Chapter IX

Air & Naval Operations: Strategy and Execution

Introduction
Field Marshal Bernard Montogomery highlighted the importance of air force in the overall outcome of an war by saying, “If we lose the war in air we lose the war and we lose it quickly". An all out war like that of 1971, couldn’t have been fought without adjunct operations by the Navy keeping control of the sea and the Air Force ensuring command over the airspace. Before taking an account of naval and air force operations conducted by the opposing forces, it would be prudent to have an overview of their developmental history from the partition days till beginning of the war so that their combat potential can be gauged which would enable to analyse their operational strategy and tactical employment. In both India as well in Pakistan and more so in Pakistan Army has been the primary defence force and therefore got treatment of big brother vis -a -vis navy and air force. In no war scenario for various emergency duties army also play the major role there by keeping its place of prominence alive. Unlike army which is a manpower heavy organization, navy and air force are high value equipment heavy organizations and are cost prohibitive for a third world economy like India and Pakistan. Both these countries traditionally vied for each other’s inventory and did their best to outmatch other within the constraints. At the time of independence both India and Pakistan inherited army with experience of two world wars and many battles but its navy and air force were not only small but also less battle hardened.

In this chapter, an endeavour will be made to seek answer to the following questions:
(a) What was the state of navy and air force of India and Pakistan and how were they built up to make them combat ready?
(b) At the time of war what was their organization and what equipments were held by them?
(c) What were the naval and air strategy and tasking?
(d) Performance appraisal including highlights of certain air and naval actions. How did the navy and the air force contribute towards the overall outcome of the war?

Though scope of the discussions will majorly cover naval and air actions related to Bangladesh campaign, however a broad overview of the operations in the west will be given to afford understanding and examination of the overall strategy.

Map No.15

(Source: John H. Gill, Colonel, An Atlas of the 1971 India-Pakistan War: The Creation of Bangladesh, p.71)
NAVAL OPERATIONS-1971 WAR

Development of the Indian Navy

During the partition the erstwhile Royal Indian Navy was inherited by India and Pakistan in the rough proportion of two to one. India got about 32 light vessels of mixed types against Pakistan’s 16 and the ship repair facility at Mazagaon Dock, Bombay and Calcutta.² Nehru understood the importance of an independent strong navy to ensure security of sea lines of communications so that Indian merchant ships sail freely in the Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal. But Nehru visualized the navy more as protector of sea lanes for the mercantile ships than an war arm which could be engaged against destroying enemy’s naval ships and infrastructure. Building up naval ships is a time consuming affair. Notwithstanding Nehru’s desire, navy was not built up the way it should have been. After the Indo China War of 1962, India commenced a general military buildup. The build-up however, revolved around a strong army with supporting air force. Little combat role was envisaged for the navy during this period. 1965 War clearly brought out the inadequacies of navy. Fazal Muqeem made an observation that “The Indian Navy was taken completely by surprise, and was not prepared to seek an engagement at sea with a much weaker opponent.” (Pakistan’s attack in 1965)³. The naval lobby became vociferous and restructuring of navy received more attention and budget allocation.

The maritime threat to India remained ambiguous. In March 1949, roles defined for the navy was protection of merchant ships, assistance to army for any amphibious operation and offensive operations against enemy ports and installations.⁴ The need to increase the naval capability was merely based on conjectural perceptions of the evolving strategic environment around India. Some of the factors that worked in favour of the navy were the:

a. Modernisation of small Pakistan Navy and its growing potential to harass Indian merchant fleet.

b. The Chinese threat in the Bay of Bengal.

c. The importance of strong indigenous merchant fleet for economic prosperity was felt.
d. And the new awareness of the long gestation period involved in building a balanced naval force.

The need for naval build-up was politically accepted. Thus the orders were placed for the acquisition of eight F-class submarine, OSA class missile boats and Petya Class escort vessels from USSR. Structural changes were also made in the command organisation. Three operational commands namely the Western Naval Command at Mumbai, the Southern Naval Command at Cochin and the Eastern Naval Command at Vizag were created. Apart from the new acquisitions, the naval expansion also saw the building up of infrastructure and reinforcement of facilities along the west coast at Okha and Diu and at Andaman and Nicobar islands at Port Blair. The ports in Andaman and Nicobar Islands were modernized for operations. To enhance the early warning and surveillance capabilities, maritime aircrafts were acquired and refurbished along with other surface units. Thus at the time of going to war in 1971, the Indian Navy had the inventory of one aircraft carrier INS Vikrant, INS Mysore, light cruiser INS Delhi, six frigates, eight missile boats and four submarines.

