

Socio-economic Conflicting Issues Embedded in Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971: Coverage of the *New York Times*

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This study explored the impacts of the coverage of the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971 by the New York Times. In the backdrop of the Cold War phenomena the United States reportedly took a position against Bangladesh's liberation while the war created a humanitarian orgy of killings, rapes, and the dislocation of millions of people. The war impacts still haunt the nation as the incumbent Bangladesh government began trials of "war crimes" and already executed some opposition leaders for alleged collaboration with the Pakistani Army. As the first textual analysis of the Times' coverage of the Bangladesh War in the postcolonial era, the study revealed that the Times played a humanitarian role but was seemed influenced by the confrontation with the Nixon Administration on secret papers and policies of wars, popularly known as "Pentagon Papers."

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh Liberation War and the Cold War

The birth of Bangladesh in 1971 as a breakup of Pakistan through a civil war was the result of one of the most crucial postcolonial conflicts in the Cold War contexts. This war led Pakistan and India into their third war after Britain had to quit the subcontinent in 1947 (*New York Times*, December 25, 1971). According to Anthony D. Moses (2011), Bangladesh war also resulted in a standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union, which reportedly "allied" with India in the breakup of Pakistan, while the U.S. "opposed" that. The *New York Times* (December 25, 1971) also viewed that "The birth of a nation could hardly be less auspicious than the emergence of Bangladesh as the third major independent state of the Indian subcontinent." This consequence of the conflict attracted worldwide public and media attention that also had some relevance with the legal fight between the White House and the *New York Times* about printing of the "Pentagon Papers" (Hollen, 1980).

According to Rounaq Jahan (1995), the Pakistani army killed approximately three million people and raped a quarter million women, while Kevin Rafferty (2013, November 16) put the killing figure as up to 100,000 people. Q.M. Jalal Khan (2018) cites that there are controversies about the Bangladesh War casualties.¹ From a different standpoint of the war scenario, Sarmila Bose (2014, 2010, 2005) states that the war was simultaneously a battleground for different kinds of violent conflicts that ensued military crackdown on a civilian population to full-scale war between India and Pakistan. Nayeem Mohaiemen (2008) states, eventually, the Bangladesh war became a crucial spotlight and a crusading issue for the *New York Times*, which covered most news stories via Indian sources and columnists, such as Khuswant Singh (August 1, 1971).

After about a 10-month-long war for freedom from Pakistan, the people of Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) achieved their independence on December 16, 1971 “with eventual Indian help” (Riaz, 2014, p. 122) based on the Bangladeshi or Bengali nationalism, a controversial issue a nation has long been confronting (Khan, 2018, Murshid, 1993). Benjamin Zeitlyn (2014) also adds that the shared history and shared forgetting about the events of 1971 are contested as well as nationalism in Bangladesh. About this disconcert, Bose (2014) further opines, this must be the only country in the world where there are two views on the independence of the country. Jahan (1995), however, claims that the unique significance of Bangladesh is that it was the first nation-state to emerge after waging a successful liberation war against a postcolonial state.

Another significant phenomenon was Nixon Administration’s support for a unified Pakistan. Washington did it to use Pakistan as a mediator with China in a new cold war strategy (Hollen, 1980). Rafferty (2013) and Samuel Tofte (2011) state that US president Richard Nixon and Kissinger made common cause with Mao Zedong’s China in backing the Pakistani generals, who were useful in forging the US-China rapprochement. Bose (2014, 2010, 2005) thinks that the Cold War served as the international backdrop to this regional conflict within Pakistan and between India and Pakistan. The U.S. 7th Fleet stalled into the Bay of Bengal faced a resolute Russian fleet bringing the world on the brink of a nuclear confrontation over the birth of Bangladesh after Cuban crisis (Hollen, 1980).

PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study explored how the *New York Times* covered the war in the midst of the Cold War and in which case the U.S. took a position against Bangladesh’s independence. Many academic researchers, politicians, and social activists researched the media coverage of this war in general but there was no in-depth textual analysis to see the focus, importance, and interpretation that reflect frames and tones from the viewpoints of professional journalism. The frames and tones usually determine the media coverage (Golan, 2006). While most researchers followed their own frames and tones from other emotional points of casualties of East Pakistanis (Bengalis), very few looked impartially at the other sides—what happened aftermath the war, in which case the defeated parties also reportedly incurred wraths of Bengalis (Redclif, 2011). Victoria Redclif (2011), giving example of Biharis who supported united Pakistan, stated the regressive situation of Biharis, as they remained stateless until 2008.

What the media, especially the *Times* in early December (1971) also warned as “the blood and bitterness—internal and external—that may long plague the new Bengali nation and its neighbors” is still severely felt. The bitter consequences of the Bangladesh war even after about 50 years are exposed in hostile relations as the incumbent Bangladesh government started trials, and already executed some leaders of the then “pro-unity” political parties, which are at present in the opposition. Again, this 1971-war related trial raised controversies and conflicts locally and internationally (Moses, 2011). Many scholars, such as Rafferty (2013) state that war tribunal has been criticized as flawed by many human rights organizations, which even support bringing the 1971 criminals to justice, because of the danger of “controversial death penalties.” Internally, almost no one dares to raise voices against the tribunal courts, which are alleged as politically biased (*Hindu*, April 24, 2014). This Indian newspaper the *Hindu* also reported: on April 17, the Bangladesh’s War Crimes Tribunal initiated contempt proceedings against the Dhaka-based British journalist David Bergman for, among other matters, questioning the death toll from the country’s 1971 war. Bergman (December 13, 2018) again in a recent story argued about the misstatements of the war casualties as well as the loopholes of the Tribunal.

