

The Bangladesh War 1971: Tale of two Generals

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The following article consists of a review of two books by two Generals on the Bangladesh War 1971. For reasons of space, the article is being printed in two self-contained installments. This article reviews the book by Indian General Jacob; the second (to be published on 21 January 2005) will review that by Pakistani General Niazi. Editor

What makes "Surrender at Dhaka" by Lt. Gen. JFR Jacob and "The Betrayal of East Pakistan" by Lt. Gen. AAK Niazi different from other books on the Bangladesh War of 1971 is that the authors are insiders.

Jacob, from an old-established Kolkata Jewish family, was Chief of Staff (COS) of India's Eastern Command (GOC-in-C Lt. Gen. JS Aurora) with headquarters at Fort William in 1971. Niazi, from Pakistan's backward rural district of Mianwali where soldiering is the preferred profession and pastime, commanded Pakistan's Eastern Command based in Dhaka.

Jacob won. Niazi lost. This brutal fact is reflected in the tone and texture of the two books.

Jacob's is brisk and positive and describes how he organized things and people to achieve victory. He's not at all bashful about blowing his own trumpet. Niazi's is a tiresomely detailed and convoluted apology bristling with tortuous and outlandish self-justification. He blames everybody but himself for his Command's debacle.

The books' value lie not so much in the campaign details these are well-covered in Victory in Bangladesh by Indian Maj. Gen. Lachman Singh Lehl and Witness to Surrender by Pakistani Maj. (later Maj. Gen.) Siddik Salek but in the anecdotes and vignettes about peoples and things and the opinion of the authors about events and personalities.

The article reviews the books from this perspective.

Surrender at Dhaka

Perhaps Jacob's most revealing information is details on the effective logistics build-up that he and others rightly consider to be "...the critical factor in the success of the campaign" (p78-83). Constructing roads, upgrading signals and other forms of communications, collecting vehicles, transporting stores (54,000 tons), getting bridging equipment, moving ammunition all these and myriad other requirements for waging war successfully were in place before hostilities commenced.

Jacob rightly claims credit for this impressive logistics achievement. He took a risk and started stockpiling by end-May 1971 even before receiving Army HQ's (AHQ) operating instruction and without briefing Aurora. When Aurora found this out some time later, he wanted to suspend work till the op instruction arrived. Jacob with difficulty prevailed upon him to let logistics preparations continue.

This episode is symptomatic of the uneasy Aurora-Jacob relationship. The COS seems to have little time for his GOC-in-C. Jacob makes the remarkable contention that he couldn't brief Aurora on the logistics preparation because the latter was "...involved in advising the Mukti Bahini and spent time touring. These activities kept Aurora so busy that Jacob was "...left to get on with the planning, both operational and

logistic, for the regular Army." (P64)

This astonishing observation doesn't exactly flatter Aurora though Jacob maintains he got on well with his boss despite this and other differences (p.155), nor is it a particularly edifying example of a smooth Commander/COS relationship based on mutual confidence.

Though Jacob fulsomely praises India's Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Gen. (later Field Marshal) SHFJ Manekshaw (p.153-54), he berates him for putting the capture of ports of Chittagong and Khulna, and other territory, ahead of the capital Dhaka as the strategic objective in AHQ's operating instruction and 13 December 1971 directive to Eastern Command (p65-67, 159).

Jacob graphically describes the conference in

early August 1971 in Fort Williams' war room to discuss AHQ's instruction. Manekshaw, Aurora and Director of Military Operations Maj. Gen. (later Lt. Gen.) KK Singh adamantly rejected Jacob's forceful recommendation that Dhaka should be the strategic objective. Jacob quotes Manekshaw: "Sweetie, don't you see that if we take Khulna and Chittagong, Dacca will automatically fall." "Sweetie" was the loaded endearment the COAS used before proceeding to rebuke. Jacob stuck to his guns. But his seniors remained unmoved.

Thus, the northern sector (101 Communications Zone) was lightly resourced compared to Eastern Command's other three sectors, each under a corps. Yet it was the 101 formation whose

troops (Kier's 95 Mtn. Bde. plus 2 Para by then placed under IV Corps) reached Dhaka ahead of the other units (around 15 December). Had Manekshaw released 6 Mtn. Div. which Jacob repeatedly requested AHQ to Eastern Command and 101 Zone before 8 December 1971, perhaps Dhaka could have fallen earlier.

Jacob provides a tantalizing peek into Delhi's vacillating thoughts on the timing of Indian military intervention in Bangladesh. In early April 1971, Manekshaw at a cabinet meeting used some astute arguments and with some difficulty managed to convince PM Indira Gandhi of the unpreparedness and inadvisability of the Indian army intervening forthwith (see Appendix 6 for Manekshaw's amusingly candid

account of this meeting)

Jacob corroborates Manekshaw's account. In the beginning of April, Manekshaw had rung up Jacob to say that the government wanted Eastern Command "...to move immediately into East Pakistan". Jacob protested, observing that he "...could be ready earliest by 15 November.

