

An Analysis of US Policy in the Liberation war of Bangladesh, 1971

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Abstract: *Bangladesh took her place in world map as a sovereign country after nine months long war against Pakistani army government. There were many countries involved in the Liberation war of Bangladesh. United States made their policy in East Pakistan crisis to making happy Yahya Khan, the president of Pakistan. By using this policy they wanted to rebuilt relationship with China, controlling Muslim countries of Middle East, Pakistan was the country by what they can implement their policy. But the involvement of Soviet Union with India made difficult situation for USA.*

Keywords: *Bangladesh, Kissinger, Liberation war, Nixon, Pakistan*

I. Introduction

Bangladesh gained her independence after sacrificing lots of lives in 1971 after nine month fighting against autocrat Pakistan. From beginning President Richard Nixon supported all military action including genocide in East Pakistan. India was involved in liberation war of Bangladesh and both Russia and India signed a treaty at August 1971. United states tried to make relationship with China where Pakistan played middleman role. On the other hand, Nixon and Kissinger used the Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Libya for supplying arms to West Pakistan (1). An effort to save West Pakistan from the aggression of India, obviously US also tried to save themselves from the threaten of Soviet Russia (2). Nixon and Kissinger had a very bad impression on Indians. Especially the Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi and Nixon did not have a good relationship. US president Nixon tried heart and soul to save Yahya Khan whereas Soviet Russia was in favour of India and Bangladesh. The involvement of these two super power countries in Liberation war of Bangladesh turned to cold war. In this war the United States played a very unjustified role against Bangladesh (3). Before discussing about the United States of America's foreign policy in liberation war of Bangladesh, try to draw the background of Liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971.

II. Language Movement

Bangladesh was the part of Pakistan after division of India in 1947. Pakistan had two wings named East Pakistan and West Pakistan. But question was that what will be the state language? Urdu and Urdu will be the state language of the both East and West Pakistan, Pakistan government declared. But the students and intellectuals of East Pakistan protested against this declaration and demanded Bengali as the state language of Pakistan. Tamaddin Mujlish first started the protest against Pakistan government about language issue (4). In 6th December, 1947 East Pakistani students made a procession in Dhaka University and established 'Rastrabhasa Songram Porishad' under the leadership of professor Nurul haque of Tamaddin Mujlish. The member of East Pakistan Congress party, Direndro Nath Dutto proposed to add Bangla with Urdu and English in constituent assembly in 23 February, 1948. But Liaquat Ali Khan, the prime minister of Pakistan and Khaza Nazimuddin, the chief minister of East Pakistan rejected this proposal (4). Students protested against the decision and made a procession in University of Dhaka. They called strike and the leaders like Shawkat Ali, Kazi Golam Mahboob, Shamsul Huq, Oli Ahad, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Abdul Wahed and others were arrested. Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the governor general of Pakistan came to East Pakistan on 19 March and again declared Urdu would be the only state language of Pakistan in a civic reception programme at Racecourse Ground (5, 6). The language action Committee was established lead by Abdul Matin on 11 March 1950. Khawaja Nazim Uddin came to Dhaka and again mentioned publicly no other language but Urdu would be the state language of Pakistan on 27 January 1952 (7). Students reacted very negatively and gave slogan Rastrabhasa Bangla Chai (we want only Bengali as a state language) and called strike on 30 January 1952. Bengali students and leaders planned for a huge demonstration against the decision of Pakistan government in the month of February 1952. As a result section 144 was imposed by government. But students from different colleges and leaders were gathered in Dhaka University on 21 February, 1952. Finally the students lead by Abdul Matin and Gaziul Haque violated the section 144 and shouted slogans Rastrabhasa Bangla Chai (we want only Bengali as a state language). Police fired upon the processions and killed Salam, Rafique, Jabbar, Barkot and others (8). After a long journey

and sacrifice of lives, Bengali and Urdu were officially selected as a state language of Pakistan in 1956. From 1952 the people of Bangladesh celebrate Mother Language Day in 21 February. UNESCO declared 21 February as an International Mother Language Day in 17 November 1999.

