

The Breakup of Pakistan

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Introduction

Chronology

The crisis of the breakup of Pakistan can be divided, in terms of U.S. participation, into roughly four major phases. The first began with the Pakistan army crackdown in the East Wing of Pakistan on the night of March 25/26, 1971.¹ This followed a three-week period of civil disobedience and the exercise of *de facto* governmental power by the Awami League led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The Awami League had won an overwhelming victory in the December 1970 election for the Constituent Assembly, the climax of a movement towards greater autonomy for East Pakistan which began in 1954 or perhaps even earlier. The drive for autonomy was fueled by the economic, political and bureaucratic discrimination against East Bengal by the West Pakistan-dominated central government, exacerbated by the West Pakistani belief (held particularly by the Punjabi-dominated military) that Bengalis were culturally and racially inferior.

The crackdown, in which Sheikh Mujib was captured and thousands of Bengalis were killed—students, Hindus, and members of the police and army, particularly—precipitated a full-scale civil war, a declaration of independence by the Awami League leaders who had fled to India, and, in the view of most observers within the State Department and without the inevitable breakup of Pakistan. As Tajuddin Ahmad, Prime Minister of the Awami League government-in-exile, put it in April, “Pakistan is now dead and buried under a mountain of corpses.”²

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The second phase of the crisis began with the announcement of Henry Kissinger's visit to Peking (July 15) and the signing of the Indo-Soviet friendship treaty (August 9). This phase featured the build-up of guerrilla forces (the Mukti Bahini) inside East Bengal, and the increase of direct and indirect Indian support, against the backdrop of a refugee population in India of nearly ten million by November. It ended with the outbreak of full-scale war between India and Pakistan on December 3rd.

The third phase was the war, in which India, with the help of the Mukti Bahini, quickly defeated the Pakistan army in the East, and while fighting a holding action on the ground on the Western front, used air and naval power to damage Pakistan's military capability. The final phase began with the transfer of power to Sheikh Mujib on January 12, 1972, and ended with U.S. recognition of Bangladesh, on April 4, 1972.

Decision-Making and Rationales

Virtually all the decisions made by the U.S. in this crisis originated in the White House. By and large, explicit rationales for those decisions were *not* communicated to State Department officials, still less to the Congress and the public. Since the end of the crisis, some rationales have been presented, most notably by President Nixon in his "State of the World" message to Congress of February 9, 1972, but what interviewees* agreed were the *real* reasons for U.S. policy have never been publicly stated. I will discuss some of those decisions in detail below, mentioning others only briefly because of lack of information and space. Having presented what I believe the rationales of each of these decisions were, I will move to a detailed discussion divided into two parts: the facts of the case, and the implications. The study will conclude with a brief sketch of the implications of these decision cases taken together.

Those decisions I will discuss in detail are:

- (1) the decision *not* to comment on the initial "blood-bath" in East Bengal, and, later, the decision not to criticize Pakistan as the killing continued;

(*) Much of the material in this study is drawn from interviews with government officials and private individuals, conducted in the summer of 1974. The line of argument presented is entirely my own, however, and when it is necessary to identify the source of a statement as an interview, an asterisk in parentheses is placed in the text, thus: (*).

- (2) the decision to cut off most arms aid to Pakistan, while continuing to supply some;
- (3) the decision to provide humanitarian relief to refugees in India and to the people who stayed in East Bengal;
- (4) the decision to pursue a political solution of the crisis with the Pakistanis, the Indians, and the exiled Bengali leadership;
- (5) the decision first to attempt to prevent the outbreak of war between India and Pakistan and then to end it once it had begun.

The rationale for the first decision was that the civil war was an internal affair of Pakistan; but the reason for not letting concern for violations of human rights override that principle was the “historical coincidence” that Pakistan was the intermediary in the arrangement of the opening to China. These delicate negotiations, which were initiated in 1969³ and had reached the stage of the exchange of notes via Pakistan by early 1971, became very serious on March 15th, and a specific invitation (in a sealed envelope) for either Kissinger or Rogers to visit China was conveyed by the Pakistan Ambassador some time before April 6th.⁴ Presumably the secrecy of the negotiations, and thus the opening itself,⁵ would have been jeopardized by an “unfriendly” gesture to Pakistan at the very moment a breakthrough was achieved.

The reason for not criticizing Pakistan over the violent repression in East Bengal is tied to the generally favorable position vis-a-vis Pakistan that the U.S. adopted. As stated publicly, the pro-Pakistan “tilt” was meant to retain “leverage” with President Yahya Khan. It is likely that the desire to remain the friend to China’s friend contributed to the decision, as did the factor of President Nixon’s personal rapport with President Yahya, and his positive feeling towards Pakistan. (This factor has been emphasized by too many to be discounted, despite Kissinger’s remark that “I do not think we do ourselves any justice if we ascribe policies to the personal pique of individuals.”)⁶

The rationale for cutting off arms aid was simple: the Pakistan army was making use of them in a situation contrary to the agreement under which the U.S. supplied them. The reason for continuing a comparatively small flow of spare parts, etc. was symbolic and was tied to the general pro-Pakistan U.S. stance. The decision to provide humanitarian relief needed no justification, but the proportions of aid given to India compared to aid earmarked for East Bengal underlined the White House position that humanitarian aid was to be the “centerpiece” of the U.S. political-diplomatic effort.

The “political solution” was juxtaposed to a military solution: if the U.S. and others did not succeed in getting a political settlement of the civil war, India

in one way or the other would see that Pakistan was broken up. The rationale was that the U.S. did not wish to see the breakup of Pakistan occur, especially with outside intervention, because that would “destabilize” the region. The need to preserve Pakistan’s “integrity” was even greater in view of her alliance to the U.S. and friendship with China.

