

A BIZARRE combination of moral blindness and political unrealism has characterized the handling of the Indo-Pak crisis by the Nixon administration. Even so, the United States is relatively immune from the consequences of this folly.

For with the Communist world divided, almost nothing that happens in South Asia can adversely affect American security in a serious way. But similar folly in other areas could well blow the President's hopes for a generation of peace.

The present round of trouble in the subcontinent goes back to the decision made by the Pakistan government in mid-March to suppress by force the separatist movement in East Bengal. The result of that decision was moral crime on the grand scale. Hundreds of thousands of innocent people were murdered by Pakistani troops, and millions were forced across the border into India as refugees.

Moreover, the decision was not only a crime, it was a blunder. With its government and forces centered in the western part of the country, Pakistan was unable to sustain repression a thousand miles away in East Bengal. Among the refugees in India, there began to grow up an insurgency force—the Mukti Bahini—determined to separate East Bengal from Pakistan in a new nation to be called Bangla Desh.

THESE developments presented a golden opportunity to Indian nationalists eager to settle old scores with Pakistan once and for all. They had rebuilt their army since the debacle of the war with China in 1962, and were confident they could whip Pakistan in an all-out encounter. Thus secure, they saw in the East Bengal situation an opportunity to put steadily increasing pressure on Pakistan.

To that end they armed and trained the insurgent East Bengali forces. They brought their own armies up to the frontier of Pakistan. They were thus acting as a kind of escort force for growing incursions by the insurgents against the Pakistanis in East Bengal.

At that point the United States still had some leverage. This country is the mainstay of the international groups that provide foreign aid critical to the development of both India and Pakistan, and there was an obvious way to avert the developing trouble. That was to have President Yahya Kahn of Pakistan open negotiations with the West Bengali leader, Mujib Rahman, who had been jailed back in March.

But Washington was never sensitive to the moral enormity of Pakistan's behavior. Hence, the willingness to let military spare parts go there for months after the massacres of East Bengal got under way.

Neither was the administration alert to the cold-blooded logic driving the Indians towards war. Thus the administration did not apply truly heavy pressure on Pakistan for an opening of negotiations between President Yahya and Sheikh Mujib—not even after Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India visited Washington and named that as a price for peace.

WITH WASHINGTON going less than all-out on the negotiating front, Mrs. Gandhi had little reason to control the Indian hawks. Slowly and deliberately, they applied pressure around Pakistan's borders. In the end, Pakistan felt obliged to respond with what is now open warfare.

Containing the fighting now devolves upon the other great powers in the area—the Russians who are backing the Indians; and the Chinese who support Pakistan. The duel between the Communist Big Two thus dominated the United Nations debate, and whatever the result (and the most likely outcome is for a new Bangla Desh state) it will not cause any serious trouble for this country.

Still, there are some hard questions the Nixon administration should be asking itself. Wasn't the administration blind and deaf to the moral crimes committed by Pakistan? Didn't the administration miscalculate what

India would do? Weren't both these judgments an expression of President Nixon's personal prejudices and preferences? Weren't these personal inclinations enormously weighted because of the emasculation of the State Department?

More important still are some long-range questions. Couldn't such a woeful performance yield serious trouble in coming encounters with the Communist giants? Even if the United States is insulated from the worst difficulties by the division in the Communist world, what role should this country be playing in the southern continents of the Third World? Does this country want forever to be the patron of regimes in Asia, Africa and Latin America that make up the pillars of the unfree world?

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Unrealism on

New War