III. Election of 1970

The first election in the history of Pakistan was held on 7 December, 1970. People were spontaneously participated in this very expected election. Awami League, lead by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the main leading party of East Pakistan. On the other side Zulfikar Ali Butto of Pakistan Peoples Party was the main competitor for power. Awami League gained majority vote in this election (9) and won 160 seats out of 162 seats in East Pakistan. Along the selected female candidates out of 313 seats in Pakistan assembly Awami League had got 167 seats and Pakistan Peoples Party had got 87 seats and others gained 58 seats. The popular vote of Awami League was 12,937,162 on the other hand PPP's vote was 6,148,923. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was unable to get any seat in West Pakistan similarly Bhutto did not get any seat in East Pakistan. In spite of winning the election with huge popular votes and seats, the president of Pakistan General Yahya did not hand over power to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (10). Tension and dissatisfaction among the people of East Pakistan towards West Pakistan had again more aggravated. This unfair decision of West Pakistan was another important step along the way of Independence war of Bangladesh.

IV. Liberation War:

President Yahya planned to do conspiracy and declared the postponement of Assembly in March 1971. The people of East Pakistan were very furious and started demonstration in Dhaka city. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who led the people of East Pakistan by his charismatic leadership, declared 5 days long strike and called non-cooperation movement in East Pakistan. People of East Pakistan unquestionably followed their leader. President Yahya imposed curfew to control the situation. But people broke the curfew by doing demonstration and slogans. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman delivered a speech in Race course field (now called Shohrawardi Uddan) on 7 March 1971. In this speech he declared this fight is our fight for Liberation, this fight is our fight for independence (11). President Yahya Khan appointed General Tikka Khan as a governor of East Pakistan by planning to conduct genocide in East Pakistan. Yahya came to East Pakistan to do meeting with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on 15 March, 1971 and in the same time he brought troops in East Pakistan simultaneously. Pakistani government tried to show their effort to solve the problem but they took time to arrange troops to do the genocide in East Pakistan. At the night of 25 March 1971, genocide was started by Pakistani army. It was called Operation Searchlight (12, 13). All foreign journalists were sent out of country. Pakistani army started massacre by killing arrested Bengali officers in Rajarbag Police line (14). They attacked Dhaka University and killed not only students but also teachers and staffs (15, 16). President Yahya ordered "killed three million of them" (17). 30,000 people were killed, and the death squad were moved towards the town, East Pakistani were flown out to escape from west Pakistani army (18).

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the leader of East Pakistan, was arrested in that night. One of the objectives of genocide was to arrest the leader (19). Before getting arrested, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman called people to come together and fight for free independent Bangladesh and his declaration was transmitted via EPR's transmitter from Dhaka to Chittagong and rest of the country (20). On 27 March 1971, Major Ziaur Rahman declared the independence of Bangladesh from Chittagong Kalur Ghat Betar Kendro on behalf of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (21). The Liberation war was started on 26 March 1971. Government officials, political activists, students, workers, peasants; professionals, people of all ages and levels were participated spontaneously on the war (22).

The formal Bengali army officers meet in Head quarter of second East Bengal in Taliapara on 4 April 1971. Colonel Mohammad Ataul Gani Osmany, Lieutenant Colonel Abdur Rob, Lieutenant Colonel Salahuddin Mohammad Reza, Major Kazi Nuruzzaman, Major Khaled Mosharaf, Major Nurul Islam, Major Shafat Jamil, Major Mainul Hossain Chowdhury and others were present (22). Bangladesh Armed Forces was formed and selected Col. MAG Osmani as a commander in chief. This arm Forces fought alongside of civilian of Bengal known as Mukti Bahini (23).