The facts and figures of the war casualties are also a matter of dispute at the level of researchers. Some scholars, such as Jahan (1995) and Nayanika Mookharjee (2006) claim that some millions of people were killed, and about a couple hundred thousand Bengali women were raped. Many other scholars, such as Bose (2014, 2012), Khan (2018) dispute this figure including some of the media reports. On the other hand, Sayeeda Saikia (2004) thinks the inner conflicts within the communities that led to rampant violence against women in the wars were overlooked and women’s voices were actively silenced and their experiences invisible in the Bangladesh’s official history.

Journalists, who included overseas reporters, could not cover the war news easily due to Pakistani Army's restrictions on and confinement of journalists (Mascarenhas, 1971). Yet, some foreign journalists, including Sydney H. Schanberg of the *Times*, were able to escape from the confinement and covered some pieces of the incidents (Dring, 1971). According to Fazlul Quaderi (1972), other journalists returned to their countries and wrote reports on the Pakistani military crackdown. The *Times* covered the Bangladesh war amidst emotions, and notions regarding the war and crimes perforated by the actors—local, regional and global. The study needs to look at those complex issues and factors whether the news media could have dealt with those from the factual, neutral, and objective points of view.

This study selected the *New York Times* because it is considered one of the national “newspapers of record” in the United States. Maxwell McCombs (2005), Guy Golan (2006), and Ratliff and Hall (2014) say that the *Times* is often an agenda-setter to other newspapers and the news outlets. The *Times* is also known as a liberal and elite national newspaper (Fuller and Rice, 2014). It is, therefore, important to see how and what role the *Times* played on that crucial questions around adequacy and effectiveness of the response to a crime against humanity and human rights—that remains important to be explored further.

The study attempted to answer primarily three research questions: What were the prominent frames used by the *Times* in its coverage of Bangladesh independence war? Prominent frames, here, refer to the frequently focused importance and interpretation of facts. Also, were there any signs of political overtones and racially biased inputs from the news, views, and images the *Times*? And what were the impacts of bias and overtones, if there was any? These frames and tones are important determinants of the news coverage. Also, it is important to see whether the viewpoints of other academic research are similar to or different from the frames and tones reflected in the news media coverage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The news media tend to cover conflicts and hostilities—local, regional, global—from the broader perspectives of superpower rivalries. According to Donald Beachler (2007), the massive communal violence that occurred in East Pakistan in 1971 received worldwide attention at that time. M. Mamoon (2002) also observes that Bangladesh War had aroused conscience and sensibilities of people around the world, including the U.S. Extant literature showed that the Bangladesh War was covered from the perspectives of Prickly Condition of the Sub-continent, News Media's interests in Conflicts, and “Crusading” Role of the *New York Times*.

The division of subcontinent into India and Pakistan in 1947 was against the will of the then Indian leaders. These two countries were never on good terms. Both the countries fought two more wars before 1971, especially on the claim on Kashmir. A. D. Moses (2011) thinks that according to many Indians and Pakistanis, Bangladesh War was another “Indo-Pakistani War of 1971.” It is evident from the fact that Indian army's invasion of E. Pakistan forced Pakistan's surrender, and that surrender was to the Indian army (Sen, 2013). Rashed Chowdhury (2015), a Bangladeshi freedom fighter in 1971 as he claims, and who served as a Bangladesh Ambassador to some countries that include Japan, also writes, “Indian support for Bangladesh's independence was deep-rooted. Since...1947, India never felt comfortable that its archenemy Pakistan flanked it from the east and west.... The chance of a life time knocked at India's doors in 1971” (2015, pp. 289, 290).” Q. M. J. Khan (2018) thinks that Bangladesh situation has been the results of historic ethnic politics of the Indian subcontinent and Indo-Pakistan rivalry. Khan in this regard quotes from Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru's “Nehru Doctrine” as sketched in his *Discovery of India*. “India will inevitably exercise an important influence,” (p. 371), as Nehru said about the future of the sub-continent. In this regard, Anisur Rahman (2017) also says that even Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi along with Nehru used to say openly that Pakistan would not sustain long” (p.322).

S. Bose (2014, 2012) views, the Cold War also served as the international background to this regional conflict. According to S. A. Siraj (2014), after independence from the British, both the countries warred over the territory of Kashmir in the Himalayas. In the series, the war on Bangladesh became the third.

According to Jasjit Singh (1999), India and Pakistan also fought the fourth major war on Kashmir in 1999, known as Kargil War.

The news media, more likely than not, present news and views in their own styles that frame the news—professionally, and economically as well as politically, and ideologically. Media scholars thus discern that conflict is one of the popular elements of news frames. R. E. Hiebert (2003) views that any warfare and propaganda are integral parts of the media. Scott Althaus (2018, 2006) and E. Herman, & N. A. Chomsky (1988) argued that the news media played a key role in forming public opinion in favor of or against wars and conflicts. S. D. Cooper (2006) says it is difficult to find a piece of journalism that offers no interpretation of the facts it contains. Where foreign events are involved, the news media typically obtain information from official sources close to home (Hossain, 2015), with an inevitable bias in terms of framing of issues and events (McQuail, 2010). In regard to frames and or tones, D. V. Dimitrova and J. Stromback (2005) discussed different types of war frames used in the mainstream news media.

