

Indian Military Involvement in the 1971 Crisis of East Pakistan: A Justification of Level of Analysis

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Abstract: The liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971 was a watershed moment in the page of South Asian history and the trajectories of the then Cold War politics. Although many people of East Pakistan jumped into the liberation war taking whatever they had in hand inspired with the flammable 7th March speech of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and started guerilla fight against West Pakistan army, the then Indira Gandhi government sent Indian military in favor of East Pakistan was also vital. It is till now a matter of interest that why Indira Gandhi sent military for liberating Bangladesh despite many studies have been carried out on this issue. Therefore, this paper attempts to investigate the factors causing Indian military involvement in liberating Bangladesh from West Pakistan. In doing so, this article applies Kenneth Waltz's three levels of analysis- Individual, State and International. Moreover, this paper focuses on the conceptualization of the Level of Analysis and describes the background of the liberation struggle of East Pakistan and the Indo-Pakistan dissension. Based on secondary data, this paper takes the Indian military involvement as a case study of the Level of Analysis. By sincere exploration of previous history and utilization of Waltz's Level of Analysis in International Relations, it is found that the shrewd leadership of Indira Gandhi, the internal organization of India, and the then bipolar system were vital factors influencing the Indian military involvement in the 1971 crisis of East Pakistan. It is also argued that the military involvement of India was shaped by the combination of the three levels of analysis.

Keywords: Indian Military Involvement, Liberation War of Bangladesh, Waltz's Level of Analysis

1. Introduction

In 1971, the liberation war of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) influenced not only the regional political landscape but also the global context. The war where India militarily involvement is also known as the third Indo-Pakistan war. In response to Indian military incursions and logistic help to the Mukti Bahini (freedom fighters) in East Pakistan, Pakistan launched a series of preemptive airstrikes against Indian airfields on December 3, 1971 [1]. From that day, India started fighting a full-scale war against its counterpart Pakistan and India's armed forces with Bengali Mukti Bahini (freedom fighters) decisively defeated Pakistan's armed forces in the east in a twelve-day war. The immediate outcome of the war was the creation of

Bangladesh as an independent state on 16 December 1971 and India was the first foreign state to recognize the new country. Pakistan's pre-emptive attacks on India were not the prime reason other than situational logic for India to militarily intervene in East Pakistan; there are some deeper aspects for consideration. The Indian intervention into this liberation war has generated huge literature.

Marwah demonstrates that mainly historical animosity and an exodus of massive refugees from the eastern wing of Pakistan to India caused the latter to intervene into the former [2]. Hossain reveals that as a prudent leader Indira Gandhi chose the way of military intervention because of India's national interests and the flow of East Pakistani refugees in her country [3]. Haider argues that India's actual objective behind friendly stance to the independence struggle of Bengalis in East Pakistan was to dismember and enfeeble its

arch neighboring enemy, Pakistan [4]. Agarwal contends in reality what happened during the liberation war in the Sub-Continent was determined by the Soviet Union vs. the United States of America and China. He further shows that inefficacy of the United Nations (UN) during the independence war of East Pakistan was the reflection of the realities of the Cold War politics [5]. However, analysis from the extant literature stands singular or binary perspectives which cannot effectively explain the reasons of the intervention. For example, an immediate refugee problem triggered by the crisis on India and the political difference between India and Pakistan cannot perfectly illustrate Gandhi's dictation to the military intervention. A range of other causes such their historical rivalry, alliance system etc. were considerably responsible in this regard. Thus, a more longitudinal and complete theory-oriented study for taking all the influencing and actual aspects for this Indian participation in one study needs to be accomplished for a broader understanding. The aim of the study is to examine the reasons of the Indian military intervention into the 1971 East Pakistan crisis through the three levels of analysis of Professor Kenneth Waltz: Individual, State, and International. Waltz proposed Level of Analysis (LoA) in his intellectually acclaimed book *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* to examine why war occurs in international politics [6].

