

THE U.S. RESPONSIBILITY

IN BENGAL

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Thanks very largely to the American strategies of the last two decades, Pakistan is now in the fist of an awesome military-bureaucratic fascism, which possesses the power of modern weaponry given to it by the United States, and has launched, so as to protect itself as well as the interests of its sponsors, a genocide in the Eastern, majority part of the country.

Pakistan is allowed no independent press at all, and all foreign correspondents were barred from East Pakistan as of March 25, the first night of the Terror. It is, therefore, impossible to give entirely accurate figures. Relatively more knowledgeable sources, however, estimate a quarter of a million to half a million dead, five to eight million refugees who have already fled to India, and an unimaginably vaster number of potential refugees created within East Pakistan. Practically all East Pakistanis live at the starvation point—those, that is, who still live. Furthermore, a number of international agencies, ranging from Oxfam to Senator Kennedy's Subcommittee on Refugees, have estimated that, unless a political solution to the Bengali tragedy is found by August 1, or thereabouts, the terrorism unleashed by the West Pakistani junta will have claimed perhaps as many as twenty million victims by the end of the year.

Within West Pakistan, the junta has arrested, tortured or banished from the country hundreds, perhaps thousands of dissenters, particularly from the Left Wing. The courts and the information media are manipulated with almost medieval

swagger. For example, Abdullah Malik, a noted radical journalist, was fined 50,000 rupees and sentenced to a long term in jail for what was considered an "insult" to the President; the court declared in the judgement that, but for the advanced age of the victim, flogging would have been recommended. The repression in West Pakistan is yet in no way comparable to the genocide in East Pakistan; it is, nevertheless, as widespread as, say, in Greece, and is surely a foretaste of things to come.

The Pakistani military is a creation, literally, of Western imperialism. On the highest levels, it is run by generals trained first in the British Indian Army with all the colonialist intent and outlook implicit in that training. Then, as the United States became the dominant imperialist power in Asia, she also became, and remained until 1965, the exclusive supplier of arms and training to this military. Since the 1965 Indo-Pakistani conflict, the United States has been under constant pressure from the larger and more influential Indian clientele and has had to cut down on arms supplies to Pakistan. However, under one cover or another, the aid has continued. On June 22, for example, the *New York Times* reported that between 1967 and April, 1970, the flow of equipment from the Air Force sales alone had reached close to fifty million dollars; the sales from the Army and Navy are still unknown. Further, the same report revealed that in October, 1970, the Administration agreed to sell to Pakistan

an undisclosed number of F-104 fighter planes, B-57 bombers, and armored personnel carriers. Even as the genocide continues, arms are still being sent. For the latest shipments, the United States government has given three quite conflicting explanations: that the shipments are merely a bureaucratic error, that they are carrying deliveries on orders accepted before April 8, when the Nixon administration supposedly imposed an embargo on arms to Pakistan, and that continuation of arms aid is necessary for the United States to gain the leverage for forcing the junta to accept a sensible political solution.

In the face of this blatant duplicity, it is reasonable to ask what United States interests are being served in Pakistan and why is it that the Nixon administration is so anxious to underwrite the survival of the junta.

East and West Pakistan, although units in one country, are a thousand miles apart from each other. East Pakistan shares a border with Burma, is separated from China by a very narrow strip of Indian territory, and is vulnerable to the politics and pressures of Southeast Asia. West Pakistan, on the other hand, is closer to Iran and the Middle East. Both are very important for maintaining a presence in the Indian Ocean. United States aid has been tied therefore, to Pakistan's membership in both the offensive alliances, namely SEATO and CENTO, which stabilize the American interests in Southeast Asia and the Middle East. No Pakistani mercenaries are used in Vietnam; the West Pakistani junta has, however, periodically dispatched such items as children's toys and equipment for flood control so as to display her solidarity with the junta in Saigon. In the Middle East, the monarchs of Iran, Jordan and Saudi Arabia—all noted clients of the United States—are Pakistan's best friends. Thus, while Jordan is too embarrassed to petition for American troops for suppressing the Palestinian guerrillas, Pakistani battalions, equipped of course with American arms, have been sent in to do King Hussein's dirty work.

