

Independence of Bangladesh: The Impact of Global Factors

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The independence of Bangladesh is a great development, which raised many significant issues in the sub-continental as well as the world political arena. Relatively Bangladesh has not been important to global politics and has not caused direct confrontation among global dominant powers. But no doubt the independence movement of Bangladesh drew the world powers into the crisis resulting in immense diplomatic competition amongst the global powers for establishing hegemony and finally this competition contributed, to a great extent, in the process, which expedited the independence. This competition also resulted in heavy economic aid and a huge military supplies into the region.

The emergence of Bangladesh as an independent nation state is the result of political instability, economic disparity between the two parts of Pakistan and irresponsibility of its ruling elite. The independence movement, however, invited the involvement of major global powers and India, and resultantly there was a great transformation in subcontinent's system and alter..... alignment system.

The Bangladesh case can give a comprehensive idea about the super-power involvement in the local crisis projecting their competition for global hegemony as well as the contemporary global political situation. The independence movement of Bangladesh as a case has tremendous potential to help us understand the very nature of global powers as well as the contemporary global power structure.

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The prime object of writing this paper is to see how the global factors did contribute or how much its impact was on the independence of Bangladesh.

Another question has been raised in the discussion is why Bangladesh did not come into being in 1947 the year of dividing the sub-continent for creating Pakistan and India. What are the factors that led Bangladesh (the then East Pakistan) to remain within the orbit of Pakistan? What are the factors that led to the independence movement in 1971. However, these issues would be briefly discussed since the prime object being the case of seeing the impact of global factors in the independence movement of Bangladesh.

While discussing the global factors and contemporary attitude of various nation states the nature of the global power structure and the hegemonic tendencies would be focused. Special attention has been given on the attitudes and opinions of various nation states as expressed in the United Nations with special reference to the reasons and political background.

The question may arise why the crisis erupted when it did? Does it have any correlations with great power interaction? Was the crisis expedited by great power involvement? It might be so, though the crisis was inevitable because of its 'preexisting latent conflict' but it has been the case that the crisis was influenced directly or indirectly by the super power involvement and the existing global factors. It clearly indicates that the crisis was related to great powers as well as the small powers interaction. If the independence of Bangladesh is considered as an unit of analysis, it can be generalized that in all such cases the involvement of global powers as well as small are inevitable. However not because of hegemonic reasons, but considering many other factors, such as, political, regional interest, national interest, humanitarian urge and economic interest, the involvement of great and small powers have been very common in the present day situation in the global arena.

During the period of 1947-71 the rulers of Pakistan, basically being from its Western part, gradually tried to demolish the ethnic integrity of the Bangalees by imposing Urdu language, and by economic, cultural, social and political exploitation. In sum, the polity of the then Pakistan appeared to be undemocratic, military-dominant, bureaucratic, unpopular, unfaithful to its people and exploitative in nature, because, the authorities or ruling elite did not face the electorate for two decades after the independence of 1947; the first ever drafted constitution was abrogated (1956); and the country was virtually ruled by military dictatorship in the name of different absurd democracies, such as, 'controlled democracy' of General Iskandar Mirza, 'basic democracy' of Field Marshal Ayub Khan and later so called promised democracy of General Yahya Khan. General Yahya Khan promised to return the power to elected civilians. However, during the crisis, considering the super power inaction at the initial stage, General Yahya prolonged his military suppression of the East Pakistan, and he was made to believe that the super-power would not intervene into the crisis, which later on was proved wrong.

The independence of Bangladesh is not simply a geographical political or economic separation but in reality it was a challenge to the very concept on which Pakistan was created. The emergence of Bangladesh is a serious blow to the basic ideological foundation of Pakistan, the Two Nation Theory - Hindus and Muslims are two separate nations in the sub-continent and thereby formed two nation states.

As early as 1956, Prof. Hans J Morgenthau, the then Director of the Center for the Study of American Foreign Policy at the University of Chicago commented on the foundation of Pakistan and made a prediction about its feasibility. He said "Pakistan is not a nation and hardly a state. It has no jurisdiction in history, ethnic origin, language, civilization, or the consciousness of those who make up its population. They have no common interest in common except getting rid of Hindu domination. It is to that fear, and nothing else, that Pakistan owes its existence."

Separated not only by 1200 miles of Indian territory but even more by language, ethnic composition, civilization and outlook the formation of Pakistan, as if after the Civil War, Louisiana and Maryland had decided to form a state of their own with the capital in Baton Rouge.