**Development of the Pakistan Navy**

Across the border the Pakistan navy too was the most neglected of the three services. Pakistan's main fleet which consisted of one cruiser and seven destroyers were of World War II vintage and unsatisfactory sea going and fighting capabilities. Very limited funds were spared from the defence budget for the navy for any modernization, acquisition of new equipment and replacement of old ships. His performance in 1965 was much greater than the role demanded and was beyond the expectations of most optimists. Though Pak Navy had shown its importance in war, its importance was not recognized by the defence planners and very little budget was allocated. Out of budget of Rs.20 crores, only 4 to 5 crores worth of foreign exchange component was allocated. Therefore no money was available either for modernisation or acquisition of new equipment or replacement of its old fleet. At the time of going to war in 1971, Pakistan had a very modest sea going capability with just one major naval base in the west at Karachi. The only real teeth were three newly acquired Dolphin Class submarines on which Pakistan Navy laid a lot of trust.
Apart from the ageing fleet, a major material handicap for Pakistan navy was the unavailability of maritime air element. Pakistan Navy lost a great deal of its offensive and defensive capability due to this factor. The newly acquired submarines could not be effectively used or employed because of the non availability of maritime effort to direct the submarines to surface enemy targets. The Navy also remained completely blind to the operations of Indian fleet and missile boats which proved to be a major disadvantage. Keeping in view the requirement of the air effort, the navy had earlier requested to joint chiefs committee at different times since 1963 to procure maritime reconnaissance and strike aircraft for PAF(Pakistan Air Force) for supporting naval operations. However, maritime air support was a low priority for PAF and no such capability was developed. Thus the Pakistan navy was forced to go to war with inadequate and outmoded ships of great quantitative and qualitative disparities and without air cover. Pakistan navy officers were relatively younger, had seen quick promotions and did not have the benefit of intensive training. It was further handicapped by the lack of fleet support and poor cooperation of the Pakistan Air Force. In 1971, Pakistan navy had additional constraints of manpower since 3,000 officers and men out of a total 8,000 were rendered ineffective after military action began in East Pakistan in Mar 71, thus reducing the effective strength by nearly 38% at the time of going to war because the Bengali naval personnel either deserted or suspected or the navy suffered casualty during the civil war till November 1971. In the East, Pakistan maintained a brown water navy and not a blue water navy unlike India which itself gave a parity disadvantage. Before the strategy and the concept of operations is analysed, it would be proper to ascertain the comparative strength of the two navies at the time of going to war.
Table No.6: Comparative Strength of the Opposing Naval Forces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Ships</th>
<th>Indian Navy</th>
<th>Pakistan Navy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cruisers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destroyers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frigates</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petyas</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minesweepers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submarines</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missile Boats</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logistic Ships</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Naval Air Arm**

- Sea hawks/Carrier aircrafts: 35, -
- Alize ASW aircrafts: 12, -
- Seaking ASW Helicopters: 8, -

**Strategic Perspective of the Pakistan Navy**

Pakistan firmly believed that any war with India would be of short duration. The main battle of survival was expected to be fought in the plains of Punjab and Rajasthan in consonance to their strategic perception that “defence of the east lies in the west”. Therefore all efforts had to be made to strengthen the land and air elements no significant role was envisaged for the navy although, the Navy had a vital task of keeping the sea lanes open for supplies by sea into East or West Pakistan. Thus Pakistan Navy always found itself in a continuous struggle to assert its rightful place in the country’s defence hierarchy.⁸

Navy was at the back stage and was involved in a civil war in East Pakistan. No satisfactory higher defence organisation existed in Pakistan to set a war aim as a whole for the country. In such a situation, the navy had no idea of the national objectives of war or war aims. It is well documented that the Pakistan Navy Chief did not know about
Yahya’s plan to go to war till 29 November, came to know of the outbreak of the war through the news on the radio. In these conditions of disadvantage the Pak naval Strategy was defensive which it had planned assiduously. Pak navy hoped to safeguard its coastline, while avoiding any battle with the Indian navy surface ships. The newly acquired submarine arm would be on offensive patrols off the Indian ports to deliver a deadly blow the Indian Navy and its morale. Thus the Pak navy displayed a clear tactical thinking and awareness of its limitations- to be aggressive with its submarine arm and to be defensive on all other fronts, till the Indian navy fleet was located and immobilized. Thus the roles of Pak navy were limited to the:

a. Seaward defence of its coastline and ports Karachi, Chittagong and Chalna.
b. Assistance to army in the riverine defence of east Pakistan.
c. Escort merchant ships carrying important supplies for Pakistan.
d. To be aggressive with its submarine arm and to be defensive with the surface units.

Pakistan Navy: Eastern Naval Command

Fleet Commander-Rear Admiral Mohammad Shariff

Patrol Craft
- PNS Comilla
- PNS Jessore
- PNS Rajshahi
- PNS Sylhet
- 24 Improvised Gunboats
- PNS Gazi was also in Bay of Bengal

Strategic Perspective of the Indian Navy and the Concept of Operation

India possessed a strong political government which not only provided a sense of stability to the country but more importantly for the military, was able to lay down clearly the national aims and objectives for which military solution was being sought. Its military aims were:-

a. To liberate Bangladesh as quickly as possible, and
b. To fight holding action in the West and in the North if required.
With a well maintained navy, a growing merchant ship building industry and with the tenth largest navy in the world, the Indian Navy had a well defined strategy. The overall strategy of the country was to use Army and Air Force for the main thrust and navy to protect sea lanes of communication in the Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal along with destruction of Pakistan navy’s war assets including its ports.

The Naval concept of operations catered for the following:

1. Destruction of Pakistan’s maritime forces.
2. Impose naval blockade of East and West Pakistan.
3. Protection of Indian merchant fleet and keep sea lanes open for the essential strategic traffic.
4. Protection of Indian coasts and ports.

