

Politics in Pakistan and the Bangladesh Liberation War, 1971

*Guru Saday Batabyal**

The Partition of India in August 1947 was a colossal man-made catastrophe resulting in the formation of Pakistan, with its east and west wings. Jinnah's two-nation theory ignored the diverse culture and geographical settings. East Pakistan got its first political shock when Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy—a popular mass leader—did not become the chief minister of East Pakistan. Further, in the initial period of state formation, there was forceful imposition of Perso-Arabic culture and Urdu language by the leadership of Pakistan, consisting majorly of Punjabis and Pathans from West Pakistan. It triggered a pan-East Pakistan movement, cutting across political ideologies, and resulted in the emergence of a strong sub-regional identity. This aspect, coupled with economic deprivation and denial of political power sharing, led to the conflict between east and west wings of Pakistan, culminating in the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971. Pakistan got the support of United States and China, while the Soviet Union was aligned with India. This article discusses the politics that played a significant role all through, that is, from decolonisation of the Indian subcontinent to the formation of Bangladesh.

Keywords: *Bangladesh Liberation War, Politico-Military Strategy*

INTRODUCTION

Human history is replete with examples that prove politics and war are intertwined. According to Clausewitz, war is not merely a political act

* Col Guru Saday Batabyal, Retd, PhD, has 42 years of cross-functional experience in the Indian Army, United Nations, Industry and Academia. He is an author of many articles, book chapters and a book titled *Politico-Military Strategy of Bangladesh Liberation War, 1971*.



but also a real political instrument.¹ A Harvard professor, commenting on decolonised Asia and Africa, wrote: ‘They are not yet nations in being but only nations in hope.’² State formation in Pakistan took a wrong trajectory after its inception and the persistent denial of the principle of equal rights and self-determination to the people of East Pakistan, defying the much-promised democratic norms, was the root cause of the problem. Continuous dissensions caused societal frictions, which took the shape of conflicts.

Political and constitutional history of Pakistan, and the social, cultural, racial and economic equations between her two erstwhile wings...reveal 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 paradhin nagarik* (Dependent people of an independent country).³

Political scientists, while theorising causes of war, have mostly ignored domestic political variables.⁴ The 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War is a classic example of how domestic political variables added much significance to the cause of war. Continuously denying a rightful place to the political leadership of East Pakistan resulted in political alienation of Bengalis. In addition, economic deprivations and cultural conflict caused by the imposition of Urdu triggered a movement that culminated in a war of liberation.

Political decisions, therefore, need careful consideration because they have repercussions. This is what happened with Pakistan in December 1971: wrong politics since its creation, interwoven with the internal conflicts between its two wings, concluding with India’s intervention, led to its cessation. There is a need to understand how politics in Pakistan forced East Pakistan to reach the stage of seeking liberation that ended with the birth of Bangladesh, which altered the geography of South Asia and ushered in a new political order for India in the region.

Divisive politics had begun with the Bengali Muslims even before the creation of Pakistan, but for the sake of brevity, this article covers the period after decolonisation of the Indian subcontinent, with a brief prelude to politics leading to the Partition of India. The topic under discussion is being dealt with in various sections, such as the landmark political events in Pakistan leading to the Liberation War, India’s political compulsions and the Cold War geopolitics during the war in 1971.

POLITICS, PARTITION OF INDIA AND ITS FALLOUT

The nexus between politics and religion had led to much mistrust between the religious communities in India, specially in the last 150 years of British rule. Though there had been occasional rifts between Hindus and Muslims, it was the British rulers that added fuel to the fire with their *divide et impera* policy. In the early stages of his political career, Jinnah exhibited no religious bias. In fact, after the conclusion of Lucknow Pact in 1916, Sarojini Naidu hailed him as the apostle of Hindu–Muslim unity. However, in 1920–21, Jinnah was ridiculed by the Congress leaders for criticising their support to Khilafat movement and for questioning Gandhi and the Congress for mixing religion with politics. Fearing marginalisation, Jinnah commenced to rechart his path.

Jinnah's ultimate embrace of what he once called 'the communal fringe' was a political response to his marginalization within the Congress, and the decimation of the Muslim League in the 1937 elections to the state legislature. He was hell-bent on the creation of Pakistan as a Muslim country...⁵

It remains a puzzle if the two-nation theory was Jinnah's core belief or his political manoeuvre to ensure an edge in the power-sharing game. As a shrewd politician and a pragmatic person, he publicly took a hard stand demanding a separate Muslim state, but '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.'⁶

Jinnah's reciprocal hatred for Nehru, dislike for Gandhi and Mountbatten and above all, obsession for power made him a changed man by 1946. Although the Lahore Resolution of March 1940 had introduced the idea of a separate homeland for Muslims, it was only in 1946 that there was official endorsement of the concept of a single state of Pakistan. Further, the idea of an undivided Bengal received a death knell when the Bengal Legislative Assembly voted for Pakistan on 20 June 1946. Jinnah, the sole spokesperson for the Muslims of Indian subcontinent, sold the dream of Pakistan to people of the common faith of 'Islam'.⁷ Historian Ayesha Jalal observed:

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. Upper crust thought, the new state will give them great opportunity to occupy powerful positions

and the lower strata of the society thought, their miseries will be alleviated: Pakistan will be a land of honey and milk.⁸

The geographical separation of thousand miles between East and West Pakistan, including their diverse culture, was thought to be no barrier because it was assumed that 'commonality of faith' will be sufficient to hold the nation together. When the common Bengali Muslims voted overwhelmingly for the Muslim League in 1946, they were not voting for Pakistan but for a life free from *zamindari* rule and famines. As the zamindars were mostly Hindus, many saw it as expression of Muslim Bengalis to separate from their Hindu brethren.

