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The U.S. Pursuit of Disaster in South Asia

Suppose President Nixon had deliberately set out: to aggravate tensions in South Asia; to identify the United States with a military regime almost universally condemned for its abuse of its own people; to shred American ties with the most populous and powerful nation of that region, a democracy and a traditional friend; to help drive that dominant state into a waiting Soviet embrace; and, once war had erupted, to diminish possibilities of political compromise and undermine what moderates might remain. What would he have done differently with respect to the developing conflict between India and Pakistan over the last eight months? In our view, not much.

The whole rationale of American policy eludes us. Some payment was owed Pakistan for helping arrange Henry Kissinger's first trip to Peking. And Mr. Nixon evidently has long had a soft spot in his heart for Pakistan, at one time a model military anti-Communist regime. But at some point as the tragedy grew, cold calculations of power politics should have overtaken these largely sentimental considerations. Sound policy dictated an effort to maintain friendship with both India and Pakistan; if that were not possible, why put all the American chips on a discredited failing regime in much the smaller and more trouble-ridden of the two nations involved? If the answer lies somewhere in the political geometry of the Moscow-Peking-Washington triangle, we fail to perceive it.

The announcement yesterday that the United

States had suspended development aid in the pipeline to India is equally puzzling. The stated grounds, that such aid contributes to short-term economic welfare and war-making potential, are laughable: the gesture was purely punitive and the party that is to be punished is not the government nearly so much as the impoverished people of India. A more telling abuse of foreign aid—at a more delicate moment, when a new aid bill is hanging by a thread in conference—could not be imagined.

As we have said before, India deserves sharp criticism for its calculated use of the refugee crisis to promote the dismemberment of Pakistan, although such criticism ill befits any government, such as the American government, which tolerated Pakistan's manufacture of that crisis. Where was the quick clampdown on arms aid to Pakistan then? India's invasion of West Pakistan and its now-open designs on Pakistan-held Kashmir are entirely unsupportable. But the source of the present crisis is Pakistani policy in East Pakistan. Only there can a solution be found. That the United States should not only be failing to contribute to such a solution but could be making one more difficult to attain is a measure of how far we in fact have traveled under the much trumpeted Nixon Doctrine toward a new foreign policy. In South Asia, we have moved backward—if we have moved at all—toward those early postwar cold war attitudes that gave us CENTO and SEATO and the heavy-handed employment of foreign aid as a bludgeon or a bribe.