

INDIA'S DECISIVE INTERVENTION: EFFECTIVENESS OF ITS
ASSISTANCE DURING THE LIBERATION
WAR OF BANGLADESH-1971

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE
Military History

by

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M.D.S., Bangladesh University of Professionals, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2014

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
2015

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 12-06-2015		2. REPORT TYPE Master's Thesis		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) AUG 2014 – JUN 2015	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE India's Decisive Intervention: Effectiveness of its Assistance during the Liberation War of Bangladesh-1971				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Major Mohammad Kamrul Hasan				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301				8. PERFORMING ORG REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT The Liberation War of Bangladesh-1971 is the biggest event in the history of Bangladesh. The courage and tenacity displayed by Bangladeshi forces act as beacon of revitalizing Bangladeshi spirit in building a cohesive and prosperous society. However, this is not the end. As we talk about the Liberation War of Bangladesh-1971, it was not a war for Bangladeshis only. India was also intricately involved right from the beginning. India helped Bangladesh by providing safe sanctuaries for Bangladeshi forces, logistic supply, and above all, sheltered approximately 10 million refugees for 9 months. Bangladeshi forces fought against Pakistani forces for eight long months and were successful in depleting it significantly. Finally, it intervened the war directly by sending four Corps inside Bangladesh. India's direct involvement achieved a lightning victory in 13 days for the allied forces and gave birth to a new nation– Bangladesh. This research explores the effectiveness of India's assistance in the Liberation War of Bangladesh-1971. This also identifies that India's direct involvement was decisive in drawing a quick conclusion and creating a new nation.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Liberation War of Bangladesh-1971, India's Assistance, Alliance, Contributions of Bangladesh Forces					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT (U)	b. ABSTRACT (U)	c. THIS PAGE (U)			19b. PHONE NUMBER (include area code)
			(U)	96	

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)
Prescribed by ANSI Std. Z39.18

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

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ABSTRACT

INDIA'S DECISIVE INTERVENTION: EFFECTIVENESS OF ITS ASSISTANCE DURING THE LIBERATION WAR OF BANGLADESH-1971, by Major Mohammad Kamrul Hasan, 96 pages.

The Liberation War of Bangladesh-1971 is the biggest event in the history of Bangladesh. The courage and tenacity displayed by Bangladeshi forces act as beacon of revitalizing Bangladeshi spirit in building a cohesive and prosperous society. However, this is not the end.

As we talk about the Liberation War of Bangladesh-1971, it was not a war for Bangladeshis only. India was also intricately involved right from the beginning. India helped Bangladesh by providing safe sanctuaries for Bangladeshi forces, logistic supply, and above all, sheltered approximately 10 million refugees for 9 months. Bangladeshi forces fought against Pakistani forces for eight long months and were successful in depleting it significantly. Finally, it intervened the war directly by sending four Corps inside Bangladesh. India's direct involvement achieved a lightning victory in 13 days for the allied forces and gave birth to a new nation—Bangladesh.

This research explores the effectiveness of India's assistance in the Liberation War of Bangladesh-1971. This also identifies that India's direct involvement was decisive in drawing a quick conclusion and creating a new nation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

At the very outset, I would like to convey my deepest gratitude to my committee who took insurmountable pains to provide guidance, and read through my paper as well as providing valuable inputs throughout the process. At this point, I am indebted to Dr. Terry L. Beckenbaugh who had been my constant source of inspiration and motivation. I am equally grateful to LTC Eyster and LTC Oh for their valuable opinions during the entire period of my thesis. Guidance and assistance from my colleagues in Bangladesh also provided me with valuable direction. All the staffs of Combine Arms Research Library were extremely helpful in finding different documents and books. Not only that, they provided a useful link in coordinating with other libraries for finding useful texts. My special thanks to Ms. Venita Krueger for her all out assistance throughout the process. Finally, and most importantly, my wife Khadija Khaleq Anny and daughter Areebah Eshal had to endure much of the hardship as I was away for most of the time for conducting my research. I will remain ever grateful to them.

At last, I am grateful to Almighty Allah who provided me the wisdom and patience to go through this arduous process.

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ACRONYMS

AL	Awami League
BD	Bangladesh
EBR	East Bengal Regiment
EPR	East Pakistan Rifles
LOE	Line of Effort
UN	United Nations
U.S.	United States

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Bangladesh, formerly East Pakistan, achieved its independence in 1971 after a nine-month long war.¹ At that time Pakistan was consisted of two wings—East and West Pakistan. The war started with a crackdown by the West Pakistani military on the civilians of East Pakistan on March 26, 1971. This really started the Liberation War of Bangladesh. While atrocities continued, millions of civilians fled as refugees to India, and Bangladeshis started a guerrilla war against the West Pakistani military. They received financial aid, safe sanctuaries and training in Indian Territory. However, at the start of the war, neither guerrilla forces nor regular forces were organized to wage substantial resistance against the trained military units of West Pakistan. Gradually, both regular and guerrilla forces started to work cohesively. Fighting for eight months, Bangladeshi forces significantly attritted Pakistani military and its resources. At that point, Indian forces directly intervened the war on December 3, 1971. India's assistance brought a lightning victory for the Allied Forces as well as the independence of Bangladesh. From this perspective, it is hypothesized that Indian forces' involvement was decisive to Bangladeshi victory in the Liberation War-1971 and without them it was nearly impossible to achieve independence. But could Bangladeshi forces with Indian aid and sanctuary have won independence?

¹ Ahmed Abdullah Jamal, "Mukti Bahini and Liberation War of Bangladesh," *Asian Affairs* 30 (December 2008): 6.

Bangladeshi forces used a sophisticated form of insurgent warfare in their fight for independence from Pakistan: Fortified Compound Warfare. Fortified Compound Warfare consists of an invulnerable conventional force that has a sanctuary where it can go to escape the counterinsurgent conventional forces, and works in concert with an unconventional—guerrilla—force and has aid from a major power that cannot be stopped by the counterinsurgent forces.² Bangladesh during its Liberation War fulfilled the conditions described for Fortified Compound Warfare. There was a conventional component in the form of the Bangladeshi units that revolted against the Pakistani army at the brutal treatment meted out to their own countrymen, and then there was the Mukti Bahini, a force that consisted of some members of the regular military along with many civilians who acted as guerrillas. This mixture of conventional and unconventional forces forced the Pakistani military into hard economy of force decisions, as to whether or not to pursue Bangladeshi conventional forces to annihilate them—which proved impossible due to India’s willingness to give shelter and sanctuary to the Bangladeshi military—or disperse to try and destroy the Mukti Bahini. Neither option proved workable for Pakistani Army that was willing to use brutality, but did not have the means or resources necessary to entirely subjugate a hostile and aroused population thanks to the Pakistani government’s actions that sparked the Liberation War. Bangladeshi forces could not forcibly eject Pakistani forces from Bangladesh, but neither could Pakistani forces destroy the embryonic Bangladeshi Army. This set up a stalemate that the Pakistanis

² Thomas M. Huber, “Napoleon in Spain and Naples; Fortified Compound Warfare,” in *Compound Warfare: That Fatal Knot*, ed. Thomas M. Huber (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College Press, 2002), 99, accessed 15 May 2015, http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/army/compound_warfare_cgsc.pdf.

could not militarily win, but provided the will of the people supported the war effort, it did not have to lose. Since civilian populations not threatened with annihilation tend to not support a stalemated war indefinitely, this calculus of stalemate would eventually have worked in Bangladesh's favor.

As Bangladeshi forces started to fight the war, they eventually identified Pakistani forces' center of gravity—Dhaka. Although Bangladesh fought long eight months, they were not able to get close to the center of gravity. Their fighting was confined within bordering areas, for which they had safe sanctuaries inside India. As time went on, they were able to liberate important geographical features close to the Indian border. By the end of November 1971, Bangladeshi forces secured enough spaces inside Bangladesh for follow on forces to resume offensive and, finally, defeat Pakistani forces defending Dhaka bowl. Ironically, Bangladeshi forces' neither had the capability nor resources to continue offensive and reach Dhaka. At this time, Indian forces direct involvement brought a sigh of relief for Bangladesh. Indian forces' direct intervention was so decisive that it took only 13 days to attack the center of gravity—Dhaka-and liberate Bangladesh. Despite of the fact that India finally intervened the Liberation War of Bangladesh on December 3, 1971, its close ties with Bangladesh developed over a period of time. Conversely, Pakistan decided to brutally suppress Bangladeshis' nascent nationalism, and thus estranged all its people. To understand the dynamics of relationships between Bangladesh, Pakistan as well as India, one must go back to the formation of Pakistan and India in 1947.

As the British Empire crumbled in the immediate aftermath of World War II, there was great unrest in the crown jewel of the British Empire: India. In 1947, both India

and Pakistan gained independence from British colonial rule. Religion played a vital role in deciding that there must be two states, but also drawing the boundaries of the two states. The differences that prevailed between India and the formerly united Pakistan were also embedded within the core of the two parts of Pakistan in 1947. The differences between India and Pakistan resulted from a complex set of factors deriving from history, religion, race, ethnicity, Kashmir, and other territorial disputes.³ These disputes between East and West Pakistan were built into the unified Pakistani state and thus caused friction from Pakistan's creation.⁴ Though Pakistan was created on the basis of religious affinity despite a vast geographical distance of 1,200 miles between the nations two wings, from the onset, both sections of Pakistan were unable to attain a truly unified nationhood. Of all the provinces that constituted Pakistan, it was East Pakistan that gave the most solid support to Muhammad Ali Jinnah⁵ in his struggle for the establishment of a separate Muslim state in the Indian sub-continent. Yet within a very short period of time, the Bangladeshis began to have second thoughts.⁶

³ Kuldip Nayar, *Distant Neighbors* (Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1972); quoted in Onkar Marwah, "India's Military Intervention in East Pakistan, 1971-1972," *Modern Asian Studies* 13, no. 4 (1979): 549.

⁴ G. W. Choudhury, *The Last Days of United Pakistan* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1975); Edward S. Mason, Robert Dorfman, and Stephen A. Margolin, *Conflict in East Pakistan—Background and Prospects* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Mimeograph, April 1971); quoted in Onkar Marwah, "India's Military Intervention in East Pakistan, 1971-1972," *Modern Asian Studies* 13, no. 4 (1979): 550.

⁵ Muhammad Ali Jinnah was the founder of Pakistan and served as the first governor general of Pakistan from its independence till his death.

⁶ G. W. Choudhury, "Bangladesh: Why It Happened," *Royal Institute of International Affairs* 1944 48, no. 2 (April 1972): 242.

Although Bangladeshis were the majority group in Pakistan and spoke the Bengali language, Jinnah announced in 1952 that Urdu was the state language of Pakistan. Thus, for the first time, East Pakistan understood the futility of a religion-based Pakistan. Hundreds of students and civilians refused to accept Jinnah's verdict and protested. As a result, a Bengali-language movement started in the streets and many students were killed when the West Pakistani government ordered police to open fire on unarmed protestors. Thus the seeds of Bangladesh's Liberation War were planted. Not only this, the Pakistani General Assembly election results fueled Bangladeshi anger and resentment and increased tensions to new highs.

West Pakistan's inept governance and refusal to abide by the results of the 1970 general election that swept the East Pakistani opposition party, the Awami League, into power strained relations between the two wings of Pakistan to a breaking point. The Awami League (AL), a political party in East Pakistan, won a landslide victory in the 1970 general election under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. But Yahya Khan, the President of Pakistan, postponed the meeting of the national assembly. As a result, the AL could not form a government. However, Mujib was the *de facto* ruler in East Pakistan while Yahya was the *de jure* President.⁷ Failing to resolve the deadlock between the East and West Pakistani leaders, Yahya finally opted for maintaining the unity of the two wings of Pakistan under his control through force. He instructed Lieutenant General Tikka Khan, military governor and chief military administrator of East Pakistan, to fully

⁷ Major General Lachhman Singh (ret'd), *Victory in Bangladesh* (Dehra Dun, India: Natraj Publishers, 1981), 18.

restore the authority of his government.⁸ The repressive actions of the Pakistani forces and indiscriminate use of tanks and planes against unarmed civilians terrified Bangladeshis, millions of whom fled across Indian border.⁹ The Pakistani Military chose to eliminate dissidents by massive, brutal force, which ultimately turned the civilian populace against the West Pakistani government and fueled the Liberation War of East Pakistan.¹⁰

For East Pakistan, the war started as a spontaneous resistance against repressive actions by Pakistani forces, but soon assumed the character of an organized war of attrition for liberating Bangladesh.¹¹ To fight against 90,000 well-armed Pakistani troops, there were 9,000 members of the East Pakistan Rifles (EPR), a border patrol army, 3,000 men from East Bengal Regiment (EBR), and 24,000 policemen of East Pakistan, units formed overwhelmingly of East Pakistanis who turned against the West Pakistani military government.¹² On April 17, 1971, elected representatives of the General Assembly from East Pakistan formed the war-cabinet; and Bangladesh declared itself a sovereign democratic republic.¹³ Colonel (later General) M.A. G. Osmani was appointed as the commander-in-chief for the Bangladeshi forces. He raised regular brigades to fight

⁸ Ibid., 19.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Jamal, "Mukti Bahini and Liberation War of Bangladesh," 6.

¹² Stephen M. Gill, *The Discovery of Bangladesh* (Wiltshire, UK: The Uffington Press, 1982), 61.

¹³ Ibid., 62.

along with irregular forces. It was estimated that 70,000 guerrillas fought Bangladesh's liberation.¹⁴ Both regular and irregular forces continued fighting against the Pakistani forces, and controlled a large part of the countryside by the end of November 1971.¹⁵ The Indian Army intervened formally on December 3, 1971 and events rapidly spun out of the Pakistani government and military's control. India formally recognized Bangladesh's statehood on December 6, 1971, and Pakistan surrendered to the combined Indo-Bangladesh forces ten days later.¹⁶ Although, India covertly supported Bangladesh's embryonic government and armed forces from the very beginning of the war, the direct intervention of the Indian army facilitated victory within a short period of time.

India initially seemed unprepared for the West Pakistani government and military's actions in East Pakistan at the start of the Liberation War. The Indian Army was unable to start offensive operations in East Pakistan, even had the government declared war on Pakistan at the beginning of the West Pakistani crackdown. The Indian government opted to wait for events to unfold before undertaking major operations.¹⁷ Pakistan had very few troops in East Pakistan, and they were already involved in serious fighting with the EBR and EPR.¹⁸ Pakistani small units were deployed all over Bangladesh in a frantic bid to stamp out dissent and firmly subdue its rebellious provinces. Therefore, it was difficult for Pakistan to concentrate and organize these units

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Marwah, "India's Military Intervention in East Pakistan, 1971-1972," 551.

¹⁷ Singh, *Victory in Bangladesh*, 43.

