

Kissinger's 'Backgrounder' on the War in South Asia

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FIRST OF ALL, let us get a number of things straight. There have been some comments that the administration is anti-Indian. This is totally inaccurate. India is a great country. It is the most populous free country. It is governed by democratic procedures.

Americans through all administrations in the postwar period have felt a commitment to the progress and development of India, and the American people have contributed to this to the extent of \$10 billion. Last year, in this administration, India received from all sources \$1.2 billion for development assistance, economic assistance, of which \$700 million came from the United States in various forms. Therefore, we have a commitment to the progress and to the future of India, and we have always recognized that the success of India, and the Indian democratic experiment, would be of profound significance to many of the countries in the underdeveloped world.

Therefore, when we have differed with India, as we have in recent weeks, we do so with great sadness and with great disappointment.

Now let me describe the situation as we saw it going back to March 25. March 25 is, of course, the day when the central government of Pakistan decided to establish military rule in East Bengal and started the process which has led to the present situation.

The United States has never supported



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the particular action that led to this tragic series of events, and the United States has always recognized that this action had consequences which had a considerable impact on India. We have always recognized that the influx of refugees into India produced the danger of communal strife in a country always precariously poised on the edge of communal strife. We have known that it is a strain on the already scarce economic resources of a country in the process of development.

Therefore, from the beginning, the United States has played a very active role in attempting to ease the suffering of the refugees and the impact on India of this large influx of unexpected people. The United States position has been to attempt two efforts simultaneously: One, to ease the human suffering and to bring about the return of the refugees; and secondly, we have attempted to bring about a political resolution of the conflict which generated the refugees in the first place.

Now, the United States did not condone what happened in March 1971; on the contrary, the United States has made no new development loans to Pakistan since March, 1971.

"A spokesman," "high officials," informed sources" — these are the players in a game called "for background only" which government officials play with newsmen and which everybody but the reader wins: the newsmen get a story and government officials can speak candidly, or self-servingly, without taking official responsibility for what they say. Last week, however, the reader won one when Senator Goldwater put into the Congressional Record the transcript of a White House "backgrounder" with the press and thereby gave away the identity of the source: Dr. Henry Kissinger. The result, excerpts of which are printed here, offers a revealing glimpse of what the White House thinks — or wants everybody to believe it thinks — about the origins and causes of the India-Pakistan war.

Secondly, there has been a great deal of talk about military supplies to Pakistan. The fact of the matter is that immediately after the actions in East Pakistan at the end of March of this past year, the United States suspended any new licenses. It stopped the shipment of all military supplies out of American depots or that were under American governmental control. The only arms that were continued to be shipped to Pakistan were arms on old licenses in commercial channels, and those were spare parts. There were no lethal end-items involved.

To give you a sense of magnitude, the United States cut off \$35 million worth of arms at the end of March of this year, or early April of this year, immediately after the actions in East Bengal, and continued to ship something less than \$5 million worth; whereupon, all the remainder of the pipeline was cut off.

It is true the United States did not make any public declarations on its views of the evolution, because the United States wanted to use its influence with both Delhi and Islamabad to bring about a political settlement that would enable the refugees to return. At the request of the President, this was explained by me to the Indian Foreign Minister and to the Indian Prime Minister when I was in New Delhi in early July, and both indicated that they understood our decision in this respect and made no criticism of our decision.

They did make a criticism of the arms shipments. Secondly, we consistently used our influence that we gained in this manner to urge the Government of Pakistan in the direction of a political evolution. We urged the Government of Pakistan and they agreed that relief supplies be distributed by international agencies, in order to take away the criticism in East Pakistan that they might be used to strengthen the central authority, and the government agreed that a

timetable be established for returning Pakistan to civilian rule. That was supposed to be done by the end of December.

We urged a mutual withdrawal of troops from the border, and when India rejected this, we urged a unilateral withdrawal of Pakistan troops from the border, and that was accepted by Pakistan and never replied to by India.

We urged an amnesty for all refugees, and that was accepted.

We went further. We established contact with the Bangla Desh people in Calcutta, and during August, September and October of this year no fewer than eight such contacts took place.

