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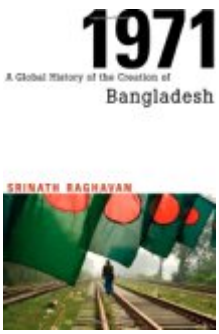
Srinath Raghavan. *1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013. 368 pp. $29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-674-72864-6.



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In October, 1971, *New York Times* reporter Sydney Schanberg began an anguished piece in *Foreign Affairs* with spare prose: "History, geopolitical forces, power balances and election results all helped shape the crisis in East Pakistan." But, he continued, "only in terms of 'the pathology of the subcontinent,' as one diplomat described it, can this bloody upheaval be adequately explained."[1]

The distance between these two statements--one coolly analytical and international, the other emotional, sympathetic, and oddly imperial in its accusations--frames Srinath Raghavan's *1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh*. A very welcome contribution to the literature of Pakistan's dismemberment and Bangladesh's independence, the book seeks to reshape the history of this unremittingly violent war. Raghavan carefully and systematically replaces the blinders of a political and historical localism by setting the conflict in the evolving international politics of the day. As he notes in his prologue, previous narratives have treated the breakup of Pakistan as "primarily a subcontinental affair--the world beyond was playing only a bit part, if that" (p. 6)--and somewhat unthinkingly predetermined. Raghavan shows (as does Gary Bass, somewhat differently, in *The Blood Telegram*[2]) that the independence of Bangladesh was not inevitable. If Pakistan's division began to seem so--as Schanberg came to believe after months of critical reporting that led the Government of Pakistan to send him packing--it was as much the result of essentially global forces in the cusp year of 1971 as it was culmination of the subcontinent's divisive and mistaken policies.

This is a story that can and should be told from many vantage points: Bangladeshi narratives of discrimination leading to national liberation; corrosively fatal analyses of national security, as understood differently in India and Pakistan, and among their patrons; searing tales of humanitarian crisis, ethnic cleansing, and genocide designed and sanctioned in West Pakistan to humble or destroy East Pakistan; post-Vietnam war sagas of Cold War grudges between the Unit-

ed States and the Soviet Union, continuing Sino-Soviet readjustments, and new alliances that were beginning to reshape North-South relations and realign the globe. Previous writings have taken account of various of these elements: Richard Sisson and Leo Rose set a detailed standard with *War and Secession* in 1990; documents published after the war illuminated a number of perspectives on the run-up to the war; writers such as Naeem Mohammien have been working through many questions of this partition from the perspective of Bangladeshis; and recently, Sarmila Bose has published a controversial rendering of the war, which Mohammien has contested vigorously. [3]

Raghavan goes further, though: he combines all of these viewpoints through meticulous archival research (and Bass has gone even further working with declassified U.S. materials) to demonstrate what global politics meant in the early 1970s. The combined forces of decolonization, changing Cold War security structures, and critically, rising--if still somewhat inchoate--globalization are the foundations of *1971*.

Few civil wars are only local--Raghavan is right to point to similarities between contemporary crises and 1971 in this respect--and there was little about the tensions between East and West Pakistan that lived in a vacuum. The awkward joining of East and West were apparent when Mohammed Ali Jinnah's first official visit to Dacca exposed deep cultural, linguistic, and political divisions in the two-winged state. Different social and class configurations between East and West, the ignominy of incomplete security arrangements for the east during the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war, and strikingly uneven economic consequences between East and West under Ayub Khan's Decade of Development were all exacerbated by judicial decisions that reinforced a sense of legal deprivation among many in East Pakistan. These cases--with which Raghavan deals only tangentially--remain historically contentious even today: at the time, for example, the Agartala Conspiracy case, which targeted Sheikh Mujib ur Rahman and his colleagues as secessionists--was thought to be a trumped-up charge of waging a war of independence rather than autonomy within Pakistan, but may have been otherwise.

Raghavan nonetheless supports the thesis that Pakistan need not have splintered: he contends, as do many others, that political misapprehensions, purposeful ignorance, policy misdirection, and ultimately, Pakistan's badly managed disputes between East and West led to Bangladeshi independence. He also contends that once war began between India and Pakistan--and he demonstrates that India ignited the fire, even while hoping that Pakistan would do so--it was not inevitable that India would win. Indeed, he shows that India's goals were relatively modest at the outset, and only grew with time and the evolving global circumstances of reshaping alliances, patronage, and changing ideas about global power. With India's victory, however, came Pakistan's defeat and the new state of Bangladesh.

