

Forum: Historic Crisis Committee

Issue: Third Indo-Pakistani War (1971)

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Introduction

The Third Indo-Pakistani War of 1971 was a military confrontation between India and Pakistan that took place from 3rd December 1971 to 16th December 1971¹. The conflict was sparked by the Bangladesh Liberation War, a conflict between the military forces of West Pakistan and the rebellious forces in East Pakistan. The war ignited after the 1970 Pakistani election, in which the East Pakistani Awami League won 167 of 169 seats in East Pakistan, thus securing a simple majority in the 313-seat lower house of the Pakistani parliament². This incentivised the East Pakistani political party to demand the right to governance, which was denied by the central government in West Pakistan. After several days of mass arrests to calm dissidence in the form of worker strikes and public protests, on 27th March 1971, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi expressed her support for the self-determination of East Pakistan, and opened India's borders to refugees³. This reaction from the Indian leadership created hostilities between India and Pakistan over the months that followed, which manifested in the Pakistani conduction of Operation Chengiz Khan.

Officially beginning on the evening of the 3rd of December 1971, Pakistan conducted operation Chengiz Khan – pre-emptive air strikes against 11 Indian air bases⁴. This led to the then Prime Minister of India stating that the air strikes were a 'declaration of war' against India, and the Indian Air Force responding with air strikes the same night. This air action marked the official start of the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971; Prime Minister Gandhi ordered the immediate mobilisation of troops and launched a full-scale invasion of Pakistan. This involved Indian forces in massive coordinated air, sea and land assaults on Pakistan from all fronts. The main Indian objective on the Eastern front was to capture Dhaka, and on the Western front was to prevent

¹ https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Indo-Pakistani_Wars

² *ibid*

³ <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/bangladesh-salutes-indira-gandhi/article2290625.ece>

⁴ <https://www.orfonline.org/research/how-1971-war-fought-won/>

Pakistan from entering Indian soil. There was no Indian intention of conducting any major offensive into Pakistan to dismember it into different states.

This crisis had a significant international dimension to it as well. With the goal of getting the international community on her side, Indira Gandhi conducted a diplomatic tour across Europe where she was successful in getting the United Kingdom and France to support her in blocking any pro-Pakistan directives in the Security Council. However, most significantly, was the twenty year treaty of friendship Gandhi signed with the Soviet Union, shocking the United States of America and providing the Indian army with assurance that China, an ally of Pakistan, would not get involved in the conflict. These relationships were historic in that they were sure to characterize their respective nations' diplomatic relations on the global level for the years to come. Lasting just 13 days, it was one of the shortest wars in history.

Definition of Key Terms

Airstrikes

An offensive operation carried out by aircraft⁵.

National Liberation Movement

A liberation movement is an organization or political movement leading a rebellion, or a non violent social movement against a colonial power or national government, often seeking independence based on a nationalist identity and an anti-imperialist outlook⁶.

Razakars

An anti-Bangladesh paramilitary force organised by the Pakistan Army in then East Pakistan, now called Bangladesh, during the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971. The Razakar force was composed of mostly anti-Bangladesh and pro-Pakistan Bengalis and Urdu-speaking migrants who lived in Bangladesh at the time⁷,

Referendum

⁵ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/air%20strike>

⁶ https://www.uni-bielefeld.de/cias/wiki/n_National_Liberation_Movements.html

⁷ A. R. Siddiqui, East Pakistan – the Endgame: An Onlooker's Journal 1969–1971, Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 171

A direct vote in which an entire electorate is invited to vote on a particular proposal. This may result in the adoption of a new law. In some countries, it is synonymous with a plebiscite or a vote on a ballot question⁸.

Self-Determination

The process by which a country determines its own statehood and forms its own government⁹.

Unilateral Ceasefire

A unilateral ceasefire is a cessation of hostilities, such as in a war, which is only binding on one of the combatant sides¹⁰.

Background Information

Bangladeshi Liberation War

An armed revolution in East Pakistan with the objective of self-determination from West Pakistan. The movement began after West Pakistan's conduct of Operation Searchlight (a planned military operation with the objective of curbing the Bengali nationalist movement by taking military control of major cities in East Pakistan and eliminating popular secessionist leaders). Bengali nationalistic sentiments were fuelled by the imposition of Urdu as a national language on East Pakistan by the central government after partition in 1948, even though majority of the population did not speak it. It was lead by Sheikh Mujib Rahman of the Awami League, the party who had democratically gained a large share of seats in the Pakistani parliament¹¹.