From June 1946 onwards, the political climate became so charged that no single individual could have stopped the Partition, but collectively they could have displayed the wisdom to withdraw from the maddening game. Jinnah and Nehru became the main players; and Jinnah became more aggressive because he lost trust in Nehru and Congress. On 16 August 1946, the Muslim League called for a 'Direct Action Day', with Jinnah proclaiming that they shall have 'either a divided India or a destroyed India'. The violence unleashed that day set in train a series of events that made the Partition of India unavoidable. The riots started in Calcutta, but soon spread to the Bengal countryside. Then, Bihar and the United Provinces erupted and finally, and most savagely, the Punjab.⁹

In March 1947, when India was reeling under communal violence and a political slugfest regarding the partition of the country, Admiral Mountbatten replaced Field Marshal Lord Wavell as the Viceroy of India. Lord Mountbatten decided to accelerate independence of India and transfer the power earlier than the original time frame of June 1948. Hearing this, many top leaders, irrespective of political affiliations, got intoxicated with power politics, so much so that kingship became more important to them than the kingdom. Even Gandhiji could not stop the mad race for power, or maybe his relevance at that juncture had lessened. Jinnah, Nehru and all top-rung leaders failed miserably to anticipate the tribulations of the Partition, which was executed through a most violent process: a retributive genocide and a holocaust of religion, where more than 2 million people were killed, more than 75,000 women raped and 14 million people were displaced—a tragic fallout of the execution of an insufficiently imagined political decision.

The economic and social linkages established since many centuries in undivided India were abruptly severed, which had a telling effect during state making. British scholar Yasmin Khan judges that the 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.’¹⁰ The Partition of India was the biggest man-made cataclysm, which had an enduring impact. In retrospect, many top leaders then displayed ‘self-delusion on a heroic scale’.

POLITICS AND JOURNEY OF PAKISTAN (1947–71)

Jalal writes: ‘General perception about the statehood in the contemporary South Asia has been the “success” of democracy in India and its “failure” in Pakistan...Interestingly, after gaining independence, South Asia, despite inheriting a common British colonial legacy led to contrasting patterns of political development.’¹¹ Moot question, therefore, is: why India and Pakistan took a different trajectory despite Jinnah’s promise to make Pakistan an exemplary democratic and secular state? He had stated in his very first address to the Constituent Assembly on 11 August 1947: ‘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.’¹²

However, ironically, he himself deviated from what he envisioned. Immediately after the creation of Pakistan, East Bengal (renamed East Pakistan in 1955) got its first jolt when popular mass leader, Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy, was excluded from a senior ministerial position at the centre, as also the post of chief minister of East Bengal, due to political machinations of Liaquat Ali Khan, Jinnah’s trusted lieutenant. Instead, his chosen person was Sir Khawaja Nazimuddin; and he too was undemocratically replaced within a short span by Governor-General Ghulam Muhammad, a West Pakistani. The episode brought many East Bengal parties together to form the United Front, which expressed its dissent through a ‘twenty-point agenda’, including autonomy of the province in line with the Lahore Resolution of 1940. In the years that followed, Bengali politicians were rarely given important portfolios. In fact, Pakistan failed to hold regular election and most importantly, it did not have a constitution which could give it 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.¹³

During the first 24 years after becoming an independent state, Pakistan made constitutions twice, once in 1956 and second time in 1962. The frequent political instability and domestic disorder in the initial years culminated into 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 the Pakistan Army Chief, General Ayub Khan, as the Chief Martial Law Administrator. Three weeks later, Mirza was sent to exile in London and Ayub Khan became the supremo of Pakistan. Ayub tried to bring in a new vision for Pakistan. He ruled Pakistan through an established civil–military coalition, where military played the dominant role of principal partner. Punjabi-dominated army always considered the Bengalis an inferior community *vis-à-vis* the so-called martial races, like Punjabis and Pathans. Cohen opined that in the dominant west wing, the idea of Pakistan pertained to a martial people defending its Punjabi stronghold. Bengal and Bengalis only figured as an investment opportunity or source of foreign exchange.¹⁴

Despite Jinnah's promise of equal treatment for all in 1947, in the same year it was proposed that Urdu be the sole state language, which would also be used in media and in schools. Urdu was perceived as the more Islamic language which would help to integrate the newly born nation. As a result, Pakistan Public Service Commission removed Bengali language from the list of approved subjects. Bengali was also removed from currency notes, postal stamps and government forms. This decision was vehemently resented as only 2.5 per cent population in East Bengal and 7 per cent in West Pakistan spoke Urdu. It led to a language agitation, which was further inflamed due to Jinnah's speech at Dhaka on 22 March 1948, where he declared that the state language of Pakistan is going to be 'Urdu and no other language'.¹⁵ This was a big blow to the Bengali Muslims and the agitation on the language issue continued for a number of years. It brought all political parties in East Bengal onto a common platform: '1952 language movement created myths, symbols and slogans that consolidated the vernacular elite.'¹⁶