"Upset and impatient" at this answer, Manekshaw called Jacob the next day to say, "...senior bureaucrats were accusing the Army of being over-cautious, if not cowardly". Jacob reiterated his position and praises Manekshaw for having the "...courage to uphold our (Eastern Command) stand". (p.36).

What is puzzling in this exchange is that Aurora, Jacob's boss, figures nowhere in it!

The matter on intervention didn't end there. Jacob sardonically recalls a visit shortly thereafter by a Border Security Force (BSF) delegation led by its Director General (DG) FK Rustomjee. He informed Jacob that Delhi had tasked BSF to throw out the Pakistanis since Eastern Command wouldn't do so. Would Jacob please send a contingent to take part in the Victory Parade BSF planned to hold in Dhaka two or three weeks hence?

Jacob laughed, told Rustomjee that he was out of his depth and politely ushered him out (p.37).

What is one to make of these accounts, especially the quixotic BSF episode? It's reasonable to assume that policy makers in Delhi, like many others, probably didn't have a clue, let alone a clear grasp, in early April 1971 of what was happening inside East Pakistan. Mrs. Gandhi's government was puzzled and unsure about the quality and magnitude of military posture and response.

The Indian civilian bureaucrats seem to have been the hawks and wanted a swift intervention. It was their military counterparts that were realistically dovish and cautious. The brass hats wanted to be 100% sure of victory before marching in. It was another case of the reversal of the conventional image of the civilians as doves and the military as hawks.

Jacob's graphic account of the background events and climactic negotiations, where he played a major role, leading to Niazi's surrender on 16 December 1971 is absolutely fascinating (p.129-148). He records Niazi and Indian Maj. Gen. GC Nagra, who had known Niazi while Defence Attaché in Islamabad, constantly cracking bawdy jokes in Punjabi (many of which Saleh in his Witness to Surrender says are unprintable) while negotiating surrender with the Indians in Niazi's Kurnilota ops room! This is an interesting insight into Niazi's tortuous character and an intriguing reaction of a defeated general under stress.

Jacob's description of the relationship between the principal generals of India's Eastern Command makes for interesting trivia. Though Lt. Gen. ML Thapan of XXXII Corps "was well liked by his staff and subordinate commanders, he "could not get on well with Aurora" and they "hardly spoke to each other."

Lt. Gen. Sagat Singh of IV Corps "did not get on well with all his divisional commanders" and his relationship with Aurora "was initially cordial but later turned sour." Lt. Gen. (later Gen. and

COAS) TN Raina of II Corps "got on well with Aurora" thank God somebody did—but "had little control over his divisional commanders who openly flouted his orders." (p.155).

Such feuds and jealousies exist in all military (and civil) establishments, so it's not surprising to find it in Eastern Command. One wonders how this Command fought as well as it did with so much friction among its senior commanders!

On the Mukti Bahini (MB), Jacob considers that Operation Jackpot, the code name for guerrilla operations inside Bangladesh, probably could have been even more effective had fewer (about 8,000) but more intensively trained fighters been deployed rather than the 100,000 or so that were actually recruited. However, this doesn't stop Jacob from praising the MB's performance, judging their contribution to be "...a crucial element in the operations prior to and during full-scale hostilities."

The one occasion Jacob ventures into diplomacy, and got roundly snubbed, is around 18 December 1971 when running into External Affairs Policy Planning Chief DP Dhar (deceased) at Dum Dum Airport, Kolkata. Jacob suggested that India should get Bangladesh to agree on "three essentials": guarantees for the Hindu minority; rationalization of the enclaves and transit rights by rail and inland waterways through Bangladesh with the use of facilities at Chittagong Port. Dhar smiled and in effect told Jacob to mind his own business (p.99).

These three items form an intriguing menu for Indo-Bangladesh diplomacy. The last item is of course a hot button issue of some vintage between Dhaka and Delhi.

Jacob makes some interesting assertions about his role in the Bangladeshi liberation movement.

Thus, he claims to have suggested to Bangladeshi leaders around the first week or so of April 1971 to "proclaim a Provisional Government...like the Free French Government... (of) de Gaulle" and even prepared the related draft declaration which he gave to Tajuddin (p.41).

Again, Jacob claims credit for initiating the first contact in early April 1971 with diplomat Deputy High Commissioner Hossain Ali in Kolkata which resulted in Ali and his staff switching allegiance to Bangladesh on 18 April 1971. The interesting point here is that Jacob did not inform Manekshaw or Aurora before taking this initiative (p.41-42). This does strain credulity more than a bit.