Perhaps the most interesting element of Raghavan's analysis--which Bass's reading of White House records supports--is that independence came about in no small measure due Washington's post-Vietnam Cold War prejudices and its profound misreading of China's diplomatic preferences. President Richard Nixon and national security advisor Henry Kissinger supplied arms to Pakistan--baldly contravening American law and over the objections of many U.S. senators. Nixon and Kissinger were bound by two serious errors of judgment: first, that the U.S. "opening" to China was a paramount U.S. national security priority, and second, that given India's seeming closeness to Moscow (with Indira Gandhi spurred on by various of her own advisors), China would step in to "save" Pakistan. China (and in many ways, the Soviet Union as well), as Raghavan demonstrates persuasively, had other interests and priorities.

The U.S. opening to China came about despite this misperception--China understood the consequences of its own choices far more astutely than Nixon did--and the United States supported Pakistan's Yahya Khan far beyond what the situation demanded. Indeed, absent U.S. military support, Pakistan would most likely have been far less adventuresome and almost certainly less brutal in its treatment of its own citizens in the East. In the end, Pakistan's ignominious defeat was also a defeat for a worldview that Nixon and Kissinger shared. Old-fashioned left-right foreign policies and politics were literally trashed by the time 1971 ended: China and India headed in different directions, Pakistan's military regime ended in disgrace and was replaced by a left-wing, pro-nuclear elected government, and the power balance in South Asia was refashioned in continually conflicted ways. In the end, the changing contours of war were as much the result of circumstance and mishap as strategic design.

Among the consequences of this trajectory was a human tragedy, and as so often happens, its effects on military strategy led in different directions. Although this war was not the first postcolonial internal borders conflict--the 1967 Nigeria-Biafra conflict set a sad example of political tragedy and humanitarian disaster--the fight for and against East Pakistan created an unconscionable humanitarian and human rights catastrophe. Indeed, it was this aspect of the conflict that brought India closer to the fray, and set off alarms across the globe. Until Pakistan-imposed censorship closed off Dacca to foreign reporting, Western journalists had been able to cross the border into India to document the massive flow of refugees--many of them Hindu--into neighboring Tripura. (Sheikh Hasina's visit to Tripura this year offered retrospective testament to the risks that India was forced to take to protect millions of displaced persons.) Schanberg had to leave Dacca, and it was finally Anthony Mascarenhas who broke a story in London's *Sunday Times* that labeled Pakistan's rampant killings as genocide. Subsequent attention, led by an activist international press, was able to summon tremendous global attention to this small, crowded corner of Asia.

Bass is devastating in his descriptions of the White House's contempt for the victims of this war, and Raghavan uses similar material to buttress his case. His discussion of genocide as the result of cross-border collaboration in pursuit of divergent interests is excellent: his treatment of the Muslim-Hindu dimension of the Pakistan army's tactics, paired with his analysis of Pakistan's efforts to force a humanitarian crisis on neighboring India, provides a clear picture of a conflict gone mad. Equally important, however, his discussion of the role of humanitarian organizations in trying to stem the tide of refugees and stave of further killings highlights the very different views of the international community--seen through the eyes of UNHCR and aid organizations--and New Delhi: the first saw the problem in strictly humanitarian terms, the latter in strictly political terms, and neither was fully correct. The issue rose to the level of UN secretary general U Thant, whose concern for South Asian peace ***after*** the conflict led him to draft a memorandum noting that the "humanitarian, economic and political problems are mingled in such a sway as almost to defy any distinction among them" (quoted, p. 153). Washington, according to Schanberg, tried to separate the region's political problems from the humanitarian, and thus India "won," in a sense: the UN paid little heed to South Asia's brutal war, and the restrictions India--already a sovereignty hawk--placed on international organizations underscored its own interests, power, and sovereignty. That Pakistan was arguing similarly--and self-defeatingly--was one of the great ironies of 1971.

As Raghavan deftly notes, the humanitarian disaster was in many ways created by the violation of a wide range of rights, a many-sided problem that afflicted South Asia (and particularly Pakistan and Bangladesh) for many years after war ended. Pakistan's political difficulties accom-

modating displaced persons from Dacca, the difficult and curious role of sectarian organizations during the war and after, sliding international alliances toward and within South Asia, and Bangladesh's struggle today with war crimes tribunals, all speak to the tense intersections between battles and politics during the fateful year of 1971.

Notes

[1]. Sydney H. Schanberg, "Pakistan Divided," Foreign Affairs 50, no. 1 (October 1971): 125-135, available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/20037892.

[2]. Gary J. Bass, *The Blood Telegram: Nixon, Kissinger, and a Forgotten Genocide* (New York: Knopf, 2013).

[3]. Richard Sisson and Leo Rose, *War and Secession: Pakistan, India, and the Creation of Bangladesh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Naeem Mohaiemen, "Flying Blind: Waiting for a Real Reckoning on 1971," *Economic and Political Weekly*, September 3, 2011; and Sarmila Bose, *Dead Reckoning: Memories of the 1971 Bangladesh War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).