Language movement is critically important because politics in East Bengal changed then onwards. It demonstrated how brutal the Pakistani leadership and army could be in repressing fellow citizens living in East Bengal. It also sowed the seeds of sub-regionalism: a new political initiative for 'an autonomy of the region that the delta had last experienced in pre-Mughal times'.¹⁷ Jinnah's Pakistan looked rather illusive to the Bengali Muslims. The growing politics of regionalism and clash of identity had a huge future ramification. The West Pakistanis perceived themselves to be racially superior and looked down upon the Bengalis as a non-martial race. The Bengalis were seen as not only socially inferior but also lesser Muslims because they did not adhere to many cultural practices that North Indian Muslims considered properly Islamic. Further, it was felt that Bengalis had been and were still under considerable Hindu cultural and linguistic influence.

In 1966, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, leader of the Awami League, adopted a six-point programme for reconfiguration of the Pakistani federation. This led to the so-called 1968 Agartala Conspiracy Case, where Sheikh Mujib, some serving and retired army personnel and senior government officials were arrested and charged with sedition. The mass protest that followed, however, compelled the Pakistan government to withdraw the case.¹⁸ The Agartala Conspiracy Case raised the political status of Sheikh Mujib, catapulting him as the spokesman of the Bengalis. On his release from prison, thousands gathered to greet Sheikh Mujib and he was honoured as 'Bangabandhu', that is, friend of Bengal. On 24 February 1969, Bangabandhu flew to Rawalpindi to argue the case for the six-point programme.¹⁹

The landslide victory of Awami League in the 1970 elections, in which it gained absolute majority in East Pakistan, raised the hopes of Bengali people for parity. It led to frantic parleys to form government at the centre, but these negotiations, which carried on till March 1971, were a camouflage. Concurrently, troops and military equipment from West were being secretly moved to east to once and for all sort out the problem of Bengali nationalism. The plan was to arrest the top leaders; decapitate Awami League; de-arm and demobilise Bengali police and men of East Bengal Rifles; and eliminate intellectuals, students and front-line people challenging the government's authority. As the negotiations reached a dead end, Yahya Khan ordered his commanders to launch 'Operation Searchlight', a military operation that led to brutal killings.

Politics of Economic Development

Since the beginning, Pakistan generated unfair economic policies which facilitated economic domination over East Pakistan by the central government in West Pakistan. All key individuals in resource allocation were always West Pakistanis. Political cleavages arising out of ethnic disunion became glaringly visible, along with the regional economic disparities, which made Pakistan further volatile and unstable. In fact, before the national elections in December 1970, Sheikh Mujib said:

...to the appalling record of economic disparity it is seen that during the last 20 years, out of the total revenue expenditure of the Government, only about Rs. 1,500 crores (that is only one fifth of the total) was spent in Bengal, as against over Rs. 5000 crores in West Pakistan. Of the total development expenditure during the same period, Rs. 3,060 crores (that is only one third of the total) was spent in Bengal, as against over Rs. 6000 crores in West Pakistan... Bengalis account for barely 15 percent in Central Government services and less than 10 percent in the defence service...The price of essential commodities has been 50 to 100 percent higher in Bengal than in the West Pakistan...Total economic impact of such discrimination is that the economy of Bengal is today in a state of imminent collapse. Near famine conditions are prevailing in most of the villages.²⁰

General impact of the politics of economy has been a considerable transfer of resources;²¹ and economic exploitation and denial of political rights are of the essence of every race-oriented colonial administration. Scenario in Bengal fitted into what Abraham Lincoln said:

Turn it in whatever way you will—whether it came from the mouth of a king or from the mouth of men of one race as a reason for enslaving the men of another race, it is the same old serpent that says: ‘You work and I eat, you toil and I enjoy the fruits of it.’²²

Also, Mao Tse Tung wrote, ‘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.’²³

Besides cultural invasion, economic deprivation and the constant denial of fair share in political space, especially when the mandate of 1970 elections was dishonoured, made the Bengalis of East Pakistan

realise that they would not get a fair deal from Islamabad and hence, they revolted.

INDIA'S PROBLEMS AND POLITICS

The events in Bangladesh at midnight of 25 March 1971, and in the months that followed, came as a rude shock to India, as it did to millions all over the world. Under the circumstances, India could not remain a mute spectator without severe damage to its own economy. Also, it had to get involved in the internal affairs of Pakistan as the problem had crossed the international boundary and reached India. The situation was assessed by New Delhi based on *realpolitik*.