The decision to exercise U.S. influence first to prevent the outbreak of war between India and Pakistan and then to end it was of course justified on the ground that war is not a way to solve international disputes (a rationale which, it should be noted, the U.S. General Assembly agreed with by a vote of 104 to 11, with 10 abstentions). A deeper rationale for the U.S. was that since India would win decisively, the “destabilization” of the subcontinent would occur. Also, the defeat of a U.S. ally would place the U.S. in a weak position vis-a-vis the USSR in upcoming summit talks. This latter reason bulks very large during the war. And underlying the “tilt” which was made explicit during the war—i.e. the war should stop because Pakistan was losing it—is the personal factor of President Nixon’s attitude. In Kissinger’s words at the Washington Special Action Group (hereafter WSAG; the minutes constitute the bulk of the “Anderson Papers”) meeting, “. . . the President is not inclined to let the Paks be defeated.”⁷

Let me discuss briefly decisions on economic aid to Pakistan and on the recognition of Bangladesh. The focal points for Congressional action during the crisis were the Gallagher and Church/Saxbe amendments to the Foreign Aid Bill which would have cut off economic aid to Pakistan until the civil war ended. The administration not only opposed those amendments, it also dissented from the Aid-Pakistan consortium recommendation to suspend aid to Pakistan (made in the wake of the leaked World Bank report which noted that the repression in East Bengal was so severe that economic aid could not be utilized there). Again, the rationale for this policy was to preserve leverage with the Pakistanis.⁸

Finally, there was a decision to delay the recognition of Bangladesh—the U.S. recognized Bangladesh on April 4, 1972, fully two months after most of the nations of Europe had extended recognition and nearly a month after Indian troops had left Bangladesh. No plausible rationale was ever given to the State Department (*), still less the Congress,⁹ but it was clearly tied to the China opening—President Nixon postponed considering it until after his trip to China (in late February 1972). Certainly, too, there was a desire to defer to Pakistan, even as the Muslim nations of the Middle East and Africa were doing.

Violent Repression; and the Register of Dissent

The Facts

After the crackdown on March 25/26, a decision was made to downplay the seriousness of the action and to avoid admitting to the facts of the “blood-bath.” In the initial phase of the civil war, there was, as Senator Kennedy said on the Senate floor on April 1, 1971, “indiscriminate killing, the execution of political leaders and students, and thousands of civilians suffering and dying every hour of the day.”¹⁰ It soon became clear from press reports that Hindus were being singled out for killing,¹¹ and by June the London *Sunday Times* could use the title “Genocide” for its introduction to one of the best accounts of Pakistan army activities.¹² Senator Kennedy, in a news conference in New Delhi in August, called the Pakistan military action “genocide,”¹³ but that word was absent from debate by public figures both before and after August.¹⁴

The administration was even less willing to come to terms with the possibility that “genocide” was occurring in the later phase of the civil war than they had been willing to condemn the initial violence of March. The first indication of this stance was Washington’s resistance to the Dacca Consul-General’s decision to have Americans evacuated from Dacca in the first week of April (*), at a time when Pakistan was claiming that the situation had already returned to normal. According to Senator Kennedy, “instead of calling it an ‘evacuation’ . . . the State Department reached into its bag of euphemisms and termed the exodus of Americans a normal ‘thinning out’.”¹⁵

The U.S. issued a statement deploring the violence at the end of the first week of April, but one view is that that actually reported a decision *not* to pressure Pakistan because it was made so late, nearly two weeks after the crackdown. U.S. officials were reluctant to make public mention of the wide-spread killing or of the facts on actions which could be labeled “genocide.” Archer Blood, Consul-General in Dacca until early June, testified before Senator Kennedy’s subcommittee on refugees on June 26th. Part of his testimony is worth quoting at length:

SENATOR FONG: When the insurgents were put down, were there actions taken by the East Pakistan Army which forced the people to leave?

MR. BLOOD: I don’t see any direct relationship between the level of insurgency and the flow of refugees.

SENATOR FONG: Then why would the refugees leave?

MR. BLOOD: . . . And, subsequently, many Hindus have left because of the way they were treated.

SENATOR FONG: Did many of them leave because they say conditions were imposed on the Hindus that they thought they couldn't live with?

MR. BLOOD: I assume so, yes.

SENATOR FONG: What would those conditions be, sir?

MR. BLOOD: I wouldn't want to go into every detail, because we have reported this in the classified messages. . . . I would prefer not to answer in open session. . . .¹⁶

The official position was that the refugee outflow was due to continued fighting and the poor economic situation. U.S. efforts were thus aimed at stopping the "fighting" (between the Pakistan army and the Mukti Bahini guerrillas) not at stopping the killing of Hindus and the destruction of their property. Official policy plus the constraints of "cliency" make it most unlikely that "genocide" ever figured in any private communication with the Pakistan government.¹⁷

While the Dacca consulate was urging condemnation of the violence, seconded by the New Delhi embassy, the Islamabad embassy discounted the reports from Dacca on the grounds that the consulate officials, being limited in their movements, could only be getting "partial" reports (*). The fact that the Islamabad embassy seemed to give greater credence to its Pakistan government sources than to its own officers in the field, despite close personal ties between the Deputy Chief of Mission and the Consul-General, must have hurt the morale of officers in Dacca. On the other hand, the Islamabad embassy protested on July 15 to the State Department that field reports on predictions of possible famine in East Bengal were being denied in public statements in Washington.¹⁸

All interviewees agreed that the "tilt" policy position of the U.S. did not affect the reporting of facts to Washington. Even after it had surfaced, during the war, Consul-General Spivack cabled details¹⁹ of his and U.N. Assistant Secretary General Paul Marc Henry's inspection of damage and bomb-rack fragments which indicated Pakistani responsibility for the bombing of the Dacca orphanage (which was blamed on India with much publicity). The Islamabad embassy sent in a report to Washington in which the Defense Representative to Pakistan and the Defense Attache questioned Spivack's conclusion.²⁰

The discounting of reports because of their tone and the presumed "cliency" bias of the drafters extended to the reporting of facts as well as to the presentation of estimates and advice on policy. (Ironically, the presumed cliency of Dacca begat

ciency in Islamabad.) But the professionalism of the Foreign Service dictated that the reporting of facts known to be unpalatable not stop.

Implications

The maintenance of contact with the Pakistanis, both in the context of the opening to China and with a view towards exerting “leverage” in the future (once the situation in the East had become clear), was clearly a matter of great importance. One non-U.S. source, who discussed the findings of the leaked World Bank report of July with Yahya Khan, says the Pakistan President could not credit its finding that official violence had and was occurring in East Pakistan. The result of a U.S. decision to raise the question of “genocide” might thus have resulted in cutting off communication with the Pakistanis (and especially with Yahya Khan) rather than in changing Pakistan’s policies.