These other claims in this readable book suggest that modesty is not necessarily one of Jacob's strengths. The book makes transparent Jacob's resentment that his accomplishments were not sufficiently recognized or rewarded.

Rumour has it that Jacob believed that he deserved to be Manekshaw's successor as India's COAS. When this didn't happen, perhaps on ethnic grounds, of all things Jacob in purposedly joined the BJP! His reward was being appointed Governor of Goa and later of Punjab.

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Bush's war on terrorism and its future

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PHOTO: AFP

A US Marine aims his rifle as they secure a neighborhood in the city of Fallujah.

before last year's US-led invasion. He also said "we invaded a country, thousands of people have died and Iraq never posed a grave or growing danger."

It is quite clear what the real reason behind the Iraq invasion was. It was oil, oil and oil! Because of the UN sanctions on Iraq, oil export after the First Gulf war and Iraqi oil production came to a virtual standstill. Bush wanted to capture this huge Iraqi oil reserve. Unfortunately, what they succeeded in doing was nothing but the destruction of a ten thousand years old civilization.

But, the actual damage has been made elsewhere. This invasion has destroyed the legitimacy of the war on terrorism, which had the support from every corner of the world. Now everyone is sceptical about the intention of the Bush's war on terrorism more than ever.

The situation in Iraq is now extremely complicated. More people are dying than during the war. Violence is everywhere in the streets of

most Iraqi cities. The Shia-Sunni faction is more divided than before. The Sunni leaders have boycotted the elections to be held on January 2005. It is a matter of concern as to how the promised elections would be held in such a violent situation and also without the participation of all the factions. Without Saddam, Iraq is a breeding ground for terrorists.

In their attempt to wipe out the terrorists, the American air raids in the Iraqi cities of Baghdad, Fallujah and Mosul are killing thousands of innocent civilians including women and children. Saddam was able to maintain status quo. He was also the most secular leader in the Middle East.

Now, if the free elections are held, the majority Shias will form the government and that will be on the basis of the Sharia laws like that of Iran. These are likely to create more communal violence and social unrest. In the end, Iraq will lose her secular face, which was strengthened during the Saddam regime.

Everybody knows about Bush's

weakness in foreign policy matters. His re-election has made the situation more complex for other countries. He seems to be more arrogant after his election to his second term of Presidency. He has appointed his former security adviser Condoleezza Rice as Secretary of State who is more hawkish than any one else in the Bush administration, in place of Colin Powell. All the important members of the Bush administration including Vice President Dick Cheney, Defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld are hardcore conservatives, all of whom were blind supporters of Bush's Iraq invasion.

The Bush administration will have to understand the root causes of terrorism. To tackle it with arrogance will not produce any fruitful result. This sensitive issue has to be dealt with more care and sensitivity. Some of the major allies of US are now realising this truth. President Bush's major ally on war against terrorism General Musharraf said he told Mr. Bush that a key to wiping out

terrorism worldwide was to resolve the Palestinian question. General Musharraf is showing eagerness and integrity to win this war on terror and who knows better than General Musharraf how to deal with this disease, because terrorism is a cancer for Pakistan and the terrorists and fundamentalists have plagued the state of Pakistan since its birth. In his official visit to Britain General Musharraf said "we must address the root causes, and get to the source of what produces terrorism, that would kill 50 percent of the problem." We are not addressing the core problems. Therefore we can never address it (terrorism) in its totality. We are fighting it in its immediate context, but we are not fighting it in its strategic, long-term context," he told BBC Television's "Newsnight" programme. British Prime Minister Tony Blair agreed with General Musharraf that the world is "absolutely" less safe because of the way the US-led war on terror was being conducted.

Actually, the war on terror has derailed from its track because of Bush's Iraq adventure which proved to be costly for him as well as for his allies. Since his Iraq invasion terrorist activities have increased worldwide. More people are dying both in Iraq and Afghanistan and elsewhere in the world. Now it is clear that the world cannot defeat terrorism by force alone, and that the world leaders must move quickly to remove the root causes of terrorism such as poverty, illiteracy and political grievances. If the political disputes were resolved terrorism would automatically decline. Among the political disputes the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should get priority. This conflict alone has made the Middle East volatile for decades. The resolution of this conflict would remove anti-American sentiments around the world. Now that Yasser Arafat, who was termed as an obstacle to Middle East peace by President Bush, is no more, Bush has no more excuse to offer. Let us hope that he would listen to his allies and restart the Middle East peace talks soon and stop supporting Sharon blindly. Thus, the war on terror would get some momentum by removing the root causes of terrorism.

