Chapter X

Role of United Nations During Bangladesh Liberation War
and its Effect on the War Strategy

Introduction

An Iranian poem inscribed at the entrance gate of UN Headquarters reads:

If thou hast no sympathy for the troubles of others
Thou art unworthy to be called by the name of a human.

The poem sums up the purpose of the United Nations. On the aftermath of World War II and in consonance with the basic tenets of League of Nations, United Nations was founded on 24th October 1945 with the purpose to bring all nations of the world together to work for peace and development, based on the principles of justice, human dignity and the well-being of all people. The UN emblem shows the world held in the “olive branches of peace”. Security Council consists of the five victors of the World War II as permanent members and ten other countries serving two year terms, the five permanent members - China, France, the UK, the USSR, and the US were also given veto power, which means that decisions taken by the Security Council can be blocked by any of the five permanent members. This is significant, firstly because the Security Council is the principle UN organ responsible for ensuring peace, and, secondly, because it is the only body whose decisions are binding on all Member States.

Liberation War of Bangladesh was fought during the peak period of cold war. Amongst the five permanent members of the Security Council, United States and China had supported Pakistan and Soviet Union had supported the cause of Bangladesh. While United Kingdom and France though sympathized to the cause of Bangladesh Liberation struggle, but abstained from voting to avoid direct collision with United States. Throughout the liberation struggle, Pakistan army committed all forms of human rights violations. Yet the United Nation could not stop the sufferings of millions of people of
Bangladesh because the United Nations can be effective only if the five permanent members of the Security Council act together. In hindsight it is revealed that the Security Council was a divided house. But even the General Assembly of the United Nations did not take up the issues related to East Pakistan to ameliorate the subjugation and sufferings of millions of people there. Subrata Roy Chowdhury in his seminal work, *The Genesis of Bangladesh*, wrote:

> It had never occurred to anybody that a repetition of the atrocities of Nazi Germany was possible under the regime of the United Nations Charter……..A persistent denial of the principle of equal rights and self determination was the root cause of the problem….startling paradox of a dependent people in a technically independent country. This is what Sheikh Mujibur Rahman meant by his familiar Bengali phrase *swadhin desher paradhinnagarik*. (dependent people of an independent country).

Political and constitutional history of Pakistan before the civil war commenced in Bangladesh amply demonstrates denial of autonomous status which was the spirit behind the formation of Pakistan inherent in the text of Lahore Resolution. An objective analyses with historical perspective in view has been carried out in Chapter II and it infers that in 24 years East Pakistan was transformed into a colony. The struggle for self determination reached its crescendo during the civil-war which should have prompted the United Nations and its members to intervene to deliver justice due to the people of Bangladesh .In this chapter I have examined aspects related to United Nation’s role in regards to convincing and putting adequate pressure on Pakistan to find an amicable political solutions, mitigation of refugee problems including safe return to their home and most importantly the role of security council and its members during crucial stage of the war to ensure cease fire . At the end ,a conclusion has been drawn on the strategic implications of UN actions or inactions on India who became partisan to the Bangladesh Liberation war.

**Refugee Problem**

Formation of Pakistan in August 1947 was a ‘geographical curiosity and a political absurdity’. While describing the united Pakistan, it was said ‘that fantastic bird of a
place, two wings without a body, sundered by the land mass of its greatest foe, joined by nothing but God. Jinnah himself was much aware of the differences between the East and the West Pakistan but apparently wanted to make a political experiment on the peoples of two wings who were racially, culturally and temperamentally different and geographically separated by a thousand miles. “It is inconceivable that a political experiment of this sort can ever succeed without implementation of the principle of equal rights and self-determination, without cultural and racial accommodation, without political freedom and economic justice, in the equation between the two wings. A total disregard of these essential requirements ……eventually led to the inevitable rapture between the two wings.”