Bangladeshi Genocide

It is estimated that between 300,000 and 3,00,000 civilians were killed in Bangladesh in the conflict. During the war, members of the Pakistani military called Razakars raped between 200,000 and 400,000 Bangladeshi women and girls in a massive systematic campaign of genocidal rape. As a result of the conflict, a further eight to ten million people fled the country to seek refuge in India. One of the most prominent events of the genocide was the Jinjira Massacre - a planned killing of civilian protesters by the Pakistani army on 2nd April 1971. The

⁸ Green, Antony (12 August 2015). "Plebiscite or Referendum - What's the Difference". ABC. Retrieved 23 August 2015

⁹ <https://pesd.princeton.edu/?q=node/266>

¹⁰ <https://study.com/academy/answer/what-is-a-unilateral-ceasefire.html>

¹¹ https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Bangladesh_War_of_Independence

killings occurred at the unions Jinjira, Kalindi, and Shubhadya of Keraniganj Upazila across the Buriganga River from Dhaka¹². The massacre, which continued for nearly 9 hours and took more than a thousand lives, was a powerful display of the Pakistani military's merciless approach to dealing with the Bengali rebels. The impact of the massacre was that the West Pakistani forces strengthened their military presence in East Pakistan - the use of blatant aggression against not only suspected rebels, but also the civilian population in the region highlighted the conviction of the military to crackdown on revolutionary forces through any means possible¹³.

Pakistani Military Operations

One of the first significant military operations by West Pakistan was Operation Searchlight, a planned military operation carried out by the Pakistan Army to curb the Bengali nationalist movement in the erstwhile East Pakistan in March 1971. Ordered by the central government in West Pakistan, the plan envisioned taking control of all of East Pakistan's major cities on 26 March¹⁴.

Another prominent military operation, and the direct trigger for starting the war between India and Pakistan, was Operation Chengiz Khan, the code name assigned to the pre-emptive strike carried out by the Pakistani Air Force on the forward airbases and radar installations of the Indian Air Force on the evening of 3 December 1971, and marked the formal initiation of hostilities of the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971.

Indian Involvement in the Bangladeshi Liberation Movement

Indian military involvement in the civil war in East Pakistan was deemed an infringement of sovereignty by the Pakistani central government in the West. The historical context of two previous wars (1948 and 1965) fought between India and Pakistan created tension between the two nations. Thus, Pakistan's suspicions of Indian involvement in the East and in general were significant reasons for their commencement of air strikes on India. India's involvement was primarily seen in their alleged support and interaction with the Mukti Bahini (Also called the Bangladesh Forces, it was formed by the Bangladeshi military, paramilitary, and civilians during the Liberation Movement in 1971 to fight against West Pakistan's military forces in the East)¹⁵.

¹² The Daily Bangla, 13 November 1972

¹³ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/the-war-bangladesh-can-never-forget-8501636.html>

¹⁴ Abu Md. Delwar Hossain (2012), "Operation Searchlight", in Sirajul Islam and Ahmed A. Jamal (ed.), *Banglapedia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh* (Second ed.), Asiatic Society of Bangladesh

¹⁵ Ahmed, Helal Uddin (2012). "Mukti Bahini". In Islam, Sirajul; Jamal, Ahmed A. (eds.). *Banglapedia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh* (Second ed.). Asiatic Society of Bangladesh

Moreover, India's alleged interference and support of the rebel movement, according to Indian leaders, was actually humanitarian aid in response to the horrors of the Jinjira Massacre.

Battle of Longewala

One of the first major engagements between India and Pakistan from 4th - 7th December 1971, fought between a defending India and an assaulting Pakistan at the Indian border post of Longewala in the Thar Desert in Rajasthan. The battle was fought between 120 Indian soldiers accompanied by 4 Hunter fighter aircraft and 2000-3000 Pakistani soldiers accompanied by 40-45 tanks. It saw heavy Pakistani casualties compared to Indian ones, with approximately 200 Pakistani soldiers killed¹⁶.

Indian Military Operations

One of the most prominent Indian military operations was Operation Trident, an offensive operation launched by the Indian Navy on the port city of Karachi. The operation was conducted on the night of 4th December and inflicted heavy damage on Pakistani vessels and facilities. While India suffered no losses, Pakistan lost a minesweeper, a destroyer, a cargo vessel carrying ammunition, and fuel storage tanks in Karachi¹⁷.