We approached President Yahya Khan three times in order to begin negotiations with the Bangla Desh people in Calcutta. The Government of Pakistan accepted. We were told by our contacts in Calcutta that the Indian Government discouraged such negotiations. In other words, we attempted to promote a political settlement, and if I can sum up the difference that may have existed between us and the Government of India, it was this:

We told the Government of India on many occasions—the Secretary of State saw the Indian Ambassador 18 times; I saw him seven times since the end of August on behalf of the President. We all said that political autonomy for East Bengal was the inevitable outcome of a political evolution, and that we favored it. The differences may have been that the Government of India wanted things so rapidly that it was no longer talking about political evolution, but about political collapse.

Without attempting to speculate on the motives of the Indian Government, the fact of the matter, as they presented themselves to us, was as follows: We told the Indian Prime Minister when she was here of the Pakistan offer to withdraw their troops unilaterally from the border. There was no response.

We told the Indian Prime Minister when she was here that we would try to arrange negotiations between the Pakistanis and members of the Awami League, specifically approved by Mujibur, who is in prison. We told the Indian Ambassador shortly before his return to India that we were prepared even to discuss with them a political timetable, a precise timetable for the establishment of political autonomy in East Bengal. The conversation was held on November 19th. On November 22nd, military action started in East Bengal.

We told the Pakistan Foreign Secretary when he was here that it was desirable on November 15th; that we thought it was time for Pakistan to develop a maximum program. He said he could not give us an answer until the week of November 22nd when he would return to his country. He also pointed out to us that there would be a return to civilian rule at the end of December, at which time it might be easier to bring about such matters as the release of Mujibur, whose imprisonment had occurred under military rule.

This information was transmitted, and military action, nevertheless, started during the week of November 22nd. So when we say that there was no need for military action, we do not say that India did not suffer. We do not say that we are unsympathetic to India's problems or that we do not value India.

This country, which in many respects has had a love affair with India, can only, with enormous pain, accept the fact that military action was taken in our view without adequate cause, and if we express this opinion in the United Nations, we do not do so because we want to support one particular point of view on the subcontinent, or because we want to forego our friendship with what will always be one of the great countries in the world; but because we believe that if, as some of the phrases go, the right of military attack is determined by arithmetic, if political wisdom consists of saying the attacker has 500 million and the defender has 100 million, and, therefore, the United States must always be on the side of the numerically stronger, then we are creating a situation where, in the foreseeable future, we will have international anarchy, and where the period of peace, which is the greatest desire for the President to establish, will be jeopardized; not at first for Americans, necessarily, but for peoples all over the world.

The unilateral withdrawal, that was without any qualifications. The willingness to

talk to the Bangla Desh people involved a disagreement between the Indians and the Bangla Desh on the one side, and the Pakistanis on the other. The Indians took the view that the negotiations had to begin with Mujibur, who was in prison.

What we attempted to promote was a negotiation with Bangla Desh people who were not in prison, and who were in Calcutta. The Pakistanis said they would talk only to those Bangla Desh people who were not charged with any particular crime in Pakistan, and I don't know whom that would have excluded.

There is no personal preference on my part for Pakistan, and the views that I expressed at the beginning, of the American position—that is, about the crucial importance of India as a country in the world and in the subcontinent—have always been strongly held by me, and I, therefore, enthusiastically support those as an expression of bipartisan American policy in the postwar period.

As for the President, I was not aware of his preference for Pakistan leaders over Indian leaders, and I, therefore, asked him this morning what this might be based on. He pointed out—as you know, I was not acquainted with the President before his present position—but he pointed out to me that, on his trip in 1967, he was received very warmly by the Prime Minister and by the President of India; that the reports that he was snubbed at any point are without any foundation, and that in any event, the warmth of the reception that we extended to the Indian Prime Minister two weeks before the attacks on Pakistan started should make clear what enormous value we attach to Indian friendship.

While I can understand that there can be sincere differences of opinion about the wise



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course to take, I do not think we do ourselves any justice if we ascribe policies to the personal pique of individuals. Besides, the charge of aggression was not made in this building in the first place.

Q: Dr. Kissinger, I would like to ask you a clarifying question about something you said just a moment ago.

You said that the charge of aggression was not made in this building.

Dr. Kissinger: We do not disagree with it, but it was in reference to a point that the President and I have an anti-Indian bias.

Q: Does this carry the implication that you are putting the responsibility for that original charge of aggression on the State Department?

Dr. Kissinger: No. There is a united governmental view on it.