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POST-26 DECEMBER UKRAINE

Export of Orange Revolution and rhetorics of a new Cold War

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There exists a possibility for Viktor Yushchenko to be the second President of post Cold War Ukraine. Although Yushchenko has criticised the outgoing President Leonid Kuchma, he is a power broker. For ten years he served as the first President of independent Ukraine. During his regime Ukraine sent 1700 troops to post-Saddam Iraq, although once the US had accused him of selling Russian-made Kornet anti-tank missiles to Iraq. Despite the criticisms, it is true that Kuchma maintained good relations with the Russian Federation and the EU simultaneously. He tried to cultivate warm relations with the West. As geographically Ukraine is in the heart of Europe, Kuchma's foreign policy had to balance Russia and Europe (West). Ukraine shares borders with Germany, which historically has been eager to influence Ukraine. Geo-strategically Ukraine is Russia-dependent.

It is known that the US has given almost 60 million dollars to the promoters of the 'Orange revolution' who supported the pro-western Victor Yushchenko. Besides, before the last second round election of November 2004 the western media manipulated the results of the early elections.

Again, the Western media have promoted the issue of dioxin poisoning of Victor Yushchenko, which has been confirmed by the doctors in Vienna. One expert on Ukrainian politics, Mark Zelzinski, commented before the fresh second round of election that, "dioxin scandal" would increase the sympathy of the voters for Yushchenko. But in reality, voters in the eastern part of Ukraine (Lugansk, Donetsk) who proclaimed, "we do not need Germany or EU," will be loyal to Viktor Yanukovich even after the presidential election. So it is not true that Yanukovich's power is ebbling.

The outgoing President Leonid Kuchma went to Moscow before December 26, 2004 and Yushchenko accused him of selling the people's interests to Russia. After the election result, the Speaker of the Russian Parliament went to Kiev for coopting the support of the EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana. President Vladimir Putin chose a soft line after the verdict of the Supreme Court, which declared the second-round results void.

It is remarkable that during a November visit to Portugal, Putin said that, "Ukraine should not be lectured, it has its own laws and constitution". In fact Putin's remarks were in response to the US State Department's comments supporting the fraud-allegation of the second round election. Even when President Leonid Kuchma went to Moscow to meet the Russian President, Putin told him that the people of Ukraine should solve their own problems. In late November 2004, Russia tested Topol - M IBM. This was perhaps an angry reaction to some western experts' (Sarah Whitmore, a teacher of Oxford University)

Brooke University and Ronald Smith, a former ambassador of UK to Ukraine and others) comments that Russia was unable to play a stronger role in Ukrainian politics. Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's negative comments on the election results were also sensitive for Putin, as Germany is the number one investor in his country. Russian experts had upgraded some missiles system as New York Times and other US publications promoted the idea that Schroeder was actually backing Putin by not withdrawing Germany's investment from Russia.

However, Russia is not going to terrorise European politics. Putin himself is a supporter of Russia's pro-western foreign policy in the post-COLD War era.

"Ukraine's economy is close to the stage of collapse" - such a comment of Kuchma was quite significant after his attempt to keep the bank-reserve steady during the election-result crisis. In reality, Ukraine will have to survive on foreign aid and investment (US, Russia, Western and others) in the 21st century. In the foreseeable future, Ukraine's external orientation will continue to influence its foreign policy not only as it relates to Russia and the West, but also to other states including the CIS states. Particularly, Yushchenko's foreign policy will be a conjunction of some new changed principles and traditional pro-Russian factors. He will not be able to bypass the 'Psychic' of millions of Ukrainians in the eastern part of Ukraine. It will be difficult for him to re-structure Russia-based security industries, which brought huge profits for Ukraine by exporting light weapons. Yushchenko will have to tour different regions of the world for promoting the interests of the arms lobbies like Putin's.

Russia's attitude towards Yushchenko and the attitude of US and the West towards Russia are the signs of rhetoric of a new Cold War. Putin expressed his dissatisfaction to an organised and early presidential election in Iraq. During his recent visit to India Putin, like Jacques Chirac, expressed that US' one-sided war against terrorism has pushed the world towards danger. He again raised the legitimacy of the aggression of US in Iraq, which bypassed the UN. He hinted of abolishing the power of veto of the permanent members of the Security Council in case of changes in the structure of the Council is effected. According to Putin the security of the small states is at risk after US-occupation of Iraq, something he hinted upon during his recent visit to India.

Russia even today exists as a rich country in scientific-technological research in one context and in another context it has been trying for the last two year to act as a leader in power-politics (also as a leader to third world small state) again. Russia - Ukraine ties survive in the 21st century from this point of view despite the recent Cold War-like rhetoric of the West and US.

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