War is not an act performed by military men alone but is an expression of the conflict of ideas, objects and the way of life of an entire society with those of another society. Liberation War of Bangladesh was in existence for many years in latent form but intensified on the aftermath of Pakistan Army’s launch of ‘Operation Searchlight’ from the night of 25/26th March 1971 onwards. During the next nine months, many died, many fled the country and many women were raped. Except for the data related to refugees, on aspects like death and rape; it is almost impossible to conclude with exactitude because of unavailability of reliable data. But after perusing various sources, one can infer that human sufferings was of alarming magnitude. Mujibur Rahman was arrested and senior leaders fled to India en masse. Most alarming issue for India at this juncture was management of refugees. Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India has described the exodus as “History’s Biggest and Cruelest Migration” and about the refugee problem, Senator Edward Kennedy characterized it as the “Greatest human Tragedy in Modern Times.” Reign of terror and persecution forced exodus of about 10 million human beings. The break-up of the arrival of refugees from East Pakistan to India as given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Up to 17 April 1971</th>
<th>119,505</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 24 April 1971</td>
<td>655,874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 1 May 1971</td>
<td>867,428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 8 May 1971</td>
<td>1,572,220</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table No. 11 : Showing Influx of Refugees
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Range</th>
<th>Number of Refugees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 15 May 1971</td>
<td>2,399,667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 22 May 1971</td>
<td>3,371,931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 29 May 1971</td>
<td>3,688,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 5 June 1971</td>
<td>4,982,792</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 12 June 1971</td>
<td>5,522,563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 15 June 1971</td>
<td>5,985,342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 28 July 1971</td>
<td>7,098,809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 21 August 1971</td>
<td>8,018,743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 27 September 1971</td>
<td>9,065,835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By November 1971</td>
<td>9,800,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On 23 April 1971, India formally wrote to the UN Secretary General on the refugee issue and made a request to provide aid to the refugees. India suggested that a dialogue may be held mentioned between the officials of Government of India and UNHCR representative in New Delhi. “Following consultations at the Administrative Coordination Committee (ACC) in Bern on 26 April 1971 with the executive heads of the UN agencies and programmes, U Thant designated the UNHCR as Focal Point for the coordination of assistance”

Pakistan strongly objected to India’s initiative and also commented that the size of the refugees what India is letting the world know is a sheer propaganda and nothing but intervention in the internal matter of Pakistan.

UN Humanitarian Help Programme was launched on 19th May 1971 and UNHCR USD 500000 aid grant was sanctioned and Prince Satruddin Agah Khan, heir of a dynasty strongly linked to Islamabad, was sent to Pakistan and India on a fact finding mission in June 1971. Prince Satruddin Agah Khan however came under flack for his pro-Pakistan statement which was highlighted by the media. For instance he echoed partly but publicly Yahya Khan’s statements about the refugee problems, when, in the course of first press conference on the topic, he preferred to speak about ‘uprooted people’ instead of refugees. Explaining directly his reticence, he said:

When we speak of refugees we must find out whether we mean people who came a long time ago, people who came during the disturbances, during the recent
elections, people who came since development in March. Question is when did they come? He then added that many people in Calcutta are still refugees in the sense that they have not been permanently settled. The issue raised by him is far from being an innocent one.\textsuperscript{12}

J.N. Dixit MEA official accompanied Prince Satruddin Agha Khan while he was touring the refugee camps. However the Prince recommended greater international assistance and faster political settlement so that the refugees can go back. Satruddin also visited some camps inside East Pakistan where again his comments were highlighted by the world media showing him as a biased person. The United Nations East Pakistan Refugee Operation (UNEPRO) was launched in June 1871. UNHRC wanted focal point concept of aid management and UN Refugee Management Peace Keeping Operations by posting UN Observers. Many of the UN members were in favour of that but USSR and India objected to this arrangement as they felt that these observers would do more intelligence gathering than mitigating the refugee problems. India had a single minded stand that the return of the refugees was only possible through a political solution. This was also the time when India was supporting the MuktiBahini in its training, arming, and operations. Positioning of the UN Observers in the border camps would have undoubtedly compromised India’s own military preparations and MuktiBahini’s preparation and operations.\textsuperscript{13} When the war commenced, Sadruddin suspended all refugee related aids to India. As at the end of August 1971, the total estimated expenditure for 8 million refugees for six months at the rate of Rs.3/- per day per person was Rs.432 crores or US $576 million; but the total amount of assistance received /promised from abroad was only $146,576 million.\textsuperscript{14}