India realised that a long-drawn civil war in East Pakistan may trigger a left-leaning pro-communist movement, overshadowing Awami League, a pro-India party. The Indian leadership also felt that the Maoist-inspired guerrilla movement in East Pakistan may join hands with the ongoing Naxalite movement in West Bengal and the surrounding region in eastern India. Thus, deserting Mujibur Rahman and Awami League would not have been beneficial at all; on the contrary, supporting him and his political agenda benefited India and the Bengali refugees, who were mostly Hindus. From a strategic point of view, 'Bengali uprising provided India with the "opportunity of the century"...to break up Pakistan and thus eliminate the threat of a two-front war in any future confrontation.'²⁴

On 30 March 1971, Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, moved a resolution in both houses of the Parliament, condemning the happenings in East Pakistan and outlining the approach of the government. On 3 April, she promised support, including an office in Calcutta, to Mujib's nominee for prime minister of the provisional government. Indira Gandhi did not want to provoke a war by recognising Bangladesh as an independent country; however, she did start considering the military option as many political leaders and strategists put pressure on her for an immediate military intervention to throw out the marauding Pakistani Army from East Pakistan. India's initial strategy was to covertly sponsor a Bengali guerrilla insurgency within East Pakistan, as evident in the secret letter by D.P. Dhar to P.N. Haksar: 'War—open declared war—fortunately in my opinion, in the present case is not the only alternative. We have to use the Bengali human material and the Bengali terrain to launch a comprehensive war of liberation.'²⁵

Indira Gandhi and her administration, while handling domestic pressure on the East Pakistan crisis, showed remarkable amount of patience and maturity to arrive at a well-charted course of action. In addition, while supporting the freedom movement in Bangladesh, India had to factor the dangerous fallout it could have on the north-eastern states and in Tamil Nadu, which often demanded separation because of distinct ethno-linguistic and cultural identity. New Delhi also had to take note of the idea of Greater Bengal, which surfaced often. It was, thus, a great dilemma for the central leadership. After a tour of the refugee camps, on 24 May, Indira Gandhi debated in the 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.²⁶

On 15 June 1971, during the budget session, Pranab Mukherjee initiated a discussion on the floor of Rajya Sabha (Upper House) that India should accord diplomatic recognition to the Bangladesh's government-in-exile in Mujibnagar. He said:

I am talking of a political solution which means categorically recognising the Sovereign Democratic Government of Bangladesh. Political solution means giving material help to the Sovereign Government of Bangladesh. I remind the House of many instances in world history where intervention on similar ground had taken place.²⁷

Moreover, by July–August 1971, 90 per cent of the refugees, who were mostly Hindus, were concentrated in the border districts of West Bengal which had large Muslim populations. Consequently, it was felt that if India did not act quickly to ensure their return, there was danger of serious communal strife. Also, India could not indefinitely bear the economic cost of such a big refugee population.

The failure of the international community to prevent 'history's biggest and cruellest migration' and violation of human rights resulted in a most formidable threat to peace in South Asia. When peace was threatened in Rhodesia, United Nations (UN) acted promptly, but

nothing was done in the Indian subcontinent even after the consummation of an unprecedented tragedy.

India's Political Decisions

1. East Pakistan crisis is a political problem and can only be resolved by a political process through the acceptance of the election mandate of the general elections in Pakistan. To start the process, Mujibur Rahman must be released immediately and the government must work with him.
2. Pakistan should immediately stop military operations 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. Domestic public opinion should be built up within the country for the probable extension of formal and active support to the liberation struggle of East Pakistan. Simultaneously, a well-planned diplomatic initiative should be undertaken to sensitise the world about the plight of the Bangladeshis and India's compulsions.

Though election result demanded that Mujibur Rahman be invited to form the government but Bhutto with only 80 seats in West Pakistan demanded parity, thus ignoring the first principle of democracy, that is, 'rule of majority'. Under the pressure Yahya indefinitely postponed the session of the Pakistan National Assembly scheduled to be held from 3 March 1971. On 7 March at Dhaka Racecourse Maidan, Mujibur Rahman at a massive public rally appealed to all Bengalis to unite and called for the struggle of liberation. He also called for total non-cooperation with the national government. He summed up his historical speech in a bold voice stating, 'We have given blood, we will give more blood'. From 7–25 March, there were two governments: the *de jure* government led by Gen Yahya Khan and the *de facto* government by Mujibur Rahman. Gen Yahya along with Bhutto travelled to Dhaka to break the deadlock. And simultaneously secretly transported troops and equipment from West to East building military might there in the name of discussion between 16–24 March 1971. Pakistan also did not have a constitution. Under these circumstances no meaningful political strategy for the war was formulated by the leaders beset with military

mindset. Only policy direction in the struggle for liberation was ‘keep India away’ because India was seen as the core problem. It was true that Awami League had India’s support; but Pakistan’s historical obsession with India blurred its vision so much that she failed to see the internal problem and widening the gap between the two wings. And Pakistan opted for a military solution to a political problem.²⁸

COLD WAR GEOPOLITICS IN SOUTH ASIA

The superpowers, namely, the United States (US) and the Soviet Union, did not show much interest in the Indian subcontinent till the end of the British rule and a few years thereafter. Subsequently, the Cold War imbroglio and the interest and influence of superpowers in South Asia made them party to the Bangladesh Liberation War and Indo-Pakistan War of 1971. In addition, the actions and influence of China, the United Kingdom (UK), other countries of Europe, Africa, the Islamic countries and the neighbouring countries during the conflict, including their involvement either directly or through their voice in the UN, had implications on the political strategy of the warring factions. Interestingly, the US, China and the Islamic countries were more supportive of Pakistan’s cry for stopping disintegration than the cry of millions of terror-stricken East Pakistanis and hence, they closed their eyes to the gross violation of human rights by the Pakistani military and its supporters.