Also, West Pakistan has played a significant role in the encirclement of the Soviet Union during the cold war years, and in the harassment of China throughout. It was from Peshawar, an American base in Northwest Pakistan, that the famous U-2 took off. The same base has been used for electronic surveillance of the defense installations in the Chinese interior. Now that Britain is completing her overdue withdrawal from the Indian Ocean, and the United States is competing with Russia for strategic control of that vast region, Pakistan's continued participation in the American design is indispensable for the conquest of not the lands but the waters of Asia. The arms that are going to the Pakistani junta to carry on the massacre of the Bengalis and the repression within West Pakistan represent a small donation made to a United States sponsored military establishment which is, in turn, expected to ensure American presence in the Indian Ocean. It is unlikely that this aid will stop altogether.

Soon after the creation of Pakistan in 1947, in fact as early as the Korean War, the American clientele in Pakistan began to shape an economy dependent on the United States. By the end of the Fifties, massive injections of American arms and money, as well as the manipulations that go by the

name of "technical assistance", had locked Pakistan into America's cold war strategies internationally, had created a monopolistic base for capital accumulation in the domestic industrial sector, and had led to a thorough militarization of Pakistan's young and vulnerable political culture. Then, in 1958, fed up with the bickerings of the civilian politicians and having tremendous faith in military establishments as being the source for stability in the Third World generally, the United States decided that time was ripe for a military take-over in Pakistan; Ayub, who engineered the coup, writes candidly in his *Autobiography* of the prior discussions he had had with some of the Pentagon crowd, including Maxwell Taylor.

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Until 1962, the relationship between the ruling elites of the United States and Pakistan was placid and profitable for both sides. Then, in an entirely separate development, the Sino-Indian conflict was staged so as to make India a full client of the United States military establishment, which had the effect not of resolving but in fact accentuating the rivalry between India and Pakistan. America's growing involvement in the Indian military affairs created a degree of insecurity among the rulers of Pakistan, who retaliated by beginning to "normalize" their relations with the Soviet Union and China. Then, three years later, at the time of the war between India and Pakistan, the United States adopted a neutral stance and put an embargo on arms to both countries, an act that the Pakistani rulers saw as being pro-India since India was getting arms from the Soviet Union as well. Again, Pakistan grew diplomatically closer to China and petitioned the Chinese for some arms. Thus, without in any way even suggesting the termination of her membership in the United States-sponsored alliances, the Pakistani junta was trying a little belligerence. The United States, on her part, managed to absorb these strains in her relationship with Pakistan through a reduced but continued flow of arms, and through increasingly large amounts of what is described as economic aid but what amounts to donations to the capitalist class in Pakistan.

While the United States was trying to play Pakistan against India, and the Pakistani junta kept her fragile status secure by playing the United States against China, the inner erosion of Pakistani political culture kept the country sliding toward a split and a final fall. I have written elsewhere of the