Daniel McQuail (2010) states that the U.S. media, even the *New York Times*, were found supportive of the U.S. government views about events or crises. R. M. Entman (2010) says the U.S. media select a portion of reality by using specific words and images in reporting. Scott Althaus (2018) also criticizes the U.S. media, which usually support the interest of the country. S. L. Carruthers (2000) finds a relationship between the U.S. defense industry and the news networks in collecting news. Though Althaus (2018, 2006) criticizes the U.S. media for usually supporting the interest of the country, other scholars, such as Mohaiemen (2008), Quaderi (1972), and Hollen (1980) stated that the leaking of the Pentagon Papers to the *Times* and the subsequent government lawsuit against its reporter, Daniel Ellsberg, had set a confrontational path between the American journalists and the embattled Nixon White House. On the basis of the literature reviews, it can be assumed that the New York Times took an anti-government role in the case of Bangladesh war.

METHODS

Scholars, such as M. McCombs (2005) Guy Golan (2006), and Ratliff and Hall (2014), and Ryan Fuller and Ronald Rice (2014) observe that a news story provides a historical narrative and offers readers more in-depth information of the issue on focus under discussion and editorials usually interpret and analyze the stories. In view of that this researcher tried to incorporate all the major news stories, bylines, editorials, and letters to the editor on Bangladesh war covered by the *Times*.

Data Collection

In the course of searching, the researcher found the bound volume of the *New York Times* news stories and editorials published under the *Pakistan Index (Times Index 1971)* in abridged format. However, 71 news stories, 21 editorials, and were 19 letters found in full format surfing through the website of Newspaper Reports 1971 of the Bangladesh Genocide Archive, besides University of Southern Mississippi (USM) microforms.

For the online searches, some keywords which include *Times*, news reports, 1971, War, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, were used. Of the 71 news stories, some are byline of its reporters, some by different news agencies, and some by independent writers. This researcher analyzed all the items of news and views. The incidents of a period of 10 months (March to December 1971) when the war took place and its preludes that started from the beginning of the year (1971) helped the researcher develop a better narrative of the war and related events in the *Times* as well as the actions of the U.S. Administration. The war ensued on March 25 and ended on December 16, 1971, with the surrender of the eastern wing of the Pakistani Army to the Indian Army.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The textual analysis tried to ascertain the frames and tones used by the *New York Times* news and views that covered the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh and their impact on the people. The impacts of the coverage came out through the writings of the columnists and its editorials. The study reveals that the coverage mainly included the issues of conflicts and war, which would lead to humanitarian problems, escalation of more hatred and clashes among the peoples and nations of the region, and the world superpowers as well.² The discussion attempted to relate the features of the findings.

Reporting of the Conflict and Military Crackdown

The *New York Times* started reporting on tensions in Pakistan from the beginning of 1971 that seemed factual without bias or political overtone. The reports of the political conflicts among politicians and military rulers started following the military ruler's refusal to hand over power to East Pakistani leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (known as Mujib) whose regional party, based in East Pakistani, won the majority of seats in the national assembly. A January 31 (1971) report said Mujib instructed banks, industries and government officials to control transactions so that no capital moved out to the West Pakistan. The *Times* (January 31, 1971) termed it "East Pakistan's self-rule broadened."

Throughout the month of March 1971, the *Times* reported negotiations among the Pakistani politicians, general strikes called by Mujib, violence, and killings due to clashes among different forces and law enforcement agencies, and finally military crackdown at the night of March 25.³ In the meantime, Grace Lichtenstein (March 27, 1971) reported ouster of its own correspondent, S. H. Schanberg with 34 other foreign newsmen. After that expulsion, the *Times*' reports and editorials seem to take a "crusading" trend, as mentioned by some researchers.

Crusading Coverage

The media took the war coverage as a "crusading" issue to let their readers and the people of the world know what had been going on involving a war. There were some genuine reasons behind that crusading coverage—"genocide" "rapes" and violence committed by the Pakistani army in Bangladesh, and displacement of millions of people who took shelter in Indian refugee camps. Consequently, it was expected that the *Times* would focus more on the sufferings of the people and violence in the war than other issues (Jahan, 1995; Mamoon, 2002).

A special report "Toll called High" with dateline New Delhi referring to an Indian press report (no name of the press) said about 10,000 people were killed in Pakistani military operation in different areas of East Pakistan (*Times*, March 28, 1971). Successively, *Times* reported that the U.S. military planes started evacuation of American citizens from East Pakistan. Later, the *Times* (March 31, 1971) published a report with illustrations on the formation of a provisional Bangladesh government.⁴

On May 2 (1971), another article by Peggy Durdin described the war scenario as one of the bloodiest slaughters of modern times. Meanwhile, Pakistan allowed six foreign journalists including M. Browne of the *Times* into East Pakistan. The journalists did not believe in official versions of the situation, as journalists were escorted to the designated places of "normalcy." A. Mascarenhas (June 13, 1971) reported in London that troops "deliberately massacred" people. On July 1 (1971), *Times* reporter Schanberg was again expelled from E. Pakistan. Nonetheless, the *Times* started to warn the parties in conflict, especially Pakistan, about an escalation of internal and regional hatred among the communities and nations with severe consequences. Some of the *Times*' letter writers also warned both Pakistan and the U.S. administration about the consequences of the "inhuman acts of violence" (April 5, 1971).