While 84 percent of the total population of Pakistan are illiterate, the literacy rate is much higher in East Bengal, which is also much more politically conscious and active than its Western counterpart. Commenting on future of Pakistan, he said, only extra ordinary wisdom and political skill will find them and put them into effect and it is hard to see how anything but a miracle, or else a revival of religious fanaticism, will assure Pakistan's future.¹

The emergence of independent Bangladesh could be considered as the implementation of original Lahore Resolution of 1940 (later to be known as Pakistan Resolution). At the Muslim League Session of 1930, poet philosopher Mohammad Iqbal in his presidential address said, I would like to see the Punjab, the North West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan amalgamated into a single state. Self government within the British Empire or without the British Empire, the formation of a consolidated North West Indian Muslim State appears to me to be the final destiny of Muslim at least of North West India.² The Bengal's political importance was however incorporated in late 30s in Iqbal's scheme in his correspondence with Jinnah on June 21, 1937.³

Choudhury Rahmat Ali, one of the foremost dreamers of Pakistan did not also consider Bengal as part of Pakistan, but he referred to Bengal as "Bangle Islam"-a muslim majority state separate from Pakistan. Some of the Bengali leaders like Abul Hashin advocated a separate independent state in Bengal on the basis of Lahore Resolution that says "the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority, as in the North Western and Eastern Zones of India should be grouped to constitute 'Independent States' in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and

sovereign.⁴ The Muslim League Legislators' convention held in Delhi in 1946 officially endorsed the concept of a single state of Pakistan comprising both the North Western and Eastern Muslim majority areas despite protests from some leaders of whom mention may be made of Abul Hashem, the then Secretary of the Muslim League, Bengal Branch. These protests were very insignificant because the popular demand for Pakistan was too strong. Besides the Muslim leaders from Bengal also felt that the demand for separate Muslim State of Bengal would delay the partition of India as well as create complications toward the movement for separate homeland for the Indian Muslims. Moreover Jinnah's stand on the concept of Indo Muslim nationhood embraced the whole of the sub continental Muslim community both theoretically and practically.

After 1947 the situation became different with the domination by West Pakistani rulers—mostly military. The geographic situation, language and cultures contributed much more sense of alienation. Besides the Urdu speaking elite of Western Pakistan, particularly the Punjabi domination in almost all spheres aggravated the situation amongst politically conscious Bengalis.⁵ Pakistan's policy makers contributed much in widening the economic disparities between the two wings by conscious decisions in favour of the western part and as such the movement for provincial autonomy was the direct outcome of the 'sense of accumulated resentment' against the policy makers, predominantly from West Pakistan having only 46 per cent of the Pakistani population which finally followed by the independence movement in 1971.

The period between 1947 and 1971 can be described as the phenomenon of internal or intrastate colonialism where one region of the country was deprived of its proportionate economic and political share in order to develop economically and strengthen politically the other region of the same country.⁶ Basically the ideology of two-nation theory and internal colonialism dominated the politics of Pakistan between the period 1947 and 1971. The prime objective of Pakistan's foreign policy

was termed security against a presumed threat from India.⁷ This search for security found way for political and military support in order to counterpoise and neutralize Indian power superiority in the sub-continent, which paved the way for super power involvement in the region's affairs. The international situation also contributed to a great extent in the involvement of the super power in the region. In early and mid 50s the cold war reached its peak. The two blocs led by the Soviet Union and the United States tried to establish their spheres of influence and hegemony all around the world specially in the Third World countries, and the sub-continent was not outside of their power struggle. During this time in 1954 Pakistan joined the Western Alliance System and signed a Mutual Defence Assistance Pact with the United States. Later Pakistan also joined SEATO and the Baghdad Pact (CENTO).

The Soviet American cold war became intense in 1960s and the United States' priorities shifted. The change in international system became worse with Sino-Indian relations and the open rift between Peking and Moscow. The Sino-Indian conflict pushed Pakistan more closer to Peking. But Pakistan continued to get military assistance from the United States, and India from the Soviet Union. During 1962-65 period Pakistan was politically heavily backed by China. Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutta, the then Foreign Minister of Pakistan said in the Pakistan National Assembly that India did not attack East Pakistan during the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war because China had told the United States in their bilateral discussions at Warsaw that Peking would intervene in the war if India attacked East Pakistan.⁸ Virtually East Pakistan, during the 1965 war between Pakistan and India was defenseless.