Most sources agreed that almost everyone at the State Department recognized what was going on in East Bengal and would have liked to see if not a U.S. condemnation at least a dissociation of the U.S. from the Pakistan regime. The facts reached the policy-makers in the White House, although there is some difference of opinion on how forceful and articulate the presentation of State Department views were; according to one official, lower levels of State felt it could have been much better, but according to Marvin and Bernard Kalb, Assistant Secretary of State Sisco “battled” with Kissinger in WSAG meetings in December.²¹

Those within the system were apparently satisfied with the channels of dissent open to them. “Official informal” letters were seen by my sources as having considerable importance in making an impact on policy decisions in most cases (in part because they are considered leak-proof, and the leaks of dissent positions seemed to distress the dissenters as much as anyone), but it was implied, not in this crisis, because policy was being made beyond the reach of the “official informal.”

No one who dissented from the U.S. policy in this crisis resigned. It would not be necessary or desirable for an FSO to threaten to resign whenever he objected strongly to a decision. But if the forceful presentation of policy alternatives is considered desirable, it might be worthwhile to make it easier for the FSO to leave the Service, by training him during his career so that he could enter a different career (e.g. university teaching, international business), or by bringing in people from outside the Service into middle-level slots.

Finally, the existence of career sub-cultures, FSOs with academic interests, for example, can provide sub-communities of knowledgeable professionals who can informally sustain the dissenter in responsible dissent. There is some evidence

that the South Asia specialists—encompassing both India and Pakistan “wallahs”—constituted such a sub-community in 1971.

The Arms Aid Cut-Off Decision; and the Use of Public Statements

The Facts

A decision was made to cut-off the supply of arms to Pakistan. In a letter to Senator Kennedy, dated April 20, 1971, David Abshire, Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations, wrote, “we have been informed by the Department of Defense that [no non-lethal military end items (of) spare parts and ammunition have] been provided to the Pakistan Government or its agents since the outbreak of fighting in East Pakistan on March 25-26, and nothing is presently scheduled for such delivery.”²² But “delivery” here meant that items contracted for and licensed for export before March 25 were considered “delivered” even though they had not left U.S. shores. This continued movement of arms to Pakistan was revealed in a *New York Times* article—presumably as the result of a leak—while the Indian Foreign Minister was returning from Washington to Delhi with what he thought were assurances that Pakistan was not receiving U.S. arms. These events contributed to Indian distrust of the U.S. (which became crucial in U.S. attempts to prevent a war; see below).

A General Accounting Office report, released on February 4, 1972,²³ revealed that not only had \$3.8 million worth of Munitions List articles been exported under valid licenses, but also “Department of Defense agencies, despite departmental directives issued in April, continued to release from their stocks spare parts for lethal end-items” and “the U.S. Air Force delivered to Pakistan about \$563,000 worth of spare parts between March 25 and mid-July 1971 on a priority basis using the Military Airlift Command. Some of these spare parts were needed to place inoperable aircraft, such as F-104’s, into operable condition.”²⁴ It was discovered in late August that until the practice was stopped by informal order on July 2nd and formally on August 12th, “military departments” entered into foreign military sales contracts of about \$10.6 million with Pakistan. . . ,”²⁵ though no licenses were issued for these contracted items. On November 8th, the State Department revoked all outstanding licenses (for goods worth about \$3.6 million) and the flow of arms to Pakistan ended.

There were several factors at work here. On one level, there was something of a bureaucratic “snafu” (*) in the instances of continued spare parts supply. This might of course be interpreted as deliberate effort on the part of Defense agencies to continue supplying a country they considered to be a good ally. The “business as usual” signing of new contracts was justified as proper because U.S. military

supply policy was “under review.” If the continued supply under valid licenses had been a “snafu” in which State Department and Defense Department signals had gotten crossed, then presumably shipments would have ceased when it was revealed in late June. But the licenses were not revoked until November—and Kissinger wondered aloud in the WSAG meetings whether that step had been wise—making it clear that the supply of a limited amount of arms to Pakistan had been U.S. policy. Christopher van Hollen, Deputy Assistant Secretary for NEA, in testimony before Senator Kennedy’s sub-committee on October 4, made U.S. policy explicit:

SENATOR FONG: The administration did not feel it should revoke the licenses that had been issued?

MR. VAN HOLLEN: That is correct. The judgment was made that this would be a political sanction, and that it would not be in keeping with our efforts to maintain a political relationship with the Government of Pakistan, looking towards the achievement of certain foreign policy objectives of the United States.²⁶

That is, these arms shipments were continued as part of U.S. attempts to maintain “leverage” on Pakistan.

During the December war, Jordan and possibly other countries offered to transfer U.S. supplied weapons to Pakistan. The question was discussed in two of the WSAG meetings whose minutes were leaked. State Department and Defense Department officials pointed out that it would be illegal for the U.S. to permit third country transfers, since the U.S. itself was barred from supplying arms to Pakistan. Kissinger, however, asked that King Hussein be kept in a “holding pattern,” noting that the President “may want to honor” requests from Pakistan for military aid of this kind.²⁷ It was later reported that “military sources” disclosed that Libya and Jordan had indeed provided aircraft to Pakistan.²⁸

Humanitarian Assistance; and the Role of Congress

The Facts

One interviewee told me that in August the President described the relief effort—which would be carried on, no matter what, for humanitarian reasons—as the centerpiece of the U.S. political effort vis-a-vis Pakistan. This view of U.S. policy was however not conveyed downward even to middle-level State Department officers. The decision was to provide aid both to the refugees in India and to those in the East (especially in the cyclone-affected areas) who did not leave. The threat of famine

would be met and India's burden would be shared. Congress, on the other hand, wanted to give more aid for refugee relief than the administration requested, and less to the people in East Pakistan, on the grounds that with a crippled transport system and the acknowledged diversion of some relief supplies and transport vehicles to the Pakistan army, there was no guarantee that such aid would reach those for whom it was intended.²⁹

The amount of U.S. assistance was consistently overstated by U.S. spokesmen, including the President, even after the crisis was over. A GAO report of June 29, 1972, listed authorized contributions for victims in India as \$94.5 million, and pointed out that of the \$276.7 million authorized for victims in Pakistan (and this included "old" money intended specifically for pre-March cyclone damage relief and normal bilateral food aid), \$201.2 million (73 per cent) was not implemented. The repeated U.S. assertion that the U.S. was contributing "more than the rest of the world combined"—a formulation the Delhi embassy finally gave up protesting (*)—appears to have been a self-serving public relations effort. The World Bank's estimate of the cost of refugee relief to India was \$700 million by March 1972 (India claimed in the U.N. debate in December that she was spending "3 million a day"); the U.S. thus would contribute about 15 per cent of the total and the "rest of the world" about the same or more,³⁰ leaving India with nearly 70 per cent of the cost of refugee relief.

