy options for the US in regard to Pakistan. They were:

- a **Option 1:** Unstinted support to Pakistan.
- b **Option 2:** Adoption of a neutral position.
- c **Option 3:** Help Yahya end the conflict, followed by autonomy for East Pakistan.

Nixon approved the third option with emphasis to all hands “not to squeeze Yahya now.”¹⁸

US tilts towards Pakistan

Despite the prevailing situation, the US allowed Pakistan to buy military equipment—such as 300 armoured personnel carriers, B-57s, and six F-104s, four maritime *reconnaissance* aircrafts, and some non-lethal equipment—of an approximate value of \$90 million, under a one-time exception, as the contract

54 Strategic imperatives of cold war geopolitics

had concluded in October 1970. It evoked reactions from the press, opposition, public, and some officials in the State Department. President Nixon was unfazed. He, in a memorandum dated 25 June, conveyed his decision to continue the present policy, which would be reviewed in due course.¹⁹

Sisson and Rose argued that:

Washington's public position from 25 March and throughout 1971 was that the conflict in East Pakistan was an internal affair in which direct intervention of foreign powers should be avoided. The stated objectives of the United States were (1) to prevent another Indo-Pakistani war; (2) to provide the humanitarian relief required in East Pakistan; and (3) to encourage a political settlement of the Pakistani civil war—preferably one that would maintain at least the façade of a unified Pakistan. If that were impossible, then the United States wanted to help arrange a peaceful separation of the country into two sovereign states²⁰

The authors appear to have gone a little soft on the Nixon-Kissinger duo, which in no way was in consonance with unofficial views and the views of the world media. The US Congress opposed it, as did the State Department bureaucracy. In his memoirs on the split between the White House and the State Department, Kissinger wrote,

On no issue except perhaps Cambodia, split between the White House and the department was so profound as on the Indo-Pakistan crisis in summer of 1971. ... [The] White House and the State Department dealt with each other as competing sovereign entities, not as members of the same team and the President sought to have his way by an indirection that compounded the internal stresses of our government²¹

Cargill Committee, a fact-finding mission appointed by the World Bank's Pakistan Aid Consortium, recommended terminating aid to Pakistan because of the atrocities of its military regime. Following this recommendation, the UK, Sweden, the Netherlands, and West Germany suspended their aid programs in July 1971. But the US, despite public opposition, continued to pursue their previously declared aid program, valued at \$188 million up to the fiscal year 1972.²²

In July, Kissinger visited India. During his visit, he invited Mrs. Gandhi to visit the US and also cautioned India against any possible war because other superpowers might get involved. Basically, he meant China, possibly invoked to scare India, but in the same breath, he assured India that the US would take it very seriously if the situation turned that way. It was indeed a veiled threat from Kissinger. About India, Nixon and Kissinger had a fixed idea, which is reflected in his book when he mentions that he left New Delhi with the conviction that India was bent on a showdown with Pakistan and was just waiting for the right time.²³

Kissinger secretly visits Beijing

Kissinger makes a visit to India and Pakistan in early July. From Pakistan, he secretly went to visit Beijing and met Chou En Lai. After a long period of containment, the US took the first step in broaching a rapprochement with China. During Nixon's presidency there was a shift in policy. Nixon and Kissinger believed that the previous government's policy of regional stability in South Asia and the balance of power could be best maintained by leaning towards Pakistan. This change had global implications and relevance for the evolving pattern of the Cold War. Nixon wanted a rapprochement with China, which he believed would better serve the interests of Washington. And Pakistan played the role of a conduit.²⁴ Kissinger, of course, wrote that,

while trying to balance public opinion and governments action, Nixon-Kissinger urged Yahya to replace military government with a civilian government in East Pakistan. They asked him to grant amnesty to political prisoners other than those accused of treason. Also requested to allow multilateral relief operations as India wanted.²⁵

But Nixon ignored the bigger picture. Mujibur Rahman and most prominent Awami League leaders were charged with treason and a civil government without them was impossible. Nixon also ignored the appeals of the Bangladesh government in exile to use his influence to get Mujibur released.²⁶

Nixon held a news conference on 4 August and there he defended his policy on Pakistan and opposed suggestions to stop aid to them, as he felt that would reduce the chances of a political settlement and aggravate the refugee problem. He also announced that the bulk of refugee aid would go to East Pakistan and not India,²⁷ even though, ironically, millions of refugees were based in India.

The Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty signed in New Delhi on 9 August 1971 irked the US, Pakistan, and China.

Meanwhile, press and public opinion was building against the US government in a big way. Senators from congress like Kennedy were strong supporters for the cause of Bangladesh. The Indian embassy in Washington, headed by a very successful diplomat, Mr. L.K. Jha, garnered immense support from many groups. On this, Kissinger on 25 August told Jha:

You must realize that no matter how much you succeed in influencing important senators, you have to deal with this administration and that means the President. As for bringing about any change in U.S. attitude, the President is angry with the Indian Embassy's efforts with the Congress. ... The Congressional leaders who support do so because they want to use any excuse for attacking the President and not because they have any deep sympathies.²⁸

Mr. J.N. Dixit, an official of the India's Ministry of External Affairs, narrates,

56 Strategic imperatives of cold war geopolitics

An interesting episode of political theatrics took place when the US Ambassador to New Delhi, Kenneth Keating, told Mrs. Gandhi at a meeting in her South Block office that the US wished to avoid taking the embarrassing decision to stop economic assistance and cooperation with India and hoped that India would reconsider its policies on East Pakistan issue. Mrs. Gandhi's response was prompt and decisive. She told Keating that there was no need for US to be embarrassed and suggested the immediate closure of the US Aid Mission in New Delhi. She stuck to her decision. The office was closed down... and converted into a hotel (Qutub Hotel) by the Indian Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC).²⁹

Post Mrs. Gandhi's Soviet visit in October, Nixon, during a meeting with Foreign Minister Andre Gromyko, requested the Soviet government to discourage India and allow Yahya more time to settle the crisis. And Kissinger on 9 October asked for Soviet to help discourage India from allowing infiltrations of Bangladeshi guerrillas from eastern India.³⁰

Indira visits United States

Mrs. Gandhi's visit to the US was planned in early November. Nixon wrote a letter to Yahya, which Farland, the US Ambassador in Pakistan, delivered to him on 2 November. Through this letter, Nixon suggested Yahya accommodate the maximum possible number of elected members to form a civil government to restore the situation there. He also felt this would stop flow of refugees to India. Mrs. Gandhi visited the US on November 4–5. Nixon told her that

Yahya is ready to appoint a civil government in East Pakistan ... war is unnecessary, and his administration will view any aggressive act deserving the most severe censure and redress. Chinese, Soviet and America's interests were at stake in South Asia. It would be impossible to calculate precisely, the steps which other great powers might take if India were to initiate hostilities.³¹

It was a clear warning to India. But Mrs. Gandhi was not to be cowed down. She made it known that the problem had been created by Yahya's government and that both the terror-stricken Bengalis from East Pakistan and the people of India, because of the unmanageable influx of refugees, were victims. She insisted on the release of Mujib, the withdrawal of Pakistani forces from East Pakistan, and the installation of a government by the Awami League, the majority party as mandated by the people.

On 22 November, the Indian Army, while retaliating against Pakistani artillery fire in Indian territory, carried out a hot chase by breaching the East Pakistan border and stayed on there. Kissinger called it the outbreak of war. The next day while chairing the WSAG meeting, Kissinger rejected a State Department

proposal to put more pressure on the Yahya government. Instead he asked the State Department to refer the matter of the violation of the border to the UN. Further, Kissinger informed the group that Nixon had taken the decision to cut off economic aid to India because of this incident. The US government also sent cables to India, Pakistan, and Soviet Russia cautioning against war.³² On 23 November, Mrs. Gandhi informed the Indian parliament that the army had crossed the East Pakistan border in self-defence and any future decision to cross the border would be left to the military commanders on the scene.³³

On 29 November during the WSAG meeting, Kissinger stated that Mrs. Gandhi had decided on war prior to the talks and had made the trip to Washington just as a cover for her preparation.³⁴

On 1 and 2 December, the State Department announced the cancellation of all outstanding export licenses for the shipment of ammunition and other military equipment to India in view of the situation in South Asia and engagements between the Indian and Pakistani armies. The State Department further stated that the move was political rather military, an attempt with the belief that India should take steps to diffuse the war like situation with Pakistan.³⁵ Mrs. Gandhi replied that “only the elected representative of the people of Bangladesh could decide the future of that country, and in her view, they would settle for nothing less than the liberation.”³⁶

And on 3 December, the Pakistani Air Force carried out pre-emptive air strikes on air bases in north-western India, in Jammu, Punjab, and Rajasthan. The Pakistani army also launched a ground attack, a move that may not have been the most appropriate.

Once the war broke out, Kissinger told Nixon,

What we are seeing here is the Soviet-India power play to humiliate the Chinese and to also somewhat us. The dismembering of Pakistan would... mean that the friends of China and the United States have been clobbered by India and the Soviet Union.³⁷

Meanwhile, the US made frantic efforts to impress upon Soviet Russia not to oppose their move in the UN and to pressurise India to call for a ceasefire. Simultaneously, the US urged Iran and other Islamic countries like Turkey, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia to supply weapons to Pakistan, which would be made up in due course by the US. Washington also thought of drawing the Chinese into this imbroglio to scare the Indians. On 6 December, Nixon told Kissinger that “I think we have got to tell the Chinese that some movement on their part we think towards Indian border could be very significant... Indians will be petrified.”³⁸

The US, based on initial input from the CIA and the fixated mindset that the leadership had, thought that India, after routing the Pakistani Army in East Pakistan, would switch its forces to West Pakistan for an all-out war to annihilate the Pakistani armed forces, before reclaiming Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. Baluchistan, too, would be separated along with it, which would mean the total dismemberment

58 Strategic imperatives of cold war geopolitics

of Pakistan. An ally of China and the US meeting this fate was unacceptable and had to be prevented at any cost. However, the CIA assessed that it being winter and because of their present army deployments, China did not have the military capability for any major showdown with India, though they would be able to launch a limited, small-scale diversionary attack. The CIA furnished another report that Mrs. Gandhi had presumably stated, during a cabinet meeting, that if China rattled their swords, the Soviets had promised to counterbalance that action.³⁹

But Nixon believed that China could exercise a restraining influence on India. He said that “even a movement of some Chinese toward that border could scare those goddamn Indians to death”⁴⁰ Accordingly, to convey Nixon’s message on 10 December, Kissinger met Huang Hua, the Chinese representative at the UN and suggested the Chinese military help. Huang Hua’s response was full of diplomatic niceties without any commitment. He ended the meeting by saying that President Nixon’s message would be conveyed to Mr. Zhou Enlai.⁴¹

To restrain India, the US also put tremendous pressure on Soviet Russia at this juncture through various means, including a ploy to raise their stakes. Kissinger and Nixon both were more worried about maintaining US credibility in the eyes of China and other allies. Kissinger was emphatic when he said, “A Soviet stooge, supported with Soviet arms, is overrunning a country that is an American ally.” Both Nixon and Kissinger perceived that US credibility was at stake. On 10 December, Kissinger informed the Soviet representative Vornstov that the US had allied commitments with respect to defending Pakistan through a secret protocol and that the US military had been ordered to prepare to help Pakistan and that a final decision would be taken by 12 December. Nixon told the visiting Soviet Agriculture Minister Vladimir Matskevich that like the USSR had a treaty with India, the Americans too had a similar treaty with Pakistan. Factually and technically, the treaty that both Nixon and Kissinger mentioned did not exist. It was just an assurance to Ayub Khan through an aid memoir. And the Baghdad Pact guaranteed Pakistan the US’ military help only if it was attacked by a communist country. In the instant case, India was not a communist country. Srinath Raghavan mentions that Kissinger’s ploy had the desired effect on Vornstov, who sent a telegram to Kremlin saying, “Military aid involves moving U.S. aircraft carriers, and naval forces in general, closer to the sub-continent.” Vornstov was not wrong. Nixon ordered Admiral Elmo Zumwalt to move Task Force 74, which included the USS Enterprise, from south Vietnam to the Malacca Straits and onward to the Bay of Bengal.⁴² Nixon commenced gunboat diplomacy to scare India, though the official US stand was that this was to rescue stranded American citizens, who had already been evacuated. After all, moving the biggest aircraft carrier with a nuclear arsenal could not be without strategic purpose. In fact, in this context, probably Kissinger’s writing would also help illuminate the purpose of this move:

The dismemberment of Pakistan by military force and its eventual destruction without American reaction... would have profound international

reaction. ... Since it was common concern about Soviet power that had driven Peking and Washington together, a demonstration of American irrelevance would severely strain our precious new relationship with China.⁴³

Senator Kennedy denounced Pakistan's military brutality calling it a "genocide." He and many prominent congressmen visited East Pakistan and India to ascertain the situation on the ground and were extremely vocal all throughout about the Nixon government's policy during the Bangladesh Liberation War. On 11 December, Kennedy made a scathing attack on the US government's inaction and silence on the situation in East Pakistan and relegating India's priority to the backburner in their rush to place a new priority on China.⁴⁴

Role of the USSR

In the immediate post-World War period, the Soviets saw the world as being divided into two camps, i.e. the capitalists and the socialists, with there being no possibility of any middle road between the two, particularly for those countries that did not join any military block. Countries like India, therefore, did not matter to the Soviets. After Stalin's death, a more responsive attitude towards these states was adopted by Khrushchev. Sission and Leo commented:

Initially Soviet Union became involved in South Asia in the mid-1950s to fore stall and counteract U.S. "intervention" in that region through Pakistan's membership in U.S. sponsored military alliance system and through massive American economic aid programs to India. ... India was the critical state in the subcontinent in Soviet calculations... it had become a basic objective of Soviet policy to prevent any serious disjuncture in its relationship with India.⁴⁵

In 1965, Khrushchev and Bulganin returned Nehru's visit to the Soviet Union. On the conclusion of the 1965 Indo-Pak war, the USSR facilitated the Tashkent Agreement between Mr. Lal Bahadur Shashtri, Prime Minister of India, and Field Marshal Ayub Khan, President of Pakistan. The acceptance of Soviet Russia as an arbitrator by both Pakistan and India gave the USSR prominence in South Asia vis-à-vis the US. K.P.S. Menon mentioned that "in a way Tashkent is an epitome of Indo-Soviet friendship – a friendship whose purpose is not to threaten or encircle any nation, but to prevent the cause of peace in the world, more particularly in South Asian region."⁴⁶

However, there had been much criticism in India about returning strategically important locations captured during the war, like the Hajipir Pass. Some sections felt that Pakistan was favoured by Soviet Russia. Even foreign writers of repute like Sission and Leo Rose observed:

At the Tashkent Conference, however, Soviet Union began to modify its "support India" policy in South Asia in favour of a somewhat more

60 Strategic imperatives of cold war geopolitics

nonpartisan position, officially neutral but in practice however, Moscow was slightly biased towards Pakistan during arbitration in Tashkent. Moscow made a concerted effort to expand its economic, political, and security relations with Pakistan while at the same time maintaining a close relation with India. Moscow made an agreement to construct its first modern steel mill in Pakistan and also in July 1968 signed an agreement to supply, \$30 million (given the discount rates, this was equivalent of \$50–\$60 in U.S military sales) military equipment, including medium tanks, rocket launchers, artillery guns, helicopters, etc.⁴⁷

Immediately after becoming prime minister, Mrs. Gandhi declared on 26 January 1966 that “the fundamental principles laid down by my father to which he and Shastriji dedicated, continue to guide us. It will be my sincere endeavour to work for the strengthening of peace and international equality, free from domination and fear.”⁴⁸

However, during the next couple of years, Soviet Russia became less comfortable with Mrs. Gandhi as they felt she was more pro-America. This was allayed by a speech by Mr. Morarji Desai, Deputy Prime Minister of India, on the occasion of the completion of two decades of Indian-Soviet diplomatic relations on 13 April 1967. He said:

The friendship between our two governments and between our two peoples has gone on growing without any interruption and with hardly misunderstanding. I hope and trust that we shall continuously behave in such a manner that this friendship is not only impaired but that it grows stronger and stronger, so strong that nothing can come in the way at any time in future.⁴⁹

Meanwhile, Soviet Russia made an agreement with Pakistan in which the latter would receive Soviet tanks, guns, and other military hardware. In India, this news created adverse public opinion and criticism. Mrs. Gandhi raised her concerns with the Soviets over their arms deal with Pakistan. Kosygin assured that nothing would undermine the friendship between the two countries. He declared, “Every country in the world could envy Indo-Soviet relations. This fact is accounted for by the trust and confidence which exists between our nations as well as development of political and economic co-operation.”⁵⁰

Brezhnev's proposal for an Asian collective security system

During his visit to New Delhi, Islamabad, and Kabul, Kosygin urged for the settlement of differences between Kabul and Islamabad and between Islamabad and New Delhi. He urged increased regional economic cooperation constructively among the three countries on a tripartite basis. The Soviet Premier promised that his country “would do all it can on its part.”⁵¹

This statement was a prelude to the Soviet President Mr. Leonid Brezhnev's suggestion to create a collective security system in Asia. During the International Conference of Communists and Worker Parties in early June 1969, Brezhnev stated, "We are of the opinion that the course of events is also putting on the system of collective security in Asia."⁵² The Brezhnev plan was never clearly defined, possibly it was kept delightfully vague to ascertain the interest of the proposed members. Essentially it was aimed at checking China. India did not welcome the Asian collective security system because it did not want to deviate from its stated policy of non-alignment. The pact would have ultimately turned into another military alliance, despite its overt garb of economic cooperation. Pakistan, too, was not in favour as that would have compromised their friendship with China and the US. From the Pakistani perspective, G.W. Choudhry writes:

Following a Moscow Conference of Soviet envoys, the Ambassador to Pakistan called on Yahya as well as on the Pakistan Foreign Secretary to try to sell the Brezhnev scheme. He described the proposed plan in lofty terms, stressing such features as "non-interference in internal affairs of signatory countries" and "economic, cultural and scientific cooperation." The Ambassador pointed out to the Foreign Secretary "the inadequacy of economic collaboration" under SEATO and CENTO in contrast to the more worthwhile collaboration under the Soviet plan. But upon being questioned about security aspects of the plan, the Soviet Ambassador had to reveal its main purpose, which had to do, not with economic cooperation, but with China. The specifics of the proposed security agreement also made this plain. For example, the signatories would not enter into any alliance, formal or informal, with a third country that might be hostile to any member countries, nor should they "make any commitment inconsistent with the proposed Asian Security Plan"; in addition, the signatory countries "will consult each other in case of an aggression by a third party." The anti-China slant was also indicated by the fact that Brezhnev announced the plan only three months after the most serious armed conflict to date on Sino-Soviet borders. ... Moreover, if the proposed security plan could be used against a nation that Pakistan considered a friend, it apparently could not be used against Pakistan's true enemy. Yahya wanted to know what help, if any, the Brezhnev plan would offer "in case of an aggression committed by one-member country against another"—such as would be the case in a repetition of the 1965 Indo-Pakistani war. The answer was as evasive as it was rhetorical: "The Asian Security Plan will put an end to such regional conflicts which the Imperialist countries like USA and expansionist ones like China encourage."⁵³

Moscow had to reorient its approach more towards economic cooperation with Asian countries, though periodically Brezhnev and other Soviet leaders pressed for collective security systems for Asia. India however felt that a concept like the

62 Strategic imperatives of cold war geopolitics

Asian security system could be considered, provided that China was excluded; however, Pakistan straight away rejected the idea and maintained a pro-China policy.⁵⁴

USSR response on the massacre in East Pakistan in 1971

The USSR was the first of the major international powers that responded publicly to the 25 March crackdown in East Pakistan. On 2 April 1971, President Podgorny sent a letter to the President of Pakistan, General Yahya Khan, appealing for the adoption of urgent measures to stop the bloodshed and repression of the population of East Pakistan and called for him to turn to methods of peaceful political settlement. He also requested Yahya not to misinterpret Soviet motives, as they were guided by the principles of Universal Declaration of Human Rights and by concern for the welfare of the friendly people of Pakistan.⁵⁵ This infuriated Yahya. In a reply on 6 April, he wrote, “No country, including the U.S.S.R could allow anti national and unpatriotic elements to proceed to destroy it or to countenance subversion.” He further reminded the Soviets that any interference by an outside power would constitute a violation of the UN charter. Kosygin assuaged Yahya by writing a milder letter and Moscow, on many occasions, publicly announced that the East Pakistan issue was an internal matter of Pakistan. The Soviets sometime later also expressed their willingness to mediate between the two wings of Pakistan, but the moment the rapprochement between the US and China became public at the end of July, the Soviets did not want to miss the opportunity to restart building a strong relationship with India to create a model of mutually beneficial realpolitik.

The Indo-Soviet treaty

A broad agreement on the proposed Indo-Soviet Treaty was reached during negotiations conducted by the Indian Ambassador to Moscow, Mr. D.P. Dhar, in mid-1969 and it is probable that the treaty would have been signed in the first half of 1970 if the political situation in India had permitted. But while negotiations were quietly on with India, the Soviet Union, from 1969 to mid-1971, continued to maintain its balanced policy in South Asia. In fact, it shipped armaments to Pakistan until early 1971.

At this juncture, India was finding it difficult to manage the refugee problem. The return of refugees was possible only if there was an amicable political solution acceptable to the Awami League, which was not in the offing by the Yahya government. Also, the official response of the US, China, Islamic countries, etc. being that the “East Pakistan imbroglio was an internal matter of Pakistan” and the recent US-China rapprochement facilitated by Pakistan made it a mutual necessity for India and the Soviet Union to sign a treaty. In late July, Mrs. Gandhi dispatched her trusted emissary, Mr. D.P. Dhar, to Moscow to propose the treaty be concluded at the earliest. However, Moscow was apprehensive of India’s demand to join the war should China intervene if there was another round of

Pakistan-India war. But Dhar allayed the fears of physical intervention by Soviet Russia, instead including a “consultation clause” in the treaty. After clearing up each other’s stands, the Soviets dispatched their prime minister, Kosygin, to Delhi. He formally signed the treaty on 9 August. The text of the treaty is provided in Appendix 5. It was a real diplomatic coup on the part of Mrs. Gandhi that made good strategic sense, both for India as well as the Soviet Union. Despite the treaty, for some time the Soviets believed that “the political crisis and refugee problems are two different issues which should not be linked.”

The Soviets did not want another Indo-Pak war. As expected, the treaty drew flak from the US and Pakistan, however, China, significantly, kept quiet. The Soviet Ambassador to the US assured Kissinger that Moscow was doing its best to restrain India; the Soviets wanted peace and stability in the Indian subcontinent too. On invitation from the Soviets, Pakistan’s foreign secretary visited Moscow in late August to fully understand the implications of the treaty. Pakistan was also informed through their ambassador that the main purpose of the treaty was not to encourage India to start another war but rather to restrain it. But during Pakistan’s foreign secretary Sultan Khan’s meeting with Mr. Grmyko on 6 September, it was conveyed that although East Pakistan’s problem could only be resolved by political means, despite the Soviets’ earlier advice, the Yahya government resorted to bloodshed and persecution. Gromyko further stated that the Soviet Union valued its relationship with Pakistan and emphasised again that the Pakistan government should follow the path of restraints.⁵⁶

For some months India had commenced a diplomatic offensive by sending emissaries to many countries and also by writing to almost 72 nations apprising them of East Pakistan’s predicament and India’s position, and seeking an immediate solution to the Bangladesh problem. Mrs. Gandhi, accompanied by Mr. D.P. Dhar, visited Moscow on 27 September and on the next day had a marathon six-hour meeting with Brezhnev, Podgorny, and Kosygin. Mrs. Gandhi urged them to help find a political solution to the Bangladesh crisis, starting with release of Mujibur Rahman. Simultaneously, she requested for military equipment, arms, and ammunition to help India prepare for contingencies, should diplomatic means fail. The Soviet leaders’ reply was in the affirmative, along with them cautioning for “restraint.” “The Soviet Government reportedly agreed to one billion dollars in military and economic aid, but with no specific programs designated.”⁵⁷

The Soviet-Indian joint statement issued from Moscow on 29 September 1971 is reproduced below:

Taking note of the developments in East Bengal since March 25, 1971, both sides consider that the interests of the preservation of peace demand that urgent measures should be taken to reach a political solution to the problems which have arisen there, paying regard to the wishes, the inalienable rights and lawful interests of the people of East Bengal as well as the speediest and safe return of the refugees to their homeland in conditions safeguarding their honour and dignity.⁵⁸

64 Strategic imperatives of cold war geopolitics

It was amply clear that Moscow did not want a showdown between India and Pakistan even at that stage and therefore advised both countries' leadership accordingly. But Moscow too understood that a permanent solution could only be achieved through political means. However, after Mrs. Gandhi's visit to Moscow, the Soviet Union became more sympathetic to India's compulsions.

Also, there was gradual shift in Moscow's position on Bangladesh.⁵⁹

On 14 October, while attending a function in Persepolis organised by the Shah of Iran to celebrate 2,500 years of the Persian empire, Yahya had a private meeting with Podgorny on the side-lines. Yahya stated in an interview that Podgorny has assured him that the Indo-Soviet Treaty was not directed against Pakistan.⁶⁰ During this meeting, Podgorny wanted to know Yahya's plans for transferring power to the civilian-elected leaders of East Pakistan. He also suggested Yahya begin the process by releasing Mujibur Rahman and having a dialogue with him as Mujib's acceptance of the plan would be necessary. Yahya retorted by saying that he would never talk to "that traitor" (Mujib). Yahya said he was hopeful that in a few months, his plans to transfer power would bear fruit. Podgorny cautioned Yahya that time was running out.⁶¹ Following this meeting,

Radio Pakistan announced Soviet Union's keen interest in the unity and integrity of Pakistan. The Soviet Premier during his visit to Canada in October indicated that the Soviet President in his discussion with President Yahya in Iran asked for the restoration of democracy in East Pakistan, the freeing of the Sheikh and arrangements for the return of refugees from India.⁶²

Soviet Air Marshal P.S. Koutakhov arrived in New Delhi on 30 October to coordinate arms and military equipment supply to the Indian defence forces and arrange for their immediate transfer. Interestingly, Soviet aircrafts loaded with military weapons meant for India had a refuelling halt at Lahore Airport and the Pakistan government was aware that the aircraft was going on to India.⁶³

As there was no change in the situation, India asked the Soviets for a "consultation" as per Article IX of the Indo-Soviet Treaty. Nikolai Firyubin, Deputy Foreign Minister, came to India in early November and had an extended stay and dialogues in New Delhi as well as in Calcutta with the Bangladesh government in exile. Around the same time, Vladimir Kudryavtsav, a Soviet expert on Asian matters visited India and described the Bangladesh war as "a War of National Liberation," the first office bearer of the Soviet Union to make such a statement in public.⁶⁴

A gradual shift in Soviet policy became visible from the beginning of November. The Soviet press started covering Bangladesh-related news and articles extensively. Commentators began to criticise the performance of the government of Pakistan in Bangladesh.⁶⁵

When the US government dispatched a naval taskforce to the Bay of Bengal, the Soviet Ambassador Nikolai Pekov assured the Indian government that the Soviet Union would "not allow the Seventh Fleet to intervene" in the Bangladesh war.⁶⁶

Role of China

From the time of India's independence onwards, Chinese policy towards India reflected its ambivalent stand. In 1949, China made an uncharitable comment about India's Nehru government, calling it a "lackey of the Western imperialists." However, relations between the two neighbours improved in due course and in 1954 a treaty on Tibet that included Panchsheel (the Five Principles) was signed. Sisson and Rose observe that:

China used India, with Nehru's enthusiastic concurrence, as a channel of communication to the ... non-communist states in Asia and Africa. ... "*Hindi-Chini, bhai-bhai*" (Chinese and Indians are brothers) was the slogan used by both New Delhi and Beijing to describe their relationship. "*Hindi-Chini, bhai-bhai*" became "*Hindi-Chini, bye-bye*" with the outbreak of a bitter dispute over the Sino-Indian border in 1959 ... culminat[ing] in the brief, but, intense, Sino-Indian War of October–December 1962. From that point on China's policy objectives in South Asia fundamentally changed... to one in which New Delhi became the primary target of Chinese policy in the region. ... The simultaneous crises in China's relations with India and the Soviet Union in the early 1960s induced Beijing to undertake a concerted campaign to improve and expand its relations with Pakistan.⁶⁷

China continued its 1962 war hostility towards India until 1965, articulated through various means like the Chinese press, official statements and notes, and the choice of words by their leaders at various international events. After 1963, China became closer to Pakistan, reorienting its policy after the 1962 Indo-China war. By 1963, Bhutto could declare that an attack on Pakistan would involve the "largest state in Asia." China's hostility towards India was on three accounts. They were: a border dispute, India's cordial relations with the superpowers, and China's new friendship with Pakistan.⁶⁸

Mr. K. Subramanyam, a well-known Indian civilian strategist, observed:

In 1965, the attitude of China was of acute hostility, anti- Indian both in a declared and an implied manner. On the Rann of Kutch issue, China accused India 'big nation chauvinism and expansionism'. It claimed that border has never been delineated and that Pakistan was experiencing what China had in 1962. It sympathized with Pakistan, 'just stand' in opposing the 'Indian policy of military expansion' ... on the Indo-Pakistani hostilities of September 1965. ... China squarely condemned India for being the aggressor. There was no equivocation, nor any attempt to see or present the Indian point of view. ... On the issue of Kashmir ... it maintained that India has ruthlessly exploited the Kashmiri people. ... China therefore, supported the right of the Kashmiri people to self-determination.⁶⁹

66 Strategic imperatives of cold war geopolitics

After the Tashkent conference, China understood that actual military intervention against India in support of Pakistan would incur a high price and thus rejected the Pakistani request of “specific security commitments that would oblige the Chinese to intervene another Indo-Pakistani conflict.”⁷⁰

Chinese reaction to Bangladesh developments

For the first time on 3 April 1971, the New China News Agency (NCNA), in a broadcast over Radio Peking, reported the developments in Bangladesh, with General Yahya’s statements over Radio Pakistan made on 26 March in which he blamed the secessionist elements of the eastern wing. It also highlighted that Pakistan had lodged several strong protests against India’s blatant interference in the internal matters of Pakistan. It also covered the Indian External Minister’s statement on 26 March that the Indian government “cannot but be gravely concerned at events taking place close to our borders.” In addition, it referred to the resolution of the Indian parliament stating that it “cannot remain indifferent.” An article in the party organ, the People’s Daily, denounced India, the US, and Soviet Russia for interfering in the internal affairs of Pakistan. Zhou Enlai (Chou Enlai) sent a letter to Yahya stating that what was “happening in Pakistan at present was purely the internal affair of Pakistan which can only be settled by Pakistani people themselves and which brooks no foreign interference.” It also said that “we have noted that Indian Government has been carrying out gross interference in the internal affairs of Pakistan by exploiting the internal problems of Pakistan.”⁷¹ The letter is available in Appendix 6.

Sisson and Rose succinctly comment that “this letter was a masterpiece of evasion and subterfuge … it ended with a statement with a pledge of Chinese support to Pakistani people –but not specifically to the Yahya Government”.⁷²

The Chinese consul in Karachi on 25 May said that the Chinese government and people would always firmly support Pakistan in its just struggle to safeguard its national independence and territorial integrity.⁷³

During the next couple of months, the Chinese government, except for periodic denunciations of Indian interference in Pakistan, did not make any serious move relating to the Bangladesh crisis. By October, no satisfactory political solution was brought in to resolve the crisis in East Pakistan. The Indo-Pak war was imminent. On 1 November, Radio Pakistan quoted Yahya as having told an interviewer that China would intervene if India launched war.⁷⁴ To muster Chinese support on the Bangladesh crisis, Pakistan sent a delegation consisting of Bhutto, General Gul Hasan, and Air Marshall Rahim Khan. The delegation was in China from 5–8 November. China’s Acting Foreign Minister, Mr. Chi Peng-Fei in his banquet speech on 7 November repeated the essence of Zhou Enlai’s letter to Yahya written on 11 April. Once again, the issue was termed an internal matter of Pakistan to be “handled by its own people”; and India was accused of meddling into Pakistani affair. He further suggested that “disputes between states should be settled by the two sides concerned through consultations

and by resorting to force.” The speech ended with Chinese rhetoric expressing support to Pakistan in their just struggle to defend their sovereignty and national independence.⁷⁵

In a meeting with Chou Enlai, Air Marshall Rahim requested the Chinese to provide 30 fighter planes along with other military supplies. Bhutto asked the Premier whether China would consider joining Pakistan in the event of an Indo-Pak war. Zhou’s reply was very specific. He said that war was unlikely. If that happened then Chinese military forces would not intervene directly in support of Pakistan, but political and material support would be provided.⁷⁶

But on return to Pakistan, Bhutto made a grand announcement that China had assured support to Pakistan if a war between India and Pakistan were to occur. On the outbreak of war, Chou Enlai in an interview with Neville Maxwell of *The Sunday Times* said, “If India should brazenly provoke war, she would taste in the end the bitter fruit.”⁷⁷ On 9 December, at a diplomatic reception in Peking, Zhou Enlai wished for Pakistan’s victory in the war.⁷⁸

Response from Islamic countries

At the end of June 1971, 22 Islamic countries attended a conclave in Jeddah where Pakistan raised the concern of external interference (from India), which might result in disintegration of Pakistan and sought the support of the Muslim brotherhood. Unanimously, Islamic countries expressed their support for Pakistan’s unity and territorial integrity. India did not expect much support from the Islamic countries of Africa, west Asia, and south-east Asia, but gave importance to their views. Since the middle of 1971, India had sent emissaries to all the major Islamic countries to explain that it was not a conflict between Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan, but between two hostile Muslim communities of East and West Pakistan. India was partially successful in her aim to diminish their support for Pakistan. Leaders like Anwar Sadat (Egypt) and those of other Islamic countries did not want to see the break-up of Pakistan. Almost all the Islamic states gave moral support to Pakistan and a few gave financial and material support during the war.⁷⁹

Response from other European countries

In the last week of October 1971, Mrs. Gandhi undertook a tour of western Europe and the US to appraise them of the on-ground situation and to draw attention of some of world leaders. Belgium agreed with the Indian view point on the political solution for the Bangladesh problem, with a guarantee for safe return of the refugees.⁸⁰ An article titled “Genocide” published on 13 June 1971 in *The Sunday Times* by Anthony Mascarenhas, a Pakistani reporter, shook the UK when they read the gory details of the Pakistani army’s brutality in East Pakistan. A team of British parliamentarians visited East Pakistan to find that Pakistan’s propaganda blaming India for the crisis in the region was baseless.

68 Strategic imperatives of cold war geopolitics

In end-October, Mrs. Gandhi met British Prime Minister Edward Heath to explain the present situation in East Pakistan and the problems India was facing with such a huge number of refugees. British views were generally in consonance with the Indian ones that a peaceful political solution had to be found to restore citizens' democratic rights, which would facilitate the return of the refugees and the refugees.⁸¹ On 9 November Heath wrote to Yahya requesting him to release Mujib from prison and commence dialogue with Awami League leaders. But Yahya was as obstinate as before and refused to have any dialogue with Mujib. By the end of November, Heath realised that it would be more prudent for the UK to align with India than with Pakistan.⁸²

The French President, M. Georges Pompidou, too favoured for a political solution in East Pakistan as he felt the crisis occurred because of political reasons. He also cautioned that if a political solution was not found then the Indian sub-continent would be swept off in a storm with the consequences hard to predict.⁸³ During her three-day visit to West Germany, Mrs. Gandhi met its chancellor Willy Brandt thrice. Brandt too followed a similar line and stated that for the sake of maintaining peace and stability in the region, a political solution to the problem of East Pakistan must be found that would eliminate the existing situation of strife and ultimately enable refugees to return home. He stated the federal government was ready to support measures that would help in finding a political solution. But Brandt also realised importance of having a dialogue with Mujibur Rahman and assured Mrs. Gandhi that he would write to the President of Pakistan.⁸⁴

Marshal Tito of Yugoslavia, after attending the Shah of Iran's Persepolis celebration, visited India and on the Bangladesh crisis said that the problem could be solved with a political solution acceptable to the elected representatives of East Pakistan. Tito believed that a political solution was possible even at that stage, possibly by granting autonomy to East Pakistan.⁸⁵

Interestingly all these leaders knew very well that Yahya had not been so far able to offer a political solution that would satisfy both the eastern and western wings of Pakistan. Yahya and his government were adamant on not releasing Mujib and dealing with him and the top Awami leaders, now part of Bangladesh government in exile functioning from Calcutta. This was the indispensable first step in a political solution. Time was indeed running out, so was the patience of the people of East Pakistan and the government of India.

Role of neighbouring countries during 1971 crisis

Amongst the neighbouring countries, Nepal by far took the most neutral stand because of its not-so-cordial relations with India during 1970–71, though initially they supported Pakistan's stand. As the flying of Pakistan's aircrafts over the Indian airspace was not permitted, Sri Lanka allowed refuelling and transit facilities to Pakistani aircrafts during 1971. This irked India because just a few months previously, India had assisted the Sri Lankan government in quelling communist

insurrections by rushing in the Indian armed forces. Pakistan too sent its armed forces during this crisis. It was a precarious situation because the Indian Air Force manning air traffic control in Sri Lanka had to direct the Pakistani Air Force for their military operation happening in East Pakistan. The IAF raised objections. In August, External Affairs Minister Swaran Singh rushed to Sri Lanka to request Mrs. Srimavo Bandaranaike's government to stop offering these transit and refuelling facilities to Pakistan. Bandaranaike also offered a commonwealth solution between India and Pakistan. But since beginning, Mrs. Gandhi had made it very clear that the problem in East Pakistan was a problem between the two wings of Pakistan and, as such, had to be resolved between them. Myanmar, then under the rule of General Ne Win, was not vociferous during the liberation struggle, though many Rohingya refugees fled to Myanmar during the brutal operations of the Pakistani army. Apparently, he did not want to draw much international attention. Bhutan was supportive of India and Bangladesh during this period.

International non-governmental response

Interestingly, international media and many luminaries took a pro-Bangladeshi stand and forecasted the separation of Pakistan at the beginning of the civil war. A few examples are cited below.

On the brutality of the Pakistani army in East Pakistan, American magazine *Time* wrote, as early as 5 April 1971,

Even if President Agha Mohammed Yahya Khan is prepared to accept casualties of a geometrically greater magnitude, the outcome is likely to be the final breakup of East and West Pakistan and the painful birth of a new nation named Bangladesh.

The New Statesman, London, commented on 16 April 1971 that "if blood is the price of a people's right to independence, Bangladesh has overpaid." *News Week* on 2 August wrote, "Pakistan died in March... says a Karachi editor. ... There can never be one nation in the future, only two enemies." Prof. Louis Dumont, Director of the Institute of Higher Studies, Paris, wrote in *Le Monde* on 6 August 1971 that "the Pakistan of yesterday is dead."⁸⁶

In *The Sunday Times* of 11 July 1971, a former British Minister and a British member of the parliamentary delegation that visited East and West Pakistan wrote:

This downward spiral can only be reversed by political solution acceptable to the people of East Pakistan. In practice this must mean a political solution acceptable to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the Awami League. ... Yahya Khan must either accept this or continue with his policy of suppression- a policy which is bound to fail sooner or later. ... That the United States should line up with China in supplying armed forces of Pakistan at the

70 Strategic imperatives of cold war geopolitics

moment is something that defies any rational explanation. ... There should be the most explicit condemnation from the governments and parliaments and influential commentators from all kind ... it must be clear that the world identify themselves with the aspirations of the people of Bangladesh, and that are united in demanding shift in policy by the government of West Pakistan⁸⁷

Prof. J.K. Galbraith said that,

a peaceful political solution recognizing the right of the people of East Bengal to govern themselves was the only way out of the crisis. ... The people of Bangladesh had to be in charge of their destiny, of their own lives, their politics and polity. A solution could not be one that involved rule by and from West Pakistan.⁸⁸

Mr. Mitchell Sharp, the Canadian Foreign Minister, said, “It would be irresponsible to recommend the division of Pakistan. ... It may be that this will turn out to be the only solution.”⁸⁹

From the very beginning of its inception, Pakistan thought of the US as its primary source of military and diplomatic support against India. When the civil war broke out in East Pakistan, India was getting closer to Soviet Russia and Nixon tilted more towards the military-ruled Pakistan as he perceived that India, a client state of the communist Soviet Russia, was all set to destroy the US’ ally, Pakistan. To protect Pakistan during the Liberation War, the US gave economic aid towards refugee relief. It urged India not to use a military option and also advised Pakistan to settle disputes with East Pakistan. Yahya, on the request of Nixon, facilitated a rapprochement between the US and China. The US tilted towards Pakistan and when the war ultimately occurred, the Nixon administration resorted to “gunboat diplomacy” by deploying a naval task force and the USS Enterprise to the Bay of Bengal. Nixon wrongly presumed that the Liberation War was a fall out resulting from the Cold War. It failed to visualise that it was a fundamental development in subcontinental affairs and its resolution had to be found from within rather than through the influence of external powers.

How does one explain Nixon’s gunboat diplomacy? Was it not an attempt to save a client state by threatening India? What about Nixon/Kissinger coaxing the Chinese to open a third front to scare India? The Indo-USSR Friendship Treaty signed on 9 August 1971 was a game changer, which clearly made the two superpowers getting closer to two regional states of South Asia maintain the balance of power. This treaty was of great use during the Liberation War by checking the physical participation of China and bringing a semblance of power equity between the superpowers in South Asia and in the Indian Ocean zone. Most importantly, the USSR’s viewpoint during the debate and its use of its veto power during voting in the UN Security Council allowed India and the Mukti

Bahini some time to conclude a swift military operation in East Pakistan, resulting in birth of a new nation, Bangladesh, on 16 December 1971.

From the analysis of the official response of international bodies it can be deduced that there were divergent views of the 1971 South Asia crisis. By far, there was a consensus that the influx of millions of East Pakistani refugees was an unbearable burden for India, not only from an economic point of view but also in the threat it posed to imbalance social harmony. But there was no uniform view on creating the requisite conditions for refugees to return home. On the question of the right to self-determination of the people of Bangladesh, two trends were discernible: (a) It was an internal matter of Pakistan and there was no requirement for the international community even to discuss it and (b) It was not a matter solely within the domestic jurisdiction of Pakistan and the situation called for a political solution.

From the analyses of unofficial international views, the picture of support for the democratic rights for the Bangladeshis, condemnation of Pakistan's action, the US' inaction, Yahya's obstinacy in not talking to Mujibur Rahman, and India's legitimate involvement to solve the refugee problem got wide coverage.

In fact, after Mrs. Gandhi's exhaustive final phase of foreign tours in quest for peace, preceded by the tours of other Indian leaders like Mr. Jay Prakash Narayan, Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Mr. Siddhartha Shankar Ray, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, Mr. Swaran Singh, etc., to many countries across the globe, the conclusion was drawn that India had to fight alone, though it could bank on the USSR's support in the UN.

Srinath Raghavan makes a very relevant observation when he says, "War makes strange bedfellows". Very interestingly there were a few unexpected developments during the preparatory period of the 1971 Indo-Pak War. Anwar Sadat of Egypt—whom India had supported during Arab-Israel War of 1967, and had condemned Israel for attacking—supported Pakistan on the basis of Muslim brotherhood. Following this episode, Israel, with whom India did not have any diplomatic relations, on the advice of Mr. D. N. Chatterjee, a Joint Secretary posted as Indian Ambassador in Paris, was contacted secretly through an influential Israeli named Zabludowicz for emergency help with ammunitions and weapons. The Prime Minister of Israel, Golda Meir obliged by secretly airlifting arms, which originally were produced for Iran and ammunition meant for the Israel Army, to India along with instructors in the speediest manner. Details of this aspect are available in the Haskar Papers archived at the Jawaharlal Nehru Library, New Delhi, which were kept a close secret until not too long ago.⁹⁰

After exhausting all the diplomatic options for an amicable political solution to the problem of East Pakistan, which could have paved the path for the return of ten million refugees, India opted to exercise "the military option" as an instrument to achieve its national objective. After consulting with the chiefs of the armed forces, it was felt absolutely necessary to carry out a swift operation before a ceasefire was forced upon India by the UN Security Council. India's primary objective was to capture the maximum possible territory in East Pakistan so that

72 Strategic imperatives of cold war geopolitics

the Bangladesh government in exile could be relocated at the earliest to their soil and so that the refugees could also return. Meanwhile, Mrs. Gandhi, through various inputs, assessed that China was unlikely to physically participate in the proposed war because of the snow-covered passes and because the majority of its troops were deployed opposite Manchuria against the Russians. Information on failure of the Bhutto-led team that visited Peking in the first week of November to obtain China's assurance of physical participation in a possible Indo-Pak war was also passed on by Mr. Brajesh Mishra, then stationed in Peking. Mrs. Gandhi put the armed forces in final gear in a "ready to go position." She and General Manekshaw, Joint Chief of Staff, took a calculated risk based on the capability of the armed forces and after assessing the geo-political imperatives in South Asia. Now India was waiting for the most appropriate strategic timing to launch an offensive. The Indian Army commenced selective preliminary operations (nibbling actions) from 22 November in East Pakistan. Some documents mention the date as 21 December. Evidence suggests that India decided to commence war from 4 December. But, as the situation unfolded, Pakistan kicked-off the two-front all-out war against India with the pre-emptive air strike on 3 December 1971. India was thus saved by Pakistan from being seen as the aggressor and this action officially made Pakistan the party that started the war.

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74 Strategic imperatives of cold war geopolitics

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5

POLITICO-MILITARY STRATEGY OF INDIA, PAKISTAN, AND BANGLADESH GOVERNMENT IN EXILE

Strategy is about getting more out of a situation than the starting balance of power would suggest. It is the art of creating power.

—Lawrence Freedman¹

National strategy does not only concern the military but the whole gamut of national interest. Prerequisites for the evolution of national strategy are national homogeneity, internal stability, military capability, and, last but not least, the will and strength as a nation to safeguard its values and interests. Therefore, there is a requirement for the development and utilisation of the political, economic, psychological, and military power of a nation to safeguard national interest. Like many modern wars, the Bangladesh Liberation War also started only after exhausting all political and diplomatic options. While war strategy will be analysed in this chapter, during the Bangladesh Liberation War, the political and diplomatic dimensions of the campaign are of a more abiding interest.²

At the time of the Bangladesh Liberation War, no institution in the Indian Army taught or studied strategy in depth, though tactics was taught and practiced with adequate detail. Historically, military officers of undivided India were taught to handle platoon- and company-level tactics and not higher-level strategy, as British generals used to occupy those senior positions. Generals of both India and Pakistan at the time of the 1971 war were mostly of a pre-independence vintage and carried this historical baggage.

There are varying views on whether India has a strategic culture. There are arguments for and against it. However, before we proceed to examining different

views, it is necessary to understand definition of strategic culture. Alastair Ian Johnston's definition is:

Strategic culture is an integrated set of symbols (i.e. argumentation, structures, languages, analogies, metaphors etc.) that acts to establish pervasive and long-lasting grand strategic preferences by formulating concepts of the role and efficacy of force in interstate political affairs, and by clothing these conceptions with such an area of factuality that strategic preferences seem uniquely realistic and efficacious.³

George K. Tanham stated that

Indians have not been great strategy thinkers or developers of strategy, although they have been profound thinkers in many other fields [their] view of life as unpredictable did not lead Indians to see the need for strategy and even if they had, they would have been unlikely to proceed because if the future is unknown and [w]hy plan?⁴

Tanham also argued that the lack of a monolithic political identity in India has caused a lack of strategic thought and forward planning. Tanham's arguments have been debated in Indian strategic circles and many do not agree with his findings. Gautam Das, a strategy theorist, challenged Tanham's observation by stating that he falsely assumed that India is a monolithic political entity. Geographical India was made up of many kingdoms at different times and had more than one political empire. India should not be judged by analysing the period of the British Raj only.⁵

Namrata Goswami, another person with expertise on matters of strategy, argues:

What I understand by strategic culture is an ideational milieu by which the members of the national strategic community form their strategic preferences with regard to the use and efficacy of military power in response to the threat environment. Each country has its own way to interpret, analyze and react to external opportunities and threats. As a member of the Indian strategic community, let me assure you that we do have a strategic culture where we closely assess the external environment and debate on the efficacy of the use of military power in addressing external threats. That India tends to give priority to dialogue over the use of military power in foreign policy does not mean that it does not have a strategic culture; it just means that the strategic preferences are different from the normal understanding of how Great Powers behave.⁶

Some argue that Indians learnt strategy through the mythological literature like the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and religious scripts like Vedas, Upanishads, and Puranas. It is a fact that after Kautilya's "Arthashastra," for 2,000 years there was no

other Indian literature on strategy and statecraft worth mentioning. But can literature on strategy be the only barometer for measuring the strategic efficacy of a nation? When the Bangladesh campaign took place, India's Nehruvian foreign policy of non-alignment was rather used as "foreign policy autonomy" to seek a powerful international partner that would serve the best interest of its national security.

Political leaders, diplomats, senior civilian officials, military officers, economists, the intelligence community, and, last but not least, academicians are all part of the national strategy mechanism and must work in cohesion. Most importantly, therefore, is the vision of the strategic leadership that makes history, that builds nation, and that makes armed forces victorious. In a democratic country like India, one with such diversity, a strong central government in New Delhi headed by a person with vision, grit and determination can only shape the strategic direction for the country. In the March 1971 general election, Indira Gandhi came to parliament with a two-thirds majority. Mrs. Gandhi proved to be a strong prime minister who used her power to formulate and implement her foreign policy objectives, especially in relation to the East Pakistan crisis and shaped the destiny of not only India, but of South Asia.

India's political strategy during the East Pakistan crisis

The Indian public was stunned by the news of the ghastly massacre during "Operation Searchlight" by the Pakistani Army that commenced in East Pakistan on 25 March 1971. It evoked sharp reactions from many quarters. Opposition parties started putting pressure on the government for early action and early recognition of Bangladesh as a nation. Mrs. Gandhi handled the event deftly and with full sincerity of purpose. However, *ab initio*, her response was absolutely measured. On 27 March she met opposition leaders and told them that her government would not support secessionist movements in East Pakistan at that stage as that would invariably draw international repercussions.⁷

The Indian government initially believed that though the conflict over the formation of a civilian government in Pakistan was intense, the political groups of Pakistan, under the supervision of President Yahya Khan, would negotiate a settlement. The Indian government did not anticipate Mujib's arrest and a final break off of the ongoing negotiations. The initial response of government of India after the brutal military action was highly vocal but cautious. Neither did it want to antagonise Pakistan, nor did it want to rouse passion within the country, so as to avoid demands by various political groups in India for immediate action. And, of course, at this stage it did not give any kind of impression that India would provide material assistance to the freedom fighters (Mukti Fauz)⁸. About India's initial response, Mr. J. N. Dixit, an Indian Foreign Services Officer who was involved in management of refugee affairs, wrote:

Although it (India) extended general support, to the cause of East Pakistanis, India was cautious not to take macro-level diplomatic or political steps in support of the liberation struggle. While providing facilities for the

establishment of an interim government and giving general support to the resistance movement, India had not given formal recognition to what came to be known as the Mujibnagar Government.⁹

The Bangladesh Government in exile, which was set up on 17 April 1971 at the mango grove of Baidyanathitala (later named Mujibnagar), was soon shifted to Calcutta along with its office bearers, with the assistance of the government of India.

Management of domestic politics

The refugee influx not only resulted in an economic drain for India but also raised several tricky domestic political problems that complicated decision making. The refugees were concentrated in some of the most trouble-ridden sections of India, namely, West Bengal, Assam, and tribal-inhabited Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland. West Bengal too had been facing a severe Naxalite problem since 1969. The Congress party-supported coalition, which won the March 1971 election in West Bengal, lasted only few months until 28 June, when “President’s rule” was imposed in the state. Indian army units and central forces were engaged in controlling the Naxalite problem. Even in 1971, many Naxalites were operating in the border areas of East Bengal with some success. Refugees were also disturbing the existing social fabric in places such as Tripura, where they outnumbered the locals. Though they were barred from taking jobs, about 3 million of them entered the labour market of West Bengal. And cheap labour disturbed the existing wage pattern, causing great resentment. It also created high inflation. The CPI(M) and CPI political parties established contact with the pro-China wing of the Pakistan Communist Party, including the National Awami Party (Bhasani). The CPI(M) wanted immediate recognition of the Bangladesh Government in Exile and opposed military intervention by India in fear of an escalation into an all-out Indo-Pak War. Some Communist Party members contacted New Delhi to ask it to remain firm in its policy regarding East Pakistan’s problem. Mrs. Gandhi refused any solution to the Pakistani crisis that did not ensure the return of the refugees to East Pakistan.¹⁰

While supporting the freedom movements in Bangladesh, India had to factor in the dangerous fall-out such an event could have on its north-eastern states and in Tamil Nadu, which often demanded separation from India because of its distinct ethnolinguistic and cultural identity. It was a great dilemma for the central leadership. It also had to take note of the idea of “Greater Bengal,” which surfaced off and on.

Mrs. Gandhi and her administration, while handling domestic pressure on the East Pakistan crisis, showed a remarkable amount of patience and maturity to arrive at wellcharted courses of action.

The decision-making elite in the Government of India could not totally ignore public views on the East Pakistani situations, but it handled all

suggestions and criticisms calmly, rarely rejecting anything out of hand, but also rarely, if ever, revising policies to suit critics. From 25th March to the end May, New Delhi discouraged projections of a major Indian role in the resolution of the crisis in East Pakistan.¹¹

This approach has been criticised by Sisson and Rose because they felt that “it did not make good political or strategic sense.”¹²

Evolution of policy strategy

Behind closed doors, in early April it was debated whether immediate military action by India would be a good strategy or not. It is said that Mrs. Gandhi wanted that, as did some of her cabinet ministers, Mr. D. P. Dhar, and preeminent civilian strategist Mr. K. Subramanyam.¹³ Though Subramanyam was not part of the government functionaries, his opinion carried weight. But Mr. Swaran Singh, the External Affairs Minister, and General Manekshaw, the Joint Chief of Staff, advised otherwise. Mr. P.N. Haksar was also against immediate action. Swaran Singh felt that an immediate launch of army operation would result in India being seen as an illegitimate aggressor and being condemned by the international community. Manekshaw, the pragmatic and assertive soldier, in clear-cut terms demanded more time for preparation, training, and equipping the armed forces. Manekshaw was also worried about the interference of the monsoon in the proposed military operation; their arguments prevailed in the final decision. The Defence Minister Mr. Jagjivan Ram too supported the views of the Army Chief.¹⁴ Mrs. Gandhi’s advisers also felt that in addition to ensuring India’s international credibility, the US and China factors would have to be considered when evolving a holistic and pragmatic policy. After due deliberation, an “evolutionary policy stance was adopted aiming at freedom to exercise military option if interim measures taken by India did not succeed in resolving the crisis in East Pakistan.”¹⁵ Salient aspects of the policy approach are stated below:

- a The East Pakistan crisis could only be resolved if Pakistan respected the election mandate of the general elections, thus assuring the legitimate political aspirations of the Bengalis.
- b To start the process, Mujibur Rahman had to be released immediately and be allowed to move to Dacca to begin the political process. The Pakistan government should thereafter have further negotiations with him.
- c Pakistan had to ensure the safe return and resettling of all the East Pakistani refugees now based in India.
- d Pakistan should immediately stop military operations in East Pakistan and troops should return to the barracks.
- e The international community should pressure Pakistan, through bilateral diplomatic and UN channels, and impress upon them to resolve the crisis in East Pakistan by peaceful means.

- f The UN and its relevant ancillary establishments should initiate immediate and adequate refugee relief programmes ensuring the early return and settlement of the millions of refugees located in India.

Politico-strategy: first tranche

By the end of April 1971, Mrs. Gandhi and her advisors, after considering all options, concluded that the first and most important strategic move had to entail “preparation of the domestic public opinion in India for the probable extension of formal and active support to the liberation struggle of East Pakistan.” Simultaneously it was considered strategically imperative to sensitise the world, to make them aware of India’s compulsions, concerns, and rationale for its reactions as they evolved. Therefore, it was necessary to undertake a comprehensive and well-planned diplomatic initiative.¹⁶

Ensuring structural arrangements for dealing with East Pakistan crisis

Formulating a strategy itself is not enough, its implementation is as important, if not more. To this effect, the basic organisational and political arrangements were in place by end-May. The following actions were taken:

- a A Special Unit was set up in the Ministry of External Affairs to deal with the East Pakistan Crisis. Mr. J.N. Dixit was made director of this division.
- b The Establishment of a Secretariat of External Affairs Ministry (Liaison Office) at 18 Camac Street in Calcutta to coordinate with the Bangladesh Government in Exile. Mr. A.K. Ray, assisted by Ms. Arundhuti Ghosh, were entrusted with the task of liaising with the Bangladesh Government in Exile, Central Government, and Government of West Bengal and to facilitate the preparation of the Mukti Bahini.
- c Mr. S.K. Singh was made responsible for coordinating the publicity campaign for the government of India’s East Pakistan policies.
- d R.D. Sathe, of the MEA’s Economic Division, was made responsible for coordinating economic assistance to the Bangladesh Government in Exile.
- e A committee of secretaries comprising of the Secretaries of Defence, Home, Finance, and Foreign Affairs was set up to take executive decisions dealing with preparations for war. The Director General BSF, Civil Defence, and heads of other Para Military Forces were co-opted as and when required. The apex of direction and supervision remained with General Manekshaw (Joint Chief of Staff) and D.P. Dhar (Chairman of the Planning Committee of Ministry of External Affairs).
- f Mrs. Gandhi involved senior politicians and ministers like Mr. Swaran Singh, K.C. Pant, Y.B. Chavan, Jagjivan Ram, etc. in fine tuning India’s policy and in briefing foreign governments, to mobilise both domestic as well as international support.

Handling the refugee issue

One of the biggest challenges of the Indian government was handling the refugee issue as it had both internal as well as international ramifications. Seeing the pathetic conditions of the refugees during her two-day mid-May tour to Assam, Tripura, and West Bengal, Mrs. Gandhi was alarmed as well as shocked with the magnitude and intensity of the refugee crisis. On 24 May, she debated in parliament:

Conditions must be created to stop any further influx of refugees and to ensure their early return under credible guarantees for their safety and wellbeing... unless this happens, there can be no lasting stability or peace on the subcontinent. We have pleaded with other power 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.¹⁷

Actually, the refugee issue and its allied problems drew the attention of the world's media both by default as well as by the design of the Indian government, whose media management team widely projected the inhuman conditions of the refugees and the enormous problems India was facing in feeding and sheltering millions of them. India wanted early return of the refugees through a political solution. Though many governments may not have openly supported India because they thought that would entail supporting the disintegration of Pakistan, the unofficial position of the majority of the world's population was sympathetic to the brutalised East Pakistanis and the problem-ridden India. However, that helped only in raising some money and material help for the refugees, but no official pressure was put on Yahya Khan to seek a permanent resolution to the ongoing crisis.

Assistance in the creation of a resistance movement in East Pakistan

Until May, India did not want to enhance her role in resolving the East Pakistan crisis, lest it be seen by the international community as meddling in another country's affair. Instead of a direct intervention at the early stage of the crisis,

New Delhi considered it essential to assist in the creation of a resistance movement in East Pakistan as the political and military basis for direct Indian intervention. If military action were unavoidable, India preferred that its moves be interpreted as supportive of a Muslim led East Pakistani liberation movement rather than just another India-Pakistani (i.e., Hindu-Muslim) conflict.¹⁸

On 20 July 1971, Mr. Swaran Singh appraised parliament that India was helping the Mukti Bahini, in consonance with the earlier resolution of parliament,

adopted unanimously, pledging sympathy and support and that India was pursuing that resolution in the best possible manner. He was emphatic in his statement, “We are doing everything possible to lend support to the freedom fighters.”¹⁹

Indo-Soviet friendship treaty: A diplomatic coup by India

Though both India as well as Pakistan did not accept Brezhnev’s proposal for Collective Security for Asia, mooted in 1967, India kept the issue alive by asking for alternatives and alterations to the proposed plan, etc. No political solution to resolve the Bangladesh imbroglio was forthcoming and the tilt in US policy in favour of Pakistan was becoming more and more visible. When Sino-US rapprochement began with Kissinger’s secret visit to Peking on 9 July 1971 arranged by Pakistan, Mrs. Indira Gandhi wished to take advantage of the situation and made a calculated move to rebalance great power relations in the Indian subcontinent. She sent her confidant Mr. Parmeshwar Narayan Haksar to work on an agreement with Soviet Russia. And on 7 August, the signing of the Indo-Soviet Treaty became a strategic masterstroke by Mrs. Gandhi. It was indeed a diplomatic coup for India. About the treaty, in his book, *Foreign Policy of India*, N. Jayapalan writes:

The immediate objective of the Treaty was to serve as a deterrent against Pakistani threat to India’s security. It was also designed to check the possible Sino-Pak collusion against India. It was an important measure for neutralizing the growing Washington-Pindi-Beijing entente which had within it certain big dangers for the security needs of India. It also assured Soviet support for India at the United Nations. It was concluded at a time when East Pakistan was in turmoil and it indirectly helped India to make a decisive contribution towards the creation of Bangladesh. In the Bangladesh War of December 1971, India received full support and it prevented a possible Chinese and American intervention from the side of Pakistan. It also led to Soviet support for India at the United Nations and checked the adoption of U.S-China approved anti India moves in the Security Council.²⁰

With the passage of time, it was becoming more and more clear that it could be a well-nigh possibility for government of India to exercise the military option in support of the liberation struggle of Bangladesh. The signing of the Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty was the most significant strategic step that India took in preparation for the possibility of a likely participation in the Bangladesh freedom struggle. Mani Dixit spells out importance of the treaty in the following words:

The most important political and strategic clauses were those which stipulated that both countries guarantee each other’s security that if there is any perceived threat by either party in the agreement they will enter into

immediate consultations to fashion remedial counter measures; that they will not enter into any arrangements or agreement with other countries which will be detrimental to each other's security interests; and they will cooperate with each other to strengthen security.²¹

Keeping the gun powder dry while pursuing diplomacy

Senior commanders of the Indian Armed Forces took stock of the situation in April 1971, to assess its war worthiness. It was felt necessary to prepare the armed forces for any eventualities, while the effort to persuade Yahya into a political solution was ongoing. It was found that the army's reserve holdings of arms, ammunition, equipment, spares, etc. were low. Holdings of critical items were much lower and in short supply. The first action that Manekshaw initiated was making up the deficiencies of reserve items expeditiously. Government machineries, ordnance factories, tank manufacturing units, etc. were geared up to accelerate production for making up the shortfall in reserve holdings.

Thereafter, Manekshaw turned his attention towards ensuring units' and formations' war worthiness by making up their deficient manpower, arms, ammunition, and equipment. It became a herculean task because of the heterogeneous varieties of equipment the Indian Army held. Sukhwant Singh, the then Deputy Director General of Military Operation, paints a vivid picture about the conditions prevailing in the army units and formations at that time:

Making up their (Units & Formations) deficiencies in manpower, equipment and ammunition became difficult as a major reorganization and re-equipping of the Indian Army was then in progress, especially in Armoured Corps and in Artillery. Some units were under raising, others were converting to newly introduced equipment, and yet others were getting familiar with specialized equipment... rationalization (of equipment to achieve homogeneity) was over by August. Rationalization of stockpiling of General Staff reserves of equipment and spares needed more time. ... Placing ammunition stocks presented certain difficulties, especially of imported varieties because the required quantities were not available... items of short supply were proportionately distributed in such a manner that the immediate requirements of a short and intense war would be met. ... The redistribution was completed surreptitiously by the middle of October under cover monsoon and winter stocking, and it served well.²²

To make up for the lack of road and rail networks in the eastern theatre, the Border Road Task Force (BRTF) and central and state road construction agencies were put on the job to construct communication networks so that stocking and dumping of stores and building up troops and movements could go on smoothly.

Restraint and surprise were embedded in the strategic planning and preparations of the armed forces. Various measures were adopted to keep the movements of units to forward areas a secret. Particularly in the western theatre, troops were moved late. Manekshaw waited until the beginning of October and thereafter commenced movements to forward areas, which were completed by the middle of November. Sukhwant Singh makes an interesting observation, which had great strategic relevance for Pakistan. He comments, “The tactical imbalance (of Indian army) which existed because of the improper locations of troops was redressed by the third week of October. Yahya waited too long.”²³ Which means that the Indian army was well prepared to tackle a Pakistani offensive thereafter and Yahya lost the strategic advantage of a pre-emptive attack; the best time for Pakistan would have been to launch an offensive operation in October.

Manekshaw also activated the Joint Intelligence Committee under the Chairmanship of the Vice Chief of Army Staff, consisting of representatives of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), The Intelligence Bureau (IB), and the Directors of Intelligence of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. In addition, an inter-services Joint Planning Committee was also formed to achieve better cohesion amongst the three services.

Manekshaw knew well that “the man behind the gun is more important than the gun.” To boost the morale of soldiers expected to fight until the end and make the supreme sacrifice if needed, he convinced the government to introduce better compensation measures for martyrs’ family members and for those who may be disabled due to war injuries. Taking a cue from Napoleon, he also introduced several medals like the Silver Jubilee of Independence Medal, Wound Medal, etc. as part of his efforts to motivate and psychologically boost the soldiers’ morale so that they could give their best. Manekshaw, who was severely wounded during World War II and was awarded the Military Cross for his bravery and leadership, knew the importance of morale as a force multiplier during war.

Diplomatic offensive: strategy to garner international support

Since beginning of the East Pakistan crisis,

Mrs. Indira Gandhi believed and made it amply clear through various statements that there must be a political, rather than military, solution to Pakistan’s problem in its eastern province and that the great powers had a special responsibility to help see such a solution through.²⁴

With this belief, to sensitise the international community and garner their support for India’s policies related to the East Pakistan crisis, emissaries were sent to brief foreign governments. Swaran Singh undertook a tour of the important capitals of North America and Europe between May to September 1971. K.C. Pant visited a number of Asian and Central American countries. Mr. Mohammed

Yunus, a friend of Mrs. Gandhi, was dispatched to Islamic countries to convince them and argue for India.

For the major part of 1971, India kept hoping that good sense would prevail among the Pakistan government after they understood the ground realities and that foreign nations in general, and the US in particular, would put adequate pressure on Pakistan to resolve the dispute by granting autonomy to East Pakistan, which Mujibur Rahaman repeatedly voiced support for through his six-point formula and election manifesto. Indira Gandhi also hoped that the millions of refugees would go back to their homes if such a political arrangement emerged. But it did not happen that way.