The United States after the war in 1965 stopped military aid to Pakistan but Pakistan continued getting massive military assistance from China. According to Mr. Nixon's 1971 foreign policy report, China supplied military hardware worth 135 million dollars between the period 1965 and 1971 to Pakistan.⁹

In the late 60s and early 70s the global situation turned to a new era. The Sino-Soviet cold war reached to extreme point and was about to explode in 1969. Soviet Union further reinforced her political economic and military support to India. There was indications of rapprochement between China and the United States. Sino-American rapprochement however opened possibilities for both Pakistan and India for further gaining militarily and politically from their respective allies. The United States decided to resume arms supply to Pakistan in October 1970. America's global strategy at this time was particularly emphasized on rapprochement with China and the economic interests in the Gulf region. Since mid 1950s the Soviet Union, following Pakistan's defence arrangement with the United States, had increasingly supported India in its regional ambitions and it is the only super power which never supported Pakistan politically. The Soviet support to India however was based not on any humanitarian reasons but as opposing to Sino-American hegemony in the region and to establish its own global interests in the region. The Indo-Soviet treaty in August 1971 provided more Soviet support (military) to India and according to the February 1972 report of the President's (United States) foreign policy, the Soviet Union and its East European allies sent supplies militarily worth 730 million dollars during the period 1965-1971 to India.¹⁰

The emergence of Bangladesh has perhaps two different aspects significance i.e., a) it reversed the regional system that had been working since 1947 and b) it has exposed the problem for those countries which have potential Bangladeshes in their national structures. Since long back the region has been an arena of external influences and after the independence of most the countries in the region, the competition for economic diplomatic and political hegemony have been intensified. Before 1947, Britain's role was very important. Many may be of the opinion that the external powers' role in the region have been constructive, but the direct or indirect involvement of the super powers and China the emerging super power of what is questionable and case in point; and the intensity is ever-growing

in different environment of the region. The relations of the region with all great powers and China are extensive significant and important.

The policies and actions of these powers heightened and lessened regional tensions under different circumstances of the region. Global and regional trends determined the political shape of the region, and as such, the roles of the major powers or the regional perceptions of world politics are important, despite of the fact that the region is not of special importance to the security of the super powers, except China being the central strategic factor in the arena.

Nixon's China policy in 1969 reinforced the United States and Pakistani relationships and eventually complicated the American role during Bangladesh crisis. In February 1971 President Nixon in his State of the World message said that 'the United States would not allow any outside power to attain predominant influence and make the region a focus of super power conflict'.¹¹

Nixon's China policy created some significant impact on Bangladesh crisis. Presumed China's intervention and the United States' inaction India signed the Indo-Soviet Treaty. The American role during the Bangladesh crisis could best be observed in a report to the Congress on February 9, 1972 where President Nixon said that 'the United States did not support or condone' the Pakistani military's severe repression of the East.¹² Despite public criticism, the Nixon administration did not condone military atrocities operated by the Pakistani military junta in Eastern part and practically opposed the nationalist movement during the Bangladesh crisis. Soviet support to India and Nixon's China policy motivated him, to great extent, for his support to Pakistan. However it does not reflect the whole picture of the United States' notion toward the Bangladesh crisis. Senator Kennedy charged President Nixon for 'watching the crisis in silence'. A Louis Harris survey found that the American people, generally less interested in South Asia, disapproved Nixon's handling of the Bangladesh crisis by a two-to-one margin.¹³

Though Soviet Union was the first among the super powers to condemn Pakistani military atrocities in Eastern part but it is hard to believe, specially considering the global super power politics, that the Soviet Union supported the Bangladesh cause just because of suffering humanity or because of being interested in 'restoring the democratic rights of the Bangalees'. President Nixon said, 'Soviet policy, I regret to say, seemed to show the same tendency we have witnessed before in the 1967 Middle East war and the 1970 Jordanian crisis to allow events to boil up toward crisis in the hope of political gains'.¹⁴

In the Bangladesh case, Peking's traditional sympathy for national liberation movements was not projected and China chose pragmatism over ideology because its hostility toward the Soviet Union and India. It was not ready to see the Bangladesh's independence movement backed by Delhi and Moscow. However, during the Pakistani president's visit to Peking in November 1970, Premier Chou En Lai urged him to find a reasonable solutions to the growing East West problems. Chou, after the December election in Pakistan wrote both Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Zulfikur Ali Bhutto for coming to a satisfactory settlement. But when the war broke out China supported Pakistan in the United Nations Security Council. However, China expressed herself more against the Soviet Union than in favour of West Pakistan.