Neither the Security Council nor the UN General Assembly followed its own precedent in the case of Arab Refugees from Israel at least to affirm the East Bengal refugees rights to return, resume normal life, recover their property and homes and rejoin their families according to the provision of Universal Declaration. The world body did not ask the Islamabad Government to create conditions suitable for the return of refugees. At the 26\textsuperscript{th} session of the United Nations, 47 speakers in the General Assembly called for a political reconciliation in Pakistan, but none took the step of introducing the issue in the agenda of the General Assembly or Security Council that might have lead to action. The
international response to the refugee problem was confined to providing some inadequate relief measures.\textsuperscript{15} Indira Gandhi expressed her disappointment at the failure of United Nations in dealing with the root cause of the refugee problem. She said:

\begin{quote}
I am afraid the UN has not done much. It has ignored the basic question of why these people have to come. They would not have left their homes unless there were compelling reasons. The UN should see why these people are coming and create conditions by which these exoduses will stop.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

**Persecution of Minorities**

Although, the Nehru-Liaquat Ali Agreement of 8 April 1950 guarantees to the Hindu minority in Pakistan in respect of life, culture, freedom of speech, occupation and worship, but the Pakistani army in its declared policy of purifying East Bengal Muslims started eliminating the Hindu minority consisting of nearly 10 million people. Extermination and persecution of minorities, particularly the Hindu community indiscriminately; in execution of a plan or conspiracy to kill, or to terrorize and compelling them to leave East Bengal; torture and cruelties; looting and destruction of their properties etc. amount to crimes under Article 6(b) of the Nuremberg Charter read with Article 46 of Hague Convention(IV)\textsuperscript{17}. Michael Hornsby wrote a story in *The Times*, London highlighting the atrocities in “predominantly Hindu villages like Sinduri, Boliadi, Chapair, Radhanagar, Attabha, Tekrabari, Bhringraj, and Sewratali. Then usual pattern was for the troops, guided by Muslim informers, to enter the the villages and destroy systematically almost every dwelling and hut. The villagers would be killed, the girls raped and money, gold, ornaments looted or stolen.”\textsuperscript{18} Though the Hindu communities were the major target but other minorities like Buddhists and Christians were not totally spared. Time magazine of 2nd August sums up the position:

\begin{quote}
The Hindus, who account for three-fourth of the refugees and the majority of the dead, have borne the brunt of military's hatred. It is the most incredible calculated thing since the days of Nazis in Poland.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

It is a burning fact that during the war of independence in 1971, Hindus fell prey to the extreme level of atrocities by the Pak Army. Hamdoor Rahman Commission Report (HRCR) too brought out this fact. Historical evidences lead to conclusion that there was a general feeling of hatred against Bengalis amongst the soldiers and officers including the
Generals. There were verbal instructions to eliminate Hindus” (ch. 2, pt. 15 of HRCR). The most horrifying admission comes from a witness named Lt. Col. Aziz Ahmed. Referring to Commander Lt. Gen. Niazi’s attitude towards Hindus, he says “…General Niazi visited my unit at Thakurgaon and Bogra. He asked us how many Hindus we had killed….” (ch. 2, pt. 18 of HRCR)\textsuperscript{20}. Col Nadim Ali of Pakistan (then a Captain) years later wrote, “It is Mujib-ur-Rahman’s home district. It is a hard area. Kill as many bastards as you can and make sure there is no Hindu left alive,” I was ordered.”\textsuperscript{21}