Another significant military operation conducted by India was Operation Python. A follow-up mission to Operation Trident, it was launched on the night of 8th December in response to Pakistan's increase in aerial surveillance of Indian military ships, and their strategy to intermingle with merchant ships to go unnoticed. While India did not suffer any heavy losses, Pakistan lost a fleet tanker and the Kemari Oil Storage facility¹⁸.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

India

India, along with Pakistan, was one of the primary actors in this crisis situation. Prior to the official beginning of the war, India's role in the build-up to it was evident in its border policy regarding the East Pakistan Liberation Movement - the Indian government opened the East Pakistan-India border to allow Bengali refugees to seek shelter in India. The governments of multiple states - West Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Meghalaya, and Tripura - established refugee

¹⁶ Karl R. DeRouen; Uk Heo (2007). Civil Wars of the World: Major Conflicts Since World War II

¹⁷ Commander Neil Gadihoke. "40 Years Since Operation Trident". Indian Defence Review

¹⁸ https://ipfs.io/ipfs/QmXoypizjW3WknFijnKLwHCnL72vedxjQkDDP1mXWo6uco/wiki/Operation_Python.html

camps along the border. After hearing claims of support for rebel Bengali movements, the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, declared to the international community that their opening up of borders was rather in assistance to the thousands of displaced Bengali refugees and not a tactical move to trouble their long-time rivals Pakistan. With the escalation of the humanitarian crisis, Indira Gandhi appealed to the international community for help but failed to elicit a response. However, the rapid influx of immigrants proved to be a burden on India's economy, which was struggling to find the resources to support them. Thus, after the escalation of suspicion between India and Pakistan over the coming months, the Indian leadership declared that it would be more economical for India to go to war with Pakistan rather than continue to host thousands of refugees¹⁹. After the official commencement of the war in early December, India launched a series of military attacks such as Operation Trident and Operation Python on Pakistani ground forces, air and naval bases. Additionally, India fought directly with Pakistani forces at the Battle of Longewala.

Pakistan

Pakistan was seen as the primary aggressor in the Third Indo-Pakistani War of 1971. Prior to the official commencement of the war with India, the tension between the two countries rose over months partly due to Pakistan's refusal to grant autonomy to East Pakistan. Central Pakistani military forces had occupied East Pakistan to suppress the rebel movements, marked significantly by Operation Searchlight in late March. Here, the tension between the two nations rose because Pakistan alleged that India was deliberately hindering Pakistan's efforts in quelling the self-determination movement, and was in fact actively in contact with the Mukti Bahini. Pakistani president Yahya Khan publicly criticised India for its involvement in harbouring refugees, who Pakistan instead saw as prisoners of war. When tensions peaked in early December 1971, Pakistan launched Operation Chengiz Khan, an aerial mission to attack Indian air-force bases. This offensive action described clearly that Pakistan was willing to engage in direct warfare with India if they continued to engage with the Bengali rebels. Over the course of the war, Pakistan engaged in direct military confrontation with India such as in the Battle of Longewala, with its leadership staunchly refusing to pull its forces out of East Pakistan. This was because the East held approximately half of Pakistan's population and was an extremely significant economic contributor to the central government's treasury. Thus, the stakes were very high for Pakistan in this war, as it risked losing a huge proportion of its territory, population,

¹⁹ Raghavan, Srinath (2012), "Soldiers, Statesmen, and India's Security Policy", India Review

and economy - moreover, a loss to the rebel movement would deal a crushing blow to its military's pride²⁰.

China

Throughout the entirety of the war, China strongly criticised India for its involvement in the Bangladeshi Liberation Movement, and accused India of having soft imperialistic designs for South Asia. Prior to the official beginning of the war, China provided the Pakistani leadership with advice, particularly in finding a peaceful resolution with the rebel leaders so that Indian involvement did not reach the level of engagement of a direct war - a difficult war that China advised Pakistan could not win while fighting on multiple fronts. When the war officially started, China disagreed with Pakistani president Yahya Khan's stubborn military approach, but continued to criticize India's supra-national tendencies nonetheless. Furthermore, once the war began, US President Richard Nixon encouraged China to mobilise its military forces across its border with India to increase pressure on the Indian leadership. However, China did not respond to this encouragement as it did not want to formally enter any military confrontation, whilst also being wary of the strength of Indian forces on China's border²¹.

Iran

Over the course of the conflict, Iranian leadership showed strong support for Pakistan. It helped Pakistan shelter fighter jets and provided it with free jet fuel during the conflict. Iran's political stance behind these actions was that it did not want an imminent power vacuum in East Pakistan to cause it to fragment into multiple states - this was because Iran already had hostilities with some of its Arab neighbours, and did not want any potential rivals to encircle it²².