The build up to the war was slow and deliberate. The likelihood of a war was apparent for a long time due to peculiar political situation that existed between India and Pakistan at that time. The navy had ample time to work up its forces, plan its deployment, and refine its operational and logistics plans. Western fleet involved itself into practicing its battle doctrines missile attacks. Its made its presence felt on the Saurashtra coast calling on the ports more frequently. The OSA Class missile boats which had arrived just before the war were put through brisk pace of practices. This gave an insight of her operational capabilities and allowed navy to formulate special missile boat tactics for the war. Pak Navy’s strength in undersea warfare through the newly acquired Daphnes class of submarines and PNS Ghazi was given due recognition and ASW exercise were conducted on a large scale. The navy also launched into research and experiments in sonar detection technology. The crux of Indian naval planning was on offensive technique and thus to gain an upper hand.

The Indian navy was divided into two Task Forces, i.e. the Eastern Task Force under the command of Vice Admiral N. Krishnan with HQ at Vizag, Andhra Pradesh and Western Task Force under Vice Admiral S.N. Kohli with HQ at Bombay.

**Indian Navy-Eastern Task Force**

FOC-in-C, Vice Admiral N. Krishnan and the Fleet Commander was Rear Admiral Srihari Lal Sharma result. It had the following inventory:
**Air Craft Carrier:** INS Vikrant – Captain Sawraj Prakash (Majestic class light Aircraft Carrier). On board she had 300 Squadron (Sea Hawk), and 310 Squadron (Alize) of air crafts.

**Frigates**
- INS Brahmaputra – Captain J.C. Puri (Leopard class frigate)
- INS Beas – Captain L. Ram Das (Leopard Class Frigate)
- INS Kamrota – Captain A.P. Awati (Petya class frigate)
- INS Kavaratti - Captain S. Paul (Petya class frigate)

**Destroyer**
- INS Rajput – Lt. Commander Inder Singh

**Submarines**
- INS Kalvari – (Submarine)
- INS Khandari - (Submarine)

**Petrol Vessels/Crafts**
- INS Panvel – Lt. Com. G.R. Naroha (Gunboat)
- INS Pulikat – Lt. Com. S. Krishnnan (Gunboat)
- INS Panaji – Lt. Com. R. Gupta (Gunboat)
- INS Akshay – (Gunboat)
- Padma (Mukti Bahini)
- Palash (Mukti Bahi)

**Landing Ships (LSTs)**
- INS Gharial – Lt. Commander U. Dabir (Landing Ship)
- INS Gildar – Lt. Commander A.K. Sharma (Landing Ship)
INS Maggar – Lt. Commander AT. N. Singhal (Landing Ship)

Indian Navy-Western Task Force
Under the command of Vice Admiral SN Kohli, Western Task Force comprised of two task groups. One task group included one cruiser and nine DD/FF which were to operate west of Karachi of the Makran coast to draw out the Pak Navy flotilla employed in protecting Karachi so as to denude it of its defensive maritime elements and also to guard the sea lane in the Arabian Sea. The second task group operated from Kathiawar port was made-up of the offensive punch of the Indian navy and mainly consisted of eight missile boats which were to carry out offensive operations off Karachi and interdict the Pakistan navy surface ships as well as disrupt merchant trade. Three submarines were deployed off the approaches to Karachi and the Makran coast to interdict Pak Navy units and merchant shipping. IAF was to give air cover to the naval manoeuvres and ensure favourable air situation. Sukhwant Singh commented that, “Towards this end it was arranged that that to cover the approach of the missile boats IAF would neutralize the airfields near Karachi, and after completion of the raid it was to support withdrawal of the missile task force. This delicate synchronization and dovetailing of air effort was perfected with painstaking care.”

Defensive Measure. India had taken protective measures for her maritime assets as far as back June 1971 when the naval control of shipping had been instituted and harbor defence organizations were activated. A detailed set up was put in place to keep tag of the Indian merchant ships globally. For this purpose, globally all the Indian merchant ships were put under the control of the Navy Chief to ensure their safe passage.

Pakistan Navy-Western Fleet
Commander-in-Chief: Vice Admiral Muzaffar Hasan.
Flotilla Commander -Rear Admiral M. A. K. Lodi.Cruiser: PNS Babur (flag)

Destroyers: PNS Badr, PNS Khyber, PNS Shahjahan, PNS Alamgir, PNS Jahangir.
**Frigates:** PNS Tipu Sultan, PNS Tughril, PNS Zulfiqar.