**Racial Discrimination**

After independence, several factors contributed to the gradual widening of gulf between the two wings. The fundamental factor was the difficulty of West Pakistani elite to accept Bengalis as equal partners. British description of West Pakistanis as Martial Race and Bengalis as non martial was embedded in the minds of West Pakistanis. Even Field Marshal Ayub Khan purported to have said to his Bengali friend, “Your music is so sweet. I wish to God, you Bengalis were half as sweet yourself.”\textsuperscript{22} Hamid Hussain a Pakistani intellectual wrote:

The prejudice against Bengali Muslims has a long history and was quite prevalent long before Pakistan emerged as an independent state. Muslim intellectuals, elites and politicians, which belonged to northern India, had the picture of a Muslim as tall, handsome and martial in character. These characteristics were applicable only to Muslims of northern India. As Bengali Muslims didn’t fit into this prejudiced and racist picture, therefore they were ignored at best and when even allowed to come closer, were considered inferior. Bengalis were shunned despite their political advancement and strong resentment against oppression and tyranny. A large portion of Bengali Muslims was converts from Hindu low castes………… The majority of Bengali Muslim population which had customs common with Hindu peasantry and had a proud sense of their language was not considered as ‘proper Muslims’ by…..almost all of West Pakistan. This perception later influenced the official decision to ‘Islamize’ and ‘purify’ East Bengali culture in Pakistan after 1947. \textsuperscript{23}
Many Pakistani military officers referred Bengalis in derogatory terms like ‘Bingo Bastards, cowards etc. The civil services too believed that the taste of the danda (the big stick) will cowdown the Bengali babu. The UN condemned racism of Ian Smith of Rhodesia but despite of its precepts in Resolution 1904(XVIII), the United Nations made no protest against the promotions and practice of racial discrimination in East Bengal by Punjabi dominated West.

It was most sickening to see reference of the word ‘Bangladesh’ in the Hamidoor Rahaman Commission Report (HRCR). Though Bangladesh was certainly a proscribed word to Pakistani government and the military junta during 1971, they used the word as a code for ‘summary execution’. The reference is found in Lt Col. Mansoorul Haq’s statement where he narrates "A Bengali, who was alleged to be a Mukti Bahini or Awami Leaguer, was being sent to Bangladesh- a code name for death without trial, without detailed investigations and without any written order by any authorised authority" (ch. 2, pt. 15). This is further substantiated by perpetrations of 1971 - An Analysis in Light 93, another witness named Mr. Mohammad Ashraf, ADC of Dhaka at that time, when he narrates, "... People were picked up from their homes on suspicion and dispatched to Bangladesh, a term used to describe summary executions. ... The victims included Army and Police Officers, businessmen, civilian officers etc...There was no Rule of Law in East Pakistan. A man had no remedy if he was on the wanted list of the Army..." (ch. 2, pt. 16). While discussing the political background of the defeat, HRCR states that the arbitrary methods adopted by the Martial Law administration in dealing with respectable East Pakistanis, and then sudden disappearances by a process euphemistically called "being sent to Bangladesh" made matters worse (“HRCR: Conclusion” ch. 4, pt. 3). Killing Bengalis was certainly encouraged and applauded by the hierarchy of the Pak Army during the war. We find the reference in another witness’ statement - during his visit to formations in East Pakistan General Gul Hassan used to ask the soldiers "how many Bengalis have you shot" (ch. 2, pt. 17).
Genocide

Historical evidences lead to conclusion that Pakistani leadership thought that mass murder and brutality would be a necessary measure to control the possible major uprising and stop eruption of a volcanic situation in East Pakistan. President Yahya, while presiding over a conference purportedly to have said, “Kill three million of them, rest will eat out of our hands.” Amongst all the charges against Yahya government, most serious allegation was purposeful act of genocide. Saturday Review was of the opinion that what happened in East Bengal 'appears to be a probable case of genocide'.