Major General Sukhwant Singh avers, “The more international pressure became ineffective, the more India was pushed closer to thinking of war.... [the] more it alienated international option. Yahya Khan fully exploited this in many capitals.”²⁵ On 19 July 1971, Yahya Khan declared in an interview with a correspondent of *The Financial Times*, London, “If India made any attempt to seize any part of East Pakistan” this would be treated as an attack on Pakistan—“I shall declare war, let the world note. Nor will Pakistan be alone.”²⁶ India’s External Affairs Minister, Mr. Swaran Singh, promptly replied to the “threat of war” from Yahya. He said:

Pakistan had been all along trying to mislead world opinion by asserting that Pakistan’s problem was with India and not with the people of Bangladesh. The Pakistani military regime’s reckless brutality had landed it in a morass. Pakistan must realize that only a settlement with the representatives of Bangladesh would solve the problem. But so long it did not realise these activities of the *Mukti Bahini* would increase. And if Pakistan made this an excuse to launch an attack on India, “we will defend ourselves.”²⁷

On 15 August, Independence Day in India, emboldened by the Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty, Mrs. Indira Gandhi announced from the ramparts of Red Fort, Delhi, “We do not want war. We do not rattle sabres, but India is prepared for any emergency.”²⁸

Along with diplomacy, the militaries on both sides were carrying out preparations to meet war-like contingencies. Thus, having kept the military option open, Mrs. Gandhi set upon a final attempt to impress upon the international community the need to pressurise and pursue Yahya Khan to embark on a political solution for the East Pakistani crisis and create a favourable situation to facilitate the return of the refugees. She began her journey with Soviet Russia. In Moscow she said,

We cannot but be perturbed when a fire breaks out in a neighbour’s house. What happened in East Bengal can no longer be regarded as Pakistan’s domestic affair. More than nine million Bengalis have come into our country. We cannot be expected to absorb them. We have problems enough of our own and we certainly do not need to add to our vast population.²⁹

On 23 October, Mrs. Gandhi embarked on a three-week tour to several Western Nations, namely, the US, France, the UK, West Germany, Belgium, and Australia. She did her best to explain the situation in South Asia, requested their help in sharing the economic burden of managing the refugees, and asked them to persuade the Pakistani government for an expeditious political settlement of the East Pakistan problem. She assured the world that India would not assume the role of aggressor. She also expressed her willingness to meet Yahya and discuss the situation. But she reiterated that any settlement in East Pakistan had to be negotiated with Mujib and the elected leaders of the Awami league. Yahya was absolutely rigid in his stance of refusing to deal with Mujib and other Awami leaders whom he termed “traitors.”

Military strategy: India

Because of the past experience of wars with China and Pakistan, the Indian Armed Forces did not assess any threat from East Pakistan nor did it create a contingency plan for a major operation there. The Siliguri corridor was always considered a strategically vulnerable area and, as such, its protection was planned for. The northern and western borders of India were thought to be strategically vulnerable because of the earlier threat perception. With the new worsening situation in East Pakistan, the Indian military had to relook at their national security strategy *de novo*. It was assessed that if an operation had to be undertaken in East Pakistan, it had to be ensured that any threats on the western and northern borders—which Pakistan had always considered their primary objectives during previous Indo-Pak wars—were properly taken care of. India did not have sufficient forces to take care of simultaneous threats from Pakistan and China, if perpetrated by them. As Pakistan, by August, had moved sufficient troops into East Pakistan, they were capable of putting up a good defensive battle.

As for an offensive operation in East Pakistan, the bulk of the troops had to be mustered from the formations deployed on the northern borders against China. This thinning out was a risky proposition because China could have taken advantage of it. Therefore, the timing of the operation was planned during winter months, when passes are closed because of snow. Accordingly, any time between December–January was considered suitable. It was thought that a calculated risk of thinning out the northern border forces could be taken because of the timing as well as the deterrence the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship was for China. Having considered all the factors, a strategy of offensive defence in the West and, defence in the North and a swift offensive in the East was finalised broadly.³⁰

Although the importance of Dacca as the *gravitas centre* was understood by the higher echelons of the army, factoring in Pakistan’s defensive capability, numerous river obstacles, likely international reactions, and a UN intervention for a ceasefire, Dacca was not earmarked as the stated final objective in the beginning, as detailed planning could be carried out for the capture of territory up to the major river line. Many have criticised the exclusion of Dacca in the initial operational

directives issued by Army Headquarters. General Krishna Rao, who was one of the Divisional Commanders during the Bangladesh Liberation War, states:

As Pakistan had sufficient troops to offer adequate resistance, to any advancing troops, any premature adventure on Dacca could prove to be unsound. It was felt that full advantage should be taken of the geographical configuration, which in turn indicated that land operations should be launched from all three sides, while Naval operations should be launched in the South. A Naval blockade would ensure isolation of East Pakistan. As there were only two squadrons of Air Force in East Pakistan, by knocking these out of the war as early as possible after the start of the war, a condition of war supremacy could be created, where by ground forces would be able to operate freely without enemy air interference. As far as the land forces were concerned, it was considered that an advance to the major rivers from the different Sectors and securing the available ferries, would facilitate launching of operations into the Dacca Bowl and its ultimate capture.³¹

It could be seen that General Manekshaw had a difficult task in his hands—taking care of the western as well as eastern fronts against Pakistan and the north and north-eastern fronts against any Chinese threat. His basic strategy was a blitzkrieg offensive operation in the east and to defend and hold the west and carry out limited offensive operations where possible. He took a calculated risk by thinning out troops deployed against the Chinese to build up forces in the eastern theatre.

Unlike India, Pakistan had the advantage of being able to quickly mobilise army formations for war because their cantonments were located closer to the border. India's politico-military strategic thinkers were not very sure about responsible behaviour on the part of Yahya, who could plunge into war without much provocation. His series of public, sabre-rattling statements in various national and international forums were a matter of concern for India. To obviate any such design, in September Manekshaw, after obtaining political clearance, commenced mobilisation of army formations from interior locations of India to areas in proximity to the international borders with Pakistan in both the east and west wings. The Air Chief and Naval Chief too readjusted their resources and positioned their units accordingly, as per joint planning. To ensure better inter-services coordination, the Eastern Air Headquarters based in Shillong and the Eastern Navy based at Vizag, positioned their advance headquarters in Calcutta.

Military historian D.K Palit commented that the core of the Eastern Command plan in the Bangladesh campaign was:

Contain the enemy strong points at the border while powerful mobile thrusts, by a series of by-passing moves, cut the enemy's line of communication and raced ahead for the Dacca "bowl". There would be three major thrusts, one each from each of the three-army corps, and a lesser thrust

from the Meghalaya areas. Each would strive to by-pass major resistance and make for the strategic target, while leaving behind detachments to contain and eventually liquidate centres of resistance. With the cooperation and support of the air and naval arms, he would isolate Dacca.³²

On the eastern front, Lt. Gen. J.S. Aurora planned a multi-pronged offensive and from as many directions as possible to destroy the enemy forces and capture the maximum possible territory. Multi-directional attacks can be defined as an attack launched by balanced groups with inbuilt reserves simultaneously, along more than one axis, each adequately apart, contributing to the accomplishment of the final mission, which otherwise would have required a large number of attacks in phases. The concept of multi-directional attacks offers a greater degree of moral ascendancy over the defender, offensive action, initiative, and chance of success, besides economising troops and time. A major advantage of such strategic plan is the “earmarking of separate troops for diversionary attacks or feint attacks will not be required.”

Surprise, which is a key factor in the success of an operation, is bound to be achieved through a multi-directional attack. For a defender, it was difficult to ascertain the intention of the attacker as simultaneous attacks from different directions lead to confusion, isolation, and also undermines the defender's morale. The defender's attention remains divided, as do his resources to react when facing multi-directional/multi-pronged attacks.

It was possible for the Indian forces to carry out an isolation and envelopment of the Pakistani forces through multi-prong attacks by different corps and within the corps through multi-directional attacks from the Divisions. This strategy gave flexibility and thereby ensured exploitation by those formations who were successful. Surprisingly, though discussed during the planning stage, possibly anticipating a political settlement, the capture of Dacca as the ultimate objective was not formally planned in Delhi or Calcutta. As events took a different turn, so did the decision regarding the final objective.

Government of India's policy directives for military option

As the situation in the east kept deteriorating and Pakistan mobilised its forces in the west, in October 1971 India laid down the following limited objectives for its possible military operations:³³

- 1 To assist the Mukti Bahini in liberating a part of Bangladesh where the refugees could be sent to live under their own Bangladeshi government.
- 2 To prevent Pakistan from capturing any Indian territory of consequence in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan, or Gujrat. This was to be achieved by offensive defence and not merely passive line-holding.
- 3 To defend the integrity of India from a Chinese attack in the north.

The Indian Navy

The Indian Navy's (IN) strategy was to keep the sea lines of communication open for India and deny the same to Pakistan. In the east, the navy was tasked with isolating the Bay of Bengal and making all the ports of East Pakistan inoperative so that Pakistan could not use them. In the west, the objective was to destroy the Karachi port and its ancillary installations.

The strategy of Indian Air Force (IAF) and IN was part of the overall military strategy of India and each service, because of close coordination since the planning stage, complemented each other to achieve the overall aims of the national strategy.

The Indian Air Force

Based on the directive issued by the Cabinet to the Chiefs Staff Committee, the war aims for Indian Air Force (IAF) operations were laid down as follows.³⁴

- a To defend the home base against enemy air attacks.
- b To support the army in the field, and in order to do it, gain and maintain a favourable air situation over the tactical area, and mount reconnaissance, interdiction, and other operations having a direct bearing on the outcome of land battles.
- c To conduct counter air operations, i.e., reduce the effectiveness of the Pakistani Air Force (PAF) by destroying its aircraft and bases.
- d To provide air transport support to its own forces.
- e To provide maritime support to the navy.

As part of the strategic mission, emphasis throughout the war was on interdiction. In the west, the IAF's primary tasks were the disruption of Pakistan's communications, destruction of fuel and ammunition dumps, and the disruption and prevention of ground force concentrations to thwart major offensives against India. On the eastern front, while the Indian Army launched a blitzkrieg operation, the IAF's strategic objective was to make the PAF non-operative by knocking off the aircrafts and by carrying out selective bombing on runways to make them unserviceable, thereby achieving total air superiority. In addition, the IAF was to provide direct support to the ground forces during the army's blitzkrieg offensive operation.³⁵

Pakistan's political strategy

Pakistan's anti-India obsession was prominently visible all through the crisis, from the national general election held in December 1970 to the abortive political negotiations between Mujib, Bhutto, and Yahya. Pakistan, for every problem in East Pakistan, blamed India, be it the victory of the Awami League in the election, the increased regional aspirations expressed through Mujib's six-point

election manifesto, or the subsequent exhibition of the spirit of Bengaliness. Pakistan failed in resolving the domestic political problem with a political solution.

The primary objective of Pakistan's foreign policy making from May through the December was to constrain India from acting in a way that threatened the integrity of Pakistan or that would force a political settlement on any terms other than those stipulated by military regime.³⁶

Pakistan made an aggressive effort towards obtaining the support of the international community with a view to restraining India, by drawing their attention.

Pakistan's assessment of the situation³⁷

- a India could extend limited support and training to the Bengali guerrillas but would not intervene militarily.
- b Pakistan's army and auxiliary force had the capability to tackle the Mukti Bahini, who would not be a major threat, overpower the state machinery, or free the eastern wing through guerrilla warfare.
- c The Mukti Bahini would not be able to pull it off if India could be pursued by the international community to withdraw support.

Sisson and Rose observe, "Throughout, Pakistan's strategy toward India was to constrain and to defend; and throughout the autumn months Pakistani leaders looked outward to the international community for salvation rather than inward for political solution"³⁸ To exert pressure on India, Pakistan tried hard to win the sympathy of Islamic countries, the Western bloc, and China. At the same time, they pressed hard for UN intervention on the subcontinent to turn politico-military conditions in their favour and thus perpetuate the status quo. They expected the US, China, and the Arab countries to help and join them in their war. They received very little direct support, belying their expectations. Despite coaxing from the US, China didn't move its forces against India in the Chumbi Valley (Sikkim). The US deployed its aircraft carrier 7th Fleet on 10 December 1971 but could not alter the course of the war.

Pakistan's military strategy

Since the inception of Pakistan, the bulk of its armed forces were stationed in West Pakistan, with a division-sized force in East Pakistan. The Pakistani Army's vision was "defence of the East (Pakistan) lies in the West (Pakistan)." It was originally based on an analysis by Field Marshall Auchinlek on the defence potential of the Indian subcontinent during the British Raj. Taking cue from this, Field Marshall Ayub Khan made this Pakistan's national defence strategy, which continued until 1971. General Niazi explains:

92 Politico-military strategy of India

This strategic vision means that, battle of the East will be fought in the West. Translated into coherent terms, this means that the decision in a war with India would be obtained on the Western Front by launching a vigorous offensive to capture a sizable chunk of strategically important Indian Territory. East Pakistan garrison, on the other hand, would fight a defensive cum limited offensive battle, by keeping the maximum number of Indian troops engaged and tied down for a given period, until the decision on the Western Front is achieved.³⁹

Based on this strategic concept, Pakistan in 1971 planned to fight the decisive battle in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab. They also perceived that their allies, like the US, China, and a few countries from the Islamic brotherhood, would join them in their war and as in the past, this time too, the UN would pressurise India into agreeing to a ceasefire before any major damage could be done.

About Pakistan's overall strategic concept of war against India, Niazi states:

This concept was adopted after protracted trials based on copious studies and remained the basis of our military strategy till the end of the 1971 war. Within the context of this concept, the plans for fighting a war with India in East Pakistan were not to be in isolation, but an integral part of the overall strategy. The battle plans of both the theatres were concomitant and interdependent. ... The theatre plans were accordingly evolved to support each other.⁴⁰

Strategy of the Pakistani Air Force (PAF)

The strategy and concept of operation of the PAF has been analysed by Air Commodore Jasjit Singh based on his study of the PAF's official histories. Following are the highlights:⁴¹

- a Begin war with pre-emptive strikes on Indian air bases and radar facilities.
- b Give maximum support to General Tikka Khan's strike force (Army Reserves, 1 Corps, and 2 Corps), with five divisions at his disposal; proposed offensive into India by a pincer attack in tandem to capture maximum Indian territory in the area south of the Sutlej river to ease off pressure in East Pakistan.
- c Achieve a condition of air superiority in the projected area of offensive operation.
- d Continue proving protective cover to the strike force.
- e Undertake interdiction tasks destroying Indian supply lines, air bases, and ground forces.
- f Maintain offensive pressure on the IAF until the army's offensive was launched.
- g Provide needed air support to the Pakistani army's holding action along the entire 3,700 km border from Kashmir to Kutch.
- h Provide limited air support to the Pakistani Navy (PN).

Overall strategy of Pakistan Navy

Pakistan had a small navy with vintage ships and equipment. In a nutshell, its overall strategy was to keep its ports secure and operative. Also, to secure sea lines of communication to ensure uninterrupted commercial shipping.

Pakistan's war strategy in the east

Based on the broad military strategy, the mission given to Lt. Gen. Niazi, GOC Eastern Command of East Pakistan, were:⁴²

- a Evict the guerrillas.
- b No territory should fall into enemy hands, which they can declare as Bangladesh.
- c Defend East Pakistan against external aggression.

Aligning with the mission, four tiers of defence in East Pakistan revolving around various important communication centres/towns were developed into the fortress concept of defence by Niazi. The tactical level of the design of battles and its execution are briefly covered in Chapter 6.

Comments on Pakistan's strategy in East Pakistan

The Pakistani government assessed that India's war aim would be to capture adequate territory in East Pakistan to accommodate the refugees and the Bangladesh Government in Exile so as to address India's socioeconomic problems, created because of the influx of refugees. Any war of a longer duration and higher intensity would be halted by China through physical intervention in support of Pakistan and by the diplomatic intervention of the United States and the UN leading to a ceasefire. A scenario of the war leading to the capture of Dacca and all of East Pakistan was never perceived by Pakistan's strategic planners. Accordingly, Niazi was tasked with preventing internal subversion and defending East Pakistan against external aggression. Niazi's strategic thinking was naturally influenced by the assessment made at the higher levels of government, wherein only limited aims were attributed to India. Therefore, the effective defence of the Dacca Bowl, the political and military heartland of East Pakistan, never formed the basis for the evolution of the strategy for the defence of East Pakistan.⁴³

Strategy of Government of Bangladesh in Exile

The historian Muhit commented that the “proclamation of independence provided the basis for organization and direction of efforts.”⁴⁴ The central direction of the Liberation War commenced on 17 April 1971, the date the Bangladesh Provisional Government came into being. In the absence of Mujib, under the leadership of Mr. Syed Nazrul Islam, Acting President, and Mr. Tajuddin Ahmed,

Prime Minister of the Provisional Bangladesh Government functioning from Calcutta, planning for the independence of Bangladesh continued. The Bangladesh Government in Exile sought help of the Indian government for all types of issues, including arming, equipping, training the Mukti Bahini, and lending its voice in international forums to put pressure on the Pakistan government to come up with an expeditious solution for the crisis. In early May, Manekshaw issued instructions to the Eastern Command, giving a policy direction about the Mukti Bahini's training, equipping, and support by BSF and army to enhance its capabilities. All throughout, the Bangladesh Government in Exile was coordinating with HQ Eastern Command to improve the operational efficiency of the liberation force.

Another very important strategy adopted by the Bangladesh Government in Exile was to rouse the conscience of the world by writing to world leaders and deputing emissaries across the globe. Mr. Bhasani wrote to Mao Tse Tung and other world leaders, the texts of which are in Appendix 7. Justice Abu Syed Chowdhury, with the tacit support of the British government, opened an office in London for building public opinion; he was the main voice of Bangladesh in the UK, Europe, the US, Latin America, Canada, etc. The text of his address in Europe is available in Appendix 8. He also led a 16-member delegation to the UN in an effort to plead on behalf of Bangladesh. Justice Chowdhury also periodically issued rebuttals to Pakistan's propaganda to uncover the truth.⁴⁵

The Bangladesh Government in Exile as part of its strategy also made a good psychological impact through its independent Radio Station named *Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra* and through media briefings with a two-fold aim— one, to motivate the freedom fighters and Bengalis across the globe to rise to their cause and raise funds, and two, shaping the opinions of international communities in favour of Bangladesh.

During this period and throughout, the Bangladesh government, along with India, sensitised the international community to ensure the safety of Mujibur Rahaman, who was jailed in West Pakistan. Yahya announced the commencement of in-camera trial of Rahaman. Anticipating a grave threat to his life, Syed Nazrul Islam warned Yahya Khan that any attempt on the life of the Rahman would destroy Pakistan.⁴⁶

In the middle of October 1971, Mr. J.N. Dixit and Mr. S.K. Singh, both from the Indian External Affairs Ministry, were sent to Calcutta to exchange views with the officials of the Bangladesh Government in Exile. The Bangladesh Prime Minister's office told them that

while a guerrilla warfare could continue for many years, the various groups of the freedom fighters will not be able to overcome the Pakistani military without direct Indian military support. Col. M.A.G. Osmani, who was titular head of all the freedom fighters, gave a clear assessment that if there was no direct military support from India, the youthful groups fighting the West Pakistan army would be reduced to carrying on a hopeless struggle which may ultimately fade away.⁴⁷

Dixit mentions that following specific suggestions were made by the Government in Exile to the government of India in October, which can be termed part of their strategy that involves India:⁴⁸

- a The Bangladesh government should be given formal recognition and Bangladesh existence as an independent country should be legally acknowledged.
- b A Joint Command should be formed between the Indian Armed Forces and the Mukti Bahini of Bangladesh to draw up immediate plans for full-scale military operations against Pakistani armed forces in Bangladesh.
- c India should indicate to the UN that, given the dilatory attitude of majority of the members of the organisation, India and Bangladesh would not countenance any intervention by the UN that would aim at a compromise scaling down the demand for the complete independence of Bangladesh.

The Government in Exile opted for the best course option:

To carry on the struggle in the hope that people of Bangladesh would keep the spark of freedom aglow and the world at large would become increasingly aware of their struggle. Guerrilla warfare was an essential ingredient of the struggle

Its emissaries tried their best to impress upon foreign nations to influence Yahya for an expeditious political solution along with release of Mujibur Rahaman and other Awami League leaders. Under the leadership of Justice Abu Syed Chowdhury, the Bangladesh Government sent a delegation to the UN to be heard, though formal permission was not granted.

Mukti Bahini/Resistance Group: In addition to the re-organised regular armed forces under Col. Osmani, various other categories of freedom fighters and resistance groups (generic term, the Mukti Bahini) became the sword-arm of the Bangladesh struggle. Its basic strategy was spelt out in the “Teliarapara Document,” approved by the Bangladesh Government in Exile.⁴⁹ Because of various diluted versions and distortion of the history of the Mukti Bahini, senior commanders in May 2008 jointly prepared a historical paper titled, “Bangladesh Liberation War – 1971: The Strategy and Organization of the Fighting Forces.” About the broad strategy, it states the following:⁵⁰

- a A large number of guerrillas would be sent into Bangladesh to strike at the enemy everywhere, through raids and ambushes.
- b Industries would not be allowed to run. This would be achieved by blowing up electrical poles and power sub-stations, thereby disrupting power supplies.
- c Pakistanis would not be allowed to export any raw materials or finished products. This would be achieved by disrupting the port facilities and destroying warehouses where such materials were stored.
- d Vehicles, railways, and river crafts that were for the movement of enemy troops and military supplies would be systematically attacked and destroyed.

96 Politico-military strategy of India

- e Tactical planning would be drawn in such a manner that the enemy would be forced to split into smaller groups. After isolating them, the guerrillas would strike deadly blows on the enemy groups.

The Mukti Bahini, aligning with its performance and capability and the type of support it received from BSF and Indian Army, changed its operational strategy, which is evident during pre-monsoon, monsoon, and post-monsoon phases of operations undertaken by them.

How does one examine appropriateness of the politico-military strategy formulated and executed during the Bangladesh Liberation War 1971? Military strategy is derived from political strategy, which leads to evolution of national policy.

In achieving policy goals, strategy must pass four simple tests: it must be politically *acceptable*; it must be *feasible*; it must be *suitable* to the circumstances; and it must be *sustainable* not only in terms of resources, but also in the common will of the members of an organisation or the people of a nation to see it through.⁵¹

Retrospectively, it can be said that Pakistan's political strategy one of different treatment of one wing with 55% of its population by disrespecting the ballot and subduing the resultant protests through bullets, creating the enemy within. The common will of the country was divided and measures adopted were unsuitable to the circumstances. A feasibility study and risk analysis should have given Pakistan the answer that the military strategy adopted by them against the bigger Indian armed forces supported by the Mukti Bahini was not sound. But they were under an impractical assumption and false belief that added to their failure. That China and the US would join them physically to fight the war against India was an impractical assumption. Despite Bhutto's return from China empty handed, Yahya Khan had claimed that the "Chinese Ambassador in Islamabad had assured him that within 72 hours (from December 12) the Chinese Army will move towards the border."⁵² Pakistan had been deeply embedded in false belief that Muslims had never been defeated by Hindus, so they could not be beaten ever.

Their... military planning was bolstered by a firm conviction, held even through the end of the December war, that it was impossible for Pakistan to lose a war to India. Such an outcome was inconceivable; in the worst case some miracle would intervene to save Pakistan.⁵³

When the war started, Nurul Amin, a Bengali-Indian Muslim League leader who opposed the liberation of Bangladesh, was named as prime minister and Bhutto was made deputy prime minister and foreign minister—a move by Yahya to keep himself in power, to keep Mujib and other senior Awami league leaders based in India out of power despite popular choice, and to keep Bhutto under check. But Bhutto had an altogether different aim, which was proven as the events unfolded and more historical truths were discovered. Then-Foreign

Secretary of India, Mr. T.N. Kaul writes that “the military leadership of Pakistan fell into Bhutto’s trap.”⁵⁴ Yahya planned to install the civilian government prior to the meeting of the National Assembly. Yahya was too late in his effort to install a civilian government and also had false hope that even at that stage when the war had commenced a political solution of his choice could work to keep both wings together. Everyone was more interested in power than the survival of Pakistan as conceptualised by Jinnah. Yahya wore two hats: Commander of the Armed Forces and the Head of State. And he was no Napoleon or Fredrick the Great who could handle both with ease and efficiency.

Following Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s declaration of independence in March 1971,

The Government of India decided on a two-track approach to resolve East Bengal crisis. Firstly, to support the liberation struggle to exert pressure on Pakistan Government to respect the electoral verdict of 1971. Secondly, mobilize international public opinion through bilateral contacts and the United Nations. While India successfully followed the first track, the second track was beset with several hurdles, particularly because of United States support to Pakistan ‘regime’.⁵⁵

Since beginning of the East Pakistan crisis,

Mrs. Indira Gandhi believed and made it amply clear through various statements that there must be a political, rather than military, solution to Pakistan’s problem in its eastern province and that the great powers had a special responsibility to help see such a solution through.⁵⁶

With the advantage of hindsight of close to five decades, one can probably deduce that India’s evolution of its politico-military strategy and its response during the Bangladesh crisis were well planned. Fervent appeal to international communities to see reason and seek a resolution of the crisis through political means were the main themes until mid-November. Diplomacy and preparation for a possible war went on in tandem. Basically, it was a strategy of “one leg on the ground”—if one fails, the other can stand in good stead. A nation should not be found wanting in handling a situation like that of 1971 for lack of a strategy encompassing all aspects of national security interest. A series of sequential steps were taken and this effort would prove vital later, to justify military action by India. Pakistan and a few others felt that India orchestrated the dismemberment of Pakistan, which has been refuted by ample historical proof. Dixit writes:

Political and psychological factors characterizing the East Pakistan crisis made India’s involvement in the liberation struggle inescapable. The point to be understood that India’s support to the liberation struggle of Bangladesh was not a pre-planned conspiratorial strategic move but a politico-strategic response to the continuous threats which Pakistan had been posing against the unity and territorial integrity of India right since the partition of the country in 1947.⁵⁷

As Chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, General Manekshaw as well as other two service chiefs understood the importance and role of the involvement of politicians and bureaucrats in finalising defence policy and evolving a broad national strategy. The service chiefs worked in close coordination with them. Manekshaw's proximity to Mrs. Gandhi and mutual respect for Mr. D.P. Dhar and the understanding between them helped in formulating national policy guidelines.⁵⁸ Never before there was such synergy amongst politicians, bureaucrats, and the defence forces. "India's proclaimed policy has all along been never to be the first to strike, but only to retaliate in the event of an attack by an adversary."⁵⁹ When talking about the Indian military strategy in the context of the western theatre, General Krishna Rao states

Indian Military strategy was tailored to meet the requirements of the Government's policy. Formations all along the Front were to remain on the defensive initially, if Pakistan started the war, commands could retaliate by going on the offensive, on orders from Army Headquarters and secure the limited objectives set to them. There was no question of any efforts at dismembering West Pakistan, as mischievously propagated in certain quarters.⁶⁰

India showed her restraint and belief in democratic norms, visible through a graded response and the measured public utterances by its leaders, whereas Pakistani leaders and media were full of war rhetoric and the battle cry "crush India." Throughout the period of crisis, "Pakistan was desperately seeking UN intervention and proposed international supervision of troop withdrawal and stationing UN observers,"⁶¹ which India resisted all along. On 24 November in Islamabad, Yahya stated that within the next ten days, he would be fighting on the front. "Yahya thus wanted to settle a political problem through military solution in spite of Pakistan's apparent weakness in the east."⁶² Yahya failed to listen to the sage advice of Clausewitz who said, "War cannot be divorced from political life. Whenever this occurs in our thinking about war, the many links that connect the two elements are destroyed and we are left with something pointless and devoid of sense."⁶³

Politico-military strategy has to be finalised by leaders, keeping the long-term aim in view. The country must benefit from the courses of strategic options it has charted, weighed and opted.

"The strategists deal with the future – a future that is volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. The purpose of strategy is to influence that future to serve one's national interest better".⁶⁴ The military is a nation's last means of carrying out its national objective. Only a visionary leader can use this asset appropriately. Force without wisdom falls under its own weight—so said Horace.⁶⁵ The best politico-military strategy will always be: "Use military forces only in the national interest, with full understanding of the end goal and that too when victory is assured". The national interest, a well-considered end goal, and victory—all three are abiding parameters. Because, unlike a game, "in war, there are no runners-up."⁶⁶

Notes

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- 7 *The Statesman*, 28 March 1971.
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- 11 Ibid., p. 151.
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- 13 *National Herald*, 5 April 1971. Subramanyam advocated in his article that India must launch military operation right away because the situation created by the East Pakistan crisis offered India “an opportunity the like of which will never come again.”
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100 Politico-military strategy of India

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6

PLANNING AND CONDUCT OF OPERATION

A good plan violently executed now is better than a perfect plan executed next week.

—General George S. Patton

About the Bangladesh Liberation War, military historian of repute Major General D.K. Palit writes, “Few campaigns in history have caused as much surprise and speculation as the Indian Armed Forces’ liberation of Bangladesh and with good reason.”¹ He justifies his statement by saying that despite the Indian Army’s series of combat engagements during the previous twenty-four years of India’s independence,

the watching world formed an image of our (India’s) military machine – a good second class British left over ... on the wane in actual combat capability. ... At best it can be considered comparable to the Pakistani armed forces – but, certainly in Western eyes, even that was debatable.²

Before discussing the conduct of operations, it would be prudent to carry out a brief study of both the Indian as well as the Pakistani armed forces as they were in 1971 to have an overview. Both India as well as Pakistan had progressively acquired better arms and equipment and had raised more units and formations after independence. Both the armies improved in acquiring more tanks and artillery guns. Senior officers of both the armed forces were trained during the pre-independence era; therefore, they followed the tactical concepts of the Second World War. Both countries acquired better aircrafts for their air forces. But Pakistan neglected her navy, whereas India tried to build up its within economic

102 Planning and conduct of operation

means. India procured British Sea King helicopters during 1971. Most importantly, India had an aircraft carrier, INS Vikrant, and a greater number of conventional warships like frigates, destroyers, and cruisers, which gave the Indian navy a good edge over the Pakistani one.

In the east, India could muster seven Infantry divisions for the Bangladesh campaign. Out of these, except for one that was originally earmarked for operation in East Pakistan, the other six were to be mustered from elsewhere. For example, two divisions involved in counter insurgency operations in Nagaland and Mizoram were pulled out, three divisions deployed in looking after the Chinese threat in the Siliguri corridor were relocated, and one division was brought from the Uttar Pradesh-Tibet border, thus accepting calculated risks of the Chinese threat. This division, however, was not to be employed in depth in Bangladesh as it was to be quickly switched back to meet the Chinese threat if any. India had an APC Battalion (Armoured Personnel Carrier—Mechanised Infantry), three armour regiments, and two independent armoured squadrons.³

Until Operation Searchlight, Pakistan had one infantry division of four brigades in East Pakistan. After the March 1971 episode, East Pakistan built up strength to five infantry divisions comprising of 35 infantry battalions and seven wings of paramilitary forces by flying them in from West Pakistan on an emergency basis. Therefore, the divisions did not have their usual artillery and logistics complements. There were six field regiments of artillery and a couple of independent mortar and field batteries. Pakistan had one armoured regiment of Chaffee tanks and two independent armoured squadrons of Chaffee and PT-76 tanks. Between April and May 1971, Pakistan raised 35,000 armed Razakars and 25,000 recruits for the East Pakistani Civil Armed Forces. Personnel recruited for these organisations were mostly non-Bengali Muslims (*mujahirs*) and collaborationist Bengali Muslims. In the east, Pakistan had a small component of their air force, comprising two dozen Sabre jet fighters and a few communication helicopters. Their navy had only a good number of gun boats.

Usually in a conventional war, for undertaking an offensive operation the minimum ratio of the attacking force should be 3:1. But Lt. General Jagjit Singh Aurora did not have overwhelming edge on Lt. General Niazi's army in the eastern theatre. The Indian strategy and operational tactics mainly depended on speed, which required a superiority of force. But under the circumstances, "only audacity and boldness in execution would clinch the issue."⁴

In the west, India had 12 Infantry Divisions, one Armoured Division, three Artillery Brigades, two Independent Infantry Brigades, two Armoured Brigades, and one independent Parachute Brigade. Against this, Pakistan had ten Infantry Divisions, two Armoured Divisions, two Independent armoured Brigades, two Independent Infantry Brigades, and a few Armoured Regiments. Thus, in the west, where major battles were to be fought in the plains of Punjab and Rajasthan, Pakistan had more tanks than India, which suited the mobile warfare, however, they had little fewer Infantry than India.

Eastern theatre

Pakistan's concept of defence in the East

General Headquarters of Pakistan Army (GHQ) based in Rawalpindi charted out following mission for Lt. Gen A.A.K. Niazi, who was the Commander of Pakistan's Eastern Command:

- Evict guerrillas.
- No territory to fall into enemy hands that they can declare as Bangladesh.
- Defend East Pakistan against external aggression.

In alignment with the tasks in hand, Niazi's conception of defence in Bangladesh

was based on having different layers which will augment each other. The concept envisaged imposing maximum attrition on the enemy to dissipate and weaken his forces to make him loose cohesion before he attacked the main force and made deep thrust in the area. A forward defence posture based on strong points and fortresses, which were to be stocked was decided upon.⁵

Niazi planned four lines of defence in East Pakistan revolving around fortresses⁶. They are:

Border Outposts (BOPs): A line of outposts located as far forward as tactically sound and possibly near the international boundary to act as the eyes and ears and to serve as a buffer and delay the advancing enemy as long as possible. Regular army beefed up important positions held by the Civilian Armed Forces (CAF) whereas rest of the BOPs were held by Razakars.

Strong Points: These were the second line of well-prepared and well-stocked defence, formed on features of tactical importance, including small towns and communication centres. They were expected to put up stiff resistance and inflict maximum casualties on the advancing enemy.

The Fortresses: They were the third tier of defence around important towns and communication centres. They were well prepared and stocked and troops were expected to fight a "last man, last round" defensive battle. Niazi stated, "This line of defence was to be designated as the no-penetration line... and troops were to stay there dead or alive."⁷

Defence of Capital City Dacca: The final tier of defence was the defence of the gravitas centre, Dacca, the government and the eastern army's seat of power. This was planned in the following manner:

- a **Dacca, Outer Defence Line:** After fighting the battle of attrition, troops were to fall back to this line, which ran from Pabna in the west to Bera then to Sirajgang to the north and to Mymensingh. Further from Mymensingh,

104 Planning and conduct of operation

the line went south to Bhairab Bazar then south west along the Meghna to Daudkhandi and Chandpur then ran north west along Padma and further to Madhumati and back to Pabna. Though Bhairab and Mymensingh were developed as fortresses and Faridpur and Daudkhandi were developed as strong points, remaining positions were not developed.

- b **Dacca, Inner Defence Line:** It was planned to have a fortress defence at Narayanganj and strong points at Kalaikar and Tongi. None were developed by December 1971.

Pakistan's operational plan in East Pakistan

Pakistan always placed overriding importance on the western wing, possibly because the army and ruling elites mostly belonged to West Pakistan. The major portion of armed forces too were located there, for its defence or for launching offensive operations against India. To many ruling elites and armed forces, Pakistan meant West Pakistan only. East Pakistan—the land mainly comprising the Bengalis, who were perceived to be under influence of India as they were from the same ethnic stock—was never given equal importance. Based on this perception, it was assessed that India would not be a military threat to East Pakistan. Therefore, the defence of East Pakistan never merited much consideration from the Pakistan government. Almost since the creation of Pakistan, about a division's worth of troops (14 Division) was kept in East Pakistan: "More for keeping control on the Bengalis, rather than for effective defence of the territory."⁸ However, in view of the adverse developments in East Pakistan, about four additional divisions worth of troops had to be hastily moved from the west to the east. This had resulted in some imbalance in the west, in that the offensive capabilities of the west were somewhat curtailed. As far as the eastern wing was concerned, the divisions were initially deployed in penny packets, in many cases down to the company level, to deal with internal situations. However, after gaining a reasonable degree of control over the situation, it was possible to employ the troops available in a more concentrated form for the defence of East Pakistan. The total of about five divisions available including Paramilitary Forces were reasonably adequate to put up a fairly effective defence of the territory. The degree of effectiveness naturally depended upon the soundness of the strategy adopted and the plans evolved.

In an effort to fight against Bengali guerrillas and the Indian Armed Forces, Niazi reorganised his army through readjustment, raisings, and redeployments of forces, which were completed by the end of October 1971. Broadly, the formations were tasked as under:

- 1 14 Division, earlier was located at Dacca, was assigned Mymensingh-Sylhet-Chittagong sector to defend the area east of the Brahmaputra and Padma/ Ganges rivers.
- 2 16 Division to defend the Rangpur-Bogra-Rajshahi sector.
- 3 9 Division less one brigade to defend the Jessore-Kushtia-Faridpur sector.

- 4 314 Brigade (new *ad hoc*) with EPCAF (East Pakistan Civil Armed Forces) created for the defence of the Khulna sector.
- 5 91 Independent Brigade (new *ad hoc*) raised at Chittagong to defend the Chittagong sector.
- 6 53 Brigade to move to Dacca on relief.
- 7 39 Division with 53 Brigade was raised to defend Chandpur to operate under GHQ.
- 8 36 Division was created at Dacca with a new *ad hoc* 93 Brigade at Mymensingh.

Niazi had a shortage of artillery, which was proportionately distributed to the defending formations based on the assessed enemy ingress routes. It was decided that the troops would fall back on pre-designated final lines to block the approaches to Dacca. 14 Division, 93 *ad hoc* Brigade from Mymensingh, and 314 *ad hoc* Brigade from Khulna were to fall back on Dacca area. Niazi's plans were approved by General Hamid, Pakistan Army Chief, during his visit to Dacca in October 1971 and the Pakistan General Head Quarters (GHQ), issued a changed Order of Battle.⁹

Niazi was keen on launching a limited offensive operation inside India. GHQ approved his proposal to launch offensive operations against English Bazar or Balurghat and also to destroy Farakka Bridge by employing SSG Commandos.¹⁰ So, with the resources mentioned above, along with terrain and tactical considerations based on the Niazi's overall strategy. the sector-wise deployment of his force and tactical plan were as given below:

a South-western sector

In this sector, Jessore was the most important cantonment township and communication hub. The Old Calcutta to Dacca Road passes through Jessore via the old Goalundo Ghat ferry. It had an all-weather airfield. Khulna, an important port town, lay to the south of Jessore. Jhenida to the north of Jessore also lay on the route to Goalundo Ghat and Faridpur ferries. Jessore was close to Calcutta. Therefore, it goes without saying that capture of Jessore and progress of the operation further from this axis would be the obvious choice for the Indian army's. Niazi, likely expecting a major Indian offensive operation in this sector, deployed 9 Infantry Division under Maj. Gen. M.H. Ansari for the defence of the Kushtia-Jhenida-Jessore and Khulna lines. This Division gave the responsibility to 57 Infantry Brigade for the defence of the Jhenida-Kushtia, and 107 Infantry Brigade was tasked with defending Boyra-Jessore. After delaying and causing attrition in the attacking troops, this brigade was to fall back to Magura-Faridpur. One battalion was tasked with looking after the Satkhira-Khulana area. An *ad hoc* EPCAF brigade located in Khulna was to join the battle of Dacca in subsequent stages.¹¹

b North-western sector

The northern portion of this sector lay in proximity to the Indian Siliguri corridor; therefore, for Indian defence planners the sector had strategic importance

in context to the Chinese threat. The Rangpur Cantonment Township and Bogra were important communication centres from where routes led on to the ferries at Phulchari, Siraj Ganj, and Bera. Niazi deployed 16 Infantry Division under Maj. Gen. Nazar Hussain Shah for the defence of the sector, with headquarters at Bogra. This Division had the 23, 107, and 205 Brigades. The 23 Infantry Brigade was responsible for the defence of Dinajpur-Rangpur and the 205 Infantry Brigade was deployed for the defence of Hilli. This brigade, after fighting at Hilli, was to fall back to Bogra to defend it. The 107 Infantry Brigade was deployed in depth holding Panitola, Nawabganj, and Ishurdi with a battalion each. In addition, 34 Brigade was deployed for the defence of Natore.¹²

c Central sector

This sector lies to the south of the Indian state of Meghalaya. The capital city Dacca, Mymensingh, and Tangail were the important townships and communication centres in this sector. The general area around Madhupur-Tangail was forested and the sector was comparatively much less developed. Meghalaya being hilly terrain, Niazi assessed that the Indians might not launch major thrusts from here in the sector. It was given less importance by Niazi, because he never expected a deep penetration of the Indian offensive right up to Dacca. The 36 Division (*ad hoc*) under Maj. Gen. Jamshed Khan, with headquarters at Dacca, was to defend this sector. It did not have the formal components of a division and was allotted limited troops. The 93 Infantry Brigade was given the responsibility for the defence of the Mymensingh-Jamalpur sector.¹³ Maj. Gen. Lachhman Singh, one of the Indian Division Commanders during this war, felt that “the best geographical approach to Dacca from Indian territory was through the central sector from the north even though the eastern sector provided a much shorter approach.”¹⁴

d Eastern sector

This sector was important as many townships, ports, and airports were located here. Sylhet, Comilla, and Chittagong were important cantonments located here. In addition, Maulvi Bazar, Bhairab Bazar, Daudkhandi, and Chandpur were other important communication centres located in this sector. Dacca was in the closest proximity to the Indian border from Comilla. Suitable ferries existed at Ashuganj, Daudkhandi, and Chandpur, which lent importance to the progress of the operation. There was even a railway bridge at Ashuganj. Three important ports—namely, Chittagong, and on the Meghna river, Chandpur and Daudkhandi—were located here. Notwithstanding operational logistics problems Indian Army might have faced, Niazi assessed that the Indians could launch an offensive operation here. Accordingly, he deployed 14 Infantry Division under Maj. Gen. Abdul Majid Khan for the defence of the Sylhet-Brahmanbaria sector and 39 Infantry Division for the defence of the Sylhet sector, 313 Infantry Brigade for the defence of Maulvi Bazar Sector, and 27 Infantry Brigade for the defence of Brahmanbaria and Akhaura sector with the divisional headquarters at Ashuganj. The 39 Adhoc Division under Maj. Gen. Rahim Khan was made responsible for the defence of the Comilla-Feni line. The 117 Infantry Brigade

was to be initially deployed at Comilla and later fall back to the Mynamati-Laksham sector and 53 Infantry Brigade in the Feni sector. An *ad hoc* brigade was given responsibility for the defence of the Chittagong sector.

Defence of Dacca

In regards to the defence of Dacca, historians have given varying statements about the initial deployment of Pakistani troops. General Niazi apparently had planned for two lines of defence for Dacca and tasked Maj. Gen. Jamshed with defending Dacca. It was decided by him that in case the forward defended positions become untenable then the troops would fall back to predesignated final lines to block the approaches to Dacca. Niazi stated that Operational Instructions as on March 1971 spelt out that after fighting the forward defensive battles, 14 Division, 93 Adhoc Brigade from Mymensingh, and 314 Adhoc Brigade from Khulna were to fall back.¹⁵ In October that year, Niazi made various amendments to the March 1971 plan. He did not initially cater for any troops in Dacca. One wonders whether he was ever serious about the Indian Army's capability to reach Dacca. Niazi of course claimed that

Dacca was the linchpin. The whole defence concept was built on various lines of defence based on the rivers or other water obstacles, or on major centres of communication acting as fortresses which the enemy would have to clear before advancing any further towards Dacca.¹⁶

General Krishna Rao, on the defence of Dacca, commented that no preparation was made for defensive battle in Dacca. He states,

As far as the defence of Dacca was concerned, there were no troops specifically earmarked for the defence of Dacca as such, nor were any defence works constructed. As the war progressed, it was hoped that should the necessity arise, the troops could fall back from the fortresses as required. However, no detailed plans were made, nor any orders issued, for fear that these may have an adverse psychological effect on the resolve of the troops to hold on to the various fortresses.¹⁷

Niazi had two recourses open to him in planning his defence: defend Dacca strongly and the forward area lightly or the opposite. In the first option, the attacking Indian force would have an ingress without much fighting but would have taken time to capture Dacca. Possibly the time would have been adequate for international intervention for a ceasefire. In the second option of defending the border in strength, denuding Dacca with a plan of series of battles of attrition in the intermediate zone, and then falling back to Dacca was preferred. However, this option would not take care of any major breakthrough by the bypassing force and the insufficient quantity of troops failed to ensure adequate reserves to deal with such situations. But Niazi opted for a compromised option of keeping a brigade's worth of paramilitary troops to take care of Dacca and waited for the withdrawing troops to reinforce the defence of Dacca.¹⁸

108 Planning and conduct of operation

Having finalised the concept of defence and the reorganisation of units and formations, Niazi gave out his final instructions on the design of the defensive battles as follows:¹⁹

- a Troops deployed in the BOPs to hold the posts until GOCs ordered them to retreat.
- b During retreat to a fortress, troops would fight a delaying action to “trade space for time.”
- c The fortresses should be defended to the last to facilitate adequate time for decisive operations in the west.
- d On orders, units/formations to fall back to Dacca to occupy outer-line defensive positions to defend Dacca.

Indian operational plan

Theatre strategy complements the national strategy. In the eastern theatre, the strategy adopted was an offensive operation with multiple thrusts to move without pause, to put relentless pressure on the enemy. The aim was to bypass and contain the fortresses and strong points by following the Russian strategy of *expanding torrents*. “Eastern Command was given the task of destroying the Pakistani Forces in the Eastern theatre and occupy the major portion of East Pakistan”.²⁰

During the Bangladesh campaign, it was well known that if a war was to be fought in East Pakistan, clearly it would extend to the western wing also. It was a foregone conclusion that Pakistan would fight the main campaign in the west, as per traditional strategy. Therefore, it would be an all-out war with Pakistan. The importance of the capture of the capital city Dacca, the ultimate objective, was well analysed during preliminary planning at the Indian Army Headquarters. However, factors like the unavailability of overwhelming superiority of force because of the two-front war, Chinese threat, obstacle-ridden terrain of East Pakistan, and, most importantly, the likely intervention by the UN Security Council for a ceasefire within a short timeframe during the operation were considered and objectives were set excluding Dacca initially. Maj. Gen. Rajendra Nath writes:

Many months before the war, Manekshaw issued a comprehensive and thoughtful directive to the Eastern Command. He laid down strategy and tactics to be followed. The aim was to destroy the Pakistan Army in the Eastern Wing in a short and decisive campaign. ... He clearly laid down that the Indian forces were to advance as quickly as possible. The fortified places were to be bypassed... from the flanks and deep penetration affected, thus upsetting the Pakistan plans.²¹

Not including Dacca in the initial planning and not catering for any resources to capture Dacca has been criticised by a section of military historians, including Lt. Gen. J.F.R. Jacob, Chief of Staff Eastern Command, functioning under Lt. Gen. J.S. Aurora.

But people like General Krishna Rao, who was one of the divisional commanders and a decade later became COAS, felt that excluding Dacca at that stage was right. He avers:

India initially planned for the capture of territory up to the major river lines. While it was necessary to keep in mind the Dacca bowl as the ultimate objective, any further planning could be carried out, depending on the progress of the operations up to the major river lines. As Pakistan had sufficient troops to offer adequate resistance to any advancing troops, any premature adventure on Dacca could prove to be unsound. India felt that full advantage could be taken of the geographical configuration, if the land operations is launched from all the three sides.²²

Eastern command order of battle

General Aurora, GOC-in-C, Eastern Command, had three army corps, namely the newly raised 2 Corps located at Krishnanagar (West Bengal), 33 Corps located at Siliguri, and 4 Corps located at Agartala. In addition, 101 Communication Zone Headquarters based at Shillong, which was meant to look after operational logistics, was converted to act as a fighting operational formation akin to a division.

Troops to tasks

Sector-wise allotment of resources and broad tasks have been described below:

- **Eastern sector (Sylhet-Chittagong sector)**

The 4 Corps headed by Lt. Gen. Sagat Singh was allotted three divisions less one brigade, Kilo force had two battalions, few EBR battalions, and two squadrons of armour. This sector provided the nearest approach to Dacca and the 4 Corps was tasked with clearing the area east of the Meghna and capturing Chittagong. Pakistan's 14 and 39 Divisions consisting of 11 battalions were deployed in this sector.

- **North-western sector (Rajsahi sector)**

The 33 Corps commanded by Lt. Gen. M.L. Thapan had 20 Mountain Division with an additional brigade, two armoured regiments less a squadron, and one Engineer Brigade. 71 Mountain Brigade operated in the North. The tasks were to cut the Hilli-Gaibanda waistline and, in the subsequent phase based on progress, capture Bogra or Rangpur. Opposing this force was 16 Division of Pakistan commanded by Maj. Gen. Nazar Hussain Shah and 29 Cavalry.

- **South-western sector (Jessore sector):** The newly raised 2 Corps commanded by Lt. Gen. T.N. Raina had two divisions, one Parachute Brigade less

110 Planning and conduct of operation

one battalion, and one squadron. The initial task was to capture Jessore and Jhenida and in subsequent phases capture Khulna, Hardinge Bridge, Faridpur, and Goalundo Ghat ferries. Pakistan's 9 Division was confronting them.

- **Central sector:** 101 Communication Zone. Maj. Gen. G.S. Gill/Maj. Gen. Gandharv Nagra were deployed in this sector, which was considered a low priority. It had one brigade and some paramilitary forces. A parachute drop by one battalion was planned at Tangail and reinforcement of an additional brigade was planned if the situation so demanded. No armour or bridging resources were allotted.
- **Indian Navy (IN):** In the Bay of Bengal, the main task was to deny supplies to the occupation government in Bangladesh and to prevent any enemy forces from escaping. As soon as Pakistan declared war, the Eastern Fleet went into action. By 10:30 am on 4 December the aircraft carrier Vikrant sent out her first flight of Seahawks to bomb Cox's Bazar, putting the airfield out of action. Steaming north, the Vikrant was within bombing range of Chittagong by early afternoon. Her aircrafts attacked both the harbour and the airfield. The IN strategy and operation have been covered separately in this book.
- **Indian Air Force (IAF):** It had total air superiority after it damaged only airfield at Dacca on 6 December 1971. One squadron of the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) remained grounded and was not operational. The IAF strategy and operation have been covered separately in this book.
- **Border Security Force (BSF)** helped the Mukti Bahini in carrying out raids on the border outposts, supported them logistically, and, later when the course of the battle changed, they helped the Indian Army in ground operations. The BSF was also used to guard the line of communications and ensure maintenance of law and order in rear areas.

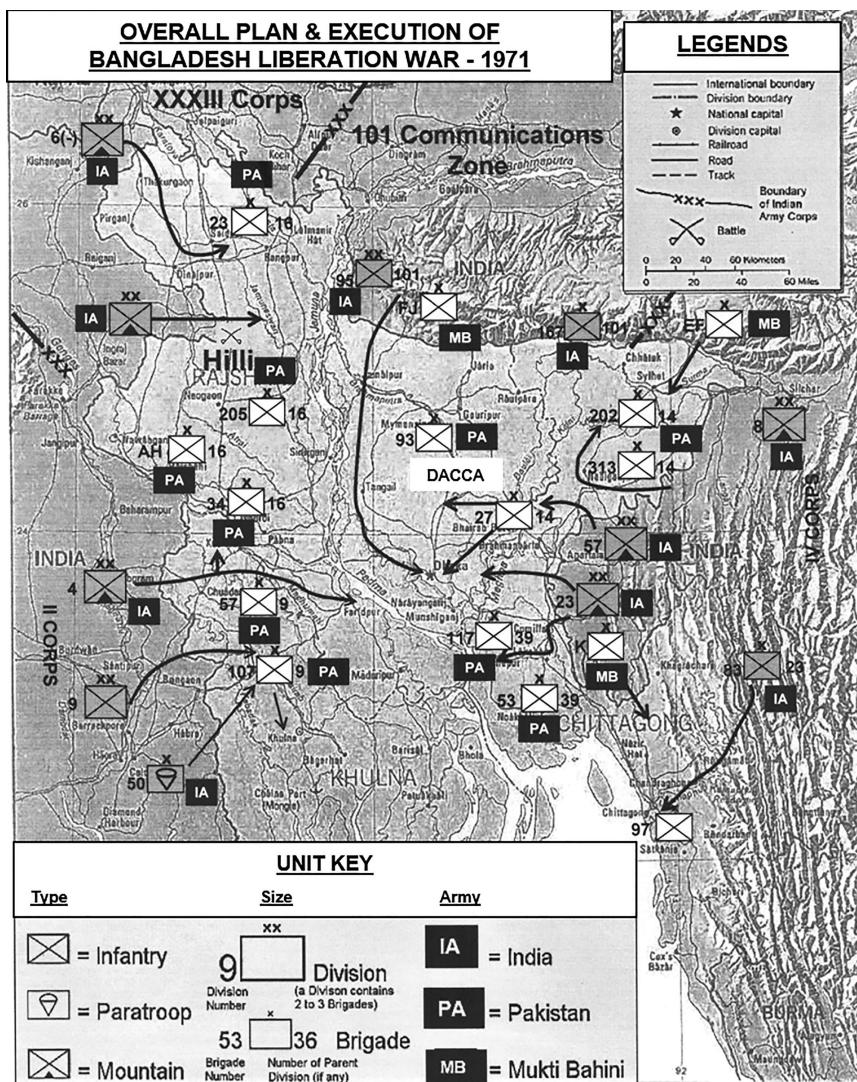
North-western sector: the offensive operation by 33 corps

Area of operation

This sector lay north of the Padma and Jamuna. The north-western sector was bounded by the river Teesta and its tributaries to the north, the Jamuna river to the west, and the river ganga to the South. Rivers Atrai and Karatoya, and many other rivulets, flowed through the entire area. The main communication centres to the north were Thakurgaon, Dinajpur, and Rangpur, while in the southern half they were Rajshahi and Bogra. The Balurghat salient jutted out along the line Hill-Goraghata. The main broad-gauge railway line connected the border towns with an alignment of north to south from the Hardinge Bridge via Ishurdi-Hilli-Saidpur. The metre-gauge rail network connected Dinajpur with Lalmonirhat. This sector covered approximately one-third of the area of East Pakistan.

Pakistani deployment

Gen. Niazi, having understood the importance of this sector, was all set to give a proper fight to the offensive force. 16 Infantry Division under Maj. Gen. Nazar



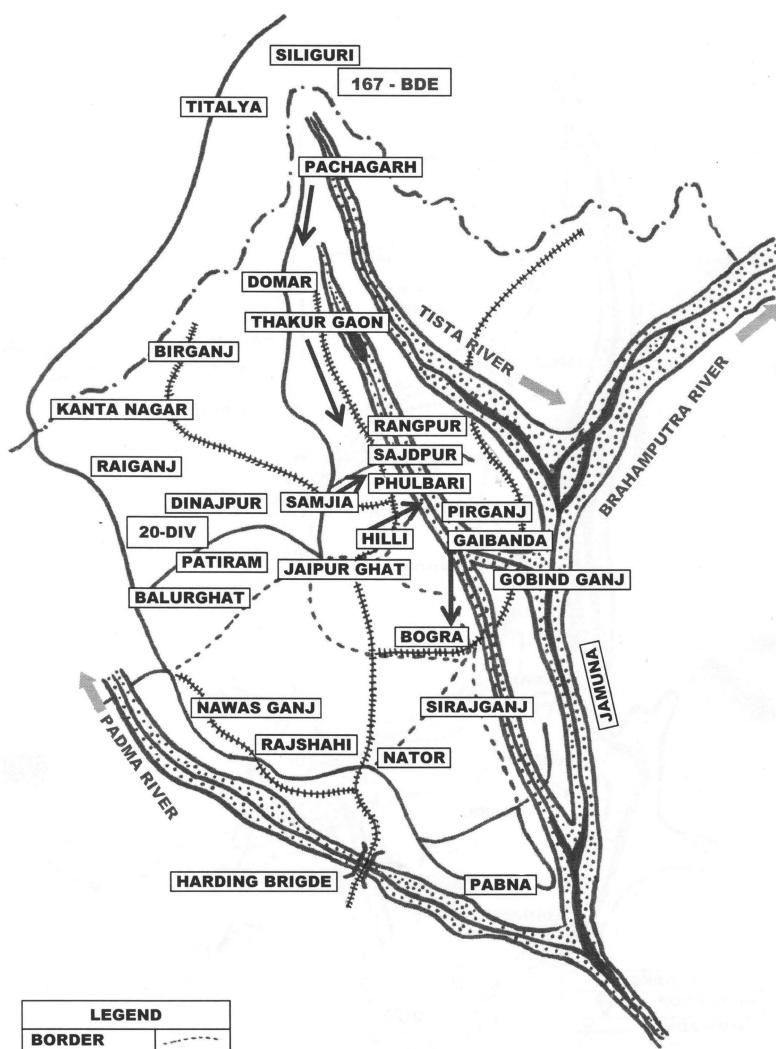
MAP 6.1 Bangladesh Liberation War-1971: operation plan of the opposing forces.

Hussein Shah was made responsible for defending this sector. Thakugaon, Dinajpur, and Rangpur were held with a brigade; Hilli and Goraghat area with the second brigade; and Rajshahi, Ishusdi and Naogaon with the third brigade.

Indian operational plan (33 Corps)

33 Corps with its Corps HQ at Siliguri was commanded by Lt. Gen. M.L. Thapan was tasked with launching the offensive operation in this sector. The Corps was composed of 20 Mountain Division commanded by Maj. Gen. Lachhman Singh Lehl,

9 and 340 Infantry Brigades, an Engineer Brigade, and an Armoured Regiment (PT-76 Tanks). As per the broad strategy for the offensive operations in the north-western Sector, Bogra was identified as the key to unbalancing the entire Pakistani force operating in the sector. However, the other large town, Rangpur, was also an important objective. The broad plan was to advance onto Bogra along the Hilli-Gaibanda axis while Pakistani forces deployed to the North in the Dinajpur-Rangpur area were to be pinned down by subsidiary actions. The thrust to Bogra was to be via Hilli, Pirganj, and Ghoraghat-Gobindganj.



MAP 6.2 Planning and conduct of 33 Corps Operation.

There had been a great debate at the HQ Eastern Command, Calcutta, during the finalisation of the offensive plan of 33 Corps. Apparently Aurora was not too confident of Thapan's capability. The pros and cons of various options were discussed by Aurora and Thapan.²³ Aurora's Chief of Staff, Jacob, too had different views many times. The final plan for the offensive approved by the Army Commander was as follows:²⁴

- a 71 Mountain Brigade under Brig. P.N. Kathpalia to advance along Mirgarh-Pachgarh-Thakurgaon to secure Panchgarh and Thakurgaon by D plus 5 (five days after the start of the operation).
- b A brigade from 20 Mountain Division to advance from the south along Gangarampur-Dinajpur-Kantanagar to link up with 71 Mountain Brigade near the bridge over Atrai on road to Saidpur by D plus 5.
- c 20 Mtn. Division was to advance up with two brigades using the Samjia-Phulbari-Palasbari and Hill-Gaibanda axes, with one brigade establishing the firm base. Capture Thakurgaon, Dinajpur, and bridge on Atrai and Palasbari by D plus 5.

Depending upon the progress of the operation, subsequent operations towards Rangpur or Bogra would be decided in due course.

- d In this plan, the 202 Brigade was asked to capture Hilli, a strong fortress. This was a faulty plan; actually it should have been asked to bypass. General Thapan was rightly against it, but Aurora overruled him.²⁵

Conduct of operation

The 71 Mtn. Bde. under Brigadier Kathpalia advanced with great speed from Mirgarh to Thakurgaon, a distance of 60 km and by 4 December completed the capture of Pachagarh and Boda. After capturing Birganj on 5 December the brigade was halted at Kantanagar Bridge on the Dhepa river. This bridge was demolished by the Pakistani army and they put up a heavy resistance. The brigade could hardly make any progress for next few days and suffered heavy casualties. The brigade managed to cross the river 10 miles upstream and after capturing Khansama was nearing Nilphamari when the surrender took place on 16 December. The action of this brigade had tied down Pakistani garrisons at Dinajpur, Saidpur, Porbaltipur, and Rangpur, thus preventing a pulling out of troops to reinforce threatened areas further south.

Further south, the 202 Mtn. Bde. under Brig. F. Bhatti was given the task of capturing the Hilli defence complex. This was the only battle the Indian forces fought to capture a Pakistani fortress during the entire Bangladesh operation and it proved very costly in terms of casualties and time.

114 Planning and conduct of operation

The 20 Mtn. Div. offensive was now modified to advance on single axes along Phulbari-Charkhai-Pirganj Road, 66 and 202 Mtn. Bde. with an additional battalion each from 165 Mtn. Bde. and 340 Mtn. Bde. were to advance on this axis. The 165 and 340 Mtn Bdes were to invest Dinajpur from south. Phulbari was contacted and captured by 66 Mtn. Bde. Group while 340 Mtn. Brigade Group, under Brig. Joginder Singh, was tasked with capturing Pirganj, which it did on 7 December, and cut off Rangpur from Bogra. The attack on Bogra was planned meticulously with full support from the air force and tanks. After two days of fierce fighting, Bogra was captured on 16 December; Rangpur too fell on the same day.²⁶

Conclusion

The entire action by 33 Corps saw some 450 Pak officers, 670 JCOs, and 16,800 ORs surrender after ceasefire with 3,000 from the PARA military forces. The Indian casualties were 16 officers, 11 JCOs, and 344 other ranks killed and 54 officers, 33 JCOs, and 874 ORs wounded. Most of the Indian casualties were suffered during the battle at Hilli by 202 Mtn. Bde. The most spectacular performance in the 33 Corps Operation was that of 340 Mtn. Bde. led by Brig. Joginder Singh, which bore the major burden of winning the war in this sector and suffered only 46 all-ranks killed proving that manoeuvre warfare is economical in both casualties and time compared to attrition warfare. Pakistan's 16 Division commanded by Maj. Gen. Shah could have given a better fight had he moved the brigade deployed in the Nator-Rajshahi sector to strengthen the Bogra-Ichhamati complex. The Indian plan to capture the fortress at Hilli was not wise at all. However, Hilli taught India a good lesson on how to modify rest of the offensive operations. The overall tangible result was the capture of 150 km of East Pakistan territory in this thrust line.²⁷

South-western sector: offensive operation by 2 corps

Area of operation

The south-western sector lay opposite Calcutta and the Krishnanagar sector in West Bengal. East Pakistan had a 600 km border with India to its west. Jessore, which was 90 km from Calcutta and 45 kms from Bangaon (West Bengal), was an important cantonment town and the most lucrative objective for the invader. Jhenida was another important township in this sector. The Khulna and Chalna ports were located in this sector.

Order of battle

The newly raised 2 Corps was placed under command Lt Gen T.N. Raina. It comprised of 9 Infantry Division commanded by Maj. Gen. Dalbir Singh and 4

Mountain Division commanded by Maj. Gen. M.S. Brar, 50 Parachute Brigade less a Battalion, 45 Cavalry (PT-76 Tanks), and a Squadron of 63 Cavalry (T-55 Tanks). In addition, the Headquarters Bengal Area was reorganised for limited offensive tasks under Maj. Gen. P. Chowdhury; one Infantry Battalion and some units of Paramilitary forces were placed under him.

Plans of the opposing forces

Pakistani plan of defence

The 9 Division of Pakistan with its HQ at Jessore commanded by Maj. Gen. Ansari planned to delay the Indian forces at the Benapole-Barasana-Rajapur line with the aim of delaying the advancing enemy as much as possible and, after fighting battle of attrition, pull back to Jessore and Jhenida, the two fortresses of the area. Ansari calculated that the attacking force would not venture to strike deep without neutralising one or both the fortresses. If the Indian Army decided to dominate and isolate them in order to capture, he would have to employ a division each, which would not leave the Indian Army with adequate troops to achieve a breakthrough. The 9 Division had two infantry brigades, namely 107 Brigade under Brig. Makhdum Hayat with HQ at Jessore with the responsibility of defending the area from the border region of Jibannagar to the Sunderbans to the south, and 57 Brigade, under Brig. Manzoor Ahmed with HQ at Jhenida, to defend area from Jibannagar to Padma in the north. One squadron of Chaffe tanks was also allotted to 9 Division.²⁸

2 Corps operational plan

Lt Gen T.N. Raina was tasked by HQ Eastern Command to capture Jessore and Jhenida and subsequently secure Khulana, Faridpur, Goalondo Ghat, and Hardinge Bridge. Raina employed 9 Infantry Division under Maj. Gen. Dalbir Singh in the Jessore sector and 4 Infantry Division under Maj. Gen. M.S. Brar in the Jhenida sector. HQ Bengal Area with its small outfit operated along the Satkhira-Khulna axis, in conjunction with sectors 8 and 9 of the Mukti Bahini.

Conduct of operation

9 infantry division

The division was tasked with capturing Jessore by D plus 7, i.e., within seven days of the start of the operation. It proceeded to contact the Jessore defences by advancing along the Bangaon axis. From first light on 4 December to 6 December, Jessore was pounded and a series of hammering attacks were launched to achieve a breakthrough. Surprisingly, by dawn on 6 December, Maj. Gen. Ansari decided to vacate Jessore, which was an inexplicable act. Jessore was, however, not

occupied by the Indian Army until 7 December. The 9 Infantry Division continued to advance towards Khulna with 32 Infantry Brigade. The Indian advance was, however, delayed by a series of tactically sited delaying positions of the Pakistani army. The Indians had to clear the delaying positions step by step through deliberate attacks. It took the entire division four days to cover 30 miles against an opposition of approximately one infantry battalion. The advance was again stalled at Daulatpur on 11 December and it continued to stay there until 15 December. On the night of 15/16 December, an attempt was made by the 42 Infantry Brigade to resume the advance but by then the ceasefire had come into effect.