¹⁸ Ibid.

for a conventional war. Besides, India had no intention of intervening militarily in East Pakistan during the initial months of the crackdown, but from May 1971 onwards, it was clear that India might have to use force to ensure the return of several million East Pakistani refugees.¹⁹ India also feared that the longer the war dragged on, the brutal nature of the West Pakistani military's operations against the Bangladeshis might lead to a very long, destructive guerrilla war. In such a scenario, political leadership might switch from the Awami League to more radical groups. This was not an option the Indian government wanted or desired, but it hoped that international pressure might force the Pakistani government to some kind of accommodation with the Bangladeshis.²⁰

India's hopes for an international settlement to the crisis in Bangladesh fell victim to Cold War international diplomacy. Pakistan's calculated massacre of the Bangladeshis shook the economic-political structure of India.²¹ India waited for months for the international community to come up with any feasible solution. Both the United States (U.S.) and China sided with Pakistani rulers regarding atrocities as an internal matter of the country. The U.N. also restricted its operations to humanitarian work.²² Frustrated with international inaction, India began aiding Bangladeshis in their struggle with Pakistan. India's direct military intervention brought the Bangladesh Liberation War to a stunningly fast end with Pakistan's surrender and Bangladesh's undisputed independence. In Bangladesh, Bangladeshi forces that fought in liberation war are lauded for being

¹⁹ Ibid., 44.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Gill, *The Discovery of Bangladesh*, 76.

²² Ibid., 77.

instrumental in liberating the country.²³ However, the Indian military's direct intervention pushed the Pakistani government and military over the precipice. There's no question that India's participation resulted in the nearly immediate surrender of Pakistan. But without that direct intervention, would Bangladesh have won its independence?

Research Question

The purpose of this study is to determine whether direct Indian military intervention was necessary for Bangladesh to achieve its independence in the Bangladesh Independence War of 1971. To analyze the aforementioned problem, the research will address the following primary question: Could Bangladesh have achieved its independence without the direct military intervention of Indian forces during the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971? Two secondary questions are:

1. What actions did the West Pakistani-dominated government take to East Pakistanis that made the latter ripe for rebellion?
2. What role did Bangladeshi forces, both regular and irregular, play in helping Bangladesh to achieve its independence?

Definitions of Terms

Allied Forces: While Bangladeshi forces fought the Liberation War for nearly eight months from March 26, 1971. Indian forces joined the war from December 3, 1971. The term "Allied Forces" refers to both Bangladeshi and Indian forces.

Allied Offensive: Allied offensive refers to the operations conducted by both Indian and Bangladeshi forces (regular and irregular).

²³ Jamal, "Mukti Bahini and Liberation War of Bangladesh," 6.

Awami League: It is one of the two main political parties of Bangladesh. It was founded in 1949 in the province of East Bengal. It was established as an option to raise the voice of the oppressed people of East Pakistan. Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani played a key role in the establishment the party.²⁴

Bangladeshi: The term “Bangladeshi” refers to the people of East Pakistan. In this paper, the term Bangladeshi is used to refer East Pakistani people before independence of Bangladesh as well as Bangladeshi people after independence in 1971.

East Pakistan: It refers to present-day Bangladesh.

Freedom Fighters: Freedom fighters is the English translation of Mukti Bahini. It refers to Bangladeshi regular soldiers, guerrillas and also civilians who operated against the Pakistani forces.

Irregular Force: It refers to both Mukti Bahini and Freedom Fighters. For ease of understanding, in this paper, Freedom Fighters, Mukti Bahini or Irregular forces indicate the same.

Joint Operations: The term joint operations are used to determine operations conducted by Bangladeshi Army, Navy, and Air elements as well as its irregular forces.

Mukti Bahini: Mukti Bahini comprised of Bangladeshi regular forces and civilians, and it operated as an effective guerrilla force to keep the Pakistani forces dispersed during the Bangladesh Liberation War.²⁵

²⁴ Marcus Franda, *Bangladesh The First Decade* (New Delhi, India: South Asian Publishers, 1982), 12.

²⁵ Gill, *The Discovery of Bangladesh*, 62.

Regular Force: Regular forces were the conventional forces that were raised during the Liberation War in 1971. There were three regular brigades—Z Force, S Force, and K Force. Each brigade was composed of two—three battalions. Prior to the start of the Liberation War, the bulk of the troops were part of the regular Pakistani Army.²⁶

West Pakistan: It refers to present-day Pakistan.

Limitations

The biggest limitation to the study is the recent nature of the events. Many participants on both sides of the conflict are still living, and relevant government documents from the three countries involved focused on in the study are still classified and this is an unclassified examination of the Bangladesh War of Liberation. Furthermore, gaining access to Top Secret or even FOUO documents generated by the Pakistani government and military and the Indian government and military is next to impossible. This will hamper the author's context and make it more difficult to ascertain the motivations of the governments and militaries involved.

Significance of the Study

The current military environment features many unconventional conflicts. While most are not on the scale of Bangladesh's uprising against Pakistan, an examination of whether Bangladesh could have achieved independence without direct Indian military involvement will prove fruitful for officers wishing to study Fortified Compound Warfare and how it might function in a modern environment. Historian Thomas Huber in his

²⁶ Khan Md Salahuddin, "Liberation War Bangladesh" (Masters in Defense Studies, Bangladesh University of Professionals, 2000), 59.

examination of the Peninsular War in Spain during the Napoleonic period and the role of the Spanish conventional and guerrilla forces and their cooperation with British forces under the Duke of Wellington, defined Fortified Compound Warfare:

These methods included, notably, establishing a safe haven for his [Wellington's] army and cultivating the advantages of alliance between the technologically advanced major power he represented and the insurgent indigenous power. Adding the elements of safe haven and major power alliance to his compound warfare system in effect made this a very powerful 'fortified' compound warfare system.²⁷

The Bangladeshi forces conducted a classic Fortified Compound Warfare-based insurgency. There was a conventional force that consisted of the elements of Pakistani Army that were raised in East Pakistan, immediately revolted against the West Pakistani military at the start of the military crackdown against Bangladeshi dissidents. Then, there were the Mukti Bahini, a guerrilla force that kept the West Pakistani military elements from concentrating to destroy the conventional Bangladesh forces. These two elements had a safe haven across the border in India, and were given tremendous aid in the form of money, supplies and munitions to conduct the insurgency. India became one of the first countries to recognize Bangladeshi independence. India's contributions were certainly important, but would the outcome be different if the Pakistanis did not draw India directly into the conflict?

Thus, it will be necessary to study and reevaluate the contribution of the Indian and Bangladeshi forces separately. That is going to build a solid foundation of understanding the respective forces' capabilities and limitations. This will also strengthen the unconventional warfare doctrine of the Bangladesh Army and contribute to the

²⁷ Huber, "Napoleon in Spain and Naples," 99.

national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bangladesh. An in-depth analysis will also bolster policy makers of both the countries to work on common platform meeting all bilateral interests.

Historiography

The purpose of a historiography essay is to review the scholarship related to Liberation War of Bangladesh to identify the relationship of India and Bangladesh. As the thesis clearly focuses on identifying the background of Liberation War of Bangladesh *vis-à-vis* the Indian perspective in 1971 and the Indian intervention during the conflict of 1971, a number of books, articles, journals, and different historical documents were studied. As such, this part of research aims at taking a holistic look on different documents and to endeavor to bring out relevant ideas pertaining to the topic. It reviews scholarship followed by the researcher's comments. This will enable identifying areas of analysis that need further analysis or were not examined into in the previous analyses.

The Bangladesh Liberation war is understandably looked upon with pride in Bangladesh and India, and as a national embarrassment in Pakistan. As such, the scholarship by Indian writers focused more on the contribution of the Indian Armed Forces along with the nation's humanitarian support for the millions of Bangladeshi refugees that provided food, clothing and shelter while India also allowed the Bangladeshi irregular forces bases of operation on Indian Territory. However, Bangladeshi writers often took a contrarian standpoint that supports their contention that the Bangladeshi Freedom Fighters were ultimately responsible for winning the country's independence, thus giving short-shrift to India's substantial contributions.

Stephen M. Gill, in his book *The Discovery of Bangladesh*, provides a narrative account of Bangladesh's birth. He explains the chief causes of the Liberation War of 1971, vividly identifies important personalities, and most importantly, identifies the role of world powers giving emphasis on India's role during that period. His book deals with the Liberation War in three distinct phases. While the first part is a historical survey of the emergence of the new nation; the second part is about the geography and demography of Bangladesh; and the third part is a chronology of important dates of events of Liberation War. The writer identifies the partition of India in 1947 as the root of the conflict between Bangladesh and Pakistan. Keeping what became Bangladesh as a part of Pakistan was opposed by Muslim League leader Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy during 1947. He also mentioned that the two wings of Pakistan were split not only geographically, but in nearly everything except religion. Though Pakistan was created on the assumption that Muslims would receive better treatment by their own co-religionists this illusion was dispelled when the leaders of West Pakistan started exploiting and killing the Muslims of East Pakistan. He identifies that, on March 25, 1971 when the Pakistani Military launched its sudden attack on the civilians of East Pakistan, there were only 9,000 members of East Bengal Rifles against 90,000 troops of West Pakistan. As such, all the Bangladeshis fled to India to get weapons. He estimates that a total of 70,000 guerrillas fought for the liberation of Bangladesh. Besides, India supported Mukti Bahini to the point of allowing them to establish bases on Indian soil. Even, on April 17, 1971, the elected representatives from East Pakistan got together near the Indian border to form a government, and the Bangladeshi war-cabinet. Soon after that, the cabinet moved its office to Calcutta, India. However, at the later stages of the war, India intervened

physically, which Pakistan political and military leaders did not envision in the initial days of war. The writer concluded that Bangladesh's will of the people were so strong that no power on earth was able to crush that.²⁸

Another perspective of the Bangladesh Liberation War is Charles Peter O'Donnell's *Bangladesh: Biography of a Muslim Nation*. In chapters five, six, and seven the writer clearly narrates the Bangladeshis' struggle for autonomy, the chronology of different events that led to the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971, and the creation of an independent nation. Most specifically, in chapter seven, O'Donnell examines the tensions between India and Pakistan in 1971, the requirement of Indian intervention, and finally, the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971. He writes that during the initial days of Pakistani atrocities, approximately nine million refugees took shelter in India—posing a great threat to Indian economy. However, India urged world leaders to act decisively on the issue. A global failure to provide help for the refugees and solve the problem led India to intervene in East Pakistan. Besides, the U.S. and China urged Pakistan to seek a reasonable solution in regards to East Pakistan. Indian intervention took only 13 days to execute an elaborate pincer movement on Dhaka that forced Pakistani surrender. India also recognized Bangladesh as an independent nation on December 6, 1971. This allowed India to legitimize its action as Bangladesh's problem was no longer considered as a Pakistani domestic issue.

Another portrayal of the Liberation War 1971 is Craig Baxter's *Bangladesh: A New Nation in an Old Setting*, 1984. The writer identifies that the nature of Pakistan with its two wings in 1947 was a flawed construction. Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, and the

²⁸ Gill, *The Discovery of Bangladesh*.

Muslim League, had worked for a state where Muslims could frame their own destiny away from the Hindu majority of India. Though there was significantly greater support for an Islamic state in West Pakistan than in East Pakistan, the East wing was set up as a secular state. Baxter describes the tensions that led to the outbreak of violence, and the start of the Liberation War. The writer points out that India aided the freedom fighters of East Pakistan, and formally intervened directly in late November. After a long period of Pakistan's attempt at the forced coercion of the East Pakistanis, the West Pakistanis attacked India, bringing the latter formally into the conflict. On December 16, 1971 Dhaka fell to the invading Indians. Though the writer gives due credit to the Indian Armed Forces for liberating Bangladesh, he does not detail the contribution of the Bangladeshi freedom fighters or the Bangladeshi regular forces.²⁹

Another book that examines the studies full circle of events that started on the March 25, 1971 is S. N. Rampal's *India Wins the War*. *India Wins the War* gives a detail chronology of events of the Liberation War of Bangladesh. Rampal was an Indian Air Force officer who participated in the conflict. He brings out the glaring disparities between East and West Pakistan in terms of social, economic, and political measures. Rampal argues that Pakistan's relations with India were never cordial. The lessons learnt in 1947 and 1948 and 1965 shaped the two country's long rivalry. As such, the harsh treatment of East Pakistan by West Pakistan touched India from the very initial days of the India-Pakistan separation. He points out that the birth of Pakistan as a Muslim nation with two equal wings was a myth because the equality never existed. As such, East

²⁹ Charles Peter O'Donnell, *Bangladesh: Biography of a Muslim Nation* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984).

Pakistan was a place where basic human values were ignored, where the might of the foolish ruled over the right of the noble and the peace loving. India, being geographically very close to East Pakistan, observed this up close and personal. After the war started with the brutal West Pakistani crackdown, approximately 10 million Bangladeshi refugees took shelter in Indian states. As such, India appealed to the world for a peaceful solution to the problem, so that ten million refugees could return to their homes. Additionally, India faced tremendous economic problem as it had to provide food and shelter for this vast flood of refugees. Meanwhile, India provided support for the Bangladeshi freedom fighters to step up their activities inside East Pakistan. Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi traveled to many countries hoping to broker an international solution to the crisis. After Colonel M. A. G. Osmani became the Commander-in-Chief of Bangladesh, he issued an appeal for arms aid and other help from many countries of the world. On April 10, 1971, the proclamation of independence was released and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman received his appointment as the president of the Republic. The Mukti Bahini continued with its operations from the beginning of the war till the last week of November. India provided much needed shelter, food, and assisted with the other kind of aids to the freedom fighters. Thus, India adopted an indirect approach to the war. Diplomacy was another important catalyst from India's side. The writer also identified that the Mukti Bahini liberated some pockets of Bangladesh as it carried out extensive guerrilla activities. However, the Pakistani Air Force's mishandled attack of the Indian airfields on the evening of December 3, 1971 closed all avenues of negotiation between India and Pakistan. As such, India entered the war on December 3, 1971. However, the Mukti Bahini remained a strong force that provided combat intelligence, conducted wide-

area security operations, sabotage activities, and also participated in combined operations with Indian forces. Though the writer specifically discusses the aerial war in detail, he credited both the Indian and Bangladeshi Forces for defeating the Pakistani military, but the title of *India Wins the War* demonstrates rather forcefully where the author's sympathies lay.³⁰

From the aforementioned review of the literature, it can be concluded that India's intervention in the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971 was decisive. Was it necessary for Bangladeshi independence? No one argues that India's role was irrelevant, and that India's military and humanitarian support of the fledgling Bangladeshi government and military were crucial, not to mention the sanctuary given to both by India. However, the Mukti Bahini fought for eight months prior to direct Indian intervention and Pakistan was no closer to subjugating Bangladesh than it was the day the crackdown began. Though Indian assistance hastened the victory of Bangladesh, it will be worth analyzing of the potentialities of the Mukti Bahini to liberate Bangladesh. The guerrilla fighting, which kept Pakistani forces dispersed and vulnerable to Bangladeshi, and eventually Indian, conventional forces makes having a better understanding of the capabilities of the Mukti Bahini crucial.