**Submarines:**
PNS Ghazi (operating in the Bay of Bengal ), PNS Hangor, PNS Mangro, PNS Shushuk.

**Oiler:** PNS Dacca.

**Mine Sweepers:**

PNS Muhafiz, PNS Mujahid, PNS Moshal, PNS Momin, PNS Mubarak, PNS Mahmood, PNS Munsi

**Comparative Force Level in the West:** A comparison of the naval forces in the west tabulated below proves that both the navies in the West had parity:\(^{15}\):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ships</th>
<th>Indian Navy</th>
<th>Pakistan Navy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Submarine</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cruisers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destroyers/ Frigates</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auxiliary Smaller Vessels</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Deployment of Pakistan Navy in the Western Theatre**

Based on the concept of operations, the Pakistan Navy units were deployed as follows:\(^{16}\):-

a. **Submarines.** Three Daphnes were deployed on the focal points off Mumbai and the Kathiawar coast for offensive operations against the Indian units. The two Midget submarines were deployed off Okhla and Diu on interdiction mission in shallow coastal waters.

b. **Surface Forces.** The Pakistan Navy’s surface ships in Western Theatre were mainly deployed for the defence of Karachi and two patrol lines were established...
off the port. A group of MSCs were to operate in the approaches to Karachi to
dawn and dusk for minesweeping operations to keep the channel clear.
c. Air elements. After the Pakistan Air Force had indicated their inability to provide
any surveillance effort, Pakistan International Air Fokker had been utilized for
maritime surveillance over the area of interest.

**Indian Navy Deployment in the West**

In the West INS Mysore, flying the flag of Rear Admiral KC Kuruvilla, headed the
Surface Action Group, that comprised Trishul and Talwar, Khukri, Kripan and Kuthar,
Cauvery and Krishna, Tir and Ranjit and two missile boats under tow by ships.
A special C-in-C task force comprising of two Petyas and four missile boats were
retained in Mumbai to undertake the first attack on Karachi and any subsequent attacks
which during the course of war became possible and desirable.
The Pak surface units were no more modern than Indian Navy, although some of them
had received a thorough refit. The fire power of Pakistan destroyers could be considered
to be marginally superior to Indian navy.
Where the Pak Navy scored over the Indian Navy was in their submarine arm. The
French Daphne class submarines were the most conventional submarines at that time with
sensors and armament which were far superior. This was why INS Khukri was detected
much before the frigate could detect the submarine and was sunk by PNS Hangor on 9th
December.
During the war, Naval Control of Shipping and Regulations of Maritime Movement
became responsibility of the Indian Navy. A huge preparation and coordination with
various organizations like Director General of Shipping and various port authorities,
Excise Department etc. had to be undertaken which were meticulously planned, 
coordinated and executed ensuring safe passage of the Indian merchant ships.

**War in the Arabian Sea:** The Pak Naval HQ had ordered all major units of their
Western Fleet out at sea in late November under Rear Admiral Lodhi. Two patrolling
arcs centering Manora had been established for early warning of incoming attacks. A
destroyer was deployed to patrol at 70 miles while the minesweepers in turn patrolled at 30 miles. The remaining major units operated west of Karachi while the three Daphne submarines were deployed further forwarded towards the Indian Coast.

On the morning of 4th December itself IAF bombed Karachi and two nearby airports at Mahir and Badin. Rocketing and strafing harbor facilities were kept up with increasing intensity. The air action diverted Pakistan’s attention from the two task forces which were approaching Karachi.

As part of a major operation undertaken by the Indian Navy with code name ‘Operation Trident’ the first missile attack was launched on the Night of 04/05 December 1971 by the Indian missile boats operating south of Karachi and sank the destroyer PNS Khaibar and minesweeper PNS Muhafiz which were on patrol duty between 70 and 30 miles distance respectively southwest of Karachi. This was a major blow to Pakistan. IAF too put relentless pressure by bombing and rocketing areas in and around Karachi between 3rd and 8th December. Consequently, elements of Pak Flotilla were berthed at various points in the harbor on 8th December to augment air defence of Karachi harbor. However, the oiler PNS Dacca, owing to her deep draft and being oil laden was left at Manora anchorage. It was on this night (8 December) that the Indian missile boats carried out their second missile attack at 2230hours. Two ships to include one merchant ship and PNS Dacca (Oiler) were damaged and another merchant ship was sunk during the attack. One of the missiles of the salvo hit an oil tank in Keamari area and set ablaze.

John Gill comments that, “Although its surface ships were bottled up in Karachi after 5 December, the Pakistan Navy was able to strike back below the waves, with a Daphne class submarine, PNS Hangor, sinking an Indian frigate, INS Khukri, on 9 December. India’s fleet air arm also lost an Alize ASW aircraft to a Pakistani F-104 during operations over the Arabian Sea.”

INS Khukri was torpedoed thrice in quick succession by PNS Hangor on the night of 9/10 December, the ship sank quickly and went down the sea along with its valiant Captain Mahendra Nath Mulla and 17 officers and 176 sailors. It indeed was a great loss to Indian Navy and the only ship lost during the entire war. On 10th morning Navy during an all out rescue mission could pick up 6 officers and 61 sailors, survivors of Khukri.
Naval War in the Bay of Bengal

Indian Navy in the East

The Eastern fleet consisted of the aircraft carrier Vikrant, Brahmaputra, Beas, Mamorta and Kavaratti. At the outbreak of war the fleet was out at sea in the Bay of Bengal. The submarine Khandari formed the sub-surface force whereas landing ship tank craft Magar, Gharial and Guldar formed the force to undertake to transportation and amphibious role. The Rajput, Panvel, Pulicat and Akshay formed the local defence group along with Desh Deep, the light vessel tender which had been requisitioned and commissioned for afloat support.

