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The Barometer

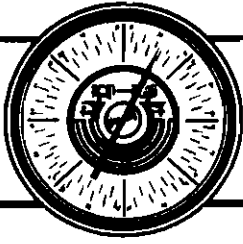
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THE BAROMETER

(Dr. John Tashjean comments on a "Review" article question regarding the mission of Task Force 74 in the Indian Ocean in 1971.)

"What was TF 74 going to do if India did choose to continue the war, and why operate in the Bay of Bengal rather than the Arabian Sea if the deterrence mission was in the West rather than in the East?" This excellent question about the role of Task Force 74 in the Indo-Pakistani War of December 1971 was asked by Lieutenant Commander McGruther in this *Review* 4 years ago.¹ So far, it appears, no answer has emerged in the literature.

We may therefore take note of a possible answer that, however plausible, is so tentative as to constitute only an hypothesis worth further examination. For convenience I call this hypothesis "the Palit solution."²

The Palit solution of McGruther's problem is simple: neither Pakistan nor the United States expected India to engage in blitzkrieg in East Pakistan. So TF 74 was dispatched to the Bay of Bengal, only to find a *fait accompli*. The Indian dash to Dacca in a dozen days effectively preempted a naval presence mission.

These bare bones of the Palit solution must be fleshed out by one important allegation of Palit's: the deployment of East Pakistani ground forces, stretched out in hedgehogs all along their border, played perfectly into the hands of LTG J.S. Aurora of the Indian Army, the author of its blitzkrieg plan.

Readers of Manstein's *Lost Victories* will recall the clear parallel of Polish deployment in 1939.

How naval presence and attempted blitzkrieg might have interacted had the East Pakistani posture been different; how events might have unfolded had escalation been permitted to TF 74—these questions are well beyond the scope of this brief note. Palit, relying on National Security Council records published in this country, asserts that the declaratory mission of TF 74, namely evacuation, was a cover for a presence mission. The complexities and opportunities of evacuation, from Saigon to Zaire, are also beyond our scope. *Decent Interval* has not, it seems, deterred the Europeans.

As though this were not complex enough, there is also a puzzle within the puzzle. By the fall of 1971 informed American circles knew that there were Indian "hawks" advocating a quick war.³ Even so it would appear that the contingency of an Indian blitzkrieg was not taken seriously, or at least not with respect to East Pakistan alone. The rapid military clinching of a protracted regional disaffiliation defines, as we see in retrospect, the blitzkrieg that gave birth to Bangladesh. "The inclusion of the less-developed world in the strategic picture entailed . . . the extension of the list of actors to the sub-national level, for the unitary nation is a peculiarly modern European phenomenon."⁴

Given a two-tier system of national powers outclassing states of third and fourth military rank, blitzkrieg solutions

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must be assumed to be of interest to second and third rank powers seeking a decisive regional rearrangement prior to superpower intervention. General Palit is explicit about the calculations of world politics that went into the

making of Mrs. Gandhi's command decision. And students of personality theory interested in Indo-European names will be aware that Mrs. Gandhi is named after Indra, the god of war.⁵

NOTES

1. Kenneth R. McGruther, "The Role of Perception in Naval Diplomacy," *Naval War College Review*, September-October 1974, pp. 3-20.

2. After Major-General D.K. Palit, *The Lightning Campaign: the Indo-Pakistan War 1971* (New Delhi: Thomson Press India Ltd., 1972).

3. "... As the flood of East Pakistani refugees into West Bengal continues, further destabilizing the Indian economy and the politics and society of West Bengal, the Indian hawks' argument—that a quick war will cost less than the indefinite political and economic burden of the refugees and the guerrilla war—becomes to them more telling. As of this writing (late October 1971) it appears that Mrs. Gandhi has chosen to escalate covert military aid to the Bangla Desh guerrillas rather than give in to the hawks' pressure to attack Pakistan, thus avoiding worsening India's international position and especially antagonizing Moscow, while putting the onus on Pakistan to attack India. Even so, one wonders how long she will be able to hold out against war. Border tension is reportedly rising." William E. Griffith, *The Great Globe Transformed III, The Indo-Pakistani Crisis* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Center for International Studies, 28 October 1971), C/71-17, pp. 6f.

4. J.E. Tashjean, "Modern Forms of Conflict," *Journal of the RUSI*, December 1977, p. 21.

5. Frank D. Balog, "An Assessment of the Relevance of the Comparative Mythology of Georges Dumézil for Political Thought," *Revue européenne des sciences sociales* (Geneva), v. XII, no. 33 (1974), p. 198.

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