Research Methodology

The primary research question is: Could Bangladesh have achieved its independence without the direct intervention of Indian forces during the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971? Secondary questions are what actions did the West Pakistani-

³⁰ S. N. Rampal, *India Wins the War* (New Delhi, India: Army Educational Stores, 1971).

dominated government take to East Pakistan that made the latter ripe for rebellion? What role did Bangladeshi forces, both regular and irregular, play in helping Bangladesh to achieve its independence? The responses of the secondary questions will address the primary question. Based on the secondary questions, the research is divided into three parts: the background of the Liberation War; the role of Bangladeshi forces; and the Indian forces' involvement. The thesis' structure reflects the research questions. Thus, the first part of the thesis will focus on the background. Second part will discuss on the role of the Bangladeshi forces. And finally, the third part will focus on the Indian forces' involvement in achieving victory.

Analysis of Background of Liberation War

Chapter 2 of this paper will focus on the background and Indian perspective during the Liberation War 1971. The background of the Liberation War will be analyzed from a study of primary and secondary sources available since the separation of India in 1947. This part will construct the framework on which Indian involvement *vis-à-vis* Bangladeshi forces' contribution will be analyzed in subsequent chapters. While chapter 2 paints the background of the Liberation War, this will also focus on India and East Pakistan relationship prior to the commencement of the Liberation War. This will allow readers to understand factors that brought India to the brink of a war with neighboring Pakistan.

Analysis of Bangladeshi Forces' Involvement in the 1971 War

Chapter 3 of this paper will discuss Bangladeshi forces' involvement during the Liberation War. It will identify the contribution of forces and progress they made before

the involvement of Indian forces. This will be done following an operational framework. While doing so, firstly, researcher identifies Bangladeshi forces' aim, military end state, and center of gravity. The author constructs an operational approach (figure 1) based on personal understanding through an examination of the primary and secondary sources. Secondly, chapter 3 illustrates detail account of Bangladeshi forces' contribution in achieving its end state following the operational approach. Finally, the chapter concludes with an analysis between contributions of Bangladeshi forces *vis-à-vis* military end state. By this, this chapter identifies Indian forces relevance for direct intervention with a view to liberating Bangladesh.

Analysis of the Indian Armed Forces' Involvement in the 1971 War

The Indian forces' contribution will be analyzed in chapter 4. Indian forces capitalized on previous successes made by Bangladeshi forces for eight long months. As such, their role will also be analyzed following the similar method of chapter 3. This chapter starts with an operational framework where Indian forces' aim, military end state, and center of gravity are identified. Later, it enumerates Indian forces' operations following the operational approach (figure 1) identified in chapter 1. Finally, the chapter analyses Indian forces' involvement in the war with a view to identifying its decisiveness.

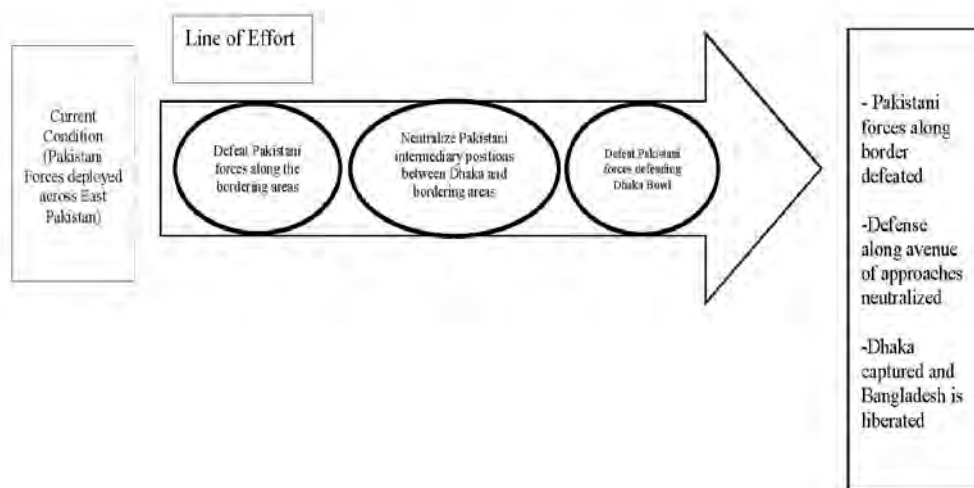


Figure 1. Operational Approach

Source: Created by author.

CHAPTER 2
BACKGROUND OF LIBERATION WAR
AND THE INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

The Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971 was the culmination of a 25-year tumultuous relationship between East and West Pakistan. The British failed to keep a united India as riots started between the Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims in 1946. The riots were so widespread that on August 14, 1947 India was portioned into two separate states. Thus partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 divided British India into two independent countries of India and Pakistan.³¹ Pakistan was composed of two wings—East and West Pakistan. The two wings were united emotionally, but the marriage of the two wings was artificial as they had little in common other than religion.³² Their speech, thought, food habits, dress, living and generally speaking, their respective way of life, were totally different.³³ These differences, in course of time, gave rise to a tumultuous relationship that failed to keep the two wings united. The flawed relationship ended in a brutal war in 1971. As such, it is imperative to learn the background of the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971. This chapter will examine also the relationship between the East Pakistan and India. That will be a solid platform to analyze direct Indian involvement in the war. Among the major events under consideration are the Bengali

³¹ Singh, *Victory in Bangladesh*, 1.

³² Rampal, *India Wins the War*, 2.

³³ Ibid.

language movement in 1952; the provincial elections of 1954; Ayub Khan's declaration of martial law in 1958; the constitution of Pakistan of 1962; the Awami League's Six-Point Program of 1966; and the election of 1970.

Language Movement–1952

After the partition of India into two states, India and Pakistan on August 14, 1947, Muhammad Ali Jinnah of the Muslim League became the first governor general of Pakistan. As Pakistan was composed of two wings—East Pakistan and West Pakistan; the wings were separated by 1200 miles of land and 2500 miles of sea. Fifty million West Pakistanis consisted of four major ethnic groups: Punjabis, Pakhtuns, Sindhis, and Baluchis.³⁴ Each of these groups was distinctly separate by their way of life and language as well as culture. On the other hand, 75 million Bangladeshis comprised 95 percent of the population of East Pakistan.³⁵ Bangladeshis had one language and were proud of their ancestry; their language and literature were older than Urdu, the national language of West Pakistan, used by minority.³⁶ Yet Mohammad Ali Jinnah stated in a public speech in March 1948 that Urdu would remain the state language of Pakistan. This infuriated all the non-Urdu speaking people of East Pakistan. On February 21, 1952, students and other civilians came out in the streets in protest but the police cracked down on the unarmed civilians. The event affected the debate in the constitution assembly,

³⁴ Gill, *The Discovery of Bangladesh*, 22.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

which labored slowly toward a constitution for Pakistan.³⁷ The anger of the Bangladeshis eventually had an effect on the language section of the document.³⁸ The assembly decided in September 1954 that “Urdu and Bengali and such other languages as may be declared” shall be “the official languages of the Republic.”³⁹ For East Pakistan, the language movement was the first stepping stone to independence. Moreover, it was for the first time that both the wings felt huge differences amongst them. They also realized that Pakistan was formed around the idea of a fanatic religious state, where the only thing common between the various people, was Islam.⁴⁰ This deep understanding of the East Pakistanis was reflected during the provincial election held in 1954.

Provincial Elections–1954

The first provincial elections were held in East Pakistan in 1954. In this election, Suhrawardy’s newly organized Awami League (Peoples’ League) allied with Fazlul Huq’s Peasants’ and Workers’ Party and a coalition of other Bangladeshi-dominated parties to form the United Front. In this election, the people of East Pakistan voted unilaterally for the alliance. As a result, the United Front had the maximum number of seats. Nurul Amin’s Muslim League, the dominant party in West Pakistan, won just 10 seats in East Pakistan; and thus, the Urdu-speaking people in East Pakistan’s ability to dictate policy was essentially finished. Fazlul Huq also became the chief minister of East

³⁷ Craig Baxter, *Bangladesh: A New Nation in an Old Setting* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984), 31.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Rampal, *India Wins the War*, 1.

Pakistan. The fine showing of the United Front convinced the politicians, civil servants, and the military at the center that they had to constrain Bangladeshi nationalism.⁴¹

Soon after his ascension to the power as chief minister, a labor strike at a jute mill near Dhaka, the future capital of Bangladesh, paved the way for West Pakistan to undermine the United Front. In the labor strike, approximately 400 workers were killed and 1,000 more wounded. West Pakistan blamed the United Front for its inability to handle the situation. In the aftermath, chief minister Fazlul Huq was ousted for treasonable acts stemming from his inability to control the riot. Fearing that the United Front victory and the disorders at the jute mill would lead to provincial autonomy, the West Pakistan also ousted the entire East Pakistan cabinet and, under a provision of the British act of 1935 installed Iskander Mirza, then Defense Minister, as Governor of the North-West Frontier Province.⁴²

Despite the fact that the cabinet and chief minister could not stay in power in East Pakistan for long, the leadership of West Pakistan was well aware of the growing restiveness of the East Pakistani population. Nevertheless, the government of West Pakistan, although was aware of the growing Bangladeshi nationalism and anger, did little to assuage or even acknowledge that West Pakistan continued its policies that economically and politically kept East Pakistan as almost a colony of West Pakistan. As such the central government's intervention in East Pakistan's affairs remained a common phenomenon. The stern treatment by the West Pakistani government of East Pakistan made the civilian populace of the latter feel more like an occupied territory rather than a

⁴¹ O'Donnell, *Bangladesh: Biography of a Muslim Nation*, 50.

⁴² Ibid.

co-equal element of the same national entity. The seeds of resentment against the West Pakistani government sown in 1947 were growing deep roots.

Ayub Khan's Declaration of Martial Law–1958

In 1957 and 1958 governments rose and fell in Dhaka as the result of both instability in the assembly alignments and of intervention by the central government.⁴³ As a sequel to the uncertainty, the deputy speaker of the house was killed in a riot. In such a dilapidated condition, president Mirza abrogated the constitution and declared martial law. General Ayub Khan remained as the chief martial law administrator. Calling this regime “the revolution” Ayub proclaimed its purposes “to clean up the mess” and “to attack the problems of smuggling, black- marketing and corruption.”⁴⁴ The pattern that led to the eventual demand for Bangladeshi independence had been largely entrenched during the parliamentary period.⁴⁵ Though Ayub Khan introduced a system of basic democracy⁴⁶—reducing the role of political leaders; he could not remain away for long from a political structure. Soon after his initiation of a new regime, he became the head of the Muslim League. In 1962 Ayub Khan promulgated the new constitution of Pakistan, primarily giving enormous power to the president. Unfortunately, nothing addressed the concerns of East Bengal; and as such, anger, resentment and Bengali nationalism continued to grow.

⁴³ Baxter, *Bangladesh: A New Nation in an Old Setting*, 43.

⁴⁴ O'Donnell, *Bangladesh: Biography of a Muslim Nation*, 56.

⁴⁵ Baxter, *Bangladesh: A New Nation in an Old Setting*, 43.

⁴⁶ Ayub Khan's basic democracy was just an eye-wash to general mass. By installing basic democracy, he wiped out traditional ideas of a democratic society.

With a view to legitimizing his regime, Ayub Khan announced a national election in 1965. Though he won the election, he failed to capitalize his gains for the long term. He cracked down hard on the Bangladeshi opposition in East Pakistan, throwing many of the United Front leadership in jail. These actions merely scratched the surface of Ayub Khan's troubled leadership. Among them were the unwise decision to go to war with India in 1965 over Kashmir; the agreement with the Indians at Tashkent in 1966; allegations of corruption that touched Ayub's family; and a decline in the once robust health of the soldier-statesman.⁴⁷ On March 25, 1969, Ayub resigned the presidency to General Agha Muhammad Yahaya Khan, who proclaimed martial law.⁴⁸

Awami League's Six-Point Program–1966

Before the resignation of Ayub Khan, several events took place in the political spectrum. Among those, the Awami League's Six-Point Program was viewed as a foundational document in Bangladesh's struggle for independence. This was not an instant memorandum developed within a short time. Rather, it was an outcome of Bangladeshi grievances accumulated for a long time. The initiation of the Six-Point Program started as a sequel to several events. However, the election of 1965 played an important role in formulating the program.

In preparation for the national elections, Bangladeshi political opponents of President Ayub Khan in January 1965, organized the Combined Opposition Party (COP), made up of such antagonistic groups as the Awami League (led by Sheikh Mujibur

⁴⁷ Baxter, *Bangladesh: A New Nation in an Old Setting*, 44.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Rahman, Suhrawardy's successor), the council Muslim League (a splinter group of the Muslim League headed by Kwaja Najimuddin), Jaamat-i-islam and Nizam-i-islam, both religiously oriented parties.⁴⁹ COP planned to nominate a single candidate against Ayub Khan, who was nominated by the Muslim League of West Pakistan. The single candidate COP found to be suitable to fight against Ayub Khan was Fatima Jinnah, the sister of Muhammad Ali Jinnah. However, as the election held and President Ayub Khan received 63 percent of the votes cast in January 1965 election.⁵⁰ Jinnah got only 37 percent of the votes cast.⁵¹ Ayub Khan was reelected as the president, but his support in East Pakistan remained narrower than in West Pakistan. Contrary to the pledges he made during the election campaign, after the election, Khan sent 40 of the opposition leaders, and many of their party workers, to jail. This proved to be a signal that he would continue formulating inequitable economic policies and programs for the two wings of Pakistan.

The worst effect of these policies was observed in per capita income. Disparities in per capita income between East and West Pakistan angered Bangladeshi politicians.⁵² No significant increase in per capita income in East Pakistan occurred between 1947 and 1965, while income in West Pakistan increased substantially during the same period.⁵³

⁴⁹ The elections of 1965 are discussed by Ayub in *Friends Not Masters*, 232-239. Khalid B. Sayeed, 1965—"An Epoch-making Year in Pakistan: General Elections and War with India," *Asian Survey* 6, no. 2 (February 1966), 76-88; cited in O'Donnell, *Bangladesh: Biography of a Muslim Nation*, 64.

⁵⁰ O'Donnell, *Bangladesh: Biography of a Muslim Nation*, 65.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 68.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

The differences were also vivid in other sectors—military, civil service, and so on. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman with his Awami League used this uneven economic development in the respective wings of Pakistan to garner support among Bangladeshis. Khan’s policies resulted in the Awami League’s Six-Point Program.

In early 1966, at a meeting of the opposition parties in Lahore following the Tashkent Agreement,⁵⁴ which ended the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965, Mujibur Rahman had set forth the Awami League policy in a six-point statement.⁵⁵ These points were aimed at making an election platform; however, intrinsically, these focused more to an autonomous body in Pakistan. They were:

1. A federal government parliamentary in form would be established, with free and regular elections;
2. The federal government would control only foreign affairs and defense;
3. A separate currency or separate fiscal accounts would control the movement of capital from east to west;
4. All power of taxation would rest at the provincial level, with the federal government subsisting on grants;

⁵⁴ Tashkent agreement was the agreement signed between India’s Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and Pakistan’s President Ayb Khan to end India–Pakistan war of 1965. The war started in August and lasted for 17 days. However, the agreement was mediated by Soviet Union and it was signed in Tashkent. As per the agreement, both countries reached to a decision of pulling back troops to pre August 5, 1965 positions.