Pakistan Navy in the East

The East Pakistan naval forces consisted only of small boats. Starting with four gun boats in Mar 71, Admiral Sharief and his band of naval officers had gradually built up the strength of small boats to 24 through improvisation and mobilization of local resources. They were mostly dispersed all over East Pakistan’s major rivers in support of Army operations and civil administration. The Pak naval forces in the East Pakistan were grossly outnumbered by the Indian Eastern Fleet. The tasks allotted to PN in the East were to:-

- Support the army in clearing rebel strong points along the coast and river routes.
- Restoration of demolished and paralysed port facilities at Chittagong and Chalna for even flow of defence stores and supplies.
- Movement of defence stores and personnel and essential civil supplies up the country by rivers.
- Restoration of oil refinery and food grain silos at Chittagong.
- It goes to the credit of PN that though restrained by resources, they carried out all the tasks commendably.

Indian Navy’s Operation in the East

During the Bangladesh campaign, the task allotted to the Indian Navy was mainly concentrated to the strike force and transport units and related to:-
(a) Carrying out strike on airfields, fuel dumps, installations at Cox’s Bazaar, Chittagong, Khulna and Chalna.

(b) Choking the lines of sea communications of East Pakistan so as to curb any movement of Pakistan merchant ships.

(c) Provide gunfire support.

(d) Encircle retreating Pakistani forces through amphibious landings south of Cox’s Bazaar.

**Naval Operation**

Immediately on commencement of war Indian Navy put blockade in the bay of Bengal ensuring stoppage of all sea traffic going and coming from the ports of East Pakistan. PNS Gazi a submarine with long range capability travelled 1500 miles from Karachi and entered the Bay of Bengal on 26th November for tracking and destroying INS Vikrant. But because of the deception plan of Indian Navy, Vikrant already left Vizag and PNS Gazi which was lurking in that area was destroyed on the night of 3rd December by INS Rajput patrolling in that area. On the morning of 4th December, aircrafts on board Vikrant raided the airfield and harbor infrastructure at Cox’ Bazar. Same evening bombing on the airports and harbours at Chittagong, Khulna and Chalna were undertaken. In the very first day of the war, major ports like Cox’s bazaar, Chittagong and Khulna were blockaded and were put out of action. During the actual war in East Pakistan, Bangladesh Navy for the disproportionately inadequate combat ships did not have much to fight. About this John Gill observes:

Pakistan Navy had only limited success against the Mukti Bahini, who succeeded in inflicting serious losses on commercial maritime traffic during the months leading up to open conflict……. There were no naval engagements, but one of the Pakistani patrol boats was sunk by an air attack and two others were scuttled by their crews to keep them out of Indian hands; the fourth, PNS Rajshahi, slipped stealthily through Pakistani minefields and along the coast to escape into Burmese waters.22

After the commencement of hostilities and when it was appreciated that the situation was favorable for the Indian navy to carry out amphibious landing in Chittagong area and also
to carry out bombardment of shore facilities of the port city, the Pakistan Navy patrol crafts were employed for laying minefields to blockade Chittagong port.

Indian navy achieved complete air superiority in the area around East Pakistan while relieving the Air Force from the task of bombing enemy targets in the riverine delta and major enemy setups and facilities. It also gave support to army during the amphibious operation undertaken on December in Cox’s Bazar. The Eastern fleet not only established it’s supremacy in the Bay of Bengal but also effectively ensured blockade of all the ports of East Pakistan. The escape routes to the south were blocked by destroying or capturing a large number of East Pakistan naval gunboats and merchant ships. Thus the tally of casualties reads as:

- Pak Naval Ships-------Town class,
- 6 -Patrol Boats of Rajshahi Class, 3 out of 4 gunboats.
- Merchant ships----four

**Trade War.** The Alize carrier borne aircraft carried out air reconnaissance in the Bay of Bengal. The Indian Navy operated her super constellation and coordinated this with suitably spaced surface units to intercept any ships entering or leaving Karachi. One Pakistani merchant ship was captured near Gwadar and taken to Mumbai. The blockade was effective. The details of merchantmen losses were:

- Captured by Indian Navy
  - Eastern Theatre---8
  - Western Theatre  3

- Sunk at Karachi port.  2

**Table No. 8 :Overall Losses Opposing Naval Forces**

The overall losses of both Indian Navy and Pakistan Navy in 1971 war were as below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Ships</th>
<th>Pak Navy</th>
<th>Indian Navy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Destroyer/Frigate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minesweeper</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submarines</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
United State’s Gun Boat Diplomacy

Tilt of the US towards Pakistan was most visible when the President of the United States, Mr. Richard Nixon and his National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, ordered aircraft carrier USS Enterprise accompanied by a constellation of warships capable of firing nuclear munitions, to sail towards the Bay of Bengal. The naval task force was designated as Task Force 74 which departed Singapore on 13th December, and passed through the Straits of Malacca on the 14th December. Though officially it was said that the purpose was to evacuate American citizens from East Pakistan, but Anderson papers and many other declassified documents have exposed the lie. It emerged that Nixon and Kissinger dispatched USS Enterprise as part of cold war politics to counter a perceived expansion of Soviet influence, to forestall a possible Indian invasion of West Pakistan for its break up, and, most importantly, to demonstrate Pakistan, China and other allies that US is a trusted partner and its influence can change the course of action as desired by her. The Task force moved towards Ceylon when Niazi surrendered.25.

