

The U.S. perspective in 1971

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RECENTLY, after almost 35 years of independence of Bangladesh, the National Security Council (NSC) of America declassified some very interesting documents relating to the Liberation War of Bangladesh. They clearly show America's policy during the war of Bangladesh in 1971.

The available documents offer many useful insights into how and why Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger made important decisions during the war of 1971. They show in detail how U.S. policy, directed by Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, followed a course that became infamously known as "The Tilt."

The first part of the documents, from March '71 to the end of May is a record of the genocide. These documents highlight some particular issues, mainly the brutal details of the genocide conducted in East Pakistan in March and April of 1971. It reveals that, in one of the first "dissent cables" questioning U.S. policy and morality, Archer Blood, as consulate general in Dhaka, wrote: "Unfortunately, the overworked term genocide is applicable."

The documents show the role that Nixon's friendship with Yahya Khan and his interest in China played in U.S. policymaking, leading to the tilt towards Pakistan. They expose George Bush Senior's view of Henry Kissinger, and the illegal American military assistance approved by Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger to Pakistan following a formal aid cutoff by the U.S. The refugee situation was also known to the U.S. government, as an estimated ten million Bengalis had fled across the border to India by May 1971.

The second part of the documents shows the desperate effort of Nixon to give military aid to Pakistan and the international ties among the countries supporting Pakistan. In this part, the U.S. first recognises the *mukti bahini* (freedom fighters) as a force to reckon with.

By using what Nixon and Kissinger called quiet diplomacy, the administration gave the green light to the Pakistanis.

In one instance, Nixon declared to a Pakistani delegation that "Yahya is a good friend." Rather than express concern over the ongoing brutal military repression, Nixon explained that he "understands the anguish of the decisions which (Yahya) had to make."

As a result of Yahya's importance in the China initiative and his friendship with Nixon and Kissinger, Nixon declares that the U.S. "would not do anything to complicate the situation for President Yahya or to embarrass him." In a handwritten letter on August 7th, 1971, to President Yahya, Nixon writes: "Those who want a more peaceful world in the generations to come will forever be in your debt."

Not only did the U.S. publicly pronounce India as the aggressor in the war, but also sent the nuclear submarine U.S.S. *Enterprise* to the Bay of Bengal, and authorised the transfer of U.S. military supplies to Pakistan, despite the apparent illegality of doing so and, though both the countries were under an arms embargo, U.S. sent arms to Pakistan via Iran and Jordan.

Excerpts of important documents are placed according to the date so that readers may understand the flow of information and the relevancy of the message at that time.

(Documents gleaned by the author.)

March 28, 1971: U.S. Consulate (Dacca) Cable, *Selective Genocide*: Consul General Archer Blood reports they are "mute and horrified by a reign of terror by the Pakistan military" in East Pakistan. Blood indicates that evidence is surfacing suggesting that Awami League supporters and Hindus are being systematically targeted by the Martial Law Administrators (MLA). He also reports that Prof. Dev, Prof. Fazlul Haque, Prof. Abedin, along with many DU teachers and MPA's have been killed.

March 28, 1971. Memorandum for Dr. Kissinger, *Situation in Pakistan*: NSC official Sam Hoskinson tells Kissinger that events in East Pakistan have taken a turn for the worse. It also acknowledges both American recognition of the "reign of terror" conducted by West Pakistan and the need to address the new policy issues

that have been created as a result of the terror.

U.S. Embassy (New Delhi) Cable, *Selective Genocide*: Ambassador Keating (U.S. consular of India) expresses his dismay and concern at repression unleashed by the MLAs with the use of American military equipment. He calls for the U.S. to "promptly, publicly, and prominently deplore" the brutality.

U.S. Consulate (Dacca) Cable, *Killings at University*: A. Blood reports an American's observation of the atrocities committed at Dacca University. "Students had been shot down in rooms or mowed down when they came out of building in groups." In one instance, the MLAs set a girls dormitory on fire and then the girls were "machine-gunned as they fled the building."