⁵⁵ Baxter, *Bangladesh: A New Nation in an Old Setting*, 45.

5. each federating unit would be free to enter into foreign trade agreements on its own and control its own earnings of foreign exchange; and (6) each unit would raise its own militia.⁵⁶

The Six-Point Program was a clear manifestation of an autonomous body in East Pakistan controlling its own fate. President Ayub Khan responded angrily to the Six-Point Program, charging that the document amounted to a demand for complete independence.⁵⁷ From the view point of those who believed in the necessity of centralized power, he was correct, but refused to negotiate with the Bangladeshis for any kind of agreement.⁵⁸

In the meantime, Ayub Khan gradually lost control of the country. The more he attempted to quash dissent and protest with increasingly violent means, the more Bangladeshis were driven toward a more vigorous form of Bengali nationalism. It was a cycle that could not continue indefinitely. Riots broke out in the beginning of 1969. He tried to defuse the situation initially through intense policing and later by use of extreme force. Nothing worked; as a result, in a broadcast to the nation on March 26, 1969, President Ayub Khan resigned, admitting that his government had lost control of the country.⁵⁹ He also abrogated the 1962 constitution and dissolved the national and provincial assemblies.⁶⁰ Ayub Khan believed that if election was held, East Pakistan

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ O'Donnell, *Bangladesh: Biography of a Muslim Nation*, 71.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 78.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

would get the autonomy it asked for through the Six-Point Program. If the Six-Point Program was implemented, it was only a matter of time until East Pakistan became an independent country. Maintaining that it was up to the army to prevent the country from collapsing into chaos; he named General Yahya Khan, commander in chief of the army, as martial law administrator.⁶¹ However, Yahya Khan refused to consider the Six Point program as a basis for government; on the contrary, he referred to himself as a temporary leader whose task was to conduct free elections for a new constituent assembly, which would draw up new constitution.⁶²

National Election–1970

As Yahya Khan received the Six-Point Program from the Awami League, he opined that he was not in a position to implement them. He reiterated his prime task was to hold a general election in 1970 and hand over power at that point. However, in the December 1970 elections, the Awami League won 160 of 162 seats from East Pakistan. Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples' Party was successful in the west, winning 81 of 83 seats.⁶³ Yahya Khan opened talks with both the leaders but failed to reach a consensus, and thus failed to hand over the power to an elected government.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Baxter, *Bangladesh: A New Nation in an Old Setting*, 45.

⁶³ Ibid., 46.

India's Perspective

There is no doubt that the creation of an independent Bangladesh was in India's interest for many reasons.⁶⁴ Firstly, the Indo-Pakistan War in 1965 over Kashmir was one of the tipping points in this regard. India spent a huge amount of money to keep armed forces at a constant state of readiness along the border of her hostile neighbor.⁶⁵ A warm relationship with an independent Bangladesh would reduce this big expenditure. Secondly, India also wanted to start trading with East Pakistan for mutual benefit. But due to several political deadlocks, it was not a foregone conclusion. Thirdly, Pakistani rulers created a problem for India by training and militarily equipping the Naga rebels⁶⁶ of Assam (northeastern part of India), who claimed a portion of India to establish an independent Nagaland.⁶⁷

Apart from these issues, millions of East Pakistanis had religious, cultural, and linguistic ties with India. West Pakistani rulers also demeaned the Hindus of East Pakistan; whereas India was a Hindu-dominated country. For all these reasons and more, India preferred an independent Bangladesh as a tonic to all these problems. The Indian government expected that if Bangladesh became independent, it would cooperate with India in a much wider form.

⁶⁴ Gill, *The Discovery of Bangladesh*, 75.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Naga rebellion is an ethnical conflict in the northeastern part of India, and Nagas fought for an independent state.

⁶⁷ Gill, *The Discovery of Bangladesh*, 75.

CHAPTER 3

CONTRIBUTION OF BANGLADESH FORCES

IN THE LIBERATION WAR

Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the background of the Liberation War and also the Indian perspective prior to the commencement of the war. It brings up a vivid illustration of events starting from the creation of Pakistan since 1947. This gives a firm base to examine the war in this chapter. As such, this chapter will make an introspective analysis of the contribution of Bangladeshi Forces—both regular and irregular.

As the war started on March 25, 1971, different events close to the date bear paramount significance. Afterwards, the roles of the Bangladeshi forces will be discussed in detail. While doing so, it will also keep the international actors' role in purview. Keeping these in perspective, this chapter initially discusses immediate issues prior to the Liberation War. Later, it illustrates operational framework of Bangladeshi forces. Description of events follows the operational framework. Lastly, it analyses Bangladeshi forces contribution through the operational construct developed in the initial part of the chapter.

Road to War

In the general election held on December 7, 1970, the Awami League of East Pakistan won a landslide victory. The results of the election are shown in the following table.

Table 1. Election Results of 1970

Serial	Party Name	East / West Pakistan	Seats (300)
1.	Awami League of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman	East Pakistan	160
2.	Pakistan Peoples' Party of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto	West Pakistan	81
3.	Independents and All Other Parties		59

Source: S. N. Rampal, *India Wins the War* (New Delhi, India: Army Educational Stores, 1971), 37.

From the election it was clear to the president of Pakistan, Yahya Khan that the East Pakistan Wing accumulated significant support of the Bangladeshi people to implement the constitution. However, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto appeared as a barrier to the Awami League to form the government. He demanded that his party achieved the majority in West Pakistan; and as such, should be allowed to form part of the government in the west wing. However, Yahya Khan insisted that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman should compromise with Bhutto before the national assembly could be called.⁶⁸ Instead of handing over power, Yahya Khan called for several meetings with Bhutto and Sheikh Mujib.⁶⁹ At last Yahya announced that the national assembly would meet on March 3, 1971. Bhutto announced that he would boycott the assembly if his demands were not met. Sensing a tense confrontation, Yahya Khan postponed the national assembly indefinitely.

⁶⁸ Rampal, *India Wins the War*, 38.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 39.

In reaction to this decision, Sheikh Mujib demanded an immediate handover of power to the elected party. He also hinted that if the Awami League's demands were not met, Bangladeshis would steel themselves for a fight to put an end to the colonial treatment to which all Bangladeshis were subjected for the last 23 years.⁷⁰ He also called for a country-wide strike and civil disobedience. The non-cooperation movement continued from March 7, 1971. During this tumultuous period, to quell an angry East Pakistan, Yahya Khan came to Dhaka on March 15, 1971. While Yahya Khan spoke of a dialogue on one hand, on the other West Pakistani troops began to pour into East Pakistan on a massive scale.⁷¹ Most of them came in civilian dress, and the airport of Dhaka was kept under strict control. On March 25, 1971, Yahya Khan, Bhutto and other members left for West Pakistan without giving any message or warning to the Awami League leaders.⁷² The West Pakistani military launched its sudden attack on March 25, 1971 at 11 p.m.⁷³ it used automatic rifles, automatic weapons, bayonets and tanks.⁷⁴ Yahya Khan appointed General Tikka Khan as the overall commander, and he was given 48 hours to suppress Bangladeshi nationalist movement.⁷⁵ Within 34 hours, approximately 10,000 unarmed civilians were killed. The primary targets were the students, teachers, and

⁷⁰ Ibid., 40.

⁷¹ Ibid., 41.

⁷² Gill, *The Discovery of Bangladesh*, 58.

⁷³ Ibid., 60.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 61.

scholars who were considered dangerous to Pakistan's solidarity and unity, but the West Pakistani Military was not overly selective in those targeted for killing.⁷⁶

To fight against 90,000 well-armed Pakistani troops, there were 9,000 members of the East Bengal Rifles, a border-patrol army that could frighten only petty smugglers.⁷⁷ They were joined by 3,000 men from the East Bengal Regiment (Bangladeshi personnel serving in Pakistan Military), and 24,000 policemen.⁷⁸ After the initial onslaught, all these people joined together to begin initial resistance. When news of killings and atrocities spread, over 10 million people took refuge to India. In the meantime, an underground radio station declared the freedom of Bangladesh.⁷⁹ On March 27, 1971 it was printed in several newspapers. Instead of asking for autonomy, it now turned to be a struggle for independence, independence of the region—now called Bangladesh.

Operational Framework of Bangladeshi Forces

On March 25, 1971, Yahya Khan returned to West Pakistan giving order to Pakistani forces to “clean up” East Pakistan.⁸⁰ With this, the army and later the air force,

⁷⁶ Archer Blood, “Document 6,” 31 March 1971, George Washington University's National Security Archive, accessed 21 May 2015, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB79/BE666.pdf>. Blood was the U. S. Consul in Dhaka, and his report makes it clear that there are hundreds if not more killings and atrocities going on day and night, especially at the University of Dhaka (although it was spelled Dacca in 1971).

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Rampal, *India Wins the War*, 45.

⁸⁰ Singh, *Victory in Bangladesh*, 42.

entered into a region of terror to annihilate the unarmed civilians of East Pakistan.⁸¹ Right at that moment, there was no government of East Pakistan. To make the situation worse, no regular or irregular forces were available to Bangladeshi leaders. However, Bangladesh government was formed on April 10, 1971.⁸² At the same time, Colonel M.A. G. Osmani was made the commander-in-chief of Bangladeshi forces.⁸³ He started organizing his forces-both regular and irregular. Even before he started issuing his orders, he appealed to the world for arms aid to fight Pakistani forces. Later, he issued his operational plan to his subordinates. In his own words, “War will go on, may be for generations, as we are determined in our mission.”⁸⁴ Bangladeshi forces focused on causing strains on Pakistani forces economically through guerilla forces’ activities. Bangladeshi forces’ center of gravity was its strong national will to defeat Pakistani forces. Besides, Bangladeshi forces’ also identified Pakistani center of gravity which was Pakistani forces deployed in East Pakistan. Besides, their military end state was to capture Dhaka and defeat all Pakistani forces deployed in East Pakistan. Keeping these in perspective, Bangladeshi forces conducted their operations for eight long months. Following paragraphs illustrate Bangladeshi forces’ operations prior to commitment of Indian forces.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 45.

⁸³ Ibid., 46.

⁸⁴ Singh, *Victory in Bangladesh*, 46.

Initial Resistance

The initial resistance of Bangladeshi officers and soldiers in the immediate aftermath of the Pakistani Army crackdown came via by shelling or by disarming officers and soldiers of different cantonments. In the south-western part of the country, the Chittagong Area, West Pakistanis started to disarm the Bangladeshis. Bangladeshis initially had no intention of fighting, but the Pakistani army's rough disarmament process agitated many Bangladeshis in uniform. This gave rise to growing resistance and anger among people. In the Chittagong area, there were two units—one Bangladeshi regular unit, the 8th East Bengal Regiment (an infantry unit) and another, the East Pakistan Rifles Regiment. Both the units revolted under the leadership of Major Ziaur Rahman and Major Rafiqul Islam as the Pakistan Army started killing the civilians and disarming military personnel on March 26, 1971. In central part of the country, Comilla Area, the 4th East Bengal Regiment (an infantry unit) was located. Except the Commanding Officer of the unit, all other officers and soldiers were Bangladeshis. On the night of March 27, 1971 all soldiers and officers arrested the Commanding Officer and Second in Command. Major Khaled Mosharrof took over command of the unit.⁸⁵ They went out from the cantonment and blocked all the approaches to the south eastern part of the country. Captain Ainuddin was given task of defending Brahmanbaria, an eastern town of East Pakistan with his company while Major Shafat Jamil moved with his company to

⁸⁵ Tanbir Alam, "Final Phase of Liberation War of Bangladesh" (MDS. Diss., Defense Services Command and Staff College, Dhaka, 2000), 6.

raid Comilla airfield.⁸⁶ In Dhaka, the 2nd East Bengal (an infantry unit) revolted on the night of March 27, 1971. Under leadership of Major K M Shafiullah, the unit moved to Mymensingh area, a northern town of East Pakistan. They established several blocking positions to forestall the advance of Pakistani military towards the north. In north Saidpur, three East Pakistan Rifle Regiments and the 3rd East Bengal Regiment (an infantry unit) were located. The 3rd East Bengal came under Pakistani shelling on the night of March 30, 1971. Immediately it dispersed from the base and located itself in the Phulbari area under the leadership of Captain Anwar Hossain. In south western part of East Pakistan was 1st East Bengal Regiment (an infantry unit). The unit came under fire on the night of March 30, 1971. The unit got dispersed and fought its way out of cantonment under the leadership of Major Hafiz.⁸⁷

In this way, all units located in East Pakistan revolted on March 26, 1971 or were forced out of cantonment either by shelling or combat by Pakistani military. Since it was the start of war, there was no organized chain of command or command and control structure to coordinate all activities of Bangladeshi units. It persisted until April 17, 1971 when the government of sovereign Bangladesh was formed.

Formation of the Provisional Government and the Mukti Bahini

Bangladesh declared its independence on April 10, 1971, retro-active to March 26, closely followed by the formation of a provisional government on April 17, 1971 in

⁸⁶ Brigadier Immamuzzaman, "A Synopsis of the Bangladesh War of Liberation," *Bangladesh Army Journal* (December 1992): 27, quoted in Alam, "Final Phase of Liberation War of Bangladesh," 6.

⁸⁷ Alam, "Final Phase of Liberation War of Bangladesh," 8.

Mujibnagar, Kustia, a town on the Indian border.⁸⁸ Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was appointed as the President of the republic and Syed Nazrul Islam as the Vice President.⁸⁹ Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was arrested by the Pakistan Military on the night of March 26, 1971 and was taken as prisoner to West Pakistan. In addition, following appointments were made on April 11, 1971.

Table 2. Formation of Bangladesh Forces

S/No	Appointment	Name
1.	Prime Minister	Mr Tajuddin Ahmed
2.	Commander-in-Chief	Colonel M A G Osmani
3.	Commander Sylhet/ Comilla	Major Khaled Mosharrof
4.	Commander Chittagong/ Noakhali	Major Ziaur Rahman
5.	Commander Mymensingh	Major Shafiullah
6.	Commander Kustia/ Jessore	Major Osman
7.	Commander Faridpur/ Barisal	Major Jalil
8.	Commander North Rajshahi Area	Major Ahmad
9.	Commander Saidpur	Major Nazrul
10.	Commander Rangpur	Major Nawajesh

Source: S. N. Rampal, *India Wins the War* (New Delhi, India: Army Educational Stores, 1971), 45.

⁸⁸ Rampal, *India Wins the War*, 45.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

The assembly acted as an ad hoc war cabinet until the Liberation War ended.⁹⁰ As a functional entity, the war cabinet moved its office temporarily to Calcutta, India. After a few months, the cabinet appealed to the Indian government for recognition and military aid; especially to aid Mukti Bahini. Besides, Mukti Bahini was organized with existing forces, which were dispersed in different parts of East Pakistan when Pakistani Military crackdown began on March 26, 1971. It was a hybrid force composed of the East Bengal Regiment, the East Bengal Rifles, police, Para-military forces and volunteers. Colonel Osmani, as the Commander-in-Chief appealed to all countries of the world to help with arms, ammunition and other assistance to fight the war. Though Bangladeshi forces operated with a more solid command and control structure, the fight was still difficult to coordinate. To operate in a more organized way, Colonel Osmani established his headquarters at Calcutta, India and divided the area of responsibility of the whole country into 11 sectors. The different sectors along with the commander are shown in the following table.