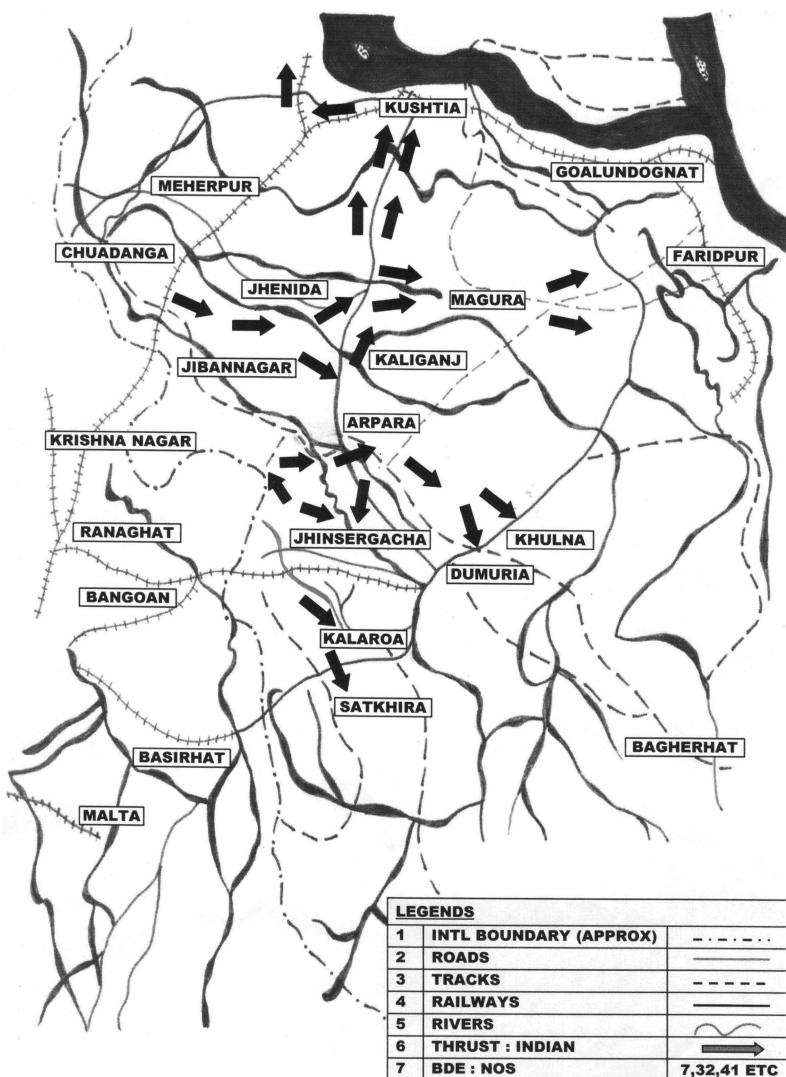
4 Mountain Divisions

The division commanded by Maj. Gen. M.S. Brar was tasked with capturing Jhenida by D plus 8 and thereafter secure the ferry site over Madhumati river by D plus 11. In the next phase, they were to secure or capture Goalondo Ghat and the Faridpur ferries. Or capture Hardinge Bridge and Kushtia.²⁹

As part of the preliminary operations, Jibanaganagar was captured by 27 November and Darsana by 4 December. A roadblock was successfully established between Jhenida and Chuadanga by an infantry battalion and an armoured squadron, which facilitated the capture of Jhenida. The 41 Mountain Brigade made a dash for Jhenida along a duck-boarded track and captured it by 6 December, which probably triggered the evacuation of Jessore. The 62 Mountain Brigade captured Magura on 8 December. This brigade was later tasked with the battle of Madhumati and, on completion, they advanced towards Faridpur. By now the Pakistani 9 Infantry Division had split up into three, with 107 Brigade at Khulna in the south, 57 Brigade at Khustia in the north, and the remnants of the division with its headquarters at Faridpur. Gen. Ansari had lost control over it. The 7 Mountain Brigade under Brig. Zail Singh resumed the advance towards Kushtia and was held up by the rear elements of the Pakistani 57 Brigade. The 22 RAJPUT Battalion of 7 Mountain Brigade, while racing towards Kushtia, suffered heavy casualties including the loss of five tanks. At this stage of the operation, Lt. Gen. Raina overreacted and diverted the whole 4 Mountain Division towards Kushtia, leaving a battalion holding the west bank of Madhumati. On 10 December two-thirds of the Pakistani 57 Brigade had crossed over almost intact and demolished the Hardinge Bridge. This decision of Raina to divert Maj. Gen. M.S. Barar's formation wasted three days. On this episode Sukhwant Singh's comments merit mention. He says:

It is a matter of wonder why Raina made Barar divert his effort to a questionable objective and why Barar did not object strongly enough to this order when the road to Faridpur and Dacca lay almost bare. Thus, both Raina and Barar lost a godsent opportunity to lead the first Indian troops to reach Dacca.³⁰

Faridpur was captured on 16 December along with Maj. Gen. Ansari, with the remnants of his division, which was in total disarray.



MAP 6.3 Planning and conduct of 2 Corps operation.

Conclusion

The 2 Corps during the operations captured or destroyed 500 personal arms, 18 Chaffee tanks, 13 guns, and four heavy mortars. Indian casualties were 367 killed, including 17 officers, 1,292 wounded, and 19 tanks lost.³¹ According to Maj. Gen. Sukhwant Singh, “Lt. Gen. Raina’s victory lay in Lt Gen Niazi’s surrender in the overall context of the Bangladesh operations.”³² Only a part of the Pakistani 9 Infantry Division fell into his hands and some were still fighting at

118 Planning and conduct of operation

Khulna, while a major portion escaped to join the Pakistan 16 Infantry Division. On interrogation after the surrender, Lt. Gen. Niazi mentioned that he did not consider the South-western sector operations to have affected his decision to surrender. In hindsight, Lt. Gen. Raina could have perhaps sped up his operations considerably and made an impact had he blocked the escape routes across the Padma river at Hardinge Bridge in the north and Khulna Bridge to the south and not diverted the 9 Mountain Division, which even surprised the Pakistani GOC, Maj. Gen. Ansari, facing him. Ansari after his surrender apparently said to the Indian 62 Brigade Commander that:

He was totally surprised to find Indian troops withdrawing instead of advancing after reaching the banks of Madhumati. He had only two battalions... which had suffered casualties in earlier battles. But when Indian troops withdrew, he decided to develop the defence and reinforced these two battalions with Paramilitary troops.³³

Raina had sufficient troops with him, but he did not keep his sights on Dacca. But for certain wrong tactical decisions, 2 Corps could probably have achieved more and could possibly have reached Dacca earlier than the other formations. In the din of glorious victory, the error of judgement by Raina was less noticed.

Offensive operation by 4 corps: Eastern Sector

Area of operation

The eastern sector of Bangladesh comprised the area east of the Meghna in the districts of Sylhet, Brahmanbaria, Comilla, and the Chittagong Hill Tracts. This sector was comparatively narrow and long and extended from the north of Sylhet to the south of Cox Bazaar. The terrain, except for the hill tracts of the southeast, were generally low lying and waterlogged by virtue of paddy fields. Cross-country movement was difficult due to numerous rivers and drainage channels. Approaches to Dacca lay across the Meghna through the ports at Chandpur and Daudkhandi, and there was only one bridge at Ashuganj to cross the Meghna for further movements towards Dacca. The Meghna was almost three km wide with a depth of 40 feet at most places. A single metre-gauge railway line connected Sylhet to Chittagong running close to the IB. Laksham was an important communication centre to Chittagong, while the Brahmanbaria area was a strategic bottleneck, owing to the Ashuganj Bridge. Both Laksham and Brahmanbaria, therefore, had strategic importance. Sylhet, Maulavi Bazaar, and Comilla were other important townships. Airfields existed at Sylhet, Shamsher Nagar, Comilla, Chittagong, and Cox's Bazar. The strategically important ports of Chittagong and Cox Bazar were located here.

On India's side, a single metre-gauge railway line connecting Dharampur to Lumding close to the international border existed. The important roads connected Silchar (Assam) to Tripura and a new road running parallel to the

international border ran from Agartala to Chandigram for quicker deployment of troops. Silchar was an important airfield capable of handling jet aircrafts while Kamalpur, Khowai, and Kailashar could only handle transport planes. The Agartala airfield was very close to border.³⁴

Deployment of the Pakistani Army

Prior to hostilities, only one infantry brigade looked after the entire eastern sector located in Comilla with a battalion at Sylhet and Chittagong. In Niazi's perception, the threat from the east was minimal in view of the inadequate infrastructure on the Indian side. Niazi's concept was to hold the border in strength. The deployment was subsequently changed to suit the growing intensity of insurgency and imminent operations by India in the erstwhile East Pakistan.

The following newly raised brigades were placed under command HQ 14 Infantry Division under Maj. Gen. Abdul Majid:

- a 202 Infantry Brigade at Sylhet.
- b 313 Infantry Brigade at Maulvi Bazaar
- c 27 Infantry Brigade located at Brahmanbaria and Akhura

The 39 Infantry Division was raised under command Maj. Gen. Rahim Khan, with 117 Infantry Brigade located at Comilla; the 53 Infantry Brigade located at Laksham, responsible for the defence of Feni; and the newly raised 97 Infantry Brigade located at Chittagong. None of these brigades had full combat power, since they consisted of one or two regular battalions, one "Azad Kashmir" unit, and a battalion strength of paramilitary forces.³⁵

Indian plan: 4 corps

Lt. Gen. Sagat Singh, GOC 4 Corps, was responsible for conducting operations in this sector, which entailed securing the area up to the line of Meghna river. A point to note is that Dacca did not find mention in the directive issued to him at this stage.

Sagat Singh was very clear from the planning stage that his ultimate objective was Dacca, though this was not spelt out by higher HQs in those many words. His strategy was to close in towards Daudkhandi and Chandpur to threaten Dacca and also ensure Pakistani units deployed in the Feni-Chittagong and Sylhet-Maulvi Bazaar sectors were tackled, to prevent interference and withdrawal that would beef up Dacca's defence. The Following formations were placed under the command of 4 Corps:

- a 8 Mountain Division under Maj. Gen. K.V. Krishna Rao
- b 23 Mountain Division under Maj. Gen. R.D. Hira
- c 57 Mountain Division under Maj. Gen. B.F. Gonsalves
- d Kilo Sector

Sagat Singh felt that greater dividends would be obtained if Pakistani forces were unbalanced by a swift and vigorous offensive to secure Chandput and Dandhkandi, to isolate all troops deployed east of the Meghna and south of Brahmanbaria, bypassing the strongly held Comilla-Maynamati fortress. In order to do this, he had to evict the 53 Infantry Brigade located at Laksham. A deception plan was devised to depict operations along the Shatir Bazaar-Belonja axis. The task was entrusted to the 23 Mountain Division.³⁶

8 Mountain Division was ordered to capture Maulvi Bazar and thereafter the Sherpur-Saidpur ferries. Also depending upon the progress of operations, it was to capture Sylhet in Phase 2. Later it was to secure Brahmanbaria in Phase 3. The division was also asked to earmark one brigade as Corps reserve after D plus 5.

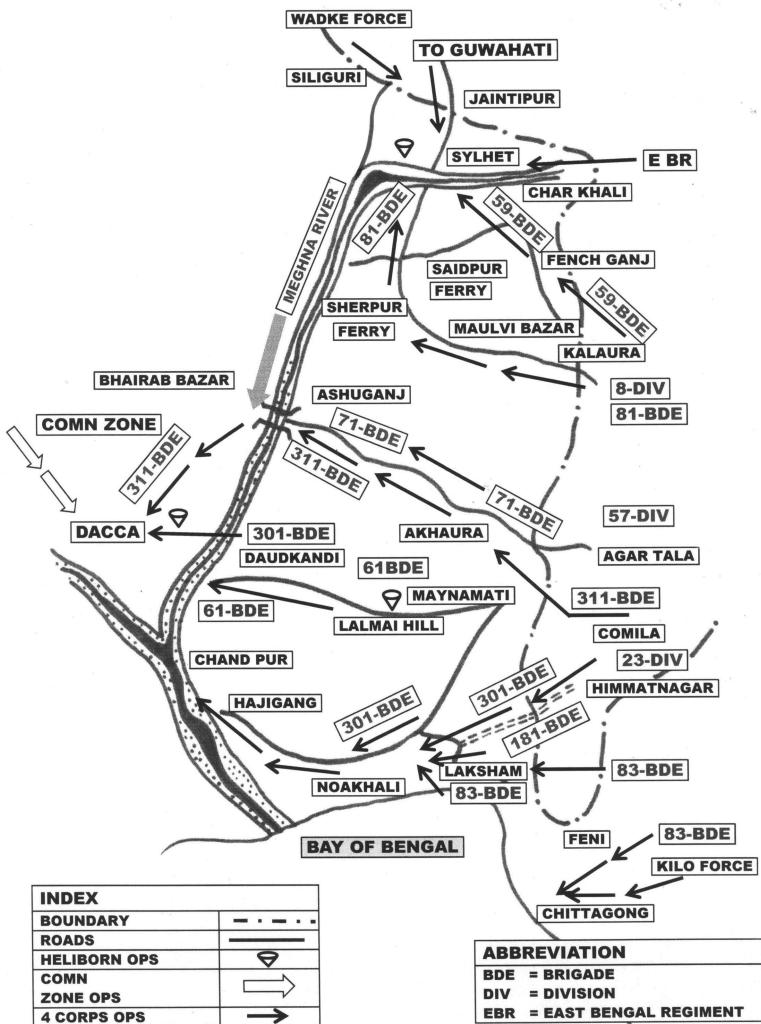
57 Mountain Division was to capture Akhaura, contain the enemy in the Brahmanbaria area, and build up north of Maynamati, then capture Daudkhandi. Subsequently, it was to capture Chittagong.

23 Mountain Division was ordered to capture the southern portion of the Lalmai Hills and contain the enemy in the Lalmai and Mynamati defences in Phase 1. In Phase 2, they were ordered to capture Chandpur. Subsequently in Phase 3, they were to clear the enemy in Lalmai Hills.

Kilo Sector and an *ad hoc* formation—comprising two Indian battalions, two converted Bangladeshi battalions, and one battalion each from BSF and CRPF, along with certain artillery elements—was to capture Feni and subsequently Chittagong, depending upon the progress.

Sylhet Sector: Operation of 8 Mountain Division.³⁷

- a 81 Mountain Brigade under Brig. R.C.V. Apte was tasked to advance along the Kaulashabar- Shamshernagar-Maulvi Bazaar axis.
- b 59 Mountain Brigade under Brig. C.A. Quinn was tasked to advance along the Dharmanagar- Kulawra-Brahmanbaria-Maulvi Bazaar axis.
- c By 2 December, against stiff resistance and heavy casualties, the 81 Mountain brigade captured Shamshernagar. The 59 Mountain Brigade contacted Kalaura and captured it on 6 December.
- d On 7 December 81 Brigade commenced its advance and 4/5 Gorkha Rifles from 59 the Mountain Brigade were heli-lifted south east of Sylhet town.
- e Pakistani 313 Infantry Brigade located in the Maulvi Bazaar area had also pulled back into the Sylhet garrison. The effective strength of Pakistan army at Sylhet was of six battalions with reduced strength.
- f Maulavi Bazaar was captured on 9 December by the 81 Brigade. 59 Brigade captured Frenchgunj on 11 December and linked with 4/5 Gorkha Rifles on 13 December.
- g Sylhet was under siege from all directions. The actual surrender of this garrison took place only on 17 December when 105 officers (including three brigadiers), 191 JCOs ,and 6,124 other ranks surrendered (nearly twice the strength under the command of Maj. Gen. Krishna Rao).



MAP 6.4 Planning and conduct of 4 Corps operation

Operations of 23 Mountain Division: Chandpur sector³⁸

23 Mountain Division commanded by Maj. Gen. R.D. Hira was tasked with undertaking operations in this sector. The divisional plan was to secure the southern area of the Lalmi Hills and subsequently capture Chandpur. The division had three brigades to undertake the operational tasks in Chandpur, namely the 301 Mountain Brigade, 181 Mountain Brigade, and 83 Mountain Brigade. In addition, the 61 Mountain Brigade (4 Corps reserve brigade) was also given operational role in this sector.

122 Planning and conduct of operation

- a 23 Mountain Division carried out preliminary operation in the Belonia Bulge to evict the Pakistani 53 Infantry Brigade located at Laksham. It was successful, but the Pakistani brigade could not be trapped and moved back at Laksham with minimal casualties.
- b The plan was modified to isolate Laksham, bypass the Lalmai defences, and dash for Chandpur and Daudkhandi.
- c 61 Mountain Brigade (4 Corps Reserve) under Brig. Tom Pande was directed to cross the Gomti and close in on Mynamati from the west. Tom Pande did an excellent job by crossing the Gomti speedily and thereafter established successful roadblocks. Daudkhandi fell on 9 December. This triggered a general collapse in the Pakistani defensive posture and Comilla was vacated and fell on 9 December. Pakistani troops were falling back to the Mynamati defended area from the border locations and the 61 Mountain Brigade trapped them, resulting in the surrender of approximately 1,500 Pakistani troops to the brigade. This was the first major surrender by the Pakistani Army. On 12 December the brigade closed on to Mynamati from the west and the north.
- d The 301 Mountain Brigade commanded by Brig. H.S. Sodhi infiltrated between Lalmai hills and Laksham on the night of 3 December and secured Mada Haraganj by 6 December. Chandpur was captured on 8 December without any opposition.
- e 181 Mountain Brigade under Brig. Y.C. Bakshi followed the 301 Mountain Brigade and established a roadblock west and north of Laksham. The Pakistani garrison escaped, leaving their heavier weapons and equipment behind. Laksham was captured on 9 December. The 301 Brigade under Brig. Sodhi captured Chandpur on 9 December. Pakistani 53 Brigade under Brig. Aslam Niazi launched counter attacks to recapture Mudaffarganj on the night of 7/8 December but was not successful. On 9 December, Brig. Niazi with most of his troops joined Pakistan's 117 Brigade in the Mynamati area. From Chandpur, Maj. Gen. Rahim Khan, with some troops, crossed over to the west of the Meghna river but the General was intercepted by the IAF and was wounded. Later, he managed to escape to Pakistan, flying via Myanmar. 23 Mountain Division was now poised to cross the Meghna river and focused their attention on Marayanganj and Chittagong, the 61 and 181 Brigades were tasked to capture Mynamati but despite their valiant efforts the fortress was held by the Pakistani troops until hostilities ended on 16 December. The Pakistani army was well prepared and gave a good fight. Brig. Mohammad Atif, Commander of the Mynamati Fortress, refused to surrender as he was sure he could hold on to this fortress for a longer duration. Ultimately because of Niazi's surrender in Dacca, Atif reluctantly surrendered. Later it was learnt that Mynamati defences were well prepared and had almost 4,000 troops because, after retreating from Laksham, the troops of the 53 Brigade joined them. Sagat Singh rightly changed his plan and bypassed Mynamati and focused on Dacca. Brig. Atif showed great determination and fighting spirit.

- f Kilo force captured Feni on 6 December and Kaberhat and Zocarganj on 8 December. The 83 Mountain Brigade and Kilo Force marred at Sitakund and reached the outskirts of Chittagong by 15 December. The Pakistani Chittagong garrison surrendered with 161 officers, 305 JCOs, and 8,618 other ranks after ceasefire on 16 December.

Ashuganj Sector: operations of 57 Mountain Division³⁹

The 57 Mountain Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. B.F. Gonsalves was responsible for operations in the Ashuganj sector. The division had two brigades under its command, 73 Mountain Brigade and 311 Mountain Brigade. Gonsalves was tasked with capturing Akhaura and closing in to Myanamati area by D plus 5 for the capture of Daudkhandi to be completed by D plus 8. Subsequently, the division less 311 Mountain Brigade was to capture Chittagong with the K-Force placed under command. Therefore, the general area where 57 Mtn. Div. had to operate covered the area of Akhaura, Brahmanbaria, Ashuganj, Bhairab Bazar, Kasba, and Daudkhandi. Later, some tasks underwent changes, keeping with the progress of operations. 61 Mountain Brigade, the Corps reserve brigade, “was given the task of making a wide outflanking movement and isolate well-fortified places like Comilla and Myanamati and thus help 57 Division in capturing Daudkhandi.”⁴⁰

Pakistan's 14 Division was deployed here, and its 27 Brigade under Brig. Saidullah was responsible for defending Akhaura, Kasba, and Brahamanbaria. Pakistan did not have sufficient troops to hold important river ports like Daudkhandi and Chandpur in the rear of the defended sector of Brig. Saidullah.⁴¹

- a Akhaura was captured on 5 December by an outmanoeuvring move carried out at night, tackling the defences from the rear, while depicting tank noises in the north east, employing 5-ton trucks (heavy trucks) with silencers removed. The deception plan worked: the Pakistanis assumed that a large number of tanks were moving towards their defended location for an assault.
- b Brahmanbaria was perceived as a bottleneck and would be strongly held. There was no intelligence about the existence of the road linking Brahmanbaria to Ashuganj. When situation was clearer, Gen. Sagat Singh changed the thrust line of 57 Mountain Division towards Brahmanbaria-Ashuganj instead of going south towards Myanamati-Daudkhandi. 311 Brigade captured Ashuganj on 10 December. While haphazardly withdrawing in panic, the Pakistani army demolished the rail bridge at Ashuganj across Meghna but in haste left behind many of their own troops on the wrong side (eastern bank).
- c GOC 4 Corps, Lt. Gen. Sagat Singh reviewed the situation and modified his plans to accelerate operation towards Dacca in his mind. Taking advantage of the situation, he planned a helicopter-borne operation (in army parlance “heliborne ops”) and sped up the build-up of troops and equipment, which was further accelerated by employing locally available river transport. The

plan was to contain Bhairab Bazar and capture Raipura followed by Narsingdi by heliborne operations across the Meghna river. Thereafter, the 73 Mtn. Bde. was to advance on the Tungi axis and 311 Mtn. Bde. on the Demra axis.

Operations against Meghna River

- a On 9 December, the water line of the Meghna was secured. Now all approaches to Dacca lay bare across the Meghna River, which was 4,000 yards wide.
- b On the night of 9/10 December, a helicopter fleet in the theatre, consisting of 14 MI-4s, were made use of to fly troops across the mighty Meghna river. Over the next 36 hours, 110 sorties were flown. The MI-4 had limited carrying capability: each sortie could carry ten soldiers with equipment and weapons. For the first time in the Indian subcontinent, an army undertook this kind of unconventional heli-bridge operation. Not only did it ensure speed but also crossing the mighty Meghna without a physical bridge brought surprise and shock to the defenders.
- c 311 Mountain Brigade Group was the first to be lifted and secured Narsingdi on 11 December. Crossing the Meghna River and advancing to the Satlakhya river by the 57 Mountain Division was a great feat of logistics and the movement was achieved with rare ingenuity and enterprise. Credit for operations in the sector, which had far more bearing on the outcome of the war, should rightly go to Lt. Gen. Sagat Singh and to Maj. Gen. Gonsalves.⁴²

Romeo Force: Amphibious operation

Manekshaw, after observing the fast collapse of the Pakistani defence took a hurried decision on an amphibious operation at Cox Bazar to seal the escape route of the Pakistani forces from there to Burma. All his advisors were against this operation, but that would not deter Manekshaw. A battalion group comprising 1/3 GR and two companies of 11 BIHAR with some mortars were collected hastily. Fifty naval persons were to join but could not reach in time, due to the short notice. This force, called the Romeo Force, was placed under the command of the commander of the 8 Mountain Division Artillery Brigade and was asked to capture Cox's Bazar. MV Viswa Vijay, a commercial ship mustered by HQ Eastern Command and partially modified, carried them from Calcutta and the group was to be transferred to two LSTs (Landing Ships), INS Guilder and Gharial, at the rendezvous point planned on the map. Unfortunately, on ground it was found that the area was not suitable for beaching. After great effort, a few reached the bank and found no Pakistani troops and reported the presence of Mukti Bahini persons. The Mukti Bahini and local people helped this group shift from ship to shore by using local crafts. Two soldiers drowned in the process. This operation turned out to be a sort of fiasco, because there was no proper planning, coordination, recce, and forethought. And it was a rare instance when Manekshaw failed to see the logic of his advisers.⁴³

The northern sector: operations of 101 Communication Zone

The area of operation

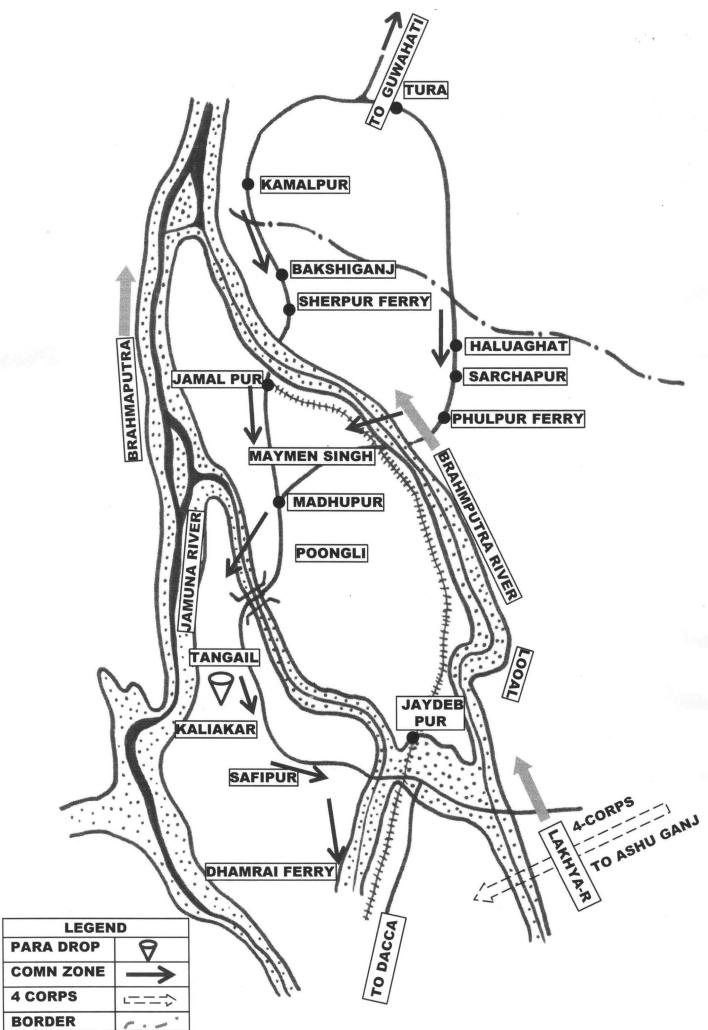
The northern sector denoted the territory south of Nagaland of India that lies between the Jamuna in the west and the Meghna in the east, with the Ganga forming the base. The Brahmaputra ran diagonally from the north west to the south east, dividing the sector into two, with about one-third north of the river. A large number of routes led into the sector from India, but all these arteries led to the two focal communication centres of Jamalpur and Mymensingh, towns lying across the Brahmaputra, an obstacle about 1,000 feet wide. Though there was no bridge over the Brahmaputra, both Jamalpur and Mymensingh had ferries from where this river could be crossed. Roads and tracks from there led to Dacca. Terrain-wise, except for the Madhupur forest in the Tangail district, the area was covered with paddy fields, marshes, and lakes. Both the Kamalpur-Jamalpur road and Mymensingh-Halurghat road converged at Madhupur, from where a single road led to Dacca. Numerous streams crisscrossing the area made the movement of wheeled and tracked vehicles off the main roads and by-ways difficult, except in the dry season. This sector afforded the most direct, though longer, route to Dacca. The Mukti Bahini led by Tiger Siddiqui operated from Tangail.⁴⁴

Pakistan's plan of defence

Gen. Niazi had given very low priority to this sector. Maj. Gen. Jamshed Khan, GOC, 36 Infantry Division with HQ at Dacca, was overall responsible for the defence of this area. There was only an *ad hoc* brigade, 93 Infantry Brigade raised under the local Martial Law Administrator, Brig. A. Qadir, which was located at Mymensingh to defend the sector, with two regular battalions, two Paramilitary battalions, and one battery of mortars. Jamalpur and Mymensingh were designated as fortresses, where main defensive battles were to be fought with delaying positions located right up to the border. He had prepared good defence at Halurghat and Kamalpur. The brigade was devoid of tanks and artillery guns, which reduced defence potential. Gen. Niazi tasked this formation to delay the Indian advance as long as possible and then fall back to augment Dacca's defences.⁴⁵

101 Communication Zone

Maj. Gen. Gurbux Singh Gill, GOC 101 Communication Zone based at Shillong, was made operationally responsible for this sector. The Area Commander primarily was responsible for providing logistics support to troops deployed in the north-eastern states. However, to make up the shortfall of troops and formation, the 101 Communication Zone was given an operational role with a comparatively smaller force vis-à-vis a Mountain Division, suited for employment in this sector where the terrain dictated suitability of a smaller force. Troops allocated to this sector consisted of 95 Mountain Brigade Group under Brig. Hardev Singh Kler, which was moved from Nagaland, and FJ Sector commanded



MAP 6.5 Planning and conduct of 101 Communication Zone Operation.

by Brig. Sant Singh had one infantry battalion brought from 23 Division, BSF Battalions, and Mukti Bahini sector 11. Its artillery component comprised one Mountain Regiment and two batteries of heavy mortars. After 8 December, 167 Infantry Brigade commanded by Brig. Irani was made available to 101 Communication Zone.⁴⁶

India's plan of offence

Maj. Gen. Gurbax Gill planned his main thrust along the Kamalpur-Bakshigong-Jamalpur axis with 95 Mountain Brigade while a stimulating brigade group

advanced along the Dalu-Halughat-Phulpur-Mymensingh axis with an infantry battalion and Mukti Bahini forces. The task of the FJ sector was to capture Mymensingh by 12 December with a view to preventing withdrawal of Pakistani troops to boost Dacca's defence. Maj. Gen. Gill decided to head for Tangail on the fall of Jamalpur to prevent the falling back of Pakistani forces to Dacca. Kamalpur, a fortified location close to IB, offered stiff resistance under an able Pakistani officer, Captain Ahsan Malik. Despite three written notes sent by Gurbax Gill to this officer (couriered by a Mukti Bahini person) to surrender and avoid unnecessary casualties, the officer refused to do so and fought gallantly. Though he finally surrendered after a stiff fight on instructions from his superior, he told Maj. Gen. Gill that he was doing not because of the warnings but to obey his senior commander.⁴⁷ Maj. Gen. Gurbax Singh Gill was severely injured in a mine blast near Kamalpur, and was replaced by Maj. Gen. Gandarv Singh Nagra; incidentally both the officers belonged to the same regiment, the 4th Gorkha Rifles. Gurbax Gill, a hard taskmaster and a no-nonsense man was the only Indian general to be severely wounded during this war.

On 5 December, Bakshiganj was captured after it was found abandoned. The 85 Mountain Brigade resumed its advance towards the Brahmaputra river in bullock carts and reached the south of it by 1730 hrs on 6 December. The move to the river line exhibited a lack of initiative and training of the units of the infantry brigade, with one battalion taking six hours to cover 22 km, while yet another took 48 hrs to cover 20 kms after fighting no more than one platoon action en route. Brig. Kler at one stage had to personally plod the battalions to move faster.

The Jamalpur garrison was now under siege with two infantry battalions. There was a requirement of additional troops to capture the position. Nagra was allotted the 167 Infantry Brigade on 9 December and the two companies of the leading infantry battalions reached Jamalpur on 11 December. The 95 Brigade contacted Jamalpur on 9 December. Indian forces surrounded Jamalpur from all sides. The IAF and artillery bombed Jamalpur very heavily. On the night of 10 December, Pakistani forces from Jamalpur made an attempt to breakout out and retreat to Dacca. This attempt was thwarted and the Pakistanis suffered heavy casualties. Lt. Col. Sultan Ahmed of 31 Baluch, which was defending this area, fought a gallant battle and refused to surrender when Brig. Kler sent him a written message. The communication between the Indian brigadier and the Pakistani lieutenant colonel makes for interesting reading. After surrounding Jamalpur fortress and bombarding it heavily, Brig. Kler sent a note through a Bangladeshi Mukti Bahini to the commander of Jamalpur informing him that he had been fully surrounded and therefore Kler was writing this note advising him to surrender to avoid loss of lives. Lt. Col. Sultan replied,

We here in Jamalpur area waiting for the fight to commence. ... It has not started yet. So, let's not talk and start it. ... Hoping to find you with a sten in your hand next time, instead of the pen you seem to have so much mastery over. ... Sincerely, Commander Jamalpur Fortress.

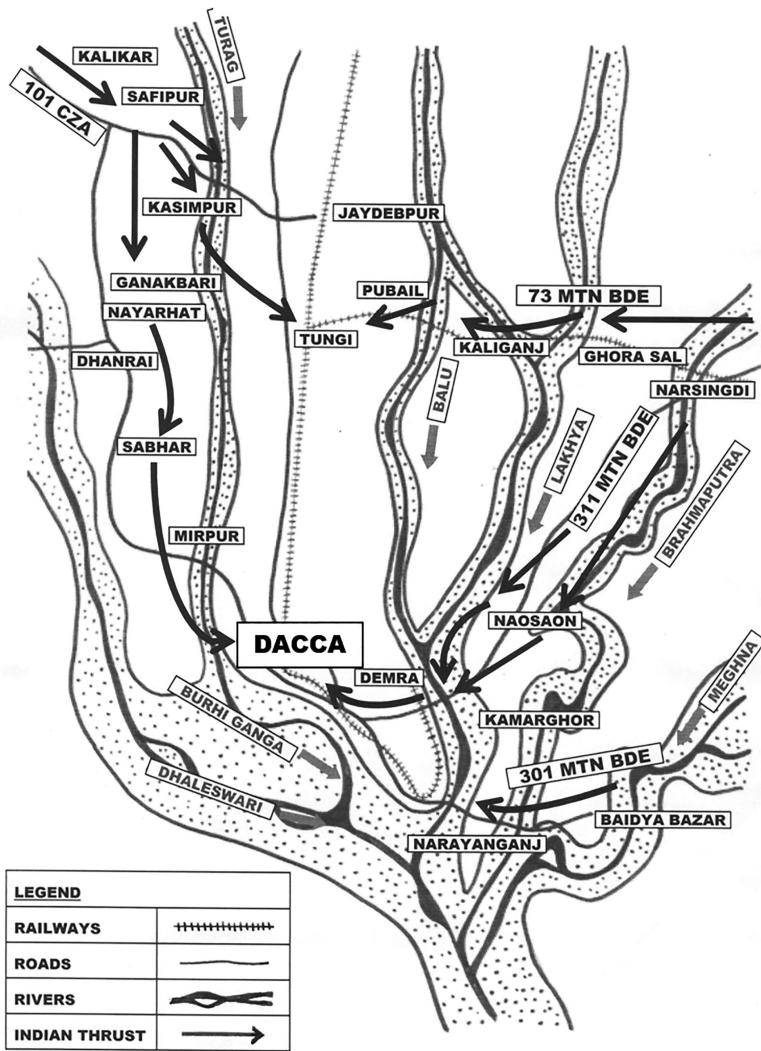
The letter was timed 9 December, 5.35 pm. The reply sent by Lt. Col. Sultan Ahmed of 31 Baluch was wrapped around a 7.6 mm bullet.⁴⁸

The garrison finally surrendered on 11 December. The total forces surrendered included two officers, 9 JCOs, and 365 other ranks. It was later revealed that the garrison had surrendered on order from higher authorities. Had they continued to hold out, probably the course of battle would have been different in this sector. Meanwhile, Mymensingh was also vacated by the retreating Pakistani troops and was captured by the FJ sector on 11 December. The fall of Jamalpur and Mymensingh paved the way for Dacca.⁴⁹

Move to Dacca

The Pakistani defence started crumbling and situations were deteriorating when 4 Corps crossed Meghna. On 8 December under the arrangements of the UN, foreign nationals were evacuated by air from Bangladesh with India's cooperation. General Manekshaw, the Indian Army Chief, sent out messages by various means including dropping leaflets and appealing to Pakistani troops to surrender to save the unnecessary loss of lives. They were repeatedly assured of good treatment as per Geneva protocols. This was organised psychological warfare by Manekshaw. Seeing the precarious situation, the Governor of East Pakistan, Mr. A.M. Malik sent frantic messages to the President of Pakistan General Yahya Khan requesting him to immediately start political processes and arrange for a ceasefire. Yahya too was secretly trying to arrange a ceasefire based on Governor Malik's recommendation, but at the same time to boost morale of his troops in East Pakistan he manufactured a bluff, telling them "Yellow from the North" (which meant the Chinese) and "Whites from the South" (which meant Americans through the sea route) were expected anytime to join the war in support of Pakistan. The Chinese did not move despite the best efforts of Nixon and on 13 December information was received that the US Seventh Fleet (USS Enterprise) had entered the Bay of Bengal. But that was more to express solidarity with their ally Pakistan rather than to make any real impact on the war.⁵⁰

At this juncture, Maj. Gen. Gandharv Nagra, GOC 101 Communication Zone, ordered 95 Mountain Brigade Group with 1 Maratha Light Infantry, 6 Sikh Light Infantry, and 2 PARA to advance towards Dacca, and 167 Infantry Brigade to capture Jaydebpur. Depending on the progress of operations, the entire force under Gen. Nagra was to isolate and dominate Dacca to facilitate its capture. The 2 PARA Battalion was parachute dropped at about 1600 hours on 11 December in Tangail, with the aim of capturing the bridge at Poongli and interrupting and destroying Pakistani troops retreating from Jamalpur and Mymensingh. The battalion was successful in capturing the bridge, however, the Pakistani troops of the Mymensingh and Jamalpur garrison had escaped through Tangail before the 2 PARA roadblock became effective. The 'Dacca Bowl' was now isolated. The 95 Mtn. Bde. linked up with 2 PARA at the Poongli bridge at around 1600 hours on 12 December, and by 1800 hours, Tangail was secured.



MAP 6.6 Advance to Dacca.

This was a historic occasion for the Indian Army. Maj. Gen. Nagra's forces, however, found themselves out of logistics support range from their bases. Though they had vehicles, there was no petrol. Air maintenance was resorted to for the 95 Mountain Brigade, when an abandoned air strip was discovered close to Tangail on 13 December. 167 Infantry Brigade had not fetched up until then. Gen Nagra ordered 95 Mountain Brigade to resume operations.⁵¹

Further advance of the brigade was delayed by strong delaying actions by the retreating troops on the Turag river line. Gen. Nagra employed 167 Infantry

Brigade on the Chandpur-Sabhar-Mirpur axis while the 95 Mountain Brigade attempted to cross the Turag river south of Tangail. 2 PARA battalion, the only infantry battalion with four 106 mm RCL guns and RPGs, were sent ahead to deal with the Pakistani armour. 2 PARA, under Brig. Sant Singh of FJ Sector, contacted Mirpur defences at about 0200 hours on 16 December. Pakistani troops armed the bridge at Mirpur for demolition but were unable to destroy it since 2 PARA totally dominated the area. The bridge, which was a gateway to Dacca, was captured intact. 167 Brigade reached Gachham on 15 December. 73 Brigade was nearing Tungi on 14 December. The Sierra Force was also threatening Demra, as was the 311 Brigade. The 301 Brigade after crossing Laksham Khola reached the northern area of Narayanganj. The Indian artillery carried out selective bombing in and around Dacca. All seaports were blocked by the IN and the airspace was completely under the control of the IAF. Dacca was being surrounded like garrotte. The Pakistani army was in very low morale. Seeing no hope of betterment of the situation, Yahya at last wrote to Malik and Niazi to stop operational activities to prevent the loss of lives and try for a ceasefire. Niazi, through Farman Ali, approached the US consul to facilitate arranging a ceasefire. To make matters worse, through an interception of a message, it was learnt that Governor Malik would hold a meeting on 14 December at the Governor's House and the IAF bombed the roof of the Governor's House. The Governor, under panic, resigned immediately and took shelter in the International Red Cross building.⁵²

The BBC on 15 December while broadcasting evening news mentioned that India had agreed to the ceasefire request of Niazi, to be effective from 1700 hours to 0900 hours on 16 December. There was lot of confusion and ambiguity about the declaration of ceasefire. Based on Manekshaw's repeated advice on surrender and ceasefire and because of the precarious situation Niazi was facing, the latter offered a ceasefire. Manekshaw, as a token of good faith, stopped air action over Dacca from 5 am on 15 December and also conveyed that he would stop all operations in the east should Niazi accept Manekshaw's ultimatum of surrender. Niazi's HQ at Dacca advised his troops to observe a ceasefire from 0500 hours to 0900 hours on 16 December. This was not known to Indian troops fighting near Dacca. Brig. Kler intercepted the message of ceasefire of the Pakistani Army in the east. Indian operational commander, Maj. Gen. Nagra, who was waiting at the gateway of Dacca at Mirpur bridge across Buri Ganga, had no information about the ceasefire from his higher headquarters. On learning about the intercepted message from Brig. Kler, Nagra, encashing on the opportunity, on his own dispatched his ADC, Capt. Hitesh Mehta and one officer of 2 PARA, to Gen. Niazi, with a message offering a ceasefire and surrender. While returning from Niazi's HQ, very unfortunately the jeep these officers were travelling was fired upon by own troops due to mistaken identity, causing injury to Major Sethi of 2 PARA whose leg had to be amputated.

Meanwhile, Niazi at 0800 hours on 16 December through a pre-set radio frequency requested Manekshaw to increase the moratorium by allowing an additional six hours, which was agreed to. Nagra knew Niazi in person from his earlier stint as a military attaché in the Indian Embassy in Pakistan. He wrote, "My dear

Abdullah, I am here. The game is up. I suggest, you give yourself up to me and I will look after you.” This was accepted by Niazi and he asked the Dacca garrison commander, Maj. Gen. Jamshed to coordinate with the Indian Army. Gen. Nagra, Brig. Kler, Brig. Sant Singh, and Lt. Col. Siddiqi, CO of 2 PARA, drove to Pakistan 36 Infantry Divisional HQ (Jamshed’s HQ) from where they contacted Gen. Niazi’s HQ. At 1100 hours on 16 December, they met Gen. Niazi, GOC-in-C, Pakistan’s Eastern Army. Maj. Gen. Jacob, Chief of Staff, HQ Eastern Command, flew from Kolkata to discuss surrender formalities and terms, including signing of the Instrument of Surrender. Niazi was more interested in a ceasefire only, rather than a surrender and had a bit of an argument with Jacob. But Jacob stood firm and Niazi had to give in. Later, Gen. Aurora, accompanied by Air Marshal Dewan (AOC-in-C East), Vice Admiral Krishnan (FOC-in-C East), and Group Captain Khondakar, Chief of Staff of Mukti Bahini, flew to Dacca to receive the surrender. Ironically, the Dacca Racecourse from where Mujib had declared the independence of Bangladesh nine months ago became the venue of surrender.⁵³

Amidst the joyous shouts of “Joy Bangla” from more than a lakh Bangladeshis gathered there, The Instrument of Surrender was finally signed at 1631 hrs at the Dacca racecourse, bringing to an end the war. A photocopy of the instrument of surrender signed by Lt. Gen. J.S. Aurora and Lt. Gen. A.A.K. Niazi is attached in Appendix 10. In all, 1,606 officers, 2,345 JCOs, 64,109 other ranks, 1,022 non-combatants of the regular army; 79 officers, 448 JCOs, and 11,665 other ranks of the Paramilitary forces; 91 officers, 30 petty officers, and 1,292 rankings of the Pakistani Navy; 61 officers, 31 warrant officers, and 1,049 airmen of the Pakistani Air Force; 166 all-ranks of the West Pakistan Police; and 7,555 civilians surrendered at various garrisons all over East Pakistan. Indian losses in the campaign were 1,421 killed, including 68 officers, 60 JCOs, and 1,293 other ranks; 4,061 wounded, comprising 211 officers, 160 JCOs, and 3,690 other ranks; and 56 missing.⁵⁴



FIGURE 6.1 Signing of instrument of surrender.⁵⁵

Western theatre

The Indian strategy had its war aims focused on the east. Strategic defence was to be maintained in the west and a counter offensive would be launched only after Pakistan initiated hostilities. This served the larger strategic purpose of ensuring that India was not accused of aggression, which could have had a negative effect on its operations in the east wing. The initiative in the west thus lay in the hands of the Pakistani military.

Indian forces and plans

There was near parity of forces between India and Pakistan as far as the armour component was concerned. However, Pakistan was deficient in infantry and here India had an edge. To Pakistan's ten infantry divisions in the western theatre, India had thirteen, one of which was deployed opposite the Tibet border in Ladakh. Pakistan had seven infantry divisions and an independent infantry brigade deployed in a holding role along the international border and the ceasefire line. Two armoured divisions, an armoured brigade, three infantry divisions, and an independent infantry brigade were available for offensive tasks or for stabilising the front.

India had Western and Southern Command opposite the Pakistani forces. Western Command consisted of the 15 Corps, 1 Corps, and 11 Corps. The 15 Corps sector stretched from Samba to Ladakh and was held with five divisions, one of which was opposite Tibet. The 1 Corps sector stretched from Samba until just short of the Dera Baba Nanak Enclave on the Ravi River. This was initially held by a division and presented to Pakistan the weakest gap in the Indian defences in the event of a pre-emptive attack. Located in the hinterland, 1 Corps was to assume responsibility of this sector on arrival. It had in its orbit (Order of Battle) 36, 39, and 54 Infantry Divisions and 2 and 16 Independent Armoured Brigades. 11 Corps was holding the area from Dera Baba Nanak Enclave until the south of Anupgarh. It had 15 and 7 Infantry Divisions, an armoured brigade, and an *ad hoc* division-size force holding the general area astride Fazilka, called Foxtrot Sector. Southern Command had two divisions under its command and was responsible for the Bikaner, Jaisalmer, Barmer, and Kutch Sectors. 1 Armoured Division stationed in Muktsar area and 14 Infantry Division stationed in Faridkot area constituted the Indian Army's reserves.

Indian plans envisaged holding operations in the west and a few limited offensive operations, plus an all-out offensive operation in East Pakistan. During 1971, the Western Command under Lt. Gen. K.P. Candeth was responsible for looking after the area of present Northern and Western Command, i.e., J&K, Punjab, UP, and Himachal Pradesh. The Western Command had 15 Corps looking after J&K, 11 Corps deployed in Punjab against Pakistan, and 1 Corps, the only offensive corps generally located between Pathankot and Jammu, was tasked to carry out an offensive in the Shakkargarh Bulge in order to capture territory. A limited offensive was

also to be launched in the Chhamb sector by 10 Division of 15 Corps. Thus, it can be seen that mostly the troops were deployed against Pakistan, except for one division, which was deployed in Leh-Ladakh for defence against China. The Southern Command under Lt. Gen. G. Bewoor was responsible for the defence of Rajasthan and Gujarat. The Southern Command was tasked with defending Rajasthan and also to capturing Pakistani territory by launching limited offensive operations. For the purpose of the war in the west, India had 12 Infantry Divisions, one Armoured Division, three Artillery Brigades, two Independent Infantry Brigades, two Armoured Brigades, and one independent Parachute Brigade. By the middle of October, the Indian army moved most of its forces towards their operational areas.⁵⁶



MAP 6.7 Comparative Force Level in the Western Theatre.

Conduct of operations

In conformity with their war strategy, Pakistan launched four attacks on 3 and 4 December. In the hill sector, Poonch was attacked on the night of 3/4 December and Chhamb at first light on 4 December. The former attack was beaten back after heavy fighting spread over three days. The attack on Chhamb was partially successful with Pakistan reaching up to Munawar Tawi. However, Pakistan's attempt to secure a bridgehead was defeated and the defences were stabilised along the Munawar Tawi.

In Fazilka, the attack was launched on night 3/4 December with Pakistan gaining a foothold on the Sabuna distributary. This provided depth to Pakistan for defending the Sulaiman Headworks. Indian attempts to evict Pakistani forces were foiled but the Pakistani bridgehead was contained. The fourth major attack that took place was in the desert sector, where Pakistan aimed to capture Ramgarh. They were stopped at the Indian post of Longewala, where the Indian company put up a stiff resistance. Thereafter, the IAF with just two Hunter aircrafts destroyed the bulk of the Pakistani armour. The area of operations was outside the range of Pakistani aircrafts, which enabled the two lone Hunters to operate unhindered.

Pakistan forces and plans

Pakistan had the bulk of its forces in the western wing, which consisted of ten infantry divisions, two armoured divisions, two independent armoured brigades, two independent infantry brigades, and para-military forces numbering about 85,000. The Pakistani Army had three Corps (1, 2, and 4) deployed in plains. Until going to war, Pakistan's military strategy had been "the defence of East lies in the West." Their operational plans were made to translate this strategy into action. According to Gen. Mukeem, Pakistan made a bold and simple plan that had a tinge of a gamble. Pakistani plans had been prepared for a counter offensive in the west, to take effect if India invaded the east wing.⁵⁷ Lt. Gen. Gul Hassan Khan, Chief of the General Staff at GHQ, in his *Memoirs* mentions that Pakistani plans contained two ingredients: first, formations other than those in the reserve were to launch limited offensives in J&K; and second, engage the Indian Army deployed in Punjab with small-scale actions, while a major counter-offensive was to be launched concurrently into India, perhaps in the Ganganagar-Suratgarh area.⁵⁸ Dhruv Katoch avers,

The latter part of the plan was altered by General Yahya Khan in respect to its timings. As per the revised plan, the main offensive would take place only after local operations had secured ground. This change ostensibly was made due to shortage of equipment and also due to operational voids caused by move of forces to its East Wing.⁵⁹

However, Pakistani writers do not mention much about the change of plans due to shortage of equipment. Pakistan's strategy hinged on the employment

of their GHQ reserves and the decision of not to unleash this potent force was rather bizarre.

Analyses of the performance of the opposing forces

At the political level, the diplomatic initiatives taken by Indira Gandhi set the stage for ultimate victory in East Pakistan. Pakistan, in particular, was found wanting in defining political and strategic goals and war aims. On the Indian side, operational art was conspicuous by its lack of application throughout the conflict in the western theatre. Senior commanders on both sides missed out on capitalising on fleeting opportunities. Both sides showed remarkable hesitation in the use of reserves. While the preservation of resources is part of command responsibility, in the context of short duration wars there is a need to effectively utilise all available resources in furtherance of the higher commanders' aim. At the junior level, the leadership displayed was of a high order. This was reflected in the success achieved in Ladakh, Kargil, Chicken's Neck, and many other areas all across the front. The defence of the bridgehead at Barapind across the Basantar River and the defence of the post at Longewala are fine examples of junior leadership rising to exceptional heights.

Though operations in the western theatre are not within the purview of this book theme, because it was a part of the overall politico-military strategy, a brief account is given below to clear the overall perspective.

The Indian Army fought well in the Ladakh sector and captured Turtok and a few strategically dominating heights overlooking the Leh-Srinagar Highway in the Kargil sector. The Minimarg area and Kaiyan bowl in the Kashmir region and the Chicken Neck area in the Jammu region were also captured. The Indian army reached up to Naya Chor in the desert area, but the Green Belt could not be reached. In addition, the war saw offensive action at the local level, which led to the capture of a large number of enclaves by both sides. The Shakargarh sector too was contacted, where a major offensive was launched but was not successful. In Punjab, the Indian Army captured Dera Baba Nanak and the Pakistani area of the Sehjra Bulge. But it lost some territory to Pakistan in the Hussainiwala area. The ceasefire, however, came into effect when Shakargarh had been contacted. Pakistan lost a good number of tanks in the Battle of Longewala. The Indian army, though much weaker in numbers there, defended it well with the support of the air force. After failing in Longewala, Pakistani offensive force 18 Division withdrew. India's 12 Infantry Division could have reached further beyond Longewala had they undertaken a relentless pursuit, but the GOC Maj. Gen. Khambatta was overcautious. His opponent on Pakistan's side, Maj. Gen. Mustafa was sacked on 7 December for his ineptitude and failure in Longewala and was relieved by Maj. Gen. Hamid. On this, Pakistani General Muqeem commented, "Mercifully the Indians did not pursue."⁶⁰

Pakistan made some dents in the Ferozepur and Fazilka sectors; had the Pakistanis exploited this further it would have been a big problem and an

embarrassment for India. Pakistan started well in the Chhamb sector and achieved a quick victory there, capturing some Indian territory. But once again they failed to maintain the momentum, which saved India a lot.

Niazi's strategy and conduct of defensive battles in East Pakistan were linked like an umbilical cord with that of the operational plan envisaged for the war in the west. Together, it made up the overall grand strategy of Pakistan. The strategy was to delay the Indian armed forces in the east as long as possible to gain adequate time for a decisive war in the west. About the conduct of the defence in the east, Niazi explained:

The concept envisaged a forward posture in defence, with the troops trading space for time in a gradual withdrawal from the borders to fortresses which were prepared as killing grounds and where last-ditch battles have to be fought, where the enemy should be kept tied down long enough to give ample time to the Western Garrison to achieve their mission. “The battle of the East will be fought in the West”. The fate of not only Eastern garrison and East Pakistan, but of the whole of Pakistan, hung on the outcome of the battle to be fought in West Pakistan, the offensive to be launched by Tikka Khan's Reserve Army.⁶¹

General Krishna Rao commented that as far as the eastern wing was concerned, by the time the war broke out, there were total of about five Divisions available including Paramilitary Forces, reasonably adequate to put up a fairly effective defence of the territory. Since Niazi's task envisaged the defence of the entirety of East Pakistan against external aggression, he had adopted a forward defence posture and a series of defence lines based on the fortress concept of defence. This concept envisaged important communication centres and towns all around ahead of the major rivers, to be held in strength as fortresses and prevent advancing forces from getting through to the interior areas. The attacking troops were to be destroyed by the main fortresses and if any advancing troops tried to get through the gaps, the neighbouring fortresses were to deal with them. Accordingly, Niazi selected the important communication centres and towns of Jessore, Jhenida, Bogra, Rangpur, Jamalpur, Mymensingh, Sylhet, Bhairab Bazar, and Chittagong as theatre fortresses. In this concept, no depth was provided for from where reserves could be employed to deal with any infiltrating columns of the enemy. No defence of the major river obstacles ahead of Dacca was thought of either, leave alone the deliberate defence of Dacca.⁶²

The Mukti Bahini's modus operandi compelled the Pakistani army to deploy in penny pockets. The Pakistani army in the east fought two wars: a civil war against the Mukti Bahini and a war with the Indian Army. Preliminary operations undertaken by the Indian army and the Mukti Bahini, which commenced from 22 November, helped in securing launching pads in some selected areas. It was surprising that Tikka Khan's much-talked about offensive operations against

India never took off in the west. Pakistan's whole strategy, therefore, became defunct because it hinged on proposed decisive action by their strike corps. Pakistani defence analyst A.H. Amin stated, "The only answer to Pakistan's strategic dilemma was to mount a pre-emptive attack on India in Monsoon season before the Indian Army had fully mobilised and the Himalayan Passes had not become snow bound. This did not happen because Indira Gandhi conducted skilful diplomacy and also because Pakistan's military junta lacked strategic insight. Indian Western Command C-in-C, Candeth, admitted that all Indian plans to attack Pakistan would have gone to the winds had Pakistan attacked in October 1971. Candeth remarked that Yahya Khan had tarried too long and had missed the boat."⁶³

Commenting on the India's strategy for the Bangladesh Liberation War, Mr. J.N. Dixit summed up the 1971 Indo-Pak war with the following comments:

The strategy worked, and all the objectives set by India were fully achieved. The Pakistan forces in East Pakistan were decisively defeated with India taking 93,000 prisoners of war, the largest number of soldiers taken prisoners in world history, and only comparable with the Russian Army capturing the entire corps of Field Marshall Von Paoli at the battle of Stalingrad. The Pakistani prisoners included all the generals serving in East Pakistan. On the western front, India pushed back the Pakistani forces from Jammu and Kashmir from the Rann of Kutch. India captured strategic locations in Jammu and Kashmir and about 5000 sq. kilometres of Pakistani territory of southern Punjab and Sind, when it declared a unilateral ceasefire in the western sector on December 16, 1971.⁶⁴

Success in Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 owes a lot to the leadership at the national level and also amongst the military. Young military leaders of both Pakistan and India proved their mettle. Mukti Bahini leadership rose to the occasion and carved a niche for themselves in the annals of Bangladeshi history. But weaknesses in Pakistan's higher-level leadership was visible all through this historical process. India's decisive victory enhanced its reputation and catapulted it to a position of regional power.

"T'WAS A FAMOUS VICTORY."⁶⁵

Notes

- 1 D.K. Palit, *The Lighting Campaign* (New Delhi: Thomson Press (India) Limited, 1972), p. 15.
- 2 Op. Cit.
- 3 Sukhawant Singh, *India's War since Independence: The Liberation War of Bangladesh* (New Delhi: Vikash Publishing House, 1978), pp. 58–60.
- 4 Ibid., p. 59.
- 5 Lt Gen. A.A.K. Niazi, *The Betrayal of East Pakistan*, pp. 83–84.

138 Planning and conduct of operation

- 6 Ibid., p. 84.
- 7 Niazi, pp. 85–86. Niazi wrote his book *The Betrayal of East Pakistan* many years later, after receiving much criticism for his inefficient planning and the conduct of defensive operations during the Bangladesh campaign. Almost all historians have found faults in Niazi. The Hamdoor Rahman Commission ordered by the government of Pakistan blamed Niazi squarely. Niazi, through his book, in addition to giving details of the Liberation War, blamed many higher-ups, at times rightly. There was also an effort to apportion the blame of defeat on others while giving a clean chit to himself. The veracity of some of his statements needs to be ascertained by corroborating facts from other unbiased sources.
- 8 Krishna Rao, *Prepare or Perish*, p. 166.
- 9 Niazi, p. 86.
- 10 Salik, *Witness to Surrender*, p. 125.
- 11 Niazi, p. 146.
- 12 Krishna Rao, p. 167, read in conjunction with Niazi, pp. 159–160.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Lachhman, p. 146.
- 15 Niazi, pp. 86–87.
- 16 Ibid., p. 87.
- 17 Krishna Rao, p. 166.
- 18 Maj Gen. Rajendra Nath, *Military Leadership in India: Vedic Period to Indo-Pak Wars* (New Delhi: Lancer Books, 1999), pp. 479–480.
- 19 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_plans_of_the_Bangladesh_Liberation_War, viewed on 26 November 2013.
- 20 Krishna Rao, p. 171.
- 21 Rajendra Nath, *Military Leadership in India*, p. 481.
- 22 Krishna Rao, p. 169–71.
- 23 Jacob, *Surrender at Dacca*, pp. 62–75.
- 24 Sukhwant Singh, pp. 162–163.
- 25 Rajendra Nath, p. 454.
- 26 Ibid., p. 487.
- 27 Sukhwant Singh, pp. 176–178.
- 28 Siddiq Salik, *Witness to Surrender*, p. 149.
- 29 Krishna Rao, pp. 172–176.
- 30 Sukhwant Singh, p. 145.
- 31 Ibid., p. 146. Also see Rajendra Nath, p. 504.
- 32 Sukhwant Singh, p. 146.
- 33 Maj Gen Ansari's comments to Commander 62 Inf Bde cited in Rajendra Nath, p. 498.
- 34 Sukhwant Singh, pp. 147–149, and Lachhman Singh, pp. 167–170.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Sukhwant Singh, pp. 148–152, Krishna Rao, pp. 183–185, Lachhman Singh, pp. 170–173, Niazi, pp. 159–165, Jacob, p. 62.
- 37 Krishna Rao, pp. 183–185.
- 38 Sukhwant Singh, pp. 148–152, Krishna Rao, pp. 183–188, Lachhman Singh, pp. 170–173, Niazi, pp. 159–165, Jacob, p. 62., Palit, *The Lightening Campaign*, pp. 110–114.
- 39 Krishna Rao, pp. 188–191; Lachhman Singh, pp. 194–212.
- 40 Rajendra Nath, p. 521.
- 41 Op. cit.
- 42 Sukhwant Singh, pp. 202–204.
- 43 Ibid., pp. 159–160.
- 44 Krishna Rao, pp. 180–183, Sukhwant Singh, pp. 183–199, Rajendra Nath, pp. 504–507.
- 45 Ibid.

- 46 Rajendra Nath.
- 47 Sukhwant Singh, pp. 189–190.
- 48 Maj Gen. H.S. Kler, *12 Days to Dacca* (Kolkata: Power Publishers, 2015), pp. 38–40.
- 49 Sukhwant Singh, pp. 202–223, Rajendra Nath, pp. 504–507.
- 50 Krishna Rao, pp. 194–196, Sukhwant Singh, pp. 202–223, Rajendra Nath, pp. 504–507.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Rajendra Nath, pp. 508–510, Krishna Rao, pp. 195–196, Kler, *12 Days to Dacca*, pp. 57–63, Lachhman Singh, pp. 240–247.
- 53 Asian Recorder, Vol. XVIII, No. 2, p. 10565, Sukhwant Singh, pp. 210–215, Krishna Rao, pp. 195–196.
- 54 Sukhwant Singh, pp. 222–224, Rajendra Nath, pp. 240–247, Krishna Rao, pp. 195–196, Lachhman Singh, pp. 247–249.
- 55 Indian Navy, sourced from Wikimedia Commons.
- 56 Rajendra Nath, pp. 531–554.
- 57 Fazal Muqeem, *Pakistan's Crisis in Leadership* (National Book Foundation-Ferozsons-Rawalpindi, 1973), pp. 106–112, cited in A.H. Amin, The Western Theatre in 1971, A Strategic and Operational Analyses, *Defence Journal of Pakistan*, February 2002, read in <http://www.defencejournal.com/2002/february/theatre.htm>, viewed on 15 December 2016, Also see Rajendra Nath, p. 532.
- 58 Lt Gen. Gul Hassan Khan, *Memoirs* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 308–310, cited in A.H. Amin, The Western Theatre in 1971, A Strategic and Operational Analyses, *Defence Journal of Pakistan*, February, 2002, read in <http://www.defencejournal.com/2002/february/theatre.htm>, viewed on 15 December 2016.
- 59 Dhruv Katoch, Brief on The Indo-Pak War 1971: Western Theatre, published in *Journal of Centre for Land Warfare Studies*, December 17th 2011. See more at: <http://www.claws.in/743/brief-on-the-indo-pak-war-1971-western-theatre-maj-gen-dhruv-c-katoch.html#sthash.rPSKkXl4.dpuf>, viewed on 14 December 2015.
- 60 Maj Gen. Muqeem, *Pakistan's Crisis in Leadership*, cited in Rajendra Nath, p. 561.
- 61 Niazi, *Betrayal of the East*, pp. 84–85.
- 62 Krishna Rao, p. 170.
- 63 A.H. Amin, The Western Theatre in 1971, A Strategic and Operational Analyses, *Defence Journal of Pakistan*, February, 2002, <http://www.defencejournal.com/2002/february/theatre.htm>, viewed on 15 December 2016.
- 64 Dixit, *Liberation and Beyond*, pp. 93–94.
- 65 Poet Southeby quoted in Palit, *The Lightning Campaign*, p. 158. Battle of Blenheim was fought in 1703. Duke of Marlborough led this famous battle also known as War of Spanish Succession to victory.

7

MUKTI BAHINI

Strategy modus operandi and contribution

A potential revolutionary situation exists in any country where the government consistently fails in its obligation to ensure at least a minimally decent standard of life for the great majority of its citizens.

—Mao Tse-Tung, On Guerrilla Warfare¹

Mujibur Rahman gave a clarion call to the people of Bangladesh exhorting, “[The] fight must go on until the last soldier of the Pakistan occupation army is driven out of the soil of Bangladesh. Final Victory is ours”²

The Mukti Bahini and various groups of freedom fighters are synonymous with the Liberation War of Bangladesh. However, their history has been mostly mixed with facts, fiction, and sometimes harsh and uncharitable criticism, depending on who wrote their history. When bringing out a factual position about the organisation and strategy of the Mukti Bahini, particularly of the fighting force, Group Captain (later Air Vice Marshall) A.K. Khondakar, Deputy Chief of Staff, Bangladesh Liberation Force and his commanders, commented,

Due to improper recording of the events during the nine-month civil war, some facts were either not recorded at all or distorted leading to inconsistency about certain events of the war. Some popular stories in circulation may not necessarily be the real truth.³

The Bengalis of the East Pakistan Rifles revolted immediately after the brutal repression of the Pakistan Army that commenced on the night of 25 March 1971 and wanted to take on the might of the Pakistan Army in tune with the clarion call given by Sheikh Rahaman to fight until liberation. The War of Liberation was started by individual military officers with their own forces in their own areas and in their own style without any central planning or coordination.

It was only after the Bangladeshi government formally took oath on 17 April 1971 that the process of coordinating the entire war effort was initiated.⁴ This chapter deliberates the following issues:

- a What made people join the liberation war en masse?
- b What were their organisational structure, strategy, and operational tactics?
- c How does one rate their performance and contribution in the liberation war?

“Mukti Bahini” was a generic term that denoted different categories of freedom fighters. Initially it started with the name “Mukti Fauz,” which was later changed to “Mukti Bahini” by substituting the Urdu word “fauz” with the Bengali word “bahini.” The increasing terror tactics of the Pakistan army gave the Mukti Bahini more recruits than they could absorb. There was no dearth of volunteers from all sections of society. The formation of the Mukti Bahini went through various stages after the brutal attack on 25 March 1971 and grew into a large and complex organisation with different kinds of capabilities. Col. M.A.G. Osmani, their Commander-in-Chief, said that

the Mukti Bahini was manufactured overnight by the Pakistan Army. Bengalis in the Army and Police might have stayed neutral had Pakistan limited their action against selected politicians. It was only when the information got around that Pakistani army was out to kill Bengali intellectuals and servicemen as well that they revolted to a man.⁵

Bengali officers and men of the East Pakistan Rifles (EPR) who were deployed along the border were the first to revolt and raise the flag of Bangladesh.⁶

On behalf of Mujibur Rahman, Maj. Ziaur Rahman, who later became President of Bangladesh, declared independence on 27 March from a radio station at Kalurghat (Chittagong). These EPR and Bengali police personnel who revolted brought their arms along and fought the Pakistan army at Chittagong, Saidpur, Kushtia, and few other places. They suffered heavy casualties. Here they realised that they had to adopt tactics of asymmetric warfare because the Pakistani army was superior to them in strength, training, arms, and ammunitions.