March 31, 1971. U.S. Consulate (Dacca) Cable *Extent of Casualties in Dacca, & Sitrep: Army Terror Campaign Continues in Dacca; Evidence Military Faces Some Difficulties Elsewhere*: Archer Blood reports that an estimated 4,000-6,000 people have "lost their lives as a result of military action" since martial law began on March 25. He also indicates that the MLAs are now focusing on predominantly Hindu areas. Another Cable reports atrocities in DU, that naked female bodies in Rokeya hall DU were found "hanging from ceiling fans with bits of rope," after apparently being "raped, shot, and hung by heels" from the fans. "Mass graves reported by workmen who dug them" "numerous reports of unprovoked planned killing."

April 6, 1971. U.S. Department of State Cable, *USG Expression of Concern on East Pakistan*: During a conversation with Assistant Secretary Sisco, Pakistani Ambassador Agha Hilaly said: "The army had to kill people in order to keep the country together."

The first "cable of dissent" by A. Blood, April 6, 1971. U.S. Consulate (Dacca) Cable, *Dissent from U.S. Policy Toward East Pakistan*: Blood transmits a message denouncing American policy towards the South Asia crisis. The transmission suggests that the U.S. is "bending over backwards to placate the West Pakistan [sic] dominated government and to lessen likely and deservedly negative international public relations impact against them." The cable goes on to question U.S. morality at a time when "unfortunately, the overworked term genocide is applicable."

April 28, 1971. Memorandum for the president, *Policy Options toward Pakistan*: (Secret, 6 pp.) (Nixon's hand-

written note.) Kissinger presents Nixon with U.S. policy options directed towards the crisis in East Pakistan. Nixon and Kissinger both feel that the third option is the best as it, as Kissinger writes "would have the advantage of making the most of the relationship with Yahya, while engaging in a serious effort to move the situation toward conditions less damaging to US and Pakistani interests." At the end of the last page Nixon writes: "To all hands: Don't squeeze Yahya at this time."

May 10, 1971. Memorandum of Conversation (3:05 - 3:30 p.m.) between U.S. and Pakistani officials including Henry Kissinger Agha Hilaly: They discuss the potential for a political solution in East Pakistan. Kissinger indicates Nixon's "high regard" and "personal affection" for Yahya and that "the last thing one does in this situation is to take advantage of a friend in need." On the same day (4:45 - 5:20 p.m.), in a meeting of the president and the Pakistani officials including Agha Hilaly, Nixon expresses sympathy for Pakistan by indicating that "Yahya is a good friend," and in response to the genocide in the East, says he "could understand the anguish of the decisions which [Yahya] had to make." Nixon also declares that the U.S. "would not do anything to complicate the situation for President Yahya or to embarrass him."

May 26, 1971. Department of State, Memorandum for the President, *Possible India-Pakistan War*: This memorandum denotes three causes that may lead to an India-Pakistan war and also formally recognises the *mukti bahini*: (1) Continued military repression in the East, (2) the refugee flow into India, and (3) Indian cross-border support to Bengali guerillas (the *mukti bahini*).

June 3, 1971 (4:00 PM.). In a Meeting Kissinger indicates that Nixon wants to give Yahya a few months to fix the situation, but that East Pakistan will eventually become independent. Kissinger points out that "the President has a special feeling for President Yahya. One cannot make policy on that basis, but it is a fact of life."

July 19, 1971 Memorandum for Dr. Kissinger, *Military Assistance to Pakistan and the Trip to Peking*: Saunders discusses U.S. aid to South Asia, noting the connections between U.S. military assistance to Pakistan and Pakistan's role in the China initiative. Kissinger writes: "But it is of course clear that we have some special relationship with Pakistan."

August 7, 1971. Handwritten Letter from President Nixon to President Yahya: Nixon writes to personally thank Yahya

for his assistance in arranging contacts between the U.S. and China. At a time when West Pakistani troops were engaging in a repression of East Pakistan, Nixon told Yahya that "those who want a more peaceful world in the generation to come will forever be in your debt."