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka was extremely wary of the warning China had issued to other South Asian countries - it feared that India might use its enhanced power against it in a similar manner that it had in East Pakistan. Because of this fear, Sri Lanka began to help the Pakistani military forces in providing a strategic location for warships and fighter jets to stop and refuel²³. For example,

²⁰ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/what-you-dont-know-about-the-1971-bangladesh-war/as-much-a-naval-battle/slideshow/58082074.cms>

²¹ Singh, Swaran, ed. (2007). China-Pakistan strategic cooperation : Indian perspectives. New Delhi: Manohar. p. 61

²² Mudiam, Prithvi Ram (1994). India and the Middle East. British Academic Press

²³ "Pak thanks Lanka for help in 1971 war". Hindustan Times. 11 June 2011

since Pakistani aircraft could not fly safely over Indian territory the Sri Lankan government allowed them to stop for refuelling at Bandaranaike Airport before flying to East Pakistan²⁴.

Soviet Union

The Soviet Union showed support for India in the war against Pakistan, and showed sympathy for the Mukti Bahini rebels. Its broader political stance in this conflict was that it saw an independent Bangladesh would weaken the presence of the USA and China in Asia. It gave assurances to India that it would take countermeasures in support of it in case the USA or China got directly involved in the conflict. Such assurances were formalized in the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed in August 1971²⁵.

United States of America

The USA supported Pakistan both politically and economically as President Nixon and his Secretary of State Henry Kissinger believed that support for Pakistan was needed in order to help reduce Soviet influence in South Asia, which was incrementally growing through their alliance with India. During the Cold War, Pakistan had been a close formal ally of the USA. Furthermore, US leadership concluded that any possible Indian invasion of Pakistan would cement the Soviet Union as the dominant major power in Asia²⁶, while also undermining the global position of the USA and the regional position of their new Asian ally China. Nixon encouraged Jordan and Iran to send military supplies to Pakistan, while also encouraging China to increase its arms supplies to Pakistan, but supplies were very limited²⁷.

Arab Nations

Arab nations in the Middle East also played a role in voicing their positions on the conflict, which in turn actualized the pressure from the international community on India and Pakistan in this crisis situation. The USA's foreign affairs department encouraged Jordan and Saudi Arabia to help Pakistan in this crisis through provision of military resources such as fighter jets and diplomatic support. Libyan leader Muammar Al Gaddafi sharply criticized Indira Gandhi, accusing her of deliberate aggression against Pakistan during a time when they're facing a difficult rebellion movement²⁸.

²⁴ <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP83S00854R000200130001-0.pdf>

²⁵ <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP83S00854R000200130001-0.pdf>

²⁶ VSM, Brig Amar Cheema (31 March 2015). *The Crimson Chinar: The Kashmir Conflict: A Politico Military Perspective*. Lancer Publishers

²⁷ Alvandi, Roham (November 2016). *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The United States and Iran in the Cold War*. Oxford University Press

²⁸ Nazar Abbas (26 August 2011). "Gaddafi is gone, long live Libya". *The News International*

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
19th March 1971	Pakistan's army suppresses a Bengali nationalist protest with approximately 1,100 East Pakistani casualties
25th March 1971	Commencement of Operation Searchlight
26th March 1971	Leader of the independence movement, Mujib Rahman, is arrested by Pakistani military moments after declaring independence for Bangladesh
2nd April 1971	Jinjira Massacre
15th May 1971	India enters into contact with the Mukti Bahini
3rd December 1971	Operation Chengiz Khan; India formally declares war on Pakistan
4th December 1971	Battle of Longewala
5th December 1971	Operation Trident launched in Karachi by the Indian Navy
8th December 1971	Operation Python launched in Karachi by the Indian Navy
11th - 13th December 1971	The USA deploys the USS Enterprise into the Bay of Bengal to intimidate Indian Naval forces; USSR sends in warships to counter USS Enterprise ²⁹

²⁹ <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/india-pakistan-1971-war-bangladesh-indira-gandhi-4429236/>

Relevant Treaties and Events

Accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India is ratified by the state's assembly (1954)³⁰.

The Jammu and Kashmir assembly approves a constitution (1957)³¹ - this adds to tensions between India and Pakistan as the latter also wanted the territory for its strategic military location and Muslim majority population.