Pakistan’s search for security status and identity coincided with the US’ search for an ally in South Asia to buttress its global strategic objective. In 1954, Pakistan became a member of military pacts—Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO)—sponsored by the US. As a result, Pakistan offered the Peshawar Air Base, adjacent to Soviet Union territory, for operation of the US military spy planes.

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA RESPONSE AND INDIA’S FINAL POLITICAL OPTION

Interestingly, as opposed to many official views, international media and various luminaries took pro-Bangladesh stand and forecast the separation from Pakistan at the beginning of the civil war. They also condemned Pakistan’s action, the US and UN inaction and Yahya’s obstinacy in not talking to Mujibur Rahman. Further, they lent support to India’s legitimate involvement to get over the refugee problem. A few examples are cited next.²⁹

On the brutality of Pakistan Army in East Pakistan, *Time* magazine of US 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.'³⁰ *The New Statesman*, London, commented on 16 April 1971: 'If blood is the price of a people's right to independence, Bangladesh has overpaid.'³¹ *Newsweek*, on 2 August 1971, wrote: 'Pakistan died in March...says a Karachi editor...There can never be one nation in the future, only two enemies.'³² A former British minister, who was also 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 moment is some thing 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 made 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 Pakistan.³³

International Official Response

National interest is the core of foreign policy framework in any country. During Bangladesh crisis of 1971, the US and China supported Pakistan, as did the Islamic nations, ignoring the cries of brothers of same faith in East Pakistan because they did not want dismemberment of an Islamic country, as such many of them were already allied with both US and Pakistan. European and African nations too supported Pakistan—many genuinely and a few not to antagonise big brother, the US. Then many African nations were facing internal problems related to the demands of independence similar to Bangladesh, hence not to add fuel to the fire in their domestic troubles they sided with Pakistan. Amongst the neighbouring countries, except for Bhutan, none outrightly supported Bangladesh or India. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the communist bloc supported Bangladesh and India.

From the moment it came into being, 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 Union and Nixon had tilted more towards the military-ruled Pakistan. To protect Pakistan during the Liberation War, the US gave economic aid for relief of refugees. Further, it urged India not to use the military option and advised Pakistan to settle disputes with East Pakistan. Yahya, on Nixon's request, facilitated rapprochement between the US and China. Thus, when the war ultimately occurred, Nixon administration resorted to 'gun boat diplomacy' by deploying *USS Enterprise* in the Bay of Bengal. Nixon wrongly presumed that the Liberation War was a fallout of the Cold War. He failed to visualise that it was a fundamental development in the subcontinental affairs and its resolution was to be found from within rather than through the influence of external powers.

Indo-USSR Friendship Treaty, signed on 9 August 1971, was a game changer as it ensured a balance of power between the two superpowers who were getting close to two regional states of South Asia. This treaty also helped to check the physical participation of China. Most importantly, USSR's viewpoint during the debate and use of veto power thrice during voting in the Security Council allowed India and the Mukti Bahini some time to conclude the swift military operation in East Pakistan, resulting in victory.

Interestingly there were a few unexpected developments during the preparatory period of 1971 Indo-Pakistan War. Anwar Sadat of Egypt, whom India supported during Arab-Israel War of 1967, and condemned Israel for attacking, supported Pakistan on the basis of Muslim brotherhood while Israel with whom India did not have any diplomatic relations secretly helped India with arms and ammunition.

From the analysis of the official response of international bodies, it can be deduced that there were divergent views regarding 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—both from an economic point of view and due to the threat of imbalance in social harmony. However, there was no uniform view on creating requisite conditions for the refugees to return home. On the question of self-determination of the people of Bangladesh, two trends were discernible: (i) it was an internal matter of Pakistan and there was no requirement for the international community even to discuss it; and (ii) it was not a matter solely within the domestic jurisdiction of Pakistan, and the situation called for a political solution.

India's Quest for Peace Fails: Opts for Military Intervention

After Indira Gandhi's exhaustive final phase of foreign tours in quest of peace, preceded by the tours of other Indian leaders—like Jayaprakash Narayan, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Yunis Khan, Siddhartha Shankar Ray and Pranab Mukherjee—to many countries across the globe to garner support, the conclusion drawn was that India has to fight it out alone, though it could bank on the USSR's support in the UN.

After exhausting all diplomatic options for an amicable political solution to the crisis in East Bengal, which could have paved the path for the installation of Awami League government as mandated in the election along with return of 10 million refugees and above all saved Bangladesh from further genocide, rape and wonton destruction India opted to exercise 'the military option' as an instrument for achieving its national objective. It was a classic case of humanitarian intervention. The primary objective was the capture of maximum territory in East Pakistan so that Bangladesh government-in-exile could be relocated at the earliest to their soil, and refugees could also return. In the meanwhile, through various inputs, it was assessed that China was unlikely to participate in the proposed war physically. Indian Armed Forces were all set for a war from 4 December 1971. However, Pakistan commenced an all-out two-front war against India with a pre-emptive air strike on 3 December 1971. This action of Pakistan made it the aggressor who officially started the war.