August 11, 1971. Meeting of the president, Henry Kissinger and the NSC Senior Review Group: Nixon says that the Indians are more "devious" than the "sometimes extremely stupid" Pakistanis, the U.S. "must not, cannot, allow" India to use the refugees as a pretext for breaking up Pakistan. Despite the conditions in the East, which Ambassador Blood described as "selective genocide," Nixon states that "we will not measure our relationship with the government in terms of what it has done in East Pakistan."

November 15, 1971. Memorandum for General Haig, *Pakistan/India Contingency Planning*: The U.S. sends the nuclear aircraft carrier, *USS Enterprise*, into the Bay of Bengal; representing possible American involvement in the conflict, especially if it expanded to a superpower confrontation.

December 4 and December 16, 1971. White House, Telephone Conversations between Nixon and Kissinger: These records, in Haig's words "confirm the president's knowledge of, approval for and, if you will, directive to provide aircraft to Iran and Jordan" so that these countries will provide aircraft to Pakistan. Nixon express his desire to, "get some PR out to put the blame on India. It will also take some blame off us."

December 7, 1971. Jordanian Transfer of F-104's to Pakistan National Security Council Memorandum for Henry Kissinger. Includes State Department Cable to Jordan and U.S. Embassy (Amman) cable: First page has a handwritten Kissinger note in which he suggests "that title should have been omitted." It expresses that "by law," the U.S. "cannot authorise" any military transfer unless the administration was willing "to change our own policy and provide the equipment directly." This would rule out any transfer of American military equipment for Pakistan, supplied by the U.S. or any third party like Jordan.

December 10, 1971. Event Summary by George H.W. Bush, (later president of U.S.): UN Ambassador Bush describes a meeting between Kissinger and the Chinese delegation to the United Nations. Kissinger reveals that the American position on the issue was parallel to that of the Chinese. Kissinger disclosed that the U.S. would be moving some ships into the

area, and also that military aid was being sent from Jordan, Turkey, and Iran. Some of this aid was illegally transferred because it was American in origin. Bush also reports that Kissinger gives his tacit approval for China to provide military support for Pakistani operations against India. Bush expresses his personal doubts about Kissinger's style, in one instance calling him paranoid and arrogant.

December 9, 1971. Department of State Cable, *Pakistan Request for F-104s*: The transfer of F-104 planes to Pakistan, from both Jordan and Iran is under review at "very high level of USG."

December 14, 1971. Department of State, Situation Report #41, *Situation in India-Pakistan as of 0700 hours (EST)*: The State Department notes that eleven Jordanian F-104 fighter aircraft have possibly been sent to Pakistan.

December 15, 1971. Department of State, Situation Report #44, *Situation in India-Pakistan as of 0700 hours (EST)*: Heavy fighting is turning in favour of the Indians, while cease-fire plans continue to be in the works.

Same day. U.S. Embassy (Islamabad) Cable: "The present trickle of Mig-19's and F-104's will not hold off the Indians." Writing next to Mig-19's notes "China" and next to F-104's notes "Jordan."

December 16, 1971. Central Intelligence Agency, Intelligence Memorandum, *India-Pakistan Situation Report (As of 1200 EST)*: India has ordered a unilateral cease fire upon the unconditional surrender of West Pakistani forces in East Pakistan. Fighting continues "between Bengalis and scattered 'Mujahid/Razakar/West Pakistani elements.'" Also, the CIA reports that a squadron of American origin, Jordanian F-104's was delivered to Pakistan on December 13 despite an American embargo on military supplies to both India and Pakistan.

December 29, 1971. U.S. Embassy (Tehran), Cable, *F-5 Aircraft to Pakistan*: The embassy in Iran reports that three F-5A fighter aircraft, reportedly from the U.S., had been flown to Pakistan to assist in the war efforts against India. A Northrop official matches the aircraft to a group of planes originally slated for sale to Libya. This information suggests that not only did Washington look the other way when Jordan and Iran supplied U.S. planes to Pakistan, but that despite the embargo placed on Pakistan, it directly supplied Pakistan with fighter planes.