The study utilizes secondary data from journals, books, magazines, documents and archives, newspapers, and several websites. As a descriptive analysis, it takes India's military involvement as a case study of the LoA. The article accomplishes its vital goals in the following steps. Firstly, it introduces the Level of Analysis. Secondly, it demonstrates the background of the liberation war. Thirdly, it explains the Indo-Pakistan dissension. Fourthly, it applies the LoA to analyze India's intervention in East Pakistan. Finally, it recapitulates the arguments made in this article. By sincere exploration of previous history and utilization of Waltz's Level of Analysis in International Relations, it is found that the shrewd leadership of Indira Gandhi, the internal organization of India, and the then bipolar system were the vital factors influencing the Indian military involvement in the 1971 crisis of East Pakistan. The paper argues that the military intervention of India was shaped by the combination of the three levels of analysis. The article highlights the value of Waltz's Level of Analysis in International Relations as it provides great empirical evidence for the theoretical tool with the reference of the particular case of the Indian military participation.

1.1. The Background of East Pakistan's Liberation Struggle

The liberation war in the eastern province of Pakistan unfolded with complex processes and phenomena. It was a part of Pakistan until 1971. The geographical distance between mainland Pakistan and its eastern province was quite absurd. There was nothing common between the Mainland Pakistan and its eastern wing other than religion and they

held no brotherly bond when it came to language, common heritage, life-style, political values and so on [7]. Pakistan's history from 1947 to 1971 was marked by political noise, economic troubles, and military rule. The people of East Pakistan were ignored from the actual political framework of Pakistan and they were even vehemently marginalized by the West Pakistani rulers in economic and educational sectors and military services. These bore several crises in East Pakistan before the civil unrest began. The primary symptoms of resentments among the Bengalis of the eastern province of Pakistan appeared in March 1948 on the linguistic controversy. These consolidated on 21st February 1952, when police opened fire on a language movement and reportedly killed nine people [8]. The movement added massive momentum to the Bengali nationalism. In 1969, a violent mass upsurge orchestrated by the Bengalis brought the fall of military dictator General Ayub Khan [4].

However, the worst shock came to Bengalis of East Pakistan in the general election of Pakistan in 1971 under the dictator Yahya Khan. Awami League led by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman emerged as the single majority party in the Pakistan National Assembly with 167 seats out of 313. Nevertheless, Khan's military regime opposed to rendering power to Rahman's party and he opted for military solution to destroy the ballot power with bullets. People of Bangladesh could not tolerate such denial to democracy. Eventually, it led to call for the independence on March 25, 1971, and so the civil war flared in Bangladesh. India sided with the cherished dream of the people of Bangladesh and made the latter liberated from Pakistan on 16 December 1971.

1.2. The Anatomy of Indo-Pakistan Antagonism

In 1947, India and Pakistan emerged in conflict with communal line after the disintegration of the Subcontinent which was previously a colony of Britain for approximately two centuries. According to famous Pakistani politician Bhutto, "Relations between India and Pakistan should resemble those between Norway and Sweden, countries which had to break apart to come closer to each other" [10]. Conversely, their mutual animosity has been an inherent part of their relationship since their birth and sidelined the assumption of Bhutto. The two states have fought four wars (1947-1948, 1965, 1971, and 1999), and locked in several military standoffs. In all four wars, Pakistan first attacked India. Except the 1971 war, all wars between them were driven by Kashmir issue. The 1971 case was crucial with political and military objectives of India for the separation of the eastern wing of Pakistan. Relative armored strengths of them considerably help them to calculate their threat perception to each other. Thus, they still give massive attention to a military build-up. Yet, until 1965 India's military strength was lower than that of Pakistan and after that, the country approached to acquire military superiority over Pakistan [2]. However, India's two military victories within that time were praiseworthy.

Some political analysts opine that Indo-Pakistan

imbroglio, which is consanguine for the internationalized civil war, appears from the unsettled communal tension [2]. However, Paul argues that besides distinct religious beliefs, two countries entangle conflict due to their territorial dispute over Kashmir, different national identities and political system (India's Democracy vs. Pakistan's Autocracy), and appetite for regional power status. Furthermore, he contends that their enduring rivalry persists for the peculiar power dynamic [11]. Such power dynamics are involved with a truncated power asymmetry that means despite India's greater aggregate power than Pakistan, Kashmir theater of conflict, alliance politics, asymmetric strategies and tactics of the latter may compensate its weaknesses against the former in regional level at least if not global [11]. In reality, Pakistan couldn't fully utilize these advantages against India.

2. Level of Analysis

In his *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis* in 1959, Waltz proposed three levels of analysis to examine the causes of war. He concluded that every level/image is interrelated with one another [6]. It means that a single level cannot efficiently explain the causes of war; rather, the interrelationship among the three levels can.