After the Bangladesh government took the oath on 17 April 1971, the process was initiated to integrate and coordinate various aspects of the liberation struggle. Defected military officers who were so far fighting the liberation war on an individual scale in a disjointed manner were invited to a coordinating conference by the government of Bangladesh, functioning from House Number 8, Theatre Road (now Shakespeare Sarani), Calcutta. The conference that lasted from July 11 to July 17 was attended by the following:⁷

1 Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed

2 Col. M.A.G. Osmani

3 Lt. Col. M.A. Rab

142 Mukti Bahini: Strategy and modus operandi

- 4 Group Captain A.K. Khondakar
- 5 Maj. C.R. Dutt
- 6 Maj. Ziaur Rahaman
- 7 Maj. Khaled Musharaf
- 8 Maj. Mir Shawkat Ali
- 9 Maj. Mir Shawkat Ali
- 10 Wing Commander M.K. Bashar
- 11 Maj. Abu Osman Choudhury
- 12 Maj. A.R. Chowdhury
- 13 Capt. M.A. Jalil

Organisation of the Mukti Bahini

Amazingly, by the end of April, the number of volunteers rose to 2,50,000. They were screened by the Awami League MNAs (Member of National Assembly) and MPAs (Member of Provincial Assembly) and those that followed the Awami League ideals were selected. After indoctrination, shortlisted persons were sent to India for training in the use of weapons and explosives. By July 1971, the organisation took the following shape:

When analysing the Mukti Bahini and its transformation and action, one finds similarity with the French concept of civil war that entails three stages:

Crystallisation: involves psychological rallying of the people.

Edification: mainly includes organisation of the revolutionary structure.

Militarisation: simultaneous creation and operation of a military machine.⁸

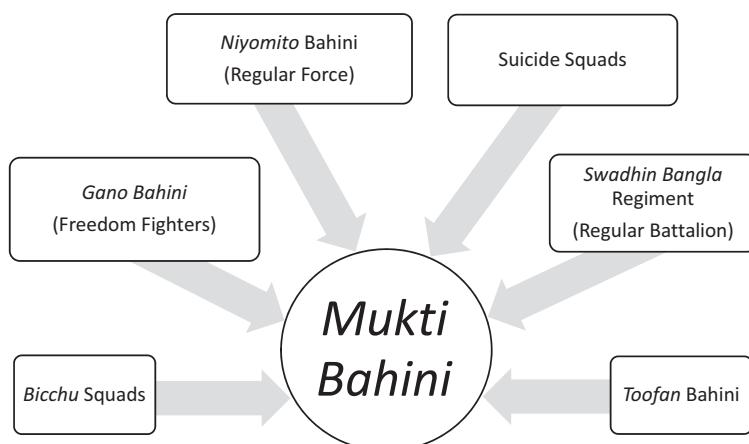


FIGURE 7.1 Mukti Bahini organisational structure.⁹

The credit for a codified doctrine of offensive guerrilla strategy goes to Mao Tse Tung. During the liberation war of Bangladesh, highly motivated but less trained and under equipped Mukti Bahini's strategy of a revolutionary warfare was essentially a series of guerrilla operations against a well-equipped and well-trained conventional army. In essence, it was an asymmetrical war. It may look simple in concept, but its application is rather complex. Mao Tse Tung taught us that if a poorly equipped and trained revolutionary force wishes to fight a relatively modern and well-equipped army, the only way to win ultimate victory lies in a strategically protracted war. To win such a war, revolutionaries must try to reverse the power relationship by (1) wearing down the enemy's strength with the cumulative effect of many campaigns and battles; (2) building their own strength through mobilising the support of the people, establishing bases, and capturing equipment; and (3) gaining outside political and, if possible, military support.¹⁰ From the point of view of the Mukti Joddhas (liberation warriors), the Liberation War ended in less than ten months because India became party to it. Their strategy by far followed Mao's dictum.

General Giap, the Vietminh architect of the victory against the French and the strategic brain behind the Vietcong in South Vietnam, wrote in his book *People's War People's Army*:

Revolutionary armed struggle in any country has common fundamental laws. Revolutionary armed struggle in each country has characteristics and laws of its own too.¹¹

The guerrilla movement was composed of three wings: well-armed action groups, which took part in frontal attacks; military intelligence units; and guerrilla bases. Colonel M.A.G. Osmani (later General) was appointed the Commander-in-Chief of all Bangladesh forces. The members of EBR, EPR, police, and other paramilitary forces were later called the "regular force" or "*niyomito bahini*".

The Teliapara document prepared under the supervision of Col. Osmani and ratified by the Bangladesh government in exile outlined the strategy of the Liberation War. It stated that:¹²

- a A big guerrilla force would be trained to destroy pro-Pakistani collaborators, disrupt communications to immobilise the Pakistani troops, and follow hit and run tactics against Pakistani posts and military convoys so that the Pakistanis would live under perpetual tension and confusion.
- b The already trained forces in the Mukti Bahini would be organised into sector troops and placed in different sectors for giving support to the guerrillas.
- c Capable persons from the regular units and guerrillas would be selected and trained to form a regular force to undertake armed actions against the Pakistan Army.

Indian Army extends support to Mukti Bahini

On 1 May 1971, General Manekshaw, Indian Army Chief, issued Army Headquarters Operation Instruction Number 52 to the GOC-in-C Eastern Command. Its aim was to assist the Bangladesh Government in Exile in organising the liberation movement. It also spelt out the broad scope of the Indian Army in facilitating, raising, training, equipping, and providing logistics support etc. to the East Bengal Mukti Joddhas for employment in their own land so they could carry on the fight for liberation. The GOC-in-C Eastern Command was assigned following tasks by the Army Chief:¹³

- a Advise and guide the Provisional Government of Bangladesh and obtain their concurrence on issues like setting up an appropriate politico-military organisation for waging war.
- b Decide and obtain concurrence of the Bangladesh government on the size of the guerrilla force. Plan for an initial size of 20,000 men to be enlarged to 100,000 subsequently.
- c Evolve and establish an intelligence set up
- d Enlarge the scope of the guerrilla operation in East Bengal by gradually escalating the intensity of the operation in the following manner:
 - **Stage 1:** Tie down Pakistani troops by keeping the border hot. Isolate and eliminate selected weakly held BOPs by the Bangladesh Force with the help of the artillery and mortar fire support of the BSF and Indian Army.
 - **Stage 2:** Commence induction of the freedom fighters inside Bangladesh for carrying out the destruction of communications systems and establishment of guerrilla bases deep inside Bangladesh.
 - **Stage 3:** Carry out raids and destroy industries, installations, petroleum dumps, etc.

Organisation and planning of Liberation Army

During the coordinating and strategy planning conference of all commanders held in July in Calcutta, Lt. Col. M.A. Rabb was appointed the Chief of Staff and Group Captain A.K. Khondaker was appointed the Deputy Chief of Staff. Force Commanders and Sector Commanders were also appointed by the Government of Bangladesh. On 15 July, Force Commanders and Sector Commanders were administered oath of allegiance to the Government of Bangladesh by the Acting President Mr. Nazrul Islam in presence of Mr. Tajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister of Bangladesh. For the purpose of the Liberation War, Bangladesh was divided into 11 sectors and areas of operation, along with a demarcation of the sectors. Sector-wise details are enumerated below:¹⁴

No. 1 sector

This sector covered the area of the districts of Chittagong, Chittagong Hill tracts, and part of Noakhali district (the area east of Muhuri River). This sector had five sub-sectors and approximately 2,100 troops, out of which 1,500 were

EPR soldiers, 200 police, 300 army personnel, and 100 members of the navy and air force. In addition, this sector had 20,000 guerrillas, of which 8,000 were organised in groups. One hundred percent of the sector troops and 30% of the guerrillas were given arms and ammunitions.

Maj. Ziaur Rahman was the commander of this sector initially but during the July conference he was made Force Commander and Capt. Rafiqul Islam was appointed Sector Commander.

No. 2 sector

This sector comprised the eastern part of Faridpur, southern part of the Dacca district including Dacca city, Comilla district (excluding area north of Akhaura-Ashuganj rail line), and Noakhali district (excluding areas east of the Muhuri river). This sector was further subdivided into six sub-sectors and in total, there were 4,000 sector troops and elements of a co-located “K-Force.” In addition, the sector had 30,000 guerrillas approximately. Maj. Khaled Musharraf was performing the duties of Sector Commander as well as K-Force Commander. Later Maj. M. Haider was made Sector Commander.

No. 3 sector

This sector covered the area part of Comilla district (north of the Ashuganj-Akhaura rail line), part of Sylhet district (south of Churamankati-Lakhai-Shastaganj general line), northern part of the Dacca district, and the Kishoreganj subdivision of Mymensingh district. The sector was further divided into ten sub-sectors and had about 2,500 sector troops and 25,000 guerrillas. Maj. K.M. Safiullah was Sector Commander. But on raising of “S-Force,” Maj. Safiullah became Force Commander and Maj. Nuruzzaman was appointed Sector Commander of this sector.

No. 4 sector

This sector comprised parts of the Sylhet district, with the western boundary along the general line Tamabil-Ajmirganj-Lakhai and the southern boundary along the general line between Lakhai and Shastaganj. This sector was further divided into six sub-sectors and had about 2,000 troops and 8,000 guerrillas. Maj. C.R. Datta was Sector Commander.

No. 5 sector

This sector covered the geographical area of the northern part of the Sylhet district, i.e., west of the general line Tamabil-Ajmirganj. It was further divided into six sub-sectors and had 800 sector troops and 7,000 guerrillas. Maj. Mir Shawkat Ali was the Sector Commander.

No. 6 sector

This sector covered the area west of the Jamuna river, comprising the districts of Rangpur and Dinajpur (excluding Ranisankali and Pirgunj). This sector was

divided into five sub-sectors and had 1,200 troops and 6,000 guerrillas. Wing Commander M.K. Bashar was Sector Commander.

No. 7 sector

This sector comprised the area of the Rajshai Pabna and Bogra districts, and parts of the Rangpur and Dinajpur districts. It was further divided into eight sub-sectors and had approximately 2,000 troops and 10,000 guerrillas. Maj. Nazmul Haq operated in this sector and after his accidental death Maj. Q.N. Zaman was made Sector Commander.

No. 8 sector

The area of this sector covered the districts of Khulna and Jessore as well as part of Faridkot district and the Satkhira subdivision in the Khulna district. It was further divided into seven sub-sectors and had 2,000 sector troops in addition to 7,000 thousand guerrillas. Benapol was the sector HQ and Maj. M.A. Manzur was Sector Commander. However, until August, Maj. M.A. Choudhury was commander.

No. 9 sector

The districts of Barishal, Patuakhali, Khulna (excluding Satkhira), and part of Gopalganj in the Faridpur district were the area of responsibility of this sector. It was divided into eight sub-sectors that had about 700 troops and 10,000 guerrillas. Capt. M.A Jalil was the Sector Commander.

No. 10 sector

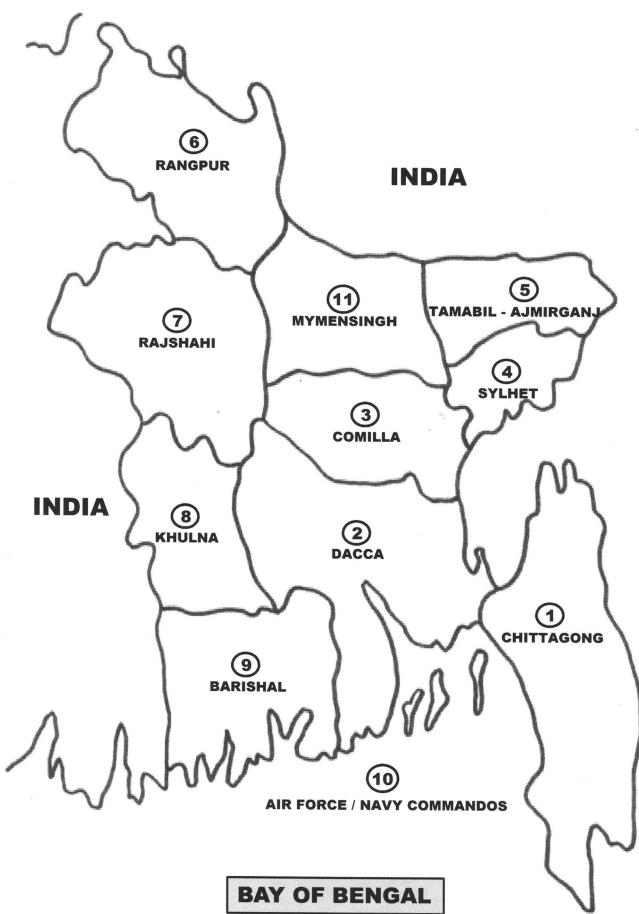
This sector was formed to accommodate Bangladeshi navy and air force commandos and during different operations in different areas, their control would fall on the respective Sector Commander. Therefore, this sector did not have any territorial limits. There were also tasked with holding and defending the liberated area of Bangladesh. It was planned that the Provisional Government of Bangladesh would shift its headquarters to the liberated area.¹⁵

No. 11 sector

This sector comprised the districts of Mymensingh and Tangail. Bahadurabad ghat and Fulchariaghata in the Jamuna in the north were also included. This sector had eight sub-sectors and a battalion's worth of troops in addition to 20,000 guerrillas. Maj. A. Taher was the Sector Commander.

Raising of regular army brigades

It was later decided that regular army brigades would be raised and a brigade would be termed a “force.” Accordingly, three of them were raised: K-Force



MAP 7.1 Sector-wise area of operation of the Mukti Bahini.

with Maj. Khaled Musarraf as its force commander raised in No. 2 sector, S-Force in No. 3 sector with Maj. K.M Shafiullah named its commander, and Z-Force with its HQ in India, lying north of the Sylhet and Mymensingh districts. Maj. Ziaur Rahman was the Z-Force commander.¹⁶

Jackpot sectors

On 26 March 1971, the BSF on orders from the Government of India commenced aiding the revolting Bangladeshi forces. On 29 April, the Indian government requested the army to take over the responsibility of assisting the Bangladeshi forces in their liberation war and the BSF was placed under command of the army.¹⁷ As stated earlier, the Army HQ accordingly issued formal instructions to the HQ Eastern Command on 1 May. Though the Eastern

Command was otherwise helping the Bangladesh Government in Exile set up its infrastructure, it commenced its formal support of the Mukti Bahini from 15 May onwards. Under the codename “Operation Jackpot,” the Indian Army coordinated training, arming, administration, and logistics support and offered advice on guerrilla operation. Initially, Maj. Gen. Onkar Singh Kalkat was the head of this project and was later succeeded by Maj. Gen. B.N. Sarkar. The areas bordering East Pakistan were divided into six logistical sectors, each to be commanded by a brigadier from the Indian army. Their areas of responsibility were called “jackpot sectors.” The Mukti Bahini sectors of Bangladesh were put under their command during the organisational stage. Each jackpot sector looked after one or more Bangladesh sectors, each of which was commanded by a BSF Commandant along with a Bangladeshi Mukti Bahini Commander who shared responsibility of the particular sector jointly. Details of the jackpot sectors are as given below:

- 1 A Sector (HQ: Binaguri, West Bengal), Sector Commander: Brig. J.C. Joshi. Bangladesh sector No. 6 was under it.
- 2 B Sector (HQ: Raigunj, West Bengal), Commander: Brig. Prem Singh. Bangladesh sector No. 7 was under it.
- 3 C Sector (HQ: Krishnanagar, West Bengal) Commander: Brig. N.A. Salick. Bangladesh sector Nos. 8 and 9 were under it.
- 4 D Sector (HQ: Agartala, Tripura), Commander: Brig. Sabeg Singh. Bangladesh sector Nos. 1, 2, and 3 were placed under it.
- 5 E Sector (HQ: Masimpur, Assam), Commander: Brig. M.B. Wadke, Bangladesh No. 4 sector under it.
- 6 F Sector (HQ: Tura, Meghalaya), Commander: Brig. Sant Singh. Later this sector was called “FJ sector.” In June, this sector was further divided by creating an E-1 Sector at Jarain (Shillong). Bangladesh sector No. 11 and Sector No. 5 (under E-1) were under this sector.

Through this network, Mukti Bahini forces communicated with the Mukti Bahini Headquarters Exiled in Kolkata and coordinated all supply, training, and operational efforts for the war. Lt. Gen. J. S. Aurora, Commander of the Eastern Command, was overseeing the entire operation.¹⁸ Regarding coordination of the Indian efforts through the Indian Sector Commanders, the official record states:

It was mainly through the Indian Sector Commanders (Jackpot Sectors) that the Mukti Bahini maintained their link with the Bangladesh Force HQ. All the operational policies were formulated at the highest level jointly between HQ Eastern Command and the Bangladesh Forces HQ and the implementation of these policies was the responsibility of the Indian and the Bangladeshi Sector Commanders. At times however, contradictory

orders were sent to the sector commanders which hindered their smooth functioning.¹⁹

During the coordinating conference held in July, the following broad strategy was formulated for conducting war against the Pakistan Armed Forces:²⁰

- 1 A large number of guerrilla fighters would be sent into Bangladesh to carry out ambushes at every convenient place.
- 2 Industries would be shut down by disrupting the electric supply. To achieve this, power substations and electric poles would be blown up.
- 3 Pakistanis would not be allowed to export any raw materials or manufactured goods and warehouses would be destroyed.
- 4 The vehicles, railways, and boats used to carry enemy soldiers and military instruments would be destroyed.
- 5 The war strategy would be to force the enemy to disperse.
- 6 After dispersing the enemy, the smaller groups would be attacked by the guerrilla fighters.

A decision was taken to create a new non-conventional fighting force by training a large number of volunteers within a short time, who would adopt hit and run tactics to weaken enemy morale. The combatants were also divided and reorganised into several groups.²¹

- 1 Organising guerrilla warfare:
 - i Groups of 5–10 trained fighters, which would be sent into Bangladesh with specific instructions to carry out guerrilla activities.
 - ii Guerrilla fighters who would be classified as:
 - Guerrilla base: each base would provide food, medicine, and accommodation to the guerrilla fighters.
 - Action group: members of this group would take part in frontal attacks, 50–100% of them would carry arms.
 - Intelligence: members of this group would gather enemy information, they would not take part in frontal attacks, 30% of them would carry arms.
- 2 The regular force would be organised as battalion forces and sector troops.

Training

Under the supervision of the Ministry of Rehabilitation, Government of India, 25 Youth Camps, each with a capacity of 1,000, were established adjacent to the Bangladeshi borders, from where youths were recruited for the Mukti Bahini. To begin with, six training camps were established near Jackpot Sector HQ to train 1,000 men per month per camp. Local army formations were supporting the effort by providing instructors at the rate of one officer for every 100 trainees, one

JCO for every 50 trainees, and one NCO for ever 20 trainees. All the freedom fighters were given four weeks of training initially, which later was reduced to three weeks to churn out more guerrillas. Training on weapon handling, field craft, raids and ambushes, and commando training, including the handling of simple demolition charges and operations of small radio sets, were imparted. Medical training was also imparted to different groups for rendering medical aid to the guerrillas.

In July 1971, the number of trainees increased to 12,000 per month, which was further enhanced to 20,000 per month from September onwards by establishing additional training camps and also increasing capacity of the existing training camps.²²

Three-month officers' training was imparted to 130 cadets at Moorti Camp (Binaguri) to provide junior leaders for the regular battalions.²³ An official account on the state of trained manpower can be gauged by the following statement:

By the end of November 1971, over 83,000 Freedom Fighters were trained, of which 51,000 were operating inside East Bengal. They were organized into teams of 10, squads of 20, and groups of 100–150. Each team was equipped with for.303 rifles, two SLR rifles, three sten guns and one light machine gun, plus two hand grenades per Freedom Fighter and sufficient quantity of explosives for demolition.²⁴

Various Groups of the Mukti Bahini²⁵

- 1 Suicide Squad: They were tasked with killing prominent workers of the Muslim League, Jamaat-e-Islami, Razakars, and Pakistani government officials. To avoid arrest, they were supposed to commit suicide.
- 2 *Bichhu* (Scorpion) Squad: They reportedly had a female wing comprised of young girls who were tasked with carrying out espionage, sabotage, and subversion in big towns like Dacca and Chittagong.
- 3 *Toofani Bahini* (Storm Troops): The Awami League in early 1971 created this organisation. They performed the tasks of commandos and operated underground.

Mujib Bahini

An elite force thoroughly loyal to Mujib whose members believed in his ideology was created secretly under supervision of Maj. Gen. Uban of the Indian Army and Student League leaders Serajul Alam Khan, Sheikh Fazlul Haque Mani, Kazi Arif Ahmed, Abdur Razzak, Tofael Ahmed, A.S.M. Abdur Rab, Shahjahan Siraj, Nur E. Alam Siddiqi, and Abdul Quddus Makhon. Apparently, this force was created to be a check on the left-wing Maoists of East Bengal and to prevent them from taking control of the Mukti Bahini. This force did not report to Col. Osmani or to the Bangladesh Government in Exile, or even to HQ

Eastern Command, though administrative support was provided by the Eastern Command, Calcutta. This obviously, at times, created friction. It had 8,000 members who were indoctrinated and trained for 45 days on guerrilla warfare. The whole of Bangladesh was divided in to four zones and each was placed under a leader of this Bahini. Sheikh Moni controlled the Chittagong, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Noakhali, and Sylhet districts. Abdul Razzak controlled the Tangail and Mymensingh districts. Sirajul Alam looked after the Rangpur, Dinajpur, Rajshahi and Bogra districts. Tofael Ahmed was in charge of Mujib Bahini operation in the Kushtia, Jessore, Khulna, Faridpur, Patuakhali, and part of the Pabna districts.

Phantom Force

A secret force comprising of 1,800 persons of 22 Establishments, directly operating under the control of the Special Secretary External to the Cabinet, Government of India operated in areas in and around the Chittagong Hill Tracts to harass the Pakistan Army in that area and also to destroy their lines of communication. This force was commanded by Maj. Gen. S.S. Uban and at times is referred to as the Uban Force. The Eastern Command provided logistics support but had no control over it. Uban was guided by the Chief of Army Staff on the operational aspect. Though both the Mujib Bahini and the Phantom Force were placed under command of Maj. Gen. S.S. Uban, these two forces operated separately.²⁶

Local guerrilla forces²⁷

There were quite a few local guerrilla forces of varying sizes operating in their area of influence and control and these groups did not report to Col. Osmani, the overall commanders of the Mukti Bahini Force. A few important groups are listed below:

- **Kader Bahini:** A former NCO of the Pakistan Army and later an Awami League student leader, Abdul Kader Siddiqui, popularly known as Tiger Siddiqui, is deemed to have organised 17,000 guerrillas and an auxiliary force numbering approximately 70,000 people, comprising rural area school students. Kader Bahini carried out some spectacular attacks in the Tangail outpost in June 1971 and killed 16 Pakistan Army soldiers. On 12 August, they successfully raided Pakistani vessels in the Dhaleswari River, killed about 100 Pakistani soldiers, and captured large quantity arms and ammunitions, including Chinese- and British-made weapons. Later in September, he met senior Indian army officers, namely Lt. Gen. Aurora, Brig. Sant Singh, etc., in Tripura and chalked out his further operational plans. The Indian army assisted him with warlike stores, including wireless sets, and also provided air force support on 10 December during their attack on the Ghatal and Gopalpur police stations and next day in their attack on Tangail.

After the PARA Battalion drop at Tangail, the Kader Bahini joined them and became part of Brig. H.S. Kler's brigade on their march to Dacca. He captured a large number of Razakkars and Pakistani soldiers and destroyed many bridges to restrict the movement of Pakistani troops.

- **Hemayet Bahini:** This force consisted of approximately 350 ex-soldiers and was under the command of Havildar Major Hemayet. This force was very supportive of Mujibur Rahman's philosophy and cooperated with the Mukti Bahini and the government of Bangladesh. They were terrors to the Muslim League and Jamaat-e-Islami followers. They operated in and around the Faridpur district.
- **Left-Wing Resistance Group:**²⁸
 - The Pro-Moscow Resistance Group of Bangladesh with leaders like Muzaffar Ahmed, Moni Singh Garo, Deben Sikdar, and Thakur participated in the liberation struggle. Initially they were active in Dacca, Comilla, Narsingdi Brahmanbaria, and Ghorashal. After the raising of the Mujib Bahini, they fell back to India. Later, they got direct support from India and formed a guerrilla force with a strength of approximately 20,000 people, who actively participated in different sectors during the Liberation War.
 - Various pro-Chinese communist groups of East Pakistan were disillusioned with China supporting Pakistan. East Pakistan Communist Party (ML) leader Amal Sen and communist leader Maulana Bhasani came to Calcutta and formed a Coordination Committee for Bangladesh Liberation. This group condemned China but disliked dominance of Awami League and the Indian government. Later, Bhasani severed relations with this group and started supporting the Bangladesh Government in Exile. A section of East Bengal Communist Party (ML) led by Abdul Haq and Mohammed Toaha condemned China but at the same time described the Awami League-led movement as a conspiracy of Soviet social imperialism and Indian expansionism. They raised 10,000 Red Guerrillas who were poorly armed and equipped. However, they took part in some actions against the Pakistani army at different places but suffered heavy casualties. They also at times clashed with the Mukti Bahini because of their ideological differences.
 - There were other groups of the East Bengal Communist Party like the Matin Alauddin group; the Ohidul Group; the Myathi Group, led by Agni Prabha Myathi; and another named the Sarbahara Group, led by Siraj Sikdar. There were also other small pro-Peking groups like the Menon-Kazi Zaffar group and the Nashiur-Nurul-Huda group. A few of these cooperated with the Mukti Bahini but some of them did not do so.²⁹

Bangladesh Navy³⁰

Some 400 naval commandos and frogmen were trained at Plassey under Commander Mathis of the Indian Navy. The Bangladesh Navy was raised in August 1971 with two boats MV Polash and MV Padma taken on loan by HQ Eastern

Command from the government of West Bengal. They were fitted with Bofors L60 40 mm guns. Commander Samant, the submariner seconded to Eastern Command by the Indian Navy, was overall in charge of this force. The navy initially had officers on deputation from the Indian Navy but had 45 former Bengali naval personnel of the Pakistani Navy, which included many frogmen. This naval force proved to be extremely effective for harassing merchant ships going to East Pakistan and laying mines on the waterways.

Bangladesh Air Force³¹

A small unit of the Bangladesh Air Force was raised in Dimapur with those Bengali officers and men who had deserted the Pakistani Air Force. This unit commanded by Group Capt. A.K. Khandekar started functioning from Dimapur from 28 September 1971. The unit had 17 officers and 50 technicians. The Indian Air Force transferred a Dakota, an Otter, and an Alouette helicopter to them. Flt. Lt. Sultan Mahmud was the commander of Kilo Flight. The unit relocated to Agartala and then Shamshernagar after 3 December 1971.

The Bangladesh Air Force performed communication duties with the Bangladesh Government in Exile and their military's top brass. After India launched its offensive operation in Bangladesh in December, the Bangladesh Air Force successfully launched 12 sorties against Pakistani targets.

Operations

In early stages of the civil war, the Mukti Bahini guerrillas attacked isolated Pakistani posts, lines of communications, and other vulnerable areas. However, after the Pakistanis managed to gain reasonable control in Dacca and other major cities, they spread out into the countryside and on to the border areas. Their efforts were concentrated on preventing infiltration and depredations by the Mukti Bahini. Apart from re-establishing various outposts along the border, the Pakistani troops carried out combing operations, with a view to eliminating armed resistance. The local population was so terrorised that they were unable to fully cooperate with the Mukti Bahini for fear of reprisals. The job of the Mukti Bahini thus became difficult. During the initial stage of the Liberation War, Pakistani troops crossing into Indian territory while chasing Mukti Fauz soldiers were allowed to return, but from 1 June onwards this was not allowed. The Indian Army joined the Mukti Bahini in repelling such hot pursuits by the Pakistani troops.³²

The armed freedom struggle of the people of East Bengal can be broadly divided into four phases:³³

- 1 **Period of Unorganised Resistance (25 March to 15 May 1971):** During this period, serious fighting took place between the Pakistani troops and the revolting Bengali officers and men of the EBR in the areas in and around

Chittagong, Saidpur, Kushtia, and in some other places. Heavy casualties were suffered by both forces. The Pakistan army used all its might, from artillery to the air force, to quell these attacks. EBR and EPR personnel crossed over to India for sanctuary and further assistance from the Indian Army. However, some East Pakistan BOPs were captured with the assistance of fire support from the BSF.

- 2 **Creation and Training of the Mukti Bahini (mid-May to end June):** The Indian Army, according to the plan of the Liberation War evolved jointly with the Bangladesh Provisional Government, commenced training the guerrillas. Selection from the volunteers was done by Awami League office bearers. Arming, equipping, and other administrative arrangements were coordinated by HQ Eastern Command and the local formations deployed nearer to the borders of East Pakistan.
- 3 **Monsoon Offensive (July–August):** The first batch of 110 freedom fighters infiltrated the Madaripur area in July 1971. They achieved success in damaging five tea factories and putting 14 tea gardens out of production. Communication lines and electric pylons were destroyed at many places in Dacca, Comilla, and Chittagong. Special mention must be made about the destruction of the railway bridge at Narsingdi, where Pakistanis suffered heavy casualties. In August, the Mukti Bahini dominated quite a few pockets and salients and retained territory like Belonia and Kaliashar in Tripura. About 6,000 freedom fighters were operating deep inside Bangladesh and organised about 1,000 raids and ambushes, which unsettled the Pakistani army in many ways.
- 4 **Period of increasing guerrilla warfare (September to 3rd December):** During this period, in addition to increasing guerrilla operations because of the infiltration of the large number of freedom fighters inside Bangladesh, a greater number of BOPs were also attacked. Particularly in the month of November, many preliminary operations were undertaken by the Mukti Bahini along with the Indian Army.
- 5 **Period from 4 to 16 December:** This is the period when the Indian Army officially launched the Bangladesh campaign. Regular units functioned to complement the operational plan of the Indian Army. Later they came under the overall command of Lt. Gen. J.S. Aurora of the Eastern Command and the combined force was called Mitro Bahini (Allied Force).

Role of cultural activists and intelligentsia in motivating the Mukti Bahini

A civil war and uprising can be sustained if there is an adequate level of motivation. In the case of the Bangladesh Liberation War, Bengalis displayed great nationalistic spirit. They suffered deprivation and hardships but continued their struggle. In the hour of this crisis, *Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra* (Radio Station of Independent Bangladesh) played a key role in igniting passion and motivating

people by airing programmes like *Agnishikha* (The Flame), a programme for freedom fighters; *Jagarani* (Awakening), a revolutionary musical programme; *Rakta Shaskhar* (Impression in Blood), a nationalistic literary programme; *Chorompotro* (Letter Ultimate), hosted by M.R. Akhtar; *Jallader Darbar* (Court of a Butcher) by Kalyan Mitra; and *Bojro Kontho* (Thunderous Voice), which presented speeches of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

World Opinion

Excerpts from different newspapers and comments from prominent world leaders on the Liberation War also aired to motivate people by letting them know the international support they had for their struggle. Many poems and songs were written for broadcasting. One of these, *Joy Bangla Banglar Joy* (Victory of Bengal) was the signature tune of the radio. Songs like Purbo Digante Surjo Uthechhe; Ekti Phoolke Bachabo Bole; Salam Salam Hajar Salam; Janatar Sangram Chalbe Chalbe ; Sona, Sona, Sona, Loke Bale Sona, Sona Noi Tato Khati, Loke Jato Bale, Taro Cheye Khati Amar Bangla Desher Mati became immensely popular. The radio station, through its inspiring programmes, boosted morale and motivated people and the Mukti Joddhas to face the Pakistanis and keep fighting. The radio station was no less strong than the men fighting with guns. Over 20 newspapers sprung up during the Liberation War; a few were printed, some cystaloyed, and a few were even handwritten to inspire the people to fight.³⁴

Performance assessment and contribution of Mukti Bahini

To be fair to the Mukti Bahini, their performance has to be gauged after labelling them as nationalists rather than revolutionaries, as this would probably be more accurate. In any case, they should not be compared with Mao Tse Tung's Red Army or with Vietcong soldiers. According to the philosophy of Mao, his Red Army fought a protracted revolutionary war for a long duration, as did the Vietcong, but here the war lasted for nine months and because of its own political-economic compulsions, India became party to the Bangladesh Liberation War. This war was a war of masses where not only did the leadership have to mobilise masses but also win them over. The Mukti Joddhas also faced problems of inadequate arms, ammunition, and equipment.

In the early phase of the war, after some initial success, the insurgency started by the individual officers with their groups waned because of their inability to stand against the much stronger and better-equipped Pakistani Army. Another important reason for this can be attributed to the inability to draw up and implement an integrated plan, laying down aims, objectives, and proper priorities. Neither was an effort made to establish a countrywide and regional system of command and control by nominating leaders and defining areas of operational responsibilities. This problem was overcome in stages after India joined them in their struggle, albeit tacitly, because of its concern over the mass flow of refugees.

The BSF and later the Indian Army got involved with the Mukti Bahini, who crossed over to India in end-April after being driven out by Pakistani troops. Operation Jackpot launched by the Indian Army mitigated this issue, which was further streamlined after the mid-July coordination meeting of Sector Commanders with the Bangladesh Government in Exile. Col. Osmani had a mindset of conventional warfare whereas the requirement was for more of a guerrilla-style of warfare. But from August onwards, the performance of the guerrillas improved. They disrupted communications and their actions hit many industries particularly the tea industry, bringing them almost to a grinding halt. Most importantly, the Pakistani Army changed their deployment strategy because of numerous guerrilla operations.

Prior to the Bangladesh campaign, regular units duly supported by the Indian Army and the BSF could gain some territory in Bangladesh through the reduction of Pakistani BOPs, which were later used as launching pads for the main operation. And during the actual campaign, they became part of the Mitro Bahini and launched an operation to complement the Indian plan. Many of them helped in arranging local transport to facilitate the speedy movement of the Indian army when it was racing for Dacca. Most importantly, freedom fighters provided much needed intelligence to the Indian army.

Other freelance guerrilla groups like Kader Bahini, Hemayet Bahini, etc. undoubtedly contributed towards accelerating the operation. The former claimed to have liberated 97 km of the road from Jamalpur to Mymensingh and captured 7,000 Pakistani soldiers and 14,500 Razakars.³⁵

Pakistani writers in particular have shown the Mukti Bahini in poor light. For example, Niazi wrote:

Our opponents the Bengalis were not considered a fighting class by the British. They had no military traditions and background or war experience. ... They were not a cohesive team, only a collection of units, groups, and individuals. Their Commander Colonel Osmani was not the type who could instil confidence in his subordinates... he had experience of staff work but lacked the experience of command of troops in battle. If the Indians and the Russians had not helped the Bengalis, they would have never dared to revolt against the centre.³⁶

This expression comes from a typical West Pakistani mindset of looking down at the Bengalis as a non-martial race, though it is true that the civil war initially was not centrally coordinated and some groups until the end were functioning independently from the Bangladesh Government in Exile.

While describing the situation as in November 1971, Maj. Gen. Sukhwant Singh wrote:

Niazi was gradually squeezed by Mukti Bahini, and this inflamed the entire border with well-planned attacks on the BOPs accompanied by efforts

to capture some salients inside East Pakistan which could help India's eventual full-fledged intervention. ... If Mukti Bahini got into difficulties, they were helped out by BSF and Indian Army. Operations of Bayra, Belonia, Kamalpur and Akhaura fall into this category.³⁷

The Mukti Bahini had mixed bag of success until the monsoon finished; rather they had very little success, which did not dent the military capability of East Pakistan army. But the scenario changed after the post-monsoon period until the end of the Liberation War. Maj. Gen. Lachhman Singh, offering a balanced view on the Mukti Bahini's contribution, states:

The direct impact of the guerrillas on the Pakistanis was not great and their contribution to the final outcome of the war was limited in the tactical sphere. But strategically, Mukti Bahini achieved its aim fully. It kept the flame of struggle aglow and the Bengali masses never gave up hope of eventual freedom....The mere presence of a large number guerrillas posed a strategic threat to the Pakistanis, who had the feeling of sitting on the top of a volcano which might erupt any moment. Indirectly it helped in dispersal of the Pakistan Army and compelled to adopt a forward posture. The most significant contribution of the Mukti Bahini was to force a faulty strategic deployment on Pakistan involving a rigid out post policy which denuded them of balance and reserve.³⁸

Though small in size, the newly created Bangladesh Navy and the naval frogmen did a commendable job by sabotaging merchant ships at the Khulna and Chalna ports and the estuaries. Even the newly raised Bangladesh Air Force, though mainly employed in communication duties, undertook 12 combat sorties in support of the main operation of the ground forces. It contributed to damaging the oil depots at Chittagong and Naryangan on 2 December 1971. It was the sense of participation and doing their bit for their country became more important. So, overall, all shades of freedom fighters contributed to accelerating the liberation of Bangladesh, certain weaknesses shown in some actions notwithstanding. General Jacob comments,

Due credit be given to the achievements of the Mukti Bahini. They played a crucial and major role in the operations leading to the surrender of the Pakistani Eastern command. They fought with courage and determination. ... They demoralized the Pakistani forces and eroded their will to fight.³⁹

Historians generally ascribe the birth of the Mukti Bahini and the commencement of civil war to the aftermath of the Pakistani Army's brutal repression on the night of 25/26 March 1971, i.e., the date when Operation Torchlight commenced and immediately thereafter, when Mujibur Rahman declared East Pakistan the "sovereign, independent People's Republic of Bangladesh." However,

Maj. Gen. Fajal Muqeem Khan in his book *Pakistan's Crisis in Leadership* mentioned that the Awami League had already formed a military committee under the retired army officer Col. M.A.G. Osmani and a plan was made in December 1970 to seize power militarily through insurgency, should political negotiations fail.⁴⁰ His statement could not be corroborated. Whatever may be the truth, the Mukti Bahini became visible in their sporadic successful actions against Pakistani troops from 27 March onwards. But the joy of this early victory did not last long because the Pakistani Army retaliated with great ferocity, resulting in heavy casualties. Those Bengali troops that revolted became terror stricken, traumatised, and rudderless. They crossed the Indian border for sanctuary. That glowing flame of freedom was flickering, it was time to protect its spark and nourish it back to life again, lest it die down.⁴¹ Initially, India's response was cautious. It did not recognise the Provisional Government of Bangladesh. It was not to be seen openly supporting and abetting the insurgency. So, the BSF was tasked with providing limited support. Bangladeshi rebel forces that crossed over to India were reorganised into rough sectors for the purpose of operation and Sector Commanders were nominated. On 30 April 1971, the Government of India made the Indian Army responsible for coordinating all affairs of the Mukti Bahini because of the magnitude of the influx of refugees and the BSF's inability to handle such a large force. Responsibility obviously fell on the HQ Eastern Command, Calcutta, who worked in tandem with the Provisional Government of Bangladesh and as per guidelines issued by the Chief of Army Staff.

Initial operations of the Mukti Bahini did not at all have any semblance of planned action. There was no central command structure, nor was there any effort to coordinate countrywide operations centrally. The revolting Bangladeshi troops adopted conventional military tactics of fighting pitched battles against the formidable Pakistan military instead of resorting to guerrilla tactics. There were many clandestine insurgent groups raised by various political parties operating locally, but regular Bengali units and paramilitary units did not have any connection or coordination with other groups until the later part of the civil war, that too not with all the groups. A thorough appraisal of the situation prevailing and reasons for the inability of sustaining the insurgency was carried out by India and appropriate corrective measures were initiated through Operation Jackpot, by co-opting six Indian brigadiers who organised the training, equipping, and coordinating of operations by the guerrillas. Though Col. M.A.G. Osmani was appointed Commander-in-Chief on 14 April 1971, until the coordinating conference held in mid-July, he did not have full command and control of the Mukti Joddhas. Osmani raised the EBR but later retired at the rank of Colonel, joined the Awami League, and was elected to the National Assembly. Osmani, son of an ICS officer, was a man of very high integrity and great patriotic zeal but with an orthodox bent of mind, who believed more in regular warfare than guerrilla tactics. By the end of October, the Bangladesh Army had eight regular battalions divided into three brigades called Z-, K-, and S-Force and one field artillery

regiment. There were also a small navy and an air force organisation. In addition, the Mukti Bahini had more than 80,000 guerrillas by then.⁴²

India's Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, told the Lok Sabha on 6 December 1971:

The valiant struggle of the people of Bangladesh in the face of tremendous odds has opened a new chapter of heroism in the history of freedom movements. ... The East Pakistan Rifles and the East Bengal Regiment became the Mukti Bahini which was joined by thousands of young East Bengalis determined to sacrifice the lives for freedom and right to fashion their future. The unity, determination and courage with which the entire population of Bangladesh fighting has been recorded by the entire world [p]ress.⁴³

The Mukti Bahini had less training and a shortage of weapons, ammunitions, and other warlike stores. Most importantly, they had shortage of junior level officers and JCOS/NCOs. These handicaps notwithstanding, their overall contribution towards liberation of Bangladesh was not at all negligible. Vast number of guerrillas operated inside Bangladesh and acted as eyes and ears for the invading Indian force. Their contribution in ensuring local resources and transport was of immense help to the advancing Indian Army, as it ensured greater mobility. Above all, they created a great fear psychosis amongst Pakistani troops and, thereby, lessened their will to fight and forced them to change their defence strategy, which the Indian Army, during the invasion of East Pakistan, reaped the benefits of. The exact number of Mukti Bahini persons killed could not be corroborated. But suffice it to say that if blood was the price for freedom, Mukti Bahini paid no less.

Notes

- 1 Mao Tse Tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000, first published 1937).
- 2 Sheikh Mujibur Rahaman, *The Unfinished Memoirs* (Dacca: The University Press Limited, 2012), p. XXIV.
- 3 A.K. Khondakar, Air Vice Marshall and other *Mukti Bahini* Commanders, *Bangladesh Liberation War-1971: The Strategy and Organization of the Fighting Forces* (A primary document prepared by the Commanders of *Mukti Bahini*, signed on 15 May 2008), p. 1.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Khuswant Singh, The Freedom Fighters of Bangladesh. *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, New Delhi, 19 December 1971, pp. 21–22.
- 6 Flag of Bangladesh had a map of Bangladesh on both the sides. Throughout the liberation struggle this flag was used. Due to the administrative problem of maintaining correct size map on both the sides, sometime in January 1972 the flag was modified by removing the map of Bangladesh.
- 7 Khondakar, *Air Vice Marshall*, p. 2.
- 8 John J. McCuen, *The Art of Counter Revolutionary War* (London: Faber and Faber), p. 43.

- 9 Prasad, p. 279, Henceforth mentioned as Official History, p. 153.
- 10 Mao Tse-Tung, *On The Protracted War*, Vol. II, Selected Works (New York: International Publishers, 1954), p. 180.
- 11 General Vo Nguyen Giap, *People's War People's Army* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961) p. 68, cited in John J. McCuen, Lt Col, *The Art of Counter Revolutionary War* (London: Faber and Faber), p. 30.
- 12 S.N. Prasad, ed., *Official History of 1971 War* (New Delhi: Ministry of Defence, Government of India, unpublished placed on the net by *The Times of India*, September, 1992), p. 155.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Khondakar, p. 2. Also read Prasad, ed., *Official History of 1971 War*, p. 279, Henceforth mentioned as Official History, pp. 153–160.
- 15 Khondakar, p. 3, Prasad, p. 162.
- 16 Prasad, p. 159, Khondakar, p. 6.
- 17 Prasad, pp. 174–176, Lt Gen. J.F.R. Jacob, p. 113.
- 18 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Jackpot, viewed on 15 August 2015.
- 19 Prasad, p. 163.
- 20 Khondakar, p. 3.
- 21 Lachhman Singh, *Victory in Bangladesh*, pp. 67–68. Palit, *The Lightning Campaign*, pp. 49–62.
- 22 A.K. Khondakar, Air Vice Marshall and other Mukti Bahini Commanders, *Bangladesh Liberation War-1971: The Strategy and Organization of the Fighting Forces* (A primary document prepared by the Commanders of Mukti Bahini, signed on 15 May 2008), p. 2.
- 23 Lt. Gen. J.F.R. Jacob, *An Odyssey in War and Peace* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2011), p. 114; Lt Gen, Also read, Maj Gen. Sukhwant Singh, *The Liberation of Bangladesh* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1978), p. 35.
- 24 S.N. Prasad, p. 279, Henceforth mentioned as Official History, p. 153.
- 25 Ibid., pp. 162–169.
- 26 Brig H.S. Sodhi, *Operation Windfall* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers), p. 48, Prasad, p. 169, also read <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/indias-secret-war-in-bangladesh/article2747538.ece>.
- 27 Saliq Siddiqui, pp. 248, 257 cited in Prasad p. 170. Also read Prasad, pp. 168–171.
- 28 Bhuyyan, p. 250, cited in Prasad, p. 172.
- 29 Prasad, p. 173.
- 30 Lt Gen. J.F.R. Jacob, *An Odyssey in War and Peace* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2011), pp. 116–118. See more at: <http://www.claws.in/742/role-of-mukti-bahini-in-indias-victory-alok-bansal.html#sthash.hlxGlbj8.dpuf>.
- 31 Jacob, p. 116. Sukhwant Singh, pp. 36–37.
- 32 Lachhman Singh, pp. 70–72.
- 33 Prasad.
- 34 Ibid., p. 182.
- 35 Jacob, pp. 112–119, <http://www.indindefencereview.com/interviews/east-pakistan-the-mukti-bahini-takes-shape/>, viewed on 12 October 2015.
- 36 Niazi, pp. 54–55.
- 37 Sukhwant Singh, p. 123.
- 38 Lachhman Singh, p. 78.
- 39 Jacob, p. 119.
- 40 Sukhwant Singh, p. 30.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Jacob, pp. 115–118, Prasad, pp. 173–179, Shukhwant Singh, pp. 30–37, Niazi, pp. 69–74.
- 43 *The Statesman*, Calcutta, 7 December 1971.

8

AIR AND NAVAL OPERATIONS

Strategy and execution

If we lose the war in air, we lose the war and we lose it quickly

—Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery¹

Introduction

An all-out war like that in 1971 couldn't have been fought without adjunct operations by the navy, keeping control of the seas, and the air force ensuring command over the airspace. Before recounting the naval and air force operations conducted by each of the opposing forces, it would be prudent to look at an overview of their developmental history from the partition until the beginning of the war, so that their combat potential can be gauged, which would enable us to analyse their operational strategy and tactical employment. In both India and Pakistan—and more so in the latter—the army had been the primary defence force and therefore received the treatment of a big brother vis-à-vis navy and air force. In any war scenario and for various emergency duties the army plays the major role, thereby keeping its place of prominence alive. Unlike the army, which is a manpower-heavy organisation, the navy and air force are high-value, equipment-heavy organisations and are cost prohibitive for third world economies like India and Pakistan. Both these countries traditionally vied for each other's inventory and did their best to outmatch the other within their constraints. At the time of independence, both India and Pakistan inherited armies with the experience of two World Wars and many battles, but its navies and air forces were not only small but also less battle hardened.

162 Air and naval operations

In this chapter, an endeavour will be made to seek answers to the following questions:

- a What was the state of the navies and air forces of India and Pakistan and how were they built up to make them combat ready?
- b At the time of the war what was their organisation and what equipment did they hold?
- c What were the naval and air strategies and tasking?
- d Performance appraisal including highlights of certain air and naval actions. How did the navy and the air force contribute towards the overall outcome of the war?

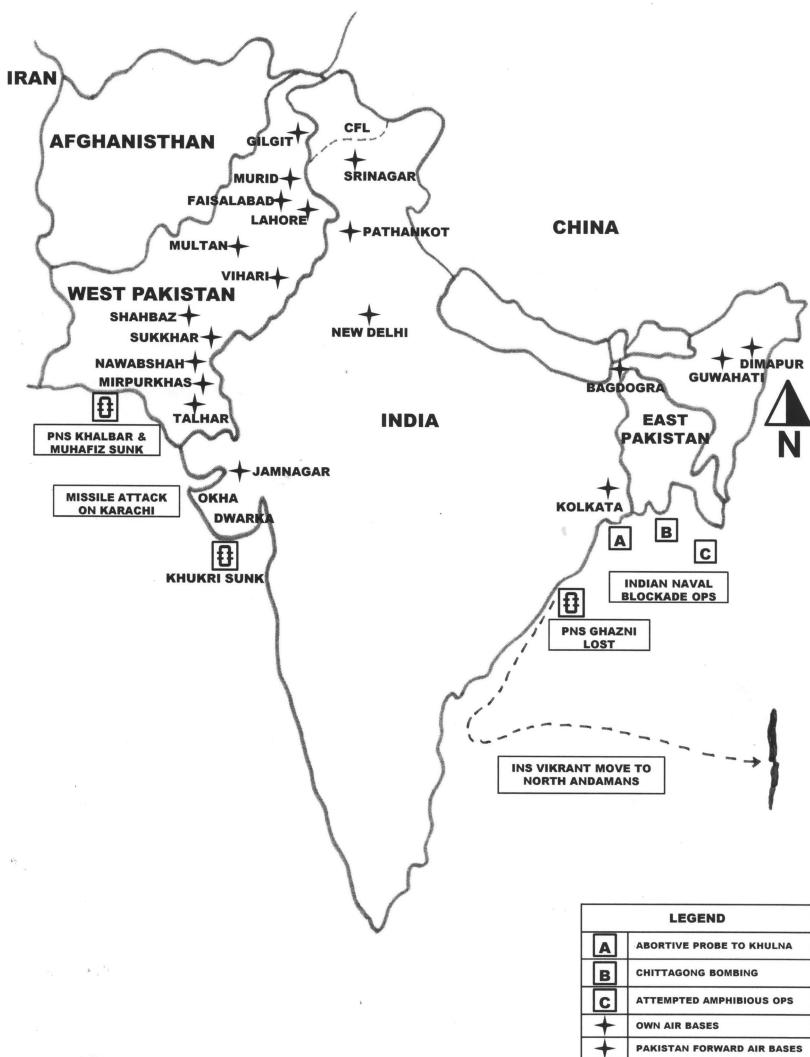
Though scope of the discussions will majorly cover naval and air actions related to the Bangladesh campaign, a broad overview of the operations in the west will be given to afford understanding and examination of the overall strategy.

Naval operations: 1971 war

Development of the Indian Navy

During the partition, the erstwhile Royal Indian Navy was inherited by India and Pakistan in the rough proportion of two to one. India got about 32 light vessels of mixed types, against Pakistan's 16, and the ship repair facilities at Mazagaon Dock, Bombay, and Calcutta.² Nehru understood the importance of an independent, strong navy in ensuring the security of sea lines of communications so that Indian merchant ships could sail freely in the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Bay of Bengal. But Nehru visualised the navy more as a protector of sea lanes for mercantile ships rather than a war arm that could be engaged in destroying an enemy's naval ships and infrastructure. Building up naval ships is a time-consuming affair. Notwithstanding Nehru's desire, the Indian navy was not built up the way it should have been. After the Indo-China War of 1962, India commenced a general military build-up. The build-up, however, revolved around a strong army with a supporting air force. Little combat role was envisaged for the navy during this period. The 1965 war clearly brought out the inadequacies of the navy. Fazal Muqeem, a Pakistani general, made an observation that "the Indian Navy was taken completely by surprise and was not prepared to seek an engagement at sea with a much weaker opponent"³ (Pakistan's attack in 1965). The naval lobby became vociferous and the restructuring of the navy received more attention and budget allocation.

Maritime threats to India remained ambiguous. In March 1949, the roles defined for the navy were the protection of merchant ships, providing assistance to army for any amphibious operation, and engaging in offensive operations against enemy ports and installations.⁴ The need to increase India's naval capability was merely based on conjectural perceptions of the evolving strategic



MAP 8.1 Overview of Air and Naval Operations.

environment surrounding the country. Some factors that worked in favour of the navy were:

- The modernisation of the small Pakistan Navy and its growing potential to harass the Indian merchant fleet.
- The Chinese threat in the Bay of Bengal.
- The importance of a strong, indigenous merchant fleet for economic prosperity being felt.
- A new awareness of the long gestation period involved in building a balanced naval force.

The need for naval build-up was politically accepted. Accordingly, orders were placed for the acquisition of eight F-class submarines, OSA-class missile boats, and Petya-class escort vessels from the USSR. Structural changes were also made in the command organisation. Three operational commands—namely, the Western Naval Command at Mumbai, the Southern Naval Command at Cochin, and the Eastern Naval Command at Vizag—were created. Apart from the new acquisitions, the naval expansion also saw the building up of infrastructure and the reinforcement of facilities along the west coast at Okha and Diu and in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands at Port Blair. The ports in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands were modernised for operations. To enhance early warning and surveillance capabilities, maritime aircrafts were acquired and refurbished, along with other surface units. Thus, at the time of going to war in 1971, the Indian Navy's inventory was one aircraft carrier, INS Vikrant; the INS Mysore; a Fiji-class cruiser; the light-cruiser INS Delhi; six frigates; eight missile boats; and four submarines.⁵

Development of the Pakistani Navy

Across the border, the Pakistani Navy too was the most neglected of the three services. Pakistan's main fleet, which consisted of one cruiser and seven destroyers, were World War II vintages with unsatisfactory sea-going and fighting capabilities. Very limited funds were spared from the defence budget for the navy for any modernisation, acquisition of new equipment, and replacement of old ships. The navy's performance in 1965 was much greater than the role demanded and was beyond the expectations of most optimists. Though the Pakistani Navy had shown its importance in war, this was not recognised by defence planners and very little budget was allocated. Out of a budget of Rs. 20 crores, only Rs. 4–5 crores worth of foreign exchange component was allocated. Therefore, no money was available either for modernisation, the acquisition of new equipment, or the replacement of its old fleet. As a result, at the time of going to war in 1971, Pakistan had a very modest sea-going capability, with just one major naval base in the west, in Karachi. Its only real teeth were three newly acquired Dolphin-class submarines, on which the Pakistani Navy laid a lot of trust.

Apart from its ageing fleet, a major material handicap for the Pakistani Navy was the unavailability of a maritime air element. It lost a great deal of its offensive and defensive capabilities due to this factor. The newly acquired submarines could not be effectively used or employed because of the unavailability of maritime efforts to direct the submarines towards surface enemy targets. The navy also remained completely blind to the operations of the Indian fleet and missile boats, which proved to be a major disadvantage. Keeping in view the requirement of the air effort, the navy had earlier requested the joint chiefs committee at different times since 1963 to procure maritime reconnaissance and strike aircrafts for the Pakistani Air Force (PAF) for supporting naval operations. However, maritime air support was a low priority for the PAF and no such capability was developed.

Therefore, the Pakistani Navy was forced to go to war with inadequate and outmoded ships of great quantitative and qualitative disparities and without air

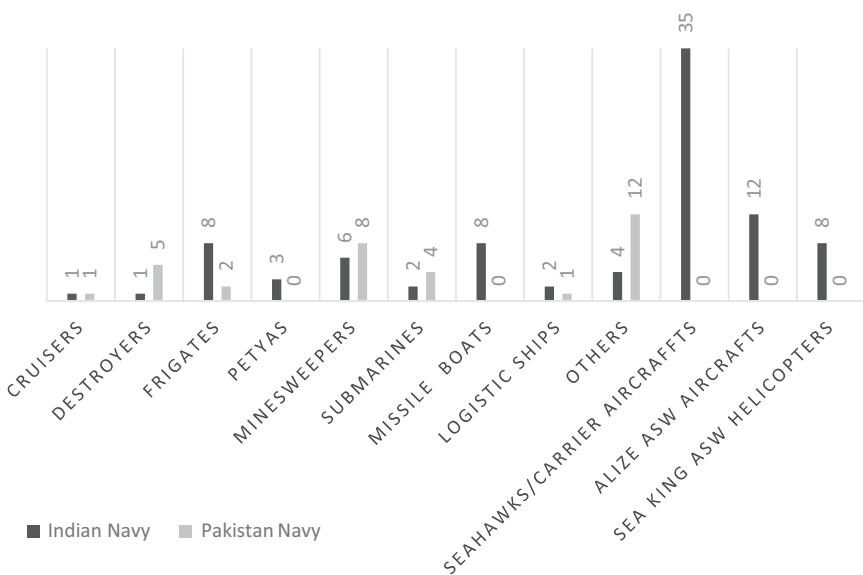


FIGURE 8.1 Comparative Strength of the Opposing Naval Forces.⁶

cover. Navy officers were relatively younger, had seen quick promotions, and did not have the benefit of intensive training. It was further handicapped by the lack of fleet support and poor cooperation of the PAF. In 1971, the Pakistani Navy had additional constraints of manpower since 3,000 officers and men, out of a total of 8,000, were rendered ineffective after military action began in East Pakistan in March 1971. This reduced their effective strength by nearly 38% at the time of going to war because the Bengali naval personnel either deserted or suspected to be untrustworthy. In addition, Pakistan navy suffered casualties during the civil war until November 1971 which caused further depletion of its strength.⁷ In the east, Pakistan maintained a brown-water navy and not a blue-water one, unlike India, which itself was a parity disadvantage.

Strategic perspective of the Pakistani Navy

Pakistan firmly believed that any war with India would be of a short duration. The main battle for survival was expected to be fought in the plains of Punjab and Rajasthan in consonance with their strategic perception that the “defence of the east lies in the west.” Therefore, all efforts had to be made to strengthen the land and air elements and no significant role was envisaged for the navy, although the Navy had the vital task of keeping the sea lanes open for supplies by sea into East or West Pakistan. It may be concluded that the Pakistani Navy always found itself in a continuous struggle to assert its rightful place in the country’s defence hierarchy.⁸

The navy was in the background and was involved in a civil war in East Pakistan. No satisfactory higher defence organisation existed in Pakistan to set a

war aim as a whole for the country. In such a situation, the navy had no idea of what the national objectives of the war or its aims were. It is well documented that the Pakistan Navy Chief did not know about Yahya's plan to go to war, he came to know of the outbreak through the news on the radio.⁹ In these disadvantageous conditions, Pakistan's naval strategy was defensive, which it planned assiduously. The navy hoped to safeguard its coastline, while avoiding any battle with the Indian Navy's surface ships. The newly acquired submarine arm would be on offensive patrols off the Indian ports to deliver a deadly blow to the Indian Navy and its morale. It can be inferred that the Pakistani Navy displayed clear tactical thinking and awareness of its limitations—to be aggressive with its submarine arm and defensive on all other fronts, until the Indian fleet was located and immobilised. The roles of the Pakistani Navy were limited to the following:¹⁰

- a Seaward defence of its coastline and ports Karachi, Chittagong, and Chalna.
- b Providing assistance to army in the riverine defence of East Pakistan.
- c Escorting merchant ships carrying important supplies for Pakistan.
- d Being aggressive with its submarine arm and defensive with the surface units.

Pakistan Navy: eastern naval command¹¹

Fleet Commander: Rear Admiral Mohammad Shariff

Patrol crafts

- PNS Comilla
- PNS Jessor
- PNS Rajshahi
- PNS Sylhet
- 24 improvised gunboats
- PNS Ghazi, also in the Bay of Bengal

Strategic perspective of the Indian Navy and the concept of operation

India possessed a strong and politically stable democratic government, which not only provided a sense of stability to the country but, more importantly, to the military. Thus, they were able to lay down clearly the national aims and objectives for which a military solution was being sought. Its military aims were:

- a To liberate Bangladesh as quickly as possible, and
- b To fight holding action in the west and in north, if required.

With a well-maintained navy, a growing merchant ship-building industry, and with the tenth largest navy in the world, the Indian Navy had a well-defined

strategy. The overall strategy of the country was to use the army and air force for the main thrust and navy to protect the sea lines of communication in the Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea, and Bay of Bengal, along with the destruction of the Pakistani Navy's war assets including its ports.

The naval concept of operations catered to the following:¹²

- a Destruction of Pakistan's maritime forces.
- b Impose a naval blockade of East and West Pakistan.
- c Protection of Indian merchant fleet and keep sea lanes open for the essential strategic traffic.
- d Protection of Indian coasts and ports.

The build-up for the war was slow and deliberate. The likelihood of war was apparent for a long time due to the peculiar political situation that existed between India and Pakistan at that time. The navy had ample time to work up its forces, plan its deployment, and refine its operational and logistics plans. The western fleet involved itself in practicing its battle doctrines and missile attacks. It made its presence felt on the Saurashtra coast, calling on the ports more frequently. The OSA-class missile boats that had arrived just before the war were put through a brisk pace of practices. This gave insight into its operational capabilities and allowed the navy to formulate special missile boat tactics for the war. The Pakistani Navy's strength in undersea warfare through the newly acquired Daphne-class of submarines and PNS Ghazi was given due recognition and ASW exercises were conducted on a large scale. The navy also launched research and experiments in sonar detection technology. The crux of India's naval planning was on offensive operations, to gain an upper hand.

The Indian Navy was divided into two task forces, i.e., the Eastern Task Force, under the command of Vice Admiral N. Krishnan with its HQ in Vizag, and the Western Task Force, under Vice Admiral S.N. Kohli with its HQ in Bombay.

Indian Navy: Eastern Task Force

The FOC-in-C was Vice Admiral N Krishnan and the Fleet Commander was Rear Admiral Srihari Lal Sharma. It had the following inventory:¹³

Air Craft Carrier: INS Vikrant – Captain Sawraj Prakash (Majestic-class light aircraft carrier). On board she had 300 Squadron (Sea Hawk) and 310 Squadron (Alize) air crafts.

Frigates

- INS Brahmaputra – Captain J.C. Puri (Leopard-class frigate)
- INS Beas – Captain L. Ram Das (Leopard-class frigate)
- INS Kamrota – Captain A.P. Awati (Petya-class frigate)
- INS Kavaratti – Captain S. Paul (Petya-class frigate)

Destroyer

- INS Rajput – Lt. Cdr. Inder Singh

Submarines

- INS Kalvari
- INS Khandari

Petrol Vessels/Crafts

- INS Panvel – Lt. Cdr. G.R. Naroha (Gunboat)
- INS Pulikat – Lt. Cdr. S. Krishnan (Gunboat)
- INS Panaji – Lt. Cdr. R. Gupta (Gunboat)
- INS Akshay – (Gunboat)
- Padma (Mukti Bahini)
- Palash (Mukti Bahini)

Landing Ships (LSTs)

- INS Gharial – Lt. Cdr U. Dabir
- INS Gildar – Lt. Cdr A.K. Sharma
- INS Maggar – Lt. Cdr A.T.N. Singhal

Indian Navy: Western Task Force

Under the command of Vice Admiral S.N. Kohli, the Western Task Force comprised of two task groups. First task group included one cruiser and nine DD/FF assigned to operate west of Karachi, off the Makaran coast, to draw out the Pakistani navy's flotilla employed in protecting Karachi. The operation was aimed at significantly denuding Pakistani navy's maritime capability in addition to guarding the sea lane in the Arabian Sea. The second task group operated from the Kathiawar port and represented the offensive punch of the Indian Navy. It mainly consisted of eight missile boats, which were to carry out offensive operations off Karachi and interdict the Pakistani surface ships as well as disrupt merchanting transactions. Three submarines were deployed off the approaches to Karachi and the Makaran coast to interdict the Pakistani Navy's units and merchant shipping. The IAF was to provide air cover to naval manoeuvres and ensure favourable air situations. Sukhwant Singh commented,

Towards this end it was arranged that to cover the approach of the missile boats, IAF would neutralize the airfields near Karachi, and after completion of the raid it was to support withdrawal of the missile task force. This delicate synchronization and dovetailing of air effort were perfected with painstaking care.¹⁴

Defensive Measures: India had started enacting protective measures for its maritime assets as far as back June 1971, when the naval control of shipping had been

instituted and harbour defence organisations were activated. A detailed set-up was put in place to keep track of Indian merchant ships globally. For this purpose, the Indian merchant ships across the world were put under the control of the Navy Chief to ensure their safe passage.

Pakistan Navy: Western Fleet¹⁵

Commander-in-Chief: Vice Admiral Muzaffar Hasan.

Flotilla Commander: Rear Admiral M.A.K. Lodi.

Cruiser: PNS Babur (flag)

Destroyers: PNS Badr, PNS Khyber, PNS Shahjahan, PNS Alamgir, and PNS Jahangir.

Frigates: PNS Tipu Sultan, PNS Tughril, PNS Zulfiqar

Submarines: PNS Ghazi (operating in the Bay of Bengal), PNS Hangor, PNS Mangro, and PNS Shushuk.

Oiler: PNS Dacca

Mine Sweepers: PNS Muhamfiz, PNS Mujahid, PNS Moshal, PNS Momin, PNS Mubarak, PNS Mahmood, and PNS Munsi

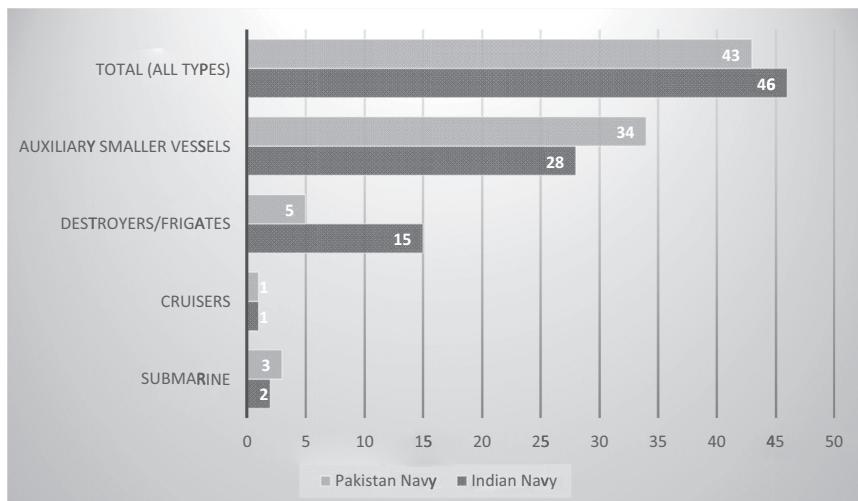


FIGURE 8.2 Comparative Force Level in the Western Theatre.

Comparative Force Level in the West: A comparison of the naval forces in the west tabulated above proves that both the navies in the west had parity.

Deployment of the Pakistani Navy in the Western Theatre

Based on the concept of operations, the Pakistani Navy's units were deployed as follows:¹⁶

- a **Submarines:** Three Daphne-class submarines were deployed on the focal points off Mumbai and the Kathiawar coast for offensive operations against Indian units. The two Midget submarines were deployed off Okhla and Diu, on interdiction missions in shallow coastal waters.
- b **Surface Forces:** The Pakistani Navy's surface ships in the western theatre were mainly deployed for the defence of Karachi and two patrol lines were established off the port. A group of MSCs were to operate in the approaches to Karachi from dawn to dusk for minesweeping operations to keep the channel clear.
- c **Air elements:** After the Pakistani Air Force indicated their inability to provide any surveillance effort, Pakistan International Air Fokker was utilised for maritime surveillance over the area of interest.