One reason for sending Task Force-74 could be to breach the naval blockade by India and help Yayha’s army exit from Bangladesh. However, this could have helped only a part of the army in Chittagong and not the whole of Pakistan Army in the East. Eastern fleet possibly in a real contest scenario would not have been able to stop the Enterprise. So they carried out disruptive attacks on the port and airfields of Chittagong and Cox’s Bazar to deny there possible use by the US Task Force. The land campaign too was getting concluded fast to forestall US intervention if any. Before the Task Force could mean any serious business the campaign was over.26 Russian Navy too was following the Enterprise: quick end of the liberation war along with surrender of Niazi’s troops possibly averted naval collusion between the two superpowers in South Asia.

AIR OPERATIONS

In the east, the Indian Air Force was numerically far superior in strength: both in manpower as well as in aircraft inventory. Like navy, the PAF was also handicapped by serious loss of Bengali pilots and technicians when it withdrew these men from active duty; 35 pilots and about 25% of its maintenance personnel; all total about 4000 persons approximately.27 Some of them also revolted and joined the Mukti Bahini.
Well before the outbreak of actual hostilities, the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) had been deliberately violating the Indian air space in the eastern Sector. With the beginning of year 1971 the frequency of these intrusions had increased. However, the Indian Air Force was restrained to take any official action against such intrusions, and kept protesting against these with the Pakistan Government. Notwithstanding such strong protests PAF continued the intrusions. Finally, on the afternoon of 23 Mar 71, when four Sabre Jets violated Indian airspace in the eastern sector, Indian Gnats were airborne and shot down three of the intruding Sabres. The IAF had made a grand debut, and in the months to follow, it blazed a trail of glory and inflicted decisive defeat upon the PAF. Before the outbreak of war on 03 Dec 71, the inventory of the IAF and PAF was as stated below:

### IAF:
Apart from the transport aircrafts and helicopters, the aircraft in service with the IAF were as given in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Aircraft</th>
<th>Number of Squadrons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gnats</td>
<td>8 sqns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MiG-21</td>
<td>7 Sqns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Su-7</td>
<td>5 sqns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunter</td>
<td>6 sqns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canberra</td>
<td>3 sqns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canberra PR</td>
<td>1 sqn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HF-24 Marut</td>
<td>2 sqn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mystere IVA</td>
<td>2 sqns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Super Constellation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(MR)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total 35 squadrons**

### PAF:
Apart from the limited number of transport aircrafts and helicopters, the PAF had the following war planes as given in the table below.

Table No.9 : IAF Inventory at the time of 1971 Indo- Pak War
Table No.10: PAF Inventory in 1971

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Aircraft</th>
<th>No. of Sqns.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F-86 Sabre</td>
<td>7 sqns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-104 Star Fighters</td>
<td>1 sqn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirage-III</td>
<td>1 sqn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-6 Mig-19</td>
<td>3 sqns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-57B Canberra</td>
<td>1 sqn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>13 sqns.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Strategy of the Opposing Forces

Initially, Pakistan adopted the offensive strategy and carried out Israel 1967 war type pre-emptive air strikes against some of the main IAF bases. This sudden strike was to try and destroy maximum number of IAF aircrafts on ground so as to reduce its ability to strike back. On the first day of 03 December 1971, PAF carried out a total of 16 raids till evening and followed it up by mounting 18 more raids till next morning on 04 Dec 71. India-Pakistan War of 1971 formally commenced with the pre-emptive air strikes by Pakistan.

Unfortunately, for the PAF, this strategy did not pay off as the IAF was well prepared for such an eventuality. Having realized that PAF adopted more of a defensive strategy; it stayed well concealed in its air fields and carrying out more of air defence roles and occasional close air support missions. Pakistan’s Air Force strategy was based on the precinct that “defense of the East Pakistan lies in West Pakistan”. In the later days of war, it seemed that PAF wanted to conserve its air resources for a prolonged offensive war in the west. Accordingly deployed only one oversized squadron of F-86 in the east along with few RF-33 aircrafts and bulk of the air force was deployed in the west. Their air strategy was primarily aimed at maintaining favourable air situation for the General Tikka Khans strike corps offensive. PAF Chief considered this commitment to be the pivotal because the success or failure of the PAF support would in all likelihood determine the fate of Pakistan’s crucial offensive. But strike corps offensive did not take off.
IAF’s Air Strategy.
In line with the government’s war aim IAF operational strategy were formulated as follows: 32

(a) Ensure air defence of the homeland against enemy air attacks.
(b) To support the Army and the Navy in their operations, gain and maintain a favourable air situation over the tactical area, and mount reconnaissance, interdiction and other operations having a direct bearing on the outcome of the land battle.
(c) To conduct counter air operations, i.e. reduce the effectiveness of the PAF by destroying its aircraft and bases.
(d) To provide air transport support to own forces.

The IAF strategy, planned well before the war, was to keep the PAF at bay in both the sectors of operations and to prevent the Pakistan Army capturing any ground in these sectors. Its aim was to gain air superiority in the Eastern Sector and help the Indian army and Mukti Bahini in the liberation of the East Pakistan. The IAF absorbed PAF’s initial strikes on 03/04 Dec 71 without any losses, and thereafter struck back strongly.