Genocide in East Bengal began on night 25/26th March 1971 and continued for the next nine months long liberation struggle. It is estimated that Pakistan army supported by Razakars and Ansars killed approximately 3 million and raped more than 2-3 Lakhs women. There were sectarian violence killing too and Bihari Muslims were victim of this. It is impossible to ascertain the exact number in regards to people killed/ raped. A survey of the media / other official reports placed below can give an idea of the figure related to killings.

**Table No.12**

**Number of Killings: an Analysis from the Media and Other Reports**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who Reported</th>
<th>When Reported (date/month/year)</th>
<th>Number in Millions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Baltimore Sun</td>
<td>14/5/1971</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Memento, Caracas</td>
<td>13/6/1971</td>
<td>0.5-1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Daily News</td>
<td>30/6/1971</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Bank Report</td>
<td>June 1971</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Die Zet, Bonn</td>
<td>9/7/1971</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York Times</td>
<td>14/7/1971</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wall Street Journal</td>
<td>23/7/1971</td>
<td>0.2-1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Christian Sie ,Mon</td>
<td>31/7/1971</td>
<td>0.25-1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Week</td>
<td>2/8/1971</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>2/9/1971</td>
<td>0.2-1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Week</td>
<td>27/3/1972</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Geographic</td>
<td>September, 1972</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 1948, is defined in Article 2 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment not the Crime of Genocide (1948): Genocide means acts committed with intent to destroy in whole or in part, a national, ethical, racial or religious groups. The acts of genocide could be killing members of a group, or causing serious harm bodily or mentally to members of a group or deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction whole or part etc. There has been debate whether one can categorize killings in East Bengal a genocide or not, Where as many feel it a genocide but authors like Sarmila Bose did not agree to call the mass killings a ‘genocide’. She commented that ‘Pakistan Army committed political killings, where the victims were suspected to be secessionists in cahoots with the arch enemy India and thus ‘traitorous’, Extra judicial political killings in non combat situations, however brutal and deserving of condemnation, do not fit the UN definition of genocide.

Mr. Subrata Roy Chowdhury, an well known legal professional and author of the book 'The Genesis of Bangladesh’ explained in great detail that leaders, organizers, instigators and accomplices participated in the common plan or conspiracy who committed or alleged to have committed crime under Article III(B) of Geneva Convention and Article 6 of the Nuremberg Charter and can be tried for the infringement of international legal norms.

General Yahya Khan and his top generals prepared a careful and systematic military economic and political operation in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). They also planned to murder its Bengali intellectual, cultural, and political elite. They also planned to indiscriminately murder hundreds of thousands of its Hindus and drive the rest into India. And they planned to destroy its economic base to insure that it would be subordinate to West Pakistan for at least a generation to come. This despicable and cutthroat plan was outright genocide.
The genocide and gendercide atrocities were also perpetrated by lower-ranking officers and ordinary soldiers. These "willing executioners" were fueled by an abiding anti-Bengali racism, especially against the Hindu minority. "Bengalis were often compared with monkeys and chickens. Said General Niazi, 'It was a low lying land of low lying people.' The Hindus among the Bengalis were as Jews to the Nazis: scum and vermin that [should] best be exterminated. As to the Moslem Bengalis, they were to live only on the sufferance of the soldiers: any infraction, any suspicion cast on them, any need for reprisal, could mean their death. And the soldiers were free to kill at will. The journalist Dan Coggin quoted one Pakistani captain as telling him, "We can kill anyone for anything. We are accountable to no one." This is the arrogance of Power. U.N. was completely ineffective in preventing the genocide during Bangladesh Liberation War.  

Preventive Diplomacy

In the late 50s and early 60s Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold considered preventive diplomacy as an approach to prevention of political conflicts, particularly at nascent stage so that the conflict does not lead to East West confrontation during the cold war era.  