There was, moreover, a coordination of public utterance in this instance. Another GAO report (of April 20, 1972, but requested in July 1971 by Senator Kennedy) stated in the introduction:

Our review efforts were impeded by Department of State and AID officials. They withheld and summarized records prior to our access and thereby limited information needed for a complete and thorough report. In connection with the GAO review, U.S. Embassy officials in Islamabad were instructed not to make available messages reporting on sensitive discussions with the GoP [Government of Pakistan], Government of India, or U.N. agencies, or certain sensitive documents relating to development of U.S. policy.

Implications

The U.S. relief effort provided a major focus for Congressional attention to the 1971 crisis. While the GAO, an arm of the Congress, was having difficulty in conducting its investigation, Senator Kennedy was able to get copies of confidential cables from Pakistan. Congressional sources I spoke with seemed satisfied with the institutional arrangements in the foreign policy field, arguing that the lack of Con-

gressional activity during the crisis (the Foreign Relations Committee never held a public hearing, for example) reflected not the lack of power or expertise but the lack of Congressional interest in foreign policy and especially vis-a-vis South Asia.

The Congressional concern with humanitarian issues reflected the U.S. public perception of the problem—a record amount of money was contributed to refugee relief from private sources— but Congress had little impact in the face of a U.S. policy which sought first to downplay the refugee issue, then to shift the focus of concern from refugees and from “genocide” to East Pakistanis suffering because of civil strife (cause unspecified), and finally, to overstate the amount of U.S. assistance.

The Political Solution; and the “Checklist” Danger

The Facts

President Nixon in his “State of the World” message of February 9, 1972, called “the problem of political settlement between East and West Pakistan,” “the basic issue of the crisis.”³¹ In May, in letters to President Yahya and Prime Minister Gandhi, President Nixon referred to the necessity of a “political accommodation,”³² by summer, this was communicated to “all parties” as being a political solution “on the basis of some form of autonomy for East Pakistan.”³³

During August, September and October, eight contacts with the “Bangladesh people” in Calcutta were made, according to Kissinger.³⁴ And, according to President Nixon, by early November, President Yahya told us he was prepared to begin negotiations with any representatives of this group not charged with high crimes in Pakistan, or with Awami League leaders still in East Pakistan.³⁵ One interviewee felt that the contacts were a “sterile exercise” and another felt that they were not serious, since follow-up cross-checks were discouraged by Washington. The difficulty here was perhaps differing perceptions of what the contacts meant.

These contacts were to lead to negotiations between Pakistan “and Bangladesh representatives approved by Mujibr,” according to Kissinger.³⁶ The negotiations never began, nor was the U.S. ever involved “on substance.”³⁷ The next step was to establish contact with Mujib to get his approval of Awami League negotiations, and Kissinger claimed that the U.S. “had the approval of the Government of Pakistan to establish contact with Mujib through his defense lawyer,” and that India had been so informed.³⁸ Prime Minister Gandhi, however, wrote to President Nixon on December 15th that “there was not even a whisper that anyone from the outside world had tried to have contact with Mujibur Rahman.”³⁹ And Ambassador Keating, reacting to the news of Kissinger’s backgrounder, pointed out that a move

to contact Mujib had been rebuffed on December 2nd, and the initiative had been suggested on November 29th⁴⁰ (*one week after the war had begun, by President Nixon's account*).⁴¹

The negotiations, President Nixon admits, were to be with those not charged with “high crimes,”—i.e., the entire top leadership of the Awami League. Given the gap between “contacts” (the latest in October) and the attempted contact with Mujib (end of November), one can understand the belief that it was all a “sterile exercise.”

There is also some doubt in another area, the proposal for a timetable for East Pakistan's autonomy. The U.S. claim was that “in mid-November, we informed India that we were preparing to promote discussion of an explicit timetable for Each Pakistani autonomy.”⁴² Kissinger told the press, “we told the Indian Ambassador . . . that we were prepared to discuss with them . . . a precise timetable for the establishment of political autonomy in East Bengal.”⁴³ Ambassador Keating, relying on the news report, pointed out that he had not been informed of this “critical fact” that “Washington and Islamabad were prepared” to discuss the timetable (emphasis added).⁴⁴ But it seems clear from another remark by Kissinger that the U.S. was seeking a timetable from India;⁴⁵ he also said “[India] knew that we believed that political autonomy was the logical outcome of a negotiation. . . .”⁴⁶ Prime Minister Gandhi indeed wrote that “the United States recognized that . . . unquestionably in the long run Pakistan must acquiesce in the direction of greater autonomy for East Pakistan. . . .”⁴⁷ There is no indication, however, that *any* timetable for political autonomy (which went beyond the scheduled restoration of civilian government in East Pakistan) was presented to Pakistan, or that the U.S. had publicly favored autonomy in a form acceptable to the Awami League.

Many officials, both in Delhi and Islamabad, believed by April that Pakistan would break up, and this assessment was supported by the intelligence community (*). Those in Islamabad felt that direct Indian intervention would be inevitable while those in the Delhi embassy felt that the guerrillas would succeed on their own (*). An interim solution of autonomy leading to independence was not ruled out as unacceptable to the Bengalis (and to India, who did not recognize an independent Bangladesh until December 6, despite considerable internal political pressure). Whether such a facade would have been acceptable to Pakistan is questionable. The Pakistan government's qualified amnesty, its willingness to accept a limited U.N. role, and the return of East Pakistan to “civilian rule” under a man totally unacceptable to the Bengalis—all pointed to as significant steps by President Nixon— were dismissed by the Awami League. The proposal to station

U.N. observers on the border was called a “non-starter” by the Delhi embassy (*). Ambassador Keating dismissed the amnesty proposal in only slightly less direct terms.⁴⁸

Implications

Ambassador Keating concluded his December 8th cable by implying that he realized he might not have been informed of some of the specific developments mentioned in the story of Kissinger’s backgrounder. Several interviewees agreed that no “political solution” was pressed on Pakistan until very late, and none could say what that solution was. If indeed it was formulated as a package by the White House, it was certainly not presented as such to the State Department. The proper presentation of alternative policy proposals was frustrated in this instance by the lack of policy guidance. State Department officials seemed to have had no idea that the White House felt it was pressing a coherent strategy towards getting a political solution, and was forced to react to proposals piecemeal.