⁹⁰ Gill, *The Discovery of Bangladesh*, 62.

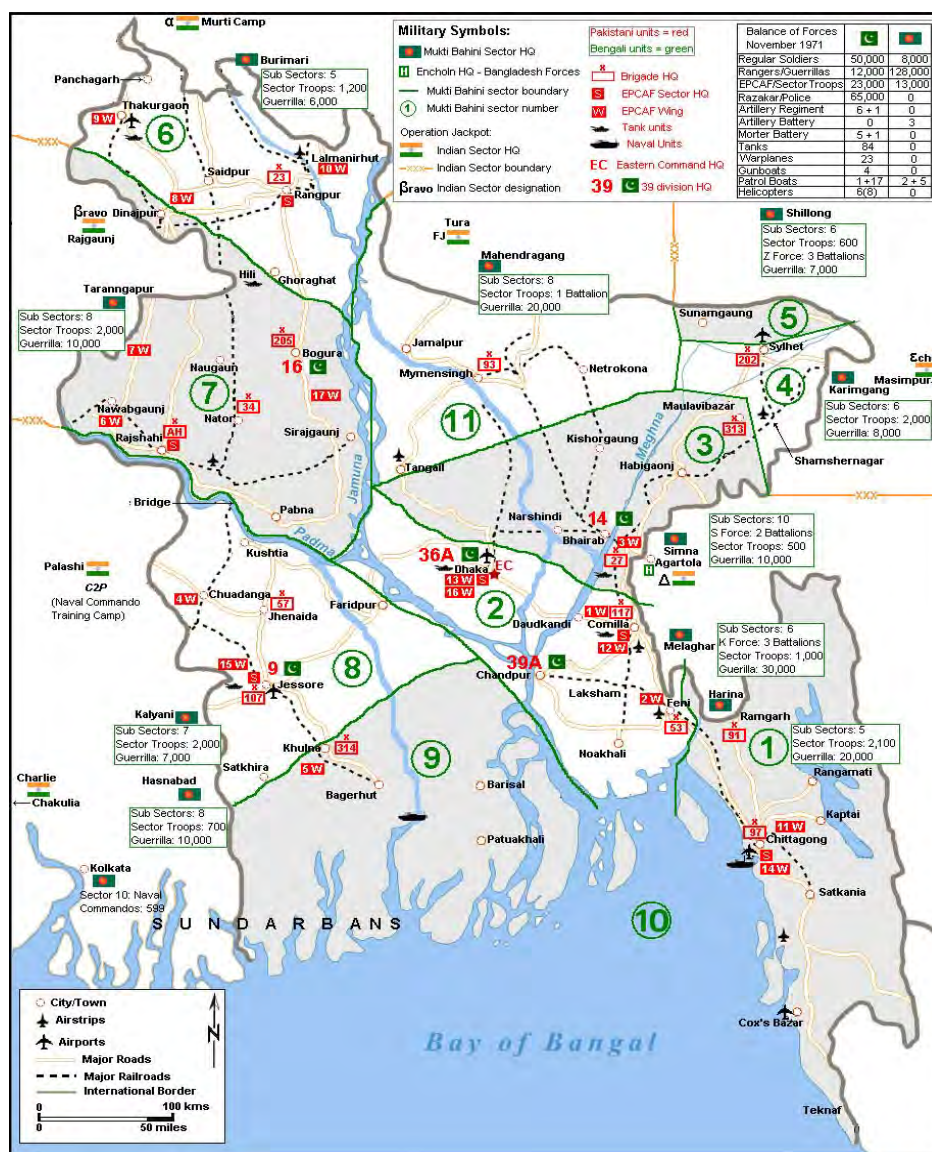
Table 3. Sectors of Bangladesh Liberation War		
Sector	Area	Sector Commander
1.	Chittagong District, Chittagong Hill Tracts, and the entire eastern area of Noakhali District on the bank of the river Muhuri.	Major Ziaur Rahman, later replaced by Major Rafiqul Islam
2.	Districts of Dhaka, Comilla, Faridpur, and part of Noakhali District.	Major Khaled Mosharraf, later replaced by Major ATM Haider
3.	Area between Churaman Kathi (near Sreemangal) and Sylhet in the north and Singerbil of Brahmanbaria in the south.	Major KM Shafiullah, later replaced by Major ANM Nuruzzaman
4.	Area from Habiganj District on the north to Kanaighat Police Station on the south along the 100 mile long border with India.	Major Chittarajan Datta, later replaced by Captain A Rab
5.	Area from Durgapur to Danki (Tamabil) of Sylhet District and the entire area up to the eastern borders of the district.	Major Mir Shawkat Ali
6.	Rangpur District and part of Dinajpur District.	Wing Commander M Khademul Bashar
7.	Rajshahi, Pabna, Bogra and part of Dinajpur District.	Major Nazmul Huq, later replaced by Subedar Major A Rab and Kazi Nuruzzaman

8.	In April 1971, the operational area of the sector comprised the districts of Kushtia, Jessore, Khulna, Barisal, Faridpur and Patuakhali. At the end of May, the sector was reconstituted and comprised the districts of Kuhstia, Jessore, Khulna, Satkhira and the northern part of Faridpur district.	Major Abu Osman Chowdhury, later replaced by Major MA Manzur
9.	Barisal, Patuakhali, and parts of the district of Khulna and Faridpur.	Major M A Jalil later replaced by Major MA Manzur and Major Joynal Abedin
10.	This sector was constituted with the naval commandos.	Indian commander MN Sumanta
11.	Mymensingh and Tangail.	Major M Abu Taher, later replaced by Squadron Leader Hamidullah

Source: Banglapedia, Sectors of the War of Liberation, S. M. Shirin, 2003.

Formation of Regular Forces

As time elapsed, it was felt that mere guerrilla tactics were not enough to end the war. In fact, Mukti Bahini executed disruption operations effectively, but was unable to hold grounds or even to secure large areas. Therefore, Colonel Osmani saw the necessity of raising the regular units. Initially, he decided to raise three regular brigades. Due to the lack of secure terrain inside the country, the brigades were raised in Indian Territory. With the headquarters of the brigades located in different parts of India, they continued to operate in exterior lines of operations aiming at depleting Pakistan military at all fronts.



Source: Google, Maps of Bangladesh, List of Sectors, accessed February 7, 2015, <https://www.google.com/search?q=map+of+bangladesh+with+sectors&newwindow=1&bm=isch&imgil>.

The first brigade was named as Z force by the name of its Commander Lieutenant Colonel Ziaur Rahman. It was raised in the Indian Territory, Teldaha of Meghalaya. The 1st, 3rd, and 8th East Bengal Regiments were integrated into this brigade. The brigade

was raised on July 7, 1971 and started operating in northern Bangladesh.⁹¹ It started its major operations when it attacked a Pakistani Army strong point in Mymensingh—an area located in north of Dhaka. Besides, on August 3, 1971 one of the units attacked the Nakshi BOP located at Sylhet area. By October 1971, Z force moved to Sylhet area and secured its position in north eastern part of Bangladesh.⁹²

The second regular brigade was formed in September and was named K Force after the name of its commander Lieutenant Colonel Khaled Mosharrof. The brigade was located in Melaghar near Agartala of India. Initially, the 4th, 9th and 10th East Bengal Regiments were under its command. This brigade was responsible for conducting operations in the eastern part of the country. The first major attack was launched on the Saldanadi railway station, which was held by the Pakistan military to keep their main supply route open. It was successful and Pakistani logistic supplies were seriously hampered towards its east and north-east defensive positions. Another major attack was launched on a Pakistani company position in Kashba area where Brigade Commander Mosharrof personally led the attack.⁹³ The Pakistani defeat at Kashba significantly lowered Pakistani morale. Though the brigade commander was injured in that battle, K Force started to surge its operational activities after this battle. K Force demonstrated its valor and courage in another significant battle, the Battle of Belonia Bulge. Belonia was key terrain that connected the southeastern part of the country with the rest. The battle started on November 11, 1971 where K Force inflicted a sharp defeat on the Pakistani

⁹¹ Alam, “Final Phase of Liberation War of Bangladesh,” 11.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., 12.

military, giving enemy forces an 80 percent casualty rate.⁹⁴ After the capture of Belonia, the major cities in the south-eastern areas were liberated from Pakistani control.

The 3rd brigade, named as S Force in honor of its commander Lieutenant Colonel K M Shafiullah, was raised at Hajamara of India opposite to Sylhet border on October 1, 1971. Initially two infantry battalions, the 2nd and 11th East Bengal, operated under its command. The most significant operation of this force was the attack on Mukundapur Pakistani border outpost on November 19, 1971.⁹⁵ The attack was successful while S Force captured 31 prisoners of war. It was a great shock to the military commanders of Pakistan.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 12.

⁹⁵ Ibid.



Figure 3. Different Areas of Battles and Engagements

Source: Researcher's construct.

Joint Operations

Until November 21, 1971, mostly Bangladeshi regular forces along with the Mukti Bahini operated in different parts of the country. Besides, there were few naval and air assets utilized to complement the war effort. However, on November 21, 1971 all the forces—Bangladesh Army, Navy, Air Force as well as the Mukti Bahini—launched their joint offensive against Pakistani military. Regular brigades were operating mostly on the north and eastern parts of country. Mukti Bahini was integrated with the regular units' operations; especially for launching disruption operation behind enemy lines. Bangladesh Navy had two ships—the *Padma* and the *Palash*. With these ships, they operated mostly in the Bay of Bengal to deter Pakistani ships coming with the supplies to Chittagong port.

The fledgling Bangladesh Air force also started its operations from an airfield located at Dimapur, India. Initially, the Indian Air Force gifted one helicopter, one twin otter plane and one DC-10 Dakota to start operations. All officers were ex-Pakistan Air Force pilots. As they started their operation in support of ground forces, many other officers joined soon. By the end of November, 1971, Bangladesh Air Force struck targets deep in to Bangladesh and gave close air support to ground operations.

Analysis of the Role of Bangladeshi Forces

As we analyze the role of Bangladeshi forces, it becomes clear that it withstood initial onslaught of Pakistani forces. Though Bangladeshi resistance started with only guerrilla forces operations, Bangladeshi regular brigades emerged within a short time. Surprisingly, Bangladeshi forces had a combination of all three services—army, navy, and air force. By the end of October, 1971, Bangladeshi forces conducted few successful

operations and defeated Pakistani forces along the border. Among these operations, the Battle of Belonia Bulge in southeastern sector and the Battle of Hilli in northwestern sector led to the defeat of Pakistani forces in those two areas and control of two major avenues of approach towards Dhaka. Few battles took place in northeastern and southeastern sectors. Among these, battle of Chatak and battle of Mukundapur are worth mentioning where Bangladeshi forces achieved success. In the north, Kamalpur was a strong Pakistani defense. Bangladeshi forces attacked it several times but of no avail. However, with the onset of Indian offensive, allied forces was able to bypass Kamalpur defense compelling Pakistani forces to surrender.

As we take a deep insight into Bangladeshi forces operations of eight months, they were mostly fighting close to border areas. It was also easy for them to have safe sanctuaries inside India and operate inside Bangladesh. Looking at the operational approach (figure 1) of allied forces, it is well felt that Bangladeshi forces were able to achieve success in gaining objectives close to the border. Not only conducting operations, they also gained substantial successes except few occasions. By achieving first objective, they created enough space for follow on forces to resume offensive. Unfortunately, this was the biggest slice of troops Bangladesh needed but they were seriously lacking resources at this point. As such, for follow on operations, they did not have any resources. Although both Bangladeshi regular and irregular forces were trying to capitalize success and push further, momentum of advance was slow and Pakistani forces were able to rapidly readjust their positions. Except procrastinating the war, it was not possible for Bangladeshi forces to achieve decisive victory against Pakistani forces. Fortunately, Bangladeshi forces were able to tie down large number of Pakistani troops

all over East Pakistan. Bangladeshi small units were deployed all over the province in a frantic bid to crush Pakistani forces.⁹⁶ It was not easy for Pakistan to assemble these units and organize them for conventional warfare.⁹⁷

While this was the happening inside East Pakistan, the UN Secretary General U Thant tried to settle the East Pakistan problem inside and outside the UN, but with little success.⁹⁸ As soon as Pakistan launched the war against India on December 3, 1971, the UN took a more vigorous approach to the problem.⁹⁹ While Soviet Union was supporting India, the U.S. and China stood by Pakistan. On December 5, 1971 Moscow vetoed a U.S. resolution urging the Security Council to call upon India and Pakistan to carry out a cease fire and military withdrawal.¹⁰⁰ The Russians exercised another veto within 24 hours when on December 7, 1971, the General Assembly voted 104 against 11 to call upon India and Pakistan to cease fire immediately and withdraw their forces to respective territories.¹⁰¹ While the UN was debating, the war on the ground was going in favor of India.¹⁰² In the meantime, U.S. dispatched a naval task forces led by the nuclear-powered carrier Enterprise from U.S. seventh fleet.¹⁰³ By the time the naval task force was close to

⁹⁶ Singh, *Victory in Bangladesh*, 43.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 29.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 30.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Chittagong port of East Pakistan, all Pakistani forces surrendered unconditionally. If the UN espoused cease fire would be in effect, Bangladeshis' hope for independence was not to be materialized.

Holistically speaking, Bangladeshi forces' selection of aim was clear but it took months to organize its regular as well as irregular forces. Besides, they were effective in causing enough casualties in rear areas conducting guerilla activities. This also led to demoralizing effect on Pakistani forces. Hence, direct impact of Bangladeshi forces' operations on Pakistanis tied down significant Pakistani military assets.¹⁰⁴ They kept the flame of struggle aglow and the Bangladeshi masses never gave up hope of eventual freedom.¹⁰⁵ Bangladeshi forces identified Pakistani forces' center of gravity as Pakistani forces deployed around "Dhaka Bowl," but defeating them required more troops and equipment which they were lacking. Thus they were also not able to achieve military end state. An introspective analysis finds that Bangladeshi forces were short of achieving its ends and, as such, needed India's assistance to retrieve them from the quagmire.