U Thant’s sent a Memorandum to the President of the Security Council 19 July 1971 explaining the situation and recommending courses of actions. Text of this letter is given in Appendix 10. However, U Thant could not prevent the conflict in South East Asia during the nascent stage or for that matter thereafter. Prof. J.K. Galbraith opined a peaceful political solution recognizing the right to people of Bangladesh to govern themselves as the only way out of the crisis. When there was a requirement to raise concern and act the United Nations failed to do so. 

Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury led a 12 member delegation of provisional Bangladesh government to the 26th UN General Assembly session in September 1971. However as Bangladesh was not a member state of United Nations the delegation was not allowed to participate in the official forum. This delegation did contact with delegations of many other countries and explained what was happening in Bangladesh and pleaded for their support. India and Soviets tried hard to accommodate the Bangladesh appeal, but due to lack of agreement among the Council members, his request for participation was kept in
abeyance. The Indian Ambassador to the United Nations Samar Sen noted, “Not hearing the voice of Bangladesh is like playing Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark.”

Office of The UN Adviser On The Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG) comments that:

Genocidal intent can develop gradually, e.g., in the course of conflict and not necessarily before, and genocide may be used as a “tool” or “strategy” to achieve military goals in an operation ............ Evidence of “intent to destroy” can be inferred from a set of existing facts which would suggest that what is unfolding or ongoing may be genocide. From a preventive perspective, there could be other indications of a plan or policy or an attempt to destroy a protected group before the occurrence of full blown genocide.

United Nations got adequate time to understand the intent of genocide or an attempt towards that direction by the Pakistani Army. Their brutality was well covered by the world media. United Nations there could have much more proactive in preventing killings of this magnitude. Despite all these efforts the General Assembly did not include Bangladesh issue in its agenda. It is very interesting to note that on 23 November 1971, during his calling on to Asst Secretary Sisco, UNHCR, Prince Sadruddin felt that 'only political dialogue between Yahya and Mujib offered any prospect for settlement of crisis...he further recommended immediate debate in Security Council as he thought that it was great shame that UN had to wait until war broke out before tackling problems in Security Council.

UN Deliberations from 4 to 23 December 1971

1971 war which commenced from 3rd December brought on twenty four resolutions during the next two weeks. Essentially the debate deliberated on the two submitted separately by US and USSR and the third one submitted by eight of the member states. Three key issues were mainly discussed. They are:

1. Immediate cease fire and withdrawal of the troops from others territory.
2. Political resolutions along with cease fire which means withdrawal of Pakistani troops and establishment of government by Awami League headed by Mujibur Rahaman.
3. Bangladeshi government in exile be allowed to participate in the Security Council proceedings.

“Neither Pakistan nor India was a member of the security council in December 1971. The Council meeting was summoned procedurally by the President of the Security Council and the Secretary General of the UN, but basically at the initiative of the US. The main purpose of the Security Council was to pass some sort of collective resolution mandating India and Pakistan to stop the war and begin a political discussion. In all 35 statements were made by the permanent representatives of the member countries and by India and Pakistan between December 4 and 21.” 43 Only resolution adopted by the Security Council was the one raised by Somalia on 6th December, which was referred to the General Assembly. The General Assembly discussed this on 7th December and out of 125 member states 104 voted for it, 11 voted against and 10 absented from voting. Based on this vote the General Assembly adopted a resolution calling for a cease fire and mutual withdrawal of troops by both sides of the border. The recommendation of General Assembly was sent to the Security Council for further debate. From 4 December to 21 December over twenty resolutions were moved in the Security Council and the General Assembly. None came anywhere near the Polish resolution moved on 15 December in its enunciation of the fundamentals or precision on procedure. But Bhutto tore it up in rage and walked away from the meeting. It was only on 21 December the Council adopted Resolution 307 (1971), much after India and Pakistan signed their own cease fire agreement that Security Council passed Resolution 30 demanding. United Nations, during the liberation war was a forum for discussing, but not resolving, the 1971 conflict.44