The Indian Navy's Deployment in the West¹⁷

In the west, INS Mysore, flying the flag of Rear Admiral K.C. Kuruvilla, headed the Surface Action Group that comprised Trishul and Talwar; Khukri, Kripa, and Kuthar; Cauvery and Krishna; Tir and Ranjit; and two missile boats under tow by ships.

A special C-in-C task force comprising of two Petyas and four missile boats were retained in Mumbai to undertake the first attack on Karachi and any subsequent attacks that, during the course of war, might become possible and desirable.

The Pakistani surface units were no more modern than the Indian Navy's, although some had received a thorough refit. The fire power of Pakistan's destroyers could be considered marginally superior to the Indian Navy's.

Where the Pakistani Navy scored over the Indian one was in their submarine arm. The French Daphne-class submarines were the most conventional submarines at that time, with sensors and armament that were far superior. This was why the INS Khukri was detected much before the frigate could detect the submarine and was sunk by the PNS Hangor on 9 December.

During the war, the Naval Control of Shipping and Regulations of Maritime Movement became the responsibility of the Indian Navy. Huge preparations and coordination with various organisations like the Director General of Shipping and various port authorities, Excise Department, etc. had to be undertaken; these were meticulously planned, coordinated, and executed, the ensuring safe passage of Indian merchant ships.

War in the Arabian Sea: The Pakistani naval HQ had ordered all major units of their Western Fleet out at sea in late November, under Rear Admiral

Lodhi. Two patrolling arcs around Manora had been established to deliver early warnings of incoming attacks. A destroyer was deployed to patrol at 70 miles, while the minesweepers, in turn, patrolled at 30 miles. The remaining major units operated west of Karachi, while the three Daphne submarines were deployed further forward towards the Indian coast.

On the morning of 4 December, the IAF bombed Karachi and two nearby airports at Mahir and Badin. Rocketing and strafing harbour facilities were kept up with increasing intensity. The air action diverted Pakistan's attention from the two task forces that were approaching Karachi.

As part of a major operation undertaken by the Indian Navy with codename "Operation Trident," the first missile attack was launched on the night of 4/5 December 1971 by the Indian missile boats operating south of Karachi. They sank the destroyer PNS Khaibar and minesweeper PNS Muhamfiz, which were on patrol duty between 70- and 30-miles distance, respectively, southwest of Karachi. This was a major blow to Pakistan. The IAF, too, applied relentless pressure by bombing and rocketing areas in and around Karachi between 3 and 8 December. Consequently, elements of the Pakistani flotilla were berthed at various points in the harbour on 8 December to augment the air defence of the Karachi harbour. However, the oiler PNS Dacca, owing to her deep draft and being oil laden, was left at the Manora anchorage. It was on night 8 December Indian missile boats carried out their second attack at 2230 hours. Two ships, one merchant ship and the PNS Dacca (oilier), were damaged and another merchant ship was sunk during the attack. One of the missiles of the salvo hit an oil tank in the Keamari area and set it ablaze.¹⁸

John Gill comments,

Although its surface ships were bottled up in Karachi after 5 December, the Pakistan Navy was able to strike back below the waves, with a Daphne class submarine, PNS Hangor, sinking an Indian frigate, INS Khukri, on 9 December. India's fleet air arm also lost an Alize ASW aircraft to a Pakistani F-104 during operations over the Arabian Sea.¹⁹

The INS Khukri was torpedoed thrice in quick succession by the PNS Hangor on the night of 9/10 December; the ship sank quickly and went down along with its valiant captain Mahendra Nath Mulla, 17 officers, and 176 sailors. It indeed was a great loss to the Indian Navy and the only ship lost during the entire war. On the morning of the 10th, the Indian Navy, during an all-out rescue mission, picked up 6 officers and 61 sailors—the survivors of Khukri.²⁰

Naval war in the Bay of Bengal

Indian Navy in the east

The eastern fleet consisted of the aircraft carrier Vikrant, Brahmaputra, Beas, Mamorta, and Kavaratti. At the outbreak of war, the fleet was out at sea in the Bay of Bengal. The submarine Khanderi formed the sub-surface force whereas the

landing ship tank craft Magar, Gharial, and Guldar formed the force that would undertake the transportation and amphibious role. The Rajput, Panvel, Pulicat, and Akshay formed the local defence group along with Desh Deep, the light vessel tender that had been requisitioned and commissioned for afloat support.

Pakistan Navy in the east

The East Pakistan naval forces consisted only of small boats. Starting with four-gun boats in Mar 71, Admiral Sharief and his band of naval officers had gradually built up the strength of small boats to 24 through improvisation and the mobilisation of local resources. They were mostly dispersed all over East Pakistan's major rivers in support of army operations and civil administration. The Pakistani naval forces in East Pakistan were grossly outnumbered by the Indian eastern fleet. The tasks allotted to the Pakistani Navy in the east were to:

- Support the army in clearing rebel strong points along the coast and river routes.
- Restore demolished and paralysed port facilities at Chittagong and Chalna for even flow of defence stores and supplies.
- Move defence stores, personnel, and essential civil supplies up the country by rivers.
- Restore the oil refinery and food grain silos at Chittagong.
- To their credit, the Pakistani Navy, though restrained by resources, carried out all the tasks commendably.

Indian Navy's operational tasks in the east

During the Bangladesh campaign, the task allotted to the Indian Navy was mainly concentrated on the strike force and transport units and related to:

- a Carrying out strikes on airfields, fuel dumps, installations at Cox's Bazaar, Chittagong, Khulna, and Chalna.
- b Choking the lines of sea communications of East Pakistan so as to curb any movement of Pakistani merchant ships.
- c Provide gunfire support.
- d Encircle retreating Pakistani forces through amphibious landings south of Cox's Bazaar.

Naval operation

Immediately on the commencement of war, the Indian Navy blockaded the Bay of Bengal, ensuring the stoppage of all sea traffic going and coming from the ports of East Pakistan. The PNS Ghazi, a submarine with long range capability, travelled 1,500 miles from Karachi and entered the Bay of Bengal on 26 November for

tracking and destroying the INS Vikrant. But because of the deception plan of the Indian Navy, Vikrant had already left Vizag and the PNS Ghazi, which was lurking in that area, was destroyed on the night of 3 December by the INS Rajput, which had been patrolling in that area. On the morning of 4 December, aircrafts on board Vikrant raided the airfield and harbour infrastructure at Cox's Bazar. That same evening, bombing on the airports and harbours at Chittagong, Khulna, and Chalna were undertaken. On the very first day of the war, major ports like Cox's Bazaar, Chittagong, and Khulna were blockaded and put out of action. During the actual war in East Pakistan, the Bangladeshi Navy, due to its disproportionately inadequate combat ships, did not have much to fight with. About this John Gill observes:

Pakistan Navy had only limited success against the *Mukti Bahini*, who succeeded in inflicting serious losses on commercial maritime traffic during the months leading up to open conflict...There were no naval engagements, but one of the Pakistani patrol boats was sunk by an air attack and two others were scuttled by their crews to keep them out of Indian hands; the fourth, PNS Rajshahi, slipped stealthily through Pakistani minefields and along the coast to escape into Burmese waters.²¹

After the commencement of hostilities and when it was appreciated that the situation was favourable for the Indian Navy to carry out an amphibious landing in the Chittagong area and the bombardment of shore facilities of the port city, Pakistani Navy patrol crafts were employed to lay minefields to blockade the Chittagong port.

Indian Navy achieved complete air superiority in the area around East Pakistan while relieving the air force from the task of bombing enemy targets in the riverine delta and major enemy setups and facilities. It also supported the army during the amphibious operation undertaken in Cox's Bazar. The eastern fleet not only established supremacy in the Bay of Bengal but also effectively ensured blockades of all the ports in East Pakistan. The escape routes to the south were blocked by destroying or capturing a number of East Pakistani naval gunboats and merchant ships. Thus, the tally of casualties reads as:²²

- Destroyer: 1 (PNS Sylhet)
- Long range submarine: 1 (PNS Ghazi)
- Patrol boats of Rajshahi-class: 6
- 3 out of 4 gunboats
- Merchant ships: 4

Trade War. The Alize carrier-borne aircraft carried out air reconnaissance in the Bay of Bengal. The Indian Navy operated her Super Constellation and co-ordinated this with suitably spaced surface units to intercept any ships entering or leaving Karachi. One Pakistani merchant ship was captured near Gwadar and taken to Mumbai. The blockade was effective. The details of merchantmen losses were:

TABLE 8.1 Overall Losses of the Opposing Naval Forces²³

Types of Ships	Pakistani Navy	Indian Navy
Destroyer/Frigate	1	1
Minesweeper	1	NA
Submarines	1	NA

- **Captured by Indian Navy**

- i Eastern theatre: 8
- ii Western theatre: 3

- **Sunk at Karachi port:** 2

The overall losses of both the Indian and Pakistani navies in the 1971 war were as above.

United States' gunboat diplomacy

The tilt of the US towards Pakistan was most visible when the President of the United States, Mr. Richard Nixon, and his National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, ordered the aircraft carrier USS Enterprise, accompanied by a constellation of warships capable of firing nuclear munitions, to sail towards the Bay of Bengal. The naval task force was designated as Task Force 74 and departed Singapore on 13 December, passing through the Straits of Malacca on 14 December. Though officially it was said that its purpose was to evacuate American citizens from East Pakistan, the Anderson papers and many other declassified documents have exposed that as a lie. It emerged that Nixon and Kissinger dispatched the USS Enterprise as part of Cold War politics to counter a perceived expansion of Soviet influence, forestall a possible Indian invasion of West Pakistan for its break up, and, most importantly, to demonstrate to Pakistan, China, and other allies that the US was a trusted partner and that its influence could change the course of action, as it desired. The task force moved towards Ceylon when Niazi surrendered.²⁴

One reason for sending Task Force 74 could be to breach the naval blockade by India and help Yahya's army exit Bangladesh. However, this would have helped only a part of the army in Chittagong and not the whole Pakistani Army in the east. The Indian eastern fleet in a real contest scenario would not have been able to stop the Enterprise. So, they carried out disruptive attacks on the port and air-fields of Chittagong and Cox's Bazar to deny their possible use by the US task force. The land campaign, too, was being concluded fast to forestall a US intervention, if any. Before the US task force could get involved in any serious business, the campaign was over.²⁵ The Russian navy, too, was following the Enterprise; the quick end of the Liberation War, along with surrender of Niazi's troops, possibly averted a naval collision between the two superpowers in South Asia.

Air operations

In the east, the Indian Air Force was numerically far superior, both in manpower as well as in aircraft inventory. Like the navy, the PAF was handicapped by a serious loss of Bengali pilots and technicians when it withdrew these men from active duty—35 pilots and about 25% of its maintenance personnel, in total about 4,000 persons approximately.²⁶ Some of them also revolted and joined the Mukti Bahini.

Well before the outbreak of actual hostilities, the PAF had been deliberately violating Indian airspace in the eastern sector. With the beginning of 1971, the frequency of these intrusions had increased. However, the IAF was restrained from taking any official action against such intrusions and kept protesting them to the Pakistani government. Ignoring such strong protests, PAF continued the intrusions. Finally, on the afternoon of 23 March 1971, when four Sabre jets violated Indian airspace in the eastern sector, Indian Gnats were airborne and shot down three of the intruding Sabres. The IAF had made a grand debut and, in the months to follow, it blazed a trail of glory and inflicted a decisive defeat upon the PAF.²⁷

IAF: Apart from the transport aircrafts and helicopters, the aircraft in service with the IAF were as in the table below:

TABLE 8.2 IAF Inventory at the Time of 1971 Indo-Pak War²⁸

Types of Aircraft	Number of Squadrons
Gnats	8
MiG-21	7
Su-7	5
Hunter	6
Canberra	3
Canberra PR	1
HF-24 Marut	2
Mystere IV A	2
Super Constellation (MR)	1
Total	35

PAF: Apart from the limited number of transport aircrafts and helicopters, the PAF had the following war planes.

TABLE 8.3 PAF Inventory in 1971²⁹

Types of Aircraft	Number of Squadrons
F-86 Sabre	7
F-104 Star Fighters	1
Mirage-III	1
F-6 Mig-19	3
B-57B Canberra	1
Total	13

Strategy of the opposing air forces

Initially, Pakistan adopted an offensive strategy and carried out pre-emptive air strikes on IAF bases, along the pattern of Israel's air attack against Egypt during the 1967 Six-Day War. This sudden strike was aimed at destroying the maximum possible number of IAF aircrafts on ground so as to reduce its combat potential. On 3 December 1971, the PAF carried out a total of 16 raids until the evening and followed it up by mounting 18 more raids until the next morning, 4 December. The Indo-Pak War of 1971 formally commenced with these pre-emptive air strikes by Pakistan.

Unfortunately for the PAF, this strategy did not pay off as the IAF was well prepared for such an eventuality. Having realised its failure to achieve its objective in pre-emptive strike, the PAF adopted more of a defensive strategy during the main phase of the war: it stayed well concealed in its airfields by carrying out more air defence roles and occasional close air-support missions. Like its army, Pakistan's air force strategy was based on the precept that "the defence of East Pakistan lies in West Pakistan." In the later days of the war, it seemed that the PAF wanted to conserve its air resources for a prolonged offensive war in the west. Accordingly, it deployed only one oversized squadron of F-86 in the east along with a few RF-33 aircrafts and the bulk of the air force was deployed in the west.³⁰ Their air strategy was primarily aimed at maintaining a favourable air situation for General Tikka Khan's strike corps offensive. The PAF Chief considered this commitment to be pivotal because the success or failure of PAF support would, in all likelihood, determine the fate of this crucial offensive.³¹ But the strike corps offensive did not take off.

IAF's air strategy

In line with the government's war aim, the IAF's operational strategies were formulated as follows:³²

- a Ensure air defence of the homeland against enemy air attacks.
- b Support the army and navy in their operations, gain and maintain a favourable air situation over the tactical area, and mount reconnaissance, interdiction, and other operations that had a direct bearing on the outcome of the land battle.
- c Conduct counter air operations, i.e., reduce the effectiveness of the PAF by destroying its aircraft and bases.
- d Provide air transport support to its own forces.

The IAF strategy, planned well before the war, was to keep the PAF at bay in both sectors of operations and to prevent the Pakistani army from capturing any ground in these sectors. Its aim was to gain air superiority in the eastern sector and help the Indian army and the Mukti Bahini in the liberation of East Pakistan.

The IAF absorbed the PAF's initial strikes on 3/4 December 1971 without any losses and thereafter struck back strongly.

On the western front, apart from counter air operations, strategic targets were chosen and attacked by the IAF. Large-scale close air support was given to land forces. In the eastern sector, after having gained a favourable air situation (actually, the IAF soon achieved total air superiority), all efforts were directed to supporting the land forces, especially in the form of close air support and heliborne and airborne assaults.

PAF vs. IAF

Air War in the West: On 3 December 1971, at 1740 hrs, the PAF simultaneously attacked the Srinagar, Pathankot, and Amritsar airfields. Late in the evening, the Agra, Jodhpur, Avantipur, and Ambala airfields were also attacked. This action provoked the IAF to strike back vigorously. On the very first night, the IAF launched a massive air strike against PAF airfields at Murid, Mianwali, Chander, Sargodha, Risalewala, and Masroor in West Pakistan and Tejgaon and Kurmitola in the East. The PAF suffered considerable damage to their airfields in the east and also lost a sizable number of aircrafts over the course of the next four days. The IAF had, thereafter, free rein to conduct raids on strategic targets all over Pakistan. Oil installations in Karachi were attacked on 4 December and left Karachi under a layer of smoke for many days.

On 16 December—the last day of the war, when Islamabad accepted the ceasefire unilaterally offered by New Delhi the IAF was dominating the skies from Skardu in the north to the Lahore marshalling yards in the centre, and from Pakistani troop concentrations in the south to Naya Chor in the west. In the eastern sector, the IAF had total air superiority and conducted operations at will. In addition, the IAF undertook recce missions for the Indian Navy in the Bay of Bengal and in the Arabian Sea, thus giving the navy a hand in its operations in this area.

At the end of the 14 days of conflict, the IAF had succeeded in its overall strategy and had kept the PAF grounded on most occasions.

IAF in support of main ground battles

In addition to suffocating the PAF on ground, the IAF played a vital role in important and decisive ground battles, both the western and eastern sectors. A few of them deserve mention:

Western sector: In the western sector, the IAF took active part in at least three important land battles. These were:

- a Chhamb: In the Chhamb area, where the fiercest battle of the entire war was fought, the IAF intervened during a period when Pakistani troops were

strongly up against the Indian troops. On 5 December, IAF fighters and bombers swung into action and rained Pakistani tanks, guns, vehicles, and troop concentrations with rockets, bombs, and canons, both during day and night. This attack was kept up for three days and succeeded in beating the Pakistani offensive back. The IAF decisively decimated the Pakistani army's threat to the Jammu area.

- b Longewala: At about the same time, further south in the Rajasthan sector, a strong Pakistani armour had penetrated 15 miles into Indian territory. The Indian Army had a small force in that area and could not have faced such a strong enemy thrust. The IAF came to the rescue just about in time and between 5 and 9 December the IAF Hunters wreaked havoc on Pakistan's tank regiment and destroyed 27 tanks. The Pakistani armour was totally crippled and beaten back to their territory.
- c Shakargarh: The Indian thrust in the Shakargarh sector owed much of its success to vigorous support from the IAF, which struck at enemy positions in depth areas and successfully checked enemy reinforcements to the battle area.
- d In addition to these three decisive battles, the IAF actively supported Indian ground forces in the Poonch, Naya Chor, and Ganganagar sectors.

Eastern sector: In the eastern sector, within the first 48 hours of the war, the IAF swept the PAF out of the skies and operated with total superiority. The IAF's main tasks were to support the land forces and attack important military targets. The IAF ensured the freedom of the eastern fleet's vessels around the coast and ensured that the PAF remained on ground while the Mitro Bahini troops marched into East Pakistan.

The IAF carried out successful interdiction missions against river traffic, river jetties, and crafts moving along the waterways, which choked off vital means of communication for the Pakistani Armed Forces. In a country where an advancing army stumbled across a river every six miles, the IAF came to its compatriots' rescue and established a heli-bridge for crossing the Meghna river and transport operations for operational logistics support and for airborne operation at Tangail. These operations imparted a new dimension to the mobility of the infantry. But the most dramatic air operation was launched in Dacca on 14 December at the Government House. Through a wireless interception, the Indian Eastern Command learnt that Governor Malik and senior defence and civil officials would be having an important meeting in the Government House at noon that day. Four MiG-21s under the command of Wing Commander B.K. Bishnoi carried out a precision strike with 57 mm rockets that pierced the roof. In a panic, Governor Malik wrote his resignation and settled down to pray. It was the last straw.

Reasons for the failure of the PAF

Historical evidence leads to conclusion that the PAF could not stand up against the IAF throughout the war. The reasons for the failure of the PAF can be summarised as under:

- a The PAF failed to carry out well-aimed attacks on IAF airfields, thus allowing the IAF to strike back vigorously and immediately. Except the pre-emptive strike on 3 December, it remained defensive, giving IAF a free hand.
- b The PAF functioned as a subordinate service to the Pakistani Army and thus lacked the freedom to plan and execute its own air operations. The PAF in the west was waiting for the Strike Corps to launch operations so that they could provide tactical support to the offensive action. It never materialised and without much action, the PAF was just holding themselves in their air bases.
- c The PAF failed to support its ground forces in decisive and important battle-fields due to a lack of proper joint planning with the Pakistani Army.

On the other hand, the IAF operated with full freedom and coordinated its activities very well with other two service branches. The IAF achieved its main aim of taking the air war deep into enemy territory by crippling Pakistan's air power to a large extent.

The PAF hoped for support from two squadrons of Iranian F-5s, but there is no indication that Tehran took any substantive steps to fulfil this expectation.³³

In previous wars, the Indian Navy had hardly played any role worth mentioning. The Navy Chief, Admiral Nanda, was very keen to play a decisive role in the 1971 war and he befittingly prepared and trained the navy. Though Bangladesh Liberation War was predominantly a war of the land forces, i.e., the army, the navy and air force contributed significantly to the overall strategy and acted as reckonable force multipliers that influenced the tactical situation, resulting in greater mobility and a speedier victory. Pakistan's Eastern Naval Commander Rear-Admiral Mohammad Sharif told the US Admiral Zumwalt during their meeting that "at the end of conflict... we [the Eastern Naval Command] had no intelligence and hence, were both deaf and blind with the Indian Navy and Indian Air Force pounding us day and night."³⁴

About the performance of the Indian Navy and Air Force and their effect on the outcome of war, the best compliments came from Lt. Gen. A.A.K. Niazi, Commander-in-Chief of the East Pakistan Armed Forces, who wrote:

The Indian navy blocked our sea communications with the west, entered our rivers, landed troops on our flanks and rear along the banks of the rivers, shot up our boats and ferries, and attacked our positions near the sea-coasts and riverbanks. Our four naval gun boats were no match to the

Indian ships. The Indian Air Force, finding no opposition, paralyzed our mobility in a couple of days. The Indians achieved their mastery of the skies when, on 6th December, our only airfield at Dacca was damaged beyond repair and our only squadron of aircraft was grounded. Most of the bridges, ferries, ferry-sites, dumps, railway yards, rolling stock, and oil storage tanks were destroyed or damaged and our positions and moves were constantly under air attack. ... Any move forward during the day meant some human lives extinguished, a boat sank, a vehicle destroyed.³⁵

According to one Pakistani scholar, Tariq Ali, the Pakistani Navy lost a third of its force in the war.³⁶ Under the able leadership of Admiral Nanda, the Indian Navy proved that an offensive approach and proactive and innovative outlook could have a telling effect on the enemy and could contribute positively towards achieving the nation's war aims. The US Army Colonel John Gill writes:

The Western Fleet of the Indian Navy ensured control of sea lane of communications in the Arabian Sea and prevented movement of the Pakistani ships to Karachi. In their first attack on the night of 4/5 December, the Osas sank a destroyer (PNS Khaiber) and a minesweeper (PNS Muhamfiz) as well as causing considerable damage ashore. Indian air attacks throughout 4 December helped to distract the defenders as well as inflicting damage. The Pakistan Navy thereafter withdrew its surface combatants inside the protected harbor, but a second Indian raid on the night of 8/9 December inflicted additional destruction on shore installations and left a navy oiler (PNS Dacca) damaged. IAF Canberra bombers also hit Karachi that night. These simultaneous strikes...again contributed to the Indian success, demoralizing the Pakistanis and leaving them confused about the nature and strength of their attackers.³⁷

Though the US' action of gunboat diplomacy by dispatching the Enterprise and her escorts, called Task Force 74, did not alter the course of the war, it brought about a thawing in the Indo-US relationship, which remained such for almost three decades. The recent disclosure of documents proves that the Soviets also ordered their navy to shadow the US task force to maintain deterrence. Niazi's surrender on 16 December and India's unilateral declaration of ceasefire effective from 17 December brought the war to an end. The US Enterprise altered its course and veered towards Ceylon and "spent the next several weeks cruising the Indian Ocean shadowed by Soviet ships before heading for the Philippines in early January 1972."³⁸

The Indian Air Force supported the army during the crucial battles. For example, Lt. Gen. Candeth, India's Western Army Commander, confirmed to the Air Chief, P.C. Lal, that tactical air support was given in the Chhamb area whenever it was required.³⁹ On the contrary the PAF, after their initial pre-emptive strikes on 3 December, remained defensive mostly.

The IAF flew a total of 11,549 sorties during the 1971 Indo-Pak War. Of those 6,604 were combat sorties and the remaining were airlift sorties. The PAF carried out 3,027 combat sorties. India lost 56 aircrafts and Pakistan lost 55: 44 in the western sector and 11 in East Pakistan. The attrition rate, which is correlated with the number of sorties, was 0.85% for India against 3.2% for Pakistan.⁴⁰

Notes

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- 2 Major General Kushwant Singh, *India's War since Independence*, Vol. 2 (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1981), p. 326.
- 3 Maj Gen. Fazal Muqeem, Pakistan's Crisis in Leadership, cited in Sukhwant Singh, *India's War since Independence*, Vol. II, p. 335.
- 4 D.R. Manekar, *Twenty-Two Fateful Days: Pakistan Cut to Size* (New Delhi: Indian Book Company, 1972).
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- 6 Fazal Mukeem cited in Sukhwant Singh, p. 345.
- 7 Ibid., pp. 327–328.
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- 9 Ibid. Also read Colonel John (Jack) H. Gill, An Atlas of the 1971 India-Pakistan War: The Creation of Bangladesh, p. 71, <http://indianstrategicknowledgeonline.com/web/71%20War%20Book%20a%20US%20Army%20View.pdf>, viewed on 15 December 2014, pp. 61–64 and Prasad.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Gill, An Atlas of the 1971 India-Pakistan War: The Creation of Bangladesh, p. 71.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Prasad, pp. 440–480 and Sukhwant Singh, pp. 335–358.
- 14 Sukhwant Singh, pp. 344–345.
- 15 Gill, pp. 82–83.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Ibid., and Sukhwant Singh, pp. 335–358.
- 18 Prasad, pp. 460–485.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Gill, p. 64.
- 21 Prasad, p. 480.
- 22 Singh, Sukhwant, pp. 337–339.
- 23 Gill, p. 91. Also read Sukhwant Singh, pp. 338–339.
- 24 Sukhwant Singh, pp. 339–340, Gill, p. 62. Also see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indo-Pakistani_Naval_War_of_1971, viewed on 26 March 2016.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Sukhwant Singh, pp. 339–340.
- 27 Gill, p. 91.
- 28 Sukhwant Singh, pp. 339–340.
- 29 Gill, p. 61.
- 30 Air Commodore Jasjit Singh, *Defence from the Skies: Indian Air Force through 80 Years* (New Delhi: KW Publishers, 2012), p. 161.
- 31 Jasjit Singh, *Defence from the Skies*, p. 163.

182 Air and naval operations

- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Ibid, pp. 144–155.
- 34 *The Story of Pakistan Air Force*, n. 14, pp. 447–448, cited in Jasjit Singh, p. 155.
- 35 Jasjit Singh, pp. 144–145.
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- 37 Admiral Mohammad Sharif telling Admiral Zumwalt in 1971, Roy, cited in K. Admiral Mihir, *War in the Indian Ocean* (New Delhi: Lancer's Publishers and Distributions, 1995), pp. 218–230.
- 38 Mahfuz, Asif, US Fleet in Bay of Bengal: A Game of Deception, *The Daily Star*, December 16, 2013, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/us-fleet-in-bay-of-bengal-a-game-of-deception>, viewed on July 10, 2020.
- 39 Gill, pp. 62–63.
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9

ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS DURING THE BANGLADESH LIBERATION WAR AND ITS EFFECT ON WAR STRATEGY

If thou hast no sympathy for the troubles of others
Thou art unworthy to be called by the name of a human

—Sa'adi¹

The couplet quoted above, from an old Iranian poem and inscribed at the entrance gate of the United Nations (UN) headquarters, is a message that signifies the purpose of the UN. In the aftermath of World War II and in consonance with the basic tenets of League of Nations, the UN was founded on 24 October 1945, with the purpose of bringing all nations of the world together to work for peace and development, based on principles of justice, human dignity, and the well-being of all people.² The UN emblem shows the world held in the “olive branches of peace.” The UN Security Council (UNSC) consists of the five victors of World War II as permanent members and ten other countries, each serving a two-year term. The five permanent members— China, France, the UK, the USSR, and the US—also have veto power, meaning that decisions taken by the UNSC can be blocked by any of the five permanent members. This is significant, firstly because the UNSC is the principle organ responsible for ensuring peace. Secondly, it is the only body whose decisions are binding on all member states.

The Liberation War of Bangladesh was fought during the period of the Cold War. Amongst the five permanent members of the UNSC, the US and China supported Pakistan and the Soviet Union had supported the cause of Bangladesh. While the UK and France sympathised with the Bangladeshis’ cause, they but abstained from voting to avoid direct collision with the US. Throughout the liberation struggle, the Pakistani army committed all forms of human rights violations. Yet the UN could not stop the sufferings of millions of people in Bangladesh because the UN can be effective only if the five permanent members of

184 Role of United Nations during Bangladesh liberation war

the UNSC act together. The UNSC was a divided house. Even the UN General Assembly (UNGA) did not take up issues related to East Pakistan to ameliorate the subjugation and suffering of millions of people there. Subrata Roy Chowdhury in his seminal work, *The Genesis of Bangladesh*, wrote:

It had never occurred to anybody that a repetition of the atrocities of Nazi Germany was possible under the regime of the United Nations Charter. ... A persistent denial of the principle of equal rights and self-determination was the root cause of the problem[...]. [the] startling paradox of a dependent people in a technically independent country. This is what Sheikh Mujibur Rahman meant by his familiar Bengali phrase *swadhin desher paradhinangarik*. (*dependent people of an independent country*)³

The political and constitutional history of Pakistan before the civil war commenced in Bangladesh amply demonstrate the denial of autonomous status, which was the spirit behind the formation of Pakistan, inherent in the text of the Lahore Resolution. An objective analysis with historical perspective in view allows one to infer that in 24 years, East Pakistan was transformed into a colony. The struggle for self-determination reached its crescendo during the civil war, which should have prompted the UN and its members to intervene and deliver the justice due to the people of Bangladesh. This chapter deliberates on aspects related to UN's role in regards to convincing and putting adequate pressure on Pakistan to find an amicable political solution; mitigate the refugee problem, including ensuring their safe return home; and, most importantly, the role of UNSC and its members during a crucial stage of the war to ensure ceasefire.

Refugee problem

The formation of Pakistan in August 1947 was a “geographical curiosity and a political absurdity.”⁴ While describing the united Pakistan, Salman Rushdie tersely said, “That fantastic bird of a place, two wings without a body, sundered by the land mass of its greatest foe, joined by nothing but God.”⁵ Jinnah himself was well aware of the differences between East and the West Pakistan but apparently wanted to politically experiment on the peoples of the two wings who were racially, culturally, and temperamentally different and geographically separated by a thousand miles.

It is inconceivable that a political experiment of this sort can ever succeed without implementation of the principle of equal rights and self-determination, without cultural and racial accommodation, without political freedom and economic justice, in the equation between the two wings. A total disregard of these essential requirements... eventually led to the inevitable rapture between the two wings.⁶

Clausewitz was explicit in his views that war is not an act performed by military men alone but is an expression of the conflict of ideas, objects, and the way of life of an entire society with those of another society.⁷ The Liberation War of Bangladesh existed for many years in a latent form but intensified in the aftermath of the Pakistan Army's launch of "Operation Searchlight" from the night of 25/26 March 1971 onwards. During the next nine months, many died, many fled the country, and many women were raped. Except for the data related to refugees, on aspects like death and rape it is almost impossible to reach a conclusion with any exactitude because of unavailability of reliable data. But after perusing various sources, one can surmise that human sufferings were of an alarming magnitude. Mujibur Rahman was arrested and senior leaders fled to India en masse. The most alarming issue for India at this juncture was the management of refugees. Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India, described the exodus as "history's biggest and cruellest migration"⁸ and US Senator Edward Kennedy characterised the refugee problem as the "greatest human tragedy in modern times."⁹ The reign of terror and persecution forced an exodus of about 10 million human beings. The break-up of the arrival of refugees from East Pakistan to India are given below.

Government of India realized that it would need international assistance to cope with the massive refugee influx. On 23 April 1971, the Permanent Representative of India at the United Nations, Samar Sen, in a meeting with the UN Secretary-General, U Thant, formally requested international aid. India suggested that a dialogue may be held between the officials of government of India and the UNHCR representative in New Delhi. Following consultations at the Administrative Coordination Committee (ACC) in Bern on 26 April 1971

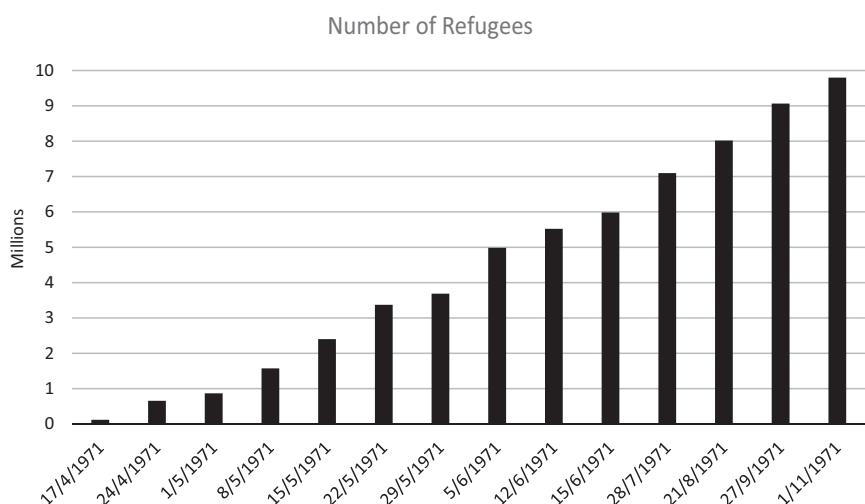


FIGURE 9.1 The Influx of Refugees.

with the executive heads of the UN agencies and programmes, U Thant designated the UNHCR as the Focal Point for the coordination of assistance. Pakistan strongly objected to India's initiative and commented that the number of refugees that India was giving the world was sheer propaganda and nothing but intervention in an internal matter of Pakistan.¹⁰

The UN Humanitarian Help Programme was launched on 19 May 1971. An amount of US\$500,000 aid grant was sanctioned and Prince Satruddin Agah Khan, heir of a dynasty strongly linked to Islamabad, was sent to Pakistan and India on a fact-finding mission in June 1971. The prince, however, received flack for his pro-Pakistan statements, which was highlighted by the media. For instance, he echoed partly but publicly Yahya Khan's statements about the refugee problem in the course of his first press conference on the topic; he preferred to speak about "uprooted people" instead of refugees. Explaining directly his reticence, he said:

When we speak of refugees, we must find out whether we mean people who came a long time ago, people who came during the disturbances, during the recent elections, people who came since development in March. [The] question is when did they come? He then added that many people in Calcutta are still refugees in the sense that they have not been permanently settled. The issue raised by him is far from being an innocent one.¹¹

J.N. Dixit, an Indian MEA official, accompanied the prince while he was touring the refugee camps. Prince Satruddin recommended greater international assistance and faster political settlement so that the refugees could return home. He also visited some camps inside East Pakistan where again his comments were highlighted by the world media, showing him as a biased person. The UN East Pakistan Refugee Operation (UNEP) was launched in June 1971. The UNHCR wanted to follow the focal point concept of aid management and UN Refugee Management Peace Keeping Operations by posting UN Observers. Many UN members were in favour of that kind of arrangement, but the USSR and India objected as they felt that these observers would do more intelligence gathering than mitigate the refugee problem. India had a single-minded stance that the return of the refugees was only possible through a political solution. This was also when India was supporting the Mukti Bahini in its training, arming, and operations. Positioning UN Observers in the border camps would have undoubtedly compromised India's own military preparations and Mukti Bahini's preparation and operations.¹² When the war commenced, Prince Satruddin suspended all refugee-related aid to India. At the end of August 1971, the total estimated expenditure for 8 million refugees for six months at the rate of Rs. 3 per day per person was Rs. 432 crores or US\$576 million; the total amount of assistance received/promised from abroad was only \$146.576 million.¹³

Neither the UNSC nor the UNGA followed its own precedent in the case of Arab refugees from Israel, at least in the sense of affirming the East Pakistani

refugees' right to return, resume normal life, recover their property and homes, and re-join their families. according to the provision of the Universal Declaration. The world body did not ask the Islamabad government to create conditions suitable for the return of refugees. At the 26th session of the UN, 47 speakers in the UNGA called for a political reconciliation in Pakistan, but none took the step of introducing the issue to the agenda of the UNGA or UNSC, which might have led to action. The international response to the refugee problem was confined to providing some inadequate relief measures.¹⁴ Indira Gandhi expressed her disappointment at the failure of UN in dealing with the root cause of the refugee problem, saying,

I am afraid the UN has not done much. It has ignored the basic question of why these people have to come. They would not have left their homes unless there were compelling reasons. The UN should see why these people are coming and create conditions by which these exodus will stop.¹⁵

Persecution of minorities

Although the Nehru-Liaquat Ali Agreement of 8 April 1950 guarantees the Hindu minority in Pakistan rights in respect to, life, culture, freedom of speech, occupation, and worship, the Pakistani army in its declared policy of purifying East Pakistani Muslims started eliminating the Hindu minority, consisting of nearly 10 million people. The extermination and persecution of minorities, particularly the Hindu community, indiscriminately, in execution of a plan or conspiracy to kill or to terrorise and compel them to leave East Pakistan; amount to crimes under Article 6(b) of the Nuremberg Charter read with Article 46 of Hague Convention (IV).¹⁶ Michael Hornsby wrote an article in *The Times*, London, highlighting the atrocities in

predominantly Hindu villages like Sinduri, Boliadi, Chapair, Radhanagar, Attabha, Tekrabari, Bhringraj, and Sewratali. Then usual pattern was for the troops, guided by Muslim informers, to enter the villages and destroy systematically almost every dwelling and hut. The villagers would be killed, the girls raped and money, gold, ornaments looted or stolen.¹⁷

Though the Hindu communities were the major target, other minorities like Buddhists and Christians were not totally spared. *Time* magazine on 2 August 1971 summed up the situation:

The Hindus, who account for three-fourth of the refugees and the majority of the dead, have borne the brunt of military's hatred. It is the most incredible calculated thing since the days of Nazis in Poland.¹⁸

It is an irrefutable fact that during the war of liberation in 1971, Hindus fell prey to the extreme levels of atrocities committed by the Pakistani army. The Hamdoor Rahman Commission Report (HRCR), a post-war fact-finding commission ordered by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's government too brought out this fact. Historical evidence leads to conclusion that there was a general feeling of hatred against Bengalis amongst the soldiers and officers, including the generals. There were verbal instructions to "eliminate Hindus" (Ch. 2, Pt. 15 of HRCR clearly brings out this aspect). The most horrifying admission comes from a witness named Lt. Col. Aziz Ahmed of the Pakistan Army. Referring to Commander Lt. Gen. Niazi's attitude towards Hindus, he said, "General Niazi visited my unit at Thakurgaon and Bogra. He asked us how many Hindus we had killed" (Ch. 2, pt. 18 of HRCR).¹⁹ Col. Nadim Ali of Pakistan (then a Captain) years later wrote, "It is Mujib-ur-Rahman's home district. It is a hard area. Kill as many bastards as you can and make sure there is no Hindu left alive," I was ordered.²⁰

Racial discrimination

After formation of Pakistan, several factors contributed to the gradual widening of the gulf between the two wings. The fundamental factor was the inability of the West Pakistani elite to accept Bengalis as equal partners. The British description of West Pakistanis as a "martial race" and Bengalis as non-martial was embedded in the minds of West Pakistanis. Even Field Marshal Ayub Khan is purported to have said to his Bengali friend, "Your music is so sweet. I wish to God, you Bengalis were half as sweet yourself."²¹ Hamid Hussain a Pakistani intellectual wrote:

The prejudice against Bengali Muslims has a long history and was quite prevalent long before Pakistan emerged as an independent state. Muslim intellectuals, elites and politicians, which belonged to northern India, had the picture of a Muslim as tall, handsome and martial in character. These characteristics were applicable only to Muslims of northern India. As Bengali Muslims didn't fit into this prejudiced and racist picture, therefore they were ignored at best and when even allowed to come closer, were considered inferior. Bengalis were shunned despite their political advancement and strong resentment against oppression and tyranny. A large portion of Bengali Muslims was converts from Hindu low castes. ... The majority of Bengali Muslim population which had customs common with Hindu peasantry and had a proud sense of their language was not considered as 'proper Muslims' by... almost all of West Pakistan. This perception later influenced the official decision to 'Islamize' and 'purify' East Bengali culture in Pakistan after 1947.²²

Many Pakistani military officers referred Bengalis with derogatory terms like "bingo bastards," cowards, etc. The civil services too believed that the taste of

the *danda* (big stick) would cow the Bengali *babu*.²³ The UN condemned the racism of Ian Smith of Rhodesia but, despite its precepts in Resolution 1904 (XVIII), it made no protest against the promotions and practice of racial discrimination in East Pakistan by the Punjabi-dominated West Pakistan.²⁴

It was most sickening to see reference to the word “Bangladesh”²⁵ in the HRCR. Though Bangladesh was certainly a proscribed word to Pakistani government and the military junta during 1971, they used the word as a code for “summary execution.” The reference is found in Lt. Col. Mansoorul Haq’s statement where he narrates, “A Bengali, who was alleged to be a *Mukti Bahini* or Awami Leaguer, was being sent to ‘Bangladesh’ – a code name for death without trial, without detailed investigations and without any written order by any authorised authority” (Ch. 2, Pt. 15, HRCR). This is further substantiated by the perpetrations of 1971—another witness named Mr. Mohammad Ashraf, ADC of Dacca at that time, narrates,

People were picked up from their homes on suspicion and dispatched to Bangladesh, a term used to describe summary executions. ... The victims included Army and Police Officers, businessmen, civilian officers[,] etc. There was no Rule of Law in East Pakistan. A man had no remedy if he was on the wanted list of the Army.

(Ch. 2, pt. 16, HRCR)

While discussing the political background of the defeat, HRCR states that the arbitrary methods adopted by the martial law administration in dealing with respectable East Pakistanis and then sudden disappearances in a process euphemistically called “being sent to Bangladesh” made matters worse (“HRCR: Conclusion” Ch. 4, Pt. 3).²⁶ Killing Bengalis was certainly encouraged and applauded by the hierarchy of the Pakistan Army during the war. We find reference to it in another witness’ statement—during his visit to formations in East Pakistan, General Gul Hassan used to ask the soldiers, “How many Bengalis have you shot?” (Ch. 2, Pt. 17, HRCR).²⁷

Genocide

Historical evidence supports the conclusion that the Pakistani leadership thought that mass murder and brutality would be a necessary measure to control a possible major uprising and to stop the eruption of a volcanic situation in East Pakistan. President Yahya, while presiding over a conference purportedly said, “Kill three million of them, rest will eat out of our hands.”²⁸ Amongst all the charges against the Yahya government, the most serious allegation was of a purposeful act of genocide. The *Saturday Review* was of the opinion that what happened in East Pakistan “appears to be a probable case of genocide.”²⁹ Genocide in the area began on night 25/26 March 1971 and continued for the next nine-month-long liberation struggle. It is estimated that the Pakistani army, supported by Razakars

190 Role of United Nations during Bangladesh liberation war

and Ansars, killed approximately 3 million people and raped more than 2–3 lakh women. There was sectarian violence and killings as well, with Bihari Muslims being the victims. It is impossible to ascertain the exact number in regard to people killed or raped.³⁰

The UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 1948, Article 2, states,

Genocide means acts committed with intent to destroy in whole or in part, a national, ethical, racial or religious groups. The acts of genocide could be killing members of a group, or causing serious harm bodily or mentally to members of a group or deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction whole or part etc.³¹

There has been debate whether one can categorise the killings in East Pakistan a genocide or not. While many feel it fits the definition, authors like Sarmila Bose do not agree with calling the mass killings a “genocide.” She commented that the “Pakistan Army committed political killings, where the victims were suspected to be secessionists in cahoots with the arch enemy India and thus ‘traitorous.’ Extra judicial political killings in non-combat situations, however brutal and deserving of condemnation, do not fit the UN definition of genocide.”³²

From the legal point of view, it is felt that leaders, organisers, instigators, and accomplices who participated in the common plan or conspiracy and who committed or are alleged to have committed crimes under Article III(B) of the Geneva Convention and Article 6 of the Nuremberg Charter can be tried for the infringement of international legal norms.³³

General Yahya Khan and his top generals prepared a careful and systematic military, economic, and political operation in East Pakistan. They also planned to murder its Bengali intellectual, cultural, and political elite. They planned to indiscriminately murder hundreds of thousands of its Hindus and drive the rest to India. And they planned to destroy its economic base to ensure that it would be subordinate to West Pakistan for at least a generation to come. This despicable and cutthroat plan was outright genocide.³⁴

The genocide and gendercide atrocities were also perpetrated by lower-ranking officers and ordinary soldiers. These “willing executioners” were fuelled by abiding anti-Bengali racism, especially against the Hindu minority. “Bengalis were often compared with monkeys and chickens”. Said General Niazi, “It was a low-lying land of low-lying people.” The Hindus among the Bengalis were as Jews to the Nazis: scum and vermin that [should] best be exterminated. As to the Moslem Bengalis, they were to live only on the sufferance of the soldiers: any infraction, any suspicion cast on them, any need for reprisal, could mean their death. And the soldiers were free to kill at will. The veteran US journalist Dan Coggin quoted one Pakistani captain telling him, “We can kill anyone for anything. We are accountable to no one.” This is the arrogance of power. The UN was completely ineffective in preventing genocide during the Bangladesh Liberation War.³⁵

Preventive diplomacy

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld considered preventive diplomacy an approach to prevent political conflicts, particularly at a nascent stage, so that the conflict would not lead to an East-West confrontation during the cold war era. U Thant sent a memorandum to the president of the UNSC on 19 July 1971 explaining the situation and recommending courses of actions. The text of this letter is available in Appendix 9. However, U Thant could not prevent the conflict in South East Asia in the nascent stage nor, for that matter, thereafter. Prof. J.K. Galbraith opined a peaceful political solution, recognising the rights of the people of Bangladesh to govern themselves as the only way out of the crisis. When there was a requirement to raise concern and act, the UN failed to do so.³⁶

Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury led a 12-member delegation representing the provisional Bangladesh government at the 26th UNGA session in September 1971. However, as Bangladesh was not a member state of UN, the delegation was not allowed to participate in the official forum. The delegation established contacts with delegates of many other countries participating in the same session and explained what was happening in Bangladesh and pleaded for their support. India and the Soviets tried hard to accommodate the Bangladeshi appeal but, due to lack of agreement among the council members, the request for the participation of the Bangladeshi delegation was kept in abeyance. In this session, during his deliberation the Indian Ambassador to the UN Mr. Samar Sen famously mentioned, “Not hearing the voice of Bangladesh is like playing Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark.”³⁷

Office of the UN Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG) comments that:

Genocidal intent can develop gradually, e.g., in the course of conflict and not necessarily before, and genocide may be used as a “tool” or “strategy” to achieve military goals in an operation. ... Evidence of “intent to destroy” can be inferred from a set of existing facts which would suggest that what is unfolding or ongoing may be genocide. From a preventive perspective, there could be other indications of a plan or policy or an attempt to destroy a protected group before the occurrence of full-blown genocide.³⁸

The UN had adequate time to understand the intent of genocide or an attempting that direction by the Pakistani army. Their brutality was well covered by the world media. The UN, therefore, could have been much more proactive in preventing killings of this magnitude. Despite all these efforts, the UNGA did not include Bangladesh issue in its agenda. It is very interesting to note that on 23 November 1971, while in a discussion with Asst. Secretary Joseph John Sisco, UN-HCR, Prince Satruddin conveyed that “only political dialogue between Yahya and Mujib offered any prospect for settlement of crisis.” He further recommended

192 Role of United Nations during Bangladesh liberation war

immediate debate in the UNSC as he thought that it was a great shame that UN had to wait until war broke out before tackling problems in the UNSC.³⁹

UN deliberations from 4 to 23 December 1971

The all-out war that commenced on 3 December brought about 24 UN resolutions during the next two weeks. Essentially, the body deliberated on the two submitted separately by the US and USSR and a third one submitted by eight member states. Three key issues were mainly discussed:⁴⁰

- 1 The immediate ceasefire and withdrawal of troops from the other's territory.
- 2 Political resolutions along with a ceasefire, which would mean the withdrawal of Pakistani troops and the establishment of a government led by the Awami League and headed by Mujibur Rahaman.
- 3 The Bangladeshi government in exile should be allowed to participate in the UNSC proceedings.

Neither Pakistan nor India was a member of the security council in December 1971. The Council meeting was summoned procedurally by the President of the Security Council and the Secretary General of the UN, but basically at the initiative of the US. The main purpose of the Security Council was to pass some sort of collective resolution mandating India and Pakistan to stop the war and begin a political discussion. In all, 35 statements were made by the permanent representatives of the member countries and by India and Pakistan between 4 and 21 December.⁴¹

The only resolution adopted by the UNSC was the one raised by Somalia on 6 December, which was referred to the UNGA. The UNGA discussed this on 7 December and of the 125 member states 104 voted in favour, 11 voted against, and 10 abstained from voting. Based on this, the UNGA adopted a resolution calling for a ceasefire and the mutual withdrawal of troops by both sides. The recommendation of the UNGA was sent to the UNSC for further debate. From 4 to 21 December over 20 resolutions were moved in the UNSC and the UNGA. None came anywhere close to the Polish Resolution, moved on 15 December, in its enunciation of the fundamentals or precision on procedure. But Bhutto tore it up in rage and walked away from the meeting. It was only on 21 December that the UNSC adopted Resolution 307 (1971), much after India and Pakistan signed their own ceasefire agreement, that UNSC passed Resolution 30 demanding. The UN during the Liberation War was a forum for discussing but not resolving the 1971 conflict.⁴² The UN's inaction during the period of the Bangladeshi liberation struggle is too glaring.

Despite a gross violation of human rights and a threat to international peace and security, the UN did not take any action to stop Pakistan by raising appropriate concern in time. The UN and some pro-Pakistan countries closed their eyes on the pretext that getting involved in the civil war would be tantamount

to interference in the internal affairs of Pakistan, a member state of UN. The right to self-determination of the people of Bangladesh was of no importance to the UN and the member countries allied with Pakistan. The UNSC, too, was oblivious to the situation in Bangladesh and did not raise concerns until the commencement of the Indo-Pakistan war on 3 December.

The resolutions moved by the USA, USSR, and Poland were most significant. In the US resolution, there was not a single reference to the political aspirations of Bangladesh. The Russian resolution, in contrast, called for a political settlement in East Pakistan as they, like India, believed that this would end the military hostilities automatically. The draft resolution moved by China was condemnatory of India and called upon it to withdraw its armed forces from the territory of Pakistan and requested other members to support Pakistan in their just struggle to resist Indian aggression. But the most significant resolution moved in the UNSC was the one proposed by Poland on 14 December. It called for transfer of power to the Awami League, the release of Mujib, a ceasefire, the withdrawal of opposing forces, the return of captured territories, and the return of refugees to their homes, under the supervision of the UN.⁴³ As mentioned earlier, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, apparently in rage, tore up this draft resolution and walked out of the meeting. That also saved India from stopping the war abruptly a day before Niazi's surrender in Dacca. New Delhi also disliked the "renunciation of the occupied territory clause" in the Polish Resolution because it implied giving back strategic heights and features like the one in Kargil. At the end of all these episodes in the UN, India declared a unilateral ceasefire before the UN could get its act together.

Pakistan is party to the Geneva Conventions of 1949. The Conventions impose a number of obligations upon a contracting party, not only in respect to its own civilian population in a situation of armed conflict, but also with regard to members of organised resistance movements, belonging to a party in the conflict, and operating in or outside their own territory (Article IV of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 relating to Prisoners of War).⁴⁴ Mr. Sayeed Muazzem Ali, a foreign service officer of Bangladesh who later served in the UN, felt:

The genocide in Bangladesh could have been averted if the UN had adhered to one of its basic purpose of "promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion." All the members were pledge-bound to take joint and separate action in cooperation with the UN for the achievement of these purposes. ... During the Liberation War many independent developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America were apprehensive of supporting the liberation struggle which could have initiated secessionist moves in their own countries.⁴⁵

However, as is evident, the allies of Pakistan insisted on adhering to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states, in order to block UN

194 Role of United Nations during Bangladesh liberation war

action. Thus, it was seen that the US, China, and all those countries that supported Pakistan gave more importance to geographical sanctity of the country rather than the desires of the majority of the Pakistani population. Muazzem also brings out how the UN ignored the gross human rights violations that occurred in Bangladesh:

It is true that the UN Charter forbids the UN from intervening in the internal affairs of member states, other than enforcement measures by the Security Council. However, this provision had been updated by the General Assembly's resolution 2144 of 26 October 1966. Accordingly, ECOSOC [Economic and Social Council], in its resolution 1503 of 27 May 1970, and UN Human Rights Commission, in its resolution 8 of 16 March 1967, clearly laid down the procedure to consider violations of human rights in member states. Unfortunately, these procedures and organs were not utilized to address the gross violation of human rights in Bangladesh.⁴⁶

On 5 November 1971 during her visit to the United States of America, reporters asked Indira Gandhi about the significance and strength of the UN, to which she replied:

[The] United Nations has its weaknesses, but we have always supported it, because we feel it is essential to have such a forum. When there was a League of Nations, everybody felt that it was not doing what it should do, and so it was done away with. So... but you had then something else and it came up under the name United Nations... it is important to have some such body. But we all know that it does suffer from certain weaknesses. It is not always able to assert itself. And, quite often, national politics play a part within the United Nations, instead of being able to lift it to higher plane.⁴⁷

Activities in the UN in the context of the Bangladesh Liberation War had strategic implications for India. Cold War politics and the division between the two blocks were visible and the discussions played out as per the predictable line. India clearly understood that in the UNSC its triumph card was a veto by the Soviet Union and that it could continue the military operation as long as it was under the umbrella of the Soviet veto. It therefore became strategically imperative for the Indian military to undertake a blitzkrieg operation. The USSR cast vetoes in favour of India against the US and other Western countries-sponsored resolutions and similarly the Polish and Soviet resolutions, which generally supported the Bangladeshi cause and India's stand, were vetoed by the US and the Western block. A few like the UK and France abstained during some voting sessions to appease the home crowd and at the same time not antagonise the US by taking a clear position. Thus, the UN witnessed a "tit for tat" scenario. J.N. Dixit avers:

Because of India's close relations and strategic equations with the Soviet Union, which were bolstered by the Indo-Soviet Treaty of August 1971, the Security Council was prevented from taking any mandatory, punitive actions against India that could have frustrated the liberation struggle. Had there not been Soviet veto, President Nixon's pro-Pakistan tilt would have found expression in a Security Council initiative[,] which would have aborted the Bangladesh freedom struggle and resulted in a monumental strategic setback for India.⁴⁸

The outcome of the deliberations in the UNGA and response by the permanent members of the UNSC left India with no choice but to finish the war with utmost speed to ensure its logical end. It also became clear to India that, after tabling the Polish Resolution, the Soviets would no longer veto any resolution sponsored by the US. The same was conveyed to India through back channels. In fact, the Soviet-backed Polish Resolution was itself a clear indication to India and its acceptance would not have been fully in India's interest. Dacca was captured within a few hours of the Polish Resolution being tabled and once the instrument of surrender was signed on 16 December, Indira Gandhi unilaterally declared ceasefire on all fronts, effective 17 December, much before the UN asked for a ceasefire on 21 December through its Resolution No. 307 of 1971. The Cold War superpower rivalry resulted in the UN failing to address the political aspirations of the people of East Pakistan and the UNSC looked the other way when all sorts of crimes were being committed by the Pakistan army in Bangladesh.

The sad story of the people of Bangladesh during the civil war was captured by the American singer Joan Baez in her “*Song of Bangladesh*.⁴⁹

The UN's inaction became a big question mark on the credibility of this august organisation. On 27 December 1971, *Time* magazine wrote, “Islamabad was the principal loser in the outcome of the war. But there were two others as well. One was the UN and the other was Washington, who appeared whole heartedly committed to the Pakistan dictator.”⁵⁰

Notes

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- 2 UN Charter, <https://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/un-charter-full-text/>, viewed on 20 July 2020.
- 3 Subrata Roy Chowdhury, *The Genesis of Bangladesh* (Calcutta: Asia Publishing House, 1972), p. vii.
- 4 *Time*, 2 August 1971, p. 30.
- 5 Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (London: Jonathan Cape Publishing House, 1983), cited in Srinath Raghavan, *A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 6.
- 6 Roy Chowdhury, pp. 8–9.

196 Role of United Nations during Bangladesh liberation war

- 7 Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976, rev.1984), ISBN 0-691-056-57-9.
- 8 *The Evening Standard*, London, 7 June 1971.
- 9 *The Statesman*, Calcutta, 15 August 1971.
- 10 Letter from N.A. Naik (Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations, Geneva) to the High Commissioner, 4 May 1971, p. 14. Fonds 13/1, Series 3, Mission to India and Pakistan (5–20 June 1971, Vol. 2), cited in David Myard, *Global Migration Research, Sadruddin Agha Khan and the 1971 East Pakistani Crisis* (Geneva: Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, 2010), p. 23.
- 11 David Myard, *Global Migration Research, Sadruddin Agha Khan and the 1971 East Pakistani Crisis*, p. 31.
- 12 Sisson and Rose, pp. 189–191, Myard, *Global Migration Research, Sadruddin Agha Khan and the 1971 East Pakistani Crisis*, pp. 23–40.
- 13 Bangladesh Documents, p. 432 cited in Roy Chowdhury, p. 227.
- 14 Ibid, also read, Sisson and Rose, pp. 189–191, Myard, pp. 23–40.
- 15 *The Hindusthan Standard*, 21 August 1871.
- 16 Roy Chowdhury, p. 145.
- 17 Excerpts of Michael Hornsby's story in *The Times*, London has been cited in Roy Chowdhury , p. 113.
- 18 *The Time*, 2nd August 1971.
- 19 Col. Sadim Ali, A Khaki Dissent on 1971, *Pakistan Defence Journal*, January 5, 2011, <http://defence.pk/threads/a-khaki-dissident-on-1971.87490/#ixzz44HtrkWbL>.
- 20 Hamid Hussain, *Road from East Pakistan to Bangladesh*, p. 2, <http://brownpundits.blogspot.in/2015/12/1971-from-east-pakistan-to-bangladesh.html>, viewed on 18 March 2016.
- 21 Ibid., p. 1.
- 22 Ibid., p. 5.
- 23 Roy Chowdhury, p. 145.
- 24 Farhana Akter Shooovra, Article named Perpetrations of 1971-An Analysis in Light of Hamdoor Rahman Commission Report published in *The Arts Faculty Journal Dhaka University*, July 2010–June 2011, p. 92.
- 25 Ibid., p. 93.
- 26 Op. cit.
- 27 Robert Payne, *Massacre*, 1st ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1973), p. 50.
- 28 *Sunday Review*, cited in Roy Chowdhury, p. 122.
- 29 For UN definition of Genocide, see http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/adviser/pdf/osapg_analysis_framework.pdf.
- 30 Hamid Hussain, *Demons of December-Road from East Pakistan to Bangladesh*, p. 2, <http://brownpundits.blogspot.in/2015/12/1971-from-east-pakistan-to-bangladesh.html>, viewed on 18 March 2016.
- 31 Sarmila Bose, *Dead Reckoning, Memoirs of 1971 Bangladesh War* (Gurgaon: Hatchett India, 2011), pp. 181–182.
- 32 Chowdhury, pp. 142–143.
- 33 R.J. Rummel, *Statistics of Democide: Genocide and Mass Murder: Pakistan*, cited in Farhana Akter Shooovra, Article named Perpetrations of 1971-An Analysis in Light of Hamdoor Rahman Commission Report published in *The Arts Faculty Journal Dhaka University*, July 2010–June 2011, p. 91.
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- 37 UN Analysis of Framework of Genocide, http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/adviser/pdf/osapg_analysis_framework.pdf, viewed on 29 March 2016.
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- 40 Dixit, *Liberation and Beyond*, p. 94.
- 41 Richard and Rose Leo, *War and Secession, Pakistan, India and the Creation of Bangladesh*, pp. 218–219.
- 42 Dixit, pp. 96–97.
- 43 Richard and Rose Leo, pp. 219–220., Also read, A.G. Noorani, The Polish Resolution, <http://www.criterion-quarterly.com/the-polish-resolution/> viewed on 16 October 2012, and Raghavan, *A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh*, p. 261.
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- 48 Dixit, pp. 97, 102.
- 49 For the complete song see <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/joanbaez/songofbangladesh.html>, viewed 20 July 2020.
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10

APPRAISAL OF THE WAR STRATEGY, AND ITS EXECUTION THROUGH THE PRISMS OF OPERATIONAL ART AND THE PRINCIPLES OF WAR

Victorious warriors win first and then go to war, while defeated warriors go to war first and then seek to win.

—Sun Tzu, Art of War

The opportunity of defeating the enemy is provided by the enemy himself.

—Sun Tzu, The Art of War

The Indian Armed Forces in general and the army in particular have been shaped by pre-colonial and colonial history. Between the end of the colonial era and 1971, the armed forces fought a few wars, but in scale and magnitude the Bangladesh Liberation War or the Indo-Pak War of 1971, as it is referred to by many, surpassed the previous wars. By the time it occurred, the Indianisation of the armed forces had substantially occurred, as a majority of the troops and officers, except those at the very senior levels, joined the defence services after independence. The senior military leadership of both India and Pakistan were of British colonial vintage. A quick and decisive victory against an equally matched professional Pakistani Armed Forces calls for an analysis of the war from various angles. Here in this chapter, an attempt has been made to evaluate the 1971 India-Pak war from the point of view of the application of “operational art” and the “principles of war.”

As brought out in Chapter 3, there are three levels in war: strategy, operational art, and tactics. When the Liberation War took place in 1971, the training institutions of the Indian Army did not incorporate ‘operational art’ in their syllabus. In fact, operational art was not seen separately and was considered a part of the tactical management of war. The present thought process of the Indian Army on operational art, included in the Indian Army Doctrine published in 2007, states:

In seeking to structure major operations, battles and engagements in pursuit of objectives, the operational level commander should design his campaign

plans around a number of building blocks which help him to visualise as to how the operation would unfold. His skills at this stage form the essence of operational art. Based on the desired end state, he derives operational objectives, decides upon the ‘centres of gravity’, ‘lines of operation’ and ‘decisive points’ and analyses the options thrown up by the conclusions drawn from these. He must also keep in mind the importance of ‘shaping the battlefield’ by the employment of firepower and manoeuvre, maintaining the tempo and factoring in operational pauses when drawing up plans.¹

Notwithstanding the absence of a formalised thought process on the operational art, the Bangladesh Liberation War fought way back in 1971 is a classic case where the capability of the Indian army and the application of operational art can be analysed, even if it was not worded that way by senior military planners at that time. A brief evolution of the concept of operational art and its definition have been explained in Chapter 2. In essence, “operational art is... the employment of military forces to attain strategic goals in a theatre of operations through the design, organization, and conduct of campaigns and operations.”²

Some of the criteria to assess the capability of an army are:³

- a Its ability to employ more than one army or equivalent in different theatres of operation.
- b Ability to synchronise simultaneous and successive operations by synchronisation of resources, timings of the operations, etc.
- c Ability to conduct joint operations by utilising resources of other services like the air force, navy, etc.
- d Logistical ability to support distributed operations, operating independently in different axes.
- e Capability of the leadership to make unambiguous intention, vision to set appropriate politico-military strategy, and ability to drive it successfully until the end state.

To meet the first criterion, the size of the army has to be big enough and the geographical setting of the war too has to be spread out enough to enable an army to showcase its ability in this respect. The Indian armed forces fought in two theatres where the Eastern Army, led by Lt. Gen. Jagjit Singh Aurora, was fielded for the liberation of Bangladesh in the eastern theatre; the Northern Army, headed by Lt. Gen. K.P. Candeth, fought the Pakistani army in the western theatre in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab; and the Southern Army, commanded by Lt. Gen. G.G. Beewoor fought at the Gujarat and Rajasthan borders, again grouped under the western theatre. Overall the politico-military strategy of India was crafted by Mrs. Indira Gandhi, her cabinet and advisers, and General S.H.F.J. Manekshaw and the other two service chiefs. Within the army, different corps fought in different axes through different arrangement of tactical actions in time, space ,and purpose, fitting into the overall objective. Thus, it can be seen that the first criterion set above is met.

The essence of the second criterion is the army’s ability to synchronise multiple operations without pause to ensure speed and momentum. The key to

achieving this is adequacy of resources and their judicious utilisation. Resources in any war can hardly be too adequate and the Bangladesh campaign is no exception. But much of the inadequacy was made up for through proper planning, positioning, and fine tuning timings so that aspects like fire support from the artillery, bridging support from engineers, and close air support from the air force for the ground forces were taken care of. Most importantly in this operation, commanders displayed ingenuity to overcome impediments and ensure the uninterrupted progress of operation. For example, a delay in crossing the Meghna river by 4 Corps troops due to the destruction and unavailability of bridge was circumvented by the utilisation of helicopters and the establishment of an air bridge through which troops could be taken across without waiting for engineers to construct a bridge. Also, local resources like various watercrafts, rickshaws, cycles, bullock carts, bridging logs, labours, etc. were utilised to the maximum with the help of the Mukti Bahini and local people.

The third criterion set is to examine the ability to conduct joint operations by utilising the services of the navy and air force. The concept of joint operation of Indian armed forces works on the philosophy that “success in a battle space depends on joint teamwork by maritime, ground and air forces operating effectively, individually and together in support of shared military objectives.”⁴ In the Eastern Army Command HQ Calcutta, to ensure successful joint operation, an Advance HQ from Eastern Air Force Command, Shillong and a suitable group from Eastern Naval HQ, Vizag were co-located during the planning stage, who were coordinating the joint operations. There are couple of examples that can be cited in the successful joint operation during the 1971 war. They are:

- a Western sector: Battle at Longewala—the air force carried out joint operations with the army in the battle of Longewala in a desert sector in the western theatre where the Indian Army just had one infantry company of 23 Punjab Regiment commanded by Maj. Kuldip Singh Chandpuri, who were under attack by Pakistani 18 Division with two armoured regiments equipped with T-59 Tanks and Sherman Tanks, respectively. On 5 December four Hunters of the Indian Air Force (IAF) launched 17 sorties destroying/damaging about 37 Pakistani tanks and stalling the Pakistani attack, causing them to ultimately withdraw.⁵
- b Eastern sector: Heliborne operation/heli-bridging—the IAF also undertook an innovative and unique joint operation mission in the eastern sector through heli-bridging across water obstacles. The first major helicopter lift (heli-lift) was carried out on 7 December when 12 helicopters carried out 66 sorties to lift 4/5 Gorkha Rifles Battalion from Kaluara to Sylhet, along with 12,500 kg of weapons and equipment. The biggest heli-lifting operations were undertaken to cross the Meghna river between Brahmanbari and Narsingdi and Daudkhandi to Baidya Bazar. Instead of building a bridge, numerous helicopter shuttle services were utilised. Of course, it was possible because the air force also maintained air superiority mainly because the Pakistani Air Force (PAF) by then had become inoperative.⁶

- c A parachute drop of 2 PARA Battalion at Tangail was carried out on 11 December. “This battalion group was to play a crucial role in the final investment of Dacca and influencing mind of the Pakistan Army Commander to surrender.”⁷
- d The Indian Navy carried out amphibious operations to land an army battalion group at Cox’s Bazaar on 15 December to block the escape route of Pakistani troops to Burma. Indian naval aircrafts also provided air support to lessen the load of the IAF and to support army operations, particularly ensuring the destruction of port infrastructure and the oil storage facilities of the Pakistani forces.⁸

These examples establish the fact that joint operations of the Indian army were planned well in advance and carried out to achieve the objective of the war. From a study of India’s war history since independence, it can also be concluded that for the first time joint operations were undertaken by India with such success.

