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U.S. task force brought New Orleans States-Item 21 Dec 71 Russia, India together

WASHINGTON — The dramatic appearance of a U.S. naval task force in the Bay of Bengal on the eve of the Pakistani surrender, it now appears, didn't intimidate India at all but merely strengthened her ties with Russia.

In New Delhi, Soviet Ambassador Nikolai M. Pegov gave India secret assurances that "a Soviet fleet is now in the Indian Ocean and . . . will not allow the Seventh Fleet to intervene."

He also promised, in case of a Chinese attack across the Himalayas, that Russia "would open a diversionary action in Sin-

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kiang." In short, he promised Soviet military action against both the U.S. and China if they intervened on Pakistan's side.

The fascinating story of big-power intrigue during the Indian-Pakistan fighting is told in secret diplomatic dispatches and intelligence reports.

It was precisely this sort of secret maneuvering that got the U.S. deeply embroiled in the Vietnam War before the American people realized what was going on. We believe it is in the public interest, therefore, to publish excerpts from the secret documents.

In earlier columns, we told how presidential adviser Henry Kissinger assured reporters the U.S. wasn't anti-India at the same time he was instructing government policymakers to take steps against India.

"The President does not want to be even-handed," Kissinger emphasized at their secret strategy sessions. "The President believes India is the attacker."

Wrong side?

The State Department's professionals argued that, morally, the U.S. should be on the side of the Bengalis who wanted their independence from Pakistan. The experts also waned that President Nixon's pro-Pakistan policy would only drive India into Soviet arms.

Kissinger gruffly disputed this, saying of India's prime Minister Indira Gandhi: "The lady is old blooded and tough and will not turn India into a Soviet satellite merely because of pique."

Heeding Kissinger and disregarding the professional advice, Nixon took a tough stand at the United Nations against India and ordered the Seventh Fleet to send a task force into Indian waters.

This was definitely intended as a "show force," although the flotilla had the additional mission of evacuating stranded Americans from embattled Dacca if the need arose.

Plans were made, meanwhile, to arrange provocative leaks in such places as Djakarta, Manila and Singapore of the task force's approach. By the time the ships had

assembled in the Malacca Strait, both the Indians and Soviets were well aware they were on the way.

This merely served to bring India and Russia closer together. A secret intelligence report, giving a "reliable" account of Soviet Ambassador Nikolai Pegov's conversations with Indian officials, declared:

"Pegov stated that Pakistan is trying to draw both the United States and China into the present conflict. The Soviet Union, however, does not believe that either country will intervene.

"According to Pegov, the movement of the U.S. Seventh Fleet is an effort by the U.S. to bully India, to discourage it from striking against West Pakistan and at the same time to boost the morale of the Pakistani forces.

"Pegov noted that a Soviet fleet is now in the Indian Ocean and that the Soviet Union will not allow the Seventh Fleet to intervene.

Soviet threat

"If China should decide to intervene," said Pegov, "the Soviet Union would open a diversionary action in Sinkiang. Pegov also commented that after Dacca is liberated and the Bangla Desh government is installed, both the U.S. and China will be unable to act and will change their current attitude toward the crisis."

Another intelligence report, giving the secret details of Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Vasily Kuznetsov's mission to India, indicates there had been some Soviet impatience over the pace of the Indian blitzkrieg.

Kuznetsov, after his arrival in New Delhi on Dec. 12, told Indian officials that the Kremlin was "impatient with the Indian armed forces for their inability to liberate Bangla Desh within the 10-day time frame mentioned before the outbreak of hostilities."

Kuznetsov pointed out, according to the secret report, that Soviet opposition to a cease-fire "becomes more untenable the longer the war goes on in the east.

"While Kuznetsov said the Soviet Union will continue to use its veto to stall any efforts to bring about a cease-fire for the present, he stressed the importance of quick and decisive Indian action in liberating Bangla Desh in the shortest time possible.

"Kuznetsov delayed his scheduled return to Moscow because he is awaiting special instructions from Leonid Brezhnev, general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, regarding India's request that the Soviet Union sign a defense agreement with the Bangla Desh government after Soviet recognition of Bangla Desh.

"According to Kuznetsov, Brezhnev was not in Moscow when Kuznetsov sent him the request for guidance."

The American people, meanwhile, are entitled to straight talk from their leaders.