There is a danger inherent in compiling a “policy checklist” and then ticking off items as they are accomplished (or partially accomplished), because one has the illusion that the policy, overall, is then “working.” The U.S. managed to get Yahya to agree to a series of steps—maybe the civilian government was not acceptable to the Awami League, but at least it was a *civilian* government; maybe Mujib would not get a public trial and would not be permitted to participate in negotiations, but at least he was *alive*; maybe the amnesty was less than complete, but at least Yahya had accepted the idea in principle; etc.—and the President and Mr. Kissinger apparently felt that progress was being made. And so they were angry (if not furious) with India for not giving Pakistan time to come to accept a political solution in such terms. But it was obvious to many officials at State that these steps came far, far too late to provide the basis for a solution; that satisfying a number of items on the checklist did not constitute a viable policy or strategy of action.

The review process in charting policy progress must be constant: whether an objective has been achieved “too late” is the kind of judgment that demands considerable reliance on the area experts (centered on the Country Director), who have a feel for the political parameters of a situation. High-level decision-makers, especially in the White House, have neither the time nor the expertise to develop such judgment adequately. In this instance, apparently, the White House relied on its own judgment, and wound up pressing for a solution which the Bengalis would have accepted before March 25th but which would not do in the fall of 1971. The White House belief that the U.S. could play the role of honest broker seemed to fly in the face of Indian distrust of U.S. motives and allegiance; area experts in the

State Department, who did keep the situation under review, were not so sanguine. To the extent that the White House belief that a political solution was aborted by Indian actions influenced U.S. policy during the December war and after, this instance points to the failure of a White House centered system.

Prevention of War; and Policy-Making Crisis by Crisis

The Facts

The danger of India going to war against Pakistan was clear from the first phase of the crisis. On May 28, President Nixon wrote to both President Yahya and Prime Minister Gandhi urging “restraint” and warning of the danger of war.⁴⁹ In the second phase of the crisis (August-November), it seemed to be only a matter of time before war broke out. U.S. policy was to urge restraint on India and Pakistan, as part of a diplomatic effort which included humanitarian relief and the effort to broker a political solution. Specific suggestions focused on a disengagement of Indian and Pakistani troops from East Pakistan borders, and the U.S. supported a Pakistani proposal that U.N. observers be posted on the border. India rejected these moves on the grounds that the threat of war arose from the situation in East Bengal, not border confrontations.

When the war broke out on December 3rd, President Nixon apparently felt that India had not given the U.S. time to achieve a solution to the crisis, and that India was thus the “aggressor.” As the war developed, officials from the U.S. ambassador to the U.N. on down followed instructions to “tilt” in favor of Pakistan. The minutes of the WSAG meeting reveal that from the outset no one believed that India would halt until she had achieved an independent Bangladesh, resolutions in the U.N. calling for a ceasefire notwithstanding. The focus of attention in WSAG was the halting of the war against West Pakistan. President Nixon reported in February that “during the week of December 6, we received convincing evidence that India was seriously contemplating the seizure of Pakistan-held portions of Kashmir and the destruction of Pakistan’s military forces in the West. We could not ignore this evidence. Nor could we ignore the fact that when we repeatedly asked India and its supporters for clear assurances to the contrary we did not receive them.”⁵⁰ He continued, “if we had not taken a stand against the war, it would have been prolonged and the likelihood of an attack in the West greatly increased. . . . The war had to be brought to a halt.”⁵¹

The means to this end that President Nixon mentioned was the United Nations, but it is not implausible that the U.S. did threaten to cancel the upcoming U.S.-USSR summit unless the Russians put pressure on India to stop. The sending

of the *Enterprise* task force into the Bay of Bengal, after the war in the East was won, has been interpreted as a signal to the USSR and to Pakistan that the U.S. would not let an ally “go under.”⁵²

An important aspect of this case is the seeming gap in communication between India and the U.S. The U.S. urged “restraint” on India; India would say “yes, but only when the Pakistan army in East Bengal shows ‘restraint’.” More directly, after Mrs. Gandhi’s trip to Washington in early November, during which she repeatedly said that India was nearing the end of her tether, she said that reports “that she and President Nixon found no common ground in their talks are entirely correct.”⁵³ The U.S. standing vis-a-vis India, and the influence it could hope to exercise was off course seriously undercut by the clear U.S. commitment to an undivided Pakistan and its unwillingness to condemn Pakistani excesses.

Another instance of communications breakdown: President Nixon claimed that no assurances denying the report of Indian intentions to seize Pakistan-held Kashmir had been received. The CIA report which I infer had touched this off held that Mrs. Gandhi intended to “straighten out the southern border off Azad [Pakistan held] Kashmir,” and to “eliminate Pakistan’s armor and air force capabilities.”⁵⁴ In the WSAG meeting of December 8, however, Assistant Secretary Sisco reported that India’s “Foreign Minister Singh told Ambassador Keating that India has no intention of taking any Pak territory.”⁵⁵ And in a public statement in New York on December 12th, Singh said India had no wish to “destroy Pakistan.”⁵⁶ But, as Sisco also pointed out, “Kashmir is really disputed territory.”⁵⁷ On balance, he doubted that India had any intention of breaking up West Pakistan.