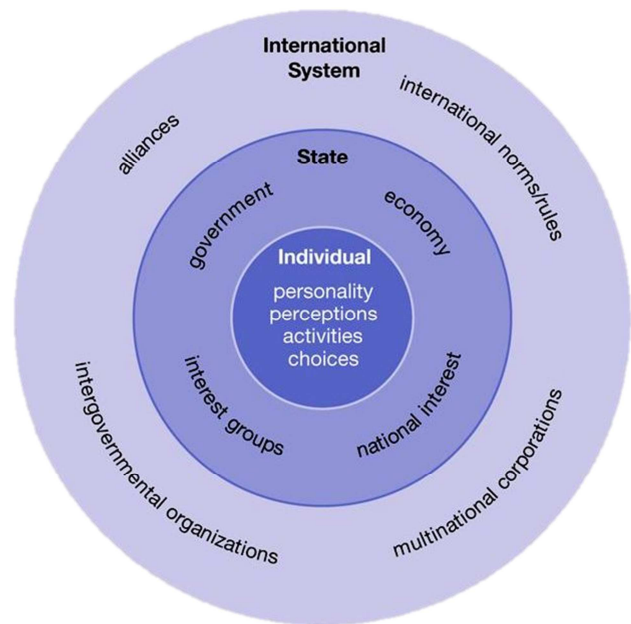
The individual-level based on classical realism argues that war sometimes happens due to state leaders portrayed with pessimistic views of human nature such as nasty, brutish, war-monger etc. Waltz stated in his book that the root of all evil is a man and thus he is himself the root of the specific evil, war [6]. Waltz articulated that if a man possesses boldness and high-mentality because he follows the dictates of the reason it doesn't mean that he will help others without self-interest [6]. Thus, a state leader who helps another state doesn't do it without considering his/her country's national or regime interests.

The state-level focuses on the internal organization of states for the state of war or tranquility. According to Waltz, geographic location, power capability, patterns of political institutions, previous history and tradition between two states influence their state of war and peace [6]. It is nicely related with neo-classical realism.

The assumptions of the international system level have generated the neo-realist theory Waltz later elaborately discussed in his another book *Theory of International Politics*. States in the world are as like individuals in the state of nature. Neither they are perfectly good nor controlled by law. Consequently, conflict and violence among them are inevitable [6]. This indicates the absence of any international supranational institution that controls the behaviors of sovereign states. For Singer, this level helps us study interacting fashion developed by it to generalize phenomena of the rise and fall of coalition, the longevity of particular power formation, and change in its stability, its reaction to alteration of political institutions, and the norms and values which it reveals as a social configuration [13].

Mingst and Arreguin-Toft have provided a comprehensive view of the three levels of analysis through the graphic

analysis [14].



Source: Adapted from Mingst, and Arreguin-Toft [14].

Figure 1. Level of Analysis.

According to the Figure 1, if the Individual Level is the focus, a leader's personality, perceptions, activities, choices of individual decision-makers and individual participants explain the causes of war. With the regard of the State Level, the illustration is derived from the different characteristics of the state (democracy vs. authoritarian government), the type of economic system (capitalist vs. socialist), interest groups within the country, or even the national interest. If the International System Level is the focus, the explanation rests with the anarchic nature of that system because of the lack of effective world government for restraining zero-sum behaviors of states.

3. Level of Analysis and India's Military Intervention into the 1971 Crisis of East Pakistan

In this section, three levels of analysis of Waltz have been utilized to get a broader understanding of India's intervention in the eastern wing of United Pakistan. Therefore, for every level, this segment has attached a relevant phrase or term to underpin the important factors which influenced India to facilitate for the creation of an independent Bangladesh at the cost of Pakistan.