Syed Muazzem Ali observation stated below on the UN inaction merits mentioning:

As per its Charter, the UN could have taken action on account of gross violation of human rights, for threat to international peace and security, or for both. Unfortunately, Pakistan’s allies took shelter under the UN principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states in order to block any UN action. They simply refused to consider the inalienable rights of our people to self determination and self rule. Security Council, the principal body entrusted with the task of maintaining International peace and security, did not consider the
Bangladesh issue until 4 December 1971 when the Indo-Pakistan war broke out.\(^4^4\)

The Resolutions moved by the USA, USSR and Poland were most significant. In US resolution, there was not a single reference to political aspirations of Bangladesh. Russian resolution in contrast called for a political settlement in East Pakistan as they like India believed that would end the military hostilities automatically. Draft resolution moved by China was condemnatory of India and called upon India to withdraw its armed forces from the territory of Pakistan and requested other members to support Pakistan in their just struggle to resist Indian aggression. But the most significant resolution moved in the Security Council was one proposed by Poland on 14\(^{th}\) December. This resolution called for transfer of power to Awami League, release of Mujib, Ceasefire and withdrawal of the opposing forces and return of captured territories and return of refugees under supervision of the United Nations.\(^4^5\) As stated earlier, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto who apparently in rage tore this draft resolution and walked out of the meeting. That also saved India from stopping the war abruptly a day before Niazi’s surrender in Dacca. New Delhi also disliked the ‘renunciation of the occupied territory clause’ in the Polish resolution because it had a strategic implications like giving back the strategic heights and features like the one in Kargil.\(^4^6\) At the end of all these episodes in the UN, India declared unilateral ceasefire before UN could get its act together.

**Conclusion**

“Pakistan is a party to the Geneva Conventions of 1949. The Conventions impose number of obligation upon a contracting party not only in respect of its own civilian population in a situation of armed conflict but also with regard to the members of organized resistance movements, belonging to a party to the conflict and operating in or outside their own territory. (Article IV of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 relating to Prisoners of War)\(^4^7\) Mr. Sayeed Muazzem Ali, a foreign service officer of Bangladesh who later served in the UN, felt that:

> The genocide in Bangladesh could have been averted if the UN had adhered to one of its basic purpose of “promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.” All the members were pledge-bound to take joint and separate
action in cooperation with the UN for the achievement of these purposes. …..During the Liberation War many independent developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America were apprehensive of supporting the liberation struggle which could have initiated secessionist moves in their own countries.\textsuperscript{48}

However, as is evident, the allies of Pakistan have insisted to adhere to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states to block UN action. Thus it would be seen while US, China and all those countries who supported Pakistan gave more importance to geographical sanctity of Pakistan than the desire of majority of Pakistan. Muazzzem also brings out how UN ignored gross human rights violations occurred in Bangladesh:

It is true that the UN Charter forbids the UN from intervening in the internal affairs of member states, other than enforcement measures by the Security Council. However, this provision had been updated by the General Assembly’s resolution 2144 of 26 October 1966. Accordingly, ECOSOC [Economic and Social Council], in its resolution 1503 of 27 May 1970, and UN Human Rights Commission, in its resolution 8 of 16 March 1967, clearly laid down the procedure to consider violations of human rights in member states. Unfortunately, these procedures and organs were not utilized to address the gross violation of human rights in Bangladesh.\textsuperscript{49}

On 5\textsuperscript{th} November, 1971 during her visit to the United States of America, reporters asked Indira Gandhi, about the significance and strength of the United Nation. To which she replied:

United Nations has its weaknesses, but we have always supported it, because we feel it is essential to have such a forum. When there was a League of Nations, everybody felt that it was not doing what it should do, and so it was done away with. So ………but you had then something else and it came up under the name United Nations……..it is important to have some such body. But we all know that it does suffer from certain weaknesses. It is not always able to assert itself. And, quite often, national politics play a part within the United Nations, instead of being able to lift it higher plane.\textsuperscript{50}