Once the war broke out, the US made a last-ditch attempt to save its client state Pakistan from disintegration and thwart Bangladesh's liberation. It made frantic efforts to impress upon the Soviet Union to not oppose their move in the UN, in addition to pressurising India for a ceasefire. Simultaneously, the US urged Iran and other Islamic countries, like Turkey, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, to supply weapons to Pakistan. Washington also thought of drawing the Chinese into this imbroglio to scare the Indians. However, India could not be stopped from participating in the war.

UN AND BANGLADESH LIBERATION WAR

The division of a state into two separate states has been a permissible mode of implementing self-determination according to the will of the people. For example, Singapore separated from the Federation of Malaysia. Quincy Right has observed: 'There is no rule of international

law forbidding revolutions within a state, and the United Nations Charter favours self-determination of the people.³⁴

Bangladesh Liberation War was fought when the Cold War was at its peak. Amongst the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, the US and China supported Pakistan, while Soviet Union supported the cause of Bangladesh. The UK and France, though sympathetic to Bangladesh's liberation struggle, abstained from voting to avoid direct collision with the US. Throughout the liberation struggle, Pakistan Army committed all forms of human rights violations. The UN could not effectively stop this because it can be effective only if the five permanent members of the Security Council act together. As evident, the UN Security Council was a divided house. Even the UN General Assembly did not take up the issues related to East Pakistan to ameliorate the subjugation and sufferings of millions of people there. Subrata Roy Chowdhury 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....'³⁵

The political and constitutional history of Pakistan before the civil war commenced in East Pakistan amply demonstrates the denial of autonomous status, which was the spirit behind the formation of Pakistan, inherent in the text of Lahore Resolution. An objective analysis with a historical perspective infers that in 24 years since the creation of Pakistan, 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 to deliver justice due to the people of Bangladesh.

A peaceful political solution recognising the right of people of Bangladesh to govern themselves was the only way out of the crisis. However, UN did not push Pakistan for a political solution to resolve the Bangladesh crisis, which was a great failure in preventive diplomacy. It could not also invoke Chapter VII for enforcing peace in Bangladesh as the Security Council was a divided house. This inaction of the UN became a big question mark on the credibility of the august organisation. On 27 December 1971, *Time* magazine stated: 'Islamabad was the principal loser in the outcome of war. But there were two others as well. One was the UN and the other was Washington, who appeared wholeheartedly committed to the Pakistan dictator.'³⁶

CONCLUSION

The break-up of Pakistan happened because, as a nation, it could not integrate its two wings socially, economically and politically. The disintegration commenced with the denial of thousand years of deep-rooted cultural traditions of Bengal. Forceful imposition of Perso-Arabian culture and denial of the rightful place of Bengali language triggered the conflict between the two wings of Pakistan, which grew manifold with the passage of time. Economic deprivation and political alienation added fuel to the fire. 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 were to 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.'³⁷

By the end of 1970, Pakistan had witnessed two ineffective and feeble constitutions, one military coup and two martial law administrators. Pakistan had turned into a praetorian state, derailing the much-dreamt democracy of its founder father, Muhammad Ali Jinnah. In a praetorian state, the military, instead of fighting and winning international wars, maintains its influence in the domestic political system, controlling decisions or supporting some particular political faction to maintain its own interests.³⁸ In 1971, the Pakistan Army politically supported Bhutto and influenced every decision of the government. As observed by Samuel Huntington: 'authoritarianism may do well in the short term but experience clearly has shown that only democracy produces good government over the long haul.'³⁹

Senator Edward Kennedy characterised Pakistan Army's inhuman brutality in Bangladesh as the 'greatest human tragedy in modern times'.⁴⁰ Between 1948 and 1967, the total number of Arab refugees from Israel amounted to 13,50,000; in Laos, 7,00,000 were displaced; in Vietnam, displaced people numbered 6 million during the longest war in America's history; and in 1971 war, about 10 million refugees from Bangladesh took shelter in India.⁴¹ India was passionately concerned about the events unfolding in East Pakistan. The plight of millions of Bengalis who took refuge in India stirred the hearts of the people. The unbearable economic strain and socio-political and psychological factors due to the East Pakistan crisis made India's involvement in the liberation struggle inescapable. The point to be understood is that India's support to the liberation struggle was not an orchestrated pre-planned move, but

a politico-strategic response befitting the situation. Since the 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.'⁴²

In the Bangladesh Liberation War, the political aim of the Government of India was to enable 10 million refugees to return safely to Bangladesh and to ensure the security of India's border. Along with this, Indian strategists felt that the creation of a new friendly neighbouring nation would be in India's strategic interest, as it would cut Pakistan to size, reducing its potential and stature. India, all through this period, had to bear tremendous pressure from the US and posturing from China. Well aware of the perils of getting involved in a major conflict with Pakistan and its supporters, India ensured support of the USSR by signing a Friendship Treaty on 9 August 1971.

For Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, it was not an easy task to manage internal and external politics during the nine months of the war. Friendship treaty with the USSR was a master stroke, which ensured external support during the most crucial period of the war through its veto power in the UN Security Council. Regarding political hurdles within the country, Pranab Mukherjee observed, 'Mrs. Indira Gandhi proved as adept and adaptable dealing with the recalcitrant elements in both her own party and the opposition.'⁴³ There was pressure on her to prolong the military operation in the western theatre to liberate Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. Militarily, it may have been achievable; but Indira Gandhi showed political maturity to conform to her original war aim, and also to prove to the world that India was not out to Balkanise Pakistan as many, specially the US, thought so. India unilaterally declared ceasefire before the Security Council could pass a resolution to this effect and pulled its troops out of Bangladesh, amply proving its claim that it was fighting the war primarily as a humanitarian intervention and not a conquest. Though India's intervention was criticised by many governments who were supporting Pakistan, including a section of people—specially international legal experts—who viewed India's action as violation of international law and defiance of just war theory, many political scientists pointed out that Bangladesh was 'a paradigmatic case of a justified humanitarian intervention'.⁴⁴

The *Time* magazine, capturing the grim realities after the war ended, stated:

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.⁴⁵

In the midst of Cold War geopolitics and Sino-US reproachment, such a massacre could happen because of the deafening silence of big powers, like US and China, and many who gave overriding importance to Pakistan's territorial integrity than the sufferings of majority of its people. Bangladesh Liberation War is, thus, a classic example of an intra-state conflict that grew to become an inter-regional conflict and ended as a global conflict—a result of the Cold War geopolitics. Garry Bass captures the East Pakistan crisis of 1971 in these words:

With hundreds of thousands of people killed in Pakistan's crackdown, these atrocities were far bloodier than Bosnia and, by some accounts, on approximately the same scale as Rwanda. Untold thousands died in squalid refugee camps as ten million Bengalis fled into neighbouring India in one of the largest refugee flows in history. The crisis ignited a major regional war between India and Pakistan... And it brought the United States, the Soviet Union, and China into crisis brinkmanship that could have ignited a military clash among superpowers—possibly even a nuclear confrontation.⁴⁶

The root of cessation of Pakistan can be traced to the very idea of Pakistan which was created on Jinnah's two-nation theory. The Partition

of India happened to suit the political aims of many leaders. Since religion was used as a vehicle to reach their objectives, artificially constructed Pakistan had to break someday. Had Pakistan remained politically correct, been fair and treated all citizens equally, as promised by Jinnah at the beginning of its journey, and come out with a political solution rather than going to war, the country would not have been dismembered. Unfortunately, the leadership was fixated in seeing all problems as India's handiwork. On 16 December 1971, Bangladesh rose on the ashes of Pakistan, forever burying Jinnah's two-nation theory in the deep sea of Bay of Bengal.

The military strategy of India was tailored to meet the government's political objectives. Through humanitarian intervention of 1971, India, ably supported by the Mukti Bahini, deftly executed the Liberation War. Three million Bengalis sacrificed their lives at the altar of freedom to get their sovereign, democratic Republic of Bangladesh. India achieved its politico-strategic objectives while carrying out her 'responsibility to protect', an international norm which came into vogue many years later in 2005, after being endorsed by the member states of UN.

While concluding, I would like to draw attention to a salient observation of a study group on World War II, as it is also applicable for the Bangladesh Liberation War:

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.*⁴⁷

Thus, as war and politics are deeply interlinked, moral responsibility for the end result that charts the course of history of a nation squarely rests on its leaders, whose political decisions and actions lead to better or worst outcomes. Cessation of Pakistan through the traumatic birth of Bangladesh after a nine-month war is a testimony of political *hara-kiri* on the part of Pakistan.

NOTES

1. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War: On the Nature of War*, Dummlers Howard/Paret version No. 1, 1984, p. 20; Carl von Clausewitz Quotes, BrainyQuote.com, BrainyMedia Inc, 2021, available at https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/carl_von_clausewitz_403393, accessed on 3 November 2021.