¹⁰⁴ Singh, *Victory in Bangladesh*, 62.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

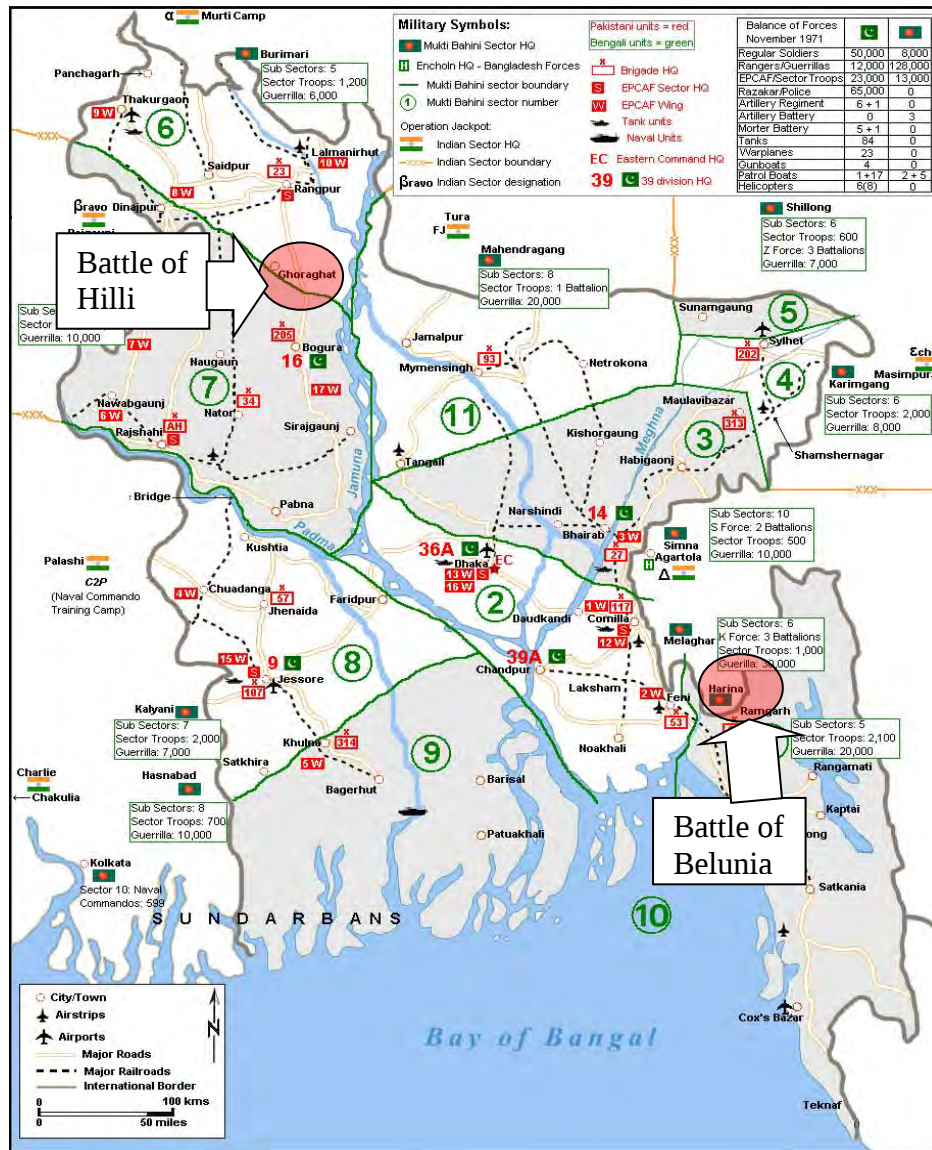


Figure 4. Map of Bangladesh with Sectors
(Major Battles fought by Bangladeshi Forces)

Source: Google, Maps of Bangladesh, List of Sectors, accessed February 7, 2015,
<https://www.google.com/search?q=map+of+bangladesh+with+sectors&newwindow=1&tbm=isch&imgil>

Views of International Community

As the joint offensive started, the war cabinet also started to launch their international campaign to gain support for the cause. The first overseas mission of the provisional government of Bangladesh, established in London in late August, directed the activities of Bangladeshis in Europe, the United States, and the United Nations.¹⁰⁶ Besides, a number of Pakistani diplomats of Bangladeshi origin resigned from their posts while working in foreign missions. The defections gave an international dimension to the depth of Bangladeshi efforts.¹⁰⁷

Through all these efforts, the international community was informed of Pakistani atrocities committed against Bangladeshis. However, the major powers of the world responded differently to this issue. This also had a deep-rooted perspective for all of them. Among them, the U.S. directly supported Pakistan from the very beginning of the crisis due to the Cold War. Pakistan was the member of SEATO (South-east Asian Treaty Organization) and CENTO (Central Treaty Organization) with U.S. in 1954 and 1955, respectively, against world communism.¹⁰⁸ As a result of all these agreements, Pakistan was in a very warm relationship with the U.S. Furthermore, the U.S. needed a reliable ally in South Asia. As relations with China deteriorated after the communist revolution in 1949, the U.S. had no other alternative but to rely mostly on Pakistan for dealing with matters in Asia, and in particular South Asia. Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger

¹⁰⁶ O'Donnell, *Bangladesh: Biography of a Muslim Nation*, 99.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Iqthyer Uddin Md Zahed, "An Analysis of U.S. Policy in the Liberation War of Bangladesh," *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 23, no. 2 (May-June 2013): 125.

played the most important role in formulating policies for President Richard Nixon's administration during 1970 and 1971. Kissinger presented three potential courses of action to Nixon with regard to the crisis of East Pakistan. Proposal Number One: Support Pakistan completely, including military action in East Pakistan taken by the Yahya government. Proposal Number Two: Postpone all economic and military aid to Pakistan. Proposal Number Three: Send aid for East Pakistan and India for victims and refugees.¹⁰⁹ Nixon adopted a course which was a combination of option one and three. He decided to take part in favor of West Pakistan and send humanitarian aid to East Pakistan and India as well.¹¹⁰

Though the Nixon administration preserved a pro-Pakistan policy, the U.S. politicians, especially a number of senators and members of congress criticized administration government policy on the East Pakistan issue.¹¹¹ Senator Edward Kennedy asked for U.S. Government to keep pressuring Pakistani government to stop the massacres, which were perpetrated by U.S. supplied weapons.¹¹² Ten senators appealed for sending aid to East Pakistan and forestalling the aids to West Pakistan.¹¹³ Amidst all critiques, U.S. finally requested that the Pakistani government pursue a peaceful solution

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston, 1979), 848-849, quoted in Zahed, "An Analysis of U.S. Policy in the Liberation War of Bangladesh," 125.

¹¹¹ J. Anderson, *The Anderson Papers with George Clifford* (New York: Random House, 1973), 205, quoted in Zahed, "An Analysis of U.S. Policy in the Liberation War of Bangladesh."

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., 125.

to the crisis on April 7, 1971. However, Josef Sisco, the Assistant Foreign Secretary of U.S., pulled an about-face and termed the crisis a Pakistani internal affair the following day.¹¹⁴ However, the then U.S. ambassador to India Kenneth Kitting disagreed with Josef and urged upon all international community to intervene for peace.¹¹⁵

Notwithstanding Kissinger's efforts to support Pakistan, the Russia-India treaty, signed in August 1971, when Kissinger completed his tour in Peking. This really deteriorated the relationship between Washington and Indian leadership. As such, when Indira Gandhi met with President Nixon on November 4, 1971 in Washington, she failed to reach to a negotiated agreement on East Pakistan issue. Even on November 5, 1971, both the leaders sat for a dialogue but had a preconceived idea that those meetings would prove unproductive and the agenda simply avoided East Pakistan issue. In this regard, Senator Edward Kennedy's visit to East Pakistan and his subsequent statement in the U.S. brought Americans closer to realities of the problem; as a result the U.S. Senate rejected the foreign bill of 2,900 million dollars to Pakistan.¹¹⁶

Analysis of India's Stance prior to Committing Forces in Close Combat

After the tragic events of March 25, 1971, Indian officials and civilians did not hide their feelings toward Bangladeshis.¹¹⁷ Though it was initially sympathetic, but soon

¹¹⁴ L. A. Nichter and R. A. Moss, *Pakistanat: A Journal of Pakistan Studies* 2(3) (2010), quoted in Zahed, "An Analysis of U.S. Policy in the Liberation War of Bangladesh," 125.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Rampal, *India Wins the War*, 58.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 95.

it turned into open *de facto* support for the Bangladeshis. Many Indians never reconciled to the existence of Pakistan, and welcomed the Bangladeshi revolt as evidence of the breakup of Pakistan and the return of “East Pakistan” to the bosom of India.¹¹⁸ Along with the civilians, different political parties raised their voices to extend moral and material support to Bangladeshis. On March 27, 1971, Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi described the killings in East Pakistan “as not merely the suppression of a movement but a meeting of unarmed people with tanks.”¹¹⁹

The sudden strife in East Pakistan posed serious problems as well as gainful opportunities for India.¹²⁰ It not only created a burden on the economy of India but also belched forth a firm belief of weakening Pakistan militarily. Separation of East Pakistan from the west wing would give India pre-eminence in the subcontinent and also seemed to offer an end to the periodic armed confrontations if Pakistan could be cut to size.¹²¹ It also offered the possibility of reducing interference by outside powers, who might abandon their policy of arming a weaker Pakistan to achieve borrowed military parity with India.¹²²

Basing on these perspectives, a friendly Bangladeshi government was to complement India strategically. Even Indian Parliament assured the people of East Paksitan on March 30, 1971 that “their struggle and sacrifice will receive the whole-

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Singh, *Victory in Bangladesh*, 25.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

hearted support and sympathy of the people of India.”¹²³ Not only that, although the refugees were welcomed on Indian soil at the beginning, the realities of daily life induced a mood of sullenness and resentment at personal hardship among dwellers in the border areas.¹²⁴ Prices of daily commodities went up, and feeding several million refugees was becoming a big problem for India. At this juncture, India tried to convince international community to help the refugees; but Pakistan denied entry of humanitarian aid agencies calling the situation as internal matter. Being unable to amass international support to help refugees who took shelter in India, it decided to help Bangladeshi guerillas as a solution to the problem. On July 20, 1971, Indian Minister of External Affairs Swaran Singh admitted in his budget speech that India was helping the Muktibahini, saying, “this Parliament had unanimously adopted a resolution pledging sympathy and support and we are pursuing that resolution in the best possible manner and we are doing everything possible to lend support to the freedom fighters.”¹²⁵

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 26.

CHAPTER 4

DIRECT INVOLVEMENT OF INDIA AND CREATION OF A NEW NATION

Introduction

In the previous chapter, contribution of Bangladeshi forces towards Bangladeshi independence has been described in detail. It is clear that Bangladeshi forces held their own areas against the Pakistani regular army for eight months. Not only that, they were successful in liberating crucial pieces of territory along India-Bangladesh border operating from safe sanctuaries in India. They constantly cut off Pakistani supply lines, forcing a crisis in Pakistani logistical chain. Meanwhile, India faced a serious refugee crisis in terms of food, water and financial back up with approximately 10 million Bangladeshis seeking refuge in India. At the same time, both India and Pakistani forces deployed facing each other across their borders. Repeated air space violations and border skirmishes dramatically increased tensions between the two rival countries. On December 3, 1971 the Pakistani Air Force attacked Indian air fields and India declared war against Pakistan. The Indian army deployed four corps for combating Pakistani forces in East Pakistan. Pakistani forces deployed three and a half divisions in East Pakistan along with a few naval vessels and eighteen fighter-bomber aircraft.¹²⁶ Pakistani forces were determined to defend the Dhaka Bowl¹²⁷ as they realized the loss of the

¹²⁶ Rampal, *India Wins the War*, 67.

¹²⁷ Geographically the capital of East Pakistan, Dhaka was surrounded by three major rivers-the Padma, the Meghna and the Jamuna. As defense of Dhaka meant defending along the major river, it was commonly referred as Dhaka Bowl defense.

Dhaka Bowl meant their defeat in East Pakistan. This chapter describes in detail the Indian offensive against Pakistani Forces in East Pakistan. While doing so, Indian forces' offensive is described from allied perspective as both Indian and Bangladeshi forces fought together when India directly intervened in the war. This chapter concludes with an analysis of Indian forces' contribution towards military end state. However, before the chronology of events, it is equally important to understand the opposing forces' plans in East Pakistan.

Pakistani Plan

As the struggle for independence of East Pakistanis played out on an increasingly global stage, Pakistan also was embroiled in a conventional, limited war with India. Lieutenant General Amir Abdullah Khan Niazi was made the commander of Pakistan forces in East Pakistan. He had few options defending East Pakistan in the wake of any Indian invasion. Firstly, he had the option of deploying along the borders and gradually withdrawing behind the major rivers to defend the Dhaka Bowl.¹²⁸ This involved dispersing his forces in wide areas, but this made any retreat vulnerable due to the Indian Air Force's air supremacy and Bangladeshi guerrilla activities at night. Secondly, Niazi had another option of concentrating on the defense of the Dhaka Bowl, which would determine the fate of East Pakistan.¹²⁹ However, it had its inherent disadvantages of losing large chunks of territories without fighting and encouraging guerrillas to conduct increased activities in the rear areas with revived morale. Thirdly, Niazi contemplated a

¹²⁸ Singh, *Victory in Bangladesh*, 38.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

fortress concept of fighting war. The fortress concept, which visualized that Pakistan would convert important border towns and communication centers into theater fortresses along the main axes of ingress from India and defend them till the last.¹³⁰ Each fortress would be self-sustaining with ammunition, food rations and petroleum. Niazi surmised that India would need a force several times larger to defeat and capture these fortresses.

On the basis of his assessment, Niazi opted for the fortress concept but with a mix of deployment along the periphery.¹³¹ General Hamid, Commander-in-Chief, Pakistan Army, visited Dhaka in September 1971 and discussed the plan with Niazi. As he went back to Pakistan, the General Headquarters of the Pakistan Army approved the plan. Although the plan was approved, timings of the operations did not favor Pakistani plans. It was winter in East Pakistan, and the ground was firm and dry. Overall, the terrain was good for tank maneuver and aerial action was possible without much hazard which was a definite advantage for Indian offensive.

Allied Plan

As Indian offensive plan integrated all Bangladeshi forces already operating in East Pakistan, the plan was referred as allied offensive plan. The Indian High Command struggled with two options to define its ultimate objectives in East Pakistan. First, Indian forces considered capturing Dhaka, the capital of East Pakistan, which would have liberated Bangladesh at the earliest and ensured the surrender of Pakistani forces.¹³² It

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid., 39.

¹³² Ibid., 44.

involved crossing all the major rivers and a race toward Dhaka. As Indian forces lacked adequate engineering resources, the possibility of failure was very high in this extremely risky course of action. Besides, the United Nations struggled to impose a cease fire at the earliest date possible. In such a situation, Indian forces might not be able to capture any significant objectives to trade as a bargaining chip. In addition, sufficient territory might not have been cleared to return Bangladeshi refugees.¹³³

Second, India thought of clearing territory up to the “river lines”¹³⁴ and surrounding the Dhaka Bowl for subsequent operations.¹³⁵ This option had the advantage of attaining concentration of force at decisive points. By following a peripheral and constrictor strategy, India could safely expect to achieve a breakthrough at a number of points and clear the areas up to the river lines.¹³⁶ At last, the Indian high command embarked on the second option of capturing territory up to the major rivers and gain significant land to accommodate refugees. Detail plans were formulated in Calcutta where the newly-formed Bangladesh Government representatives also participated. It was decided to launch the offensive through several sectors where Bangladeshi forces already operated. As such, the Indian Eastern Command decided to operate in concert with the

¹³³ Ibid., 45.