The fourth criterion to evaluate capability of undertaking operational art is to look at the logistical ability to support the distributed operations undertaken in different axes, analysing the requirement, allocating resources to tactical-level commanders to support the execution of allotted tasks. The aspect of flexibility in terms of logistics and the diversion of resources to where they are needed is important. Strategic-level commander Lt. Gen. Aurora, after assessing the tasks, terrain, force levels of 2, 4, 33 Corps and 101 Communication Zone, ensured its build-up through the establishment of maintenance/staging areas. 4 Corps was the largest in size and farthest from where they had to be launched for operation. The corps staging area Tripura was 1,400 kms away from the area of operation. A single-line meter gauge railway link was to be painstakingly used. A Corps Maintenance Area (CMA) was built up at Teliamura and a Forward Maintenance Area (FMA) at Udaipur to support 4 Corps’ operation. Nearly 30,000 tons of stores were moved to Teliamura for 4 Corps, 14,000 tons were moved to Krishnanagar for 2 Corps, 7,000 tons to Raiganj for 33 Corps, and 4,000 tons to Tura to cater to the 101 Communication Zone. In addition, roads and a few airports (e.g., Tripura) were built or repaired by employing Border Roads and other similar organisations.⁹ The operation plan had a lacuna in that it catered to advancing up to the river line. The fast movement of 101 Communication Zone and some other formations approaching Dacca created logistical problems, which were addressed through aerial supply. Even a few field artillery guns and ammunitions were lifted by air to meet the emergency operational requirement. Local resources were also made best use of. Engineering stores were pre-positioned to cater to river crossings for some formations; for example, Farakka was an engineering dump where crafts were kept for 2 Corps to cross Padma. The historical examples quoted prove that the Indian army, despite various problems and odds, was able to ultimately plan and stage-manage the distributed operations by providing requisite administrative and logistics support. Thus, the fourth criterion to support the Indian army’s ability to execute operational art has been proven through examples of the 1971 war.

202 Appraisal of the war strategy

The fifth criterion to be examined is the ability of the leadership to make clear the intention, state the unambiguous political aim of the war, formulate an appropriate politico-military strategy, and display the ability to drive the war successfully until the end state is reached. In a democratic country like India, the political aim and strategy is evolved by the prime minister, in this case, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, in consultation with cabinet ministers. Military strategy was formulated at the service headquarters by General Manekshaw, Admiral S.M. Nanda, and Air Chief Marshall P.C. Lal. Being the Joint Chief of Staff and as the army was the main component of the Bangladesh Liberation War, Manekshaw played the dominant role and so did the Eastern Army Commander Lt. Gen. J.S. Aurora. Aurora interacted with the Corps and Divisional Commanders, war-gamed the plan evolved at Army HQ, and matched it with logistics capabilities. Mr. D.P. Dhar, Head of the Policy Planning Committee, played an important role and was the fulcrum of many activities and many times acted as the link between the military and political leadership. Civil-military coordination and synergy between the politico-military and foreign policy dimensions of the war were exhibited without crossing each other's path. In his book, *Race to the Swift*, Richard Simpkin wrote, "Synergetic – that is, its whole [the entire army] must have an effect greater than that of the sum of its parts."¹⁰ This was clearly visible during the Bangladesh campaign and race to Dacca. The strategic-level politico-military leadership exhibited synergy, vision, and a risk-taking ability that re-wrote the history of South Asia.

After evaluating the application of operational art by the Indian army during the Bangladesh Liberation War, it can be concluded that historical evidence suggests that the Indian army, by far, successfully applied operational art during the 1971 Indo-Pak War.

Now let us examine the campaign through the lens of the "principles of war." A war plan is arrived at after considering a host of factors and a number of likely courses of actions and weighing their advantages and disadvantages before adopting the "best course of action." In this process, the accent is upon keeping one's mind uncommitted, letting the prevailing situations and logical deductions therefrom-point the way toward the most suitable course of action; not rigid formulae or rules of thumb procedure. At the same time, an analysis of the history of warfare indicates that there exists certain fundamental truths and trends that require observation and following, as well as certain pitfalls that must be avoided, if a military plan is to be successfully executed.¹¹ Napoleon's successful conduct of war and his revolutionary military ideas created interest in military thinkers of his time and also inspired many generals to learn and imbibe his methodology for conducting future campaigns. "The 'Principles of War' as it stands today is primarily derived from the Napoleonic style of warfare."¹²

The Principles of War are broad guidelines that influence the conduct of war at every level of military operations. They are based on experience, wherein their application with judgement led to victory. They are not rules, yet disregarding them involves risk and could result in failure.¹² The principles of war followed

by most professional armies are almost same, with some variations. The Indian Army Doctrine lays out the following principles of war for the Indian armed forces along with an explanation for each:¹³

- 1 **Selection and Maintenance of Aim:** The aim is expressed as an intention, purpose, or end state. It should be selected carefully, defined clearly, and stated simply and directly. Once selected, it must be maintained.
- 2 **Intelligence:** Military intelligence involves the acquisition and exploitation of information about the enemy. Informatics plays a major role in ensuring that intelligence is available in time and in the desired form.
- 3 **Surprise:** Surprise implies catching the enemy off balance, thereby forcing him to engage in battle in circumstances unfavourable to him.
- 4 **Offensive Action:** Offensive action is the chief means of achieving victory. It results from offensive spirit and helps in the seizure and maintenance of initiative.
- 5 **Concentration of Force:** Concentration of superior force at the chosen place and time ensures success in battle.
- 6 **Cooperation:** All agencies involved have to work jointly towards achievement of the overall aim to achieve success in war. Jointmanship leads to cooperation; cooperation produces synergy.
- 7 **Security:** Security relates to the physical protection of ground, troops, equipment, material, and documents. It also involves the denial of information.
- 8 **Economy of Effort:** Economy of effort connotes balanced deployment and judicious employment of forces to ensure success with minimum casualties.
- 9 **Flexibility:** Flexibility is the capability to react appropriately to changing situations.
- 10 **Maintenance of Morale:** Morale is one of the more important elements of war. High morale fosters an offensive spirit and the will to win.
- 11 **Administration:** Placing the resources required at the right place and time to help commanders at all levels achieve their respective objectives is the function of administration.

Through the lens of the principles of war enumerated above, the Bangladesh Liberation War has been examined below.

- **Selection and Maintenance of Aim**

In the 1971 operations, the political aim of the government of India, as spelt out by Mrs. Gandhi, “was to enable the 10 million refugees to return in safety to Bangladesh and to ensure the security of our border.”¹⁴ The government of India laid down following limited aims for its possible military operations:¹⁵

- a To assist the Mukti Bahini in liberating a part of Bangladesh where the refugees could be sent to live under their own Bangladeshi government.

204 Appraisal of the war strategy

- b To prevent Pakistan from capturing Indian territory of consequence in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan, or Gujrat. This was to be achieved by offensive defence and not merely passive line holding.
- c To defend the integrity of India from a Chinese attack in the north.

India's military operations had a limited aim of liberating East Pakistan to get the 10 million refugees out of India and enable the will of people of East Pakistan to prevail. Hence to this end, offensive operations were launched on the eastern front and an offensive defence posture was adopted on the western front. We see that the aim was very well selected and maintained throughout the operations. On the completion of the liberation of Bangladesh, there was pressure both on Mrs. Gandhi and Manekshaw to use this opportunity to sort out the Kashmir problem by recapturing POK. Capturing Lahore was also much within the capability of the Indian Armed Forces. But Mrs. Gandhi, after achieving the political aim initially set, did not pursue it further and called for a unilateral ceasefire on the western front on 17 December 1971 and Manekshaw, despite provocations, adhered to the political direction. The US put pressure on the USSR to advise India to refrain from extending the war into west and not to break up Pakistan, but it cannot be said for sure whether the ceasefire announcement on 17 December was due to international pressure or to India's adherence and maintenance of aim. After the war, Mrs. Gandhi many a times asserted that it was her government's considered decision to ensure the end state of the war at that stage only after weighing international reactions during debates in the UN. Mrs. Gandhi wrote, "The majority at the UN were against us and did their best to embarrass us. Sardar Swaran Singh, who was the Foreign Minister, had an unpleasant time there till I declared the unilateral ceasefire."¹⁶

The Pakistani army changed their original military aim of offensive operation in the west, to a defensive posture during the course of war, and thus lost the advantage it would have accrued had it captured Akhnoor and unleashed Tikka Khan's offensive corps as per the original plan. In hindsight, the diversion of Pakistani troops from the Chhamb sector made little impact on halting the Indian offensive and it would have been more rewarding for Pakistan had they pressed ahead with the attack in the Chhamb-Jaurian sector in the western theatre.

• Intelligence

It is impossible to make sound plans without accurate intelligence. In the 1971 war, the Indian Army was better prepared as far as intelligence was concerned, compared to previous wars or other confrontations, though this did not mean that intelligence flowed accurately and was available in a timely fashion. On the military side, Manekshaw activated the old joint services organs and created some new ones. A Joint Intelligences Committee, consisting of representatives of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), the Intelligence Bureau (IB), and the Directors of Intelligence of the three services, was formed under the chairmanship of the Vice Chief of Army Staff. This ensured coordination at the top and intelligence sharing.¹⁷

In the eastern theatre, no intelligence repository was available before the planning of the Liberation War as, in India's defence, planning a major military operation against East Pakistan never figured into its plans before the Bangladesh crisis. So, intelligence had to be collected from scratch. However, the Mukti Bahini was able to provide a good amount of intelligence. Still there were some gaps, particularly in topographic information; for example, it came to light during the operation that the Pakistanis had converted one of the railway tracks into a road between Akhaura and Ashuganj. Although it was close to the border, this information was not available before the start of the war.¹⁸ In addition, there were some inaccuracies or gaps in information related to Pakistani deployment. Niazi's army in the east was much handicapped by poor intelligence on the Indian armed forces as the local population was mostly against the Pakistani army. In 1971, it was almost impossible for the Pakistani army to gather timely and accurate intelligence. To that extent, the Indian army during the Bangladesh campaign had a fair amount of intelligence and the main credit for that should be given to the Mukti Bahini and the local population of Bangladesh. About the aspect of intelligence during Bangladesh campaign, Maj. Gen. D.K. Palit wrote:

The highly educated personnel of *Mukti Bahini* readily understood what information was required, where and how to get it, and how and when it should be conveyed for maximum utility and effectiveness. Indian forces from the earliest days of confrontations on the border were almost invariably in possession of detailed information... one of the reasons why the swift by-passing moves were so effective was that within few hours of hitting against an enemy positions local volunteers will carry out quick reconnaissance... and return with the necessary information and then act as guides if required... intelligence channels also provided steady flow of reliable information from Dacca and other centres"¹⁹

Intelligence was also gathered through the BSF during the planning stage. And it was the intelligence gathering through wireless interception that the high-level meeting of Governor Malik in Dacca became known, which was followed by a successful IAF bombing on the governor's official building.

As Pakistan was planning a major offensive in the west, it became important for India to avail accurate intelligence with regards to their deployment and reserves. Certain deployments of the holding forces in Jammu and Kashmir, the Sialkot sector, the Multan sector, the Lahore sector, and Sindh sector were known.²⁰ Intelligence on location and movements of reserves was of paramount importance for India in the western theatre. It was the most vital information that army needed. General Krishna Rao observed:

Intelligence in this regard was either not forthcoming or was faulty. For example, it was reported that 7 Infantry Division had moved to Hajipir area, whereas it was discovered much later that it had moved to Changa

Manga forest south of Lahore. Similarly, the location of 1 Armoured Division was not known for a long time much after the war commenced. By far, India had reliable information about the enemy's strength, dispositions particularly in the eastern theatre, the credit can be attributed to the *Mukti Bahini* forces and an overwhelming local support. Equally the movement of some Pakistan Infantry Brigades from southern area to the Sialkot area to the north during the war, came as a surprise. However, in the Rajasthan/Gujarat sector, there was a failure of intelligence on India's part to give Early Warning of Pakistani offensive. Thus, Indian armed forces were totally surprised when the offensive was launched.²¹

R&AW was the only intelligence agency capable of penetrating enemy territory to get such information, but the organisation was found wanting, possibly because of its structural lacunae. On the whole, from the intelligence point of view, the Indian armed forces in the eastern theatre had better intelligence than in the western theatre, mainly because of the Mukti Bahini and friendly population of Bangladesh, which were of immense help in the successful conduct of the Bangladesh Liberation War.

- **Surprise**

In the 1971 Indo-Pak War, surprise was missing at the strategic level because the opposing forces were aware of the possibility of a conflict and the emerging conflict process went through a gradual escalation; both sides were preparing for six months or so preceding the actual war. However, at the tactical level both sides achieved surprise in few places, which were planned. A few examples are:

- a The reverse that the Indian army suffered in Chhamb during the 1971 operations can be attributed to the fact that Maj. Gen. Jaswant Singh, the GOC 10 Infantry Division, was too preoccupied in the initial stages with plans for an offensive by the Indian forces in this sector so the defences west of Munawar Tawi were not as well prepared as they should have been. By launching an offensive in the very sector where India was also planning an offensive, the Pakistani army achieved a major surprise as the Indian GOC could never imagine that the enemy would launch an offensive in this very sector.²² This was an intelligence failure too.
- b The raid conducted by 10 PARA CDO at Chachro in the western theatre is a prime example of what surprise can achieve at the tactical level.
- c In the eastern theatre, the concept of "Expanding Torrents," an offensive tactic, took the Pakistani army by total surprise. A multi-directional offensive coupled with parachute dropings acted as a major force multiplier for the Indian army. In fact, until the surrender, Lt. Gen. A.A.K. Niazi, GOC-in-C, Pakistan Eastern Command believed that a brigade-size force had been parachute dropped, though actually it was one battalion only. India not

denying a BBC News report announcing that a brigade-size force had been para-dropped was assumed as truth. Speed itself lends to surprise: the Liberation War is a classic example of that. This fact is borne out by the comment from Niazi: "You always seemed to come around behind."²³

- d The Indian Navy's missile attack on Karachi Harbour on 4/5 December.
- e A Pakistani submarine torpedoing the INS Khukri off the Kandla Coast.
- f Canberras and modified AN-12 (transport aircraft) were mustered to attack gun areas and rear administrative echelons of Pakistan to thwart a heavy attack of Pakistani forces in the Poonch sector. Night bombing in the Kahuta area, south of the Hajipir Pass, was also carried out to support army operations in the western sector after some modifications.²⁴
- g Air attacks by just four aircrafts in support of 23 PUNJAB against a Pakistani armoured thrust at Longewala resulting in damage/destruction of 37 tanks.
- h Lt. Gen. Sagat Singh's innovative use of helicopters for river crossings, thus achieving speed that surprised the Pakistani Army in the east.

- **Offensive Action**

In the 1971 war, the tactics adopted in the east are of great military significance even to this day. They were novel and followed the principle of Expanding Torrents, a concept mooted by Liddell Hart.²⁴ Success was fully exploited by continuous and vigorous offensive action by infantry units, which ensured the collapse of the Pakistani defence in East Pakistan. However, there seemed to be a certain hesitation and doubt about the overall strategy in the west. With the depletion of Pakistani forces by three divisions who were deployed in East Pakistan, India had the opportunity to launch limited offensives and capture POK. A limited offensive from 25 Infantry Division sector towards Mirpur would have relieved pressure on Chhamb, where the Pakistani army had launched a successful offensive. The offensive into the Shakargarh salient also displayed a lacklustre and half-hearted attempt on the part of higher commanders of the Indian army. However, offensive action by the Indian Army in the Kargil sector paid dividends. The Indian Navy (IN) and Air Force (IAF) maintained an offensive strategy during the war. An attack on the Karachi port on 4/5 December 1971 is testimony to this, where both the IAF as well as IN took part.

The Pakistani Air Force (PAF) remained defensive all throughout the war after the initial air attack on 3 December. About this Pakistani Maj. Gen. Fajal Muqeem wrote:

The defensive strategy of the PAF, in fact gave the IAF a free hand to interdict Pakistan communications and other strategic targets and to keep pressure on the Pakistani troops in the forward areas. The situation as it emerged, seemed that, while the PAF had complete superiority in the air on their bases, the IAF could operate without hindrance in the forward areas and over Pakistani vital communications along her borders.²⁵

Relentless offensive action tied up Pakistani forces in Bangladesh, giving them no respite. A sizable number of Pakistani troops were carrying out retrograde operations because of multiple offensive thrusts, which paved the way for the Indian army to reach Dacca so soon. Thus, it can be seen that this principle was followed well in the Bangladesh campaign in the eastern theatre, whereas in the western theatre, though the basic strategy was offensive defence, the Indian army in certain areas cited above did not pursue this principle too well. Pakistan's planned offensive by their strike corps did not take place at all.

• **Concentration**

If opposing forces have similar force structures, are identical in technology, and have similar doctrines then the most important factor to win a war/battle is the size of the force, in line with the dictum of Napoleon, who said, "God is on the side of the large battalions."²⁶

In the 1971 operations, in the eastern theatre, the Indians were able to concentrate their troops by organising redeployment without denuding the western theatre, where Pakistan was planning a major offensive. For example, in the planning stage, certain formations deployed against the Chinese at Uttar Pradesh-Tibet border were thinned out and brought in to the eastern theatre, which resulted in mustering about seven infantry divisions for the Bangladesh Liberation War.²⁷ The concentration of force is not in numbers alone—audacity of planning, boldness in execution, and speed through the application of manoeuvres, matter the most. In the east, the force ratio was a little less than 2:1, which is much lower than the traditional minimum 3:1 yardstick for an offensive operation. Sukhwant Singh observed that "India did not have any substantial edge over Pakistan in terms of superior strength in this theatre; the normal yard stick in military assessment is three attackers to one defender."²⁸ But concentration was achieved during the numerous offensive operations undertaken during the Bangladesh campaign by arranging and ensuring the fire power of artillery and air force in time and at the right place and by the application of manoeuvre warfare. Niazi violated this principle by deploying his army in penny-packets while aiming at holding every inch of ground in East Pakistan.

However, on the western front, the Indian Armed Forces launched their attacks over an extended front at different places, instead of holding some places with fewer forces and ensuring requisite concentration at decisive points. Lt. Gen. Harbaksh Singh, the then GOC-in-C Western Command, in his book *War Dispatches: Indo-Pak Conflict 1965*, wrote, "Our strategy of war (during 1965) should have been confined to the concentration of effort on a few, well defined offensive actions on narrow frontage to achieve rapier like thrusts deep into enemy territory."²⁹ In hindsight it is felt that the same could have been the strategy of the Indian army in the western theatre during the 1971 war. About concentration as a principle of war, Maj. Gen. P.K. Mallick wrote,

Concentration does not imply that there should never be dispersion. A carefully organised distribution of troops and firepower, accompanied by feints and a convincing deception plan, helps to balance our own forces and confuse the enemy. Knowing when to concentrate and when to disperse is a matter of timing and judgment, depending on a careful appreciation of the situation.³⁰

In 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh essence of this thought process was visible in many operations undertaken by the Indian army in East Pakistan.

- **Cooperation**

The essence of cooperation is jointmanship for achieving common object. There is an organisational deficiency in the Indian defence set-up—unlike in many other countries, there is no Chief of Defence Staff in India. The Joint Chief of Staff is a loose arrangement held by the service chiefs in rotation. During the Bangladesh war, General Manekshaw was the Joint Chief of Staff. Intra-services cooperation was ensured by the three service chiefs as generally they gelled well. Between the political entity and the service HQs, the gap was lessened by the induction of D.P. Dhar, designated Chairman of the Planning Committee of the Ministry of External Affairs, into war councils. Dhar worked closely with Manekshaw right from the planning stage to the end of the war and even thereafter until many matters were settled. At the higher strategic level, their cooperation and understanding of the combined potential of political and military means and their use of this was very effective. Incidentally, such an arrangement was made for the first time in India in 1971.

Similarly, the Joint Planning Committee dealt with the inter-service coordination of operational plans and work started on establishing a Combined Services Operational Headquarters. Thus, South Block (HQ of the Indian Army and Navy) and Vayu Bhavan (HQ of the Indian Air Force) became a well-knit team.³¹ During the 1971 operations, it was seen that in achieving the objective, the resources of the entire nation were used to the fullest extent for the first time since independence. In this context Maj. Gen. Lachhman Singh wrote,

Cooperation became the pervasive principle between the staffs, services, troops, paramilitary forces and the civilian agencies. Railway and civil authorities rose to the occasion and a gradual and progressive build up began. Labour, accommodation and road transport were organised to meet the needs of the defence services.³²

Military actions conducted by all three services were coordinated in a manner hitherto unseen. That the army command was located in Calcutta, the IAF in Shillong, and the navy in Vizag was no barrier in executing a synergised,

210 Appraisal of the war strategy

well-coordinated campaign in the eastern theatre. The air force and navy opened up Advance HQ in Calcutta to ensure fool-proof inter-services cooperation.

With air supremacy achieved, the Indian ground forces could move at will while denying the same to the Pakistani armed forces in the eastern wing. The IAF not only supported the army adequately but were extremely successful in interdicting Pakistani troop movements. With the PAF completely knocked out of the sky, heliborne, para dropping, air supply, casualty evacuation, and pamphlet-dropping operations could be carried out with impunity. The navy too, with its aircrafts operating from the carrier INS Vikrant, struck from the Bay of Bengal onto Comilla and Chittagong. They also helped in the amphibious landing of a battalion group at Cox's Bazaar to block any movement of Pakistani soldiers into Burma. These actions lead to the conclusion that it is because of joint operations that the victory in the war was achieved speedily.

During 1971, there was adequate cooperation between the civil set-up and the military both in New Delhi and in the bordering states where war preparation was on. Cooperation by the railways and other transport agencies, and the intelligence agencies; between the BSF and army; and between the Mukti Bahini and the Indian Armed Forces were visible. Small frictions, which could have affected the overall aim, never were allowed to take shape. For example, initially there were issues related to the BSF coming under the command of the army but this was soon sorted out. In aspects related to cooperation, it was also established that the personalities of the leadership matter a lot in ensuring multiple agencies functioning in synchronisation with mutual cooperation.

• Maintenance of Morale

During the planning stage, Manekshaw took adequate steps to build the morale of the troops. He ensured that those soldiers who may become casualties or be wounded during the war would be looked after by way of enhanced family pensions. He also ensured the retention of married accommodation so that the education of children of army personnel would not suffer. Various medals were instituted to motivate officers and men of the armed forces. The government of India accepted many of his recommendations so that soldiers could go to war with a high level of morale and motivation.³³ During the 1971 operations, within one week of battle it was evident that the "CRUST" of Pakistani defences had been bypassed or crushed. The Indian forces were on the threshold of Dacca within ten days. Winning is the biggest morale booster for a soldier or his unit and that happened quite regularly as, except in a few places, the Indian army was not heavily challenged. Due to fairly good administrative support, the army had a supply of meals, ammunition, and medical facilities with smooth flow, which continued to help in keeping their morale high. The entire countryside of Bangladesh knew that the Mitro Bahini was winning. The Mukti Bahini, as is the fashion of guerrilla armies, grew tenfold braver with each new Indian victory. Psychological warfare launched by Manekshaw, using various means like

broadcasting messages through radio stations explaining the futility of war and advising Pakistani troops to surrender to save their lives with assurances of looking after them as per the Geneva Convention. Actions like dropping multilingual leaflets from the air, etc. were undertaken, which eroded the will of Pakistani troops to fight a futile war. The Pakistani forces were informed by Manekshaw through those multilingual leaflets, a kind of psychological warfare launched by him on 7 December and in a letter to Niazi dated 15 December, that they would be saved from the wrath of the local population if they gave themselves up to the Indian forces. Yahya, too, gave in and on 15 December through a telegram advised Niazi not to prolong the war anymore because it was much beyond his means and asked him to take a decision to prevent the unnecessary loss of lives. This had a stunning effect on Pakistani morale and led to their surrender on 16 December 1971. Winning in the battles works like catalysts—it boosts the morale of fighting men. But in tough situations, the will to fight, a convincing cause, and leadership are a few factors that keep the morale of soldiers high, as is their motivation level.³⁴

- **Security**

It is important to organise the physical protection of warlike stores, military/national assets, and information security by ensuring that there is no breach of military planning and relevant details are not passed to the enemy. During the Liberation War, protection was catered to for all important bridges, like the Farakka Bridge, Howrah Bridge, etc. As per army practice, country-wide Vulnerable Areas (VAs) and Vulnerable Points (VPs) were assessed and, depending upon their importance, security against air and physical raids were catered to. Niazi, during his initial planning, set a target to destroy Farakka Bridge and bomb Calcutta,³⁵ but the PAF was crippled within 48 hours and thereafter no air offensive could be undertaken by them in the east. A night blackout all over India within the striking range of the PAF was imposed to prevent any surprise night attack. Territorial army units and air defence units were deployed in important places like Howrah Bridge and major oil/ammunition depots. Civil defence organisations and police forces were also utilised for this purpose. The security of information was also ensured by adopting various procedures like the use of signal codes and protection of communication lines. Historical records lead to the conclusion that no serious breach of security occurred during the Liberation War.

- **Economy of Effort and Flexibility**

In certain aspects, the principle of economy of efforts may sound like contradiction to the concentration of force. However, economy of effort aims at the optimal utilisation of resources. There are many examples that can be cited for this. For example, the grouping, regrouping, and tasking of 4 Corps Reserve Brigade, commanded by Brig. Tom Pande. Another example is the utilisation air/artillery

212 Appraisal of the war strategy

efforts. Artillery was not in preponderance in the eastern theatre. Very judicious use of this meagre resource was. A couple of days after the start of the war, some air force units like the 221 Sqn (SU-7) at Panagarh and 30 Sqn from Kalaikunda were diverted from the east to the west.³⁶ The last two examples are also proof of flexibility. In fact, the very plan of the Eastern Command and not initially naming Dacca a specific target was itself meant to retain flexibility and further decision and tasking of formations beyond the river line would depend on progress. Lachhman Singh avers, “The airdrop to our troops at Jhenida gave us flexibility to operate boldly. ... Our administrative plans worked and showed resilience to meet changing situations.”³⁷

• Administration

Until 1970, the Indian army in their contingency planning did not factor in any major military operation in East Pakistan. And therefore, neither the fighting units nor the administrative echelons were positioned for a short-notice war. For this reason, in particular, General Manekshaw asked for adequate time to prepare the army for a campaign in Bangladesh. The riverine terrain of Bangladesh posed administrative problems. There was a requirement for a vast amount of transport, including rail, river, air, and road. Napoleon famously said, “An army marches on its stomach.” The greater implications of this in modern warfare are sound operational logistics and a fool-proof administrative system to ensure unhindered operations by the armed forces. The military administration should ensure the needs of the armed forces, including rations and medical facilities for the troops; the issuance, repair, and maintenance of clothing and equipment; ammunition; vehicles; replenishment of fuel; warlike stores; ammunition; etc. Maj. Gen. Lachmann Singh highlights the importance of administration in war in the following words:

The interdependence of strategy and administration is obvious. The earlier strategic requirements are foreseen the earlier arrangements are earlier the arrangements and infrastructure can be organized. ... The strategic plans were finalized in outline at an early stage and the administrative planners immediately undertook the time consuming development of administrative infrastructure keeping in mind security of administrative establishments and surprise aspects of operational plans. ... The foresight of the planners in finalizing the operational plans at the strategic level early was a great asset to the administrative staff.³⁸

Administrative support was well catered to in the 1971 operations. The period from April to December 1971 was most profitably used for administrative preparations, taking into account the poor communications, the riverine terrain, the total lack of support bases, and non-existence of earlier plans of such large-scale operations in the eastern theatre.

The administrative plans for the Liberation War were finalised by July 1971. Maintenance areas were raised in each operational sector, using existing manpower resources. Communication centres were established at Tura, Teliamura, Krishnanagar, Dharmanagar, Shillong, and Calcutta. A CMA at Teliamura and FMA at Udaipur were built up to cater to 4 Corps. A CMA for 2 Corps was established at Krishnanagar, an FMA was built at Raiganj (West Bengal) to support the operations of 33 Corps, whose operational base was Balurghat, and another FMA was built at Tura for maintaining 101 Communication Zone. Thousands of civilians' vehicles from states bordering West Bengal were collected and pressed into military logistics build-up. The difficulties faced in supporting operations beyond the Meghna and Brahmaputra were made up for through various improvisations and the utilisation of local resources. Historical examples of this war are replete to prove that sound administrative planning, improvisation coupled with vigorous leadership, motivation, and having sight of success led to victory.³⁹

"Operational Art" is an arrangement of various tactical actions in time, space, and purpose towards achieving strategic goals through the design, organisation, integration, and conduct of operations.⁴⁰ An evaluation of the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War proves that the application of operation art by the Indian Armed Forces were, by far, done successfully for the first time since independence. In the eyes of western military thinkers and strategists, the conduct of operational art by India during the 1971 Indo-Pak conflict was noticed and earned praise and credibility, establishing the superior military capability of India in South Asia.⁴¹

The Principles of war are beacon lights for senior military commanders and their staff in the planning and conduct of warfare. About the principles of war, the British Defence Doctrine makes an emphatic statement that "they are enduring, but not immutable, absolute or prescriptive, and provide an appropriate foundation for all military activity. The relative importance of each may vary according to context; their application requires judgement, common sense and intelligent interpretation."⁴² The Indian Army Doctrine states that "they are not rules; yet disregarding them involve risk and could result in failure."⁴³ The Indian army and other big armies all over the world do give due importance to the principles of war in their training, teaching, and practice of warfare. It has been established that in this war the Indian Armed Forces, by far, adhered to all the principles of war. Its violation by the Pakistani Army in the context of some of the military operations undertaken during the war were glaring. Jomini's advise to commanders on the adherence of principles of war is stated below:

There exists a small number of fundamental principles of war, which may not be deviated from without danger, and the application of which, on the contrary, has been in all times crowned with glory.⁴³

Napoleon talked about the importance of the definite object of war and adherence to established rules. He exhorted, "War should be made methodically for it

214 Appraisal of the war strategy

should have a definite object; and it should be conducted according to the principles and rules of the art.⁴⁴

Depending on various operational factors and situations that have led to war, certain principles of war require more attention than others. But the most important principle of any war is the “selection and maintenance of aim.” In the instant war, on this aspect India scored over Pakistan. Maj. Gen. Shuja Nawab of Pakistani Army admitted that India’s biggest advantage lay in the fact that it had a clear aim for its war effort: to capture and liberate East Pakistan. On the other hand, Pakistani troops in the east had an amorphous mandate: keep India at bay.⁴⁵

Notes

- 1 *Indian Army Doctrine* (Shimla: HQ Army Training Command, 2004), p. 20.
- 2 Col. L.D. Holder, A New Day for Operational Art, *Army*, p. 24, cited in Maj. Robert D. Cox, *India and the Operation Art, A Monograph* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College, 1991).
- 3 Cox, *India and the Operation Art, a Monograph*.
- 4 India Strategic, February 2010, <http://www.indiastrategic.in/> topstories497.html.
- 5 Air Commodore Jasjit Singh, *Defence from the Skies* (New Delhi: KW Publishers, 2013), p. 149.
- 6 Ibid., p. 146.
- 7 Ibid., p. 147.
- 8 Palit, *The Lightning Campaign*, p. 149.
- 9 Lt-Gen. J.F.R. Jacob, *Surrender at Dacca*, p. 79, Also read, Lachhman Singh, pp. 265–267 and Khalid M. Zaki, Colonel, *Through the Lens of Operational Art: 1971 Bangladesh Campaign* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College, 2011–2012), p. 49.
- 10 Richard E. Simpkin, *Race to the Swift* (Elmsford, New York: Pergamon Press, 1985), p. 24.
- 11 D.K. Palit, *The Essentials of Military Knowledge* (Dehradun: Natraj Publishers, 2000), p. 129.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 *The Indian Army Doctrine* , pp. 23–24.
- 14 Letter of Indira Gandhi dated June 7, 1979 addressed to Maj Gen Lachhman Singh answering his questionnaire on Bangladesh Liberation War, cited as Appendix 2 in Lachhman Singh, *Victory in Bangladesh*, p. 307.
- 15 S.N. Prasad, ed., *Official History of 1971 War* (New Delhi: Ministry of Defence, Government of India, unpublished placed on the net by The Times of India, September, 1992), p. 279. Henceforth mentioned as Official History.
- 16 Excerpts from the letter of Indira Gandhi dated June 7, 1979 addressed to Maj Gen Lachhman Singh answering his questionnaire on Bangladesh Liberation War, cited as Appendix 2 in Lachhman Singh, *Victory in Bangladesh*, p. 307.
- 17 Sukhwant Singh, pp. 54–55.
- 18 Krishna Rao, *Prepare or Perish*, p. 202.
- 19 Palit, *The Lightning Campaign*, pp. 154–155.
- 20 Krishna Rao, p. 241.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Sukhwant Singh, Vol. 2 pp. 335–340.
- 23 Brigadier Amar Cheema, *The Crimson Chinar; The Kashmir Conflict: A Politico Military Perspective* (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers), p. 340.
- 24 Expanding Torrent is a tactical design of offensive operation, designed to collapse a defence zone by the cumulative effects multiple combat thrusts and similar to

- wearing away of a channel by swift torrent of water, hence the name. This concept finds mention in Liddell Hart, *The Man in the Dark Theory of Infantry Tactics and the Expanding Torrent System of Attack*, p. 15 cited in Lt Col. Richard M. Swain, *Liddell Hart: A Monograph* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College, 1986), p. 17. Liddel Hart, Journal of The Royal United Services Institute, Westminster, London.
- 25 Maj Gen Fazal Muqeem Khan, *Pakistan's Crisis in Leadership* (New Delhi: Alpha & Alpha, 1984), p. 241.
 - 26 Mowbray, p. 6, <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/readings/mowbray/mowbmod1.htm>, viewed on 12 March 2015.
 - 27 Sukhwant Singh, p. 59.
 - 28 Ibid., p. 138.
 - 29 Lt Gen. Harbaksh Singh, *War Dispatches* (New Delhi: Lancers, 1991).
 - 30 P.K. Mallick, Centre for Land Warfare Studies, *New Delhi, Journal*, No. 12 (2009), http://www.claws.in/images/publication_pdf/1249965562Mankshaw%20Paper%2012.pdf, Lachhman Singh, p. 263.
 - 31 Sukhwant Singh, pp. Vol.2, pp. 335–340.
 - 32 Lachhman Singh, pp. 263–263.
 - 33 Ibid., pp. 266–271.
 - 34 Air Commodore Jasjit Singh, *War in the Sky*, p. 165.
 - 35 Sukhwant Singh.
 - 36 Official Record, p. 596.
 - 37 Lachhman Singh, p. 271.
 - 38 Ibid., p. 262.
 - 39 Details available at www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/opart/opart-jrm.htm and <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a240408.pdf>, viewed on 12 March 2016.
 - 40 Army Doctrine Reference Publication No. 3-0 Headquarters Department of the Army Washington, DC, 6 October 2017, <http://www.apd.army.mil>.
 - 41 Joint Doctrine Publication 0-01 (JDP 0-01), 4th ed., dated November 2011 http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/FDB67DF9-5835-47FD-897D-CA82C17EC7A5/0/20111130jdp001_bdd_Ed4.pdf.
 - 42 *The Indian Army Doctrine*, p. 23.
 - 43 Jomini, *Precis de l'Art de la Guerre*, 1838, cited in *The Indian Army Doctrine*, p. 23.
 - 44 Napoleon, *Maxims of War*, 1831.
 - 45 Shuja Nawaz, *Crossed Swords: Pakistan, its Army, and the Wars Within* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 299.

11

REFLECTION AND WAR HIGHLIGHTS

Victory turns on the ‘spirit’ of armies,
will’ of commanders and the
‘support’ of the civilian national base,
Not simply the indiscriminate application of raw force,
Let any of the three components
of Victory be lacking, and
defeat is assured.

—Lt. Col. Frederick W Timmerman Jr.¹

While reflecting on the Bangladesh Liberation War, the first thing that strikes one is the premise on which Pakistan was constructed, defying all tenets of the formation of a nation state. Religion as a bonding factor did not stand the test of time. The 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War realised Louis Mountbatten’s prophecy that the union between the two halves of Pakistan would not last a quarter of a century.² It also disproves the idea of Pakistan based on Jinnah’s “two nation” theory, driven by the craving for power, where religion was used as a vehicle to reach the desired end state. Historical evidence suggests that he was aware of the coherent culture of Bengal and the danger of dividing the pre-independence state of Bengal on the basis of religion. Jinnah argued and pleaded with Mountbatten not to divide Bengal and Punjab and give them in one piece to Pakistan. Despite all his shenanigans, what Jinnah eventually put his hands on was, in his words, a “mutilated, moth-eaten” Pakistan. Scholars time and again have pointed out that the idea of Pakistan was ill conceived. Salman Rushdie called it “insufficiently imagined,” while it was considered an “artificial construction”³ by Jaffrelot. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad went a step further and proclaimed it one of the “greatest frauds” on millions of people. The emergence of Bangladesh left a big question mark on the logic behind the partition of British India and the creation of

Pakistan. History bares the fact that the political whirlpool over partition engulfed many a leader both from the Indian Congress as well as the Muslim League and to some “kingship became more important than the kingdom.” Jinnah was not alone in the race for kingship! He commenced the journey of the new nation of Pakistan with a noble idea, that all its citizens were equal irrespective of culture, religion, language, and belief as per democratic norms. But the seed of division between the two wings of Pakistan was sowed when Jinnah was at the helm of affairs. A couple of months after Pakistan came in to being, during his visit to Dacca in March 1948, Jinnah announced, “Urdu and Urdu only will be the state language of Pakistan.” Already a simmering issue, instead of respecting the wishes of 55% of its population and dousing the fire, he added fuel to it. Ian Chocrane observes:

The causes of the Bangladesh War of 1971 lay in an indivisible trinity of culture, economics and politics with culture at the apex... peoples of the two wings of Pakistan were so culturally diverse it would have been impossible to form a unified and cohesive nation-state, and that the cultural differences which existed between the Bengalis of East Pakistan and the Punjabis of West Pakistan transcended both time and space without any horizontal linkages.⁴

In this book, I intended to examine the grand strategy of the war and did not restrict it to military strategy alone because “that would have left many vital factors out of account. Strategy is almost unintelligible if looked at through military spectacles only.”⁵ The topic, therefore, is vastly complex. I shall present the interpretation and findings of the study, highlighting the undying art of strategy and its importance in the outcome. Strategy, which once upon a time was the domain of the military, underwent a transformation a few centuries ago when the great political thinker and master strategist Machiavelli, through his magnum opus, *The Art of War*, introduced

the concept of the involvement of the whole state in fighting a war, and the pursuance of that war until a political decision favourable to the nation as a whole (and not merely to the head of the state) was reached... he framed first great principles of political strategy. ...War must be waged by the whole nation: and, in return, the aim of winning a victory must be to benefit the nation as a whole. ... Because of his theory of the political importance of the war, Machiavelli stressed the necessity for planning and preparation for war by the whole nation so that the issue would not be left to an individual or a chance victory.⁶

Interpretations and findings

The study, after evaluating the total strategy as explained above and discussed in previous chapters, came to the conclusion that in India, policy objectives were evolved after due deliberations by the prime minister; her cabinet ministers;

218 Reflection and war highlights

advisers like Dhar, Haksar, and the Chiefs of the Army, Navy, and Air Force; and the directors of the IB and R&AW. Opposition leaders were also taken into confidence for formulating the national strategy and how to tackle the crisis. Some of the salient aspects in regard to policy formulations, the political aim of the war, and the military strategy have been highlighted below.

Evolution of India's policy strategy

In early April 1971, it was debated whether immediate military action by India would be a good strategy or not. There was divided opinion: whereas one group in the government thought of an early war, another group opposed military action in haste. Proponents of early military options argued that winning a war at this stage would be easy, as the Pakistani army in East Pakistan, with just about one division plus troops consisting of 16 infantry battalions grouped under four brigades, were grossly inadequate to stop the onslaught of the Indian army. Secondly, this group also felt that an immediate intervention would facilitate installing an Awami League-led government as per the election mandate and thereby would ensure not only the early return of the refugees to their homes but also the prevention of a further influx of refugees. K. Subramanyam, Director of Institute of Defence Strategy and Analyses, a non-government think tank, wrote a much-quoted article expressing his views favouring an early war, seizing the opportunity presented by the turmoil of civil war in East Pakistan. His views were supported by many across political party lines and by some retired generals like military historian, Maj. Gen. D.K. Palit, who felt that early military intervention would save many lives in Bangladesh. But another group opposed military action in haste. Prominent amongst them were Mr. Swaran Singh, the External Affairs Minister (EAM), and General Manekshaw, the Joint Chief of Staff. Swaran Singh preferred restraint and was of the opinion that India should make a case to ensure international support and legitimacy in order to launch a military offensive. Manekshaw wanted more time for planning and preparation, to make up for a deficiency of men and machines. He was aware that war in the east would automatically extend to the west. The fate of an unprepared army in 1962 was a grim reminder to him. Manekshaw was also worried that the army operation would run into the monsoon and that China would join the war, by opening up a third front. Cold War rivalries in South Asia were also factored in by the decision makers. After due deliberation, the following policy stance was framed:

- 1 The East Pakistan crisis is a political problem and can only be resolved by a political process through acceptance of the election mandate of the general elections by Pakistan. To start the process, Mujibur Rahman must be released immediately and Yahya Khan should recommence dialogue with Mujibur Rahman.
- 2 Pakistan should immediately stop military operation in East Pakistan and troops should return to the barracks.

- 3 The international community should pressurise, through bilateral, diplomatic, and UN channels, and impress upon Pakistan to resolve the crisis in East Pakistan by peaceful means. The UN must adopt immediate and adequate relief measures to assist refugees in India and ensure their early return home.
- 4 Build up domestic public opinion within the country for the probable extension of formal and active support to the liberation struggle of East Pakistan. Simultaneously, undertake a well-planned diplomatic initiative, sensitising the world about the plight of the Bangladeshis and India's compulsions.

Government of India's policy directives for the military option

India used an escalatory matrix by increasing military involvement in stages as below:

- a To begin with, the BSF was asked to provide limited assistance to Mukti Bahini already crossed over to India. This went on until April.
- b From May onwards, the army was asked to take over responsibility of Mukti Bahini in matters related to training, equipping, arming, and coordinating guerrilla operations.
- c From July onwards, the government of India permitted its armed forces to enlarge preparatory activities for a possible war in the eventuality of a political settlement for the Bangladesh problem failing.

It can thus be seen that the degree of readiness for the armed forces and posturing for a possible military operation were stepped up with regular periodicity, in line with the political compulsions of the government to exercise the military option as and when required.

As the situation in the east kept deteriorating, Pakistan mobilised its forces in the west in October 1971; in response, in November the government of India, led by Indira Gandhi, formally laid down its political aim for the impending war when it felt that India had exhausted all other options that could offer a satisfactory solution. In the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, the political aim of the government of India, as spelt out by Mrs. Gandhi, "was to enable the 10 million refugees to return in safety to Bangladesh and to ensure the security of our border." But, along with it, Indian strategists felt that the creation of a new friendly neighbouring nation would be in India's strategic interest, as it would also cut Pakistan's size, thereby reducing its potential and stature. To translate this political aim into reality, the following limited objectives for its armed forces were given:

- 1 Assist the Mukti Bahini in liberating a part of Bangladesh, where the refugees could be sent to live under their own Bangladeshi government. Basically, what it implied at that stage was that henceforth the armed forces would give full support to the Mukti Bahini while carrying out operations against the Pakistan army along the border area.

220 Reflection and war highlights

- 2 Prevent Pakistan from capturing any Indian territory of consequence in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan, or Gujrat. This was to be achieved by offensive defence.
- 3 Defend the integrity of India from a Chinese attack in the north.

Observations and comments on the Indian strategy and conduct of 1971 war

- a **Political Initiative and Diplomatic Offensive:** In 1971, India kept all options open, and to begin with it desired a political solution to the problem. It became important for India to launch a diplomatic offensive to counter Pakistan's claim that the Bangladesh crisis was an internal issue of Pakistan and that it deepened because of India's instigation and active involvement in destabilising Pakistan as India had not reconciled with the idea of partition as yet. Being a democratic country, Mrs. Gandhi understood the importance of managing the opposition parties and she used the platform of the Lok Sabha (lower house) and Rajya Sabha (upper house) in debating, informing, and opinion building. Mrs. Gandhi used the services of opposition leaders, in addition to government officials and ministers of her cabinet; they were sent to various countries to explain India's compulsions and socio-economic problems they were facing because of the Bangladeshi refugees. Most importantly, these emissaries were tasked with making the international community understand that the issue had to be solved through a political solution and the problem had to be seen not as a conflict between India and Pakistan but as one between the two wings of Pakistan.
- b **Alliance with USSR:** The Indo-USSR Friendship Treaty signed on August 1971 was a master stroke of Mrs. Gandhi, which ensured balance of power in South Asia. When war became a real possibility, the Soviet airlifting of military equipment to India began from the end of October onwards. In the crucial hour, the USSR used their veto power a couple of times in the UN Security Council to allow India time to carry out a swift military operation to win a decisive victory. The friendship treaty proved to be "the most significant political and diplomatic leverage to India during 1971 war. ...Two Deputy Foreign Ministers of the Soviet Union, Firbyubin and Kuznetsov were of particular help to India during the period."⁷
- c **Propaganda War/Media Campaign:** India made a coordinated effort to bring to the notice of the world media the plight of the Bangladeshi refugees and India's compulsions. Media briefings before and during the war were a regular feature. This helped in shaping world opinion, irrespective of the stand of their respective governments. Ironically, though many governments did not support India's stand, many of their people and much of the world media did. Post war, the Hamdoor Rahman Commission Report by Pakistan brought out that the Indian propaganda was so successful that

- all efforts made by the military regime in Pakistan to diffuse the situation in East Pakistan left the world unimpressed.
- d **Restraint:** India showed immense restraint in not opting for a military option during the early months of 1971 and held back against all provocations until the legitimacy of her direct intervention was understood by the world. India recognised Bangladesh officially only on 6 December, despite pressure from opposition parties and the Bangladeshi government in exile. As a part of this policy, the military was asked not to move troops in the western sector to deploy early so that India was not seen as the aggressor. Military deployment was completed only in November 1971.
 - e **Ensuring Legality:** Though supported through every means but India's actions like not recognizing Bangladesh prematurely proved that the plot was not created by India, but Pakistan's problems were of their own doing and the demands of the East Pakistanis were legitimate. What the government of Pakistan, led by Yahya Khan, failed to realise was that force cannot crush ideas; it was the idea of Bengalis to liberate themselves from the tyranny of Pakistan. By joining the war, however, India violated international laws on the territorial sanctity of Pakistan, but was able to defend the humanitarian intervention with the responsibility to protect principle, as India had done so to save Bangladeshis from further annihilation.
 - f **Selection of Timing of the Campaign:** It was debated whether to start the military campaign in April or during November/December 1971. December offered the strategic advantage of preventing China from opening the NEFA front due to winter snows. Also, it allowed better operational movements due to the dry season and receding waters in the rivers of East Pakistan. Besides, it allowed India adequate time to prepare, re-group, and train both their own armed forces as well as the Mukti Bahini. India also gave enough time to Pakistan, world powers, and the UN to suggest a political solution. Sisson and Rose observed that "the timing was right in all aspects, as late November to early December was ideal for a clinical military operation."⁸
 - g **Air Superiority:** In the eastern theatre, the Indian Air Force had total air superiority after they damaged the only airfield in Dacca on 6 December 1971. As a consequence, the only squadron of the Pakistan Air Force stationed in East Pakistan remained grounded all through the war. The Indian army could operate freely because of total air superiority. The air force also helped the Indian army to maintain the fluidity of the operation and, being devoid of this valuable war-winning arm, the Pakistani army surely was in a greatly disadvantageous position.
 - h **Naval Blockade:** The Indian Navy, by enforcing a blockade in the east ensured that the Chittagong and Chalna ports were non-operational. This cut off East Pakistan from the rest of the world substantially and the Indian Navy maintained "command of the sea" (the naval equivalent of having air superiority) in the west, in the Arabian Sea, in addition to in the Bay of

222 Reflection and war highlights

Bengal. Communication assumes great importance in strategy. India could ensure almost unhindered communication at various stages during the war, denying same to its opponent.

- i **Maintaining Lightning Speed (Blitzkrieg):** The Indian army's race to Dacca had elements of the application of Liddell Hart's tactics of *expanding torrents* and *strategy of indirect approach*. The operation progressed, bypassing the fortresses and strong points through multi-prong thrusts, dividing Pakistan's reaction capability and achieving surprise through speed and mobility. Fifty-seven Mountain Division and elements of 4 Corps tackling Dacca from the east fit into the scheme of attack through an indirect approach. This coupled with the bold employment of helicopters for crossing Meghna and other river obstacles and air borne operations (the parachute dropping of 2 PARA battalion at Tangail) expedited progress of the operation. It unbalanced Niazi's force and thus helped achieve the element of surprise.
- j **Decapitation:** The relationship between war and psychology in times of existential crisis is explicitly expressed in this war. Attacking the minds of the commanders through Manekshaw's psychological operations and relentless offensive operations by the Indian armed forces gravitated disorder due to uncertainty and fluidity. Yahya's plans further went awry because of unclear instructions and lack of information from Rawalpindi (GHQ). Much to the surprise of the Commanders of the Pakistan Army in the East, the Indian Army dropped troops of the Para Brigade (2 PARA) in Tangail on December 12 in the rear of the Pakistani Forces. The shattering explosion on 15 December caused by the precision firing of 128 rockets by the IAF into the Government House Dacca where Governor A M Malik was chairing a meeting had the desired impact on all those present at the meeting. Encirclement of Dacca by the Indian army and Mukti Bahini and Manekshaw's well-orchestrated psychological operations further created a panic amongst the commanders and senior office bearers. Niazi and many of his commanders lost the "will" to continue resisting the advancing Indian Military. By December 15, decapitation was complete.
- k **Encirclement:** Dacca was encircled from three sides, which caused panic in the minds of commanders as well as troops.
- l **Siege:** The unavailability of imagined external help from the US and China and no help from West Pakistan along with the encirclement of Dacca by the Mitro Bahini (allied forces led by India) created a siege-like situation.
- m **Strategy of Dislocation:** The Mitro Bahini in time and space outmanoeuvred the Pakistan army and many times gained the decisive advantage by menacing the enemy's retreat and by breaking the equilibrium of its disposition and cutting off local supplies. Niazi's surrender despite having 30,000 troops in Dacca is proof of psychological dislocation fundamentally springing from a sense of being trapped.
- n **Force Multiplier:** Mukti Bahini and the local people of East Pakistan proved to be a force multiplier for the Indian Army. Pakistan, in this respect,

was at a disadvantage as they had a minuscule percentage of the population as their support base. This unique support of the civilian population base was no less a contributor to the victory.

- o **Communication gap at the Tactical Level:** While much of the operation was well conducted, there were occasional communication and coordination failures. Here are few examples: While Dacca was being surrounded like a garotte, most spectacular events happened in the area where Nagra was at the helm of affairs. On 15 December, the spotlight shifted from 4 Corps to Nagra's sector. On the afternoon of 15 December, the 101 Communication Zone under Gandharv Nagra was placed under 4 Corps for better coordination. However, no signal instructions were issued during the melee and Nagra was not able to communicate with 4 Corps. The BBC on 15 December while broadcasting the evening news mentioned that India had agreed to a ceasefire on request from Niazi, to be effective from 1700 hours on 15 December to 0900 hours on 16 December. There was lot of confusion about the declaration of ceasefire: Indian troops fighting in this sector were not aware of the ceasefire declaration. Nagra, who was waiting at the gateway of Dacca, at Mirpur bridge across river Buri Ganga, had no information of the ceasefire. Early morning on 16 December, Brig. H.S. Kler, Commander of 95 Mountain Brigade Group under Nagra, informed him that a message had been intercepted by his signal company indicating that Pakistani troops would observe a ceasefire from 5 pm on 15 December to 9 am on 16 December. On learning this, Nagra encashed the opportunity and on his own dispatched his ADC, Capt. Hitesh Mehta and Capt. Nirbhay Sharma, Adjutant 2 PARA, under a white flag to contact Niazi and deliver a letter advising him to surrender. Meanwhile, Manekshaw agreed to Niazi's request to increase the moratorium by another six hours. At about 8:30 AM on 16 December, the party drove in a jeep and on the way Maj. J.S. Sethi of 2 PARA and Maj. Tejinder Singh, 41 Para Field Regiment Engineers, joined. The party was halted some distance away from the bridge by the Pakistani Army. Nagra's message was delivered to one Pakistani officer who sent it to Niazi's headquarters. The message read, "My dear Abdulla, I am here. The game is up. I suggest you give yourself up to me and I shall look after you." Maj. Gen Muhammad Jamshed, GOC 36 ad hoc Infantry Division, responsible for defending Dacca, accompanied by the Indian officers who took the message, came to meet Nagra. No one noticed that the white flag was removed from the jeep by someone while the party was being entertained to tea. Meanwhile, after the party left with the message for Niazi, a platoon of 2 PARA decided to redeploy near Mirpur Bridge for better domination, but they knew nothing about the party carrying the message of ceasefire. An LMG opened fire on the jeep. Sethi's leg, resting on the step outside, was hit with many bullets. Two bullets kissed the American helmet of Maj. Tejinder Singh. Jamshed shouted, "Someone is firing on us!" Further mishap was averted when Capt. Nirbhay Sharma and other officers shouted for them

to stop firing. It indeed was a close save for the rest! Maj. Sethi later was evacuated to the Pakistan Military Hospital at Dacca, where Pakistani army doctors carried out the amputation of his leg. Sethi became the first Indian army officer to be admitted to the Pakistan Military Hospital. Nagra, while at Niazi's headquarters, was requested by the Pakistanis to send an officer to stop the fighting at Tungi. With no officer around, once again Nagra sent his ADC Hitesh to pass the message of ceasefire to the Indian troops moving along the Tungi/Jaydevpur-Dacca axis. Hitesh along with an officer (believed to be OC Provost of the Pakistan Army, based at Mirpur-Dacca) and couple of soldiers of the Pakistan Army travelled in a Pakistani army jeep to inform them about the ceasefire and the ensuing surrender to avert further clashes and bloodshed. The advancing Indian Brigade (167 Infantry Brigade) led by 7 BIHAR, once bitten twice shy, was very cautious in preventing any exfiltration of the Pakistan army, like the recent daring escape of Lt. Col. Sultan Ahmed, CO 33 Baluch, along with 100 men from Jamalpur. Immediately on spotting the Pakistani jeep, they brought heavy fire down on it with all guns blazing, damaging the jeep severely. The lives of the occupants were put out like a lamp blown by a gale. This unfortunate incident happened hours before Niazi's surrender in Dacca.

In the western theatre during the battle of Palanwala, due to lack of coordination and information sharing between the formations, the 3/4 Gorkha Rifles under 68 Infantry Brigade was tasked to counter-attack a position that was assumed to be occupied by the Pakistani army, whereas, actually the feature was held by another infantry battalion of the Indian army, the 10 Garhwal Rifles. When the assaulting troops were approximately 200 m or so from the objective, the CO 10 Garhwal Rifles realised that their own troops were coming in for a counter-attack. Reacting quickly to the mistake, CO 10 Garhwal Rifles Lt. Col. Onkar Singh came out of the bunker and shouted from the top of his voice to stop the attack. A major massacre was averted but Singh fell prey to the bullets, probably from the machine gun detachments supporting the assaulting columns. This happened primarily due to a lack of coordination and a gap in information at the formation level. Similar confusion in war, though not uncommon, brings out lessons on the importance of communication and coordination.

Pakistan's politico-military strategy

Unlike India, Pakistan did not have a democratic government at the time of war or for that matter for most of the period from its inception until its disintegration. General Yahya had on two hats: one of the President and Head of the Government of Pakistan and the second of the Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistan Armed Forces. After a long spell of military rule under Field Marshall Ayub Khan, Yahya intended to install a democratic government in Pakistan and he conducted a successful general election in December 1970. Neither the

establishment of Pakistan who were feeding information to Yahya nor the political parties of Pakistan were able to guess the election result. The overwhelming majority of the Awami League led by Mujibur Rahman upset the whole calculation and an all-out effort was made by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and the establishment of Pakistan, supported by the all-powerful military, to deny power to the majority party, the Awami League. Because that would have resulted in transferring power from the Punjabis and Sindhis to the Bengalis, which was unacceptable to them. Pakistan also did not have a constitution. Under these circumstances no meaningful political strategy for the war was formulated by leaders beset with a military mindset. The only policy direction was “keep India away” because India was seen as the core problem. This attitude also gave birth to rhetoric, like “crush India” slogans. It was true that the Awami League had India’s support, but Pakistan’s historical obsession with India blurred its vision to the internal problem and widened the gap between the two wings. Internal decay is more harmful to a nation than external aggression. The leadership in Pakistan failed to arrest the decades of internal decay and when the situation went awry and the country’s eastern wing came to standstill because of mass civil disobedience, they opted for a military solution to a political problem.

The Pakistani Army’s vision was “defence of East Pakistan lies in West Pakistan” or “the battle of the East will be fought in the West.”⁹ It was originally based on an analysis by Field Marshall Auchinlek about the defence potential of Indian subcontinent during the British Raj. Taking a cue from this, Field Marshall Ayub Khan made this as Pakistan’s defence strategy, which continued until 1971. It was a vague and much vaunted strategy, which did not factor in the geo-political realism of 1971. The aim was to contain the Indian forces in the east to prevent their deployment in the west, where they were planning to fight decisive offensive operations in J&K and Punjab to capture strategically important Indian territory. It was assumed that a captured piece of Indian territory would enable Pakistan to negotiate with India from a position of strength. Pakistan also perceived that their allies like the US, China, etc. would join them in their war and, supported by their alliance partners, the UN would pressurise India to agree to ceasefire before any major damage could be done. Niazi stated that defence strategy of Pakistan

was adopted after protracted trials based on copious studies. Within the context of this concept, the plans for fighting a war with India in East Pakistan were not to be in isolation, but an integral part of the overall strategy.¹⁰

It is to be noted that Lt. Gen. Niazi, GOC Eastern Command of former East Pakistan, was tasked to evict guerrillas, ensure that no territory fell into enemy hands that they could then declare as independent Bangladesh, and to defend East Pakistan against external aggression. It can be seen in this context that one was an internal issue of solving political problem through military means and other two were to keep India at bay.

Flaws in Pakistan's strategy

General Beauford while discussing strategy concluded, “In war the loser deserves to lose because his defeat must result from errors of thinking, made either before or during the conflict.”¹¹ This study has found certain major flaws in Pakistan’s national strategy during the 1971 War. In 1971, one of their wings, East Pakistan, was fighting for liberation, the election mandate was not respected, and there was a constitutional crisis in Pakistan. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto claimed that Punjab and Sindh were the bastions of power in Pakistan and that could not be shifted to Dacca. Bhutto was able to take the military along by convincing Yahya and many other generals to solve the political crisis by unleashing the military, so as to not hand over power to the Bengalis. Even the civil services believed in the “use of force to cow the Bengalis” and advised the government accordingly. Pakistan was devoid of a political strategy; they were working on the principle of revenge for daring to challenge the central authority, even if that was the army. With such a mindset, there was a void of strategic insight. The leadership did not spell out in clear terms the political aim of the war. Pakistan violated the abiding principle of war: “selection and maintenance of aim.” In this context, it is proven that India had a clear aim for its war effort: to capture and liberate East Pakistan, but the Pakistani government gave vague and unachievable directions to Lt. Gen. Yahya, Commander-in-Chief of East Pakistan: keep India at bay.

Now here is another pertinent question about Pakistan’s military strategy – the defence of the East lies in the West. Can there be any fixed strategy for a quarter of a century for a country that had its origin during colonial rule and for a different reason? Accepting the colonial standpoint after constructing a new nation essentially meant one wing telling the other wing with a larger population, “You are indefensible, so you are dispensable. However, after fighting a decisive war in the western wing, we will repair your situation during negotiations with the enemy.” This was questionable logic both from a political and military angle.¹² Can a formula like fixed strategy be used when choosing a course or courses of action, irrespective of any situation? Unlike the previous Indo-Pak wars, the Pakistani army in the east was fighting a civil war from March 1971. By the time the main war occurred, the troops were worn out, fatigued, and, to an extent, demotivated. The army also did not have its full complements of fire power. The PAF and PN were minuscule in number in East Pakistan. The handling of the situation leads one to believe that it was a failure on the part of Pakistani leadership, who could not anticipate the possibility of a major war with India. Apparently, they assessed that the US would put adequate pressure on India and that, coupled with the China factor, would deter India from taking such a drastic step.

Thirdly, instead of a purely offensive strategy in the west, they could have strengthened their defences in both the east and west by balancing the distribution of force. Pakistan could have fought a good defensive battle in the west with limited, well-planned offensive actions. As Liddell Hart envisioned, defence is the best form of warfare if conducted properly. Pakistan did not have depth in their geography, so trading space for time as part of their military strategy

was ruled out. But by organising a proper defence and limited offensive actions, which was the Indian strategy in the west, they could have held the attacking force at or near the border and could have gained time for the UN to enforce a ceasefire. Maj. Gen. D.K. Palit comments, “Clausewitz reasoned that the defensive must be the ‘stronger form of war’ because it was normally the weaker side that adopted it. ... However, the defensive battle can succeed only when it reverts to the offensive.”¹³ That is where fierce limited offensive should have done the trick. The same argument supporting a conventional form of defence was propounded by General Sundarji who wrote:

The strategy of conventional defence consists of two parts. The first is a dissuasive part; a strong defensive position, which can extract a heavy toll from the attacker. ... The second part of the strategy is the almost axiomatic counter offensive, at a time and place of the defender’s choice. ... The threat of counter offensive, and the certainty of heavy damage to the original attacker, is the deterrent part of the equation.¹⁴

Along with this, another question to be answered – did Pakistan aim to win the war against India and Mukti Bahini in the East and against India in the West? Since many months before launching the air offensive on 3rd December, Pakistan was threatening India with war. However, Pakistan leadership did not display their strategic insight on whether to fight war at all or not or when to fight. In this context, Agha Amin, a Pakistani strategy analyst states:

Pakistan Army did learn some strategic lessons from the 1965 War. ... However, the whole situation had now drastically changed. While 1965 was the best chance for Pakistan to go at war, 1971 was the worst moment to start war with India. Again, as in 1947 the Pakistani leadership was caught in an irrevocable vicious whirlpool of history. Since Ayub lacked both political as well as military strategic insight he had irrevocably alienated the country’s East Wing! Pakistan in 1971 was a house divided against itself and East Pakistan had to fall.¹⁵

False Sense of Superiority: There was a sense of hollow propaganda, unjustified bragging, and living on past glory, like saying the Musalmans had never lost a war against the Hindus in 1,000 years of history or that one Muslim soldier is equal to ten Hindu soldiers, etc. This fostered a false sense of ego amongst the Pakistanis, which cannot be factored in war as strength; on the contrary, not being realistic in an assessment of strength could lead to disaster. Some senior leaders of the Pakistani army showed tendencies of such thinking. A Pakistani columnist wrote:

Rhetoric hyperbole and irrational thinking have no place in military profession where life and death situations are involved. In June 1971, Lt. Gen. Niazi while presenting his plan to the central government said, “I would capture Agartala and a big chunk of Assam and develop multiple thrusts

into Indian Bengal. We would cripple the economy of Calcutta by blowing up bridges and sinking boats and ships in Hooghly river and create a panic amongst civilians. One air raid in Calcutta will see a sea of humanity in motion to get out of Calcutta.”¹⁶

Risk analyses and strategy

In Chapter 2, the Lykke model of risk analyses of strategy was explained. In the Lykke proposition, the ends are “objectives,” the ways are the “concepts” for accomplishing the objectives, and the means are the “resources” for supporting the concepts. If the three components are not kept in balance and if any one of them is abysmally disproportionate, the risk is too great and the strategy falls over. It appears that the Pakistani leadership did not carry out risk analyses in the planning stage. A case in point: why did they plan Tikka Khan’s 1 Corps offensive against India, assuming a favourable air situation? Was a favourable air situation achievable when the IAF had superiority in numbers? Indian 1 Corps (Offensive Corps) was also positioned by November in the projected area of operation of the Pakistani Offensive Corps. So launching such an operation would have been suicidal; it would have incurred very heavy casualties to both tanks and fighter aircrafts, and was therefore uneconomical. Based on a calculation by applying operational research methods, Air Commodore Jasjit Singh highlighted that the heavy loss of aircrafts to ensure a favourable air situation for the duration of the planned main offensive would have been cost prohibitive and almost senseless.¹⁷

This offensive operation, which was conceptualised to be the lynchpin of the overall strategy of Pakistan, was not unleashed until end of the war. After delaying the unleashing of this strike corps by a week, possibly there was some realisation that such an operation would have been suicidal—it would have incurred very heavy casualties to both tanks and fighter aircrafts—and therefore, it was shelved. About this, Pakistani strategy analyst A.H. Amin wrote,

There was a reason for this inaction. One that the cost was too heavy and the second that armour higher commanders (the CGS Gul Hassan and GOC 1st Armoured Division) as Yahya Khan asserts had lost the will to launch an attack.¹⁸

Timing of the war

The location and timing of a war is itself a big strategic decision that lends to the outcome of the war. The Indian Army in the west was fully deployed only by the end of November, as part of the political deception plan so that world would not see India as a war-mongering nation, aiming to destroy Pakistan. But on the other hand, Pakistani cantonments were nearer to the border and the army had completed her war mobilisation by October 1971. It was the right moment for Pakistan to launch a pre-emptive war in October 1971, i.e., just after the

monsoon season when Indian troops were not yet fully deployed. And had it done so, India would have been in a difficult situation and possibly history could have been different. The Pakistanis dithered too long and commenced operations on 3 December 1971, when India was fully positioned.