3.1. The Individual Level-Indira Gandhi

Indian Prime Minister Gandhi was a cunning and hawkish stateswoman who was central in making India's foreign policy and the decision of military intervention in the liberation war of East Pakistan in 1971. Mrs. Gandhi saw the 1971 crisis as an opportunity for the national interest of India

to curtail the influence and threat of Pakistan. On 27 March 1971, Mrs. Indira Gandhi expressed full support of her government to the independence struggle of East Pakistan [15]. It was the following day after the Pakistani military with genocidal intent started massive killing of the people of Bangladesh on 26 March. Understanding the political situation in the then bipolar world, she gave importance to the strategic matters. Gandhi government firstly saw the prospect of success of the liberation movement in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan). When they saw the growing strength of the secessionists and dissidents of Bangladesh, they primarily started giving propaganda support, weapons, explosives, and training to them [15]. Moreover, she solicited humanitarian assistance from the International Community (IC) on Bengali refugees amid a debate by some members of her party and the opposition whether India would give early recognition to Bangladesh [3]. The refugee matter was sensitive to Gandhi. Some excerption of her speech in October in London shows her concern on refugees:

The refugees have highlighted problems for us in India because they have posed not only a tremendous economic burden, they have created social problems and political problems and, above all, the security problems, the stability, and integrity of India... We think this is the responsibility of the International Community to see that a way out is found... [15].

It helped her to internationalize the issue and encouraged the IC to pressurize Pakistan and strengthened the humanitarian intervention pretext into East Pakistan. Professor Ashfak Hossain argues that Mrs. Gandhi including military strategists of India wanted changes of rival and non-democratic Pakistan's political framework. They sensed it was at least possible in its eastern province [3]. In July, the then American National Security Advisor Dr. Henry Kissinger visited in India and it was primarily seen as a positive stance of America to relieve suspicions of its nonchalance to India. However, Kissinger's clandestine trip from Pakistan to China impacted on India's strategic concerns. PM Gandhi wanted a political settlement of the 1971 crisis but she could not reach on it due to international polarization of it and the growing suspicions of India on the American position. Approximately two weeks later of the hidden visit, the Indian Government announced the signing of the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace and Friendship, August 9, 1971 [2]. It was a shrewd political calculation of Ms. Gandhi because the treaty added a strategically high defensive profile for India. Without doubt, it hinted a degree of the proclivity of military intervention of Gandhi in Pakistan's civil war.

As a cunning leader, Ms. Gandhi started traveling to the Western World including the United States of America from October 1971 with a view to earning world opinion and support. She was able to get both the United Kingdom and France to break with America [9]. Those visits were diplomatically offensive to Pakistan. Her dictation to militarily meddle in the eastern wing of Pakistan defeated the Pakistani army and made Bangladesh an independent state. It secured the monopolistic dominance of India in South Asia.

When Indira Gandhi won the war against Pakistan, even Atal Behari Vajpayee who underestimated Gandhi hailed her as an avatar of Goddess Durga delineated as a warrior who defeats evil in Hindu Mythology [16].

3.2. The State Level-Different Internal Orientation Between India and Pakistan

The differences between India and Pakistan's internal orientation are fundamental to understand why India militarily intervened in Pakistan's civil war in 1971. The two neighboring states regard each other as an arch-enemy. The state of Pre-partition relation between the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Muslim League (ML) generated incommensurable Indo-Pakistani relations after they became independent following the partition of the Indian Sub-Continent [17]. The INC opposed the "Two-Nation Theory" of ML because the former held a secular identity for united India. In comparison, the ML was an inherently Muslim organization that claimed for an independent state (Pakistan) for the Muslims. However, it was established primarily to counter the step-brotherly behavior of INC to Indian Muslims. The ML succeeded for the divide of the Sub-Continent. The divergences between two political parties have shaped the internal political landscape of the two countries. Therefore, India has been dubbed the largest democratic country in the world while Pakistan has been labeled an autocratic country since the very beginning of their independence. Indian politician Sashi Tharoor says in an Up Front program of Al Jazeera that "In India, our state has an army; in Pakistan, the army has a state" [18].

James L. Ray has shown in an experimental analysis of his research article that democratic states don't fight with each other while there is a high degree of possibility of war between democratic and autocratic countries [19]. The non-democratic political culture of Pakistan enhanced the possibility of the third Indo-Pakistani War. Furthermore, the secessionist movement in the eastern wing of Pakistan erupted because of the democratic demand of Bangladeshis after the 1970's national election of Pakistan. The value of democracy can be conceptualized by the post-war peaceful French-German relations after the inception of Germany's democratic culture. Germany was previously an autocratic state while France was democratic following the French Revolution; they had intensely hostile relations until the Second World War. India and Pakistan struggle for power accumulation for ensuring their relative advantages and national interests e.g. territorial integrity. Morgenthau believes that international politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power [20]. By birth, Pakistan was a very weak state compared with India economically and militarily in some stages. Compared with Pakistan which adopted the liberal economy, India had better economic strength based on mixed economy [17]. Pakistan became a member of American-led CEATO and CENTO and got military assistance from America. After the first Indo-China war in 1962, Communist China began to provide military assistance to Islamabad [21]. India's military assistance came from