¹³⁴ River lines refers to the areas starting from India-Bangladesh border up to three major river—the Padma, the Meghna, and the Jamuna—surrounding the capital Dhaka.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

Bangladeshi forces to leverage their activities. The plan was war-gamed and was leveled as the Allied Forces offensive plan.¹³⁷

The Allied plan conceptualized the idea of bypassing all the Pakistani fortresses and race towards Dhaka. In this context, four major thrusts were to be developed by four Corps from four different directions. Operations in the northwestern sector would be conducted by XXXIII Corps under the command of Lieutenant General M. L. Thapan.¹³⁸ The main effort of this Corps would be 20th Mountain Division, while subsidiary efforts needed to be developed in the bordering areas and communication centers.¹³⁹ However, XXXIII Corps was tasked with capturing the area up to Bogra, west of the major river Jamuna. The newly-raised II Corps under Lieutenant General T. N. Raina was assigned to make a thrust into the Southwestern sector.¹⁴⁰ The II Corps' role was to clear an area up to the west of River Padma, which includes two major cities i.e.; Jessore and Khulna. The IV Corps deployed along the eastern side of East Pakistan. The majority of Bangladeshi forces combined with the IV Corps. All the three regular Bangladeshi brigades—S Force, K Force and Z Force—were grouped with IV Corps.

A secondary thrust was planned by the 101st Communication Zone with its elements of 95th Mountain Brigade and 167th Mountain Brigade to be developed from north. Since the Pakistanis had no tanks in the northern sector and were supported by one

¹³⁷ Singh, *Victory in Bangladesh*, 46.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 65.

¹³⁹ Khan, "Liberation War Bangladesh," 18.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 98.

light battery of artillery, the Indians also allotted limited resources for this sector.¹⁴¹

Major General Gurubax Singh Gill was responsible for this sector under the direct control of Army Commander.¹⁴² All the Corps were to advance to near Dhaka and liberate as much land as possible. However, in the event of new opportunities, contingency plans were prepared to capture Dhaka. Apart from all these, sector troops of Bangladeshi forces were integrated with the advancing Indian advancing to facilitate their intelligence, communication, and capture of objectives.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Singh, *Victory in Bangladesh*, 137.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 136.



Figure 5. Allied Forces Offensive Plan

Source: Wikimedia, “Bangladesh,” accessed March 31, 2015, http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b0/Bangladesh_1971_Liberation.jpg.

What brought India into the War?

Although each side had a plan prepared, war did not start until the pre-emptive attack by the Pakistani Air Force on Indian airfields on December 3, 1971.¹⁴⁴ Both the

¹⁴⁴ Rampal, *India Wins the War*, 61.

countries had a long history of martial tension ever since their founding in 1947. Pakistan benefitted from the Cold War as a U.S. partner in containing communism. The Pakistani military received significant military aid from the U.S. since its founding.¹⁴⁵ Surprisingly, it also received aid from China to contain India and from the Soviet Union to maintain the balance of power in the region.¹⁴⁶ With all this aid, Pakistan's military spent the vast majority of its considerable energies focused on the threat from India.¹⁴⁷ The rivalry continued till 1971 when President Yahya Khan responded to East Pakistan's demand for autonomy by imposing martial law, and in fact, began a Civil War on March 25, 1971.¹⁴⁸

Even before that, during the month of January, 1971, an Indian Airliner, a Fokker Friendship, on a scheduled flight from Srinagar to Jammu was hijacked by Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan and exploded in Lahore in the presence of high-ranking civil and military officers in Pakistan.¹⁴⁹ Later, as the Pakistani repression and brutality continued, Bangladeshi Forces fought with the deployed Pakistani troops in East Pakistan. Meanwhile, Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, tried to draw international attention to the crisis, but failed. United States President Richard Nixon wanted to reward Yahya for his help in communicating with China, and he had an intense personal dislike

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 63.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 64.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 63.

¹⁴⁸ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Nixon: The Triumph of a Politician* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 482.

¹⁴⁹ Rampal, *India Wins the War*, 51.

for Indira Gandhi.¹⁵⁰ Further, Nixon saw Pakistan as a friend of China, and India as a friend of the Soviet Union.¹⁵¹ Nixon's triangular diplomacy was just coming into play in the summer of 1971, and already it was getting terribly complicated as the number of actors grew beyond the original three, the U.S., China, and the Soviet Union.¹⁵² India, fearful of the emerging U.S.-China-Pakistan alignment, and rebuffed by a hostile Nixon Administration, sought friendship in Moscow.¹⁵³ On August 9, 1971, as Kissinger put it, "came the bombshell of the Soviet-Indian Friendship Treaty."¹⁵⁴

By mid-October 1971, observers of South Asian affairs were nearly unanimous that both countries—India and Pakistan—were in the grip of war fever.¹⁵⁵ They both sent troops close to the bordering areas. Border skirmishes and air space violations were also on the rise. In the wake of such high tensions, Kissinger convened a meeting of the Washington Special Action Group (WSAG), composed of representatives from The Departments of State and Defense, the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Council.¹⁵⁶ Everyone but Kissinger thought that independence for East Pakistan

¹⁵⁰ Ambrose, *Nixon: The Triumph of a Politician*, 482.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid., 483.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ War Fever, *Washington Post*, October 17, 1971, cited in O'Donnell, *Bangladesh: Biography of a Muslim Nation*, 102.

¹⁵⁶ Ambrose, *Nixon: The Triumph of a Politician*, 483.

was inevitable and desirable, and that India had no design on West Pakistan.¹⁵⁷ However, the conference ended without any plausible decision.

But Kissinger wanted to be tough with both India and the Soviets. So did Nixon.¹⁵⁸ On October 19, 1971, Nixon instructed Brigadier General Alexander Haig, Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, Kissinger was on his way to Peking, to “hit the Indians again on this,” by threatening to cut off American aid to India, already under great stress because of droughts, followed by major floods and cyclones, and accommodating 10 million East Pakistan refugees.¹⁵⁹

On November 4, 1971, Indira Gandhi thought of making another appeal to the international community on East Pakistan crisis. She came to Washington to discuss issues with Nixon. But America’s unwillingness to restrain Yahya was quite clear after Indira Gandhi’s return to India.¹⁶⁰ At that time, Pakistani warplanes repeatedly violated Indian air space, often resulting in chase by Indian war planes. On November 23, 1971, three intruding Pakistani Sabre jets were shot down by Indian Gnats in the Eastern Sector.¹⁶¹ This really infuriated Yahya, and he declared a National Emergency on the same day. On November 24, 1971, Indian troops in the Eastern Sector were permitted to cross border in self-defense.¹⁶² Yahya also issued mobilization orders to the Pakistani

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Rampal, *India Wins the War*, 59.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 60.

¹⁶² Ibid.

forces. He contemplated on a major decision on whether or not he should attack India. But he did not spend much time to deliver the attack order. Pakistani planes attacked Indian airfields in the evening of December 3, 1971, thus brought India into war.

Operational Framework of Opposing Forces

Although Yahya had closed all windows of negotiations by giving the order to attack Indian airfields, he conceptualized precise objectives and purposes for Pakistani Forces. Pakistan's aim in East Pakistan was to hold its position in view of defensive geography and limited chances of reinforcement due to the distance from West Pakistan and the non-availability of a direct route for the same.¹⁶³ Its military end state was to control rebellion and establishment of government authority in East Pakistan. In so doing, Pakistani forces considered Dhaka as the center of gravity. They thought control of Dhaka would determine future course in that complex environment. In the west, Pakistan's objective was to launch an offensive thrust in Jammu and Kashmir, particularly in view of its losing ground in the East Pakistan.¹⁶⁴ Any territory gained in Jammu and Kashmir would give Yahya an asset for a bargain. To this context, offensive in the west was considered was a mere limited objective attack in a broader periphery.

On the contrary, India's aims were quite clear. First, it was to fight alongside Bangladeshi forces in East Pakistan to liberate Bangladesh. Second, it was to contain the enemy in the western sector from advancing.¹⁶⁵ However, to contain the Pakistani forces

¹⁶³ Rampal, *India Wins the War*, 69.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

in the western sector, India took offensive actions at certain places and made diversions. As India operated along with Bangladeshi forces in East Pakistan jointly, their offensive was termed as Allied offensive. While India intervened in East Pakistan, its military end states were bulk of the Pakistani forces in East Pakistan destroyed and major portions of East Pakistan occupied including entry ports of Chittagong and Chalna.¹⁶⁶ Although Indian forces' Commander Jagjit Singh Aurora rightly identified Dhaka to be the Pakistani forces' center of gravity, but remained silent about the approved plan where there was no mention of capturing Dhaka.¹⁶⁷ However, as war went on, Indian forces were able to modify their plan identifying Dhaka as the center of gravity. Accordingly, they also allocated additional resources.

On December 6, 1971, Major General GC Nagra, central sector commander, sent his assessment to Indian forces' commander, Aurora.¹⁶⁸ He indicated that there was a good possibility of contacting Dhaka defenses early and asked for additional brigade, an armor squadron, a field regiment, a medium battery, and additional signal resources.¹⁶⁹ Fortunately, he was allotted with all the resources as Indian forces' command reevaluated their plan according to changed scenario. With the allied forces' aim, military end state, and center of gravity in perspective; following paragraphs describe allied forces' offensive following the operational approach (figure1) identified in chapter 1.

¹⁶⁶ Singh, *Victory in Bangladesh*, 46.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 140.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

Conduct of Allied Offensive in East Pakistan

The Allied offensive plan was ready and India waited for an opportunity to intervene directly in the Liberation War of Bangladesh. West Pakistan carried out a pre-emptive air attack on the Indian installations of Srinagar, Pathankot, and Amritsar airfield on December 3, 1971 in the afternoon.¹⁷⁰ Right after that incident Indian President V.V. Giri declared a state of emergency and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi addressed the nation just after midnight.¹⁷¹ Thus with the shelling of seven airfields of India, West Pakistan drew India into war. From December 4, 1971 the Indian offensive was under way.

The II Corps under the command of Lieutenant General Raina advanced with objective of capturing area up to west of the River Padma. He earmarked the 9th Infantry Division under Major General Dalbir Singh to secure Jessore and then be prepared to detach a suitable force to capture Khulna, a major township.¹⁷² The 4th Mountain Division under command of Major General Barar advanced through the northern part of this sector to capture two ferry sites across River Madhumoti. Bitter fighting took place in Jessore Township while Pakistani troops withdrew under intense pressure of the II Corps. The routes from Jessore to Jhenaidah and Magura were open to 107 Brigade by December 7, 1971 as 4th Division had captured Jhenaidah and Magura on December 7 and 8 respectively.¹⁷³ From then onward, route to Dhaka lay open to allied forces with

¹⁷⁰ Rampal, *India Wins the War*, 86.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Singh, *Victory in Bangladesh*, 99.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 128.

only a weak ad hoc task force comprising elements of 38 Frontier Force and 50 Punjab of Pakistani forces remained there.

In the XXXIII Corps area, major thrust was developed by the 20th Mountain Division while subsidiary thrusts were developed by two brigades.¹⁷⁴ Two columns advanced up to Rangpur town by December 9, 1971 and halted there, faced with the tremendous strength of the Pakistani defense. The 20th Mountain Division was to launch two consecutive attacks to capture Hilli, a tactically significant area in the northwestern sector. However, with the fall of Hilli to the Allied forces, the XXXIII Corps could easily advance up to Bogra, a town close to the River Jamuna.¹⁷⁵

In the Eastern sector, the main offensive was launched from Agartala, an Indian border town, which was directed towards the Akhaura-Bhairab Bazar Axis by the 57th Mountain Division along with the Bangladeshi S Force brigade that operated in Sector 3.¹⁷⁶ Pakistani 14th Division elements were deployed in this sector. By December 5, 1971 bordering towns were captured by Allied forces. At this juncture, Pakistani 14th Division conducted a tactical redeployment west of the River Meghna. While withdrawing, Pakistani forces demolished the only bridge over the River Meghna. To offset Pakistani delaying tactics, a massive helicopter-lift was conducted to build up troops behind 14th Division. By December 14, 1971, leading elements of 57th Mountain Division reached outskirts of Dhaka.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 72.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 78.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 31.

In northern sector, two brigades advanced along the Kamalpur- Jamalpur and Haluaghat–Mymensingh axes. Initially, 95th Mountain Brigade along with Bangladeshi Forces of Sector 11 operated in this area. They could clear up to Mymensingh,¹⁷⁸ which was an important town in the north. Considering allied success, Indian army commander Field Marshal S.H.F.J. Manekshaw quickly allotted 167th Mountain Brigade with 101st Communication Zone to the movement.¹⁷⁹ As the brigades advanced towards Dhaka, one paratrooper battalion was dropped behind enemy lines in Kalihati near Tangail. Once the Pakistani brigade was fully encircled, Pakistani brigade commander Brigadier General Quadir surrendered. After linking up with the paratrooper battalion, Indian brigade reached Joydevpur on December 13, and Tongi Bridge—a town close to Dhaka—on December 14, 1971.¹⁸⁰ By the morning of December 16, the 101st Communication Zone elements were inside Dhaka.

As allied forces advanced towards Dhaka from all directions, Indian Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal S.H.F.J. Manekshaw sent a message to Islamabad, Pakistan on December 15, 1971 that he would accept a ceasefire provided Pakistani Army in Bangladesh surrendered to the advancing Indian troops.¹⁸¹ Lieutenant General A. A. K. Niazi, Commander Eastern Command of Pakistan, agreed to surrender along with his

¹⁷⁸ Mymensingh was considered an important town because it was located adjacent to a major river—the Brahmaputra. Capture of Mymensingh meant complete control over the river line of communication.

¹⁷⁹ 101 Communication Zone was the thrust developed by allied forces from north of East Pakistan. It comprised of 95 Mountain Brigade, 167 Mountain Brigade, and all Bangladeshi Forces of Sector 11.

¹⁸⁰ Khan, “Liberation War Bangladesh,” 31.

¹⁸¹ Singh, *Victory in Bangladesh*, 240.

90,000 regular and Para-military forces. Later, the surrender was signed in the fading light of December 16, 1971 in full view of nearly a million of Bangladeshis.¹⁸² Thus Bangladesh came into being as a new state.

How effective was the Indian Forces' Involvement?

India declared war against Pakistan and joined with Bangladeshi forces on December 3, 1971.¹⁸³ While Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora became the commander of the joint forces, the war with India as a full participant lasted only 13 days. On December 16, 1971 Lieutenant General Niazi, Commander Eastern Command of Pakistan surrendered with all Pakistani troops. Although the joint forces' astounding victory demonstrated the efficacy of the Indian forces' involvement, it had deeper meaning in strategic as well as operational context.