President Nixon apparently wanted more ironclad assurances; the State Department spokesman reported on December 15th that “India has not replied to U.S. request for assurances it will not attack West Pakistan after defeating Pakistan in the East.”⁵⁸ (General Niazi, the commander of the Pakistan army in the East, had asked the U.S. to convey his request for a ceasefire on the morning of December 14th, Washington time). It is difficult to understand why Washington expected India *not* to attack while Pakistan continued to wage war in the West. Even before the outbreak of the war, on December 2nd, Mrs. Gandhi said: “If any country thinks that by calling us aggressors it can pressure us to forget our national interests, then that country is living in its own paradise and is welcome to it.”⁵⁹ In the event, President Yahya only agreed to the Indian ceasefire offer under pressure (*). Yahya’s broadcast to the nation, delivered four hours before the ceasefire was announced, in which he spoke of a fight to victory, suggests that the ceasefire was indeed hard to accept. Here, as in much of the crisis, the U.S. misunderstood both the Indian position and, probably, the intensity of Pakistani feeling.

Implications

Communication and contact between the countries involved were not impeded by cliency—the unwillingness to carry unpleasant messages to the government concerned, e.g., as it had been in the 1965 war, when Ambassador Bowles was said to have shown such reluctance—nor by any other organizational constraint. There may well have been failures in communication at even the most rudimentary level: misunderstanding Pakistani English usage, for example (*). More important is the apparent belief that conveying a message means that the recipient has digested its meaning. This dichotomy is neatly illustrated by the words of an American official in Islamabad, speaking around November 20: “we’ve been in it up to our necks—making suggestions, talking privately with Yahya and others night and day—but this is a closed society. They don’t pay any attention—there’s no flexibility left. We no longer have any reason to expect the Pakistanis to behave.”⁶⁰ One suspects that India and Pakistan had similar difficulties in conveying *their* position to American officials.

There are two facets of the communication problem which relate to the U.S. effort to prevent a war. (1) The problem of ambiguity in statements and intentions, and the possibilities of “weathervaning” in analysis which this opens up, and (2) the variant definitions of the size and time dimensions of the “crisis” itself.

President Nixon and Henry Kissinger were apparently unsatisfied with Indian assurances because of the ambiguity inherent in any interpretation of a domestic political situation—they overestimated the importance of Indian “hawks” like Defense Minister Jagjivan Ram, in this instance—and in the less than sweeping nature of the assurances received (which were, to be sure, perfectly understandable from the Indian standpoint). Ambiguity can be used as a tool, however: Kissinger emphasized in the WSAG meeting of December 8th that “we cannot afford to ease India’s state of mind” presumably about U.S. intentions to come to Pakistan’s assistance.⁶¹ Ambassador Keating had made it clear to Indian officials that third country transfers of weapons required U.S. approval and was told by Under Secretary of State John Irwin, on Kissinger’s orders, “in view of intelligence reports spelling out military objectives in West Pakistan, we do not want in any way to ease Government of India’s concerns regarding help Pakistan might received from outside sources.”⁶² Again, there is no reason to believe that India or Pakistan would not pursue *their* foreign policy vis-a-vis the U.S. by using the same technique.

Although, as noted above, interviewees agreed that the reporting of facts to the highest levels was not restricted, I was told that there was “weathervaning” in analysis: the preferences of the top levels were fed back to them. The ambiguity which is inherent in the communications between nations—and to a degree within

one nation's foreign service—opens the way to anticipatory compliance in reporting and analysis that does not compromise professional responsibilities.

The second facet of the communication problem here has to do with the dimensions of the crisis and ideas of crisis management. The U.S. treated the threat of war and its outbreak as a separable crisis amenable to what one interviewee called the “standard crisis manual” which says “first, urge restraint; second, get the fighting stopped; third, get the parties talking.” India's position was that the crisis of a threat of Indo-Pakistan war could not be and should not be separated from the overall crisis which began on March 25th.

U.S. policy towards South Asia was very much a crisis by crisis affair. From the U.S. point of view, “the crisis” did not mean the totality of events in 1971 (as it did for India and Pakistan), but rather a series of interrelated crises, like the war. Officials were taking up new posts in the summer of 1971, as is usual, and though the overall crisis was relatively subdued—no headlines, just one constant stream of refugees—they did not go into the details of previous “crises.” Nor were the ex-incumbents sought out when new “crises” or decisions were encountered. Familiarity with the current file, coupled with overall expertise, was believed to be sufficient.

In 1971, decisions were made at the White House. During the “smaller” crises—the initial crackdown, the first realization of the magnitude of the refugee flow, the December war, etc.—raw intelligence reports and reports of facts direct from the field reached the highest policy-making level and probably were read. During the less active phases, analytic reports warning of the danger of continued armed violence against Hindus by Muslims reached that level (*), but there is little reason to believe that it made an impact. By the time of the crisis of the war, Indian motives might well have been difficult to discern or appreciate. A problem in an area like South Asia, which is a low priority in U.S. national interest terms, has to be more serious than in other areas before it reaches a “crisis” level, and the failure to appreciate the dimension of the crisis from the point of view of the other parties is exacerbated by the tendency to shift not only decision making *but also analysis* to levels in which expertise is severely limited. It is hardly surprising that the U.S. failed to head off war on the Indian subcontinent in 1971.

Conclusions

From the point of view of the White House, I suspect, U.S. policy in South Asia in 1971 was a qualified success. The key goal of the opening to China was not jeopardized by events on the South Asian subcontinent. The progress towards detente with the USSR was not harmed, and valuable lessons were learned on how effective ties with the Soviet Union could be. Relations with Pakistan remained firm, with

all that meant for U.S. flexibility in the Middle East (recall that Middle Eastern nations, by and large, gave Pakistan considerable support during 1971). Relations with India were none too good to begin with; a further deterioration could be borne with equanimity, with the added thought, perhaps, of letting the Russians enjoy that headache for a while. Bangladesh and Sheikh Mujib—with whom the U.S. had had close ties— might well want U.S. friendship and aid to counterbalance India and the USSR.

On the other hand, of course, Pakistan had been reduced in power, though India's military development since 1965 precluded a position of parity for Pakistan in any case. A nation state, in ally, had been dismembered by its neighbor, but Pakistan was, in the view of some observers, doomed from its birth, and in the view of others, better off without the drain East Pakistan was becoming. Vigorous U.S. opposition to the war had been concurred in by almost all the nations of the world, and especially Third World nations. The U.S. was vilified in moral terms both at home and abroad, but in the context of the war in Vietnam (which was to be ended, after all, with the help of new relations with China and U.S.—USSR detente), that was hardly unusual. Moral outrage evaporates while national interests remain; even India would come around eventually.