As regards to the United States foreign policy in the region, the United States Secretary of State Rogers called the events, 'tragic and one of the major disappointments for United States foreign policy in 1971'.¹⁵

During the crisis most of the world governments refrained from immediate condemnation of the atrocities but the press, particularly in Britain and the United States rendered remarkable humanitarian services by publicizing the horrors and atrocities in Bangladesh which rouse tremendously the world support and sympathy for the sufferings of Bangalees. Various personalities and organizations around the world showed sympathy. From the

beginning of the crisis Senators Kennedy and Sax by, labour MPs Mann and Storehouse among many others spoke out and considered the crisis as uprooting massacre, in addition to a number of organizations and political parties around the world. Except the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, rest of the socialist world remained silent. Majority of the Muslim countries also remained silent and supported Pakistan except for the very soft voices of Indonesian and Egyptian newspapers.

Practically the United Nations General Assembly in 1971 became a center of Global politics in connection with the two exciting and controversial issues i.e., the admission of the China and the Bangladesh crisis. However, the conflict in West Asia and the search for a new Secretary General were also important issues in the world body in 1971. With the American announcement of no longer opposition to China's admission, the Peking's admission to the world body had been confirmed and the future of Taiwan in the United Nations became uncertain.

During the period September 27 to October 13 in 1971, 117 countries participated in the General Debate of the World body and only 5 countries including Pakistan and India mentioned the Bangladesh crisis in their statements which could be classified into groups of countries advocating different solutions of the crisis. According to these various groups: a) the problem should be solved from the humanitarian point of view and made no reference to political aspects of the crisis; b) political solution should be evolved; c) crisis should be settled between India and Pakistan with or without the United Nations; d) a political solution should be reached in consultation with the elected representatives of the people; and e) some countries refrained from any substantial comment. Only Saudi Arabia took a firm pro-Pakistani stand. Many countries, at the initial stages of the crisis viewed it as the domestic one and could be solved in its own way of which mention may be made of China and the United States. Considering the severe situation in the region and at the request of nine countries - Argentina Belgium, Burundi, Italy, Japan, Nicaragua, Somalia, the United Kingdom and the United

States, an emergency meeting of the Security Council was convened on December 4, 1971.¹⁶ Soviet Union and Polish delegates proposed at the outset of the meeting that Bangladesh representative should be invited and be heard. The Chinese delegates opposed it supporting Pakistan and opined it that as a domestic affair of Pakistan. Pakistan threatened to withdraw if Bangladesh was invited. Supporting Pakistani stand, the Chinese delegate maintained that India had openly invaded East Pakistan and demanded that the Council should strongly condemn the aggressive acts of the Indian government.

Suggesting immediate ceasefire and the withdrawal of armed personnel to their own sides of the border, American delegate submitted a resolution and authorized the Secretary General to ensure the implementation of the ceasefire and withdrawal of the troops. The resolution called upon both India and Pakistan to facilitate the voluntary return of refugees to East Pakistan.¹⁷ Since the resolution did not mention the political solution of the crisis, the Soviet Union called the resolution one-sided. The Soviet Union and Poland voted against and Britain and France abstained. With the Soviet veto the resolution was lost and this was the 106th veto used by the Soviet Union in the 26 year history of the United Nations.¹⁸ Considering the deadlock and as a result of discussions between the delegates a meeting of the Security Council was called on December 5, 1971 which received three draft resolutions:¹⁹ a) a Soviet resolution called for political settlement in East Pakistan which would inevitably result in a cessation of hostilities and called upon Pakistan to cease all acts of violence in East Pakistan; b) Chinese resolution called for a ceasefire and withdrawal of forces and called upon all states to support the Pakistani people in their just struggle to resist Indian aggression,²⁰ and c) the resolution sponsored by Argentina, Burundi, Italy, Japan, Nicaragua, Sierra Leone and Somalia called for a ceasefire and withdrawal of forces, intensify the efforts to bring about conditions for the voluntary return to the refugees to their homes and full cooperation of States with the Secretary General in aiding the refugees.²¹ The Soviet resolution supported by Poland was opposed by China and the 8-Nation