Warning of Consequences and Internal Pressure

In its prognostic view, the *Times* in an editorial (March 28, 1971) said that resort to force by both sides was a tragic mistake that could only inflict horrible new suffering on Bengalis, recent victims of one of the history's worst natural disasters. Another *Times* editorial titled "In the Name of Pakistan" (March 31, 1971) said the struggle in Pakistan could have dangerous strife among communities in the

subcontinent with international consequences, especially if a prolonged guerrilla warfare ensued. By the term communities, the *Times* might have meant between Bengalis and pro-unity Bengalis and Biharis, migrated from India to E. Pakistan in and around 1947 when the British quit India. By nations, it obviously meant Pakistan and India which were in hostile relations since 1947 liberation. International consequences would mean by the involvement of super powers, especially the U.S. and the then Soviet Union entangled in the Cold War. Cultural differences between the peoples of Pakistan were also the issue of the *Times* coverage.

The *Times* from the very beginning warned the nations, especially Pakistan and the U.S., about the dire consequences of the conflict and its escalation across the borders. No government heeded to those, rather their actions resulted in the escalation of the hostilities leading to war between India and Pakistan. In that situation, Soviet Union supported India diplomatically and militarily while the U.S. and China supported Pakistan. The *Times*' writers condemned both the American and Pakistani actions, obviously because of their wrong steps that led Pakistan to the civil war and consequently to the war with India.

While the *Times* criticized the UN for its failure to settle the matter of conflict and bloodshed, the *Times* did not criticize the Soviet veto to the UN resolution to stop the escalation of war and bloodshed. The *Times*' coverage of internal pressure on the Nixon Administration and continuous criticisms of both the U.S. and Pakistani regimes by its writers and editorials could be interpreted as its unequivocal support for the Indian policies. Hence, there might be a question that hadn't India been a party to this problem, what would have been the *Times*' role in the Bangladesh war. The *Times*' support to the Indian position against Pakistan and its writers' belittling views of the Bengalis and doubt about future of the nation led the researcher to this inference. Its legal fight with the administration which was supporting Pakistan might have also influenced the *Times* to take a warpath position against Pakistan versus its "friendly nation."

A Friendly Nation: India

Times' news and views urged the Nixon Administration and international communities, especially the United Nations to exert pressure on the Pakistani regime to hand over power to the elected representatives of the East Pakistan to reconcile the hostility. *Times*' writers, however, maintained a low profile to express their concern (probably, not at all) about the breakup of Pakistan in a situation of fire-band and misunderstanding. Pakistani regime alias West Pakistani partners had been making injustices to its eastern partners, no doubt, but no *Times*' writing suggested any specific formula or terms of negotiations between the two sides of Pakistan. Almost all the news and views of the *Times* highlighted the differences, especially culture and language, between the two parts. Pakistan had long been a crucial partner of the U.S. in the global and sub-continental politics and was helping the U.S. in negotiation with China at a Cold War strategic situation. The *Times* never called it a "friendly" nation. Ramesh Thakur (1993), understands that India was one of the leading founding members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and historically sided with the Soviet Union during the Cold War time what no U.S. Administration liked.

Socio-Economic Disparities and Differences in Cultures

In an article on March 27 (1971), *Times* said that Pakistanis were bound chiefly by their common religion but differ in East and West in culture and language. An article by Joseph Lelyveld (April 7, 1971), held that the idea of Pakistan as a nation built on shared faith of Islam was an abstraction. P. Durdin's (May 6, 1971) article said that the roots of tragedy in Pakistan were in geography, history and the nature of man. Indian writer Khushwant Singh's article (August 1, 1971) as well as Natasha Chowdhry (1971) depicted that grievances over language and the economic exploitation gave birth to E. Pakistani nationalism, which soon crystalized as a demand for an autonomous homeland.⁵ Virtually, it was not E. Pakistani nationalism (as Sing hinted), it was rather Bengali/Bangladeshi nationalism which has had a connection with India across the border (people of some east-Indian states also speak the same language, which is Bengali). Some other *Times*' writers also highlighted the cultural differences vis-à-vis the religious-bond that brought them together once. Singh also narrated incidents of rapes of young

women by the Pakistani army. None mentioned about rapes of Bihari women and killings of their men and children, in cases, indiscriminately. This article discusses those issues separately.

The issues which shattered the feelings of unity among the peoples of East Pakistan and West Pakistan were found tangible in 1947 when it achieved independence from the British. But later actions of disparities and domination by the west part on the east embittered that unity. The news and views of the *Times* have highlighted those issues that made some impacts along the line of that particular situation influenced by the local, regional and global politics of that time. Anthony J. Marsella (2005) also points out that conflicts relative to culture involve parties with differing constructions of reality regarding the distribution of power, control, and influence. The *Times* picked up those of the culturally taunted views, such as one made by a Pakistani army officer about the East Pakistanis. The *Times* made the headline: “Bengalis are chicken hearted.” In a separate story, the *Times* headlined “Pakistan’s Jihad” (holy war). Another headline said: “An alien army imposes its will.” As a sign of overtone, *Times*’ Malcolm W. Browne’s article titled “Pakistan’s Loss: A Disaster or a Blessing” (December 25, 1971) also dubbed Bangladesh as a “sick siamese” and “overcrowded, under-endowed, and storm-plagued.”