On 17 April, 1971 the People's Republic of Bangladesh, a provisional government named Mujibnagar Sarkar was established. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the president and Syed Nazrul Islam was the vice president and acting president in Bangabandhu's absence, and Tajuddin Ahmed was the prime minister. Bangladesh was divided by eleven sectors geographically and single sector commander for each sector (24). There were many sub groups fight against Pakistan army in different places, like Kader Bahini of Tangail, (25) Latif Mirza Bahini of Sirajganj, Akbar Hossain Bahini of Jhinaidah, Hemayet Bahini of Faridpur, Quddus Molla and Gafur Bahini of Barisal, Afsar Bahini of Mymensingh and Aftab Bahini of Mymensingh. Mujib Bahini was organised by Sheikh Fazrul Haque Moni, Tofael Ahmed, Abdur Razzak and Sirajul Alam Khan (22)

India declared war against Pakistan and joined with Bangladeshi forces on 3rd December, 1971. Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora became the commander of the joint forces. After joining India, war lasted only thirteen days (26), on 16 December 1971 General Niazi, Chief of Pakistan forces surrendered in Race course field.

V. The Role Of United States

Bangladesh part was a debatable and separate chapter for United States foreign policy. The Liberation war of Bangladesh and problems created by it was a great surprise for United State. At the first of seventy decades the consequence of the problems was beyond their thinking. The foreign policy of United States about Bangladesh Liberation war was double minded and against the interest of Bangladesh. They tried not to create bad impression about America on both Pakistani and Bengali leaders' minds. But Nixon government helped Pakistan morally, politically and economically (3).

US president Richard M. Nixon supported Pakistan from March to December in 1971 against Bangladesh continuously. So the question is why US support Pakistan? Pakistan was the member of SEATO (South-East Asian Treaty Organization) and CENTO (Central Treaty Organization) with United States in 1954 and 1955 against the communism of the world (27). As a result of those agreements Pakistan had good relationship with US from earlier. On the other hand India signed alliance with Soviet Union in august 1971 which was a risk and hindrance for US to exercise power in south Asia. USA was looking for a faithful friend for controlling Muslim countries in Middle East (28). As a Muslim country Pakistan was automatic choice for this objective. After being defeated in Vietnam War, the USA was interested to rebuild relationship with China. Washington cut off all relationships with China due to communist revolution in 1949. Kissinger wrote in his book 'White House' that there was no alternative to communicate with China except Pakistan. To take control in South and South East Asia and rebuild relation with China, Pakistan was the faithful media for the USA (29, 30). In 1967 Nixon did not get warm reception in India tour comparing Pakistan. In Pakistan he had received an exceptional warm reception. Kissinger mentioned it "never forgot" reception. Nixon always gives high priority to Pakistan in US policy in South Asia concern. India- Russia treaty on 9 August in 1971 surprised the US and became a threat for them. As a result the USA helped Pakistan (31, 32).

Henry Alfred Kissinger played a vital role in US foreign policy of Nixon governments. As a part of his job he played as a main character to make policy in Liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971. Kissinger presented few proposals to Nixon as a solution of East Pakistan crisis. Proposal Number one- support Pakistan completely including military action in East Pakistan taken by Yahya government. Proposal Number two- postponed all economic and military aid to Pakistan. Proposal Number three- to send the aid for East Pakistan and India for victims and refugees. Nixon took part in favour of West Pakistan and send humanitarian aids to East Pakistan and India as well (33).

A meeting was called by Senior Review Group to review East Pakistan crisis on 6 March 1971. In this meeting Kissinger said that Nixon does not wish to do anything against Pakistan what makes upset Yahya Khan. Johnson, the official of foreign affairs said that supporting of West Pakistan will not affect on relationships between India and United States. He also said that the interest of United States, Russia and India in south Asia will be stable by remaining undivided Pakistan. Kissinger chaired in another meeting of Washington Special Action Group on 26 March 1971 and briefed that Nixon was unwilling to do anything against military action of Yahya (34). Unfortunately US support the genocide in East Pakistan done by Pakistani army.