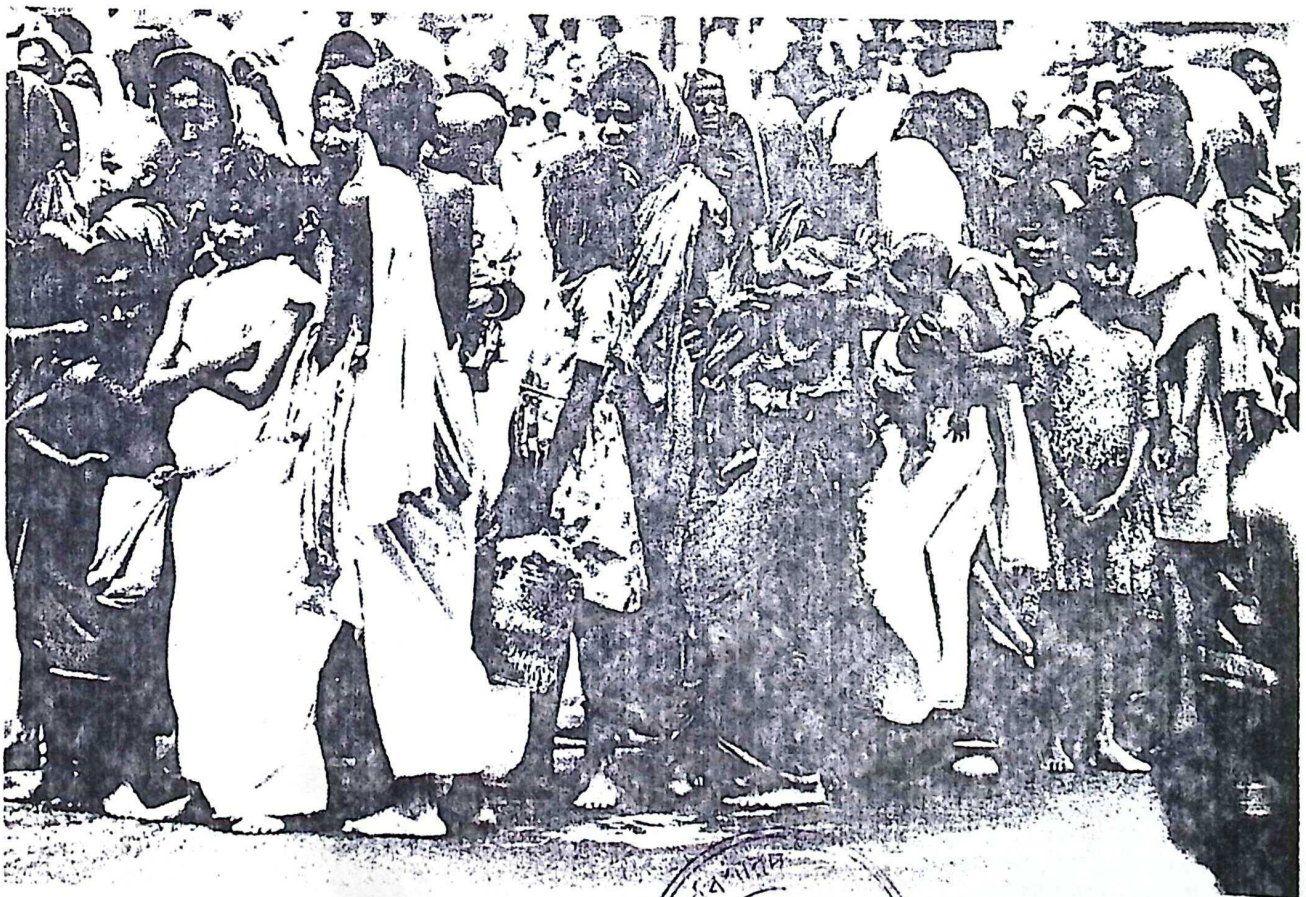
domestic contradictions which have led to such extreme polarization in Pakistan today.* The capitalist factor is worth underscoring here. Owing mainly to the manner in which the United States economic "aid" is dispensed, Pakistan was facing a situation, by 1968, wherein twenty families controlled 97% of all insurance, 80% of all banking, and 66% of all industry. Needless to add, the generals got huge chunks out of it all. Besides, the growth of militarism and monopoly capitalism have polarized not only classes but also regions. The Army is an altogether West Pakistani Army; the twenty families that control major portions of the wealth of the country are West Pakistani families. Bengali nationalism is a genuine protest against this colonial relationship between East and West Pakistan.

Unfortunately, the factionalism of the East Bengali Left made it possible for Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Awami League, a pro-Western and essentially urban middle-class apparatus, to give the most effective political expression to the nationalist sentiments of Bengal. Thus, despite very acute

class contradictions, we have had in Pakistan, until very recently, a situation where the militaristic domination of East Bengal was being opposed not by a mass movement of the exploited peasants but by the aspiring middle classes of Bengal.

Quite contrary to the dominant trend in Western reporting, the fact is that the United States supported the autonomy move in Bengal until very recent months. For one thing, she could please her Indian clients by doing so; given the animosity toward Pakistan, the Indian government supports anything that spells trouble for her adversary. For another, an Awami League government in East Pakistan would have been a clearly pro-American government and thus yet another instrumentality for the United States to maintain her presence in the Indian Ocean and her bases near China and Southeast Asia. American officials let it be known, therefore, that were there to be an autonomous East Bengal, the United States would provide her aid on separate, more flexible terms. For example, as recently as last March, barely two weeks before the massacre started, Selig S. Harrison, reporting from Bangkok, quoted "a high American official" (a euphemism for the United States Ambassador to Pakistan) as saying that the United States could provide an autonomous East Bengal with immediate aid amounting to as much

* See Ahmad, " 'Law and Order' in Pakistan", *The Nation*, April 14, 1969. Also, for more recent developments, see Ahmad, "The Bloody Surgery of Pakistan," *The Nation*, June 28, 1971.



as 500 million dollars to take care of the initial problems of autonomy. Sheikh Mujib's Awami League obviously enjoyed American blessings.