resolution was vetoed again by the Soviet Union, which was the second veto of the Soviet Union within twenty-four hours.²² Chinese resolution was withdrawn considering the indifferent support from the members of the Security Council. Another effort at the third meeting of the Security Council was also failed on December 6 because of the different attitudes of the members.²³ China, the Soviet Union and the United States raised objections to a French resolution calling for immediate ceasefire, reciprocal disengagement and the speedy creation of conditions for the voluntary return of the refugees. Because of Soviet Union's insistence on using its veto for an Indian-Pakistani ceasefire a decision at the December 6, 1971 meeting of the Security Council was taken to put the whole issue before the 131 Nation General Assembly.²⁴ China and the United States voted in favour, Poland and the Soviet Union along with Britain and France abstained. Since the Assembly would turn up to be a place of complicated power struggle Britain and France perhaps well realized the fact and abstained. Besides under the United Nations charter the Assembly does not have power of enforcement²⁵ and normally it becomes a place of confused debates of its large number of membership. However the Security Council failed to decide on an important issue and thus exposed its importance before the world. The shifting of Bangladesh issue was the direct result of the Sino-Soviet and super power clash. December 4, 5 and 6 meetings of the Security Council are proved as the super power struggle in connection with a local crisis, and ideological issues had little significance, but political considerations had been obvious. During this crisis the United States and Chinese interest got identified and Sino-Soviet cleavage became sharper. Altogether, between December 12 and 21 there had been seven meetings of the Security Council in connection with Bangladesh crisis alone²⁶ and the outcome of the meetings were hopeless. It simply intensified the super power cleavage. The representative of China on December 16 charged India, through a circulated statement, for assisting the Soviet Union to destroy Pakistan and committing aggression against China. The Chinese statement also charged India that it wanted to become a sub-super power in the

region.²⁷ However the Indian delegate declared that since Pakistani forces surrendered in Bangladesh and Bangladesh was now free and liberated, it was unnecessary for India to continue the present conflict and India had ordered its armed forces to ceasefire²⁸ which virtually ended the crisis.

The Bangladesh situation virtually isolated India in the world body because out of total 131, 104 members sided against India which was supported only by the Soviet Union, Bhutan, Cuba and Soviet Union's East European allies.²⁹ Rumania voted with China. Yugoslavia and Egypt - the great non-aligned allies of India voted with Pakistan. Among those who had abstained from voting were only 5 out of more than 70 non-aligned members. All Arab countries sided with Pakistan. Only Oman abstained. Their prime objectives might have been that they did not want to see a brother Muslim country dismembered. Most of the African countries joined the Pakistan supporters, but Malawi and Senegal abstained, and Equatorial Guinea, Guinea and Lesotho absented themselves. Most of the South and South East Asian countries followed the Sino-American line. Afghanistan Singapore and Nepal abstained and Mauritius, Maldives and Burma absented themselves. The Latin American countries, except Chile (abstained) also followed the American line. In Europe, Britain, France and Denmark abstained. In African case, most of the new African countries viewed the independence movement of Bangladesh as the 'secessionist attempt'. Perhaps they looked it on par with the Biafran secession movement. Many African countries do have the problems with their national integration. As for example, Uganda, Kenya, Sudan, Chad Zaire, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Somalia and Zambia have been confronted with the problems of 'dangerous division and possible disintegration'. And as such, to support such case like Bangladesh would have encouraged their own troubles in their countries. Most of the small countries viewed the crisis with suspicions because of strange Sino-American combination one side and Indo-Soviet alliance on the other'.

The Security Council debates on Bangladesh crisis was marked by 'bitter exchange of remarks between the Soviet Union and China'. The two powers, during the discussions in the Security Council meetings worked against each other and held their own views on the crisis. China charged the Soviet Union that it wanted to exploit India's dependence in order to control the India-Pakistan sub-continent and the Indian Ocean and eventually expand its spheres of influence to compete with other super powers for world hegemony. The neutral attitude of Britain and France projected a major breach in the western alliance dominated and led by the United States. Perhaps Britain's knowledge about the sub-continent enabled it to assess the Bangladesh crisis in exact perspective.

The Bangladesh crisis offered some observations about the roles of the major powers in the region. The United States, as it appears now, would maintain a low profile in the region because of its major interests in the Gulf region and because of its own internal economic situation. Besides, the region does not cause a direct confrontation of the super powers. The Soviet Union and China would sustain their diplomatic competition. The internal instability and the global political situation would always invite the major powers' involvement in the region. However, the independence of Bangladesh showed that in small countries' crises, direct or indirect involvement of the super powers would be inevitable, and the major powers tend to instigate small scale conventional wars which would definitely lead to instability within less developed nation states, and perhaps at the same time would discourage big crises which would bring stability amongst the major powers in terms of their relations and interactions.

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