

# America and the World: I

By ANTHONY LEWIS

LONDON, June 11—All over England this week children are coming home from school asking their parents for a few pence to give for relief of the East Pakistan refugees. In the newspapers the refugee tragedy has been the dominant story for many days; the largest-circulation tabloid has spread a relief appeal over page one. The House of Commons has been debating how Britain can do more to help.

In the United States, by contrast, the flight of five million refugees into impoverished India, with disease and starvation threatening, has evidently had no great public impact. A news agency manager remarked the other day that the stories from India were getting little play in most U.S. papers.

President Nixon has made no public statement on the disaster since it began three months ago with the intervention of Pakistani troops in East Pakistan. But then no reporter has asked him a question on the subject at a press conference.

Why? The United States does not have Britain's historical relationship with India, but that is not a sufficient answer. Americans have traditionally been generous in helping at times of great human disaster, whatever the historical or political context.

A major reason must be Vietnam—the wounding effect of the war on American attitudes toward the world. "It is part of the turning inward after Vietnam," a wise U. S. official said of the limited public reaction to the Pakistan disaster.

Looking at it another way, the present episode shows the distortion in American values that has occurred because of Vietnam, the disproportion in our weighing of political and human interests. If our sense of proportion were more balanced, how would we

## AT HOME ABROAD

compare our relative interest in South Vietnam and India?

South Vietnam has a population of 18 million. Historically, its society has had little connection with Western law or political ideas. The country is governed by a general who jailed the runner-up in the election, the peace candidate, and who is now busy rigging the terms of the next election.

Until John Foster Dulles staked out an American responsibility there in 1954, hardly anyone would have conceived of South Vietnam as of particular strategic interest to the U.S.

India is the world's second most populous country, with 554 million people at last count. No one who has read E. M. Forster would make the mistake of equating Indians with Englishmen, but the legal and political systems of independent India remain recognizably like those we know in Britain and the United States. The Prime Minister is in office as the result of a free election and is trying to deal with terrible problems by democratic means. The stability of a continent depends on her success.

On behalf of Nguyen Van Thieu and his colleagues in Saigon we have spent 45,000 American lives and many billions of dollars, and still we are not ready to put a terminal date on our involvement. We cannot do that, President Nixon says, until we are sure Saigon has a reasonable chance of keeping the Communists out after we leave; otherwise there might be a "bloodbath" in South Vietnam.

Well, there has just been a bloodbath in East Pakistan, one of the largest and most blatant in a very long time, and the sounds of protest from Washington have not been audible. Presi-

dent Yahya Khan sent his army in to wipe out the results of a free election. Tens, probably hundreds, of thousands were massacred directly; millions have fled; now epidemic and famine threaten both the refugees in India and those who remain in East Pakistan.

A reporter for the British Broadcasting Corporation, Alan Hart, said a few days ago that unless the situation is stabilized in East Pakistan sufficiently to get the rice planted in the next few weeks, "It is possible, probable, that 20 million or more East Bengalis will be starving by September and October." Mr. Hart added: "All my instincts tell me that it may already be too late . . . unless the outside world imposes its will and its aid on Yahya Khan."

Officials in Washington must know all that as well as Mr. Hart. The reality is that Yahya Khan will have to be pressed hard to allow effective, internationally supervised aid in East Pakistan—and that the only solution imaginable to stabilize life in Pakistan and get the refugees back is some form of independence, with Yahya's army out.

But there is no sign of willingness in Washington to press Yahya Khan. The attitude there is, as one close observer put it: this is an awful situation, but we'd better not get our hands in too deep or we'll get burned again.

There is no pretending that any outside government can easily bring about a decent solution in East Pakistan. But it would be reassuring if one felt the United States had a sense of proportion about the interests involved. The State Department took pride this week in the amount of American aid authorized for relief of the growing disaster. In fact that sum, \$17.5 million, is a little more than half what we now spend on the Vietnam war every day.