Talks between the foreign ministers of India and Pakistan are held regarding the territorial dispute over Kashmir, but no agreement was reached (1963) - lack of agreement between the two parties was indicative of the growing suspicion between them and the obstinate nature of India's foreign policy, as it refused to cede territory to Pakistan.

Pakistan refers the Kashmir case and India's lack of negotiating to the Security Council after being dissatisfied by the 1963 talks (1964)³² - bringing in the decision-making organ of the UN officially marked the entry of power players like the USA and the Soviet Union into the diplomatic talks, both of which were eager to strengthen their presence in the south Asian region.

A UN mandated ceasefire is ordered after the 1965 war between India and Pakistan (1965)³³ - helped to restore economic and diplomatic relations between the two countries and brought relative stability to the high-tension borderlands.

Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and Pakistani President Ayub Khan signed an agreement at Tashkent to restore economic and diplomatic relations (1966)³⁴ - the resumption of an official cooperative relationship between the two countries, aided by a UN mandated ceasefire, showed how the leadership of both nations did not want to take any decisions that would immediately encourage another war.

³⁰ <https://uca.edu/politicalscience/dadm-project/asiapacific-region/indiakashmir-1947-present/>

³¹ http://jklaw.nic.in/the_constitution_of_jammu_and_kashmir_1956.pdf

³² https://www.un.org/en/sc/repertoire/64-65/Chapter%208/64-65_08-3-The%20India-Pakistan%20question.pdf

³³ <https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/unipombackgr.html>

³⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Tashkent-Agreement>

Possible Actions

Referendum in East Pakistan

This would allow the East Pakistani citizens to democratically decide their own fate, and could possibly constitute a fair resolution to the conflict. However, it is possible that a referendum in a crisis-stricken zone could be influenced by the presence of either Indian or Pakistani troops in the region, thus possibly yielding a crippled result.

Establishment of diplomatic talks between India and Pakistan

Creating a forum for diplomatic talks could help resolve the conflict in a peaceful manner and without further bloodshed. However, challenges exist in the matter of who mediates such talks, considering that major powers such as the USA and the Soviet Union had significantly different motivations in establishing their presence in Asia.

Imposition of economic sanctions on either or both of India and Pakistan

Economic sanctions could prove to be an effective punishment for India and/or Pakistan for directly engaging in a war with each other that resulted in thousands of lost lives. The strength of these sanctions as well as deciding who shares more of the blame are important factors to consider for such an action.

Declaration of martial law in East Pakistan by central Pakistani forces

Considering that East Pakistan still fell under the sovereign territory of Pakistan, the declaration of martial law by Pakistan could perhaps allow it to instill civil stability in the region in terms of reducing violence by acting as a deterrent. Challenges exist in ensuring that increased West Pakistani forces in the region do not contribute to the humanitarian crisis occurring there.

Complete occupation of East Pakistan by central Pakistani forces

The usage of military force to completely occupy East Pakistan could allow the central Pakistani government to effectively demolish the Mukti Bahini and the growing Bengali self-determination movement. Challenges for Pakistan exist in finding solutions to hold off Indian interference during the occupation.

Security Council mandated restriction of military forces

Since several of India's major operations were through the usage of their naval force, the restriction of it could forcefully help create peaceful conditions in the subcontinent region. Since Pakistan's initial aggression in Operation Chengiz Khan was conducted aerially, the restriction of its air-force could significantly reduce its capacity to engage in military conflict with India, thus possibly helping to end the conflict. The viability of a restriction of the Indian navy and/or the Pakistani air-force lays with specifying a compromise in which an equitable/deserving proportion of each country's military forces is restricted - deciding which country deserves more/less restrictions and the degree of these restrictions will be the job of the delegates of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Call for the creation of a War Crime Tribunal for East Pakistan

Considering that one of the major facets in this conflict was the violent humanitarian crisis happening in East Pakistan, the creation of a judicial body to reprimand the perpetrators of the Bangladeshi genocide could be a viable manner to obtain justice for the thousands of lives lost in the conflict. Challenges exist in deciding fair adjudicators for this tribunal.

Assist in the creation of a new interim government in East Pakistan

In this crisis situation, a prominent cause for the loss of thousands of lives is the power struggle between the rebelling Bengali forces and the West Pakistani military forces in East Pakistan. International assistance in setting up a new interim government in East Pakistan could help provide stability to the chaos-stricken region. However, the level of independence from West Pakistan that this possible new government would have is up to the decision of the committee, and will depend on other countries' foreign relations with Pakistan. The implications of an independent new government would mean that Pakistan would lose a sizeable portion of its territory and approximately half its entire population.

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