Pakistan's diplomatic strategy

Pakistan like India, contacted the leaders of many countries, impressing upon them India's interference in Pakistan's internal matters. The US, China, and Islamic countries supported Pakistan. In fact, the voting pattern in the UN General Assembly itself proves that Pakistan was successful in convincing many governments about India's interference in their internal matter. Mainly, it worked on the basis of a military alliance system like NATO or SEATO, which Pakistan or an Islamic country was a member of; the latter viewed the situation as a Muslim country, Pakistan, being destroyed by a Hindu country, India. China, an age-old ally of Pakistan, as such had cold relations with India after China's aggression against India in 1962. A few, African and South East Asian countries did not want to support the Bangladeshi liberation cause in fear that their country might then fall prey to similar activities from dissenting groups within.

Observations on Pakistan's conduct of war

A few salient aspects that emerge on the conduct of war are mentioned below:

- a **Deployment of the Pakistani Army in the East:** Niazi wanted to hold every important feature in East Pakistan just because he was mandated to ensure territorial sanctity. This strategy of fighting defensive battles by deploying troops thinly proved to be wrong. Such deployments can act as eyes and ears for the commanders and offer early warnings but cannot put up a stiff resistance. Niazi did not arrange an adequate reserve to stop the advancing Indian Army. At some places like Hilli, his fortress concept of defence worked because of the Indian Army's wrong tactical plan to capture Hilli. But after learning this lesson, the Indians thereafter mostly bypassed strong points/fortresses, thus defeating Niazi's design of defensive strategy. Niazi did not ensure the proper defence of Dacca, the lynchpin of East Pakistan, though he claimed that he catered to it through his contingency planning. Even if he did that, he did so on the assumption that forward troops would successfully conduct retrograde operations. But speed achieved through helicopter-bridging, air-borne operations, the success of Tiger Siddiqi's liberation force, and the successful conduct of air operations by the IAF caught Niazi and his army by surprise. This, therefore, proves that Niazi's defensive strategy, design of defensive battles, and deployment of troops were unsound. It appears that in his assumptions during the planning stage, he accorded himself too much success and assumed that everything would

230 Reflection and war highlights

happen as per his plan, which led to the improbabilities of war not being factored and him not giving his enemy their dues, which is a reflection of his traits and ideas of self-assumed invincibility, examples of which have been discussed before.

- b **Professionalism:** In terms of soldiering, Pakistani soldiers and officers at the tactical level proved to be professional fighters, just like the Indian armed forces. Some of them showed outstanding leadership qualities and indomitable courage against heavy odds during the war. A few examples are Brigadier Tajjamal Hussain who fought a valiant battle at Hilli, Captain Ahsan Malik at Kamalpur, and Lt. Col. Sultan Mehmood at Jamalpur in East Pakistan and Maj. Gen. Iftikar in the western theatre, who successfully launched an offensive operation against India in the Chhamb sector.
- c **Morale:** The Pakistani Army fought a civil war in East Pakistan for nine months before the main war. They were under constant fear of Mukti Bahini guerrillas. Under such circumstances, the soldiers were tired and their morale was low. Exceptions apart, the will to fight eroded slowly. India's simultaneous offensive operations and unchallenged heavy air attacks also added to the low morale. Manekshaw's psychological war through radio broadcasts and dropping of leaflets advising Pakistani soldiers to surrender and not to fight a futile war also had an effect. Assurances were given by Manekshaw that they would be looked after as per the Geneva Conventions for prisoners of war. Even the armoured commanders of the strike corps opposing India in the western theatre lost the will to fight because they too thought that it would be an exercise in futility. This was further accentuated because of successful Indian naval offensives and air raids of Karachi port. When Pakistan was disintegrating, besides the military, public morale too touched rock bottom. As Colin S. Gray and many other theorists of strategy have observed, "Strategic history demonstrates the prevalence of loss of enemy's will in deciding military outcome."¹⁹
- d **Discipline and Soldiering:** The bedrock of any army is discipline. Pakistani soldiers were incited to persecute minorities, kill non-collaborators of all hues, rape women, and destroy properties of the Bengalis of East Pakistan. The Hamdoor Rahman Commission report highlighted such undesirable acts, which had the backing of senior commanders. Soldiers were loose cannons and lose cannons are unlikely to bring down effective fire.
- e **Pakistan Air Force (PAF):** The PAF in the east was made inoperative by 6 December. Niazi's army thus had the unenviable and difficult task of defending against a superior invading army backed by their air force, which maintained air superiority during the entire duration of the operation. However, Pakistan's air force in the west, after the surprise air offensive on 3 December, kept themselves mostly in defensive mode to secure their assets and due to some shortages of technicians because a sizable amount were Bengalis who were no longer available. Even with constraints, the PAF could have been better used in offensive actions and in a close air support role for their

- ground operations. Besides logistics issues, the main reason for Pakistan's failure in Longewala was the lack of air cover; they could have done better.
- f **Pakistan Navy (PN):** In the East, the minuscule PN could not achieve much mainly because they were outnumbered by the IN, who could ensure a total blockade in the Bay of Bengal. In the west, the destruction of INS Khukri was a successful operation by the PN, but they failed to secure sea lines of communications. Like PAF, the PN too was cautious in protecting their bases after the damage of the Karachi port by the combined operations of the IN and IAF.
- g **Coordination:** Various inputs suggest that there was less coordination amongst the services. Unlike India, where all the three services' headquarters in 1971 were located in New Delhi, Pakistan's Naval Headquarters was located in Karachi. Pakistan's commencement of war by launching air strikes against India was learnt by their Naval Chief through radio news. There was also much less communication between East Pakistan and West Pakistan during the war. When defeat became more and more visible in the east, less and less communication flowed from the west.

Comments on the strategy of Bangladesh Government in Exile and the Mukti Bahini

- a **Bangladesh Government in Exile:** Functioning from Calcutta, the Bangladeshi government, though they needed and used Indian assistance in their fight for liberation, maintained a dignified, independent stand, signalling that they valued their independence fiercely. The Bangladesh government's efforts to build support for their cause received wide global attention. It sent emissaries to various countries to raise funds and seek support. Their propaganda machinery was actively used. The government of Bangladesh insisted repeatedly that India should recognise Bangladesh so that they could enjoy legal status of an independent country. Another strategy and stance during those series of debates in the UN, the Provisional Bangladesh Government conveyed through India that no compromise on the demand of independence would be accepted under the intervention of the UN. There is adequate proof to suggest that the leadership of the Provisional Government of Bangladesh rose to the occasion during the crisis in the absence of their supreme leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Mr. Tajuddin Ahmed, and his team of ministers displayed exemplary tenacity to see their country through this period of turmoil.
- b **Mukti Bahini:** Opinions on the performance of the sword arm of the Bangladeshi government are divided into mainly two distinct lines, depending on who wrote their history. Bangladeshi writers have highlighted their heroism and glorified their contributions in glowing terms, but Pakistani writers and one-odd Indian writers have expressed different opinions about their performance. Firstly, to determine a factual assessment of their contribution,

it would be wrong to judge their capability of fighting the guerrilla warfare compared to Mao Tse Tung's army or the Vietcong guerrillas, as those were deeply, politically indoctrinated and fought protracted wars. Secondly, to make a judgment in hindsight on whether they would have been able to liberate Bangladesh without the Indian Army is today a futile academic exercise. Almost all Indian writers and military commanders have accepted the fact that the Mukti Bahini provided highly valuable intelligence about the deployment, logistics, and morale of the Pakistani army, in addition to helping the Indian army establish a link with the local population during the invasion. While the Indian armed forces played the major part when the war broke out, various groups of liberation fighters played crucial roles through their guerrilla activities during the preceding nine months, which resulted in a quick and successful conclusion to the war. Their contribution to the creation of Bangladesh, therefore, is invaluable.

Miscellaneous highlights

Missing the last chance

Pakistan had one last chance in November 1971 to resolve the issue politically by releasing Mujibur Rahman and making a settlement based on his six-point demands. But Yahya was adamant on not talking to Mujib and popular Awami League leaders. He insisted on talking to a small group of neutral, elected candidates to be selected by him, which was just not acceptable to the Awami League. Possibly it was the last great political blunder, but for which Pakistan would not have been dismembered the next month.

When did the war commence?

The Pakistani army in the east decided on a hot pursuit of the Mukti Bahini taking sanctuary in Indian territory, including by undertaking air operations from mid-November onwards, when the Mukti Bahini intensified its operations. Indian troops retaliated against the PAF and ground troops crossing Indian border. Historical evidence suggests that direct conflict between India and Pakistan commenced from 22 November 1971, the date of the battle of Boyra, a joint preliminary operation launched by the Indian Army and the Mukti Bahini. Also, on this very day at Boyra when the ground forces were fighting, four fighter jets of the IAF drew first blood while chasing Pakistani jets flying over the skies of Jessore in East Pakistan. After this, Yahya declared that Pakistan would opt for an all-out war if India did not stop supporting the Mukti Bahini's operations. Offensive posturing by the Indian Army in the form of preliminary operations, or in loose terms "nibbling operations," continued on the eastern front. Actually, India planned for an offensive to commence on 4 December, but Pakistan preempted them with air strikes against India on 3 December, the date that is mostly considered as the commencement of the war. Whereas it is true that the date of

the two-front war can be noted as 3 December, following a series of ongoing skirmishes with the patrolling troops of both armies on 21 November, in a surprise move the 14 Punjab Battalion of the Indian army – supported by PT-76 tanks from 45 Cavalry and Mukti Bahini moved in to capture the areas around Garibpur inside the East Pakistani territory to deny launching pad to Pakistani army. Boyra was attacked on the next day as part of preliminary operations. Niazi claimed that the war commenced on 21 November, though historians of Indian origin claim that the nibbling operations commenced from 22 November onwards. However, this proves beyond doubt that, at least in the Eastern theatre, the war did not have a cold start on 3 December, though officially India declared war against Pakistan after the series of pre-emptive airstrikes by the PAF, codenamed “Operation Chenzig Khan,” akin to the Israeli “Operation Focus” in the Arab-Israeli Six-Day War.

Israel's secret support to India

Though there were no diplomatic relations between India and Israel, on a special request through a non-governmental influential Israeli, Mrs. Golda Meir, the Prime Minister of Israel secretly sent arms and ammunitions to India just before the war. The loaded aircraft did refuel in Islamabad before landing in India. Uniquely, the Bangladesh Liberation War made for strange bedfellows. Though, later Golda Meir, on a quid pro quo basis, requested India to open up diplomatic ties, it took 22 years thereafter for the Indian High Commission to start business in Tel Aviv.

US failed to convince China to participate in the war

US government documents now declassified prove that Kissinger had a series of secret meetings with a Chinese representative in November and early December 1971, to convince them to open up a third front to scare India. But China wanted the matter to be settled in the UN Security Council. The tilt of the US towards Pakistan has become more visible after the declassifications of these documents.

The operation that made the biggest impact

If one operation is to be cited as having made the biggest impact on the minds of senior Indian government officials and army commanders, it was the precision air strike by the IAF on 15 December, undertaken hurriedly based on an intercepted radio message that a cabinet meeting presided over by Governor Malik would be held at the Governor's Residence (now known as Banga Bhavan). The rockets extensively damaged the conference room, which unnerved the East Pakistani rulers and hastened their acceptance of the Indian proposal of surrender.²⁰

Was Dacca planned as the final objective?

There has been much criticism of the Indian military strategy in the east, in particular of the Army Headquarters, as its operational instructions did not include Dacca as the final objective. The Army HQ did not cater for resources to achieve

234 Reflection and war highlights

this either. From various inputs, it has emerged that seizing Dacca was discussed initially in the planning stage but was not included in writing explicitly in the operational instructions. Manekshaw had an initial mandate to capture adequate territory in East Pakistan so that the Bangladesh government could establish its office there and refugees could return to their land. An operation up to the river line was planned because detailed realistic planning could have been done up to here only. Beyond the river line, a commander could keep his sights on targets but could not possibly plan for this in detail at the beginning. Moltke the Senior said, “Never in any war planning can be made till last or war can never be fully planned.” Aurora planned for a multi-pronged offensive, retaining the flexibility to progress the operation further towards the gravitas centre, Dacca, depending upon which corps were making speedy advances. A likely intervention by the UN Security Council asking for a ceasefire was also kept in mind. But Lt. Gen. Sagat Singh was clear in his mind that he had to reach Dacca and set his plans accordingly. Jacob had been critical about Dacca’s exclusion in the Army HQ operational instructions. One cannot say with exactitude what was verbally discussed between Manekshaw and Aurora. It is well-nigh possible that retaining flexibility and planning up to the river line was discussed between them, which Jacob as COS was not privy to. Dacca was captured on 16 December and the surrender ceremony was held there. Whether it was included or not in the written orders of the Army HQ is purely an academic discussion in hindsight. Many possibly would have given different accounts if the result of the military operation was reversed.

Col. M.A.G. Osmani’s absence in the surrender ceremony

Some historians mention that Col Osmani, Commander-in-Chief of the Mukti Bahini, should have been a signatory of the surrender document along with Lt. Gen. J.S. Aurora and that his exclusion was a major political mistake. The Indian Army explained that the helicopter that was sent to fetch him had faced a snag. A few doubted this version and opined that the episode happened that way by design. Though Group Captain Khondekar, second in command of the Mukti Bahini, was present at the ceremony, Osmani’s presence—irrespective of the differences he had with senior Indian commanders—would have made the surrender ceremony politically correct. It was a sensitive issue and a sore point. Many in Bangladesh were critical of this. It is not conclusive whether other liberation fighters not under Osmani, like Tiger Siddiqi, would have agreed to his presence or whether Niazi would have created a last-minute hiccup which the Indian Army wanted to avoid. No clear conclusive historical proof is available on this sensitive issue.

Uniqueness of the 1971 Liberation War

- This war can be cited as an example of the use of the Russian tactic of *desan**ity*, i.e., simultaneity in spatial as well mental spheres, including deception, were practiced. Also, we find an application of Liddell Hart’s strategies of indirect approach and expanding torrents.

- This was the first time an army in Asia (the Indian army) conducted heliborne operations.
- A conventional force (Indian Armed Forces) and guerrillas (the Mukti Bahini) fought in tandem. There are not too many instances like this.
- India had unique advantages of the domestic population of the invaded country supporting the military forces of the invading country. Pakistan had disadvantages in this respect.

Why did India stop the war after the capture of Dacca and not progress in the west to decimate Pakistan?

There is one school of thought that India's grand strategy in 1971 and the war aim should have included the capture of POK to once and for all sort out the Kashmir issue. Some amount of relocation of the force was underway from the eastern theatre. For example, air force squadrons were moved from Panagarh in the east to the western sector a week or so after the official commencement of the war. The morale of the Pakistani forces after the surrender in Dacca was abysmally low. For India, it became a situation of "now or never." But Mrs. Gandhi's political objective of the war did not extend beyond the scope of the liberation of Bangladesh. Maybe it would have been possible to achieve such a probable extended aim militarily, but the UN pressure on ceasefire would have come in the way. The Soviets were breathing down India's neck to wrap up the war at the earliest. Evidence suggests that the Polish Resolution in UN had Soviet backing, the acceptance of which would have been disadvantageous to India because of the stipulations of returning captured territory. And the Polish Resolution had a high chance of being passed, but for Bhutto walking away from the meeting—this saved India from losing strategically important captured areas. Mrs. Gandhi did not want to extend the scope of the war, despite being advised to do so by some of her colleagues, lest India be seen as out to destroy Pakistan, which was what Nixon perceived. It was, in every way, a liberation war and not a war to conquer. Even Sam Manekshaw was convinced about the termination of the war at this juncture. Therefore, the leadership put the brakes on the momentum of the war machine. There was immense pressure from the US on the USSR to convince India not to balkanise Pakistan, their client state. Did India take this major strategic decision because of international pressure or for moral reasons? Journalist and writer Pran Chopra said,

The political advantages of an immediate and unilateral cease-fire, partly conceived in terms of prestige were weighed against the military advantages of inflicting further attention on the enemy and capturing some crucial territorial point. Within a few hours Mrs. Gandhi consulted senior cabinet colleagues, the three Chiefs of Staff, and leaders of the main opposition parties in Parliament. ... In varying degrees nearly all of them preferred the political advantage. After considering these different opinions, Mrs. Gandhi came to the conclusion, at about 7.30 p.m. the political gains of a unilateral ceasefire were more important than the military gains of continuing the War.²¹

Forgotten Indian prisoners of war

Maj. A.K. Ghosh, Maj. Ashok Suri, Captain Kamal Bakshi, and Flt. Lt. Gurvin-Singh Rai are amongst the 54 Indian prisoners of war (POWs) (3 from 1965 and 51 from the 1971 Indo-Pak war) that remain untraced and apparently languishing in Pakistani jails. Strained relations between both countries have stood as a hindrance to getting to the truth about their existence in Pakistan. The anguished families of these unlocated POWs are unhappy with the sincerity of efforts of successive Indian governments to get them back to India. When Pakistan produced a list of 635 Indian POWs from 1971, 51 of these untraced men did not figure in that list. Families of these POWs have put pressure on the government to take the matter to the International Court of Justice, but the Indian government seems unwilling to internationalise the issue. In 2015, the Ministry of Defence, on a petition of Jas Uppal in the Supreme Court, submitted an affidavit with a declaration that the government does not have any details about these 54 POWs. Two of the relatives of these war prisoners who are citizens of the UK raised this issue in the British parliament, however, the British government did not pursue it further to avoid meddling in an internal issue of India. Possibly records of the Red Cross on the 1971 war can throw some light on the situation, but these records are to be kept confidential until 2035 for some unknown reason, unless they are too sensitive and embarrassing. And by the time these records are declassified, most of these untraced POWs may not be alive. The government of India could have bargained hard with Pakistan before returning Pakistani POWs, but the politico-bureaucratic leadership and the military's top brass failed in their solemn duty to repatriate these Indian POWs.

An unrecognised genocide

Polish Jewish jurist Raphaël Lemkin is credited for coining the word “genocide,” constructed by joining two words “genos” and “cide.” In Greek, *genos* means race or tribe, and in Latin *cide* means killing. The UN General Assembly Resolution 96 (I) of 11 December 1946 asserts,

Genocide is a denial of the right of existence of entire human groups, as homicide is the denial of the right to live of individual human beings; such denial of the right of existence shocks the conscience of mankind...and is contrary to moral law and to the spirit and aims of the United Nations. The General Assembly, therefore, affirms that genocide is a crime under international law... whether the crime is committed on religious, racial, political or any other grounds.²²

And on 9 December 1948, the UN unanimously adopted a convention on genocide, identifying it as a crime “committed with the intention to destroy in whole or part a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.” Its sole purpose was

prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide by codifying it in a dedicated treaty of international law.

Genocide in Bangladesh commenced with the Operation Searchlight on 25 March 1971. American diplomat in Dacca Archer K. Blood reported in his famous “Blood Telegram” to the US government: “Wanton acts of violence being committed by Pakistan military in various parts of city of Dacca, non-Bengali Muslims are systematically attacking poor people’s quarters; Hindus undeniably are special focus of military brutality.”²³ Though the news of the genocide trickled in from then, two and a half months later the world was shaken and shocked reading West Pakistani journalist Anthony Mascarenhas’ story titled “Genocide,” where in he wrote:

I saw Hindus, hunted from village to village and door to door, shot off-hand after a cursory ‘short-arm inspection’ showed they were uncircumcised. I have heard the screams of men bludgeoned to death in the compound of the Circuit House (civil administrative headquarters) in Comilla. I have seen truckloads of other human targets and those who had the humanity to try to help them hauled off ‘for disposal’ under the cover of darkness and curfew.²⁴

R. J. Rummel, professor of political science at the University of Hawaii writes:

These ‘willing executioners’ of genocide and gendercidal atrocities were fuelled by an abiding anti-Bengali racism, especially against the Hindu minority. ... The Hindus among the Bengalis were as Jews to the Nazis: scum and vermin that [should] best be exterminated. As to the Moslem Bengalis, they were to live only on the sufferance of the soldiers: any infraction, any suspicion cast on them, any need for reprisal, could mean their death. And the soldiers were free to kill at will.²⁵

Not only the Pakistani military, but also radical religious paramilitary militias formed by the West Pakistani army, namely the Razakar, Al-Sham, and Al-Badr forces, were as much involved in rape and genocidal acts. After the liberation of Bangladesh, a large number of supporters of Pakistan met with the same fate during revenge killings.

In the nine-month duration of the war, the Pakistani army, with the assistance of local collaborators, systematically executed an estimated 991 teachers, 13 journalists, 49 physicians, 42 lawyers, and 16 writers, artists, and engineers. The number of intellectuals killed in the country cannot be estimated exactly, let alone the identities of the persons killed.²⁶

But the genocide in Bangladesh did not have an official reckoning because of variations in perception. In this context, Lorraine Boissoneault writes,

Unlike the Rwandan genocide, or the Holocaust, or the killing that followed the breakup of Yugoslavia, the genocide in Bangladesh... has largely

slipped out of public awareness—even though the upper estimate for the death toll is 3 million.²⁷

It is impossible to arrive at the exact number of deaths during this most unfortunate genocidal melee. The basic issue of contention is the politicisation of the death toll. Estimates for the total number of deaths range from 500,000 to over 3 million, with the death toll having become politicised over the years, says Lisa Curtis, a senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation's Asian Studies Centre. "Regardless of what the number is, clearly massive atrocities took place against the Bengali people... I think we have to say that the atrocities committed by the Pakistan military far outstripped what we saw from the other side." On 6 April 1971, out of sheer frustration and disgust the US diplomat in Dacca Archer Blood said, "Our government has failed to denounce the suppression of democracy. Our government has failed to denounce atrocities. ... Our government has evidenced what many will consider moral bankruptcy." Years later Nixon was recorded saying, "I think Biafra stirred people up more than Pakistan, because Pakistan, they're just a bunch of brown goddamn Muslims." On this, political scientist Gary J. Bass wrote, "Above all, Bangladesh's experience shows the primacy of international security over justice." Though it would be impossible to estimate the figures of death and rape accurately, there is a general consensus amongst academicians, journalists, and subject-matter experts on the commission of genocide by the Pakistani Army. Mujib talked of "three million killed," while the Pakistani government has tried to estimate the figures in thousands only. But Mujib was right when he said that few nations had had to make such colossal sacrifices in human life and suffering as the Bengalis in "an epic liberation struggle."²⁸

Was it a "just war" for India?

Clausewitz's oft-quoted precept, "War is the continuation of policy by other means," is possibly a justification for a nation to wage war once peaceful measures to resolve a conflict have been exhausted. At the same time, one must take note that Clausewitz perceived war as "an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfil our will."²⁹ Is war then a controlled affair or a no-holds-barred military action to fulfil one's will? Most importantly one should question: if war is an act of violence that has serious negative impacts, is it all morally justifiable? On the contrary, one can also debate, "Is war always wrong?" These divergent ideologies on war can be best expressed through various theoretical perspectives; for the sake of brevity, we can shortlist three major belief systems that are widely articulated: the "just war" theory, realism, and pacifism. The tenets of the "just war" philosophy will be factored in to validate justifications, if any, of India's participation in the Liberation War.²⁹

The Just War Theory is a doctrine on war ethics that sets the moral compass of statesmen and military leaders while waging war. Generally, it is believed that

the “just war” tradition is derived from Christian values and synthesis of Greco-Roman classics. Augustine (354–430) provided a foundation and Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) codified those reflections into the distinct criteria that remain the basis of the Just War Theory, which can be split into two distinct subsets: the right to wage war and right conduct in war. The right to wage war comprises six criteria: just cause, right intention, public declaration of war by a proper authority, last resort, probability of success, and proportionality. These guidelines, under all circumstances, must be met before going to war. Just war theorists perceive that if war is at all inescapable then it can be made less terrible through right conduct. For right conduct during war, just war theorist Brian Orend stipulates five criteria: discrimination and non-combatant immunity, proportionality, restrictions on prohibited weapons, and prohibitions of means. Through experiences in modern day wars, theorists such as Gary Bass, Louis Iasiello, and Brian Orend, have ideated and added a third subset to the Just War Theory, which concerns justice after a war is terminated, including peace treaties, honourable surrender, reconstruction, restoration, war crimes trials, and repentance.³⁰

Realism as a concept has more of a following among practitioners of international relations, political scientists, and scholars. Realists from Chanakya, Thucydides, and Machiavelli to Henry Kissinger were of the view that a hostile nation needs to be eliminated with whatever methods available and that interest of the state must prevail over all other sentiments. Therefore, war once waged has to be won at any cost and the morality aspect is meaningless because ethics alone cannot necessarily guarantee victory. To put it simply, realists believe the maxims “all’s fair in love and war” and “morality is a luxury states can’t afford.”³¹ However neo-realists like Kenneth Waltz differ from this kind of approach to war and feel that war can be justified only for self-defence. But to a realist, offence would be the best form of defence—they argue that if you know for sure of an enemy attack, then what sense does it make to wait until he attacks you; instead he creates some damage and then you hit back in self-defence to let the world know how morally right you were.³²

Pacifists like Jenny Teichman literally “reject war in favour of peace” because war is an act of violence, which pacifists outrightly condemn. In nutshell pacifism is “anti-warism.” They deeply believe in the ideology of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. But though realists have great respect for Gandhi and Luther Jr. for their moral strength, they feel pacifism is too idealistic.³³

Western philosophers and political scientists have, of late, realised that on just war, possibly the oldest scripture in the world is the Hindu epic, *The Mahabharata*. This epic describes Kurukshetra War, where “Just War” is postulated through the idea of “*dharma yuddha*,” a Sanskrit term made up of two roots: *dharma* meaning righteousness and *yuddha* meaning warfare.³⁴ It specifies the rules of engagement that two warring parties agree to follow. *The Mahabharata* covers the debate on “just cause” before going to war, including last minute efforts to avoid war through negotiations; it talks of just means and fair rules of conduct during war, which were accepted by the warring parties after due deliberations. *Dharma*

240 Reflection and war highlights

yuddha signifies that war is waged to uphold the principles of righteousness and not fought for gain or selfish reasons. The criteria of just war envisaged in *The Mahabharata* are: war as a last resort, with good intentions, having proportionality, ensuring fair treatment to prisoners of war, and causing no harm to non-combatants, women, and children, besides the prohibition of the use of celestial weapons (weapons of mass destruction and specialised uncommon weapons believed to be bestowed by the gods). The principles of *dharma yuddha* have much compatibility with the Western philosophy of “Just War.” Without going into detailed analyses of each viewpoint, suffice to say, India since time immemorial has imbued the principles of morality in war and non-violence (*ahimsa*), which, as a philosophy and guiding principle to human beings, is deeply rooted in Hinduism and other religions that originated in India like Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism.

Overburdened with ten million refugees and pained by the rape, genocide, and mass killings of the East Pakistanis, India joined the war to ensure a quick end to human suffering of worst kind and also to ensure its own socio-political and economic security. It is pertinent to mention that India officially joined the war nine months after the Pakistani army's brutal atrocities began on 25 March 25 1971. During the interim nine months, India repeatedly requested Pakistan to stop military action against the hapless Bangladeshis and resolve the impasse through a political solution by adhering to the election mandate and resettling the refugees who had taken shelter in India. It sensitised the world through diplomatic channels about the serious violations of human rights in the eastern wing of Pakistan and Mrs. Gandhi herself, through a personal visit in November 1971, urged the US to impress upon its close ally Pakistan the need to free Mujibur Rahman and seek a political solution. While in the US, she stated,

We are told that the confrontation of troops is a threat to peace. Is there peace when a whole people are massacred? Will the world be concerned only if people die because of war between two countries and not if hundreds of thousands are butchered and expelled by a military regime waging war against the people? We cannot draw upon precedents to deal with this unprecedented variety of aggression. We have to devise new patterns of response³⁵.

No recourse was available from the UN Security Council. India would have welcomed intervention by the UN but, failing to garner any response, as a last recourse it opted for unilateral armed intervention, that too after Pakistan launched the first air assault. If similar action was taken by India two or three decades later, possibly they would have been criticised much less. NATO's bombing in Kosovo (1999) and the American and British-led unilateral action in Iraq, though not explicitly authorised by the UN Security Council, prove that Western states do not believe in the authority of the UN Security Council and they will not hesitate to pursue their hegemonic interests if realpolitik

demands so. Their actions in Iraq did not receive support from many nations. India supported civil war in Bangladesh, siding with the Bengalis who were linguistically and culturally almost identical to the people of the Indian state of West Bengal, which was one province before partition of India. India's support of the Bengalis was increased in tranches, from ideological support to supporting the freedom fighters and culminating in armed intervention to prevent a human catastrophe. That was the period when the Indian state neighbouring East Pakistan, West Bengal, was severely infested with Naxal activists and when the presence of millions of refugees in the state that outnumbered original inhabitants in some states like Tripura had huge socio-political ramifications. Refugees disrupted the existing labour market by offering to work for abysmally low wages and local people losing jobs caused resentment and created anomalies in the socioeconomic sector of the north-eastern Indian states. Though the Indian Defence Forces had been keeping their powder dry since July 1971, troop movement to the western border were completed only in November, just weeks before the actual war. India showed enough restraint for nine months, much against the wishes of many citizen, who wanted early military action to save hundreds of thousands human lives from the marauding Pakistani army and its compatriot Razakars. Despite continued pressure from the Government of Bangladesh in Exile, India recognised Bangladesh only on 6 December 1971. The PAF attacked on 3 December 1971 and at midnight Mrs. Gandhi, while addressing the nation through the All-India Radio. Announced, "War has been forced on us through the wanton and unprovoked aggression of Pakistan. [The] aggressor [will] be decisively and finally repelled."³⁶ This announcement fulfilled the criteria of "public declaration of war by a proper authority." India joined the war as a "last resort," fulfilling the most important criteria of a just war. There was no ambiguity in India's stated war aim: "to ensure return of Bangladeshi refugees and to assist them in establishing a government of their choice." India, through its actions, exhibited other criteria of a just war—"right intentions," as posterity has proved that India never intended to conquer East Pakistan to annex it nor balkanise West Pakistan to destroy the state of Pakistan. No state should go to war unless it is sure of victory. To assess "the probability of success," the Indian military and political decision-makers carried out risk analyses and balanced ways and means to achieve their war objectives. From the Friendship Treaty with Soviet Russia to the preparation to ensure a superior war machine at the time of going to war, to deciding the timing of the campaign, evolving a sound politico-military strategy, and the biggest force multiplier, "the unstinted support of the people of Bangladesh"—together all the factors favoured India, leading to an assured victory.

Neither India nor Pakistan had nuclear weapons when the war was fought in December 1971. It was a conventional war in every sense with one exception—the people of the country being invaded supported the invaders as the invasion was on their behalf. Proportionality was ensured by ensuring least possible collateral damage to the existing infrastructure in Bangladesh. The Pakistani army

242 Reflection and war highlights

blew up bridges and followed a “scorched earth” policy in its eastern wing. For example, a big road bridge at Jhikargacha over Kapotakkha River in Jessore was blown up when the Pakistanis were withdrawing. Many intellectuals were selectively killed in Dacca when final defeat became just a matter of time. India all through the war was mindful of the probable damage and efforts required during the reconstruction stage and maintained proportionality while planning, ensuring no overkill during the conduct of the operation. The Indian Army during the war in Bangladesh did not target the civilian population not supporting the war nor pro-Pakistani people, while the Pakistani army carried out the wanton destruction of property, mass rape, and genocide. Even when some members of the Mukti Bahini attacked the Razakars and their families to take revenge for their butchery, the Indian Army stood firm and did not allow men to commit any crime, at least in their presence and in the areas of their influence. After the surrender, POWs were treated with dignity, adhering to the rules of the Geneva Convention. On conclusion of the war, the Indian government as well as the army helped in reconstruction in Bangladesh and withdrew from Bangladesh without any delay.

Along with Pakistan, many nations condemned India’s intervention as defying Article 2 of the UN Charter, which gives paramount importance to the sovereignty of a nation in the international state system. India’s ethical rightness to join the war has been studied through the principles of Just War Theory, which “postulates that war, while terrible (but less so with the right conduct), is not always the worst option. Important responsibilities, undesirable outcomes, or preventable atrocities may justify war.”³⁷ Bangladesh fits into the classic example what Brian Orend wrote,

For some of the worst atrocities in wartime have occurred within, and not between, national borders. Some states, historically, have used the cloak of war with foreign powers to engage in massive internal human rights violations, usually against some disfavoured group.³⁸

The moot question is what remedial measures were available to the majority of citizens of a nation (East Pakistan) when a powerful minority from another wing of their own state (West Pakistan) used state machinery and acted savagely against the fellow citizens and deployed its armed forces to carry out massacres with utmost brutality? Just because it was not a cross-border aggression, could the world remain a mute spectator in the name of non-intervention, as incorporated in Article 2 of the UN Charter? Weren’t the people of East Pakistan entitled to the provisions of human rights against this barbaric violence unleashed by their state machinery? Besides Bangladesh, such events happened in Cambodia and Uganda in the 1970s, Rwanda in 1994, Serbia/Kosovo in 1998–99, and in Sudan/Darfur from 2004 onwards. India’s intervention was a classic case of humanitarian armed intervention on behalf of the Bengali victims. One may question how a violent aggression can be a humanitarian. And the term “humanitarian intervention”

may sound like an oxymoron—a paradox. As Coady wrote in the *Journal of The United States Institute of Peace*,

The term humanitarian is now used to distinguish interventions that are aimed at rescuing foreign people from the harm that is being done, or is about to be done, to them by the state authorities who are responsible for their protection. It might be better to call it altruistic intervention, but we will follow common currency and call it humanitarian.³⁹

Pratap Bhanu Mehta wrote that India's 1971 armed intervention in East Pakistan—undertaken for a mixture of reasons—is widely and fairly regarded as one of the world's most successful cases of humanitarian intervention against genocide. Indeed, India, in effect, applied what we would now call the “responsibility to protect” (R2P) principle and applied it well. Eminent political theorist Michael Walzer, while arguing about “just and unjust war,” has unambiguously cited Bangladesh as a paradigmatic case of a justified humanitarian intervention.⁴⁰ But many international legal experts did not agree to this view as they feel “no principle is more sacrosanct in the modern concept of international order based on the state system than the inviolability of the borders of a sovereign state.”⁴¹

If humanitarian intervention is to be undertaken, who should do it? Legally, it can be best undertaken under the aegis of the UN—Chapter 7 has a provision of “peace enforcing.” Here is a grandiloquence from Kofi Anon years later:

Is there not a danger of such interventions undermining the imperfect, yet resilient, security system created after the Second World War, and of setting dangerous precedents for future interventions without a clear criterion to decide who might invoke these precedents, and in what circumstances?⁴²

But what happens if the UN for some reason fails to act altogether? India as well as the Bangladesh Government in Exile repeatedly pleaded for the UN's intervention, but the UN was a divided house because of the compulsions of Cold War geo-politics, which resulted in inaction. There was a precedent of Rhodesia in 1966, where the UN intervened invoking Chapter 7. But Bangladeshis were treated like children of a lesser god. Had the UN intervened, there would not have been any requirement for India to initiate unilateral humanitarian armed intervention. The US and the UK unilaterally intervened in Iraq: Tony Blair called it a humanitarian intervention; it was debated whether the motive was purely altruistic or whether, in addition to stopping and hunting down Saddam Hussain, the lure of the oil fields and the real-time live testing of the latest armament and defence technology were also packaged in the name of unilateral humanitarian armed intervention. Just war traditions have been maintained by India with no ulterior motive of expansionism or economic interest, though there has been some argument that India gained strategically through the disintegration of Pakistan. Philosophers and practitioners of international law must

not forget that Pakistan's army in East Pakistan was an army of occupation since it started Operation Searchlight. The Indian government argued that genocide in East Pakistan could not be treated as an internal matter of Pakistan: it should be a matter of concern for the international community, it being a crime against humanity. Usually, in humanitarian intervention, armed aid from the international community is essential for effective resistance against aggression, since domestic populations are at a huge disadvantage and are massively vulnerable to the violence of their own state. India opted for a new pattern of response: intervention against the autocratic regime of Pakistan who perpetrated crimes against humanity, genocide, and mass rape on a horrific scale, which was no less than what happened in Rwanda. India's participation in the Bangladesh Liberation War is a classic case of humanitarian intervention, which goes beyond Article 2 of the UN Charter, which is highly eloquent on non-interference by another state but silent on internal aggression by an autocratic, unfair regime.⁴³

Leadership and the 1971 war

Mao Zedong said, "Victory or defeat in war is determined mainly by the military, political, economic and natural conditions on both sides. But not by these alone. It is also determined by each side's subjective ability in directing the war." A study of a war of the magnitude of the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, which had interregional and global consequences, cannot be complete without a quick review of the leadership that were the main actors on the stage. The leaders frame strategy; on the subject of strategy, Trotsky wrote, "Principles of strategy never transcend common sense." This philosophy implies that leaders should exercise common sense while formulating strategy. Pakistan's strategy of a military solution to the political problem showed a lack of common sense, though India during 1971 war displayed politico-strategic vision through its leaders at various points on the spectrum. Mrs. Gandhi was admirably determined not to give in to the pressure of the US and others who sided with Pakistan for various reasons. She was clear in her mind that India, though poor, would not mortgage a nation's security and honour to its economy. Mrs. Gandhi, through her charismatic personality and strength of will, provided outstanding leadership all through the Liberation War. Taking a cue from Liddell Hart's theory on strategy, it can be summed up that Mrs. Gandhi mastered the first stage of grand strategy: that of developing and coordinating all forms of warlike activities, and all possible instruments, which may be used to operate against the enemy's will. The political aim of the war was unambiguously spelt out by her; she listened to the experts' opinions on the timing of the war, ensured national support of the war machinery, and left the service chiefs to strategise and conduct war with no interference. Mrs. Gandhi also exhibited farsightedness in terminating the war, though a section of Indian think tanks felt that it could be extended by a week or so to consolidate positions on the northern and western fronts, including regaining important territory lost in the Chhamb sector. Democratic India's institutional

procedures ensured synergy while preparing for the war. About the cooperation and synergy at the higher level, senior Indian defence officer and a strategy analyst Kapil Kak commented:

The prime minister was ably assisted by the three Service Chiefs, Gen. ‘Sam’ Manekshaw, Air Chief Marshal Pratap Lal and Adm. SM Nanda, Defence Secretary KB Lall, Foreign Secretary TN Kaul, External Intelligence Chief RN Kao, Director Intelligence Bureau RN Banerjee and, the most important of all, Chairman Policy Planning Committee DP Dhar and Principal Secretary PN Haksar. DP Dhar was doubtless the strategic mastermind, ably assisted by PN Haksar. Both were trusted confidants of the prime minister who helped her transform a crisis into a strategic leap.⁴⁴

Mr. Swaran Singh, Foreign Minister of India, deserves due credit for the formulation of a sound diplomatic strategy and the perfect use of an escalation matrix during the Bangladesh crisis. When the war was in full swing, he led the Indian delegation to the UN General Assembly to explain India’s position for a political settlement acceptable to the elected and acknowledged representatives of the people of Bangladesh. His eloquent and forceful debates in the UN Security Council on Bangladesh’s cause during the war were matchless. Both the Indian and Pakistani generals who were strategising the war, by training and practice, followed World War II strategy unsuitable in the modern warfare. In the Second World War the time factor was of no importance nor was the loss of territory. The territory was alien soil, either belonging to allied nations or to colonies that could be traded for time. In the time thus gained, the war potential in men and material could be built up to such preponderant extent as to ensure victory. Such luxury was unthinkable in 1971 where war had to be finished at the earliest before the international community put a halt to it. Therefore, speed was the biggest war-winning factor and only the mental mobility of commanders could have ensured this, which most of the generals on either side of the Radcliff line woefully lacked. Many were simply timid. Amongst the Corps Commanders of both sides, the performance of Lt. Gen. Sagat Singh, GOC 4 Corps of Indian army in the eastern theatre, was the best. Farsightedness and unconventional strategic thoughts added momentum to the spectacular victory in this war. Junior-level leaders in both countries fighting tactical-level battles proved their mettle and demonstrated good leadership qualities facing tough odds. Strategic-level leaders of the IN and IAF played no lesser role in speeding up victory for India. Lt. Gen. Jagjit Singh Aurora, GOC in C Eastern Command, was ably assisted by his Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Jacob, who played a salutary role during the war. Though Jacob in his book did not describe Aurora in glowing terms, to be fair and to remain intellectually honest, Aurora deserves a share of the glory as much, if not more. Usually while recalling the account of an army-dominated war, the role of the air force and navy are less remembered. Air Marshal Hari Chand Dewan of Eastern Air Command, Air Vice Marshal Maurice Baker of Central

246 Reflection and war highlights

Air Command, and Vice Admiral Nilkant Krishnan played their roles effectively and contributed towards formulating and implementing the tri-service grand strategy. The blitzkrieg of Indian Army in the east could be only possible with the air force ensuring air superiority and the navy blocking the Bay of Bengal and aircrafts of INS Vikrant beefing up the air force.

War strategy evolves from the political aim of the war. Pakistan did not have a political aim and was least prepared for a war, therefore, by all means the war should have been avoided. The Pakistani Navy Chief learned of the PAF's air attack on India on 3 December through a radio announcement—an unthinkable lack of coordination and communication at the strategic level. Until August 1971, Pakistan didn't even consider the possibility of an all-out war with India. Maj. Gen. Fazal Muqeem Khan of Pakistan writes, "One single factor that contributed most to our debacle in December 1971, was the failure of planned and integrated war effort at the national level."⁴⁵ This is in line with what Clausewitz observed:

No-one in his right mind starts a war without knowing what he intends to achieve by it, or how he intends to achieve it. Thus, the politics (and hence the policy) must be appropriate in the first place if a successful strategy is to be derived, let alone implemented. Strategic level leaders should know how to formulate strategy by factoring all aspects like value-based policy, economic situation, military capability, available power of information inputs etc.⁴⁶

After the declaration of the election result, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto played power politics at the cost of his country's stability and unity. His famous statement "numbers alone don't count," his slogans like "*udhar tum, idhar hum*" (you are there in East Pakistan, I am here in West Pakistan), actions like tearing up a draft of the Polish Resolution in the UN and during a telephonic conversation with Yahya, allegedly feigning that he could not hear Yahya, etc. lead us to believe that Bhutto possibly was not keen for a unified Pakistan or a Pakistan ruled by someone else. It is also alleged that in 1970, Bhutto asked M.M. Ahmed, a senior civil servant, to write a concept paper on "how Pakistan without East Pakistan was a better option for Pakistan" rather than to have two wings. Niazi felt that the final plan for the dismemberment of Pakistan was hatched between General Yahya and Bhutto in Larkana, Bhutto's hometown. The plan, which came to be known as the M.M. Ahmed plan, aimed at abandoning East Pakistan without a successor government, which meant by losing the war. So, all the efforts of Yahya's junta and Bhutto's coterie were directed towards losing the war. Lt. Gen. Niazi viewed the loss of East Pakistan as an "engineered debacle"⁴⁷ and outrightly blamed General Abdul Hamid Khan, army chief, and Lt. Gen. Gul Hasan, Chief of General Staff, GHQ at Rawalpindi for not providing him any support during the war. There was no serious strategic plan made in GHQ against the possibility of a major Indian attack, though redeployment was planned in East Pakistan with no holistic thought of an all-out war. During the 1965 Indo-Pak war the defence of East Pakistan was not given any weightage: they were left to God

and India's mercy! Though the scenario during 1971 changed, the eastern wing did not get the attention that the western front got. Top army leadership failed to arrest the morale decay in and the mayhem caused by the Pakistani army in East Pakistan. Air Marshal Abdur Rahim Khan was the air chief during the war who did not exploit the full potential of his air force after the PAF's pre-emptive strike (codenamed Operation Chengiz Khan) on 3 December, which too could not much damage IAF installations. In the west, 70% of the PAF's effort was dedicated towards defensive tasks and in the east, the PAF became totally inoperative within 48 hours of the war beginning. Vice-Admiral Muzaffar Hassan was Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistani Navy during the war. He did not have much wherewithal for a major naval war and maximum assets were deployed to look after the interests of West Pakistan, ignoring repeated requests of Rear Admiral Mohammad Sharif, Flag Officer Commanding, Eastern Naval Command (Pakistan), to augment his resources in East Pakistan. It is also evident that he was treated as a junior partner in Pakistan's tri-service fraternity. Vice Admiral Muzaffar Hassan—commander in Chief Pakistan Navy—was dismissed from service in 1972, along with Air Marshal Abdur Rahim Khan—Commander in Chief Pakistani Air Force. They are not remembered as leaders with strategic vision. Rear Admiral Mohammad Sharif, despite his meagre resources being limited to mainly gun boats, displayed sound strategic view in planning and daringness in execution, including planning for an evacuation to Burma. Air Commodore Inamul Haque Khan, the senior-most PAF officer in Dacca, whose force was hugely outnumbered by the IAF, remained grounded mostly during the war. However, Inamul Haque was instrumental in getting almost all the PAF pilots and army helicopters flown out of Dacca to Burma to save war assets and trained pilots from falling into the hands of the Indian armed forces. Both Rear Admiral Mohammad Sharif and Air Commodore Inamul Haque were taken as POWs by India along with Niazi.

Niazi, who was the face of Pakistan in Dacca, was also known for his vanity, professional ineptitude, and moral turpitude. Even against all odds, Niazi could have held on for another two to three days had he organised the defence of Dacca well, but he lost his nerve and gave in early. The power-hungry Bhutto defied the election verdict and Yahya, along with the military and the bureaucratic establishment, refused to grant more autonomy to East Pakistan. Under such conditions, negotiations with Mujibur Rahman became impossible and the impasse remained for some time. The treatment meted out to East Pakistan during the period after the election made Mujib change his stand from autonomy to freedom. He became rigid on this stance, as were other leaders of East Pakistan. At that juncture when the dissent reached its peak, ordering brutal military action against the Bengalis of East Pakistan was a gross miscalculation, a testimony to leadership failure. Yahya lacked political vision—he was ill advised too. After the dismemberment of Pakistan, Bhutto replaced Yahya and ordered the Hamdoor Rahman Commission (HRC) to inquire into the reasons for the failure of the Pakistani armed forces and the surrender in Bangladesh. The terms of reference

of this commission were to fix responsibility on the leaders of the armed forces for the military debacle, but ironically politicians and bureaucrats were left out of the ambit though they were no less responsible. The commission squarely blamed Niazi for the failure in East Pakistan and reported,

Because of his sexual immorality and indulgence in the smuggling of *paan* (betel leaves) from East to West Pakistan... he failed to inspire respect and confidence in the mind of his subordinates, impaired his qualities of leadership and determination; and also encouraged laxity in discipline and moral standards among the officers and men under his command. ... The commission recommended that a coterie of generals – General Yahya Khan, General Abdul Hamid Khan, Lt-General S.G.M.M. Pirzada, Lt-General Gul Hasan, Major-General Umar and Major-General Mitha – be publicly tried for criminal conspiracy because in agreement with one another they brought about a situation in East Pakistan which led to a civil disobedience movement, armed revolt by the Awami League and subsequently to the surrender of troops and the dismemberment of Pakistan.⁴⁸

Such was the state of higher-level military leadership in Pakistan! The HRC brought out some glaring facts about the moral decay of senior army generals of Pakistan whose lust for wine, women, and wealth effected their professional efficiency, which set in because of long-term martial law and meddling in the civil administration of the country. But the disintegration of Pakistan is not a military debacle alone; a portion of the blame must be taken by Bhutto, the military, the and bureaucratic establishment of West Pakistan. East Pakistan had been simmering for many decades and political imbroglio in 1971 started because of Bhutto's insistence on sharing power, even though the PPP was not a majority party. Force was used by the government to bring normalcy to East Pakistan with a hope that the Awami League and Mujib would give in. Here Yahya and his coterie failed miserably in their judgmental capabilities, which is a mandatory quality of leadership at the national level. On the contrary, Yahya's government, instead of taking a neutral stance, became a partisan participant supporting the demand of PPP leader Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto. "True of Jinnah's role in the partition of India, it is equally so in the case of Bhutto, the supposed destroyer of Pakistan's integrity."⁴⁹

Clausewitz states that it is far more difficult to understand strategy than tactics, since things move very slowly in strategy and the principal actors are far away from the heat and friction of the battlefield. Thus, strategy is a hundred more times difficult to comprehend and conduct than tactics.⁵⁰ 1971 was a year of national and international crisis in South Asia. Pakistan fought two wars: first a civil war and then the Bangladesh Liberation War with India and various groups of the Mukti Bahini. Until almost the middle of the year no one thought seriously about war. But each side gradually became inflexible and the gap widened. An internal problem escalated to a regional problem, which further escalated to an international competition between superpowers, adding a global dimension

to the war. Opportunities were there to find a resolution to the problem. But each party thought compromise could only be possible on their terms. Global players joined the race and it was reflected in the UN's inaction. On 15 December 1971, Mrs. Gandhi wrote to President Nixon that "the tragic war that was going on could have been averted if, during the nine months prior to Pakistan's attack on 3 December, the great leaders of the world had paid some attention. West Pakistan got the impression that they could do what they wanted because no one, not even the US, would choose to take a public position that while Pakistan's integrity was certainly sacrosanct, human rights and liberty were no less so and that there was a necessary inter-connection between the inviolability of states and contentment of people."⁵¹

Plato said, "Our object in the construction of the state is the greatest happiness of the whole, and not that of any class." There is ample proof to suggest that the disparity between the two wings occurred because "happiness of the whole" was violated by the Punjabi/Sindhi-dominated leaders of Pakistan (meaning West Pakistan). The Language Movement was the beginning of the road to Bangladesh. The war was avoidable if leaders had been flexible and accommodative. Pakistan did not fight a conventional war in a coordinated manner. What is bewildering is that in the critical days, Niazi was falsely assured that China and the US would join the war and turn the tide. He was left to fend for himself and no support was available from Rawalpindi, giving an impression that it was Niazi's war in East Pakistan.

The freedom movement in Bangladesh was started by the inspiring leader Mujibur Rahman; during the period of the nine-month Liberation War he was imprisoned in West Pakistan. In his absence, Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, other cabinet members, and Col. Osman Gani and leaders of Mukti Bahini, working in tandem with India, led admirably despite many hurdles. Col. Osman Gani, a highly patriotic person, had a sharp mind and a sharp tongue as well. He was already retired and in the 1970 election became a member of the national assembly. At the beginning of Liberation War, he was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Mukti Bahini. Initially his mindset was fixed on conventional warfare, which should never be the strategy of a weaker force contesting a well-trained, well-equipped, stronger enemy. Later, the Mukti Bahini changed its strategy and became more effective as a guerrilla force. Gani was over cognisant of process and protocol, which sometimes became an irritant with Aurora's HQ in Fort William, Calcutta. But there was never any dearth to Gani's zeal and undaunting spirit and, for the sake of greater cause, he did not mind India's Eastern Command dealing with his deputy. He did not meddle in operational matters when the Mukti Bahini was co-opted into the operational plans of the Indian army. This arrangement served the purpose well. Many Mukti Bahini leaders at the tactical level, though less trained and rudimentarily armed, were well charged and worked in tandem with the Indian army, including those who were fighting separately, like Tiger Siddiqi, exhibiting raw courage and great tenacity. The Mukti Bahini contributed towards faulty strategic deployment by Niazi and enhanced India's operational

capabilities by providing intelligence and local support. Napoleon said, “There are only two powers in the world, the spirit and the sword. In the long run, the sword will always be conquered by the spirit.” In the Bangladesh Liberation War, sword and spirit joined hands.

Yahya put on two hats, Commander-in-Chief and President; he was no Napoleon or Frederick the Great who could handle the affairs of state and a military campaign with equal ease. Most importantly, as the national head he was no match to Indira Gandhi in political adroitness. The Indian Army won the war because it was led by better leaders at the strategic level; the same was not true in the case of Pakistan. Maj. Gen. Gandhary Nagra GOC 101 Communication Zone and Brig. Hardev Singh Kler displayed great initiative during the race to Dacca. Jacob, as Chief of Staff to Aurora, acted like a fulcrum; along with Nagra, he checkmated Niazi, outwitting him into surrender. The war also exposed the shortcomings of Pakistan’s much publicised strategic doctrine, “Defence of East Pakistan lay in West Pakistan.” Pakistan had a misplaced hope and a wrong strategic assessment regarding the US and China’s physical participation in the Indo-Pak war as its ally. J.N. Dixit, the Indian External Affairs Ministry official who had seen the events closely as a participant, sums up the liberation war with the following comments:

Politico-military strategy formulated by India and its execution translated into achieving all the objectives set by India. The Pakistani forces in East Pakistan were decisively defeated with India taking 93,000 prisoners of war, the largest number of soldiers taken prisoners in world history, and only comparable with the Russian army capturing the entire corps of Field Marshal von Paoli at the battle of Stalingrad. On the Western front India pushed back the Pakistani forces from Jammu and Kashmir from the Rann of Kutch. India had captured strategic locations of Jammu and Kashmir and about 5000 square kilometers of Pakistani territory in Southern Punjab and Sindh when it declared a unilateral cease fire in Western front on 16th December 1971.⁵²

A strategic perspective on loss and gain

While Bangladesh was liberated by paying a heavy price and making their dream possible, albeit expeditiously with the intervention of India, in terms of territorial gain or loss, Pakistan forever lost its eastern wing with the emergence of Bangladesh and gained about 126 km² land in places like Chhamb, Hussainiwala Enclave, and Fazilka in Punjab. Though the territorial loss for India to Pakistan in terms of area was much smaller, the areas lost were significantly important from an economic and strategic point of view. India’s standing and prestige rose a few notches after the win. For Pakistan, it was an ignominious defeat and great loss of prestige. A section of Pakistanis view losing East Pakistan as a strategic advantage for Pakistan from the point of view of defence and the perpetual political squabbling that frequently paralysed government. Usually in a war, the victor has a bigger say at the negotiating table but many in India, including the likes of

Jacob, felt that the strategic “advantages gained on the battlefield were frittered away at the Shimla conference.”⁵³ At the conference, a compassionate Mrs. Gandhi, desperately searching for an outlet to peace, was trapped by Zulfiqar Bhutto’s emotional quagmire. To save face back home, Bhutto pleaded before her to save him the embarrassment of returning to his country empty handed and he feared that if that happened it could ignite political turmoil in Pakistan, as enraged citizens were demanding the expeditious return of the 93,000 POWs. Pakistan got back their 93,000 POWs. India could have bargained hard to settle all outstanding issues like Kashmir and the return of some strategically important areas held by Pakistan. The team who assisted Mrs. Gandhi in Shimla surprisingly did not have a military member. And this was not the first time that India failed to negotiate hard. The return of the strategically important Hajipir Pass to Pakistan, captured by the Indian army during the 1965 war, is another example. At the time of India’s intervention, many strategists thought an independent Bangladesh henceforth would remain an all-weather friend of India. But this calculation went awry after Mujib’s assassination. Only when Hasina and her party Awami League were in power did Bangladesh keep cordial relations with India. Therefore, winning the war is not enough, for long-term strategic gain, the negotiations after the war are as important, if not more. Pakistan, having realised itself inferior to India’s growing military prowess, has resorted to asymmetric warfare to avenge its defeat in 1971, bleeding India through thousand cuts. In their quest to defeat India, Pakistan and terrorism have become synonyms!

When concluding this chapter, I draw attention of my readers to a salient observation of a study group on the Second World War, as I felt it is as much applicable for the Liberation War of Bangladesh. It states:

No amount of operational virtuosity... redeem fundamentals flaws in political judgment. Whether policy shaped strategy or strategic imperatives drove policy was irrelevant. Miscalculations in both led to defeat, and any combination of politico-strategic error had disastrous results... *Mistakes in operations and tactics can be corrected, but political and strategic mistakes live forever.*⁵⁴

And for this very reason, the moral responsibility for the end result during the course of history of a nation rests on its leaders, whose decisions and actions lead to better or worse outcomes.

Notes

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252 Reflection and war highlights

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- 31 Ibid. Many believe that non-violence alone could not win freedom for India, there were other reasons too.
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12

YEARS BEYOND THE LIBERATION WAR

We behold what we are, and we are what we behold.¹

—Ved Vyasa, *The Bhagavad Gita*

In the summer of 1971, when the civil war in East Pakistan was at its peak, Harvard professor of political science, Rupert Emerson, commenting on decolonised Asia and Africa, wrote, “They are not yet nations in being but only nations in hope.”² Much water has flowed through the rivers Ganges (India), Indus (Pakistan), and Padma (Bangladesh) since the war bugle stopped playing after the surrender of the Pakistani army in Dacca on 16 December 1971. The geo-political calculus of South Asia went through two major changes in the twentieth century with the emergence of two new nations during this period: Pakistan in 1947 and Bangladesh in 1971. Ironically, violence became a common denominator during the birthing process of both nations; they still suffer from the trauma of their birth pangs and the unhealed scars of their dismemberment. Ayesha Jalal wrote, “General perception about the statehood in contemporary South Asia has been the ‘success’ of democracy in India and its ‘failure’ in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Interestingly, after gaining independence, South Asia, despite inheriting a common British colonial legacy, followed contrasting patterns of political development”.³ A nuanced view of these states based on a comparative analysis of state formation in modern South Asia is necessary to decode this contrast and understand whether these “nations in hopes” have transformed into “nations in being,” thereby realising the dreams of their founding fathers when they began their journeys.

After spending ten months in a Pakistani jail, Mujibur Rahman returned to Dacca in January 1972 to a hero’s welcome. There was euphoria. A large number of people with unsurpassed enthusiasm gathered to glimpse their leader supremo

who now faced the tough job of getting the country back in shape. And what shape was it in when he returned to Dacca? Capturing the grim reality, *Time* magazine wrote:

In the aftermath of the Pakistani army's rampage last March, a special team of inspectors from the World Bank observed that some cities looked "like the morning after a nuclear attack." Since then, the destruction has only been magnified. An estimated 6,000,000 homes have been destroyed, and nearly 1,400,000 farm families have been left without tools or animals to work in their lands. Transportation and communications systems are totally disrupted. Roads are damaged, bridges out and inland waterways blocked. The rape of the country continued right up until the Pakistani army surrendered a month ago. In the last days of the war, West Pakistani-owned businesses—which included nearly every commercial enterprise in the country—remitted virtually all their funds to the West. Pakistan International Airlines left exactly 117 rupees (\$16) in its account at the port city of Chittagong. The army also destroyed bank notes and coins, so that many areas now suffer from a severe shortage of ready cash. Private cars were picked up off the streets or confiscated from auto dealers and shipped to the West before the ports were closed.⁴

Just a week before the liberation of Bangladesh, on 6 December 1971, Ural Alexis Johnson, a career foreign service officer and under-secretary of state, during a meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group (WSAG) chaired by Henry Kissinger, predicted that an independent Bangladesh would be an "international basket case."⁵

Even years later Henry Kissinger uncharitably termed "Bangladesh a Bottom-less Basket."

Mujib focused on rehabilitation and revamping the crisis-ridden economy and war-ravaged society. Bangladesh became a parliamentary democracy under the new constitution, which came into force in December 1972. The constitution created a strong executive prime minister, a largely ceremonial presidency, an independent judiciary, and a unicameral legislature on a modified Westminster model. The Awami League contested the March 1973 election and won handsomely, based on the four founding principles on which they wanted to shape the newly born country: nationalism, secularism, socialism, and democracy. Opposition political parties were almost non-existent during the early stage of the new nation's political journey. Prime Minister Mujib came to office with immense personal popularity and high expectations from his people. To make matters worse, Bangladesh witnessed the worst kind of famine in 1974–75 due to flood, mismanagement, and corruption, "causing an estimated 450,000–1.5 million deaths through starvation and diseases such as cholera and diarrheic diseases."⁶

In January 1975, Mujib amended the constitution to change Bangladesh into the presidential system of government and banned all political parties, in order to

embark upon making Bangladesh a “one party state.” akin to China and Soviet Russia. Mujib termed it the “Second Revolution” and became the sole policy decision-maker, which did not augur well. Though there was some improvement in the economic situation during the first half of 1975, Mujib was losing popularity rapidly because many felt that he was veering towards autocracy or, at best, “a democratic dictatorship.” Despite a warning from the Indian intelligence agency RAW regarding threats to his life, Mujib was indifferent to his personal security, owing to his firm belief that none in Bangladesh could ever think of killing him. And the emotional man that he was, he failed to observe the dark cloud lurking over him. On 15 August 1975, a section of young military officers in a *coup de eta* assassinated him along with all the members of his family living with him in his private house in Dhanmandi, Dhaka. Two of his daughters, Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana, living abroad survived.

Mujib’s assassination threw Bangladesh into political turmoil. The country was under military rule for 15 years. Another president, General Ziaur Rahman, was assassinated on 30 May 1981 by another group of army officers while he was on a visit to Chittagong. And in 1982, Lt. Gen. H.M. Ershad, Army Chief, through a bloodless coup seized power from President Abdus Sattar and ruled the country for almost eight years. During this period, he permitted limited political activities but when he lifted martial law in 1987, the situation spiralled out of control due to strikes and demonstrations and Ershad imposed a state of emergency. In 1988, Islam became state religion of Bangladesh, which was in vogue at the time. The country was hit by a devastating flood in 1988, causing immense loss of life and homelessness of more than 10 million people. Mass protests forced Ershad to step down in 1990 and in 1991 Begum Khaleda Zia, the widow of President General Ziaur Rahman, became prime minister. Once again, the constitution was amended to give executive power to the prime minister. Politics in Bangladesh since then have revolved around two “Battling Begums”: Sheikh Hasina Wazed of the Awami League and her bitter rival, Khaleda Zia of the Bangladesh National Party (BNP). Political unrest manifested in violent protests and strikes during 2007–08, when both Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina remained out of power and the country was under an extra-constitutional military-backed caretaker government. Winning the election in January 2009, Sheikh Hasina became prime minister a second time. She instituted an International Crime Tribunal to try war criminals who sided with Pakistan during the Liberation War and were party to the genocide. Ghulam Azam, leader of the Jamaat-e-Islami party and several others were convicted in 2013–14. Hasina began her third term as prime minister in January 2014, after her party Awami League won an election boycotted by the opposition amid an ongoing political crisis. In 2015, the government banned Ansarullah Bangla Team, an Islamist group, for their alleged role in targeting pro-secular people. And the next year, Dhaka witnessed a major terror attack at a posh restaurant in the diplomatic enclave, killing 20 people, including 18 foreigners. Islamist fundamentalists killed

Avijit Roy, Faisal Dipan, Niloy, and quite a few other secular bloggers from 2013 to 2018. Threats from religious fundamentalists have taken a toll on the freedom of speech and thought, the very essence of a democracy.

According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), more than 723,000 Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh since 25 August 2017 in the aftermath of Myanmar army's brutal attack on their villages in Rakhine state of Myanmar.⁷ In September 2018, at the 73rd UN General Assembly, Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said there were 1.1 million Rohingya refugees now in Bangladesh. Already an over-populated country, it became a crisis for Bangladesh to manage this exceedingly large number of refugees. In 2018, BNP leader Khaleda Zia was sent to prison for five years and was made ineligible to contest elections. It gave an advantage to Hasina's coalition party to win a landslide victory in the 11th national election held on 30 December 2018. Astoundingly out of 300 seats in Parliament, 288 seats were secured by winning more than 90% of the vote. Reportedly the vote was marred by violence, intimidation, and rigging. A *New York Times* editorial commenting on the election called it a "farcical vote" and questioned the Awami League's need to rig the election, as the party would have, as such, won anyway.⁸ Hasina started her fourth term as prime minister in early January 2019. Despite criticism, Sheikh Hasina heading the government for a decade has worked well for Bangladesh to achieve greater economic growth, reduce the gender gap, and provide a stable government. It is the world's second-largest ready-made garment exporting country, after China, which has contributed immensely towards the country's GDP growth, in addition to empowering women through job creation. The Hasina government's biggest accomplishment has been in the area of poverty alleviation, which has translated into significant reduction of the number of people living below the poverty line. Bangladesh was once one of the least developed countries of the world, part of the E-9 nations, but in March 2018 it fulfilled UN criteria to be recognised as a developing country.⁹ Interestingly as of 2018, in terms of GDP per capita (current USD), Bangladesh (\$1,698.3) has overtaken Pakistan (\$1,482.4), and is not too far behind India (\$2,010).¹⁰ In the Global Gender Gap Index 2018, Bangladesh ranked 48th, whereas in South Asia it came first, distantly followed by Sri Lanka (100th), Nepal (105th), India (108th), and the Maldives (113th).¹¹

The three-decade long uninterrupted democratic experiment in Bangladesh has traversed through many pitfalls. The personalised nature of politics with a zero-sum opposition mindset of leading political leaders, the resurgence of Islam as the primordial identity, religious extremism, intolerance and persecution of minorities, killing of the people airing liberal views, etc. pose a serious challenge to the consolidation of democracy in Bangladesh. The country will remain a fragile democracy until democratic norms are followed in letter and spirit and institutions function independently, upholding constitutional propriety untarnished by the influence of religious bigotry, personalities, and politics.

Bangladesh-Pakistan relations

Soon after the liberation of Bangladesh, General Yahya Khan, President of Pakistan, stepped down as a loss in a war with India and the loss of East Pakistan made his tenure untenable. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, who replaced him, even at that stage wanted to have some kind of political tie-up with the lost eastern wing. Thrice he met Mujibur Rahman, imprisoned in a jail in West Pakistan, to convince him but Mujib remained unmoved. Responding to international pressure, Bhutto released Mujibur Rahman from jail on 8 January 1972. Pakistan recognised Bangladesh in June 1974, following which Bhutto visited Bangladesh and paid homage to its war memorial at Savar and expressed regret over Pakistan's crimes in Bangladesh. Noticeably relations improved when Ziaur Rahman, Ershad, and Khaleda Zia were in power in Bangladesh. At the same time, relations with India became distant, which can be compared to a seesaw (also known as a "teeter-totter" or "teeter board"): when one side is up, the other side is down. On the bonhomie of Pakistan and Bangladesh, historian Craig Baxter observed,

As united Pakistan, the two countries of Pakistan and Bangladesh had sought independence from India in 1947 because they were concerned about the progress and security of Muslims in a Hindu majority state. As separate countries they continue to share a community of interests in limiting the dominance of India as a common Islamic position.¹²

So far on a reciprocal basis, five Pakistani heads of governments have made official visits to Bangladesh. In the 1980s, numerous trade and cultural agreements were signed. Pakistan also gifted some old F-6 fighter aircrafts to the Bangladeshi Air Force. Though Musharraf during his visit to Dhaka said, "Pakistan share[s] the pain of the events of 1971" till date no formal apology has been tendered by the government of Pakistan for their atrocities during the civil war in 1971.