But couldn't U.S. policy have been better? (In both senses of the word: couldn't the opening to China have been achieved *without* the costs incurred in South Asia, and *with* the U.S. supporting a democracy instead of yet another military regime, condemning officially sanctioned violence against the civilian population and making every effort to get it stopped?) And would a different organizational structure have made any difference?

There were, on the whole, no problems in the flow of information upward, nor in the carrying out of instructions from the White House. There is no indication that President Nixon or Kissinger felt any lack in the information they received or in the responsiveness of officials in Washington or in the field (with the exception of Kissinger's famous remark in the WSAG meeting that he was "getting Hell from the President every half hour" because State Department officials were not "tilting" sufficiently towards Pakistan).⁶³

There were, however, severe restrictions in the flow of information downward. Rationales for policy never reached lower levels of State. Similarly, the upward flow of analysis and advice was impeded because it had to be considered irrelevant. Until July 15, when the China opening was announced, the State Department was working in the dark—receiving no guidance on what the reasons for U.S. policy were and sending up analysis and policy advice which had to be ignored, since it could not confront the real rationale. Even after July 15, rationales for U.S.

policy which took account of the China opening were not spelled out, and so meaningful alternatives could not be presented.

The secrecy of the rationale for U.S. policy meant that there was no one other than President Nixon and Kissinger who could make decisions, even on minor matters. They were the only ones able to monitor effectively the implementation of the decision, and they alone could assess its impact in terms of the goals they had set. But they also did not have the time (or the expertise) to perform those tasks well—the delay in the recognition of Bangladesh is a case in point.

Alternatives to policy were not presented effectively to decision-makers in the White House, as might be expected under the circumstances. Those sending up proposals were unaware of the “global strategy” which determined U.S. decisions. Moreover, their proposals would inevitably be framed in terms of U.S. policy towards the region or to one country or the other, and would be discounted accordingly. Ultimately, the serious consideration of bilateral and regional dimensions of policy while global objectives are pursued—sorely needed as the U.S. dealt with South Asia in 1971—depends most on having a President or Secretary of State willing and able to work with knowledgeable professionals and with organizational arrangements that effectively represent them.

Notes and References:

1. All dates with no year given are from 1971. The most readily available detailed chronology for the 1971 crisis can be found under the heading “Pakistan” in the *New York Times Index 1971: A Book of Record*, pp. 1287-1310. (Cited hereafter as: *NY Times Index*.)
2. Marta Nicholas and Philip Oldenburg, compilers; Ward Morehouse, general editor, *Bangladesh: The Birth of a Nation; A Handbook of Background Information and Documentary Sources* (Madras: M. Seshachalam, 1972), p. 82. [Cited hereafter as: *Bangladesh Handbook*. This contains the “Anderson Papers” reprinted (in pp. 112-34) from the *New York Times* of January 6 and 15, 1972; the Kissinger background briefing of December 7, 1971, reprinted (in pp. 134-42) from the *Congressional Record—Senate*, December 9, 1971; Mrs. Gandhi’s letter to President Nixon, reprinted (in pp. 143-45) from the *New York Times* of December 17, 1971; and other documents.]
3. G.W. Choudhury, *The Last Days of United Pakistan* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974), p. 68. Choudhury was a senior advisor to President Yahya at

the time, “one of the very few whom [Yahya] took into his confidence about his top secret mission [to Peking].” (*Ibid.*, p. 70).

4. See Marvin Kalb and Bernard Kalb, *Kissinger* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), pp. 237-38. Unfortunately, they do not give a date, but simply set the time as cherry blossom season in Washington.

5. On President Nixon’s and Kissinger’s belief that secrecy was required, see I.M. Destler, “The Nixon System, a Further Look,” *Foreign Service Journal*, February 1974. See also Secretary Rogers’ reply to a question at the Sigma Delta Chi convention, *Department of State Bulletin*, Vol. LXV, No. 1693 (December 6, 1971), pp. 652-53.

6. Made in his background briefing of December 7th. As reprinted in *Bangladesh Handbook*, p. 139. The remark refers to Nixon’s alleged hostility to Mrs. Gandhi; in the earlier part of his reply, Kissinger denies that either he or President Nixon had a preference for Pakistan or for Pakistani leaders.

7. “Anderson Papers” as reprinted in *ibid.*, p. 125. All statements about WSAG deliberations hereafter are from this source.

8. See the study for the Commission by Joan Hochman, printed in Appendix H.

9. *Recognition of Bangladesh*, Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, March 6 and 7, 1972; testimony of Christopher van Hollen, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near East and South Asia, pp. 6-25, *passim*.

10. As reprinted in *Relief Problems in East Pakistan and India, Part I*, hearings before the subcommittee to investigate problems connected with refugees and escapees of the Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate (hereafter: *Kennedy Subcommittee*), June 28, 1971, p. 87.

11. Many reports, from the onset of the crisis, mention this; see, for example, some of those reprinted in *ibid.*, pp. 95ff.: Peggy Durdin, “The Political Tidal Wave That Struck East Pakistan” (reprinted from the *New York Times Magazine* of May 2, 1971), *ibid.*, pp. 95-105; Mort Rosenblum, “Army, Rebels Fight Over Ruined Pakistan” (reprinted from the *Baltimore Sun*, May [?] 1971), *ibid.*, pp. 110-11; *et al.*

12. As reprinted in *ibid.*, pp. 118-20; the article introduced is by Anthony Mascarenhas, “Why the Refugees Fled,” *ibid.*, pp. 120-32.

13. *New York Times Index*, p. 1296, col. 1 (original article: *New York Times*, August 16, 1971, p. 6.).