Humanitarian Havocs

As a concern for the spiraling humanitarian problem, *Times*’ editorial (March 31, 1971) titled “In the Name of Pakistan” stated that U.S. had a humanitarian duty on this crisis the Pakistani regime created in E. Pakistan. Another later editorial (April 7, 1971) titled “Blood-bath in Bengal,” expressed concern about Nixon’s persistent silence about indiscriminate slaughter of civilians of East Bengal. Consecutive reports by S. H Schanberg (in April and May 1971) apprehended possibility of famine in some areas, especially in the squalor Bengali refugee camps in India. An allegoric editorial (May 12, 1971) titled “The Vultures of Bengal” said that fat vultures brood over the ravaged towns of E. Pakistan as the testimony of the slaughters of the Bengali separatists by the Pakistani army. Follow-up reports also stated humanitarian sufferings as such (M. Browne, May 16, 1971).

On May 30, India announced uncontrollable epidemic of cholera broken out among Bengali refugees. An early June report called the situation as misery, sickness, hunger, and death among refugees while an illustration showed a refugee woman watching over her child dying of cholera. Follow-up reports stated hundreds of refugee children dying daily from malnutrition and diseases. Meanwhile, a report said about 6,000 refugees had returned to E. Pakistan due to disgust, fear, and grief from the local people in the eastern states of Meghalaya and Assam bordering Bangladesh (E. Pakistan). Even, Calcutta Mayor, Mr. Gupta, demanded cordon around the city to prevent the further influx of refugees (Schanberg, May 7, 1971). However, India appealed for outside help to cope with the mounting flow of refugees from E. Pakistan at a rate of “60,000 a day.” In helping the refugees, George Harrison organized concerts in New York, while apathy at the official level in the U.S. prevailed.

The *Times* prominently underscored the humanitarian issues, especially relative to the Bengalis—killings, rapes, deaths and sufferings from diseases, malnutrition, scarcity of food and medicine and so on. The *Times* also reported some pieces of brutalities on the Biharis and other pro-unity Bengalis by Bengalis, but the coverage about the latter seemed fell short, especially as they were the defeated groups. Both Bose (2014, 2010) and Saikia (2004) revealed from their field investigations that all the sides across the pro-liberation and pro-unity isles severely suffered from brutalities. The perpetrators were dispersed among all sides to the conflict. There were alleged wild exaggerations or plain fabrications or distortions of the facts in one hand and overshadowing of the grimmer reality of the war on the other.

In reality, Bose in her “Fragments of Memories” (2010, 2005) said that the foreign reporters were based in New Delhi, capital of India, and had to rely on the Indian and the exiled Bengali sources who might have exaggerated many issues. Moreover, most foreign journalists did not speak the local languages and were entirely reliant on translation by locals, which was a major disadvantage for them. The reporters also made mistakes in ascertaining geographical locations. For example, *Times*’ Shanberg’s report (April 18, 1971) mentioned it’s dateline Agartola, East Pakistan, whereas Agartola is the capital of Tripura, an eastern state of India. According to Bose (2010, 2005), too often even foreign journalists seemed to be tempted by the appeal of the “good versus evil” story. And the news-hungry press

swallowed claims of fictitious events which were widely believed (Bose, 2010, 2005). So, there were various types of misunderstanding along the lines.

US-Chinese Apathy vs. Indo-Soviet Sympathy

On April 13, *Times*' reporter Schanberg said that Bengalis were bitter over the U.S. failure to take strong stands against Pakistan and over the use of US arms against them. While the U.S. State Department called the problem as "Pakistan's internal affair," Soviet President Podgorny expressed alarm about the situation in E. Pakistan. China protested Indian interference in Pakistani affairs while the Indian parliament condemned the killings in E. Pakistan. On the contrary, Soviet foreign affairs weekly, the *New Times*, accused China of interfering in the Indo-Pak affairs. Meanwhile, Soviet premier Kosygin met the Indian foreign minister in Moscow.⁶

Stepping ahead, India and the Soviet Union signed a 20-year friendship treaty, which Pakistan and the U.S. considered an arms treaty. In early August, Pakistan charged that Indian artillery-fire killed 20 civilians in E. Pakistan. In this situation, India and Pakistan broke their diplomatic relations, followed by Indian military supplies for the Bengali guerillas in the border areas. In mid-October, Nixon Administration expressed concern over the buildup of troops along Indo-Pak borders and blamed Delhi and Moscow for collaborating to divide Pakistan. On the other hand, different internal forces exerted pressure on the U.S. Administration to abandon support to Pakistan. In this case, the *Times* had apparently played an anti-Pakistan role through its criticism of the Nixon policy toward Pakistan. The *Times* said that Nixon's policy made the friendly country India angry.