There are a few contentious issues that both countries have not been able to resolve. One of them is the fate and status of more than 2 million Bangladeshis living in Pakistan illegally. A sizeable number of them came to Pakistan in the 1980s and entered the labour market. Half of them reside in Karachi alone and are working in the fishing and carpet-weaving industries and as domestic workers. Because of their illegal status, they face an identity crisis and frequent harassment from the police, blackmailing, and sexual abuse—all without recourse. The Bangladesh government is also not keen to take them back for varying reasons.¹³ Another longstanding unsettled issue is the "stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh," numbering around 540,000. The majority of them are Urdu-speaking Muslims from Bihar in India, who moved to East Pakistan in 1947 when India was partitioned and who supported Pakistan during the Liberation War. After the birth of Bangladesh, they wanted to emigrate to Pakistan, which was accepted by General Zia ul Haq, the then-President of Pakistan. Accordingly, a number of them emigrated to Pakistan but later in 2002, President Musharraf regretted his

inability to accept the balance. The fate of approximately 250,000 Bihari Muslims desirous to emigrate to Pakistan is still hanging. The International Crime Tribunal of Bangladesh tried collaborators of Pakistan during the Liberation War and, based on its indictment on 12 December 2013, executed Abdul Qader Mollha, known as “the Butcher of Mirpur.” Pakistan condemned the execution in their National Assembly and through several forums, which was strongly represented by Bangladesh. There has been a series of diplomatic rifts between the two countries. In February 2015, Pakistani diplomat Mohamed Mazhar Khan, posted in Dhaka, was deported by Bangladesh’s government for running a fake Indian currency business and in the same year in December, once again Bangladesh asked Pakistan diplomat Farina Arshad to leave for her alleged role in providing financial support to Jama’atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) militant and spy Idris Sheikh, who admitted to having received money from her. Pakistan, as usual, denied the charges and expelled Bangladeshi diplomat Moushumi Rahman, posted in Islamabad, in retaliation on the pretext of anti-Pakistan activities. Bilateral trade relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan exists though they are much below the capacity level.

India-Bangladesh

India is Bangladesh’s most important neighbour; both have a shared history, culture, language, and more than 4,097 km of porous borders, all adding to the timeless relationship between the two countries. India supported Bangladesh during the Liberation War and was the first to recognise it as an independent nation; India was also the first country to establish a diplomatic mission in Bangladesh immediately after its birth. After the liberation of Bangladesh, India assisted the Mujib government in his reconstruction efforts economically, diplomatically, and administratively. Since then, Bangladesh’s relations with India have had a series of highs and lows, depending on the type of government and the persons heading the government. Usually relations with India have flourished when the Awami League has led the government have and dipped when there was military rule or rule by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). A matter of great concern for India has been the “demographic invasion” from the Bangladesh border, which has had a telling effect on the socioeconomic spectrum and has caused disturbance in cultural and political harmony, in addition to endangering the nation’s security. Although Hasina’s government in Bangladesh pursues a policy of zero-tolerance towards terrorism, a JMB network in India was unearthed following a bomb blast at Burdwan in the bordering state of West Bengal in 2014. Despite various measures initiated by the Bangladeshi government, cross-border militancy continues to be a matter of concern for both countries. Hasina has extended full cooperation to India to deter infiltration and reduce the cross-border movement of militants. To check illegal cross-border migration, India has raised an eight-foot high barbed wire fence that covers almost 70% of the border, albeit selectively. To boost the economy and infrastructure development,

India has extended three Lines of Credits to Bangladesh in the last seven years, amounting to a total of US\$8 billion. “There are more than 60 bilateral institutional mechanisms between India and Bangladesh in the areas of security, trade & commerce, power & energy, transport & connectivity, science and technology, defence, rivers & maritime affairs etc”.¹⁴ Thirty-six functional Land Customs Stations (LCSs) have been operationalised for smooth movement of goods by road between the two countries. Two Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) along the land border, a single-window facility similar to airports and seaports operating on a 24×7 basis, have been functional since 1 August, 2017. In the energy sector, India exports 1,200 MW of electricity to Bangladesh, which is likely to grow exponentially in the future and will import liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) from Bangladesh. The two countries have extended support on trade and infrastructure connectivity in the region, both within and outside regional institutions such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). India and Bangladesh resolved a long-standing territorial dispute by formally exchanging land and population of 162 enclaves on 1 August 2015. A maritime border dispute was also resolved by India, honouring the International Court’s ruling in favour of Bangladesh. Bangladeshi Foreign Minister Abul Hassan Mahmood said, “We commend India for its willingness to resolve this matter peacefully by legal means and for its acceptance of the tribunal’s judgment.”¹⁵ But there are a few irritants, the most contested of which is long-outstanding agreement on sharing the waters of the Teesta river, which originates in Tso Lamo, in the Indian state of Sikkim; after covering nearly the entire floodplains of Sikkim, it flows through West Bengal and thereafter enters the Rangpur division in Bangladesh, draining 2,800 sq. km of Bangladesh. It is the fourth-largest among the 54 rivers shared by India and Bangladesh. According to a report on the Teesta by the Asia Foundation in 2013, its flood plain covers about 14% of the total cropped area of Bangladesh and provides direct livelihood opportunities to approximately 7.3% of its population.¹⁶ Though the central government of India agreed to resolve the long pending dispute, the “equitable” distribution of Teesta waters from India demanded by Bangladesh was opposed by the state government of West Bengal in India, because for them, the Teesta is equally important, being the lifeline of half-a-dozen districts in north Bengal. The failure to ink a deal had a fallout in regards to the country’s politics, putting the ruling Awami League in a tight spot.¹⁷

State formation in South Asia

Political scientists explain state formation by using two models highlighting “war” and “social contract” as agents of state-making based on European experiences of state formation. On the origin of a state, Charles Tilly emphasises the importance of “warfare” as the agent in state formation when explaining state formation in Europe.¹⁸ The second model of the origin of a state is the

“social contract theory,” propounded in the works of Hobbes and Locke, in which diverse groups of people come together to form states due to their common rational interests.¹⁹ South Asian state formation should be seen through a different prism, as states like India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh are the result of abrupt decolonialisation. British scholar Yasmin Khan, in her acclaimed history *The Great Partition*, judges that partition “stands testament to the follies of empire, which ruptured community evolution, distorted historical trajectories and forced violent state formation from societies that would otherwise have taken different—and unknowable—paths.”²⁰ The decolonisation process established statehood only as a form of external representation, as a formal territorial and legal framework of international politics guaranteed by the world state system and by international law.²¹ “In such cases, state institutions were exogenous rather than endogenous and a result of colonial diffusion. This can be considered a third model of state formation.”²² Though the Indian subcontinent has a long history that contributed towards structuring the present form of modern nation-states in South Asia, but from the point of view of realpolitik, eminent Pakistani historian Ayesha Jalal rightly feels that independence and the partition of India (in 1947), being a defining moment in modern South Asian history, could be considered an important milestone from where the new journey to the modern world began. Timeline of partition could serve as a good reference point to evaluate the state-society nexus in India, Pakistan, and even Bangladesh, though it was born a quarter of a century later. The partition of India was executed through a most violent process; it was a retributive genocide, a holocaust of religion killing more than 2 million people and displacing 14 million, the greatest-ever human transition during the execution of an insufficiently imagined political decision. Economics and social linkages along the length and breadth of undivided India, established for many centuries, were abruptly severed after partition, which impacted state-making in these decolonised South Asian countries.²³

The state building process involves the “creation of new government institutions and the strengthening of existing ones.”²⁴ State apparatus include institutions like bureaucracy, armed forces, educational institutions, the judiciary, police, and a correctional system.

At independence, India inherited the advantages of an established state structure and of being the recognised legatee of the colonial power on the subcontinent. Pakistan and, to a lesser degree, Bangladesh had to virtually assemble state structures from such fragments of state authority as existed within their territory.²⁵

The migrated middle class and elite Muslims of India (*muhajirs*) became the power centre in the new country of Pakistan, making it a migrant state. Since partition, Pakistani leaders had felt that the country was constantly under existential threat from India and so its army sold the idea that they were the protector of the nation against such threats and only they could give final shape to Jinnah’s “two nation”

theory and unfinished dream by waging war with India and conquering the Muslim-majority state Kashmir, whose heart is in Srinagar. The Pakistani Army remained ever relevant in shaping the country's state-making process, politics, and economic activities.

A sovereign state must have a defined territory. But the geography of the Indian subcontinent during the British Raj, since the days of Curzon or even before, didn't have a defined land border and the problem was passed on to India and Pakistan on independence. When the British handed over power to the governments of India and Pakistan, no one knew the exact geographical boundaries of their respective states. Disputes on the western border of Pakistan remain unsettled, where Balochis and Pakhtuns have challenged Pakistan's claims. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was able to successfully settle land and maritime boundary disputes with Bangladesh, but Bangladesh is yet to settle its boundary dispute with Myanmar. A peaceful settlement of the border dispute with Pakistan has not fructified, despite repeated efforts by the Indian prime ministers Indira Gandhi (1972), Atal Behari Bajpayee (1999), and Manmohan Singh (2005–07). Inherent longstanding distrust, coagulated by Pakistan's use of terrorism and Kashmir's ambiguous political status within the Indian Union has kept the dispute enduring. India's declaration of the abrogation of Article 370, which gave a special status to Kashmir, and its bifurcation by making Ladakh a union territory provoked the ire of Pakistan, thus pushing the possibility of a peaceful resolution to territorial disputes into more uncertainty.²⁶ Most importantly, on the issue of the resolution of disputes with India, the government in Islamabad cannot settle any of these without the explicit concurrence of Rawalpindi (GHQ of Pakistan Army). And that concurrence will cost the army its ever-powerful status, which they will be too unwilling to forego.

By the end of the 1970, Pakistan had witnessed the assassination of Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan, two enfeeble constitutions, two wars with India (1948 and 1965), seven prime ministers, one military coup, and two martial-law administrators. Pakistan held nationwide general election for the first time after a quarter of a century of its coming into being in December 1970 but refused to honour the mandate. That event led to the country's dismemberment, giving birth to Bangladesh in a very traumatic process. Mujib had the unenviable job of state-making in war ravaged, poverty-stricken Bangladesh. His vision of a secular democracy was scripted in the 1972 Constitution of Bangladesh. Mujib faced many challenges from the management of famine to building state institutions and infrastructure from an almost empty coffer. To wade through the plethora of problems and to arrogate himself to unchallenging authority, Mujib formed Bangladesh Krishak Shramik Awami League (BAKSAL)²⁷ and established hegemony, thus derailing the multi-party democracy. This triggered much resentment, leading to his assassination during a bloody military coup on 15 August 15. General Ziaur Rahman, the military ruler, redefined the idea of Bangladesh by replacing secularism with Islam as the state ideology during his 1975–81 regime. Zia's emphasis on this religiously oriented Bangladeshi identity was also driven

by anti-Indian foreign policy based on the need for autonomy from an overbearing neighbour. Ever since, this has differentiated the BNP's foreign policy from the Awami League's pro-India posture, which dates back to New Delhi's diplomatic and material support for Bengali nationalists and India's decisive 1971 military intervention in East Pakistan. Another bloody military coup on 30 May 1981 took the life of President General Ziaur Rahman. The country remained for 15 years under military rule and two years under military controlled-civilian rule. Bangladesh, uninterrupted since 1991, is on its democratic journey but with many flaws in its structure as it suffers from a lack of inner-party democracy, the political parties being dynastic and of a clientelist structure, who believe in zero-sum rivalry. In Pakistan, political parties are dominated by Bhutto's and Nawaz Sharif's families. India's political parties, mainly the Congress, as well regional parties, have witnessed similar traits. Dynastic politics in South Asian countries is a bane where an undemocratic source of entitlement has crept in over time, restricting meritocratic representations in the body politic. Voting based on preferences of caste, creed, and religion instead of merit have remained impediments to fair and deserving democratic representations in India. But Indian voters of late have started casting votes across the barriers of caste, creed, and, to some extent, religion. The result of India's general election in 2019 can be cited as a testament to its voters' judgemental maturity, though the religious divide has rather increased. More than party ideology, young Indians voted for a leader who is assertive, not corrupt, and who believes in the idea of "nation first." Putting the opposition political party leaders in jail and denying their participation in the election had been a norm in Pakistan and this disturbing trend has crept into Bangladesh as well. Undeniably, this trend speaks loudly about the "democracy deficit"; it also mocks at the institution of the judiciary. Unlike Pakistan and Bangladesh, the Indian judiciary has been generally spared from this malaise.

Stanley Wolpert wrote, "The success of Indian army and diplomacy in the liberation of Bangladesh was the crowning triumph of Indira's Raj, irrevocably shifting the balance of South Asian power to India."²⁸ After the war Mrs. Gandhi launched a 20-point programme to improve the economy and industrial output, along with various development programmes. India became a nuclear power in May 1974, much to the surprise of the world. To remain in power and to curb dissent, Mrs. Gandhi imposed an "emergency," throttling the very idea of democracy that her father Jawaharlal Nehru and other founding fathers had propounded when adopting the Constitution of India. Mrs. Gandhi's misuse of state apparatus and her rule during the 18 months of emergency are ever-remembered as the black era of Indian democracy and the nation learned a lesson on how abusive power can be, as it can derail a state from its democratic path towards a dictatorship. No wonder she was voted out of power in the next election. Two prime ministers of India have become victims of terror attacks; Mrs. Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh police guard and her son and successor, Rajiv Gandhi, was assassinated by LTTE terrorists during an election rally in Tamil Nadu. India is possibly the most diverse country in the world, having so many different

cultures, multiple religions, varied linguistic groups, all living in varied terrain. Over the years, many states have been divided to satisfy various pressure groups and it is evident that some divisions brought prosperity to the region—Himachal Pradesh and Haryana can be put in this category. India, aiming at “unity in diversity,” has managed federalism well despite sporadic friction between the central and state governments, particularly so when one of them is from a different political ideology. Indian politics have also matured in handling coalition politics. Yet the deficiency in integration has created demand for autonomy or independence. The north-eastern states were not integrated with mainstream politics and the economy for many decades. However, in the last two decades, in particular during the premiership of Dr. Manmohan Singh and the present dispensation under Prime Minister Modi, effort to bring them at par and integrate them through development and job creation have been initiated. The issue of national integration remains a challenge in Pakistan; a case in point is Baluchistan and the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan (Pashtunistan) demanding for separation. The tribals of Chittagong periodically agitating for self-determination indicates the lack of completion of national integration in Bangladesh too. Religious minorities both in Pakistan and Bangladesh have been systematically marginalised through persecution and discrimination.

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto ruled Pakistan for five and a half years in the most turbulent era after its dismemberment. On 10 April 1973, during his regime, Pakistan's new constitution was passed by the parliament unanimously and was ratified on 14 August that same year. With all earnestness, Bhutto got rid of “fat and flabby generals” responsible for the ignominious defeat in East Pakistan, restructured the army and bureaucracy, and undertook a nationalisation programme of 30 industries, including banks, insurance companies, textile, and rice husking mills, besides initiating land reforms. He changed the designation of army chief from Commander-in-Chief to Chief of Army Staff to send a subtle message that army would be subservient to political authority in a democratic country. But it didn't matter; the army chief remains the most powerful person in Pakistan. Bhutto, with his long-time desire to have a nuclear bomb, embarked upon a nuclear research program—a search for “credible deterrence”—brushing aside international pressure on the justification that if India could have a bomb why not Pakistan? But “Bhutto's reluctance in accepting any counter view and his retaliatory disposition would often cause several unintended crises that further isolated him from the armed forces, political groups, and even some of his early close PPP associates.”²⁹ Alas! On 4 April 1979 at the Rawalpindi jail, despite international pressure on Zia, Bhutto was hanged to death after being convicted by the country's highest court. Surprisingly all the three leaders of South Asia who ruled their countries post the 1971 Liberation War—Mujibur Rahman, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, and Indira Gandhi—had similarities in many aspects. All of them though not communists believed in socialism and nationalised many institutions like banks and shaped the principal economic and social policies

for their countries to reach out to the masses for common benefit. All of them went through very challenging times as the countries faced many political and economic problems during their rules. All were angered by criticism and bred cynicism; all were power hungry and espoused tenets of authoritarian rule. Nevertheless, all of them were bestowed with political instinct and charisma, which were harnessed at times to a greater purpose though they could have utilised these assets much better. And most unfortunately, all of them died unnatural deaths; all three even lost one or more children to political violence. A rare similarity indeed! Possibly, the state formation in these South Asian countries could have taken a different course had these stalwart leaders not died early.

General Zia-Ul-Haq ruled Pakistan for 11 years from 1977 to 1988. He was an authoritarian who as president carried out the “Islamisation” of the country with utmost zeal. In his time, draconian the Blasphemy Law was enacted, which threatened the lives of minorities and liberals. The law says,

Whoever by words, either spoken or written or by visible representation, or by imputation innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, one shall be liable to fine.

The Pakistani Army under his regime became all-powerful, subverting every other institution of the state. With the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Pakistan became a frontline state and Zia’s importance increased phenomenally as an ally to the US and China. Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) backed by the American intelligence agency CIA created Islamist guerrilla fighters known as the Mujahideen (those engaged in *jihad*, meaning “holy war”). During this war, Afghan refugees numbering 4 million or so entered Pakistan and were settled at Quetta and Peshawar. During Zia’s tenure Pakistan as a political democracy suffered heavily. Islamisation and the rise of fundamentalists pushed the country far from the democratic secular culture that Quaid-e-Azam Jinnah had dreamed of. At the time of independence 23% of Pakistan’s population was from other religions but today only 1.5% Hindu and about 1.5% Christians remain there. Even the Ahmadyyas have been declared non-Muslims. The story of Asia Bibi drew the attention of the world and can could be cited as the starker example of persecution in Pakistan and the abuse of Blasphemy Law. Asia by faith a Christian was sentenced to death on flimsy grounds in 2010 after being accused of blasphemy in an insignificant dispute with a Muslim village woman. Asia was later acquitted by the country’s highest court, which triggered violent protests throughout Pakistan led by the Islamic group Tehreek-e-Labbaik, a staunch supporters of Pakistan’s draconian blasphemy laws. Two Pakistani politicians were killed for criticising the country’s these notorious laws and supporting Asia Bibi, whose lawyer, Saiful Mulook, fled the country for fear of his safety. Bangladesh, too, has gone from having a 17% non-Muslim population to now having less than 7% minorities today.

From 1964 to 2013, around 11.3 million Hindus left Bangladesh due to religious persecution and discrimination. ... The rate of exodus over the past 49 years points to that direction that no Hindus will be left after 30 years if the rate of exodus continues in its present rate.³⁰

Minor religious groups in Bangladesh and more so in Pakistan live constantly under fear, though the degree of that varies depending on the party in power. Hasina, for example, has been fair and sympathetic to minority groups and Imran Khan promised fairness, though ground-level protection for minorities is far from the desired level. The Shia-Sunni clash in Pakistan is a menace that has taken a heavy toll on many lives. There had been occasional communal rifts in India, but post the 2002 Godhra massacre, thankfully no major communal riot has taken place. India is one of the few countries in the world whose constitution has embraced secularism as a state policy. Persons from all religious groups have held the highest constitutional positions, including in the armed forces and civil services without any discrimination whatsoever. Sadly, the same is not true in Pakistan and, to an extent, in Bangladesh.

During recent years, states in South Asia have been facing external and internal challenges. Eight states in India are under Maoist attacks. Besides this, India is mired in problems of Islamic terror, some homegrown but most abetted and supported by Pakistan. During his rule, Musharraf initially tried to control terrorism but was only partially successful. The Pakistani Army through the ISI has relentlessly pursued terrorism as a strategic tool—a low-cost option to keep the conflict with India alive and at the same time make it cost prohibitive for India, who has no choice but to deploy large army and security forces along the borders. The status of Kashmir is the biggest bone of contention between India and Pakistan. Being a Muslim-majority state, Pakistan assumes that it is but natural that Kashmir is a part of it. This issue needs examination through a historical perspective. During the meeting on 3 June 1947 where the partition of India was decided, Kashmir was not included in Pakistan. After independence, the Maharaja of Kashmir Hari Singh through an accession treaty acceded the state to India. Pakistan, violating the law, sent its army to occupy part of Kashmir, which India refers to as POK (Pakistan Occupied Kashmir) and Pakistan refers to as Azad Kashmir.³¹

The Pakistani government has denied their role in terrorist activities in India, quoting that terrorists like Kashav, who was caught during the Mumbai attack, are non-state actors. However, in 2010, Musharraf while giving an interview to the BBC openly admitted having supported jihad in Kashmir. The world view is that Pakistan is the epicentre of terror and this is not without reason: dreaded terrorists Bin Laden, Masood Azhar, Dawood Ibrahim, and many others have found shelter on its soil. Terrorism is haunting Pakistan just as much. Imran Khan, in an interview during his visit to Washington in July 2019, admitted that there are about 40 different terrorist groups in Pakistan. Bangladesh too has about 30 different groups of terrorists. Insurgency in north-east India has continued over the last seven decades, though this has, to an extent, been managed by successive

governments, it is still a matter of great concern. Appreciably, India has eliminated Khalistan movements within the country, which were demanding separation of the Indian part of the Punjab province; however, the supporters of this ideology are active in countries like Canada and the UK and the ISI engages them to suit its “fix India” narrative.

Securitisation has become an important activity in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh and much of their resources particularly of India and Pakistan are dedicated towards ensuring security, resources that could have been otherwise used for developmental activities. Deficiency in state building is a stark reality in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Military coups and authoritarian military rule may not be the only reason causing this deficiency. Pakistani politics for many years revolved around two families: those of Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. Till date, no Prime Minister of Pakistan has been able to complete his/her tenure of five years. For many years, Pakistan didn't have a proper constitution to guide them. Noted political scientist Professor Ali Riaz observed that the Bangladeshi political landscape had become dominated by the Awami League, a secularist party; the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), a centre-right party established by Zia; the Bangladesh Jamaat-i-Islami (BJI), an Islamist party that opposed the founding of the country in 1971; and the Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP), a right-of-centre party established by Ershad. During the last two decades, political choice in Bangladesh has oscillated between the two begums (Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina) as the country has not been able to produce a viable third alternative civilian political leader.³² Does type of government have to do anything with the development of a country? Gandhiji famously said, “What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans and the homeless, whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or in the holy name of liberty or democracy?” Also, one can't shy away from the fact that a democratic India, along with much divergence, has had some convergence with her siblings. Poverty, illiteracy, religious intolerance, inequality, etc. are all too common, albeit to varying degrees in all three South Asian countries. A starving man is least interested to know the type of government his country has if he gets two square meals a day. But the strongest aspect of democracy is right to choose, speak freely, and compete with others on equal footing. To that extent, there is no alternative better than democracy, though for a short period a benign dictator from the military or otherwise could be good for a country; the caveat here is that it can only be for a short duration. Democracy and political maturity with a well-drafted constitution have taken India into a different league vis-à-vis Pakistan and Bangladesh. And today Bangladesh has surpassed Pakistan on many social development parameters, including the economy. Pakistan is reeling under economic depression, with inflation at a five-year high, national debt exceeding gross domestic product, and receiving an International Monetary Fund bailout for the 22nd time.³³

Jinnah outlined his vision of Pakistan in an address to the Constituent Assembly, delivered on 11 August 1947. He spoke of an inclusive and impartial government, religious freedom, rule of law, and equality for all. Pakistan has

not measured up in any of these areas that Quaid-e-Azam envisioned. And a few days later on the night of 14/15 August, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru on the eve of India's independence, while delivering his historical speech "Tryst with Destiny," reminded the country that the task ahead included "the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity."³⁴ Though much has happened in India, much more needs to be done to realise Nehru's dream. On the state-building of Bangladesh, well-acclaimed Professor of Economics at SOAS University of London, Mushtaq Khan writes,

The emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 did not achieve internal peace. Instead, there was more violence, an attempted imposition of a one-party state, the assassinations of two heads of state, long periods of military rule and finally in 2000, the emergence of a vulnerable democracy. Even by the standards of developing countries, its emerging democracy was characterized by high levels of political corruption and insufficient attention to institution-building or developmental policy.

Banga Bandhu Mujibur Rahman dreamt of a secular socialistic democratic *Sonar Bangla* (Golden Bengal). The country too has been able to get out of a whirlpool of chaos and famine, but its state-making is largely incomplete. Notwithstanding occasional religious bigotry, India has remained entrenched in secularism despite being a Hindu majoritarian state; Pakistan and Bangladesh became theocratic states by embracing Islam as the state religion during the course of their journeys, ignoring the vision and wishes of their founding fathers.

Bangladesh soon will celebrate the golden jubilee of its birth; India will enter 75 years of her independence and so will Pakistan of its creation.

There is no single blueprint for nation-building or national integration... nation-building covers a vast range of physical, social, economic, and political phenomena extending from physiological integration in a human body, social integration in the fields of education, language, legal systems or literature, to economic integration of the advanced and the backward sectors of a society and integration of the primordial groups into a national community³⁵

While some hopes of these South Asian countries have been realised during their five-decade journeys after the observation of Rupert was made, they have miles to go. Samuel Huntington observed "authoritarianism may do well in the short term but experience clearly has shown that only democracy produces good government over the long haul."³⁶ Thus, it may also be argued that Pakistan's or Bangladesh's success or failure of nation-building, as in most other developing countries, is likely to be dependent on the capacity to respond to democratic values as distinct from authoritarianism. It may be maintained that democracy has, by far, been the most tested and accepted political paradigm that can help create conditions conducive to hold the nation. After the Modi government's abrogation of Article

370, taking away the special rights of Kashmiris, and the enactment of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), there has been an ongoing populist backlash—a section of intellectuals, political elites from opposition camps, students of a few select universities, and many in the media are suddenly vociferous on the need to defend democracy and constitution. But defend democracy against what? Against the law abrogated or enacted through parliamentary procedure as laid down in the constitution of the country? Isn't the move itself undemocratic and all in the name of saving constitution and democracy? And this group also has come up with a theory that the Modi government, with its brutal majority, is suppressing the voice of dissent. In India, there is also a funny understanding and meaning of the word "minority." With 16% of the population, Muslims are considered a minority but Parsis, Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs—though they have much lower percentages of the population compared to Muslims and theoretically fall into the category of minorities—are not perceived as minorities by politicians and the common usage of the term "minority." For political reasons, minorities means Muslims, a perception created with eyes fixed on the vote bank. So far away from the truth! We need to watch how democracy in India takes shape in future.

Time and again, war in Afghanistan has proven to be a godsent gift to Pakistan from America. It happened during Zia's as well as Musharraf's regimes and now Imran Khan's government is likely to get similar benefits. The supply of defence equipment has been part and parcel of the economic package linked with the management of Afghanistan crisis. Historically, it has been seen that every time US weapons have been supplied to Pakistan, they have been used against India and not for the purpose they were meant for. Since the time of Mao Tse Tung, China has maintained good relations with Pakistan. In 1963, Pakistan illegally ceded the Trans-Karakoram Tract, a portion of POK, to China, which later facilitated the construction of a trade corridor between western China and Pakistan. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), euphemistically aimed at improving Pakistan's infrastructure and economy, would *de facto* enable China to gain strategic access to Central Asia and the Arabian Sea is estimated to cost in excess of \$46 billion. Pakistan considers China their all-weather friend and their bond was cemented further because of their shared hostility towards India. Pakistan is also the biggest buyer of Chinese weapons and defence products, the latest being the deal to supply six submarines. Pakistanis boasts of their closeness with China with the slogan, "A friendship Higher than the Heights of Himalayas and deeper than the depth of Arabian Sea."

If one has to examine state-formation process of Pakistan, undeniably it can be concluded that it has turned into a praetorian state. Praetorianism has been described as

a type of militarism oriented to the interior life of a nation, often related to minor countries, that does not aspire to fight or win international wars, but instead to maintain its influence in the domestic political system, controlling decisions that could affect the interests of the military as a corporation, or supporting some particular political faction or party.³⁷

Amos Perlmutter, an American scholar, has classified praetorianism into three categories, autocracy, oligarchy, and authoritarian, and has stated that Pakistan falls into the authoritarian category as military rulers in Pakistan have introduced new political forces sympathetic to the military and have declared ousted politicians corrupt.³⁸ Under Nehru's leadership, India made a robust constitution within two years of independence and a robust electoral democracy by holding regular elections. While Nehru was able to steer India for a longer time, the early death of Jinnah made Pakistan an orphan and derailed the process of the democratisation of the state. But was Pakistan ever a democracy in a true sense? Supporters of the "migrant state" argument feel that Jinnah himself was a half-hearted democrat, as his style of functioning was "keeping complete control of the state mechanism with himself bypassing institutions."³⁹ "Pakistan is the most dangerous country in the world – not this year, not next year, but certainly down the road," says Michael Morell, former acting CIA director.⁴⁰ Of late it has been customary to pass negative comments on Pakistan as a failed state and every malaise there is ascribed to the generals and the army. While there may be some truth to the fact that it has a failing economy, a society ridden with radicalised Islamic people under the grip of Mullahs, a fragile democracy whose leadership has been propped up by the most powerful organ of the state, the military, who controls the strategic decisions, it would be too hasty to treat this nation as hopeless and beyond recovery. Pakistan's geography is strategically significant and great powers have never lost interest in the region. The country has fertile land with the best canal system and a sizeable young, energetic population. Aarish Ullah Khan of the Stockholm Peace Research Institute writes,

Only when Pakistan as a state is able to meet essential needs such as security, health, education and economic opportunity will it be able to stop hiding behind the 'shield' of Islam. Only then will the national political discourse shift from an ideological base to the utilitarian value of Pakistan. ... As desirable as meeting these needs is, they rank second to the need for the change of the military outlook that would probably follow an extended period of peace with India,... it is important that the religious militias are neutralized and reintegrated into society. As soon as the military leadership is reasonably convinced of the prospects of long-term peace with India, the energy that is currently devoted to militancy by extremist organizations can be diverted into social work in the name of Islam rather than of jihad.⁴¹

The country must follow a different template and make a new beginning for the sake of its millions of citizens who live on a \$4 per day income and also to usher peace into the region.

It is not good for any country to have a powerful hostile neighbour in perpetuity as that saps nation's economy and derails development. Hans J. Morgenthau (1904–80) while explaining realism in international relations asserted,

“International politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power.”⁴² It seems partition of India during decolonisation created disputes in perpetuity in the South Asian region. It may take decades, but there is no short-term solution to one of the longest disputes of the world—Kashmir. India and Pakistan have been fighting over it since partition. If that is solved, other contentious issues can be addressed with lesser efforts, in order to establish peace in the region. Thucydides teaches us that neither naïve-dreaming nor unrestrained cynicism works in international politics.⁴³ The South Asian region has witnessed long-standing fissures of race, religion, caste, gender, and political violence for decades. These fissiparous tendencies are ever problematic for socioeconomic development, including inclusivity. The perpetration of political violence in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and in some states in India to win votes at any cost has become the election strategy of political parties of all hues. Besides, the clash in ideology, religion-inspired political violence has become a norm in the region. Unless political violence is shunned and societal fissiparous tendencies are curbed, democracy cannot mature. “For Indians today may be more free than when British left these shores but they are surely less free than what the framers of constitution hoped or wished.”⁴⁴ India, while struggling with plethora of social issues and poverty at home, is now looking for a position on the world stage appropriate to its size, democracy, economy, military, and accomplishments. Successive prime ministers of India, like Manmohan Singh in his address at the New Delhi McKinsey Meet in October 2007 and Narendra Modi while delivering his speech at Kuala Lumpur at the ASEAN Business Summit in November 2015, have with great conviction conveyed to the global audience that “India’s moment has come: now it is India’s turn to regain its due place in the comity of nations.”⁴⁵ Modi has set goal of establishing a five trillion dollar economy by 2025; but it’s an extremely challenging dream as the Indian economy is undergoing a slowdown on account of both domestic and global factors. India with its 1.3 billion population, which soon will surpass China’s 1.4 billion, and the largest workforce, third-largest defence forces, seventh-largest economy is legitimately aspiring for a global role. But it faces challenges on the domestic front to keep the nation-state together, the chronic threat of terrorism from Pakistan leading to a worst-case scenario of nuclear war, and occasional disputes with China, who gives constant succour to Pakistan, furthering the drag. While India has sorted out many disputes with Bangladesh and there is an effort by both to remain good, supportive neighbours, peace between India and Pakistan remains ever elusive. The rivalry between them “is getting more, rather than less, dangerous: the two countries’ nuclear arsenals are growing, militant groups are becoming more capable, and rabid media outlets on both sides are shrinking the scope for moderate voices.”⁴⁶ The Berlin Wall has fallen, arch rivals North Korea and South Korea are coming closer since 2018; how long will the follies and furies of partition impede these South Asian nations from breaking the shackles of the past and making a new beginning. It is difficult to do crystal gaze on the time frame, but nothing is permanent. Therefore, never stop hoping for a better and more peaceful South Asia.

Notes

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APPENDICES



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APPENDIX 1

THE LAHORE RESOLUTION

Resolved at the Lahore Session of All-India Muslim League

Held on 22nd–24th March 1940

- 1 While approving and endorsing the action taken by the Council and the Working Committee of the All-India Muslim League indicated in their resolutions dated the 27th of August, 17th and 18th of September and 22nd of October 1939, and 3rd February 1940 on the constitutional issue, this session of the All-India Muslim League emphatically reiterates that the scheme of federation embodied in the Government of India Act, 1935, is totally unsuited to, and unworkable in the peculiar conditions of this country and is altogether unacceptable to Muslim India.
- 2 It further records its emphatic view that while the declaration dated the 18th of October 1939 made by the Viceroy on behalf of His Majesty's Government is reassuring insofar as it declares that the policy and plan on which the Government of India Act 1935, is based will be reconsidered in consultation with the various parties, interests and communities in India, Muslim India will not be satisfied unless the whole constitutional plan is reconsidered de novo and that no revised plan would be acceptable to the Muslims unless it is framed with their approval and consent.
- 3 Resolved that it is the considered view of this session of the All India Muslim League that no constitutional plan would be workable in this country of acceptable to Muslims unless it is designed on the following basic principle, namely that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted, with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary, that **the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the North-Western and Eastern Zones of India, should be grouped to constitute “Independent States” in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign.**

278 Appendices

That adequate, effective and mandatory safeguards should be specifically provided in the constitution for minorities in these units and in these regions for the protection of their religious, cultural, economic, political, administrative and other rights and interests in consultation with them; and in other parts of India where the Mussalmans are in a minority, adequate, effective and mandatory safeguards shall be specially provided in the constitution for them and other minorities for the protection of their religious, cultural, economic, political, administrative and other rights and interests in consultation with them.

This Session further authorises the working committee to frame a scheme of constitution in accordance with these basic principles, providing for the assumption finally by the respective regions of all powers such as defence, external, affairs, communications, customs and such other matters as may be necessary.

Source: Munir Ahmad Mughal, Lahore Resolution 1940 (March 26, 2014), SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2416506>, viewed on 30 April 2015.

APPENDIX 2

MUJIB'S SIX POINT FORMULA

Pakistan shall be a Federation granting full autonomy on the basis of the six-point formula to each of the federating units:

Point No. 1

The character of the government shall be federal and parliamentary, in which the election to the federal legislature and to the legislatures of the federating units shall be direct and on the basis of universal adult franchise. The representation in the federal legislature shall be on the basis of population.

Point No. 2

The federal government shall be responsible only for defence and foreign affairs and subject to the conditions provided in (3) below, currency.

Point No. 3

There shall be two separate currencies mutually or freely convertible in each wing for each region, or in the alternative a single currency, subject to the establishment of federal reserve system in which there will be regional federal reserve banks, which shall devise measures to prevent the transfer of resources and flight of capital from one region to another.

Point No. 4

Fiscal Policy shall be responsibility of the federating units. The federal government shall be provided with requisite revenue resources for meeting the

requirements of defence and foreign affairs, which revenue resources would be automatically appropriate by the federal government in the manner provided and on the basis of the ratio to be determined by the procedure laid down in the constitution. Such constitutional provisions would ensure that federal government's revenue requirements are met consistently with the objective of ensuring control over the fiscal policy by the governments of the federating units.

Point No. 5

Constitutional provisions shall be made to enable separate accounts to be maintained of the foreign exchange earnings of each of the federating units, under the control of the respective governments of the federating units on the basis of a ratio to be determined in accordance with the procedure laid down in the constitution. The regional governments shall have power under the constitution to negotiate foreign trade aid within the framework of the foreign policy of the country, which shall be the responsibility of the federal governments.

Point No. 6

The government of the federating units shall be empowered to maintain a militia or para-military force in order to contribute effectively towards national security.

Source: The Government of Pakistan, White Paper.

APPENDIX 3

EXCERPT FROM PRESIDENT YAHYA KHAN'S BROADCAST ON 26 MARCH 1971

My dear countrymen,
Assalam-o-Alaikum,

On the 6th of this month I announced 25 March as the new date for the inaugural session of the National Assembly hoping that conditions would permit the holding of the session on the appointed date. Events have, not satisfied that hope. The nation continued to face a grave crisis.

In East Pakistan a non-co-operation and disobedience movement was launched by the Awami League and matters took a very serious turn. Events were moving very fast and it became absolutely imperative that the situation was brought under control as soon as possible. With this aim in view, I had a series of discussions with political leaders in West Pakistan and subsequently on 15 March I went to Dacca.

Sheikh Mujibur Rehman's action of starting his non-cooperation movement is an act of treason. He and his Party have defied the lawful authority for over three weeks. They have insulted Pakistani's flag and defiled the photograph of the Father of the Nation. They have tried to run a parallel government. They have created turmoil, terror and insecurity.

I should have taken action against Sheikh Mujibur Rehman and his collaborators in such a manner as not to jeopardize my plan of peaceful transfer of power. In my keenness to achieve this aim I kept to tolerating one illegal act after another, and at the same time I explored every possible avenue for arriving at some reasonable solution.... His obstinacy, obduracy and absolute refusal to talk sense can lead to but one conclusion—the man and his party are enemies of Pakistan and they want East Pakistan to break away completely from the country. He has attacked the solidarity and integrity of this country—his crime will not go unpunished.

282 Appendices

We will not allow some power-hungry and unpatriotic people to destroy this country and play with the destiny of 120 million people.

In my address to the nation of 6 March I told you that it is the duty of the Pakistan Armed Forces to ensure the integrity, solidarity and security of Pakistan. I have ordered them to do their duty and fully restore the authority of the government.

In view of the grave situation that exists in the country today, I have decided to ban all political activities throughout the country. As for the Awami League, it is completely banned as a political party. I have also decided to impose complete press censorship. Martial Law Regulations will very shortly be issued in pursuance of these decisions.

I appeal to my countrymen to appreciate the gravity of the situation, for which blame rests entirely on the anti-Pakistan and secessionist elements.

God be with you. God bless you.

Pakistan Paindabad

Source: *Pakistan Horizon*, Vol. XXIV, No. 2, pp. 107–110.

APPENDIX 4

RESOLUTION OF THE INDIAN PARLIAMENT 31 MARCH 1971

Moved by Mrs. Indira Gandhi

This house expresses its deep anguish and grave concern at the recent developments in East Bengal. A massive attack by armed forces, dispatched from West Pakistan, has been unleashed against the entire people of East Bengal with a view to suppressing their urges and aspirations.

Instead of respecting the will of the people so unmistakably expressed through the election in Pakistan in December 1970, the Government of Pakistan has chosen to flout the mandate of the people.

The Government of Pakistan has not refused to transfer power to legally elected representatives but has arbitrarily prevented the National Assembly from assuming its rightful and sovereign role. The people of East Bengal are being sought to be suppressed by the naked use of force, by bayonets, machine guns, tanks, artillery and aircraft.

The government and people of India have always desired and worked for peaceful, normal and fraternal relations with Pakistan. However, situated as India is and bound as the people of the sub-continent are by centuries-old ties of history, culture and tradition, this House cannot remain indifferent to the macabre tragedy being enacted so close to our border. Throughout the length and breadth of our land, our people have condemned, in unmistakable terms, the atrocities now being perpetrated on an unprecedented scale upon an unarmed and innocent people.

This House expresses its profound sympathy for and solidarity with the people of East Bengal in their struggle for a democratic way of life.

Bearing in mind the permanent interests which India has in peace, and committed as we are to uphold and defend human rights, this House demands immediate cessation of the use of force and the massacre of defenceless people. This House calls upon all people and governments of the world to take urgent and

284 Appendices

constructive steps to prevail upon the Government of Pakistan to put an end immediately to the systematic decimation of people, which amounts to genocide.

This House records its profound conviction that the historic upsurge of the 75 million people of East Bengal will triumph. The House wishes to assure them that their struggle and sacrifices will receive the wholehearted sympathy and support of the people of India.

Source: Bangla Desh Documents, p. 672.

APPENDIX 5

EXCERPTS FROM THE INDO-SOVIET TREATY OF PEACE, FRIENDSHIP AND CO-OPERATION, 9 AUGUST 1971

Desirous of expanding and consolidating the existing relations of sincere friendship between them,

Believing that the further development of friendship and co-operation meets the basic national interests of lasting peace in Asia and the world,

Convinced that in the world today international problems can only be solved by co-operation and not by conflict,

The republics of India on the one side, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the other side,

Have decided to conclude the present treaty, for which purposes the following plenipotentiaries have been appointed:

On behalf of the republic of India: Sardar Swaran Singh. Minister of External Affairs.

On behalf of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics: Mr. A.A. Gromyko, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

(Article I)

The High Contracting Parties solemnly declare that enduring peace and friendship shall prevail between two countries and their peoples. Each party shall respect the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the other party and refrain from interfering in the other's internal affairs.

The High Contracting Parties shall continue to develop and consolidate the relations of sincere friendship, good neighbourliness and comprehensive co-operation existing between them on the basis of the aforesaid principles as well as those of equality and mutual benefit.

(Article II)

(Article III)

Guided by their loyalty to the lofty ideal of equality of all peoples and nations, irrespective of race or creed, the High Contracting parties condemn colonialism

and racialism in all forms and manifestations, and reaffirm their determination to strive for their final and complete elimination. The High Contracting Parties shall cooperate with other States to achieve these aims and to support the just aspirations of the peoples in their struggle against colonialism and racial domination.

(Article IV)

(Article V)

(Article VI)

(Article VII)

(Article VIII)

In accordance with the traditional friendship established between the two countries, each of the High Contracting Parties solemnly declares that it shall not enter into or participate in any military alliance directed against the other Party.

(Article IX)

Each High Contracting Party undertakes to abstain from providing any assistance to any third country that engages in armed conflict with the other party. In the event of either being subjected to an attack or a threat thereof, the High Contracting parties shall immediately enter into mutual consultations in order to remove such threat and to take appropriate effective measures to ensure peace and the security of their countries.

(Article X)

(Article XI)

(Article XII)

Done in New Delhi on the Ninth day of August in the year One Thousand Nine Hundred and Seventy One.

On behalf of

the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

(Sd.)

A.A. Gromyko,

Minister of External Affairs.

On behalf of

the Republic of India

(Sd.)

Swaran Singh,

Minister of External Affairs.

Source: *Survival*, Vol. XIII, October 1971, pp. 351–353.

APPENDIX 6

MR ZHOU EN-LAI'S LETTER TO PRESIDENT YAHYA KHAN OF 13 APRIL 1971

I have read Your Excellency's letter and Ambassador Chang Tung's report on Your Excellency's conversion with him. I am grateful to Your Excellency for your trust in the Chinese Government. China and Pakistan are friendly neighbours. The Chinese Government and people are following with close concern the development of the present situation in Pakistan. Your Excellency and leaders of various quarters in Pakistan have done a lot of useful work to uphold the unification of Pakistan and to prevent it from moving towards a split. We believe that through the wise consultations, we would like to present the actions and efforts of Your Excellency and leaders of various quarters in Pakistan, the situation in Pakistan will certainly be restored to normal. In our opinion, the unification of Pakistan and the unity of the people of East and West Pakistan are the basic guarantees for Pakistan to attain prosperity and strength. Here, it is most important to differentiate the broad masses of the people from handful of persons who want to sabotage the unification of Pakistan. As a genuine friend of Pakistan, we would like to present these views for Your Excellency's reference.

At the same time, we have note that of late the Indian Government has been carrying out gross interference in the internal affairs of Pakistan by exploiting the internal problems of your country. And the Soviet Union and the United States are doing the same one after the other. The Chinese press is carrying reports to expose such unreasonable interference and has published Your Excellency's letter of reply to Podgorny. The Chinese Government holds that what is happening in Pakistan at present is purely the internal affair of Pakistan, which can only be settled by the Pakistan[i] people themselves and which brooks no foreign interference whatsoever. Your Excellency may rest assured that should

the Indian expansionists dare to launch aggression against Pakistan, the Chinese Government and people will, as always, firmly support the Pakistan Government and people in their just struggle to safeguard state sovereignty and national independence.

Source: *Pakistan Times*, April 13, 1971, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00472337485390171>.

APPENDIX 7A

MAULANA ABDUL HAMID KHAN BHASANI'S APPEAL TO PRESIDENT MAO TSE-TUNG, AND PREMIER CHOU EN-LAI, PEKING, CHINA ON 21 APRIL 1971

Ideology of socialism is to fight against oppression. I appeal to save seven and half crores of oppressed people of Bangladesh from save the atrocities committed on them by the military junta of dictator General Yahya Khan. Yahya's military government, by the help of modern war weapons supplied by your government, are mercilessly and brutal[ly] slaying the innocent, unarmed, helpless peasants, labourers, students intelligentsia, women, and children of Bangladesh. If your government do not protest this brutal atrocities committed on oppressed masses of Bangladesh by the military junta with the help of vested interests of West Pakistan, the world may think that you are not a friend of oppressed people.

No such example of oppression, which the military junta is inflicting upon the innocent masses of Bangladesh, will be found even in times of Chiang Kai-Shek's rule in your own land, Czars' rule in Russia and in times of British imperialism in pre-independent India. The reports of atrocities and oppression, which are being given publicity by various Indian agencies, are in fact the smallest portion of the volume and nature of oppression and atrocities which are really happening in wretched land of Bangladesh at present. [The] World will come to know the true pictures and actual nature, and we'll know the truth of many complaints, if the journalists, intelligentsia, politician of any country, even of the countries friendly to Yahya's government, made [a] field survey.

You are well aware that there are tremendous people's supports behind the independent Bangladesh government than that of Sinhanouk government's Cambodia. I, therefore, earnestly request you to please extend your support, recognition and all possible help to the government of [the] independent People's Republic of Bangladesh.

I had to undergo 31 years of imprisonment to achieve independence of [the] Indo-Pak subcontinent to achieve people's rights in Pakistan. I am at present an old man of 89. At this stage of my life my humble residence has been gutted by

the barbarous soldiers of Yahya Khan. My precious collection of books from different countries has also been burnt by them. I do not know what has happened to the fate of my family after my house was set on fire.

Source: *The Liberation War of Bangladesh*, Vol. 4, pp. 470–473.

APPENDIX 7B

MAULANA ABDUL HAMID KHAN BHASANI'S APPEAL TO SECRETARY-GENERAL BREZHNEV, PRESIDENT PODGORNY, CHAIRMAN KOSYGIN, KREMLIN, MOSCOW, U.S.S.R. ON 21 APRIL 1971

On behalf of 75 million people of Bangladesh may I convey to you our appreciation of the statement issued by the presidium of Supreme Soviet through President Podgorny on the situation in East Bengal? I should, however, like to point out that more positive action is urgently required to stop the barbarous massacre of hundreds of thousands of unarmed, helpless masses of Bangladesh by the brutal military dictatorship of General Yahya Khan. These massacres are being perpetrated by the West Pakistani army with modern weapons of war supplied by U.S.A and China. People are being butchered by the trigger-happy soldiers [of] West Pakistan irrespective of caste, creed and sex, including women, children and even new-born babies in their mothers' arms. They excel in their brutality anything that has happened in history before. I earnestly appeal to you to stop this bloody massacre and not supply any aid to the military dictatorship of Pakistan. Your country and your people, under the enlightened and wise leadership of Lenin, have stood for the rights of an oppressed peoples to self-determination, and have given moral, political and material support to national liberation movements in various parts of the world. I would, therefore, appeal to you to do the same for Bangladesh and give it immediate recognition and all possible help to the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

The Soviet Union is part of Asia as well as Europe. The Leninist policy of peace is a great stabilizing factor for development throughout the world, particularly in the developing countries. What is happening in Bangladesh today is the worst form [of] colonialism and imperialism. Looting, arson, gangsterism, mass killings and molestation of women are the order of the day. We rely on the people of the U.S.S.R to raise your voice against these barbarities and the suppression of human rights. I hope that your government will give immediate attention to this urgent problem and see that the 75 million people of Bangladesh

are allowed the freedom to decide their own destiny without any interference from the military dictatorship of Yahya Khan.

I had to undergo 31 years of imprisonment to achieve independence of [the] Indo-Pak subcontinent to achieve people's rights in Pakistan. I am at present and old man of 89. At this stage of my life my humble residence has been gutted by the barbarous soldiers of Yahya Khan. My precious collection of books from different countries has also been burnt by them. I do not know what has happened to the fate of my family after my house was set on fire.

Source: *The Liberation War of Bangladesh*, Vol. 4, pp. 470–473.

APPENDIX 7C

MAULANA ABDUL HAMID KHAN BHASANI'S APPEAL TO PRESIDENT NIXON, WASHINGTON, D.C., U.S.A. ON 21 APRIL 1971

Under the direction of director general Yahya Khan and with the help of modern war weapons supplied by yours and China's governments, the barbarous soldiers of West Pakistan are brutally slaying lots of innocent, unarmed and helpless masses of Bangladesh irrespective of caste, creed and sex including women, children and even new-born babies in their mothers' arms. I fervently appeal to you to please stop fresh supply of arms and to do the needful to give an effective check in using those weapons previously supplied, so that Yahya's Government could not use these arms in killing the unarmed masses in Bangladesh.

Please extend your immediate recognition and all possible help to the Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh.

I shall be highly obliged if you be kind enough to make an arrangement so that the foreign correspondents of different news agencies are able to tour inside Bangladesh to see the nature and volume of looting, arson, gangsterism, mass killings, and molestation of women in Bangladesh by [the] West Pakistani army so that they can reveal the true picture of sordid tales of Bangladesh to the people of the world.

Source: *The Liberation War of Bangladesh*, Vol. 4, pp. 470–473.



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APPENDIX 7D

MAULANA ABDUL HAMID KHAN BHASANI'S APPEAL TO SECRETARY-GENERAL U-THANT, UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK, U.S A., DATED 21 APRIL 1971

On behalf of the 75 million people of Bangladesh I appeal to you to use your good office and raise your voice against the barbarities and brutalities being committed by the trigger happy soldiers of dictator General Yahya Khan on the innocent, unarmed and defenceless people of Bangladesh irrespective of their caste, creed and sect, including women, children and even new-born babies in their mothers' arms. I appeal to you to raise your voice against this brutal suppression of fundamental human freedom and birth right of the people of Bangladesh to decide their own destiny without any interference from West Pakistan. I appeal to you, Mr. Secretary-General, in the name of humanity to issue all immediate appeal to stop these brutal massacres of innocent people and to extend all possible help for the relief of the victims of dictator General Yahya Khan against military rule in Bangladesh. I would welcome sending your observers inside Bangladesh to see the nature and volume of looting, arson, mass killings and molestation of women by West Pakistani army so that they can reveal the true picture of the sordid tale of Bangladesh to the people of the world through the United Nations.

Source: *The Liberation War of Bangladesh*, Vol. 4, pp. 470–473.



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APPENDIX 8

EXCERPTS FROM MR. JUSTICE ABU SAYEED CHOWDHURY'S SPEECH ON THE LIBERATION WAR IN LONDON AND EUROPE

It is written in the newspaper that the East Pakistanis are leaving their country... and thousands of people have become victims of a genocide. ... What is the genesis of this genocide?

When Pakistan prepared its constitution in 1956, the theory of "majority" and "minority" was created. East Bengal through a majority province was given same number of seats with minority West Pakistan. ... But before any general election could be held the constitution was abrogated and Field Marshal Ayub Khan seized state power.

Justice Shahabuddin ex-Chief Justice of Pakistan was made the chairman of constitution commission; I was myself a member of that commission. ... We had recommended for a constitution that would reflect adult franchise, fundamental human rights, independence of the judiciary and greater autonomy for the provinces. ...We had recommended for a representative government, but it was not accepted. ... Forming a representative government was not possible without a movement. ...

Because of many years of political and economic exploitation, the people of East Bengal found out that despite East Bengal being a majority province, Karachi was the capital of the country. ... Nothing was done for the development of East Bengal's communication, agriculture, industry, and flood protection. The central administration was being run by the West Pakistani civilian officials and armed forces. Driven by economic and political exploitation, the people of East Bengal took part in the election in December 1970. They cast their votes in favour of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Awami League.

President Yahya Khan ... after pressure mounted on him for holding the session, finally called the session on 3rd March 1971. ... Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto insisted on modification of six-point programme of Mujibur Rahman and ... announced that he would boycott the session on 3rd March and would not allow any constitution to be made without the consent of his party. ... Sheikh Mujib wanted

to keep Pakistanis together. ... Under such circumstances General Yahya Khan gave the proposal for discussion. ... Keeping Sheikh Mujib busy in discussion, General Yahya Khan brought ships-load of soldiers and arms from Pakistan.

On the night of 25th March, ... Pakistani soldiers entered the city (Dacca). They bombarded the students' hostel and kill[ed] the students and teachers. ... There is a mass grave in my university (Dacca) where the dead bodies were thrown over one another. ... The city of Dacca is dead. Nearly 70% of the population has left the city. ... No one can rule over a nation by terrorising and torturing it. ... Responsibility of destruction of Pakistan should be on the military and Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto. We have been relegated to the position of a colony. We want our territory back and banish the occupation forces. As a nation, we have been subjected to betrayal. We are a separate entity in our temperament, culture, and language. We are a different nation all together. The UN Charter gives us the right for self-rule. ... Therefore, we must become independent. ... We shall build prosperous and sovereign People's Republic of Bangladesh.

(The above speech was given by Mr. Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury – Vice Chancellor of Dacca University on 8 June 1971 at the Royal Commonwealth Society Headquarters. After the liberation of Bangladesh, he became its first president).

Source: Sadik Musa, *Bangladesh Wins Freedom* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2005), pp. 403–408.

APPENDIX 9

RELEVANT EXCERPTS OF U-THANT'S MEMORANDUM TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL, 19 JULY 1971

For some months now members of the Security Council and many other members of the United Nations have been deeply preoccupied with developments in East Pakistan and adjacent Indian States and their consequences of possible consequences. I myself, expressed my concern over the situation to President Yahya Khan shortly after the events of March 1971 and have been in continuous touch with Governments of Pakistan and India, both through their Permanent Representatives at the United Nations and through other contacts.

As weeks have passed since last March, I have become increasingly uneasy and apprehensive at the steady deterioration of the situation in the region in almost all its aspects. In spite of the generous response of the international community to my appeals for assistance for refugees from East Pakistan now in India, the money and supplies made available are still nowhere near sufficient and the Indian Government still faces the appalling and disruptive problem of caring for an unforeseeable period of time for millions of refugees whose number is still increasing.

The situation on the borders of East Pakistan is particularly disturbing. Border clashes, clandestine raids and acts of sabotage appear to be becoming more frequent and this is all the more serious since refugees must cross this disturbed border, if repatriation is to become a reality. Nor can any of us here in the United Nations afford to forget that a major conflict in the subcontinent could all too easily expand.

In the light of information available to me I have reluctantly come to the conclusion that the time is past when the international community can continue to stand by watching the situation deteriorate and hoping that relief programmes, humanitarian efforts and good intentions will be enough to turn the tide of human misery and potential disaster. I am deeply concerned about the possible consequences of the present situation not only in the humanitarian sense but also as a potential threat to peace and security and for its bearing on the future of the

300 Appendices

United Nations as an effective instrument for international co-operation and action. It seems to me that the present tragic situation, in which humanitarian, economic and political problems are mixed in such a way as almost to defy any distinction between them presents a challenge to the United Nations as a whole which must be met.

The memorandum is not an official document of the Security Council and was intended to record my own deep concern with the wider potential dangers of the situation in the region and to provide an opportunity for an exchange of views among members of the Security Council on the potentially very grave situation.

Source: Items-in Peace-keeping operations – India/Pakistan – selected confidential papers on Indo-Pakistan Conflict – April–August 1971- see appendix No. 8 (Page marked-D-18), Archival Item available at <https://search.archives.un.org/uploads/r/united-nations-archives/c/2/b/c2baa349a4d494dea531a7dc9e2e013ced60294da4b9143c445d700a00056df0/S-0868-0001-03-00001.pdf>.

APPENDIX 10

INSTRUMENT OF SURRENDER OF PAKISTANI FORCES IN DACCA

The Pakistan Eastern Command agree to surrender all Pakistan Armed Forces in Bangladesh to Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora, General Officer Commanding-in-chief of the Indian and Bangladesh forces in the eastern theatre. This surrender includes all Pakistan land, air and naval forces as also all para-military forces and civil armed forces. These forces will lay down their arms and surrender at the places where they are currently located to the nearest regular troops under the command of Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora.

The Pakistan eastern command shall come under the order of Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora as soon as this instrument has been signed. Disobedience of orders will be regarded as a breach of the surrender terms and will be dealt with in accordance with the accepted laws and usages of war. The decision of Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora will be final should any doubt arise as to the meaning or interpretation of the surrender terms.

Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora gives a solemn assurance that personnel who surrender shall be treated with dignity and respect that soldiers are entitled to in accordance with the provisions of the Geneva Convention and guarantees the safety and wellbeing of all Pakistan military and para-military forces who surrender. Protection will be provided to foreign nationals, ethnic minorities and personnel of West Pakistan origin by the forces under the command of Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora.

Sd/-

JAGJIT SINGH AURORA
NIAZI

Lieutenant General

General Officer Commanding-in-Chief
Eastern Command

(India)

16 December 1971

Sd/-

AMIR ABDULLAH KHAN

Lieutenant General

Zone B and Commander,
Eastern Command

(Pakistan)

16 December 1971

302 Appendices

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, Media Center,
<https://www.meaindia.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/5312/Instrument+of+Surrender+of+Pakistan+forces+in+Dacca>.

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INDEX

- Ahmed, Aziz 188
Ahmed, Tajuddin 18, 93, 141, 144, 231, 249
Ahmed Sultan 127–8, 224
Ali, Chaudhuri Rahamat 5
Ali, Syed Ahmed 3–4
Ali, Syed Amir 3–5
Ali, Tariq 180
Anon, Kofi 243
Ansars 190
Ansarullah Bangla Team 256
Aurora, J.S. 88, 108, 131, 154, 202, 234
Azad, Maulana Abul Kalam 19, 215
- Baez, Joan 195
Bajpayee, Atal Bihari 71
Bangladesh Mukti Sangram Shilpi Sangstha 12
Bangladesh Nationalist Party 259, 267
Bass, Gary J. 238
Battle of Plassey 2
Bhasani, Maulana 79, 94, 152, 289, 291, 293, 295
Bhutto, Z.A. 16
Blair, Tony 243
Blood, Archer K. 237
Bose, Sarmila 190
Brandt, Willy 68
British rule 2–3, 49
- Candeth, K.P. 132, 137, 180, 199
Cargill Committee 54
Chandpuri, Kuldeep Singh 200
Chopra, Pran 235
Chowdhury, Abu Sayeed 191, 249, 297, 298
- Coggin, Dan 190
cultural identity 11–2, 79
- Das, Chitta Ranjan 5
Demra axis 124
Dhar, D.P. 62–3, 81, 98, 202, 209
dharma yuddha 239–40
Direct-Action 6
Dixit, J.N. 55, 81, 94, 137, 186, 194, 250
Dutta, Dharendra Nath 10
- Ershad, H.M. 256
- Firyubin, Nikolai 64
- Galbraith, J.K. 70, 191
Galibraith, John K. 52
Gandhi, Mahatma 8, 239
Gill, Gurbux Singh 125
Gill, John 180
Greater Bengal 8, 79
Gromkyo, Andre 56
- Hammarskjold, Dag 191
Haq, A.K. Fazlul 5
Haque, Inamul 245
Hasina, Sheikh 256–7, 267
Haskar, P.N. 71
Hassan, Muzaffar 247
Hindu Mahasabha 7
- Iasiello, Louis 239
- Indian Muslim League 4, 96

- Indian National Congress 4
 Indira Gandhi 18, 52, 78, 83, 85–6, 97, 135,
 137, 159, 185, 187, 194–5, 199, 202, 219,
 250, 262, 264, 283
 Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty 55, 83, 86
 Instrument of Surrender 131, 195, 301
 Inter-Services Intelligence 265
 Iqbal, Mohammad Alama 5
 Islam, Nazrul 12
- Jalal, Ayesha 7, 20, 254, 261
 Jamaat-e-Islami 150, 152, 256
 Jinnah, Mohammad Ali 5–10, 12–13, 20, 97,
 184, 216–17, 248, 261, 265, 267, 270
- Kader Bahini* 151–2, 156
 Kak, Kapil 245
 Kao, R.N. 245
 Kathpalia, P.N. 113
 Keating, Kenneth 56
 Kennedy, Edward 185
 Kennedy 51, 55, 59, 185
 Khan, Ayub 11, 13–14, 51, 58–9, 91, 188,
 224–5, 297
 Khan, Fajal Muqeem 151, 207
 Khan, Gul Hassan 134, 189, 228
 Khan, Jamshed 106, 125, 131, 223
 Khan, Liaqat Ali 10, 262
 Khan, Rahim 66, 106, 119, 122, 247
 Khan, Satruddin Agah 186, 191
 Khan, Tikka 17, 92, 136–7, 176, 204, 228
 Khan, Yahya 16–17, 52, 62, 69, 78, 82, 86,
 94, 96, 128, 134, 137, 186, 190, 218, 221,
 228, 248, 258
 Khilafat Movement 7
 Khondhar, A.K. 140, 142
 Kissinger, Henry 53, 174, 239, 255
 Koutakhov, P.S. 64
 Kripalini, J. B. 6, 21
 Kudryavtsav, Valadimir 64
- Lahore Resolution 5, 13, 54, 184, 277–8
 Lai, Chou En 55, 57, 289
 Latif, Nawab Abdul 3
 League of Nations 183
 Lemkin, Raphael 236
 Lord Cornwallis 2
 Lord Curzon 4, 262
- madrassa* 4
Mahabharata 77, 239–40
 Maj. Gen. Farman 17, 130
 Malik, A.M. 128
 Mallick, P.K. 208
- Manekshaw, Sam 235
 Martial Law 13, 16, 125, 189, 248,
 256, 282
 Maxwell, Neville 57
 Mehta, Pratap Bhanu 243
 Mirza, Iskander 13
 Mishra, Brajesh 72
 Modi, Narendra 262, 271
 Mollha, Abdul Qader 259
 Morgenthau, Hans J. 270
 Mountbatten 1, 6–8, 216
 Mujib Bahini 150–2
 Mukherjee, Shyama Prasad 7
 Muslims of Bengal 3, 5
 Nagra, Gandarv Singh 127
- Nazimuddin, Khawaja 13
 Nehru, Jawahar Lal 6, 51, 71, 263, 268
 New China News Agency 56
 Niazi, A.A.K. 41, 102, 131, 179
 Noakhali 6, 42, 144–5, 151
 Non-Aligned Movement 50–51
- offensive operations 30, 88, 104–5, 114,
 132–3, 137, 162, 167–8, 170–4, 202, 222,
 225, 230
 Operation Chengiz Khan 247
 Operation Searchlight 17–18, 23, 52, 78,
 102, 185, 237, 244
 Operation Trident 171
 Orend, Brian 239, 242
 Osmani, M.A.G 18, 94, 141, 149
- Pakistan National Assembly 16
 Pakistan Occupied Kashmir 57, 140, 266
 Panchsheel 55
 Pande, Tom 122, 211
 Pekov, Nikolai 64
 Phantom force 151
 Polish Resolution 192–3, 195, 235, 246
 Pompidou, M. Georges 68
 Punjabi 8, 10, 14, 214, 189, 217, 225, 249
- Qasim Muhammad Bin 1
- Radcliff line 8, 245
 Radio Pakistan 12, 64, 66
 Rahaman, Sheikh Mujibur 13, 94–5, 192
 Rahman, Ziaur 141, 145, 147, 256, 258,
 262–3
 Raina, T.N. 109, 114–18
 Rajagopalachari, C. 1
 Razakars 102–3, 150, 156, 189, 241, 242
 Rohingya 69, 257

- Rummel, R.J. 237
Rushdie, Salman 184, 216
- Salimullah, Nawab Sir 4
Security Council 50, 70, 108, 183, 192, 195,
 220, 234, 240, 245, 299–300
Sen, Amal 152
Shariff, Mohammad 156
Shariff, Nawaz 263
Sheikh, Rehana 256
Siddiqi, Tiger 47
Simpkin, Richard 202
Singh, Hari 266
Singh, Manmohan 262, 264, 271
Singh, Sagat 109, 119, 120, 122–4,
 207, 234
Singh, Swaran 69, 71, 81–2, 85–6, 204, 218,
 245, 285–6
six-point formula 13, 16, 85
Sodhi, H.S. 122
- State language 8–11, 217
Suhrawardy, Huseyn Shaheed 7
- Tagore, Rabindra Nath 11–12
Tashkent Agreement 52, 59, 66
Task Force 74 58, 174, 180
Teichman, Jenny 239
Teliapara document 143
The Lykke Model 27–8, 228
Tito 68
two-nation theory 5, 7–8, 20, 216, 261
Tzu, Sun 24
- USS Enterprise 58, 70, 128, 174, 180
- Walzer, Michael 243
Washington Special Action Group 252
- Zamindars 2, 7
Zia, Begum Khaleda 256–8, 267



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