14. The International Genocide Convention (not ratified then by the U.S.), defines genocide as “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group. . . .” Quoted in Michael Bowen, Guy Freeman, Key Miller (Roger Morris, Project Director), *Passing By: The United States and Genocide in Burundi, 1972* (Washington: The Carnegie Endowment for Interna-

tional Peace, 1973), p. 18. In addition to eyewitness testimony (see note 11, above), the fact that after May virtually all the refugees were Hindus supports the view that actions by the Pakistan army in East Bengal constituted genocide by third definition. However, the language used in public even by critics of U.S. policy did not include the word “genocide;” for instance, in Senator Kennedy’s report *Crisis in South Asia*, we get only an indirect usage: “Our national leadership has yet to express one word that would suggest we do not approve of the genocidal consequences of the Pakistan Government’s policy of repression and violence.” (*Crisis in South Asia*, a report by Senator Edward M. Kennedy to the Kennedy subcommittee, November 1, 1971, p. 55.) Nor is there any evidence that a “demand” was made by any member of Congress, or by any FSO, to condemn Pakistan for committing “genocide.” There was some indirect evidence in the interviews I had that policy positions which would have had the U.S. strongly condemn the killing—and place the blame on the Pakistan Government—were put forward within the State Department; the issue was raised, even if the word “genocide” was not used.

15. *Crisis in South Asia*, p. 56.

16. *Relief Problems in East Pakistan and India*, Part I, Kennedy subcommittee hearings, June 28, 1971, p. 46.

17. Roger Morris, “Clientism in the Foreign Service,” *Foreign Service Journal*, February 1974. Ambassador Farland, while perfectly correct in his relationship with the Government of Pakistan and his superiors in Washington, did “represent” the point of view of Pakistan to Washington (*).

18. See *Crisis in South Asia*, p. 57, for excerpts from the cable.

19. Jack Anderson, with George Clifford, *The Anderson Papers* (New York: Random House, 1973), pp. 242-45.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Kalb and Kalb, pp. 258-59.

22. *Relief Problems in East Pakistan and India*, Part I, Kennedy subcommittee hearings, June 28, 1971, p. 82.

23. *Relief Problems in Bangladesh*, Kennedy subcommittee hearings, February 2, 1972, Appendix III, pp. 85-92.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

25. *Ibid.* Note that none of these shipments were illegal, nor did they violate overall U.S. policy on arms to Pakistan.

26. *Relief Problems in East Pakistan and India*, Part III, Kennedy subcommittee hearings, October 4, 1971, p. 376. Christopher van Hollen’s testimony.

27. “Anderson Papers” as reprinted in *Bangladesh Handbook*, pp. 132 and 125.

28. *New York Times*, March 29, 1972, p. 1.

29. The position that the bulk of U.S. relief should go to East Pakistan was congruent with administration policy after August to portray the refugee outflow as the result of the threatened famine. But before August, the official view that all was “normal” in East Pakistan as the Government of Pakistan contended led the administration to resist Congressional efforts—especially those of Senator Kennedy—to get recognition of the danger of famine. Aid to the refugees in India, I surmise, was to ease India’s burden so that she would not have that excuse to go to war to stop the drain on her economy. Interviewees, however, discounted these explanations for the “humanitarian aid was centerpiece” view.
30. As of October 19, 1971, the U.S. had contributed 42 per cent of the “world’s” total to refugee relief in India (and 71% of the total for East Pakistan relief). *Ibid.*, p. 40. Senator Kennedy, pointing out India’s burden, concludes “we realize how little the outside world is really doing, and how paltry the American contribution is comparatively.” (*Ibid.*, p. 41.).
31. *U.S. Foreign Policy for the 1970’s: The Emerging Structure of Peace*, A report by President Richard Nixon to the Congress, February (9), 1972, (hereafter: *State of the World Message*), p. 159.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 159-60.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
34. Kissinger backgrounder, as reprinted in *Bangladesh Handbook*, p. 136.
35. *State of the World Message*, p. 162.
36. Kissinger backgrounder, as reprinted in *Bangladesh Handbook*, p. 140.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 141. These points only emerged from close questioning of Kissinger at the backgrounder of December 7th.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
39. Kissinger backgrounder, as reprinted in *Bangladesh Handbook*, p. 144.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
41. The Pakistan point of view was that the war broke out with India’s large scale incursion in support of Mukti Bahini operation on November 21st. President Nixon’s phrase was “when war erupted toward the end of November” (*State of the World Message*, p. 164). This view is supported by Wayne Wilcox (*The Emergence of Bangladesh*, Foreign Affairs Study 7, American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, Washington, 1973), p. 51, but a *New York Times* report of November 24th (*NY Times Index*, p. 1301, col. 3) says that “U.S. officials . . . dispute Pakistani charge that India has launched fullscale invasion,” and an important Pakistani General (Farman Ali), as reported on November 26th (*Ibid.*, p. 1302, col. 1), said that “field reports indicate conditions on East Pakistan border [were] returning to normal tenseness.” India, of course, held that the war began with the Pakistani air attacks on 8 Indian airfields on December 3rd; most observers agree.

42. *State of World Message*, p. 162.
43. Kissinger backgrounder as reprinted in *Bangladesh Handbook*, p. 137.
44. “Anderson Papers” as reprinted in *ibid*, p. 133.
45. Kissinger backgrounder as reprinted in *ibid*, p. 138. “We were urging movement at the greatest speed that the Pakistan political process could stand. We felt that one way to resolve this would be for the Indians to give us a timetable of what they would consider a reasonable timetable. . . .”
46. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
47. Mrs. Gandhi’s letter to President Nixon, as reprinted in *ibid*, p. 144
48. “Anderson Papers” as reprinted in *ibid.*, p. 133.
49. *State of the World Message*, pp. 159-60.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
52. Reports of the *Enterprise* task force movements first appeared on December 13th (when it went through the Straits of Malacca), when the Indian army was within artillery range of Dacca. The most detailed account of the task force deployment is in Anderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 259-69 (the chapter is titled “The Brink of World War”).
53. *NY Times Index*, p. 1301 (news story of November 16).
54. “Anderson Papers” as reprinted in *Bangladesh Handbook*, p. 128.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
56. *NY Times Index*, p. 1306, col. 2.
57. “Anderson Papers” as reprinted in *Bangladesh Handbook*, p. 130.
58. *NY Times Index*, p. 1307, col. 1.
59. Quoted in Robert Shaplen, “The Birth of Bangladesh—II,” *The New Yorker*, February 19, 1972; as reprinted in *Relief Problems in Bangladesh*, Kennedy subcommittee hearings, February 2, 1972, p. 117.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
61. “Anderson Papers” as reprinted in *Bangladesh Handbook*, p. 132.
62. Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 228.
63. “Anderson Papers” as reprinted in *Bangladesh Handbook*, p. 115.