Strategically speaking, India's direct involvement outmatched the international political pace in regards to South Asia. As soon as Pakistan attacked seven Indian air bases on December 3, 1971, India declared war on Pakistan. The President of the United States, Richard M. Nixon, strongly backed his Cold War ally Pakistan after the latter started the India-Pakistan war.¹⁸⁴ At the same time, President Nixon asked his Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, to assist Pakistan economically, morally and provide military hardware. At the same time, the U.S. government stopped an 87.6 million dollar

¹⁸² Ibid., 241.

¹⁸³ Zahed, "An Analysis of U.S. Policy in the Liberation War of Bangladesh," 125.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 126.

economic aid package for India on December 6, 1971.¹⁸⁵ The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, George H. W. Bush called for an immediate cease fire between India and Pakistan. However, the Soviet Union used its United Nations' Security Council veto to stop the proposal. In the wake of diplomatic maneuvering, the U.S. decided to send an aircraft carrier, the *USS Enterprise*, to the Bay of Bengal. At the same time, the U. S. S. R. also sent nuclear-armed naval groups to the Bay of Bengal. The UN called for immediate meeting to pass the resolution and accelerate the cease-fire process. But this did not work because before that the Pakistani Army surrendered to allied forces on December 16, 1971. It is evident that the pace of events moved faster in East Pakistan than the international community could act. Indian forces' involvement and a lightning victory stopped the cease-fire process. Besides, Pakistani forces' surprising surrender after 13 days made the U.S. as well as the U. N. efforts futile. From this perspective, India's involvement benefitted Bangladesh.

Operationally, Indian forces relied on mass concentration of forces against Pakistani military and avoided major battles along the route of ingress. The task allotted to Eastern Command by Indian Army headquarters was to destroy bulk of Pakistani forces in eastern theater and to occupy the major portions of East Pakistan, including entry ports of Chittagong and Khulna.¹⁸⁶ In pursuing objectives, Indian forces made significant progress in all sectors of the eastern theater. In southwestern sector, II Corps operated with the objectives of Jessore and Jhenaida, and advanced later with the aim of capturing objective Khulna, an important township. By December 13, 1971 all the

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Singh, *Victory in Bangladesh*, 46.

objectives were captured and II Corps was deployed west of the major River Jamuna. In northwestern sector, against Pakistan's 16th Division, the XXXIII Corps had the 20th Mountain Division with an additional brigade, two armored regiment less one squadron and one engineer brigade.¹⁸⁷ Indian forces aimed at cutting off the Hilli-Gaibandha waistline, and then, advance towards Bogra. Although Pakistani forces fought valiantly in this sector, by December 15, 1971, Indian forces closed in on Bogra. In the northern sector, 101st Communication Zone elements made significant progress while conducting an advance towards Dhaka. Though, initially, only one brigade was allotted to this Corps along with Bangladeshi forces, it found astounding success; so Indian High Command added one more brigade and one paratrooper battalion. By the morning of December 16, 1971, 101st Communication Zone elements reached Dhaka, just before the signing of the instrument of surrender in the afternoon on the same day. In the eastern sector, IV Corps was allotted with three divisions less one brigade, Kilo force—a Bangladeshi regular brigade having two battalions, a number of East Bengal Rifles battalions and two squadrons of armor.¹⁸⁸ This sector provided the shortest route to Dhaka. Indian forces along with Bangladeshi forces closed up on the River Meghna by December 14, 1971 and were poised to capture Dhaka.

From the operational point of view, it was clear that Indian forces moved nearer to their objectives according to a coordinated schedule after the monsoon.¹⁸⁹ Pakistani forces failed to surmise the bigger plan of the allied forces. Though major rivers posed

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 47.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 48.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

serious problems for the allied advance, efforts were made to conduct a vertical envelopment by using helicopters, which proved effective. In addition, Indian Chief of Army Staff, Field Marshall Manekshaw planned to make the maximum use of psychological warfare.¹⁹⁰ Indian forces conducted operations to fool Niazi to move his forces away from Dhaka. As Indian forces avoided engagements along the route of ingress from the borders, Pakistani forces failed to retreat to form a strong Dhaka bowl defense. The rapid advance of Indian forces outmaneuvered Pakistani forces' fortress concept and attacked Pakistan's center of gravity–Dhaka. Although Pakistan identified Dhaka as their center of gravity, in allotting resources, Pakistani commander Niazi made irrational decisions. As such, once Indian forces closed in Dhaka, there were inadequate Pakistani forces inside the Dhaka Bowl to defend it. The result was the unconditional surrender to the allied forces.

From the start of the war, India's aims were quite clear. First, India aimed at fighting along with Bangladeshi forces in Bangladesh for the complete liberation of Bangladesh. Second, India aimed at protecting its western flank by containing the enemy in the western sector.¹⁹¹ Till the last day, India maintained its aim and prevented any significant reversals by Pakistani forces. Besides, Indian forces were able to reach the military end state–destruction of Pakistani forces and capture of Dhaka. Additionally, they were also able to attack Pakistani forces' center of gravity–Dhaka–which was poorly defended by Pakistani forces. From these perspectives, India's involvement in the

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 49.

¹⁹¹ Rampal, *India Wins the War*, 69.

Liberation War of Bangladesh was decisive in drawing an effective conclusion in favor of India, and more specifically in creation of a new nation–Bangladesh.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

The Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971 is the story of a nine-month long war. Both Indian and Bangladeshi forces contributed to the creation of an independent Bangladeshi state. Despite being geographically co-located with India, Bangladesh was made a part of Pakistan during the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947 from British rule. Religion played a vital role in drawing the boundaries of both the states. The distance between East and West Pakistan was approximately 1,200 miles. But it was felt that Islam, which was the majority religion of the people of both East and West Pakistan, would be able to make a unified Pakistan. Unfortunately, soon after the independence in 1947, West Pakistan started to suppress East Pakistan for the former's benefit. East Pakistan was deprived of economic development, job opportunities, and industrialization. Not only that, although majority of the people of East Pakistan spoke the Bengali language, West Pakistanis tried to compel the people of East Pakistan to speak Urdu in 1952. In retaliation, East Pakistanis from all walks of life came on streets to raise their voices against their West Pakistani rulers. But West Pakistani rulers ordered police to fire on unarmed civilians on February 21, 1952. As a result, many were killed and Bangladeshis understood the futility of a religion-based Pakistan.

The situation simmered for close to 20 years, but finally reached crisis proportions in 1970. That year West Pakistani rulers refused to recognize parliamentary election results that gave power to the opposition party in East Pakistan, the Awami League. The Awami League, under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, won majority of the seats in East Pakistan during General Election of 1970. But Yahya Khan,

the president of Pakistan, refused to call the General Assembly that resulted from those elections. He sent General Tikka Khan, as chief military administrator, to establish the authority of his government in East Pakistan. In the meantime, Yahya Khan attempted to negotiate with Awami League leaders, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in March 1971. As the dialogue progressed, they failed to reach any decision because Yahya Khan refused to recognize the results of the general election. While discussions continued, West Pakistan deployed approximately 90,000 soldiers in East Pakistan. On the night of March 25, 1971, West Pakistani leaders left East Pakistan after ordering Tikka Khan to crack down on Bangladeshi opposition. This harsh crackdown started the Liberation War.

When the war started, East Pakistan did not have military or paramilitary forces. Only a few East Pakistan-based units that were part of the West Pakistan military retaliated after the initial lockdown. For civilians, it was a spontaneous reaction against atrocities committed by the West Pakistani forces. Civilians along with few dissident groups from regular forces built the first line of defense. Ten million Bangladeshis fled East Pakistan and became refugees in bordering India. On April 17, 1971, the first independent Bangladeshi government was formed in Agartala, near India. Colonel (later general) M.A.G. Osmani was made the first commander of Bangladeshi forces. He started organizing both regular and irregular forces. As time progressed, three regular brigades were formed with their headquarters in India. Also irregular forces received training in Indian Territory and operated successfully inside East Pakistan.

The actions of the Bangladeshi forces gradually attrited combat capabilities of the West Pakistan counter-insurgent forces. They failed to win a quick, decisive victory over Bangladeshi rebels and the war dragged on for weeks, and then months. Meanwhile,

India supported Bangladeshi forces and also refugees with logistics, training and sanctuary in Indian Territory. India's assistance helped Bangladesh to build a big irregular force (often called the guerrilla force of East Pakistan). It is estimated that 70,000 guerrillas fought for the liberation of Bangladesh. With India's massive *de facto* support of the Bangladeshi rebels, the Bangladeshi leadership used this aid, its invulnerable Indian territorial sanctuary and its shrewd use of both conventional and guerrilla forces to wage a sophisticated Fortified Compound Warfare insurgency against the Pakistani counterinsurgency force. Both the regular and irregular forces continued fighting against the Pakistani forces and controlled a part of the countryside near to the border by the end of November 1971. Pakistan did not have the resources or numbers to destroy the conventional Bangladeshi force, and the Mukti Bahini's constant attacks on Pakistani supply lines and garrisons forced the Pakistani military leadership to keep its conventional forces dispersed to deal with the guerrillas. This constant tug of war between the desire to concentrate against the Bangladeshi conventional forces, and the need to disperse to guard against the guerrilla forces, combined with the invulnerable Indian territorial sanctuary created a strategic conundrum that the Pakistani military never solved. While Bangladeshi forces were unable to force the surrender of the Pakistani forces in the country, it was equally clear that the Pakistanis were unable to put down the rebellion. The resulting stalemate combined with Pakistan's limited resources created a strategic situation that the Pakistani government could not long endure. The Pakistani choice to attack India, therefore, was a direct result of the Bangladeshi government's protracted war strategy. It proved to be a disastrous decision. Whereas India's aid to Bangladesh prior to the Pakistani declaration of war was *de facto* and not very subtly

covert, after India formally joined the war and added its considerable resources to the Bangladeshi Army's efforts, it was only a matter of time until Pakistan recognized the inevitable. The Indian Army intervened on December 3, 1971, while the Indian government formally recognized Bangladeshi independence three days later. It took the allied Indo-Bangladeshi forces thirteen days to force Pakistan to surrender and recognize Bangladesh's independence.

India was initially reluctant to intervene in what was widely viewed as a domestic issue when the Liberation War of Bangladesh started. But the massive refugee problem combined with the failure of the international community to do anything to resolve the massive humanitarian crisis of 10 million Bangladeshi refugees flooding into India forced that government and military to consider direct military involvement. India foresaw another problem that it might have to face. The Pakistani military's brutal methods for putting down the rebellion might radicalize Bangladeshi politics, and bring to power radical elements that might be hostile to India's interests in the region. The Awami League proved to be good partner for the Indian government. The sheer cost of feeding, sheltering and giving medical care to roughly 10 million refugees put a significant strain on India's economy. Besides, Pakistan's atrocities shook the eco-political structure of India. This made the international community's dithering on the issue extremely frustrating for India. Both the United States and China sided with Pakistan, and regarded the conflict as a Pakistani internal matter. The UN also restricted its operations to humanitarian work. Thus India had little choice but to covertly aid the Bangladeshi rebels.

As Bangladeshi forces' contributions are put through the model identified in chapter 1, they achieved success in gaining territories in bordering areas. Although they were not able to attain other objectives, Bangladeshi forces' efforts were instrumental in attaining intermediary objectives or even attacking the center of gravity–Dhaka. Bangladeshi forces complemented Indian war efforts in several ways. First, Bangladeshi forces started to operate right from the beginning as West Pakistani forces' started their atrocities in East Pakistan. Their presence kept the hope of eventual freedom alive in the hearts of the Bangladeshis.¹⁹² Conversely, West Pakistani atrocities alienated East Pakistani populace and failed to win the support in favor of their cause. Second, Bangladeshi forces achieved their long-term goal in that they kept the struggle going till the Indian forces compelled Pakistanis to surrender.¹⁹³ Third, an indirect and major impact of Bangladeshi forces' operations was to entice the Pakistani forces into a faulty deployment forward of the Dhaka Bowl.¹⁹⁴ Although Pakistani military leaders correctly identified their own center of gravity–Dhaka—they failed to deploy adequate forces to defend that crucial region. A significant factor in those deployment decisions were the actions of the Bangladeshi conventional forces and Mukti Bahini. General Niazi was forced to disperse all his forces to address threats emanating from Bangladeshi forces that operated along Pakistani lines of communication and in the rear areas. Fourth, Bangladeshi forces waged a sophisticated Fortified Compound Warfare insurgency with

¹⁹² Singh, *Victory in Bangladesh*, 288.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

its guerrilla component, regular brigades, safe sanctuary inside India, and external support from India.

This form of warfare proved to be inherently formidable as Bangladeshi forces consistently held their own against the better trained and better equipped three-and-a-half Pakistani divisions along with naval and air assets of Pakistani forces. The historical invincibility of this warfare validated the strategic vision of the Bangladeshi government and military against an opponent they could not defeat conventionally. While Bangladeshi forces were able to keep their hope for independence alive, it was not possible for them to defeat Pakistani forces as well. Although they liberated areas near border, they ran short of troops who could eventually resume offensive and race towards Dhaka. As we look through the allied operational approach (figure 1), Bangladeshi forces did not have adequate resources to pursue other objectives with a view to reaching military end state. At this juncture, India's direct involvement was the only solution to this deadlock.

India's involvement into the war on December 3, 1971 and recognition of an independent Bangladesh by December 6, 1971 were crucial. First, India's offensive inside East Pakistan and a lightning victory avoided an international ceasefire agreement and facilitated the birth of Bangladesh. Second, India's involvement inspired all locals to cooperate extensively with intelligence, labor, boats and other materials to speed up the momentum of advance. Third, quick victory solved the problems in the international domain where major powers were concerned about and India-Pakistan confrontation expanding and drawing in the Cold War Superpowers, the United States and Soviet Union. Even U.S. President Richard Nixon and his Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger,

congratulated themselves as they were convinced that they had curbed Soviet adventurism and saved Pakistan while cementing the U.S.–Chinese relationship.¹⁹⁵

Basing on the aforementioned ideas, it is well felt that India's direct involvement was decisive in liberating Bangladesh. More so, its involvement allowed a status-quo in the international arena without drawing any prohibitive interference from the major powers. However, the Bangladeshi forces' contribution was significant throughout the liberation war. Especially, for keeping the fight alive for an independent Bangladesh for long eight months, Bangladeshi forces deserves due credit. But it lacked adequate resources to defeat Pakistani forces and draw the war to an end. India's assistance filled in the vacuity of Bangladeshi forces' means to reach to the ends following a distinct operational approach.

Bangladesh, being a small country with its inadequate resources, is not able to fight conventional wars with superior adversary. Given this fact, the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971 demonstrates that the country at a seemingly huge conventional disadvantage has immense potential to engage in a protracted war using both its conventional and unconventional components to wear out its conventionally superior opponent. Moreover, the concept of Fortified Compound Warfare is likely to give added dividend if it is indoctrinated in the Bangladesh warfighting mechanism. If Bangladesh is able to wage a protracted war against any adversary, it is possible for her to leverage from a complex and fluid environment which is a requirement for small states to win any war.

¹⁹⁵ Ambrose, *Nixon: The Triumph of a Politician*, 485.

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