Nixon's policy was tilt to Pakistan from beginning but his administration claimed US did equal treatment to India and Pakistan. Archer Blood argued that if it was true, they did not deserve equal treatment. Archer Blood was US consul General in Dhaka in 1971. He informed about the situation in Bangladesh to state department frequently. He said, "US policy related to recent developments in East Pakistan serves neither our moral interests broadly defined nor our national interests narrowly defined" (35). With twenty officers Blood protested strongly against the US policy for Bangladesh crisis. Blood made conscious to administration about political treat to ignoring Bangladeshi Liberation War and taking risk to support potential loser in this war(36).

Jack Anderson, investigative journalist of US obtained some leaked paper from executive's branch and military. The Anderson papers add more critique of Nixon Kissinger Policy on East Pakistan Crisis (28). He charged the government "Richard Nixon brought the United States to the edge of another world war. His actions were deliberate; he operated in secret; and he lied to the American people about his actions" (37).

The US politicians especially a number of senator and members of congress criticised the government policy in Bangladesh (East Pakistan) issue (38). Senator Edward Kennedy asked for US government to take step immediately for peace in Pakistan because massacre was happened in East Pakistan by using American weapon. Senator Maxray was very angry for that. Ten senators requested for sending relief to East Pakistan and stop economic and military help to West Pakistan. Congress member Cornelius Gallagher who was ex-president of Sub committee of Asia Pacific affairs was criticised for helping Pakistan by supplying arms. Politicians were busy with criticism about violation of human rights and misuse of American arms in East Pakistan. National

Security Councils worked for making foreign policy for United States of America. Senior review Group and Washington Special review Group helped to NSC for making policy of White House in international crisis. NSC played very minor role about selecting policy in Bangladesh Liberation war in 1971. Henry Kissinger personally observed this matter by influencing Nixon. There was lack of understanding between Bureaucrats and White house about this issue. They considered it from opposite sides from their individual perspectives. US intellectuals created pressure to Nixon government to play an active role on this crisis in south Asia (39).

The US government urged for a first time in 7 April 1971 to find out peaceful solution for this critical problem between two parts of Pakistan. On next day Josef Sisco, the assistant foreign secretary of US said that this is an internal matter of Pakistan (29). But the US ambassador in India, Kenneth Kitting disagreed with Josef and said the international community should not avoid this matter by considering internal matter of Pakistan (40). The US media started criticise of government due to Bangladeshi people were killed by using American arms. So government decided not to send arms anymore to West Pakistan. In 19 April 1971 the Senior Review Group reviewed the US foreign policy on Pakistan issue and decided US needs a good relationship with India than Pakistan due to huge country, wealth and international status. Kissinger was present in this meeting. The Nixon government again was called for political solution in East Pakistan crisis on 12 June 1971. The US government declared to stop supplying arms but they continued to supply arms to Pakistan. Many newspaper published news about this issue. The foreign department stated that those very little amounts of arms were sent to Pakistan due to agreement signed before 25 March 1971. USA was helped Pakistan indirectly for getting arms from Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Libya (1). On October 1971, 78 jet airlines were sent to Pakistan from Saudi Arabia by USA. The USA took the contradictory policy about the Pakistan issue. USA sent huge money as a relief for inhabitation for Bangladeshi. They took this policy for two purposes. 1) To decrease forcedness of anti criticism of white house. 2) To make force on Yahya to do the political solution. After China tour Kissinger modified the policy in favour of Pakistan. From July Kissinger was active to do all for Pakistan. Russia- India Plan was confirmed to state operation against West Pakistan within month of July 1971. Kissinger thought that India was ready to attack Pakistan in the mean time. He believed Russia convinced India to do the operation. Nixon was convinced by Kissinger's thinking.

The Russia - India treaty was signed when Kissinger finished his tour in Pecking. In this time USA were quite active to solve the problem politically. According to Nixon and Kissinger, the political solution means remaining undivided Pakistan by giving autonomy of East Pakistan. House of Representatives of foreign affairs committee decided to stop monitory and military help to Pakistan until stable condition comes in East Pakistan. This policy was known as Lam policy of United State. In the month of September and October, 1971 the US diplomats communicated with representatives of temporary government of Bangladesh in Calcutta and at first the Bengali leaders interested to sit in a meeting with them for searching political solution of this problems. But they changed their mind and said that discussion only can be happened by leading of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Since he was in jail, initiatives were not worked (41).