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Friends from the West, 1971

Victory on December 16, 1971 was a victory for the Bangladeshi people and the world's conscience. The nation recalls with gratitude the help of all the friends of Bangladesh, 1971, who fought in whatever capacity they could.

ASRAR CHOWDHURY

My friend came to me, with sadness in his eyes; told me that he wanted help, before his country dies; Although, I couldn't feel the pain; I knew I had to try

-- "Bangladesh," George Harrison, Concert for Bangladesh, 1971

1971. 266 days. Three million lives. 7.83 lives per minute. An estimated ten million dislocated to neighbouring India. Countless more raped and many victims of crimes against humanity. This is just the human price a nation paid for its freedom. This is just the human price a nation paid to establish a ten-

letter word, B-A-N-G-L-A-D-E-S-H.

During 1971, we had friends in the outside world who fought for and with us to make the world know what was actually going on in what was to be Bangladesh. As Bangladesh celebrates the 38th Victory Day, we remember some friends from the West. This list is by no means complete.

The Rape of Bangladesh by Anthony Mascarenhas, *Massacre* by Robert Payne, and *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* by Susan Brownmiller are among the first documentations by foreigners of the systematic genocide against Bangladesh in 1971. The 1971 genocide ranks as one of the most brutal genocides of the 20th century, alongside the Jewish

Holocaust in Nazi Germany, the Holocaust of Soviet POWs by the German army in World War II, and the Rwandan genocide.

Mark Tully of the BBC, based in New Delhi; Simon Dring of *The Independent*, UK; William Crowley of BBC Radio; and Martin Woollacott of *The Guardian*, UK, were among the British journalists and correspondents who covered the Liberation War. Narratives by Loren Jenkins of Newsweek and Don Coggin of *Time* influenced public and political opinion in the US.

France's Andre Malraux (1901-1976), statesman and the 1960 Nobel Prize winner for literature, was one of the most influential supporters of the Liberation War of Bangladesh. Malraux was instrumental in shaping France's stand towards the Liberation War of Bangladesh. In September 1971, he publicly volunteered to join the *mukti bahini*. He visited Bangladesh in 1973.

Peter Shore (1924-2001) and John

Stonehouse (1925-1988), members of the opposition Labour Party, worked relentlessly to influence Prime Minister Edward Heath's conservative government and public and political opinion among nations in the Commonwealth.

Senator Edward Kennedy (1932-2009) personally visited refugee camps in India. His report to the US Senate influenced President Nixon's administration, which was in favour of the military junta. After independence, Senator Kennedy visited Bangladesh and planted a banyan tree in front of the arts faculty of Dhaka University where the Pakistani army had chopped down a banyan tree on the night of the crackdown, March 25, 1971.

Bangladesh did not escape the conscience of artists. For the first time, music was used as a weapon to fight a war. Ravi Shankar and Ali Akbar Khan (1922-2009), both children of Bangladesh, teamed up with George Harrison (1943-2001) of the Beatles to stage the Concert for Bangladesh at Madison Square Garden,

New York on August 1, 1971. Bob Dylan, Eric Clapton, Billy Preston (1946-2006), Ringo Starr, and Leon Russell were among the other artists.

Alongside the Concert for Bangladesh, Joan Baez's Bangladesh was also influential in motivating popular support. The American poet Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997) personally visited refugee camps in India. His poem "*September on Jessore Road*" created awareness among the intellectual circles of the West.

The names of two Pakistanis have to be mentioned. Poet Ahmed Selim went to jail for favouring the Liberation War of Bangladesh. He translated Jahanara Imam's *Ekkatturer Dinguli* into Urdu, besides having written nearly 50 short stories on the Liberation War, 1971. The second is Tariq Ali, who was vocal against the atrocities of the military junta. Tariq Ali visited Bangladesh just after its independence.

The 1971 genocide of Bangladesh challenged the conscience of the world.

Good hearts around the world joined with the hearts of the people of Bangladesh. The resilience of the Bangladeshis once again proved that songs of freedom can be temporarily suppressed but can never be silenced. Victory on December 16, 1971 was a victory for the Bangladeshi people and the world's conscience.