The United States had made three calculations: that the autonomy drive would succeed very quickly; that an autonomous Bengal would have a Rightist government; and that the United States would thus gain a reliable client in East Bengal without losing her clientele in West Pakistan. All these calculations backfired.

When the junta launched the genocide in East Bengal it was aimed at preserving her own power of militarism and capitalist exploitation of that majority part of the country. By no stretch of human imagination or values could anyone condone what may yet become the most hideous crime against humanity even in this most criminal of human centuries. However, at a cost that was in no way worth paying, the autonomy drive has been halted and East Pakistan has not undergone an indigenous Rightist take-over.

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The situation which has emerged now needs to be understood quite clearly, for it is this new situation which gives the clue to the United States going back to her unequivocal support for the West Pakistan junta. Except for a few who were killed or captured, most Awami League leaders have fled to the clubs and suburban homes in Calcutta (it is the poor that languish in the refugee camps, or perish on the way; the rich have their golf courses wherever they are) where they have formed the Provisional Government of Bangla Desh. With Indian support, they are trying to launch what they think is a guerrilla movement; in reality, what is being put together in the border regions of India is a quite conventional army that is capable, at best, of commando actions only. Internal resistance in Bengal is being organized by Left groups who, facing a monolithic enemy, have thus far been able to transcend their factionalism and have made a common front. In the Indian territories of West Bengal where the Awami League leadership is based, this leadership faces opposition from both Marxist-Leninists and the Naxalites, who are numerically weak but have a certain leverage as trouble-shooters for the Left-wing owing to their political terrorism. Together these two can morally and politically isolate the East Bengali Rightists who want to wage their "struggle" from the safety of the Indian sanctuaries.

The United States supported the Awami League in her bid for power till the very last, and abandoned her only when

the West Pakistani troops moved in. Now, the United States has chosen to be on the winning side, particularly since the winning side also consists of her own clients. When it appeared, in April and May, that the Awami League may yet stage a come-back with Indian support, the United States merely straddled the fence and even promised the Indian Foreign Minister that there shall be no aid, military or economic, for West Pakistan. During the past week, however, and particularly with the resurgence of Left politics in Bengal, it has become quite clear that whereas the Bengali struggle is bound to succeed, the struggle will be protracted and the leadership is likely to shift to the Left entirely. It is this mass character and socialist orientation of the emerging movement that forces upon the United States the need to mend her relations with the junta in West Pakistan and to finance the junta in her bid to exterminate the rebellious Bengalis.

If the United States is to maintain a presence in the Indian Ocean, it is necessary for this design that it include Pakistan. So long as this imperative exists, the United States will continue to underwrite a military regime in West Pakistan, irrespective of the human costs. If the entire population of Southeast Asia is dispensable, so are the Bengalis. The United States will of course prefer an arrangement (a "political solution" as it is called) whereby the junta stays in power in the West and the Awami League, or a similar pro-Western outfit, rules an autonomous Bengal. Under no circumstances will the United States let the West Pakistani junta get so weak as to let an autonomous East Pakistan, or an independent Bangla Desh, emerge with a leadership whose role and composition cannot be predicted. From the United States viewpoint, a butchered and terrorized East Pakistan is far preferable to a struggling Bangla Desh that may possibly drift out of the American global system. This is the meaning of the continued arms aid to the military junta in West Pakistan.

The most important single issue is that of the human suffering. Military terrorism, hunger and pestilence have claimed hundreds of thousands of lives; the worst is, I fear, yet to come. The complicity of the United States in this reign of terror is obvious; but for America's savage pursuit of global power, there would have been no militarism in Pakistan even to begin with. The crime is not merely that the arms are still going, but that they have been going in for so many years and in such quantities as to have perverted an entire culture. The crime is not only that a junta is being supported now, but that it was set up in the first place, and that it was supported for close to thirteen years. What we are seeing now is not the result of a few shipments but the cumulative effects of America's global militarism in the post-war years. Thus, merely stopping the aid now is not enough, even if such stoppage were to come about. The United States has invested three and a half billion dollars in creating the fascism that now devours Pakistan. Is she prepared to pay even half that much to restore what she has destroyed? How? And When? These are the questions we need to ask of Richard Nixon and his advisors. The deaths and the sufferings in Bengal are an American responsibility.