In the western front, apart from the counter air operations, strategic targets were chosen and attacked by the IAF. Large scale close air support was given to the land forces. In the Eastern sector, after having gained a favourable air situation, all efforts were directed to support the land forces, especially in the form of close air support and heliborne and airborne assaults.

PAF vs IAF
Air War in the West: On 03 Dec 71, at 17:40 h, the PAF simultaneously attacked Srinagar, Pathankot and Amritsar airfields. Late in the evening, Agra, Jodhpur, Avantipur and Ambala airfields were also attacked. This action provoked the IAF to strike back vigorously. On the very first night the IAF launched a massive air strike against PAF airfields at Murid, Mianwali, Chander, Sargodha, Risalewala. Masroor in the Western Pakistan and Tejgaon and Kurmitola in the East. On the very first night, the IAF knocked out 33 PAF aircraft and in the course of next four days, 39 more aircraft...
were destroyed. Later, 22 more aircrafts were destroyed, thus accounting for 1/3 of PAF which was reported to possess a total of 290 aircraft.

The IAF had, thereafter, a free hand conduct raids on strategic targets all over Pakistan, Oil installations over Karachi were attacked on 04 Dec and these attacks were reported on 08/09 Dec and left Karachi under a layer of smoke for many days to come. On the last day of the war on 17 December 1971, the IAF was dominating the skies from Skardu in the North to Lahore marshalling yards in the centre and to Pakistani troop concentrations in the South to Naya Chor, when Islamabad accepted the ceasefire unilaterally offered by New Delhi. In the Eastern Sector, the IAF had total air superiority and conducted its operations at its free will. In addition, IAF undertook recce missions for Indian Navy in the Bay of Bengal and in the Arabian Sea, thus giving the Navy a free hand in its operations over this area.

At the end of the 14 days conflict, the IAF succeeded in her overall strategy and keep the PAF on ground on most of the occasions. The IAF destroyed a total of 94 PAF air crafts out of a total strength of 600 air crafts.

**IAF in Support of Main Ground Battles**

In addition to suffocating the PAF on ground, the IAF played vital roles in important and decisive ground battles, both the western and eastern sectors.

**Western Sector:** In the western sector, the IAF took active part in at least three important land battles. These battles were:-

(a) Chhamb. In Chhamb area, where the fiercest battle of the entire war was fought, the IAF intervened during a period where Pakistani troops were strongly up against the Indian troops. On 05 December, the IAF fighters and bombers swung into action and rained Pakistani tanks, guns, vehicles and troop concentrations with rockets, bombs and canons, both during day and night. This attack was kept up for three days and succeeded in beating the Pakistani offensive back. The IAF decisively decimated the Pakistan Army threat to Jammu area.

(b) Longewala. About the same time further south in Rajsthan sector, a strong Pakistani armour had penetrated 15 miles inside the Indian territory. The Indian Army had a
small force in that area and could not have faced such a strong enemy thrust. The IAF came to rescue just about in time and between 05 Dec to 09 Dec the IAF Hunters played havoc on the Pakistan’s Tank Regiment and destroyed 27 tanks. The Pakistani armour was totally crippled and beaten back to their territory.

(c) Shakaragarh. The Indian thrust in the Shakaragarh sector owed much of its success to the vigorous support by IAF which struck at enemy positions in depth areas and successfully checked enemy reinforcements to the battle area.

(d) In addition to these three decisive battles, the IAF actively supported Indian ground forces in Poonch, Naya Chor and Ganganagar sectors.

**Eastern Sector:** In the Eastern sector, within the first 48 hours of the war, the IAF swept the PAF off the skies and operated with total superiority. The IAF’s main tasks were to support the land forces and attack important military targets. The IAF ensured freedom of the Eastern Fleet vessels around the coast and ensured that the PAF remained on ground while Mitro Bahini troops marched into the Eastern Pakistan. The IAF carried out successful interdiction missions against river traffic, river jetties and crafts moving along the waterways, which choked off the vital means of communications for the Pakistan Armed Forces. In a country, where an advancing army stumbled on a river every six miles, the IAF came its rescue and established helibridge for crossing Meghna river and transport operations for operational logistics support and for the airborne operation at Tangail. These operations imparted a new dimension to the mobility on the infantry. But the most dramatic air operation was launched in Dacca on 14th December at the Government House. Through an wireless interception, Indian Eastern Command learnt that Governor Malik and senior defence and civil officials will have an important meeting in the Government House at 12 noon that day. Four MIG-21s under command Wing Commander B.K. Bishnoi carried out a precision strike with the 57 mm rockets which pierced the roof. In a panic, Governor Malik wrote his resignation and settled down to pray. It was the last straw. Photograph of the Government House along with the news report is given in Appendix 9.
Reasons for Failure of PAF

Historical evidences lead to conclusion that the PAF could not stand up against the IAF throughout the war. The reasons for failure of the PAF can be summarized as under:-

a) The PAF failed to carry out well-aimed attacks on the IAF airfields, thus allowing the IAF to strike back vigorously and immediately. Except the preemptive strike on 3rd December, it remained defensive giving IAF a free hand.

b) The PAF more or less functioned as a subordinate service to Pakistan Army and thus lacked the freedom to plan and execute its own air operations. PAF in the West was waiting for the Strike Corps to launch operation so that they can provide tactical support to the offensive action. It never materialized and without much action PAF was just holding themselves in the air bases.

c) The PAF failed to support its ground forces in decisive and important battleground due to lack of proper joint planning with the Pakistan Army.