The relationships between Washington and Indian leadership were not friendly. Gandhi's biographer Joyakar said, Nixon had strong antipathy towards India" and he was "intense dislike" to Gandhi (42). Nixon believed that Indians were slippery and devious (21). Gandhi's desire was to use American influencing power to Pakistan to stop South Asian crisis. But Nixon and Kissinger thought Gandhi was planning to do war against Pakistan (42). Indira Gandhi, the Ex prime minister of India was made a Washington tour in 4 November 1971 and meet with Nixon in two meeting but their dialogues were not fruitful due to their mutual lack of trust (43). In first meeting, Nixon assured her that Sheikh Mujib will not be killed (28) and Yahya should agree to sit with Bengali leaders. Kissinger thought Gandhi will not be interested for war against Pakistan by seeing Success of US policy. Nixon gave some proposal to Gandhi like withdrawn the troops from India and East Pakistan Boarder and asked time limit to fix the problems. Gandhi did not response to Nixon's proposal she just listened without comments (44). Nixon wanted to avoid the issue partly and Gandhi also understood the interest of US president. She met with Nixon in second meeting on 5 November and she need to wait about forty five minutes to meet with The US president. Gandhi and Nixon both did not have interest to discuss about the East Pakistan crisis because they predicted the result of those meeting going to make zero. Gandhi was questioning Nixon about US involvement in Vietnam War and reconciling with China. That was an unpleasant meeting for both leaders. Without progress and any outstanding results the meeting was finished (45).

The Pakistan air force attacked north and west air force of India. Nixon administration strongly took part by the side of Pakistan after starting India -Pakistan war. Josef Sisco said on press conference in 4 December that India was the responsible for the boarder war. India denied all US proposals to avoid the war. Nixon asked to Kissinger to help Pakistan economically, with arms and morally. This is known by Tilt Policy. The US government stopped \$87.6 million economic help for India on 6 December 1971. The US ambassador of United Nations George W. Bush Senior proposed cease fire and withdrawn the army from Pakistan and India. But Russia imposed the power of Veto against the proposal. In 12 December an emergency meeting was called and Nixon, Kissinger and general Heig were present in this meeting. They decided to send aircraft Carrier, USS

Enterprise to Bay of Bengal (28). Russian navy started to Bay of Bengal with two groups of ships with nuclear weapons. They trailed the US activities from Indian Ocean in the meantime (46). But this policy was failed due to surrender of Pakistan army in 16 December 1971.

VI. Conclusion

United States looked for own interest in Bangladesh crisis. If US took part in favour of Bangladesh the return from their investment would be nothing (47). Kissinger wrote in his White House Years, "There was no question of "saving" East Pakistan" (48). As a part of US interest US choose tilt policy to Pakistan as a media to China and Muslim countries of Middle East. To take china in part of US side Nixon tried to balancing power of Soviet Russia. United States policy was not worked as like as the US government wanted. The administration tried to say Nixon was always influenced by neutrality. US authority did not express dissatisfaction in mass people killing operation called operation Searchlight in 25 March, 1971 and the journalist Anderson proved that the US policy was completely in favour of Pakistan by the leaked papers named Anderson Papers. United States took steps to solve the crisis by keeping undivided Pakistan and settle down the problem according to election of 1970. But Bengali leaders were not willing to sit with US representative in absent of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. This step was failed. The US policy was against the humanity. America showed the lack of moral and humanitarian concern. Yahya ordered to kill three million of Bengali in 25 March genocide in East Pakistan. US supported them by military aid and economic help. About 10,00,000 people were took shelter in India. The own people of US protest against their policy. The US aid was not sufficient for Bengali refugee India. The involvement of India added a new direction to the war. The US policy did make happy neither Pakistan nor India. The relationship was deteriorated between USA and India. US decision to send USS enterprise for helping Pakistan was proved wrong because without taking part in war Nixon called back the USS enterprise.

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