Pressure on the Nixon Administration

In early May, the U.S. Congress with the Democratic majority passed a bill on arms embargo to Pakistan. The *Times* columnist, A. Lewis, criticized Nixon's failure to make a public statement on the disaster in E. Pakistan and said that this exemplified distortion in American values that had occurred because of Vietnam. Opposing the arms shipment to Pakistan, an editorial titled "Abetting Repression" said this was going on with a shock and anger over the Pakistani savage repression of Bengalis. This was also a break of assurance of no more arms supply to Pakistan given by the U.S. administration to the Indian foreign minister, who earlier visited the White House. The editorial also credited India as a friendly foreign power.⁷

In the meantime, a lot of protests had taken place by civilians, politicians, including "progressive" Republicans against Nixon's support to Pakistan. An editorial titled "Pakistan Condemned" spoke on World Bank (WB) reports published by the *Times* a day before.⁸ Strangely, the *Times* editorial did not mention the provisional government of Bangladesh in exile formed on April 10, 1971. Meanwhile, Senator Kennedy went to visit India and denounced Pakistan's military actions against the separatists (*Times*, August 17, 1971). All these reports and editorials show the *Times* exerted a mode of pressure mechanism to which the Nixon Administration apparently succumbed.

Nixon Administration's Succumbing

Probably, as a sign of easing out internal pressure, Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, went to Pakistan on July 10 to tell its regime of no more US military aid. But *Times* columnist, A. Lewis, questioned the silence of President Nixon on the E. Pakistan tragedy. On October 5, Ted Kennedy exposed documents of offering arms to Pakistan. Meanwhile, on November 4, Indian Premier Indira Gandhi and President Nixon conferred at the White House. Nixon indicated he would do what it can to help in the context of "existing policy." Gandhi privately said Nixon recognized "sincere" understanding of Indian position. Follow-up reports said that U.S. canceled military export licenses to Pakistan and Nixon might ask Pakistan to release E. Pakistani leader Mujib.⁹ On December 3 (1971), the *Times* reported full-scale war between India and Pakistan on both eastern and western fronts. Virtually, the Indian army entered E. Pakistan in October or before, at the advent of Nixon's "sincere" understanding as Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi said.

Nixon, by this time, asked the administration to prepare a post-war relief plan. While the U.S. urged Security Council to make a resolution of an immediate ceasefire and mutual withdrawal in the Indo-Pakistan war, the following day the Soviet Union vetoed the resolution for the third time. On December 16, the day the Pakistani general already surrendered to the Indian general, the *Times* reported that the U.S. 7th fleet—naval taskforce of eight ships—moved toward East Pakistan. The move finally faced an Indo-Soviet threat and did not proceed further.¹⁰ These reports and editorials thus cued to the regional and global implications of the war, which the scholars call features of the prognostic frame.

Prognosis/Implications: Regional and Global

A *Times* editorial on November 21 (1971) criticized the United Nations and the U.S. for their failure in handling the Indo-Pak dispute. As the war escalated between India and Pakistan, another editorial said the war would create the third major nation in the subcontinent, Bangladesh, but it can set off chain reactions in populations of differing languages and religions that would reduce the subcontinent to Balkanized hodgepodge of quarreling and permanently impoverished states. Even after the end of war, a December 25 (1971) *Times*' editorial looked back at its anti-Pakistani stance and supported Indian stance of earlier occupation of some disputed areas including Kashmir. A *Times* survey revealed diplomatic and strategic gains by the Soviet Union and India, while the U.S., China, and the UN were the losers in the Indo-Pak War. A previous *Times* editorial voiced the same tone. The editorial also said the situation created fresh opportunities for Maoist extremism while the U.S. actions can only undermine faith in the U.S. support of free institutions elsewhere in the developing world. The *Times* also apprehended bleak future of Bangladesh.

Surprisingly, M. Browne (December 25, 1971) in an article said that the loss of E. Pakistan was a blessing for Pakistan. In his tone, the interrelationship of East and West Pakistan was like siamese twins, one of whom was always at death's door. The same day an editorial said the birth of Bangladesh leaves a legacy of blood and bitterness that may long plague new Bengali nation—overcrowded, under-endowed, and storm-plagued. This resembles the denting tone of the western media that forlorn the future of the Third World nations. In fact, the relationship among the religio-political groups of Bengalis and Biharis is still bickering in Bangladesh, no blame to the *Times*.

Reprisals

A late December report said thousands of Biharis and other non-Bengalis were crammed together in Mirpur on outskirts of Dhaka, surrounded by hostile Bengalis and cut-off from food, water, and electricity. Bengalis have ordered the International Red Cross (IRC) to cease its activities in Mirpur. The new Bengali regime told the IRC official that the matter of Biharis is internal, not the matter of the IRC. He said the situation of Biharis was very serious, because whoever went out for food got his/her throat slit (Sterba, December 18, 1971). Later, *Times* reported an outbreak of cholera among Biharis who were trapped by Bengalis. In this situation of retribution, China called on IRC to condemn Indian actions in Pakistan and asked for an impartial investigation of Indian army's massacring of Pakistanis.

James P. Sterba of *Times* (December 18, 1971) also reported unlawful execution of Pakistanis by Bengalis, while some people supported those actions. An earlier report also said many Biharis were killed in the port city of Chittagong by hostile Bengalis. In this respect, a Pakistani "white paper" (August 5, 1971 (August 5, 1971) charged that the separatists massacred 100,000 people in areas which came under their control. A letter writer on December 25 (1971) also mentioned about the killing of non-Bengalis "ruthlessly" and "properties of non-Bengalese burnt to ashes by the so-called freedom-loving Awami Leaguers [supporter of Mujib]." In fact, it might be hard for foreign journalists to find and ascertain how many supporters of Pakistani-unity were killed by the Bengalis because they were scattered all over E. Pakistan. The *Times*, in most cases, reported the Bengali casualties, easily available from the Bengali and Indian sources.