America and the Soviet Union. From the late 1960s, the United States reduced its armed assistance to India, which aroused suspicion to the latter over the American favor on Pakistan. Thus, India became highly dependent on the Soviet military aid. As stated earlier that India's military strength was lower than that of Pakistan until 1965. Yet, till the time, Pakistan was defeated in two wars by India. Before 1971, India obtained military superiority over Pakistan and the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation added a stark military image for India.

3.3. The International System Level-Bipolar World

To be frank, the international system or setting is important for the prediction or illustration of the possibilities of war. Cold War rivalry between America and the Soviet Union was crucial for determining the logical path of the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war. Washington and Moscow competed in South Asia to expand their spheres of influence in strategic contexts. In general, neo-realists contend that in the bipolar world if one superpower shows its sincere interests to utilize a crisis or event in its favor, the other superpower automatically reacts at it in ways that become conflicting with its counterpart. The United States of America (USA) sided with Pakistan during the Bangladesh liberation war for two reasons. Firstly, Pakistan was a member of the American-led two anti-Communist organizations (SEATO and CENTO) from the 1950s. Secondly, Washington wanted to make a rapprochement with Beijing. Henry Kissinger's clandestine trip in July 1971 to China via Pakistan for desired rapprochement with the communist country to weaken the Soviet Union proved it.

Likewise, in August 1971, the Soviet Union and India signed the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation which counterpoised America-China-Pakistan axis in Asia for the Soviet Union and added a defensive profile for India. The treaty was a follow-up calculation of Indo-Soviet relations after the Sino-American rapprochement and gave the Soviet Union a formal ally in South Asia. The treaty empowered India to militarily played role against Pakistan without experiencing a security threat from Pakistan's allies- China or the United States of America [5]. Waltz states that the stability of a system has to be defined in terms of its durability as well as of peacefulness of adjustment within it [22]. For the above context, the durability and peaceful co-existence was virtually impossible to the contending superpowers because each of them feared the other in losing their position and both of them sought relative gains. Thus, the United Nations was made ineffective by their rivalry during the liberation war of Bangladesh. America proposed three resolutions for a ceasefire between India and Pakistan in the UN Security Council but these were vetoed by the Soviet Union [23]. Here, the United States didn't propound ceasefires in normative perspective; rather, they were for the survival of Pakistan to Indian invasion.

Failing in the UN, American president Nixon administration sent the United States Enterprise into the Bay of Bengal. In response, the Soviet Union dispatched its

Indian fleet in the same region. The gunboat diplomacy of America did nothing for the outcomes of the war. India defeated Pakistan and Bangladesh emerged and India became the regional superpower in South Asia. The case of Bangladesh makes it perspicuous that not just the inter-state conflict but intra-state problem can take the superpowers into the verge of war because of the anarchic international system.

4. Conclusion

The 1971 liberation war was the extreme explosion of resentments among the people of Bangladesh because of the discrimination and repression by the Pakistani rulers. The Indian military intervention into the independence struggle acted as the role of facilitator to make Bangladesh as an independent state. In the article, it's depicted that all three levels of analysis are pertinent to examine the reasons for Indian intervention into the eastern province of Pakistan. They are complementary to a broader understanding of the intervention. In the individual level, we have shown that the hawkish personality and political outlook of Indira Gandhi played dominant role for the intervention. In the state level, we have demonstrated that India's political, economic, and social systems compared with Pakistan's influenced India to go against Pakistan. We, in the international system level, have argued that the strategic positions of the then superpowers- the USA and the Soviet Union- took the people's war into international polarization. For the 1971 incident, The USA made a bloc with China and Pakistan while the Soviet Union backed India as a strategic ally. The polarization is the outcome of what neo-realists believe that international political setting is anarchic. The UN, hence, couldn't play any proper role to stop the crisis. The emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 dismissed the credibility of "Two-Nation Theory" of the Muslim League. The 1971 South Asian crisis has, in fact, made the LoA of Waltz more relevant device in International Relations.

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