On the other hand, the IAF operated with full freedom and coordinated its activities very well with other two services. The IAF achieved its main aim of taking the air war deep into the enemy territory by crippling Pakistan’s air power to a large extent. PAF hoped for support from two squadrons of Iranian F-5s, but there is no indication that Tehran took any substantive steps to fulfill this expectation.143

Conclusion

In the previous wars, Indian Navy hardly played any role worth mentioning. The Navy Chief Admiral Nanda was very keen to play a decisive role in 1971 war and accordingly he prepared and trained the navy. Though Bangladesh Liberation War was predominantly the war of the land forces i.e. army but the navy and the air force contributed significantly in the overall war strategy and they acted as great force multipliers which influenced the tactical situation resulting in greater mobility and speedier victory. Pakistan’s Eastern Naval Commander told to the US Admiral Zumwaltz during their meeting that:

"At then end of conflict.... We [Eastern Naval Command] had no intelligence and hence, were both deaf and blind with the Indian Navy and Indian Air Force pounding us day and night"....35
About the performance of Indian Navy and Indian Air Force and their effect on the outcome of war, the best compliments came from Lt Gen. A.A.K Niazi, the Pakistan’s Commander in Chief of the East Pakistan Armed forces, who wrote:

The Indian navy blocked our sea communications with the west, entered our rivers, landed troops on our flanks and rear along the banks of the rivers, shot up our boats and ferries, and attacked our positions near the sea coasts and river banks. Our four naval gun boats were no match to the Indian ships. The Indian Air Force, finding no opposition, paralyzed our mobility in a couple of days. The Indians achieved their mastery of the skies when, on 6th December, our only airfield at Dacca was damaged beyond repair and our only squadron of aircraft was grounded. Most of the bridges, ferries, ferry sites, dumps, railway yards, rolling stock, and oil storage tanks were destroyed or damaged and our positions and moves were constantly under air attack. Any move forward during the day meant some human lives extinguished, a boat sank, a vehicle destroyed.36

According to one Pakistan scholar, Tariq Ali, the Pakistan Navy lost a third of its force in the war.37 Under able leadership of Admiral Nanda, The Indian Navy proved that offensive approach and proactive and innovative outlook can have a telling effect on the enemy and contribute positively towards achieving the nation’s war aim. The U.S. Colonel John Gill opined:

The Western Fleet of the Indian Navy ensured control of sea lane of communications in the Arabian Sea and prevented movement of the Pakistani ships to Karachi. In their first attack on the night of 4/5 December, the Osas sank a destroyer (PNS Khaiber) and a minesweeper (PNS Muhafiz) as well as causing considerable damage ashore. Indian air attacks throughout 4 December helped to distract the defenders as well as inflicting damage. The Pakistan Navy thereafter withdrew its surface combatants inside the protected harbor, but a second Indian raid on the night of 8/9 December inflicted additional destruction on shore installations and left a navy oiler (PNS Dacca) damaged. IAF Canberra bombers also hit Karachi that night. These simultaneous strikes…again contributed to the Indian success, demoralizing the Pakistanis and leaving them confused about the nature and strength of their attackers.38

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US Gun Boat diplomacy by dispatching The Enterprise and her escorts named as Task Force-74 though did not alter the course of war but brought a thaw in the Indo-US relationship which remained like that for almost three decades. Recent disclosure of documents proves that Soviet also ordered its navy to shadow the US Task Force which made deterrence. Niazi’s surrender on 16th December and India’s unilateral declaration of ceasefire on 17th December brought the war to an end. US Enterprise altered its course and veered towards Ceylone and “spent the next several weeks cruising the Indian Ocean shadowed by Soviet ships before heading for the Philippines in early January 1972.”

Air force supported the army during the crucial battles. For example Lt Gen Candeth, Army Commander confirmed to the Air Chief, Air Chief Marshal P.C.Lal that tactical air support was given in the Chhamb area whenever it was required. On the contrary the PAF after their initial pre emptive strikes on 3rd December, remained defensive mostly. The Indian Air Force flew a total of 11,549 sorties during the 1971 Indo-Pak War. Out of that 6,604 were combat sorties and the balance was airlift sorties. Pakistan Air Force carried out 3,027 combat sorties. India lost 56 aircrafts and Pakistan lost 55 aircrafts: 44 in the western sector and 11 in East Pakistan. Attrition rate which has a correlation with the number of sorties is 0.85 percent for India against 3.2 percent of Pakistan.
End Notes: Chapter –IX


9. Ibid. Also read John H. Gill, pp. 61-64., and Prasad,

10. Ibid.


17. Prasad, S.N, pp.460-485.
18. Ibid.
19. John H. Gill, p.64.
24. Ibid.
30. Jasjit, p.163.
33. Jasjit, pp.144-145.
34. Prasad, pp.480-490.


39. Ibid, p. 64.


41. Jasjit, pp. 163-164.