Diplomatic Duo and Misreading by Pakistani Leadership

The *Times* on December 31 (1971) published a report quoting Jack N. Anderson who earlier syndicated secret White House information on Pakistan-India war and proposed sales of American arms to Pakistan. Anderson claimed his source was the White House insider while the State Department denied leaking information to Anderson. This report followed a commentary by T. Wicker (December 16, 1971) that Henry Kissinger himself leaked secret information to the press. This confirmed assertion of scholars that the government itself hands out security information when that serves its political interest and the news media also collaborate with the government.

The study also revealed that the misreading by the “hotheaded” Pakistani leadership of the lips of its own people from East Pakistan and the leaders of the world, especially in the U.S., led Pakistan to a disastrous division, war, hatred, and hostilities which are still felt in the relations of Bangladesh and Pakistan, and their peoples. Right at the beginning of the conflict, a *Times*’ letter writer (April 10, 1971) told that “If the leaders of West Pakistan were sincere in their pursuit of national unity they should have read the writing of the wall and accepted the demands of the majority party.” Even if there was an exaggeration in the *Times*’ texts of news and views those could have been considered as guidelines of direction, especially by the Pakistani leadership, for a peaceful solution to the conflict. Pakistan should have read the U.S. lips and understood its intention when its Ambassador to India, Kenneth B. Keating, said East Pakistan problem is a concern of the world community and not merely Pakistan’s internal affair (Pace, April 10, 1971). This researcher thinks that remark of the U.S. diplomat who was a senator of the U.S. was an important signal about the ultimate U.S. mood and move when Nixon was seriously considering not only considering to come out of Vietnam, but also making rapprochement both the Soviet Union and China for which the U.S. needed soothing India, while apparently using Pakistan.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has stepped out of the usual frames the scholars used for other wars and conflicts covered by the international news media. The research questions have three aspects—what were the prominent frames, were there any signs of political overtones and racially biased inputs in the news, views, and images, if so, with what effects? This textual analysis of the *Times*’ contents revealed some unique circumstantial features, which cannot fit into usual frames that Dimitrova, & Stromback (2005) framed on the conflicts. Even then, some of the frames can be identified along the lines, primarily—economic disparities and clash of the cultures of two main ethnic populations—the Bengalis and other Pakistanis—in Pakistan (diagnostic), the humanitarian tragedy of millions (humanitarian), the Indo-Pak War (military), concerns about a U.S.-Soviet confrontation, internal pressure on the Nixon Administration in the backdrop of Cold War (prognostic).

The intra-national conflict of Pakistan intervened by India in the backdrop of refugee-influx into its territory and the Cold War politics as well as the *Times*’ legal battle with the White House apparently prompted the *Times* to be inclined toward India, and eventually to be a backer of Bangladesh. Overtones of the *Times*’ coverage came out through issues of cultural differences of the peoples/ethnicities of Pakistan, and its ideological and political (legal) confrontation with the Nixon Administration.

Many scholars carried out research on the coverage of the Bangladesh war by the international media, but there was no research in the area from the context of the textual analysis. Moreover, most research was blurred by the emotions and notions, because of blood-bath and deep hatred involved in the conflicts. This study, therefore, tried to open up ways of better understanding whether America’s major newspaper—the *New York Times*—could come out of its ideological and political preference. The study found that *Times* and its people staunchly supported the causes of Bengalis (Bangladeshis). Even the U.S. Administration subtly distanced itself from Pakistan, though under internal pressure and external broader geo-political interests relative to coming out of the Cold War costs. This study is a major contribution to finding out some clues different from the popular views that the United States vehemently supported the unjust war of Pakistan on Bangladeshis. The *Times*, in the case of Bangladesh war, played a different role by apparently not siding with the “the interest of the country.”

The limitation of available literature on the textual analysis of the Liberation War of Bangladesh has made the research more difficult than apprehension. The researcher did not compare the *Times*' coverage with any other newspaper from the U.S. (such as the *Washington Post*) or any other country. Moreover, the research had to rely on the news items and views of the *Times*, which were made available mainly by the Bangladesh Genocide Archive, which were very selective. The researcher, however, tried to find out some items from the microforms of the USM library. Besides microforms, the *New York Times Index 1971 on Pakistan* had many other items (such as economics, politics, international relations) in abridged forms, but could not be elaborately analyzed in this study (more studies can be done on some socio-economic and politico-cultural aspects that K. Singh (1971), N. Chowdhry 2017), and Q. Khan (2018) depicted on their articles and books). The future studies could include those issues to have a further understanding of the conflict as a whole.

This researcher hopes this study will broaden the senses and the ways of understanding the roles of the international print media, especially in the U.S., considered as the major external player, in the Bangladesh war. What the *Times* called the “long plague” of the Bengali nation, now Bangladesh, about 50 years ago, is still sadly running on the fault-line of the “distorted politics” (Bergman, December 13, 2018 & April 8, 2016). Q. M. Khan (2018) says, that distortion and controversy have long been plaguing the country since the birth of the country about almost all domestic and international issues that include especially its national identity and even selection of the National Anthem.¹¹ The title of Khan's book, *Bangladesh: Political and Literary Reflections on a Divided Country*, might give readers and scholars a reflection how divided is a nation called Bangladesh.