The nation recalls with gratitude the help of all the friends of Bangladesh, 1971, who fought in whatever capacity they could. The nation also reminds the young of today, who will take Bangladesh forward in the 21st century, about the worldwide support to our Liberation War.

In the words of Andre Malraux to the students of Dhaka University in April 1973, which are still relevant for the young of today's Bangladesh: "It is up to you to make the nation."

Shubho Bijoy Dibash, Bangladesh! Acknowledgement: Professor Abdul Mannan of University of Liberal Arts.

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Take vows afresh to achieve economic emancipation

The party in opposition should return to the Jatiya Sangsad with open heart, in a true democratic atmosphere, and solve the all petty differences on national issues, wipe out all personal grudges and rise above partisanship. Both the parties should refrain from making cheap slogans and derogatory remarks.

KAZI LIAKAT HOSSAIN

THE nation is celebrating the 38th anniversary of Victory Day with much enthusiasm today. The day marks the defeat of the occupation forces in the Liberation War in 1971.

Actually, it was Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the architect and Father of the Nation, whose great leadership and dynamism inspired the innocent, harmless teeming millions to

stand as solid as a rock in those dark days of the nine-month War of Liberation.

At this critical juncture, when the nation appears to be divided on political lines, many pertinent questions crowd the minds of the people of the land, recalling the atrocities committed by the Pakistani occupation army leading to a calamitous crisis unprecedented in modern history.

After a 9-month war, the mighty Bengali nation snatched victory at a

heavy cost. But even in this democratic era the nation is plagued and haunted by forces opposed to our glorious Liberation War. There is no sign of unity of thought and action.

Politics has become a costly game, and has been completely commercialised for the benefit of those self-certified patriots who are allegedly destroying the moral fabric and body politic of the Bengali nation.

Watchers of our political scene are observing the rapid political developments with dismay. Many people of the country have miserably failed to evaluate the sacrifices of the brave freedom fighters who embraced martyrdom at the altar of independence, and the sovereign existence of a self-respecting entity on the map of the world.

Has the political leadership of the day even thought of materialising the lofty objectives of the Liberation War? Has the present democratically elected

government really brought smiles to faces of the toiling masses who are braving all odds with patience, tolerance and perseverance? Is the present government really following the ideals of the Father of the Nation, who was brutally assassinated by a section of demented army officers?

Let it be known to all that Bangabandhu, the architect of sovereign Bangladesh, sacrificed his precious life for consolidating the sovereignty and integrity of Bangladesh. But it is most unfortunate that we have forgotten his contribution to the cause of the deprived, exploited, oppressed and suppressed Bengalis.

The time has come for us all to bear in mind that our Founding Father was not the leader of a particular party. He, in fact, was the leader of the entire nation, and as bonafide patriots it is our foremost duty to adore him. There is a ray of hope that the killers of Bangabandhu

will be hanged by the verdict of the highest court of the country.

The ruling party should not misuse the revered name of the liberator lying in eternal rest at Tungipara. This is not the time to create tension in the nation by unnecessarily naming structure after structure after the great soul. By this act of ours we are doing a negative service to him and the nation at large. We are, in a way, undermining our great benefactor by misusing his name through verbose rhetoric and utterance whenever there is scope. Do not "arouse" the nation in this cheap manner.

The Victory Day of this year will bear a special significance if terrorism, extortion, mugging, killing, women trafficking, acid throwing, raping etc are effectively curbed. With a view to curbing terrorism both the major political parties should come forward sincerely and sit together for mutual settlement of the problems now facing the

country.

The party in opposition should return to the Jatiya Sangsad with open heart, in a true democratic atmosphere, and solve the all petty differences on national issues, wipe out all personal grudges and rise above partisanship. Both the parties should refrain from making cheap slogans and derogatory remarks.

The prime need of the hour is economic development. National victory has been achieved but economic victory yet to be.

We sincerely do believe that the two principal national leaders, Sheikh Hasina and Begum Khaleida Zia, will act with utmost prudence and refrain from political hostilities which may jeopardise our hard earned unity and independence.

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