

India's Politicking in the Bangladeshi Liberation War

What is the issue?

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- India's active engagement in the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war achieved important self-serving strategic objectives.

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- But the mission also successfully managed to portray a strong humanitarian angle to its cause.

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What were the mission's strategic calculations?

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- Bangladeshi liberation militias were no match for the Pakistan army's military might and there was also enough political resistance against a clear separation.

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- While the Indian intervention was the key factor that tipped the balance, the intervention was lesser about compassion and more about real politicking.

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- **Duel Front** - The Bengali uprising provided India with an opportunity to break Pakistan, which will thereby prevent a duel front war in future.

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- Notably, although the eastern front remained largely inactive during the 1965 war, it tied down substantial military resources, which constrained operations.

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- It was estimated that while the newly formed country in the east might not remain an ally forever, it can never be as threatening as duel fronted Pakistan.

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- **Future Diplomacy** - It was thought that if Bangladesh became independent without Indian help, future bilateral relationships might not be smooth.

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- Notably, India had strongly encouraged the Bengali movement for autonomy through propaganda and secret financial support even before 1971.
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- Hence, not intervening to stop the Pakistani military for decimating the assertive Bengali voices would've become a serious breach of trust.
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- **Pro-Indian Polity** - A non-interventionist civil war would've radicalised the Bengali population and sidelined the pro-India centrist Awami League Party.
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- This could've lead to shifting the leadership of the movement to left-wing pro-China leftist parties such as National Awami Party and the Communist Party.
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- Also, protracted guerrilla warfare could've taken shape there, which had inherent security risks for India as Naxalism was rising in India too.
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How concerning was the plight of the Refugees?

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- Over 10 million refugees had fled to states bordering Bangladesh in order to escape the unfolding violence, which indeed concerned India.
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- But the concern was more economic rather than the humanitarian as refugees numbers were burgeoning had to be fed and accommodated.
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- There were also ample avenues for a communal strife as migrating Hindus and Muslims saw the members of the opposite religion with suspicion.
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- Ultimately, the campaign was brilliantly conceived and deftly executed and furthered India's strategic objectives while being seen as compassionate.
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Source: The Hindu

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