ENDNOTES

1. Q. M. Jalal Khan. “Bangladesh: Political and Literary Reflections on a Divided Country.” New York: Peterlang (2018). Khan says, the total number of people killed in East Pakistan is not known with any degree of accuracy. Bangladeshi authorities claim that 3 million people were killed, while the Hamoodur Rahman Commission, an official Pakistan Government investigation, put the figure as low as 26,000 civilian casualties [...] A 2008 British Medical Journal study by Ziad Obermeyer, Christopher Murray, and Emmanuela Gakidou estimated that up to 269,000 civilians died as a result of the conflict. The authors note that this is far higher than a previous estimate of 58,000 from Uppsala University and the Peace Research Institute, Oslo. According to Serajur Rahman, the official Bangladeshi estimate of “3 lakhs” (300,000) was wrongly translated into English as 3 million (P. 169).
2. The *Times* prominently diagnosed the causes of conflict (diagnostic frame) problems along the socio-economic and cultural differences of the ethnic groups in Pakistan. Another prominent frame focused on the consequences (prognosis) leading to humanitarian sufferings as well as strengthening the Indo-Soviet alliance as opposed to the U.S.-Chinese apathy to the causes of Bangladesh. In this frame, the *Times* identified the Indo-Soviet alliance as strategic gainers and the U.S and China as losers. The cautionary languages exposed the tones, in some cases, overtones, of the *Times* as those languages emphasized the differences between the ethnic groups—by language, by economic disparities, by cruelties of the Pakistani army, and above all, a very strong tone was “no more bond of national unity by the religion of Islam.” The *Times* writers termed the religious-bond as “cheap,” and “abstraction.” The issues which emerged beyond traditional coverage have given the researcher a better context of understanding the whole gamut of Bangladesh War and its regional and global implications.
3. On March 25 the *Times* simply reported Pakistan's central government reasserted control over East Pakistan and banned all political activities as army took control. A report, “Leaders of rebels in East Pakistan reported seized” was published later (The New York Times, March 25, 1971, 5:4. The New York Times, March 27, 1971, 1:7.
4. *Times*' editorial: “In the Name of Pakistan” (March 31, 1971. Articles “Appaling tragedy in East Pakistan” (April 1, 1971), “A resistance fighter tells his story” (April 3, 1971, 1:1), another story (1971, 1:4).
5. Khushwant Singh. “Why They Fled.” The New York Times, August 1, 1971, 13:14. Natasha Chowdhury (2017) in her research article “Case Study: Bangladesh Genocide 1971” states that the geographic distance between West and East Pakistan was mirrored by their economic and political separation, as the migration most of the ruling elite went westward from India (after independence from the U.K. in 1947) led to West Pakistan becoming the nation's (Pakistan's) political center. Between 1947 and 1970, East Pakistan received only 25% of the country's industrial investments and 30% of its imports, despite producing 59% of country's exports. Consequent of this unstable arrangement, the relationship between East and West

became ‘progressively more corrupt and neo-colonial in character’, and opposition to West Pakistani domination grew among the Bengali population. The Pakistani regimes failure to exercise its relief duties properly after the catastrophic floods in Bangladesh 1970 gave further impetus to the Bengali autonomy movement- Awami League, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman- to demand regional autonomy for East Pakistan and an end to military rule. Retrieved from https://www.ajk.elte.hu/file/BANGLADESH_GENOCIDE_1971.pdf

6. Theodore Shabad. Soviet Denounces Chinese Reds for Shift on Relations With U.S. *The New York Times*, April, 22, 1971, 12:1. Bernard Gwertzman. Kosygin Terms U.S. Aggressive. *The New York Times*, June 10, 1971, 3:6.
7. US Congress passed bill on arms embargo to Pakistan (*The New York Times*, May 7, 1971, 14:4), (June 12, 1971, 28:3). Times’ EDITORIAL: Abetting repression (*The New York Times*, June 23, 1971, 8:1).
8. “Pakistan Condemned.” *The New York Times*, April 9, 1971, 3:3. On July 13 (1971), Times published a report headlined “World Bank unit says Pakistan aid is pointless now.” Again, on July 14 (1971), Times published “Excerpts from World Bank group’s report on East Pakistan” (*The New York Times*, July 14, 1971, 11:1).
9. Kissinger went to Pakistan to tell it government no more arms aid (*The New York Times*, July 10, 1971, 6:1). More stories: (July 12, 1971, 13:5), (October 5, 1971, 2:4), (November 4, 1971, 12:4), (November 8, 1971, 1:6), and (November 25, 1971, 1:6).
10. Full-scale war between India and Pakistan (*New York Times*, December 3, 1971, 11:1. Indian army entered E. Pakistan in October or before. *The New York Times*, November 7, 1971, IV 2:4. U.S. 7th fleet was proceeding toward Bay of Bengal, but stopped under Indo-Soviet threat (December 16, 1971, 1:4).
11. Q. M. Khan also claims, “It is said that Sheikh Mujib [national leader] himself did not like [National Anthem] “Amar Sonar Bangla” and that he [Mujib] expressed his frustration and disappointment about it.”

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