2. Rupert Emerson, *From Empire to Nation: The Rise to Self-assertion of Asian and African Peoples*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967, p. 94.
3. Subrata Roy Chowdhury, *The Genesis of Bangladesh*, Calcutta: Asia Publishing House, 1972, p. vii.
4. Jack S. Levy, 'Domestic Politics and War', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. XVIII, No. 4, Spring 1988, pp. 653–73.
5. Rohit Prasad, 'The Contrasting Game Theories of Gandhi and Jinnah', *Mint*, 4 June 2018, available at <https://www.livemint.com/Opinion/TqmeVu0fCwQZlGlqvFbhWL/The-contrasting-game-theories-of-Gandhi-and-Jinnah.html>, accessed on 2 November 2021.
6. Moon Pendel, *Divide and Quit*, US: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 21.
7. Guru Saday Batabyal, *Politico-Military Strategy of the Liberation of Bangladesh, 1971*, London: Routledge, 2020, p. 7.
8. Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 7.
9. Ramachandra Guha, 'Divided or Destroyed—Remembering Direct Action Day', *The Telegraph*, 23 August 2014, available at <https://www.telegraphindia.com/opinion/divided-or-destroyed-remembering-direct-action-day/cid/157755>, accessed on 7 November 2021.
10. Yasmin Khan, quoted in William Dalrymple, *Great Divide*, available at <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/06/29/the-great-divide-books-dalrymple>, accessed on 21 January 2020.
11. Ayesha Jalal, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia: A Comparative and Historical Perspective*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 1.
12. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, 'Presidential Address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan', 11 August 1947, available at www.pakistani.org/pakistan/legislation/constituent_add_11thAugust1947.html, accessed on 8 August 2014.
13. Stephen Phillip Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan*, Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2004, pp. 15–34.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Philip Oldenburg, 'A Place Insufficiently Imagined: Language, Belief and the Pakistan Crisis', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 4, August 1985, pp. 711–33.
16. Rounaq Jahan, *Pakistan: Failure in National Integration*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1972, p. 44.
17. Willem van Schendel, *A History of Bangladesh*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 114.

18. Archer Blood, *The Cruel Birth of Bangladesh: Memoirs of an American Diplomat*, Dhaka: The University Press, 2002, p. 50.
19. Syed Badrul Ahsan, 'The Agartala Case as it Transformed History', *Dhaka Tribune*, 18 June 2020.
20. J. Lee Auspitz, Stephen A. Marglin and Gaustav F. Papenek, 'History of Economic and Political Dominion of East Pakistan', in *Bangladesh Documents*, New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs, September 1971, pp. 5–9.
21. Ibid.
22. Abraham Lincoln, 'Chicago Speech', 10 July 1858, quoted in Roy Chowdhury, *The Genesis of Bangladesh*, n. 3, p. 19.
23. Mao Tse Tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, translated by Samuel Griffith, Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000.
24. Mohammed Ayoob, 'Explaining 1971', *The Hindu*, 15 March 2018. Available at <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/explaining-1971/article23247097.ece>, accessed on 2 November 2021.
25. 'Letter from D.P. Dhar, Ambassador to the Soviet Union, India, to P.N. Haksar, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, India (1971)', Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Teen Murti Bhavan, Delhi, India, P.N. Haksar Papers, III Instalment, quoted in Garry J. Bass, 'Indian Way of Humanitarian Intervention', *Yale Journal of International Law*, Vol. 40, No. 2, 2015, available at <https://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/yjil/vol40/iss2/2>, accessed on 2 November 2021.
26. Lok Sabha Debates, 24 May 1971, p. 187.
27. Pranab Mukherjee, *The Dramatic Decade: The Indira Gandhi Years*, New Delhi: Rupa, 2014, p. 43.
28. Ibid., pp. 33–42.
29. International newspapers and magazines cited in Roy Chowdhury, *The Genesis of Bangladesh*, n. 3, pp. 248–50.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. *The Sunday Times*, 11 July 1971, quoted in Ibid.
34. Quincy Wright, 'Intervention on Invitation', *American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 53, 1959, pp. 119–21, cited in Roy Chowdhury, *The Genesis of Bangladesh*, n. 3, p. 199.
35. Roy Chowdhury, *The Genesis of Bangladesh*, n. 3, p. vii.
36. 'India: Easy Victory, Uneasy Peace', *Time*, 27 December 1971, available at <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,905593-4,00.html>, accessed on 7 November 2021.

37. Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850*, Oxford: Routledge, 2005, p. 570.
38. This definition of praetorian state is attributed to Daniel. R. Headrick, professor of history and social science at Roosevelt University.
39. Samuel P. Huntington, 'Democracy for the Long Haul', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 7, No. 2, April 1996, p. 6.
40. Senator Kenney's remark published in *The Statesman*, Calcutta, 15 August 1971, to be read in conjunction with Quincy Right, *The Middle East Crisis* (1970), 64, No. 4. AJIL, pp. 71, 82, cited in Roy Chowdhury, *The Genesis in Bangladesh*, n. 3, p. 223.
41. Roy Chowdhury, *The Genesis of Bangladesh*, n. 3, p. 223.
42. J.N. Dixit, *Across Borders: Fifty Years of India's Foreign Policy*, New Delhi: Sangam Book Limited, 1998, p. 105, cited in Batabyal, *Politico-Military Strategy of Bangladesh Liberation War*, n. 7, p. 85.
43. Mukherjee, *The Dramatic Decade*, n. 27, p. 43.
44. Michal Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 1977, pp. 90, 101–08, cited in Bass, 'Indian Way of Humanitarian Intervention', n. 25, p. 229.
45. Cited in 'Bangabandhus's Fight to Eradicate Poverty', *The Asian Age*, Dhaka, 11 May 2021.
46. Bass, 'The Indian Way of Humanitarian Intervention', n. 25.
47. Williamson Murray, Mac Gregor Knox and Alvin Bernstein (eds), *The Making of Strategy: Rulers, States and War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 3, cited in Batabyal, *Politico-Military Strategy of Bangladesh Liberation War*, n. 7, p. 251.