Activities in the United Nations in context to Bangladesh Liberation War had strategic implications for India. Cold war politics and division between the two blocks were visible
and the discussions happened as per the predictable line. One thing became very clear to India that in the Security Council her triumph card was veto by the Soviet Union and she can continue her military operation till she is under the umbrella of Soviet veto. It therefore became strategically imperative on the Indian military to undertake blitzkrieg operation. Soviet cast vetoes in favour of India against US and other Western sponsored resolutions and similarly Polish and Soviet resolutions which generally supported the Bangladesh cause and India’s stand were vetoed by the US and the Western Block. A few like UK and France remained absent during some of the voting sessions to appease the home crowd and at the same time not to antagonize the US by taking a clear position. UN witnessed ‘tit for tat scenario’. J.N. Dixit avers:

Because of India’s close relations and strategic equations with the Soviet Union, which were bolstered by the Indo-Soviet Treaty of August, 1971, the Security Council was prevented from taking any mandatory, punitive actions against India that could have frustrated the liberation struggle. Had there not been Soviet veto, President Nixon’s pro-Pakistan tilt would have found expression in a Security Council initiative which would have aborted the Bangladesh freedom struggle and resulted in a monumental strategic setback for India.51

One thing became very clear to India from the military strategy and operations point of view that the war has to be finished with the utmost speed to ensure its logical end. It became very clear that Soviets will no more veto any resolution sponsored by the US. The same was conveyed to India through the back channel. In fact, Soviet backed Polish Resolution was itself a clear indication to India and its acceptance would not have been fully to India’s interest as brought out earlier. Dacca was captured within few hours after the Polish Resolution was tabled And once the instrument of surrender was signed on 16th December, Indira Gandhi unilaterally declared ceasefire in all fronts effective 17th December much before the UN asking for a cease fire on 21 December through its resolution No.307 of 1971. Because of the super power politics, the most important issue, “fulfillment of the political aspirations of the people of East Pakistan” Nor did UN or the Security Council take any step to stop the genocidal military operations against the people of Bangladesh” 52
The sad story of the people of Bangladesh during the period of civil war was captured by the American singer, Joan Baez through his ‘Song of Bangladesh’, a stanza of which is reproduced below:  

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{Bangladesh, Bangladesh} \\
\text{Bangladesh, Bangladesh} \\
\text{When the sun sinks in the west} \\
\text{Die a million people of the Bangladesh.}
\end{align*} \]

United Nation’s inaction became a big question mark on the credibility of this august organisation. On 27th December 1971 Time Magazine wrote “Islamabad was the Principal Looser in the outcome of the war. But there were two others as well. One was the United Nations and the other was Washington who appeared whole heartedly committed to the Pakistan dictatorship.”
End Notes - Chapter X


17. The Hindusthan Standard, 21 August 1871.


19. Excerpts of Michael Hornsby’s story in The Times, London has been cited in Roy Chowdhury, Subrata, p.113.


27. Ibid, p.93


31. For UN definition of Genocide, see


37. Paper presentation by Feodor Strceivic,Director UN Information Centre ,New Delhi, on *Preventive Diplomacy as a Tool*, during a seminar in New Delhi in 2001.


39. Syed Muazzem Ali, Article on *UN Inaction During the Liberation War*, Dhaka Courier,April 2011


42. Ibid.

43. Dixit, J.N, Liberation and Beyond, p.94.

44. Sisson S. Richard and Rose Leo E, p. 218-219


48. Syed Muazzem Ali, Article on UN Inaction During the Liberation War, DhakaCourier, April 2011.

49. Ibid.


52. Ibid, p.102.

53. Words and music by Joan Baez. For the complete song see http://www.joanbaez.com/Lyrics/bangladesh.html